Introduction
Literacy in African-American Churches: A Conversation Between the Academy and the Church Begins

A DIVINE MOMENT

Almost anyone growing up in and around Protestant churches has heard the saying "God works in mysterious ways." It is a saying that is a favorite in my family and in my church. Although I thought that I believed this saying was true, I could not personally attest to its accuracy until that moment when my church community and my academic community seemed to sit down and have a conversation in my head. This unique conversation led to the research questions that have been the focus of my intellectual life for too many years to count. It is not often (well maybe it is) that one gets the seeds of a research question and subsequent project in the middle of a Sunday morning sermon, but, as one is often encouraged to do in churches, I can "claim witness" to such an event because it happened to me.

As I was sitting in church one morning listening intently to the sermon, as I had done countless Sunday mornings before, my focus drifted toward not only what this minister said but how he said it. I began paying as much attention to how people reacted to the Word as it was being preached as to the Word itself. This annoying practice of divided attention continued for several more Sunday morning worship services before I realized that I was almost as enthralled by the use of language and texts in the church as I was the message being delivered. Yet, I did not know what to make of this fascination. What was going on in this church and in my mind that kept nagging at me? Slowly I began to understand that the answer to that question was not the message but the questions that were emerging from it; they were the real message. Given my interest in literacy studies and ethnography and given my

heartfelt desire to do research that kept me connected to my community, I could not help but interpret "the message" as an invitation to "go to church." Whether or not I was being sent a divine message, I finally came to understand that I was certainly being given an opportunity. This opportunity presented itself at a time when I was thinking about where my scholarly path would lead me and if that journey would be in conflict with my life as an African-American woman from the south or if that journey would be in concert with and a celebration of that life. Up to that point, I was still not convinced that being part of the academy for an African American, and especially a woman, did not mean giving up part of one's self. Yet, here, seemingly, was an opportunity to do research in a setting that would allow me to be who I was—an African-American woman who can normally be found in church on Sunday morning. As important, I had the opportunity to do research in a setting—African-American churches—that would extend the discussion on literacy acquisition and literate practices among African Americans.

VIEWS WITHIN THE ACADEMY

Extending the discussion on literacy acquisition among African Americans was (and remains) important because of the status that literacy, particularly academic literacy, is given in the United States as a marker of success in the academy and as a marker of upward mobility. This discussion of literacy in composition studies is not about one's ability to read and write; that represents too narrow a definition of literacy. The discussion is more about the relation between how language is used and what counts as literacy. Far too many past and current discussions about African-Americans' literacy and language skills paint us in a negative light.

Too often, African Americans are still looked at as having deficient literacy and language skills that lead to problems in achieving success in academic settings. One of the major assumptions is that African-American students are not being socialized into literacy in their home communities, that they are being raised in a "literacy vacuum." Such assumptions lead to ill-conceived claims that African Americans are primarily an oral people who have little experience with literacy outside schooling, and as such are cognitively deficient. One need only look at the most recent debates about Ebonics to see how prevalent and widespread are the beliefs about the lack of literacy and language proficiency in African-American communities. In many ways, this kind of thinking reminds me of the cultural deprivation theories that were so prominent in the 1970s and the Bell Curve discussions of the early 1990s.

When I read about or hear about the many negative portraits painted of literacy and language in African-American communities, I think about my own experience growing up in and participating in African-American communities where there is much evidence of rich, complex literacy and language skills in use. So what is it that I see or that Geneva Smitherman (1977), in *Talkin' and Testifyin'*, sees that is in contrast to the negative picture I just alluded to? Have researchers ignored and/or undervalued the ways that literacy is used in the home communities of marginalized groups in the United States? What can make the portraits more complete in their depictions of African-Americans' and other marginalized groups' interactions with literacy inside and outside school?

