3
Creating a Community Within the Sermons

> That's why I like those old black geniuses of our race. They not only know how to say something; they also had something to say.
> —Reverend M.

One of the early lessons that most students of rhetoric learn is that form and content are not separate entities, that the most skilled rhetors are those who know both what to say and how to say it. This lesson was never more clearly realized than in the sermons of the three ministers in this study. For me, seeing this principle put into practice in the context of African-American churches and sermons was like being taught a new lesson, for studying these rhetors in this community setting gave me the opportunity to see the lesson about form and content taken to a new height. In African-American sermons, there is no boundary between form and content; they are coterminous. Even to attempt the separation of form and content in this setting would destroy the sermon as it exists in African-American churches. As a result of this lesson, I have seen through new lenses that, in African-American churches, how one says something and what one says are the dual but inseparable foundations for creating community within a group. That is, the good preacher—the genius—knows the Word and can preach it; he or she can capture the congregation with the "how" and "what" of the sermon. Knowing the Word is more than knowing the Bible and the history of Christianity, however; knowing the Word also means knowing African-American culture and history—knowing the people—and using that knowledge to bring the Word to the people. These new lenses have allowed me to see that "having something to say and knowing how to say it" is not simply about form and content. It is about community expectations and values; it is about the relationship between minister and congregation, speaker

or writer and audience; it is about boundaries, fixed and blurred; it is about using a text to establish and maintain a community. In African-American churches, it is about literacy.

Knowing what to say and how to say it are the major tools these ministers use in constructing a text that relies on community identification and participation to be completed. The ministers in this study suggest that through the sermon they must build a common community for people who belong to multiple communities, and they must allow space for the congregation, the audience, to talk back in the sermon. Thus, the sermon is no mere monologue. Instead, it is a dialogue between minister and congregation in which the minister directs the dialogue but the congregation participates in the dialogue by providing feedback. Most often referred to as call-and-response, this dialogue is characterized by feedback from the congregation that urges the minister on ("Preach" "Go on now"), feedback that lets the minister know that the congregation agrees with him or her ("I know that's right" "Amen"), or feedback that lets the minister know that the members of the congregation feel the spirit ("Yes, Lord!" "Jesus!"). Many times, particularly with Reverend M. and Dr. N., the dialogue becomes more like a polylogue or conversation. For example, these two ministers begin reciting a Bible verse and the congregation completes the verse, a practice that I discuss in more detail later in this chapter. For now, however, it is important to note that the dialogic interaction between minister and congregation within the sermon and the communal aspects of the sermon make it a unique kind of literate text in society.

This chapter is particularly concerned with the rhetorical strategies the ministers use and the features within the sermon that provide a foundation for constructing a community identity and consequently a community text. More importantly, the analyses in this chapter (and in chap. 4) reinforce my position that literacy in this community is a social process that relies on multiple participants, intertextuality, and shared cultural knowledge.

CONSTRUCTING A COMMUNITY IDENTITY: IDENTIFYING WITH THE PEOPLE

In establishing and maintaining a community through the sermon, these ministers must rely on several rhetorical devices or strategies, some of which they share and some of which are unique to each minister. The ministers in this study understood that much of their success as pulpit preachers depended on the how and what of their sermons—the form and content. They also understood that the foundation for constructing a community identity often began with them, the leaders in the dialogue.

Therefore, each minister sought to establish himself as part of the group while at the same time maintaining the proper amount of distance from the congregation that a minister in most African-American churches must maintain. That is, to be effective preachers, these ministers must simultaneously create bonds between them and their congregations. In other words, they must build trust between their congregations and themselves; they must construct their own identities as part of the congregation. At the same time, these ministers must show that they are leaders, that they are worthy of standing in the pulpit before the congregation. This move to the pulpit from the pew requires some distance from the congregation. However, the very fact that the minister emerges to the pulpit from the pew—in other words he or she emerges from the community—goes a long way in establishing that community identity for which these ministers strive. These dual and sometimes conflicting roles—group member and leader—when fulfilled successfully, lead these ministers to be skilled rhetors—knowing what to say and how to say it in order to establish community ties while making a separate place for themselves.

Creating this community bond with their congregations through the text is a complex process that requires that the ministers and congregation constantly negotiate new community identities. They become one community moving toward the same goals. Additional complexity is present because the common community to which minister and congregation belong may and usually does change throughout the sermon and from week to week and year to year. For example, the minister cannot always rely on appealing to the congregation's membership in African-American communities to make a point. I refer to African-American "communities" rather than "community" because it is important to understand the diverse experiences that African Americans have despite a shared cultural background. At times, the minister must appeal to the congregation's membership in the Christian community, or the specific church community, or the Chicago community. Therefore, establishing this community identity is a complex task. A key to completing this task successfully is that the ministers know to whom they are preaching; they know their audiences; they share a history, cultural backgrounds (ethnic, popular, and so on), religious beliefs, and community values, among other things. It is because of this knowledge of audience that these ministers are able to establish community ties and construct a community identity.

"WE, US, OUR": BECOMING ONE COMMUNITY

As I argued in an earlier article (Moss, 1994), "Creating a Community: Literacy Events in African American Churches," for the ministers,

> placing themselves in the congregation and seeing themselves as part of the group helps them to keep their sermons relevant to the congregation, helps build trust between the minister and the congregation, and, therefore, makes it easier for the congregation to hear and accept the message that the minister is preaching. (Moss, 1994, p. 166)

Speaking in terms of group membership is one of the most effective and obvious strategies that each minister uses to construct community identity. A consistent strategy that the three ministers use to indicate group membership is the use of first-person plural pronouns—*we, us, our*. Generally, in English, use of one or more of these pronouns is an indication that the rhetor is placing him or herself in the group about whom he or she is speaking or writing—"them and me"—or with whom he or she is speaking or writing—"you and me." The functions of first-person plural pronouns are lessons usually learned in grade-school language arts classes. What is not learned, however, is how complex and powerful these pronouns can be as they function to signal group membership.

The following section illustrates how powerful these pronouns are as they signal not only group membership and its multiple layers but also the multiple functions of first-person plural pronouns. Although this strategy is not unique to African-American ministers, they call on it often. Consider the following examples from Reverend P., the partial-manuscript minister:

Example 1:

Teams that are divided
The morale suffers, and **we** don't fare so well on the field.
You know there's simply no telling what **we** can do if **we** pull together

Example 2:

You see
One of the reasons that **we** are frequently overcome when **we**'re in a prison-kind of situation in life
Is that **we** fail to pray
And when **we** fail to pray
We ought to plan to fail

Example 3:

> but as long as **we** allow the enemy to come in and sew [sic] seeds of division and bitterness among **us**,
> **We**'ve failed to be as accepting as we can be in this
> community for Christ

These three examples show Reverend P. placing himself with his congregation by using "we." Reverend P. avoids accusatory "you're the sinner, not me" language in these statements by indicating that he, too, is vulnerable to the situations he has described. He is part of the "team" that must pull together to achieve; he can sometimes be overwhelmed and fail to pray, which results in failure; and maybe, at times, he has failed to be as accepting as he can be, just like the rest of the people in the congregation. By placing himself in the group with his congregation, Reverend P. has taken steps toward constructing a community identity and toward building a community.

Example 3 is important because it clearly indicates the community that Reverend P. is striving to build and the identity he wants to construct for himself and his congregation—the community for Christ and a Christian identity. Whenever Reverend P. speaks as part of a community, using first-person plural pronouns to indicate his membership, he almost exclusively places himself within three communities—his specific church community, the broad community of humans, and, most importantly, the Christian community. He tries to tap into examples of human nature (thus the team analogy in Example 1), and he tries to appeal directly to the people in his congregation, tapping into their general and specific needs. Example 2 appears directed more toward the congregation than a broader group. However, the dominant community, the one that Reverend P. sees himself and his congregation making a joint journey toward, is the Community for Christ. Even though this journey is led by Reverend P., it is a joint journey, a discovery process for the group. Language in his sermons such as "as we are going to discover," "we will encounter in the Church today," "as we look at this letter" reinforces this communal process of discovery and the journey in which Reverend P. and his congregation participate. Even though Reverend P. uses this collective pronoun strategy effectively as indicated in the example just given, he uses it in his sermons the least of the three ministers.

This strategy along with the others I identify later is really one that helps the ministers create an "I am one of you" persona in their sermons. Arguably, every minister, consciously or subconsciously, creates a persona that he or she thinks will contribute to his or her success as a preacher; however, Reverend P. sees his success as less

dependent on the persona he creates in the sermons than the message of the sermons themselves. Of course, he does acknowledge that in African-American churches, the message and the person(a) are as inextricably bound as are form and content. So, despite Reverend P.'s limited use of the collective pronoun strategy, he wholeheartedly believes that he had to become one with his congregation.