I am but one of many researchers who has posed such questions. One important answer to the questions or various versions of them posed here that has emerged and gained momentum is that literacy scholars broaden the domains in which literacy is studied. Thus, this answer has led to important ethnographic studies of literacy in nonacademic settings: Farr's (1993, 1994) study of the social networks of Mexican-American families in a Mexican-American community in Chicago; Weinstein-Shr's (1994) ethnography of literacy in the Hmong communities in Philadelphia; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines' (1988) ethnography of literacy use among poor urban African-American families in an urban New Jersey area; Heath's (1983) ethnography of literacy in Trackton and Roadville, working-class African-American and White communities in the Piedmont Carolinas; Philips' (1983) ethnography of literacy on the Warm Springs Indian reservation; Scribner and Cole's (1981) ethnography of literacy among the Vai in Africa; Scollon and Scollon's (1981) ethnography of literacy among the Athabaskan of Alaska. Each of these studies suggests that there is a great deal of rich and complex literacy and language activity occurring in the home communities of these various racial and ethnic groups. And each of these studies suggests that what constitutes "community literacy" for each of these communities (and communities like them) does not necessarily match what is known as *school literacy*.

Although current literacy research calls for more studies of literacy as it is practiced in the social contexts of various communities, and although many scholars (including me) rush to heed this call, we still find ourselves looking at a model of literacy that is based on traditional (i.e., narrow) academic notions of literate texts and literate behavior. Although more of us accept that different communities use literacy in ways that contrast significantly to those of the academy's departments, we rarely question whether these differences have led to or are a result of contrasting definitions of literate texts. In other words,

we continue to operate on the assumption that a literate text is similar from community to community—that the differences are evidenced only in how these texts are used. And we still view the academic expository essay as the model literate text (Heath, 1993). These assumptions conflict with current findings in literacy studies, particularly with ethnographic findings that suggest that not only does literacy function differently from community to community, but that literacy may be defined differently from community to community. In short, literacy is defined in context. It follows that if definitions of literacy are dependent on the context and community in which literacy is used, then the concept of a literate text must also be dependent on context and community.

Because of this body of research, in composition and education studies, we have come to understand the need for knowing how students use literacy in settings other than school. If community is to be part of the educational process, and it must be, then schools must understand the role of community. This knowledge is important in making connections between school and home. Moll (1992) argued that "the community needs to be perceived by others and probably by the community itself, as having resources that schools cannot ignore" (p. 227).

Like Moll, I seek to "understand and forge relationships" between the domains of school literacy and community and household literacy. Whereas Moll focused on Latino and Hispanic communities, looking at household literacy and its role in school literacy, I focus on African-American communities, and more particularly on a community institution—the African-American church—and its role in defining literacy[1] and literacy learning in African-American communities.

VIEWS WITHIN AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCHES

The African-American church is a particularly important community institution in which to study literacy because of its central role in African-American communities as a site of cultural, religious, and educational activities. African-American churches have a history as sites of literacy teaching and literacy learning. However, educators have traditionally viewed this site of literacy education exclusively in terms of the traditional school-based norm of teaching the individual to read and write. Although that portrayal is accurate, I argue that it is also simple and naive. The role of African-American churches in literacy education is far more complex and far more influential on its members than has

[1]Although literacy has meant many things throughout the world, since the invention of the printing press, it has been most associated with print. Since the mid-1980s, however, numerous studies have emerged that push for a broader definition.

been historically understood and thus has been overlooked as an important site of literacy and language learning. In assessing its importance as an educational center in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Mays and Nicholson (1933) asserted that the "Negro church is one of the greatest, perhaps the greatest, channel through which the masses of the Negro race receive adult education. . . . It becomes the center of religious, moral, and intellectual teaching" (p. 58). Its primacy as the center of political, social, and intellectual movements within African-American communities makes the church one of the longest standing, powerful institutions in this country.

In many ways, literacy in African-American churches can be understood more clearly by seeing it as analogous to invention, as LeFevre (1987) explained it. LeFevre argued that invention is "an act that may involve speaking and writing, and that at times involves more than one person; . . . it is an act initiated by writers and completed by readers" (p. 1). In this community institution, literacy often centers on the production of a text that is the result of a collaborative act between minister and congregation and that involves speaking and writing. That is, literacy in African-American churches involves speaking and writing, and is focused on texts in which rhetor and listeners—congregants—collaborate to complete the text—to produce the literacy event. This view of literacy, then, as a collaborative as well as an individual act moves one to critical questions in literacy studies and to an examination of several long-held assumptions. That is, African-American churches are sites where literacy often functions and differs widely from the notion of literacy in the academic sense. Text is defined and used there in unique ways. Additionally, this view of literacy has far-reaching consequences for how the members of this community, particularly its school-age children, conceive of literacy, literate behavior, and literate texts.

In this book I use ethnographic and textual analysis to explore literate texts and literacy traditions in African-American churches. Specifically, I focus on how literate texts are characterized and how they function within this community institution, and, more specifically still, on how the sermon calls into question long-held assumptions about texts and literacy. Four general questions guide this analysis:

1. What constitutes a text, particularly a literate text, in this setting?
2. How are what has been traditionally viewed as the components of the rhetorical situation—rhetor, audience, message—affected by an alternative view of text that I argue for in this book?

3. How does this "new" concept of literacy and text function in African-American churches?
4. How does this alternative conceptualization of literacy and text impact on traditional notions of literacy and texts?

A major assumption guiding this book is that literacy and, therefore, literate behavior and literate texts can only be defined through examining literacy in the contexts in which literacy functions (Street, 1984). That assumption has been amply illustrated and supported in Scribner and Cole's (1981) study of literacy of the Vai, Heath's (1983) study of working-class African-American and White communities in Trackton and Roadville, Shuman's (1986) study of teenage girls in Philadelphia, Fishman's (1988) study of literacy in an Amish community, McLaughlin's (1992) study of Navajo literacy on a Navajo reservation, and the list could go on. That is, the context in which literacy functions will inevitably shape how it is defined. A second assumption that guides this work is that literacy is a complex, social process involving multiple levels of participation by rhetors and audience, intertextual relationships (i.e., interdependent relations between oral, written, and sometimes musical texts) and complex belief systems of members of particular communities. Because the first assumption is no longer a novel theory and is, in fact, now commonly held, it does not call for extensive discussion. However, the notion of literacy as a complex social process is still in its infancy stage in many respects and deserves more attention.

LITERACY AS SOCIAL PROCESS

Brandt (1990), in her introduction to *Literacy as Involvement*, argued for a process perspective on literacy. In doing so she suggested that "texts take their natures from the ways that they are serving the acts of writing and reading" (p. 13). In support of seeing literacy as a social process, Brandt stated the following:

> literacy is the most social of all imaginable practices—hypersocial, actually, because it epitomizes the role of culture in human exchange and condenses into the channels of reading and writing some of the most crucial of our joint enterprises. (p. 1)

Brandt further stated:

> writers and readers in action are deeply embedded in an immediate working context of aims, plans, trials, and constructions (which

> themselves are tied to circumstantial and cultural contexts of all sorts). The language that they write and read finds meaning only in relationship to this ongoing context—a context more of work than words. (p. 4)

Brandt's stance sets the stage for looking at not only literacy as a social process but also literate texts as social processes rather than individual products. That is, it is through this "human exchange" that texts are developed in African-American churches. Of course, Brandt focused on the acts of reading and writing as decoding and encoding. Although she usefully complicated those concepts in her study, this book demonstrates that Brandt's definitions of reading and writing can be further complicated by examining what the participants do with and in texts in the churches I studied.

In many ways, this text aims to demonstrate as well as explain that any form of literacy is a complex, social process. In the context of the African-American church, however, there are three key components of literacy as a social process that this study highlights: the presence of multiple participants in the literacy event; the presence of intertextual relationships; and the influence of cultural norms and ideology that shape the way participants, intertextuality, and discourse interact. This list is by no means exhaustive. I have no doubt that there are many components of this process that will emerge in studies of literacy in other communities. However, I focus my discussion on the three components listed here because they have emerged as most important in this community institution. They stand out as markers of literacy in African-American churches.