Dr. N. (nonmanuscript) employs the collective pronoun strategy far more than Reverend P. as a way to help him construct a community identity. Consider the following example:

Especially in a society like **ours** where we have churches on every corner.
People at this hour
Jam packed in sanctuaries,
But somehow or another,
It's quite evident that
We are here but **we**'re not often sure why **we**'re here.
We're not clear about what it is that makes this moment a unique moment.
We're not certain, if you will, even what is supposed to happen to **us** at this moment.
We have clues from the past that seemingly there is a presence here that makes things different,
But unless **we** can understand clearly with **our** minds,
precisely what it is that is going on in this place at this time
And in the thousands and perhaps millions of other churches at this hour around the country and around the world,
We will never make this
Something that can be effective for **us**.

Dr. N., because of his status as a minister, supposedly knows what this "something," this "unique moment" is that he is discussing in this particular sermon. Yet, he places himself alongside his congregation who does not know, the people who are not clear. Why? Isn't he supposed to lead by example and to have knowledge that the congregation may not have? As I mentioned earlier, the ministers in this study spoke often of the tension between being in the group and leading the group, of creating that bond with their congregations while maintaining the proper amount of distance. That tension is not an either-or proposition. The ministers must do both. Dr. N., while trying to lead his congregation to some understanding of "why we're here," must also be part of the community as they strive for this understanding. Therefore, Dr. N. is showing that he, too, must try to understand why he is here and what is unique about this moment. In doing so, he is actively constructing this community bond with his congregation.

Also of interest in this example is the community to which Dr. N., himself, is bonding. His primary audience is his very own congregation, but his secondary audience is clearly churchgoers around the globe. Everyone in a church at that particular time is struggling with this issue, even the ministers. However, the previous example indicates a limited number of communities to which Dr. N. identifies with in his sermons. Consider the following example:

I want to say to the fathers and the males in particular,
It is time that **we** begin to live beyond the limits of **our** small minds.
It is time that **we** gain some sense and perspective on the magnitude and the magnificence of the earth and the universe.
We see **ourselves** as full participants,
Engaged not merely as second class or subclass participants,
but at the highest level
Of sharing in this world.
It is time that **our** visions
expand beyond the confines
of **our** small world
That **we** begin to move out not because **we** have a guarantee of anything,
but it's time that **we** live like a church.
And the richness of the possibility that if **we** use what God has given **us**, **we** can be as great as anybody.
It is time somehow or another **we** gain a sense of faith in **ourselves**.
We can believe that somehow or another, God in all of his magnitude and magnificence can imbibe himself in **us**.
What **we** see other people do **we** can do it too

This example comes from Dr. N.'s Father's Day sermon. And as he indicates in the first line of this quotation, Dr. N. is speaking to the males in his congregation. Of course, all the males in his congregation are African American. It is not a big leap to see that this statement is directed to African-American males.

Given Dr. N.'s basic stance as a "race preacher" (see chap. 2) the historical, political, and social context in which the sermon took place and Dr. N.'s consistent focus in most of his sermons on how African Americans as a race must think bigger, or expect the best out of life, it is no big surprise that many of the communities he bonds with and the identities that he seeks to construct are African American. In the Father's Day example, Dr. N. is asking that males, especially African-American fathers, have broader and larger visions for themselves. He explains that they can have that vision if they have faith in a "magnificent" God. Although he clearly establishes a bond with this group—he is after all an

African-American male, an African-American male who does have a broad vision, who is not small-minded, who believes he can do anything—he is a person who has achieved success on many levels—financial, educational, political, professional, and so on. So why identify himself with a group that, in some ways, he is clearly not a member of? The persona that Dr. N. has created is one of a successful, confident African American who believes that all things are possible with faith. He sees himself as an example, a role model. Yet, to be accepted as a legitimate role model, to be persuasive, Dr. N. has to show his congregation that, although he is successful, he is still one of the people in the community; he has not "forgotten where he came from." By placing himself in the group despite his obvious differences, Dr. N. may be sending an implicit message: "We come from the same place, and I made it through by faith, and you can make it the same way." Thus, a big part of Dr. N.'s message involves showing that he is a person "from the hood."

Reverend M., the manuscript minister, is quite skilled at creating bonds between himself and his congregation through the use of the collective pronouns *we, us, our*. He certainly relies on the strategy far more than the other two ministers. Consider the following excerpt from Reverend M.'s sermon "Living in the In Between":

So often **we** look for God in the spectacular only,
But God has a way of slipping up on **us** in the unspectacular,
Of coming quietly in ways that can almost be missed.
We look for him in a palace,
And he shows up as a Palestinian.
We look for him in a royal bassinet and here he is in a reeking barn.
We look for him in a spacious mansion being waited on by servants because of his rank.
And here he is in a small cell with Nelson Mandela being mistreated and locked up because of his color.
We look for him in the White House lawn signing into law school prayer amendment, and here he is languishing with Winnie Mandela and dodging the law of apartheid which has banned them because they speak the truth.
We look for him at a coronation ball and here he is in a crowded barrio.
We we we look for him at the head of government and here he is in the heart of the ghetto.
We look for him in the president and here he is in prisons.
We look for him to show up as a strong macho man and here he is in the person of a strong black godly woman.
We we look for him to show up

In the white strains of "Hail to the Chief" and here he is showing up in a black South African strike.
We look for him to be residing in an old stately mansion high up on a hill and instead he's there hanging on an old rugged cross over another hill.

I have highlighted this excerpt from Reverend M., first, because throughout the passage, he establishes his bond with multiple communities, and second, because he employs multiple strategies to establish community bonds. "We"—the minister and his congregation—look for God to show up in the extraordinary. What might the extraordinary or the "spectacular" be? In this excerpt, the minister gives his congregation a list of circumstances where God shows up. His circumstances span religious, racial, political, economical, geographical, gender, sacred, and secular boundaries. These various boundaries are important because they signal the many communities and social circumstances in which members of Reverend M.'s congregation might find themselves. Consequently, when trying to construct a community identity, Reverend M. must appeal to or tap into various communities. The "we" in this excerpt could be one community that looks for God in various spectacular circumstances, or the we in each example could represent a variety of communities crossing the boundaries listed previously—Black Africans and diaspora Blacks, the American political community, the Christian community, the church community, the community of African-American women, urban America, and so on. These communities or social situations are evident from the references that Reverend M. makes in the excerpt, references that people pick up on if they follow world and national current events, or know the Bible; the references are from both secular and sacred contexts. This excerpt shows how cleverly Reverend M. blurs the boundaries between secular and sacred. This excerpt is also just one typical example of how Reverend M. combines the use of collective pronouns with reliance on shared information to construct this community identity, an issue that I pursue in more detail later in this chapter.

Reverend M. also experiences much of the same tension that Dr. N. experiences in trying to establish himself as part of the community he is constructing. Consider the following two examples from two other sermons by Reverend M:

Example 1:

Some of the meanest, most miserable, ungodly people I know got more degrees behind they names and make more money than most of **us** will ever see in a lifetime.

Example 2:

Since **we** pray as a congregation, every Sunday in the year this dangerous and deceptive disciple's prayer
and since most of **us** pray it almost absent mindedly, not having any idea what **we** are saying or praying . . . .
Just what it is **we** are saying when **we** address him who brought all of creation into being,
and just what it is **we** are doing when **we** dare to sing the doxology which closes out this powerful prayer **we** pray week after week.

In the first example, the "us" is so subtly used that it is possible for listeners to miss it. Yet, the "us" is significant because with that one little word, Reverend M. places himself within the group, his church congregation, who are not mean, miserable, ungodly people with degrees and money. Ironically, Reverend M. has about as many degrees as one can get, a bachelor's degree, two master's degrees, and a doctor of ministry degree. He drives an expensive car, makes an enviable salary, and lives in the church parsonage in an upper middle-class neighborhood. Yet, he constructs an identity in this instance that downplays his credentials and status. Although Reverend M. does have all of these credentials and his congregation is aware of and appreciates his status, he does not want to separate himself from his congregation because of his educational and socioeconomic status. I must also point out that there are many members of Reverend M.'s congregation who have more degrees and make more money than Reverend M., but it is counterproductive to building a community to point these details out in the sermon.