Most obviously, the social nature of literacy requires that there are multiple participants in this process. That is, there is not a solitary writer nor an isolated reader; writer and reader collaborate in the act of making the text. The writer and reader also share the roles of speaker and listener, making the levels of participation more complex. This study demonstrates that these roles are interchangeable (writer or speaker becomes reader or listener and vice versa) and that without this unique role reversal, the text as it comes into being in African-American churches would not exist. Given this view, it seems problematic to continue, in the academy, to support the notion of the solitary or radically individual reader and writer. This view of the boundaries between writer and reader as blurred or interchangeable is supported by much research. Vygotsky's (1978) notion of internal speech, for example, suggests that "writers" and "readers" collaborate with each other to find meaning even when only one participant is physically present, and many theorists, following Barthes' (1977) "The Death of the Author" have challenged the autonomy of either category. In composition

studies, some scholars have argued that being a good writer demands being a good reader of one's own text and thus, in this sense, we have accepted the interchanging roles (Sloane, 1991). However, none of these scholars have examined the concept of multiple participants and multiple levels of participation in literacy events through the eyes of the participants themselves. Doing so, I believe, is the first step in looking carefully at literacy as a social process.

A second key component of literacy as a social process is its use of intertextuality. Bloome and Bailey (1992) suggested that "intertextuality is a key concept in understanding relationships between texts (including conversational and written texts), between and among events, between events and cultural ideology" (p. 198). African-American worship services are characterized by intertextual relationships that illuminate the complexity of the relations between speaking and listening, writing and reading, writing and speaking, as well as the relations between literacy events and cultural norms governing these events. Although African-American worship services appear to be dominated by oral events (sermons, prayers, songs), there is, in fact, an interdependence between oral and written events, and therefore oral and written texts. Thus, my discussion of intertextuality encompasses not only the interconnecting of texts but also interconnecting among media. There are also cultural norms that govern when and how certain texts are used and for what purposes they are used. These intertextual relations and their accompanying cultural norms have major implications for how African-American church communities create, define, and use literate texts. This intertextuality is also characterized by the social relations between participants and texts, relations that focus on process as an important factor in the use of literacy and on how such relations are established, maintained, and change. In this book, I examine the what and how of intertextuality in literate texts and literacy events in African-American churches.

The third component of literacy as a social process is the role of cultural norms and ideology—here, the complex belief system of members of African-American church communities. It is this complex belief system that shapes behavior, values, language use, and beliefs about language, and which sets up expectations and rules for the roles of participants and intertextual relations in the church. This belief system constitutes the shared cultural knowledge that plays a significant role throughout the African-American church. In most communities, such cultural knowledge contributes significantly to the creation of insider-outsider status. The African-American church is no exception.

As suggested earlier, shared cultural knowledge (or understanding, including norms, ideology, and artifacts) contributes

significantly to the roles and expectations of participants, intertextual relations, and just about everything else in this institution. That is, there are expectations and shared experiences that dictate "the way we act" and "what we recognize as acceptable behavior" in the worship styles of African-American churches. Of course, this cultural knowledge is complicated because of the multiple community memberships held by most members of African-American churches. There are even multiple communities within the church itself. A further complication is that one can be in the church and still be an outsider; that is, one can be unaware of the spoken and/or unspoken cultural norms.[2] Also, not every church to which African Americans belong will fit the model of mainstream African-American churches that are the models for this book (I address this point later in this introduction and again in chap. 1).

When one examines any culture, one tends to look to the artifacts of that culture as a way of understanding it, as part of the cultural knowledge. Anthropologists and archaeologists have long understood the importance of artifacts in describing a way of life of a people. Although some view artifacts as the physical materials and products of a people—architecture, documents, carvings, and so on—I use a much broader definition that would allow for products (i.e., institutions and practices) and processes as well to be labeled *artifacts*. From this standpoint, one of the most important artifacts in a culture is its language, including how a people define and use literacy. This point reiterates an earlier one, that literacy in a particular community or community institution cannot be separated from culture.

Positioning literacy in the role of cultural artifact provides an opportunity to look at literacy as both process and product. Scholars can examine how one learns and uses literacy as well as what literacy is and what constitutes literate texts. Furthermore, scholars can combine ethnographic (process) and textual (product) analyses to learn more about literacy in both roles. Examining the processes and products of literacy allows scholars more access to the complex nature of literacy, the multilayeredness of literacy. Thus, these three components of literacy as a social process—multiple levels of participation, intertextual relations, and cultural knowledge—provide keys to understanding literacy not only as a social process but also to understanding the multilayered nature of literacy as it functions in African-American churches.

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[2]I use *shared cultural knowledge* in a descriptive way rather than prescriptive in the Hirsch (1987) sense. These churches use shared cultural knowledge for the purpose of worship, not for establishing a national program or curriculum.

THE STUDY

A Community Text Arises emerges from an ethnographic study of literacy in three African-American churches in Chicago and one in Ohio. The first phase of this study focused on the African-American sermon as a literacy event (Moss, 1988). My goal in the original study was to look at the relationship between oral and written language in the sermons of African-American ministers who "composed" their sermons using varying degrees of writing. The three Chicago churches chosen for the original study (out of the 12 that I visited) were mainline Protestant African-American churches where worship styles were recognized as being in the tradition of the African-American church. One church, in the United Church of Christ denomination, was pastored by a minister who described himself as a "manuscript minister"—a minister who preached from a complete manuscript. The second church, a Baptist Church, was pastored by a "nonmanuscript minister"—a minister who rarely even wrote notes from which to preach. The third church, in the Pentecostal Holiness denomination, was pastored by a "partial manuscript minister"—a preacher who wrote out approximately one fourth of his sermon. These distinctions between the types of manuscripts the ministers used were important for the original study because of its focus on the relation between oral and written language in the African-American church. That is, I examined the impact of writing on the shape of the sermon as well as the service as a whole.

Specifically, in that study I spent approximately 10 weeks in each of the three churches collecting data through ethnographic methods—participant observation, fieldnotes, interviews, collecting artifacts, and so on. In each church I taped at least five sermons and collected any written texts or notes that accompanied these sermons. Because I was a participant-observer during the services in which the five sermons were preached, I also gathered fieldnotes during as well as before and after the services. I conducted multiple formal and informal interviews with the ministers—my main informants—as well as informal interviews with many members of each church.

In 1993, I began a second phase of the project, conducting fieldwork and gathering data in a fourth church in Columbus, Ohio, where the manuscript minister was "running" a weeklong revival.[3] This second phase of data collecting is important because it provides an

[3]Reverend M. has now run the revival for 3 out of the past 6 years at the church in Ohio. This revival, like most, is a 6-day event. The revival minister, a guest preacher, preaches two sermons on Sunday and one sermon each weekday evening. In southern African-American churches, revival is also referred to as *homecoming* because many former members living out of town return home for the revival.

opportunity to study one of the ministers in a setting other than his own church. I could then look for patterns across communities (different churches and states). During this period, I collected additional fieldnotes, audiotaped and videotaped seven more sermons and conducted another interview with the manuscript minister. The data I have for this minister, then, span 5 years and two different congregations. Because of the sheer amount of data I have for this minister and because he seems representative, in preaching style, of many traditional African-American preachers, he is referenced far more in this book than the other two ministers from the original study.

THE BOOK

In this volume, I seek to use these data to illuminate the ways that the primary model of a literate text is shaped and used in African-American churches. Chapter 1, "African-American Church as Community," examines how the African-American church has operated as a community within larger African-American communities. As a result, chapter 1 provides a historical, sociological, and theological perspective on African-American churches and an overview of major components of the church community.