The second example is a good illustration of how Reverend M. includes himself in a communal act—praying. He speaks of himself and the congregation as a single unit in the act of praying. Like Dr. N., however, he makes himself part of a group that does not understand something—the complexities of The Lord's Prayer—thus minimizing or even overlooking his role as the minister. Yet, because he is about to embark on a five-sermon series on The Lord's Prayer and because of his scholarly background, both the congregation and I can logically deduce that Reverend M. does not pray this prayer absentmindedly and does know what he is saying and praying. But Reverend M. consistently makes himself part of the community to whom he's preaching, the *us/we* who pray week after week a prayer that we really do not understand. This practice is consistent with Reverend M.'s position that to preach relevant sermons, he has to place himself in the congregation and ask himself "What do I need to hear"? This strategy seems effective for helping to construct his desired community identity.

I do not want to leave readers with the impression that the ministers only focused on commonalities, only focused on "we." In every sermon, the ministers set up distinctions between themselves and the congregations. The ministers put emphasis on "you, not me," "not us." And members of the congregation had to have room to think about and see to their individual needs. There were moments when both congregation and ministers needed their distance from each other. Even when this happened, however, the distance created was not sustained because the ministers' overall goal was to connect with the congregation.

COLLECTIVE "I"

Just as the previous discussion illustrates the multiple functions of first-person plural pronouns and the multiple layers of group memberships that are subsequently revealed, the following discussion focuses on the multiple functions and multiple layers of group membership that the ministers' use of first-person singular pronouns reveal—*I, me, mine.* Although a rhetor's use of first-person singular usually indicates a focus on the self, the analysis of the ministers' sermons indicate that the use of first person-singular can signal a concern for audience and communal bonding.

With Reverend M.'s question, "What do I need to hear today?" and a related question by Dr. N., "What is the question everyone in the congregation is asking?"—two seemingly separate perspectives become one. That is, Reverend M. sees himself as part of the congregation; therefore, the questions that he is asking or the issues that seem most pressing to him ("What do I need to hear?") are questions and issues with which the congregation is concerned ("What is the question everyone in the congregation is asking?" from Dr. N.'s perspective). This fusing of perspectives—that the congregation's and the minister's perspective become one—gives the minister the unique role of being the voice of the congregation, of being able to speak for them, at times. And it is the speaking for the congregation that I am concerned with in this part of the chapter.

The previous section of this chapter highlighted the ministers' uses of collective plural pronouns as a strategy for signalling community identity and creating bonds between ministers and their congregations. It would seem then, that first-person singular references in the texts would create distance and would be at odds with the overwhelming desire of the ministers to establish and maintain community identities. However, in these ministers' sermons, more often than not, the ministers' uses of first-person singular pronouns did more to make those communal bonds stronger. I focus in this section on the "collective I"—those moments in

the texts when the ministers' use of "I" is ambiguous, when the ministers are speaking for themselves and for the congregation, when the ministers become the "voice" of the congregation.

At times, these moments are signaled by obvious markers that indicate that the minister is speaking in the voice of the people. Consider the following examples, the first from Reverend P.'s "Prison to Praise" and the second from Dr. N.'s "You Are What You Eat":

Example 1:

And there may be some people this morning who feel as though
I'm in prison.
I'm in prison because I'm confined.
I'm a shut in.
I'm in a bad marriage.
Other circumstances in my life are out of control
and I feel as though I'm in prison.

Example 2:

I know there's something saying to you right now,
I want that power.

I want that something on the inside,
That hole in the rain. I want that something on the inside
That burnage of pain.
I want that something on the inside
and I can't explain it.
I want it this morning.

The highlighted line in each example is each minister's signal to the congregation or some group in the congregation that he is speaking for them. The "I" represents quite clearly, in those examples, that the ministers are quite deliberately trying to locate the "place" where members of the congregation are emotionally and spiritually and bring them to another "place." The markers also could imply that the ministers may not be in the same places as the people they are speaking for. These examples, however, with such obvious markers and such room for breaking community bonds, are rare. In the sermons of these three ministers, more likely and most evident are the moments when the ministers are speaking for themselves and the congregation, when the boundaries between speaker and congregation are blurred and have no markers. These examples are numerous and subtle. They signal that necessary bonding between the minister and congregation that I spoke of earlier.

Although each of the three ministers are quite skilled at using this strategy, the one who uses it most frequently is Reverend P. This fact was surprising to me given that Reverend P. used the previous strategy, collective plural pronouns, the least of the three ministers. Consider the following examples from Reverend P.'s "Marks of a Spirit-Filled Christian" and "Prison to Praise":

From "Marks of a Spirit-Filled Christian":

You see
to be filled with the spirit
means to be possessed by the spirit.
It means the Holy Spirit is now in charge of my life.
To be filled with the spirit
means that I am empowered by the spirit.
Those temptations that our brother referred to
in which I would be continually yielding to
that I would be continually falling down before.
Because I have now the spirit of Christ in my life,
I have someone within me
that enables me to resist temptation.
I have someone who is within me and able to say "no" to the devil and say "yes" to God.
I am empowered
and this is what it means to be filled with the spirit.
I am empowered by the spirit of the Lord

From "Prison to Praise":

And this is what is needed in the body of Christ.
I shouldn't have to go into the world to find fellowship,
but when my marriage is stormy,
when my children are going astray,
when my job is played out,
I ought to be able to come into the body of Christ
and surround myself
with a few Godly individuals who won't talk about me
but who will pray with me and help me ride out the storm.

In these two examples, Reverend P.'s use of "I" may signal a personal reference. Clearly, listeners and readers could look at these excerpts of text as Reverend P.'s use of personal examples, a popular and necessary rhetorical device among these three ministers. The first example, particularly, could be interpreted as Reverend P. discussing how he has been empowered by the spirit of Christ. I do not think that would be a

"wrong" interpretation. Reverend P. states that "in African-American churches, people want to know what God has done for you [the minister]." And this first example is a strong illustration of what God has done for Reverend P. Yet, to see the "I" as only referring to Reverend P.'s experience would diminish the rhetorical sophistication of Reverend P. and the other ministers, establish rigid boundaries where they do not exist, and overlook the "genius" of these ministers in maintaining communal bonds.

Even in showing the people "what God has done for the minister," Reverend P. must also identify with the group and tap into the group's concerns. He does so in both examples. It is not just Reverend P. who is empowered by the spirit of Christ. It is not just Reverend P. who has "someone within me that enables me to resist temptation." It is not just Reverend P. who may have a stormy marriage, who may have children who go astray, who may have a troubled job situation. Given the way his congregation talked about and perceived him, none of the latter problems were major concerns for Reverend P. (the congregation's perception is more important here than whatever reality may have existed). Many people in his congregation find themselves in these "places." Many people are empowered by the Lord; many people face the problems that Reverend P. has listed. However, by speaking in first person, by using a symbolically personal example, Reverend P. does not use the authoritative and often accusatory "You who are sinners" with the accompanying silently loud "Not me, I'm perfect" implication. He does not separate himself from the congregation. He blurs the boundaries between "I," the minister, and "I," the voice of the people. He manages to speak for the people and himself simultaneously. That skill takes both rhetorical sophistication and the "genius" of knowing what to say and how to say it.

In illustrating what God has done for them, the ministers in this study often use personal statements that take on the tone of a personal testimony. There is evidence of that particularly in the first example from Reverend P.'s "Marks of a Spirit-Filled Christian" just excerpted. Usually a testimony is a very specific story that one tells about some tragedy or bad time(s) a person has experienced and how God (and one's faith in God) has brought that person through the bad times. Testimonies are usually quite detailed and specific to the person narrating the story. Those types of testimonies occur in these churches. However, another type of testimonial statement appears in these ministers' sermons—testimonial-like statements that are more general than the normal testimonies. That is, the congregation does not hear from the minister a detailed story about how the Lord brought him or her through a bad marriage or through a specific illness. Instead the congregations hear the kinds of examples that follow:

Example 1:

A Jesus that I know lives
He is not a dead Jesus
This Jesus that I serve
This Jesus that I know is alive
How do I know he lives
Because he walks with me and he talks with me
He tells me I am his own
Jesus is the light of the world
Jesus puts joy in my life
Jesus gives me peace when I'm sorrow
(taken from Dr. N.'s "You are What You Eat")

Example 2:

Be still and know that God is God
Shut up for a while and listen
Jesus Jesus Jesus I can't do it by myself
Jesus I have to say
my strength is too weak
Jesus help me
(taken from Dr. N.'s "Spiritual Presence and the Power of Prayer")

These examples cited from Dr. N.'s sermons have that testimonial-like quality even more so than the excerpts from Reverend P.'s sermons. Yet, these examples are not personal testimonies. They are more like a mantra that reminds the congregation of the power of God. The testimonial-like statements could be viewed as commonplaces in the sermons where the ministers use a collective "I" as a call to recognize God's role with each individual.