Because I seek to examine literacy within the contexts of its functions in African-American churches, the settings for this study—the particular churches—are as important as any other kind of data. Chapter 2 of this book, "Entering the Communities," then, introduces to the reader, through ethnographic descriptions, the churches that I studied—the ministers, their congregations, and the history of each church. I also describe the typical worship services at these churches and provide a brief discussion of the types of texts and literacy events that typically take place in each church. In this book, I use Heath's (1982a) definition of a *literacy event*—"any action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and/or comprehension of print play a role" (p. 92). Although the sermon is the major literacy event in this community and is the focus of the next three chapters, there are other literacy events and texts that surround the sermon that demonstrate the range of texts and the diversity of uses of literacy in this setting. Along with chapter 1, this chapter sets the context for the data that will be reported and discussed in the remaining chapters of the book.

Chapter 3, "Creating a Community Within the Sermons," highlights the features of the major literacy event and text in African-American churches—the sermon. Through close analysis of individual sermons within the context of church services, I illustrate how the sermon functions as a community text. I examine the rhetorical strategies

that the participants use to create and maintain communal bonds and, consequently, a community identity through the text. I focus specifically on the following strategies: the role of collective pronouns, the role of shared knowledge, and the role of call-and-response dialogue. All three ministers rely on these three strategies within their sermons to eliminate distance and blur boundaries between them and their congregation.

In chapter 4, "Broadening the Community Boundaries Through the Text: Reverend M. in a New Congregation," I focus solely on the sermons of Reverend M., the manuscript minister (no full names will be used), from his weeklong revival services in Columbus, Ohio. I continue to highlight rhetorical strategies that are used to create and maintain community identity. I provide further discussion of the uses of call-and-response dialogue and shared knowledge. I also describe how Reverend M. uses storytelling and intertextuality in his sermons as markers of community membership. These additional data from the Columbus church emphasize the African-American sermon not only as community text but also as cultural phenomenon. Both chapters 3 and 4 contain numerous and sometimes lengthy excerpts from the ministers' sermons. Although readers cannot hear the sermons as they were delivered and, thus, cannot hear the rhythm or intonation that signals meaning in these sermons, the excerpts provide readers with an opportunity to "see" the complexities of the sermons and get a "feel" for how each minister uses language.

The analysis in chapters 3 and 4 provides a view of a text that calls into question traditionally held notions of text inside and outside the academy. Therefore, chapter 5, "The Emergence of a Community Text" deals with the implications of this study for how text is defined. Important in this discussion are the following questions: What is a literate text in African-American churches? What are the implications for how one defines writer, reader, and audience? Who owns the text? Also, important in this discussion are the implications for the relation between oral and written texts. In chapter 5 I argue for a dynamic rather than a fixed, static definition of text. I also argue for descriptions of writer, speaker, and audience that deemphasize the boundaries between those roles and emphasize the interchangeable aspects of each role. I also argue for the blurring of boundaries between oral and written language. Finally, I end chapter 5 by exploring the implications for literacy learning and teaching of members of this community setting.

NEGOTIATING THE SITES OF TENSION

Readers of this book may likely recognize seeming tensions in the text, tensions that emerge in the voice in which I find myself writing from

time to time or tensions that emerge when an apparent shift in audience occurs. It seems useful then, as a bridge to the rest of this book, to provide a prologue of sorts in which I highlight some of the tensions that emerged as I was gathering and analyzing data, and writing this book. Some of these are personal tensions that affected the lenses through which I saw the "stories" in this study and the way I painted the pictures and constructed the narratives that are at the heart of this book. Some of the tensions are those that exist in the field of composition (and literacy) studies. These tensions lead me to resist any easy or set conclusions and, instead, to call for more self-conscious acknowledgment and examination of the competing roles any researcher must face in pursuing issues such as those involving community literacies.