Dr. N., in engaging in a kind of mantra or general testimonial about the role of Jesus in his life, is calling for each individual to acknowledge this role. In a sense, Dr. N. models what he wants his congregation to do. In doing so, even in a general, nonspecific manner, in focusing on his personal relationship with Jesus, Dr. N. involves the congregation in his own personal journey, thus strengthening the community identity he has sought to establish. The congregation's involvement was evident in the volume of feedback and level of emotion these two examples garnered. When Dr. N. was seemingly speaking about himself, testifying to how he knows that "Jesus is alive," calling on Jesus to "help me" because "my strength is too weak," the congregation responded as if he was talking about them. Like Christ, he symbolically takes on their quest for goodness and righteousness, showing them by this "ritual" the possibility of success, as one whom

the spirit has hit. Shouts of "Yes," "I know he is," "Jesus," "Help me Jesus," among other statements rang out across the sanctuary. In those moments as in other similar moments in the sermons, Dr. N.'s experience and call to Jesus became the congregation's experience and call; he became a voice for the people. Dr. N. explains this phenomenon by stating that "the preacher is the vicarious success of all people." This statement refers to sacred and secular successes.

Dr. N. believed that he represented spiritual success for the people—even that his concerns are their concerns. Thus, his testimonial-like statements blurred those boundaries between minister and congregation. The "I" in many of his statements, such as those cited earlier, represent him and the people (Moss, 1994). Dr. N. can, by virtue of his religious journey and his role as preacher—a role that signals that he has the verbal skills, the "genius"—captures what the people are feeling and articulates it for them. They experience through him what they may not be able to name.

Reverend M., like Dr. N., uses these testimonial-like statements to great effect in his sermons. His use of them comes almost always at the ends of his sermons during the climax. And these testimonial-like statements tended to move the congregation to the same kinds of responses as I witnessed in Dr. N.'s sermons. However, Reverend M.'s congregation was often moved to stand on their feet, to applause, to tears, as well as the normal verbal feedback. Given that the climax in African-American sermons—the peak time—are highly charged moments in the sermon, it was not surprising that Reverend M.'s congregation would be so moved by his "testimonies" highlighted in that part of the sermon. Consider the following examples from Reverend M.'s "Lord's Prayer Part II (a sermon from a series of sermons on the Lord's Prayer) and "A Real Mother" (a Mother's Day sermon):

LORD'S PRAYER PART II

All things work together for good to them that love the Lord.
He's blessing me
even when I can't see it.
He's blessing me
Even when I don't know he's blessing me
Even when it seems like I take him for granted.
He's blessing me
When I lay down to sleep at night.
He's blessing me
When I open my eyes in the morning.
He's blessing me
When I open my voice and got something to talk about.

He's blessing me
When I put my feet out and can walk.
He's blessing me.
I can say it rejoicing.
The Lord is blessing me.

The song that the choir begins to sing in the background is "The Lord is Blessing Me Right Now." Here the Reverend and the congregation engage in intertextuality (which I discuss in detail in chap. 4).

A REAL MOTHER (Mother's Day sermon)

I really hurt in the heart for the Lord because He first hurt in the heart for me.
His hurt in the heart made Him give me life.
He gave me liberty.
He gave me victory.
He gave me Jesus.
He gave me Calvary.
He gave me a home beyond the skies.
He gave me a new name over in glory.
You don't know what he's done for me.
I hurt in the heart for him and it feels good down in my soul.

In both of these examples, Reverend M. tells the congregation, again in a general way, what the Lord is doing (and has done) for him. Even as Reverend M. is listing all the ways "the Lord is blessing him" in the first example, his congregation is showing that they identify with him with their responses—"Yes, Lord," "Yes, he is," "Amen," and with their claps. All those moments and "places" where the Lord is blessing him are moments and "places" that are not unique to him. As he names these places, people in the congregation can see themselves in those very same ordinary places. Simultaneously, the musician begins to play and the choir begins to sing "the Lord is Blessing me right now, right now." Reverend M.'s words becomes the choir's words and vice versa, and the choir and the minister become the voice of the congregation.

The second example, from "A Real Mother," functions in much the same way as the first example. The victory, calvary, liberty, and new name, among other things that the Lord gave Reverend M., are also the very same things He has given to others. While Reverend M.'s statement seems like a personal testimony (and could rightly be seen as such), he is not alone in his experience. He knows that he is not alone; that he speaks for others. Therefore, the "me" is representative of everyone to whom the minister is preaching.

Finally, of interest is the first two lines and the last line of the second example that include the phrase "hurt in the heart." This phrase comes from an earlier part of the sermon where Reverend M. explains that according to Dr. Frederick G. Sampson, a well-respected, famous Black preacher and theologian, in the ancient Sanskrit language, there is no word for "love." The equivalent term for "love" is "hurt in the heart." Thus, "I really hurt in the heart for the Lord because He first hurt in the heart for me" can be rephrased to "I really love the Lord because He first loved me."

That the examples given here function as personal, testimonial-like statements and as statements that represent the congregation illustrates again the complexity of the use of first-person plural and singular pronouns. Hubbard (1994), connecting the sermon to Bakhtin's notion of authoritative discourse, stated that it is "within this world of authoritative discourse that the Black preacher must struggle to win his voice and, equally important, an audience that will give assent to his testimony" (p. 5). That the ministers are successful speaking for themselves and others using the first-person plural indicates that first, they are "one with their congregation" in many important ways and that this "oneness" is recognized by both parties; second, that the congregation has given the ministers the authority to speak for them; and third, and, I think, most significantly, that the boundaries between ministers and congregation are clearly blurred. Sometimes, those boundaries are nonexistent. (For a fuller discussion of blurred boundaries see chap. 4.)

SHARED KNOWLEDGE: "BRING IT TO ME IN A CUP I CAN RECOGNIZE"

In an interview with Reverend M. in which we were discussing how to use the familiar to teach and preach a new message, Reverend M. stated that people want the preacher to "Bring it to me in a cup I can recognize." I use that statement as subheading for this discussion on shared knowledge because it occurred in the context of Reverend M. discussing how the preacher "must connect with the congregation where they are" in order to be effective. As previous discussions in this chapter illustrate, there are various strategies that ministers use for connecting with their congregations, for building that community identity. This section focuses on how the ministers in this study use shared knowledge to signal "in-group" communication, group memberships, community identity, or all of the above. "Bringing it to them in a cup they can recognize" is about audience expectations and demands, and the ways those expectations and demands affect the

ministers' sermons. It is these expectations and demands and how the ministers meet them that is the foundation of shared knowledge in the context of this study.

The principle that seems to undergird this reliance on shared knowledge is that the ministers use the familiar to reemphasize or reacquaint the congregation with old (or shared) information; that ministers use the familiar to make the congregation look at something familiar in a different light; that the ministers use the familiar to introduce the unfamiliar, something new; and that the ministers use the familiar to provide avenues for the congregation to enter into the text and become part of the dialogue that constitutes the text. However, to be successful at using shared knowledge as a strategy, the ministers must know their congregations well; they must make judgments about what their congregations know, what their congregations' expectations are, and "where they [the congregations] are." The three ministers must look to common backgrounds between them and their congregations to help them make accurate judgments about their congregations.

What constitutes shared knowledge? In this discussion, I use a broad operating definition of shared knowledge. In the context of this study, *shared knowledge* came to refer to those moments when ministers (and congregation) relied on common backgrounds and situational contexts (and sometimes linguistic contexts) to play a part in meaning making within the sermon (and the service). Most often, this strategy is evidenced by ministers alluding to a reference for which there is no apparent explanation in the text (examples follow later). The ministers (and congregations) rely on their shared knowledge, situational context, or both to make meaning of the reference. This strategy is complicated by the multiple cultures, subcultures, and communities that the ministers share with their congregations and by the multiple roles each participant plays as members of these various cultures, subcultures, and communities. Thus, this operating definition of shared knowledge extends beyond African-American churchgoers and even beyond African Americans. As the following discussion illustrates, shared knowledge spans cultural and community boundaries, global and local contexts, secular and sacred traditions. And because, as I established earlier, form and content are coterminous, shared knowledge extends beyond the references used in the texts—the message (which some may view as content)—to the message and how it is transmitted. Thus, "bring it to me in a cup I can recognize" is, at times, quite similar to "knowing how to say something and having something to say." Finally, shared knowledge relies on collaboration between minister and congregation. Miller and Vander Lei (1990) pointed out that "in Black oral interaction, the author collaborates not only with another writer but with the audience of the discourse" (p. 51). This collaboration is central to the creation of a community text.

"SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE": CODE SWITCHING

Both Reverend M., the manuscript minister, and Dr. N., the nonmanuscript minister spoke, in their interviews, of the importance of "speaking the language of the people," reconfirming what Mitchell (1970) suggested, that in Black congregations no matter how educated the minister or the congregation are, the minister must be Black. That is, he or she must sound Black. What does sounding Black mean, and why is it significant? The second part of the question is dealt with first. The phrase "sounding Black" probably raises all kinds of red flags and invites a range of responses. Given the recent debates about Ebonics—is it a legitimate language, a dialect, or broken English—as it relates to how some African Americans use language, sounding Black is a loaded term. Responses to the phrase could range from it being labeled a racist concept, or an essentialist[1] concept, to "it's the language of the hood." All of these responses could be true at some point. But within the context of this study, this discourse community, and particularly these ministers, sounding Black is a positive concept that focuses, again, on the ministers' rhetorical skills to create a community within their African-American congregations. Sounding Black is significant because it shows that the minister is still in touch with his people and that he is still one of them. Also, it provides the minister and the congregation the opportunity to "use English in a way that makes it their own" (Dr. N.).

Sounding Black is tied to cultural expectations that speaker and listener hold in this church setting. These ideas are intricately bound to establishing and maintaining a sense of community. Although the earlier sections of this chapter stress multiple communities, this section stresses one community—a possibly idealized African-American community. So what does sounding Black mean? There is really no one answer to that question. In this study of three Black ministers of urban Black churches, there are expectations set up by this cultural setting, a Black church service. One expectation is the use of what is commonly associated with Black language features (Vernacular Black English [VBE], another term for Ebonics) in the sermons. Each minister makes use of these features to varying degrees. Although these ministers are steeped in standard English, having been trained by White schools in the Western academic tradition and language, they have, simultaneously, remained steeped in their own Black culture and have found the need to make use of the broad range of language features that identify these ministers as part of the Black community and Black church tradition. They understand the social messages that language

[1]See Spivak's (1987) discussion of strategic essentialism.

conventions carry, that certain discourse conventions gain validity when used by the powerful in the community, as these ministers are, and that language builds community. The congregations in this study want their ministers to be educated, to have academic credentials. They want their ministers to be good with language. Verbal agility is highly valued in this community (Kochman, 1972). However, being good with language includes not only being able to manipulate standard English, but it also includes being able to use features of Black English—to "sound Black."

One of the ways in which the ministers in this study show that they are speaking the language of the people is through code switching in the sermons. "Code switching involves introducing into the context of one language stretches of speech that exhibit the other language's phonological and morphological features" (Valdes-Fallis, 1978, p. 1). Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez (1972) argued that code switching is "a symbolic process akin to that by which words convey semantic information. Code switching, in other words, is meaningful in much the same way that lexical choice is meaningful" (p. 98). Valdes-Fallis (1978), like Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez, reported "that code switching has been found to be neither random nor meaningless. Rather, it is a device that conveys important social information ranging from role relationships between speakers to feelings of solidarity, intimacy, and so forth" (p. 7). Saville-Troike (1982) stated that, "code switching may be quite unconscious, and the fact of switching itself may be as meaningful in expressing a closer or more informal relationship as the referential content or specific language forms used" (p. 63). Each of these scholars pointed to the role of code switching in expressing social information such as role relationships, group identification, and so on. Saville-Troike (1982) further stated that,

> metaphorical code switching occurs within a single situation, but adds meaning to such components as the role-relationships which are being expressed. Since speaking different languages is an obvious marker of differential group membership, by switching languages bilinguals often have the option of choosing which group to identify with in a particular situation, and thus can convey the metaphorical meaning which goes along with such choice as whatever denotative meaning is conveyed by the code itself. (p. 63)

The ministers code switch between standard English (SE) and VBE.[2] I view SE and VBE as two equal language dialects,[3] with one, SE, being the prestige dialect sanctioned by those in power in the United States. The code switching in which the ministers engage is social and metaphorical. These ministers use code switching as a means of expressing group solidarity, expressing social information, or "bringing the message home to their people." It can also be argued that the meaning does change when something is stated in VBE rather than SE. Lu (1991) argued that the language conventions of a particular discourse community play a significant role in shaping meaning. Meaning does not exist independently of language. Hence, the ministers may indeed code switch because they see VBE as a language dialect that can convey meaning that SE cannot.

When the switching does not convey social information, Valdes-Fallis (1978) labeled it stylistic switching that she defined as a "personal rhetorical device to add color to an utterance, to emphasize, to contrast, to underscore a context, to create new poetic meanings, and the like" (p. 10). I argue, however, that stylistic switching can also express social information. In fact, how can the two be separated? The examples that follow show that the code switching involves both morphological and phonological forms and correspond to often used VBE features such as double negatives, copula and auxiliary be deletion, weakening of final consonants, deletion of postvocalic //-r// in the possessive, and other features (Labov, 1972).

A close analysis of Reverend M.'s texts indicate that the code switches that appear in the transcripts of the oral sermons also appear in the written sermons. This indicates a high degree of planning on the part of the manuscript minister and points to Reverend M. using code switching as a rhetorical strategy. One of the more common switches for this minister was use of the double negative and "ain't" in phrases:

> Half the prayer is over . . . and we *ain't said nothing* about our needs and our desires.

This statement illustrates that the minister uses an alternate code for a phrase within the sentence. Other examples at the phrase level follow this pattern:

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[2]I must note here that there is a difference between code switching from Spanish to English and code switching from Black English to SE. When speakers switch from English to Spanish and vice versa, they are shifting from one language to another.

[3]These language dialects have a grammar of their own that leads some to argue that SE and VBE (or Ebonics) are separate languages. For a more detailed discussion of VBE, see Baugh (1983).

> That means that there's a king somewhere. This *ain't no* democracy. God *ain't nobody* you vote into office and if he *don't* perform like you think he ought to perform . . . then you vote him out. This *ain't no* democracy. This is theocracy.

Other examples show copula and auxiliary be deletion:[4]

> What *you* praying *bout*?

This example shows the deletion of the helping verb *are* and a phonological code switch at the word level from *about* to *bout*. Similar patterns were found in other sermons:

> *Health not* what it ought to be praise you *Home not* what it *spozed* to be praise you.
>
> *How you gone make it* . . . *'til* next payday-future
>
> Church folk—disciples *round here* testifying

The SE form of the copula is deleted in these several examples. As well, phonological code switches, *supposed* to *spozed* and *around* to *round*, occur. Some code switches involve deletion of postvocalic /r/ or /s/ in possessive adjectives and substituting subjective pronouns for objective pronouns:

> Some of the meanest, most miserable, ungodly people I know got more degrees behind *they* names and make more money than most of us will ever see in a lifetime.
> You can't keep *them* streets hot.

Throughout Reverend M.'s texts, I found numerous examples of code switching. These few examples show some of the choices that he made in his movement from one dialect to another. Most of his switches seemed to occur on the sentence level. That would suggest stylistic switches done for emphasis, contrast, or to underscore a context. All of these reasons could be working in this minister's texts. He signals, with the code switching, his verbal agility. That all of the code switches are written in the manuscripts suggests even more that these are stylistic switches. Reverend M. is very much aware of the context of the sermon event and very much aware of what language forms and uses have the most impact on his congregation and what is acceptable in this context.

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[4]A copula deletion means the expected form of the *to be* verb is deleted. For example, "the sun bright" is grammatical in VBE rather than "the sun is bright." An auxiliary *be* deletion would follow a similar pattern: "the sun shining" rather than "the sun is shining."

He understands how his audience, his congregation, will receive his message and his uses of code switching. "The ability to interpret a message is a direct function of the listener's home background, his peer group experiences, and his education. Differences in background can lead to misinterpretation of messages" (Gumperz & Hernandez-Chavez, 1972, p. 100). Reverend M. seems to have taken all of these elements into consideration either consciously or unconsciously. His congregation does not seem to misinterpret his messages. The tapes show that no unusual silence occurs during any of these code switches. Silence in this context would be the first sign of misunderstanding or not understanding. What seems most noticeable in this minister's use of code switching is that he seems to communicate to his congregation not only the impact of the message he's preaching in language that is their own, which in itself reveals social information, but also he communicates that he, along with them, is always part of the Black community.

Reverend M. was, by far, more inclined to use code switching in his sermons than the other two ministers were. Yet there were examples of code switching in varying degrees and rhetorical moments in the other two ministers' sermons. Although there are similarities in the use of code switching among the ministers, each minister's own preaching style must be taken into account when examining their uses of code switching.