Moving to a Written Text: The Ethnographic "Story"

Many of the tensions that I experienced emerged from the writing up of the research, from the scripting of this book. I began to feel in the early stages of drafting this manuscript that this book would not look like most written ethnographic reports because it relied heavily on textual analysis. Of course, I had in my mind a more "typical" ethnographic story, based on Van Mannen's (1988) *Tales of the Field* and actual ethnographies (Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Lofty, 1988; and others) that appeared, at least in my mind, far less text-based than this book. So, I began to worry about what an ethnographic study should look like. Where does textual analysis fit? How can I represent the voices of the participants in a book built around textual analyses?

The questions began to swirl in my head, and the writing began to slow to almost a complete stop. Resolution to these issues about what an ethnographic study should look or "read" like seemed nonexistent until I began to think of how I came to focus on the sermon as an important literate and then community text that deserved more focused attention. It was through examining patterns in my fieldnotes and ethnographic interviews that I began to focus on the role of the sermons within the context of the worship services of the African-American churches in this study. The analyses in those aspects of the fieldwork led me to something similar to what Hymes (1982) called a *hypothesis-oriented ethnography*, where ethnographic work centers on seeking specific information. Therefore, a narrower strip of a culture is examined. Although I had data on more than just the sermons, it was the sermons and the participants' interactions with this text that emerged from the original study as an important site of investigation for understanding literate texts in the churches.

Thus, the data dictated the form and content of the manuscript. I do not mean to say that I don't feel any more tension about my

"atypical" ethnographic study. The tension remains. However, I have begun to question whether an ethnographic study must be written as a "tale" or story in the most recognizable ways. In this book, I feel as if the ministers tell their stories through the sermon excerpts, and that my analysis weaves together those stories into a larger one. The textual analysis provides an important strand of the story that I weave together.

Another tension emerged as I tried to resolve, for myself, issues about who my audience is for this book. I found myself writing for two audiences who, in my mind at least, most often were competing with each other. One audience—the participants in the churches, the people in the community institution the book is about—should be the primary audience. It is this audience who gave me the strength and courage to do this study and provided the settings for the study. It is also this audience that I grew up with and live with and pray with, and who is most affected by the issues that I raise in this book. The other audience, the academic audience, controls my fate as a scholar. They, in important ways determine when, where, and if this manuscript is published, whether the story in this book will be allowed to be told. They also are least informed about the issues I raise in this book. At times, the double audience confused me as a writer. I was not always sure for which audience I was writing. At other times, this tension angered me. Why should I have to write to an academic audience of my peers? Why can't I write primarily for the people the book is about?

While I tell myself that I was never really able to resolve this tension, I also know that, in most important ways, the academic audience won out as the primary audience. I did not feel equipped or powerful enough to fight a battle about audience with publishers, tenure committees, reviewers, and other interested parties. However, the participants in the study were never far beneath the surface once I came to understand that I am one of them. There were times while writing this book that I forgot that it was okay for me to acknowledge my role as a participant. And as a participant and scholar I made some decisions that reflect my loyalty to and protectiveness of this group.

In the writing of this book, I was asked by several readers to compare and contrast what happens in these churches with what happens in White churches. I chose not to respond to those requests for several reasons. First, this was an ethnographic study of specific African-American churches. To study White churches would require a separate study. Second, and most importantly, to compare and contrast what people in African-American churches do with texts with what people in White churches do with texts suggests that only through this comparison and contrast with the dominant power group in American society can the actions of another group be validated. Once again, what

White Americans do would be set up as the norm. For those reasons, I chose not to set up a comparison and contrast. For people who worry that this absence signals that all the events described and analyzed in this book are unique to African Americans, that was never my intention. Any of these elements could and are found in the communities of other groups. It is the combination of events, their contexts and functions, that make them unique to a community.