Because Dr. N., the nonmanuscript minister, does not write his sermons, his code switches are most likely more spontaneous than the manuscript minister's. Yet, as pointed out earlier, spontaneous does not mean random or meaningless. In fact, as I address in more detail later, Dr. N. is quite conscious of the rhetorical power of code switching. The code switches in this minister's texts, although following similar VBE patterns as presented in the earlier discussion, illustrate Dr. N.'s interpretive use of this rhetorical pattern.

> Double Negatives:
>
> If I could win the lottery right now, *I wouldn't have no problem.*
>
> You *ain't got nothing* anyhow.

That "anyhow" is not put into a negative form is surprising. It would have fit right into the pattern established by the rest of the statement. "Ain't got nothing" seems to have the same denotative meaning as "don't have anything," but it just doesn't seem to carry as much weight or emphasis as Dr. N.'s statement carries.

Copula deletion:

As long as *you in* Mama's house, you ought to act like a boy.

When you get deep down into the stand, *you so* deep.

Combination of features:

We been down so long that down don't bother us no more.

This statement sounds as if it could come right out of the Blues, a musical genre, which makes extensive use of Black English. The minister seems to express a feeling or state of being that is incapable of being expressed by SE.

Habitual aspect:[5]

We be together.

Phonological switches:

You're always *gonna* be better off than you are.

Cause the truth will set you free.

Because these shifts occur on the sentence level, Valdes-Fallis would argue that the switches are most likely stylistic, and they convey social information. Dr. N. talked in an interview of a word having a different meaning in the congregation based on how the word is pronounced. He stated that when a minister says to a Black congregation "you must be born again," with emphasis on the *r*, that it does not mean the same as "you must be bon agin" where the *r* is not pronounced in *born*. *Surely* with the *r* sound clearly pronounced is not the same as "sholy" without the *r* pronounced and with the *u* pronounced as an *o*. Dr. N. points out that the congregation can "feel" the statements with the code switches. This minister's use of code switching is in keeping with his position that "no one should be so learned in the language of the master that they've forgotten how to talk to their own people." Dr. N. recognizes that there are power relations tied to language use. For many Black people, the use of the term *master* brings up images of slavery where *the Master* who was in charge spoke a language different from the language of the Black people who had no power. *Master* reinforces that there is the language of the people in power and the language of those without power. "Knowing how to talk to his own people" suggests that one communicates in this particular community by speaking the community's language and not the power language, a political and

[5]"We are together all the time."

rhetorical move. Dr. N.'s statement also emphasizes the bond that must exist between minister and congregation and that how one speaks affects that bond.

Reverend P., the partial-manuscript minister, does not seem to consciously view uses of Black English features in the sermon the same way that Dr. N. or Reverend M. do. Yet, he does use features of VBE in his sermons but to a much smaller degree than the other two ministers. Although most of the code switches are phonological, there are a few that are morphological:

> *Ain't* for *is not; em* for *them, they* for *them, ain't* for *are not*
>
> You take a cup of shortening by itself and endeavor to eat it and it *ain't* very good. You take a bottle of vanilla by itself, it *ain't* very good. You take a cup of sugar by itself, it *ain't* very good. But you let *em* work together.
>
> You let some of these folk around here make up *they mind they ain't* going to do something.

The last statement includes an example of dropping the postvocalic /r/ in favor of using the third-person plural pronoun as a possessive pronoun. When Reverend P. was role-playing in one sermon, he used several Black English features:

> Old self-will says "I'm *gone* do what I *wanta* do. I'm *gone* marry who I want to marry. I'm *gone* date who I want to date. I'm *gone* come to church when I feel like *comin.*
>
> Some people are so self-preoccupied that they'll say *"they talking* about us over in that corner."

Many of the code switches in Reverend P.'s examples are of the same type as the examples from Reverend M. Questions that arise when examining the role-playing quotations are why does Reverend P. code switch during the role-playing? The role-playing does mark the situation and possibly the language as special or unique. Does he feel that the language during the role-playing imitates the language of the congregation? Is it how his people speak? If yes, then why aren't there more code switches throughout the sermons? Or are more code switches necessary? It may be that with each of these ministers in each of these churches, code switching on a small scale could serve to signal to the congregations that the ministers still know how to speak the language of the people.[6]

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[6]It is important to point out that many of the features that I have highlighted are not used only by African Americans or by all or even most African Americans.

Code switching emphasizes that members in the congregations and the ministers hold memberships in multiple discourse communities, signaled by the moves between SE and VBE. Again, the ministers show their verbal agility, their rhetorical repertoire, and the congregation places even more value on such traits. One word of caution—as I have indicated in this analysis, this use of VBE or Ebonics is not used equally or the same way by each minister nor is it the only way that these ministers connect to their African-American congregations.

SHARED KNOWLEDGE, COLLABORATION, AND DIALOGUE

One of the more fascinating uses of shared knowledge in the three churches centered on the ministers' and congregations' uses of dialogue within the sermon. In earlier discussions, I highlight the dialogic nature of traditional African-American sermons. Specifically, I focus on the feedback that the congregation provides for the minister. However, most of that feedback is in the form of affirmation, encouragement, or personal expression of the spirit touching a participant. This type of participatory feedback, or call-and-response, is a phenomenon that has reached beyond sermons to most aspects of public performance in African-American communities (political rallies, concerts, movies) and has influenced many African-American orators. Consider the sermonic "talks" of academic Cornel West. In addition to those types of "dialogue" (the quotation marks indicate the nontraditional nature of this dialogue), another type of dialogue occurs. Although clearly part of the call-and-response interaction, this dialogic interaction relies heavily on the congregations' previous knowledge of biblical Scripture and on their ability to "read" (or hear) spoken and unspoken cues.

Consider the following three examples from Dr. N's sermons:

Example 1:

Dr. N.: God said "I have come that you may have life"
Congregation: (responding in unison) Abundantly

Example 2:

Dr. N.: I'm glad today that God has given me a mission that is larger than [inaudible] Because where there is no vision the people do what?
Congregation: Perish

Example 3:

Dr. N.:	And rather than act on faith, Now now faith is what? The substance
Congregation:	of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen
Dr. N.:	That's all it is

In each of these three examples, there was no warning that Dr. N. was going to engage the congregation in this call-and-response dialogue. However, the readiness of the congregation to respond indicates that this was not a unique occurrence. More importantly, there was nothing in the Scripture reading or previous parts of the sermon that supplied the congregation with the correct responses to Dr. N.'s calls. Dr. N. relied on his congregation's knowledge of biblical Scripture to supply the called-for response. Some knowledge of the Bible—the ability to memorize Scripture—is part of Dr. N.'s expectations of his congregation. He also relied on their ability to recognize the call as one that demands a congregational response. Dr. N.'s congregation was aided in their ability to recognize his call by the explicit use of markers that signal questions—"how" and "what."

Interestingly, the third example featured was used by Reverend M. in one of his sermons:

Reverend M.: Faith is

Reverend M. and Congregation: the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen

What is different when Reverend M. makes his call is that, unlike in Dr. N.'s sermons, there is no explicit marker to signal a question. And Reverend M. does not stop to let his congregation complete the verse alone. They join him in completing the verse from Hebrew 11:1. Reverend M.'s congregation is able to hear (or read) the unspoken cue that they should respond in an expected fashion—namely to respond with Reverend M. to his call. Like Dr. N., however, the correct response to the call is considered shared knowledge. Repeatedly, I witnessed this call-and-response pattern based on biblical knowledge. I witnessed a guest minister at Reverend M.'s church, who had never before been in his church, successfully employ the same strategy. And I remembered that the same strategy had been employed in the church in which I grew up in South Carolina. It seems reasonable to suggest then that one of the characteristics of literate behavior in this community institution, despite the many ways in which African-American communities may vary, is having enough knowledge about the Bible to provide accurate responses

to ministers' calls for reciting Bible verses. These responses by the congregation represent enactments of community.

How does this knowledge come to be shared? The answer to that question is rather complex and can usually be answered with "it depends." In many cases, particularly with older members, the Bible was the major "text" in the home and the only book that many of them read or had read to them. Often, the same Scriptures were read repeatedly because they seemed to speak to the needs of the people, to provide some comfort. This process has taken place not only in the home but also in the church. There are some Scriptures that are popular from church to church, minister to minister (like Hebrew 11:1, "Faith is the substance . . .") that are referred to often. Over the years, these popular Scriptures are stored in members' memories. The members do not even remember learning the Bible verses. People who cannot read come to know these verses as well as those who are formally educated. In addition, this knowledge is developed through Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, and the like. There are various church activities that contribute to literacy development.

However, some methods of learning Bible verses are more direct. In Reverend M.'s and Reverend P.'s churches, the congregation had a monthly memory verse that they were to learn and recite each Sunday morning during that month. The memory verse was printed on the Sunday bulletin. So it is conceivable that at some point, the Scriptures that become part of the sermon could have been part of the memory verses. In addition to the monthly memory verses, each church has Bible study sessions where members (and nonmembers) can study the Bible in depth. These weekly study sessions no doubt contribute to several participants' abilities to recognize, understand, and memorize verses. Clearly, memorizing Bible verses is valued in each of these churches, and thus, the data points to memorization of text as a marker of literate behavior.

What these examples point to is the collaboration that takes place between ministers and congregations in the text. In this instance, that collaboration depends on each participant knowing his or her role—minister as leader and congregation as respondent (Miller & Vander Lei, 1990). In other instances, the collaborative roles are not so distinct nor is the collaboration so easily discernible. These examples also point to the form and content of the shared knowledge as important factors. The congregations "recognize the cup" and the message that the ministers are providing.

EXTENDING BOUNDARIES THROUGH SHARED KNOWLEDGE

As stated earlier, the shared knowledge in these sermons extends beyond the biblical. One of most helpful ways to illustrate this point is to look closely at the following examples from the ministers' sermons. Each example relies on shared knowledge from various communities. Consider Example 1 from Reverend M.'s "Living in the In Between" and Example 2 from Reverend P.'s "Marks of a Spirit-Filled Christian":

Example 1:

Nothing out of the extraordinary like down in verse nine
Where it's now you see him and now you don't
Then [Reverend M. makes swishing noise] two men show up in white, like they've been beamed down from the Starship Enterprise

Example 2:

And they have put down their malt liquor, their Seagram's Seven, Wild Turkey, Johnny Walker Red, Budweiser, their happy smokes

In both of these examples, the ministers rely on their congregations' knowledge of popular culture to understand their allusions and thus make meaning. Reverend M., in Example 1, assumes that his congregation is familiar with *Star Trek* and its famed Starship Enterprise. One presumably does not have to be a Trekkie to conjure up a visual image of Captain Kirk and his crew (or Captain Picard and his crew) being beamed down from the Enterprise. Similarly, one does not have to be a heavy drinker or use marijuana to recognize the references that Reverend P. makes in the Example 2. Reverend P. relies on the congregation's knowledge of popular culture, albeit a particular aspect of popular culture, to make meaning of this example.

Other examples relied on shared knowledge of issues that are predominantly of interest to African Americans but not exclusively. Consider the following two examples again from Reverend M.'s "Living in the In Between":

Example 1:

God gives proof that if you kill a King you cannot kill what King stood for.
That if you silence a Tutu,
Ban a Boesak,
Defeat the candidacy of a Chisolm,
Derail the movement of a Jackson, or denounce the teachings of a Malcolm X,

The truths that undergird these men and women of integrity will keep on coming and keep on coming and keep on coming.
[loud applause from congregation accompanies these final lines]

The final lines of this excerpt allude to Sterling Brown's poem "Strong Men Keep On Coming," a poem that Reverend M. recites in its entirety in a later sermon, "What Makes You So Strong?" referred to in chapter 4.

Example 2:

He never heard the thunderous ovation that a James Cleveland, or a Trumaine Hawkins has heard as they brought thousands to their feet.

In Example 1 the references are obviously to black political leaders in the United States and South Africa. Although these people are known across the world, they have special significance to a congregation of African Americans who these leaders represent and sometimes speak for. Of particular interest is the first line of the first example where Reverend M. plays on the word *king*. He relies on shared knowledge and context for the congregation to pick up the reference to Martin Luther King. In Example 2, he relies on his congregation's knowledge of African-American contemporary gospel music to identify the late James Cleveland and Trumaine Hawkins, two extremely popular gospel singers in African-American communities.

The ministers also relied on knowledge they shared with their congregations that came about as a result of their memberships in their specific churches or their residences in Chicago. Reverend P. often referred to people in his sermons whom he assumed people knew: "brother Blair" or "Bishop A.B. Williams." Insiders in the church clearly knew to whom Reverend P. referred. Each minister referred to Harold Washington, the deceased former mayor of Chicago, who was the first African-American mayor of Chicago. Reverend M. often referred to Ed Burke and Ed Vrodolyak who were political nemeses of Mayor Washington. Dr. N., in the following example, relies on his congregation's knowledge of Chicago landmarks and noted residents:

Then you get downtown,
And you see John Hancock spurring up the heights up there.
Then you see [inaudible] standing up there.
Somebody owns those buildings.
Somebody owns every one of them.
And then you get downtown.
You start asking "who owns them?"
Then you find one little building standing about that high

[Dr. N. makes gesture with hand]
They say that's owned by John Johnson
Then our chest starts swellin out.
No!
Don't let their chest run out because we got a building four stories high.
What else? What else?
What about thinking of owning John Hancock's?

What is interesting about this excerpt is not the John Hancock building reference (most people living in Chicago have seen the Hancock building). What is most interesting is that Dr. N. relies on shared knowledge in Chicago; that John Johnson owns *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines and that the building that is only four stories high is the corporate office for the Johnson Publishing Company.

In many cases, the ministers relied on shared knowledge of historical concerns. Reverend M. was most skillful employing that particular strategy. Examine the following example from Reverend M.'s sermon "The Lord's Prayer Part III":

A privatized an individualistic selfish and self-centered notion of [a] you and me God Community!
We count. It doesn't matter about anybody else.
That's the God of Thomas Jefferson who held slaves.
That's the God of Emmanuel Kant, John Locke, and Adam Smith,
All of whom acted as if black people did not exist or if
they did exist they were not white people.
And the same things holds true for brother Karl Marx.
The God of Harriet Tubman however is an us God.
Community!
The God of Martin Delaney is an us God.
Community!
The God of Ida Wells is an us God.
Community!
The God of [inaudible] David Walker, Sojourner Truth, and Mary McLeod Bethune,That God is an us God.
A God of community not a God of private concerns only!

It is not difficult to see how Reverend M. has categorized the two groups of names he has referenced in this excerpt. From his perspective, the first group from Thomas Jefferson to Karl Marx are those who ignored Black people and the concerns of Black people even as they apparently argued for a more democratic society, but not for Blacks, only for themselves. The latter group, from Harriet Tubman to Mary McLeod Bethune, was

concerned not with just themselves and their own but with a more inclusive community. The only information or explanation that the congregation receives about either group comes from the linguistic context in the excerpt that points to the two groups. Reverend M. relies on shared knowledge between him and his congregation to make meaning from this excerpt. The references require some knowledge on the part of the congregation of American, African-American, and European philosophy and history. Most Americans would have been introduced to the names in the first group mentioned no later than high school (with the possible exception of Kant). Most Americans would have been introduced to only a couple of the names in the latter group in high school—Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth.

So what might Reverend M. assume about his congregation based on an analysis of this excerpt? He assumes that many of them are educated, well-read, or both; that they know history and philosophy. He assumes that they know African-American history, particularly about the African Americans who fought for the abolition of slavery and for the rights of newly freed former slaves. He also assumes that many of them know American and European philosophy and history so that they recognize the names of the people who were considered to be the "great thinkers" in Western culture. Of course, all the great thinkers tend to be White men, a point that is a not so subtle undercurrent in Reverend M.'s example.

It is possible that Reverend M. is attributing to his congregation his own personality and traits. He is a well-read, educated person. However, he is not alone. As I suggested in chapter 2, this congregation is considered to be one of the most highly educated African-American congregations in Chicago. It is quite possible, even likely, that a large portion of Reverend M.'s audience shares his knowledge of history and philosophy. It is also quite possible and likely that some members of the congregation were clueless when trying to understand the references in the previous example; they did not share the common background with Reverend M. that would allow them to access all of the references included in the above mentioned excerpt. Because of the diversity of experiences within the congregation, there is difficulty in connecting with everyone. However, as discussed earlier, the long list of references does include some names common to the majority of congregants.