Another important tension that emerged concerned my own personal writing style. Throughout the writing stages of this book, various readers have pointed out places that seemed needlessly repetitious. When I reread those sections, I did not always agree. In fact, I saw those sections as some of my most articulate moments. It was only in conversation with one of my colleagues that I began to understand the tensions about the writing. When I write, I try to create a rhythm that very much depends on phrasing, repetition of syntax, phrases, and words. Of course, other readers do not "hear" the rhythm I hear when I read the sentences. For me, the rhythm was there; for some of my readers, it was not. I also use repetition for emphasis of key points. This same colleague, who had just read parts of a draft of this book, pointed out that I was using similar techniques for rhythm and emphasis that the ministers in this study used. Until that time, I had never explicitly examined how I may have been influenced by this community institution I had grown up in and what sites of negotiation I, myself, had faced, sites that I continue to negotiate. I recognize my students as multiliterate. I see myself as multiliterate, too, but I have never really investigated what that meant for my own writing. Now, I am faced with that task.

Yet another tension I faced when writing this book was how to represent orally performed sermons in the written medium. Whenever I present conference papers based on this work, I usually play excerpts from tapes of sermons so that the audience can hear the rhythm and cadence of the ministers. However, writing for publication presented several dilemmas. Even though two of the three ministers wrote parts or all of their sermons, these sermons were most effective when heard. Several people suggested that I make a tape of the sermons to accompany the book. I thought seriously about doing just that. What stopped me was an ethical dilemma. In three of the four churches in which I collected data (the fourth church was the Ohio church where Reverend M. ran the revival), the churches sold tapes of each sermon to support ministries and the general operation of the churches. To include a tape as part of the price of a book denies the churches the rights to an income that should be theirs. To negotiate with publishers and churches about percentages of royalties to be divided up seemed problematic when more sermons from one minister were used than the others, and four churches were involved. My way of resolving this tension was, of course, not to pursue

the tape issue. Therefore, the sermons are represented in writing in a manner that provides, as much as possible, the rhythm of the sermons. Of course, another tension emerged from this issue: because ownership of text is in question in this community institution, isn't selling the tapes a contradiction to the previous attitude expressed earlier by the ministers? This is another tension I have not resolved.

Community Participant and/Versus Researcher

Some of the tensions emanated from my dual roles as community participant and researcher. I mentioned earlier, for instance, that, at times, I forgot that it was okay to acknowledge my role as a community participant. In fact, it was necessary to acknowledge that role. Yet, I found that, from time to time, I was trapped by that ancient model of research that dictated that any reference to one's self in a study as the researcher be done in an impersonal, dispassionate, third person way—*the researcher*. That model tries to erase the personal, affective experiences of researchers.

When I fell into that trap (in which I was never a permanent resident), I would see my roles as community participant and researcher as opposing roles. That is, I feared that my role as a community participant who looked at African-American churches as rich resources for literacy instruction prevented me from being a rigorous researcher. "Rigorous" researchers, I then thought, looked for the negative, the failures, the deficiencies. Because I did not stay in these traps permanently, I was able to dismiss my narrow view of the rigorous researcher as nothing more than the ravings of a scholar under the pressure of book and tenure deadlines. However, I was not able to dismiss the underlying premise that somehow my dual roles as community participant and researcher would, at the least, complicate my job as a researcher and, at the most, make it impossible.

I could list many other tensions, but doing so would, I think, begin to sound like a writer whining about all the obstacles she faced while writing this book. Instead, I suggest that battling these tensions has been a valuable process for me. What I have learned is that resolutions are not possible in a research project that focuses not on static but rather on dynamic elements like ministers, congregations, and texts. I have also learned that tensions aren't always bad. It was my struggling, on a Sunday morning, with the tensions of trying to attend to two things at once—the what and the how of one of Reverend M.'s sermons—that led me to this moment. Out of that tension grew this study, which has led me to new experiences and understandings as well as new sets of tensions. Is it unreasonable to hope that out of these new tensions may grow equally rewarding work?