In Reverend M.'s case, there are also other factors to be taken into account. Reverend M. is also teaching. He is throwing out a carrot-—"it is part of your responsibility to know, to learn about these people." Reverend M. emphasizes the value of education in this church, not just formal education, but the things one can learn on one's own by reading. One need only attend services at his church a few weeks to recognize

that Reverend M. places much emphasis on reading about the world and gaining knowledge. In Reverend M.'s church, there was a tremendous effort put forth by Reverend M. and his staff to emphasize the importance of African and African-American culture, including history, literature, art, music, religion, and philosophy. He constantly advised his congregation to read about their African-American culture but not just to stop there. He advised them to learn about other cultures and to "read what your enemies write" so that you know what they are up to. He emphasizes religion within a global context. He emphasizes that Christians have to be ready to fight in God's army, and to be ready, one must be armed with knowledge. Reverend M., thus, tries to broaden the base of knowledge for him and his congregation that provides him with a broader base of shared knowledge from which to pull examples for his sermons. Thus, his use of references such as the previous ones can serve multiple purposes, one of which may be to inspire those who are not familiar with the names he cited to investigate on their own these people. This broad knowledge base is seen in another of Reverend M.'s sermons.

Consider again the following example from Reverend M.'s "Living in the In Between," which was highlighted in an earlier discussion in this chapter. Look closely at the broad knowledge base that Reverend M. calls on and assumes his congregation can also call on to "connect" with him and this part of the sermon:

So often we look for God in the spectacular only,
But God has a way of slipping up on us in the unspectacular,
Of coming quietly in ways that can almost be missed.
We look for him in a palace,
And he shows up as a Palestinian.
We look for him in a royal bassinet and here he is in a reeking barn.
We look for him in a spacious mansion being waited on by servants because of his rank.
And here he is in a small cell with Nelson Mandela being mistreated and locked up because of his color.
We look for him in the White House lawn signing into law school prayer amendment, and here he is languishing with Winnie Mandela and dodging the law of apartheid which has banned them because they speak the truth.
We look for him at a coronation ball and here he is in a crowded barrio.
We we we look for him at the head of government and here he is in the heart of the ghetto.
We look for him in the president and here he is in prisons.
We look for him to show up as a strong macho man and here he is in the person of a strong black godly woman.

We we look for him to show up
In the white strains of "Hail to the Chief" and here he is showing up in a black South African strike.
We look for him to be residing in an old stately mansion high up on a hill and instead he's there hanging on an old rugged cross over another hill.

It is with this example that Reverend M. extends the boundaries of cultures and communities, global contexts and local contexts, secular and sacred traditions. He makes references to an American presidential song and a religious symbol; he makes reference to South Africans and Hispanics, Palestinians and African Americans. His references are sometimes explicit, other times implicit and subtle. Again, not only does his congregation have to have the knowledge that helps them connect to the spoken, but they must also be able to hear the unspoken, that "reeking barn" refers to the barn in which Jesus is born, that "barrio" is a Hispanic ghetto. Clearly, Reverend M. thinks highly of his congregation and their abilities. His pedagogical stance, unlike that in many of the schools that the children in his congregation attend, is not based on a deficit model when making judgments about his congregation's knowledge base.

Reverend M.'s heavy reliance on shared knowledge, particularly that of a broad knowledge base of his congregation is complicated because his congregation is so mixed. It is quite likely that there were some people sitting in the pews who did not recognize many of the references alluded to in the previous excerpts. Are they excluded? By appealing to such a broad base of shared knowledge, Reverend M. extends the boundaries of communities to which he and his congregation can identify. In his long list of references from across so many contexts and communities, each person in his congregation will be able to grasp on to some part of the message, maybe not the same part as his or her neighbor but some part. No one is left out who is willing to enter. Although the appeal to such a broad base of shared knowledge may exclude some, it may provide more opportunities for others to take part in the dialogue within the text.

Reverend M. is also skilled at using the familiar—shared knowledge—to introduce the unfamiliar to his congregation. He states that he "uses the cup people recognize to bring something new." In other words, Reverend M. finds that because his congregation is so familiar with the sermon as genre and text and with certain cultural knowledge, he can use their familiarity to introduce totally new information to the congregation. This point is most easily illustrated by examining an excerpt from a sermon on probably the most familiar prayer in the Bible, The Lord's Prayer. Specifically, in the sermon, "The

Lord's Prayer Part I," Reverend M. focuses on the well-known opening of "Our Father" to discuss the many ways of addressing the Lord. It is in the familiar context of the sermon and the familiar context of The Lord's Prayer and its opening, "Our Father," that Reverend M. introduces the new—a discussion of ways of addressing "Our Father" in African religions (see discussion of African religion's multiple names for God in chap. 1):

In African religions God is called the one who exists by himself
And he is called the one who is met everywhere
He is called the great ocean headdress in the horizon
And he is called the wise one
The all seeing the one who brings round the seasons
The **Zulu** call him he who bends down even majesties
The **Zulu** call him the irresistible
The **Bankutu** speak of him as **Nzambi**
The **Yoruba** call him **Olaroon**
The **Ashanti** call him **Neonmi**

This section is but one small part of a much larger section of the sermon in which Reverend M. goes through a long list of names for "Our Father" including the many names in the Bible for which Reverend M. provides for the congregation the book, chapter and verse of the Biblical reference (as if he were citing references in an academic paper). In that sense, this excerpt is part of a pattern that is quite obvious and familiar to the congregation. The congregation has been told that this new information has to do with African religions. Reverend M. provides this new information on how the Supreme Being in Africa is referred to, using in some cases literal English translations and in other cases the name as used in the African tribal language. Implicit in this discussion, of course, is the notion that the name of the Supreme Being may be different in the land of the African-American congregation's ancestors, but the concept is the same. They are referring to the same God that his congregation prays to when they say "Our Father." Yet, the congregation is given the comfort of learning the implicit and explicit message through the familiar context of The Lord's Prayer. In this instance, using the familiar—the shared knowledge—to teach the unfamiliar is an effective way of teaching a people about their culture, their heritage. It was a technique the people responded to well as evidenced by their affirmation and encouragement of Reverend M. through their feedback. This example is also important because of the diasporic connections of the religious traditions of African Americans and Africans.

"HE SURE CAN PREACH!"

The use of shared knowledge to teach new knowledge as just discussed was an effective way for Reverend M. to display his knowledge. An important factor in evaluating the three ministers in this study is how important it is to the congregations that their ministers have broad knowledge bases. There are other criteria for being judged a good preacher. As I alluded to in chapters 1 and 2, contemporary African-American congregations want preachers who are good with language, who are smart, who have credentials. In short, they want someone "who has something to say and knows how to say it." When Dr. N., Reverend P., and Reverend M. display their knowledge of the Bible, of world and local history, of politics, of African languages, and so on, they are showing their credentials. They are showing that they deserve to be in the pulpit, that they have the credentials to lead a church. The congregations as well as the ministers are aware of that dual role the ministers have of being leader of the community and part of the community at the same time. Being able to show your credentials by displaying your broad knowledge base without sounding "uppity" or worse "sounding White" is acceptable and expected behavior in these churches. The congregations are proud, and they like to brag about their preachers. In each of the churches, I was constantly reminded by members of the congregations that their minister "could preach!"

Although the discussion of shared knowledge raises many questions about what ministers assume about their congregations and whether some people are excluded from the "dialogue" if the ministers' assumptions are wrong, it also points out the extent to which the ministers in the three churches depend on in-group communication to be effective preachers. The ministers can easily measure their effectiveness by the response of the congregation. In most cases, a completely silent congregation equals a failed or, at least ineffective, sermon. Although I never witnessed a silent congregation during my observations, I have been in other churches where congregations sat silently while the minister preached. During those moments, the silence was deafening. The way to avoid that silence is to "connect with" the congregation. It would seem highly unlikely, maybe even impossible, for these ministers, particularly Reverend M., to rely so heavily on shared knowledge and consequently common backgrounds with their congregation if they had not established strong communal bonds with their congregations. These communal bonds that shape this community identity are emphasized and strengthened even more by the use of shared knowledge. Using shared knowledge signals to both insiders and outsiders that there are boundaries, albeit nonfixed boundaries, which

designate community, which signal what is valuable to know, believe, and do in a particular community.

Important questions come to mind, however. Given that these boundaries do exist to designate community, is community relegated to each minister's individual church? Do these nonfixed boundaries only exist in individual churches, or do they stretch across time and space, expanding or broadening our definition of community and text? Chapter 3 paints a picture of a complex community, a community of minister and congregation working together to create a text which is itself complex. Yet, the picture is of three individual church communities. Given the cultural knowledge that shapes African-American worship traditions, community boundaries should expand beyond the confines of one church's walls. Chapter 4, therefore, focuses on how Reverend M. expands the boundaries of community across time and space. Specifically, in this chapter, we have an opportunity to see Reverend M. creating community through the sermons in a church other than his own. This next chapter focuses on Reverend M. as he was a guest preacher running a week-long revival at a church in another city. Taken together, chapters 3 and 4 provide a multidimensional picture of both the major literate text and how it functions in and among African-American churches.