

“LOVING ALL PEOPLE REGARDLESS OF RACE, CREED, OR COLOR”:

JAMES L. DELK AND THE LOST HISTORY OF  
PENTECOSTAL INTERRRACIALISM

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MASTERS OF ARTS

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PENTECOSTAL INTERRACIALISM

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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2017

ABSTRACT

Many historians of Pentecostalism have observed that following the initial potential for interracial religion among early Pentecostals following the Azusa Street Revival in 1906, most white Pentecostals progressively cut ties with their African American coreligionists until Pentecostal denominations were almost entirely segregated by the 1930s. To many, this trend towards racial segregation seemed an inevitable trend brought on by the underlying racism of American society during the Jim Crow segregationist era before the mid-1960s. The life of white evangelist James Delk causes us to rethink the narrative of inevitable segregation. An ally and eventual member of the African American Pentecostal Church of God in Christ who became a close associate of church leader Charles H. Mason, Delk’s life offers insight into why some white Pentecostals were able to pursue and maintain interracial religion when the majority of white Pentecostals were not. His life shows how these rare interracial white Pentecostals maintained interracial religious ties due to a combination of their willingness to be counter cultural and go against the standards of white middle class social respectability. While going against mainstream culture was not uncommon to early Pentecostals, the clear interracial theology Delk held was very rare among early white

Pentecostals. Delk's willingness to go against social norms combined with his theology empowered him not only to believe and espouse interracial religion, but also to actively work to build it up. Using local and regional newspapers, as well as personal letters, books, archival collections, interviews, and secondary sources, one is able to see how Delk's path to interracial religion began not far from where many early white Pentecostals also started. In the end, the reason many white Pentecostals did not follow the interracial path of Delk was that they either rejected interracial religion, lacked a solid foundation for interracial theology, or pursued social respectability at the cost of potential interracialism. While Delk's life exemplifies the potential for interracial religion among early Pentecostals, it also shows how the very countercultural personality which enabled him to act upon his interracial theology also held the potential to sabotage his activism.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examine a thesis title “Rev. James L. Delk: The Evolution and Cause for Counter Cultural White Pentecostal Interracial Faith,” presented by Kenan A. Brown, candidate for the Masters of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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“Loving All People Regardless of Race, Creed, or Color”: James L. Delk and the Lost  
History of Pentecostal Interracialism

From nine in the morning until past eleven o'clock at night between Tuesday, November 25, 1957 and Saturday, December 14, 1957, the largest groups of African American Pentecostals, the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), celebrated its fiftieth-year existence during its yearly convocation. Gathering at the denomination's national headquarters at Mason Temple in Memphis, Tennessee, for its annual meeting, over 10,000 people crammed into the auditorium. As the space was only meant to hold around 8,000 people, an additional 5,000 people were outside the auditorium, packed in other rooms, hallways, and overflowing outside the building. The pulpit sat atop a large platform full of important COGIC members, bishops, and speakers. In front and above the platform was a balcony crowded with loyal COGIC Pentecostals. Below sat thousands of other COGIC members who had made the pilgrimage to Memphis for the convocation. Scattered throughout the sea of African American faces were a handful of white COGIC members and well-wishers. One of these few white attendees was the COGIC evangelist James L. Delk, an elder (the COGIC term for a reverend) in the denomination since 1935. Packed in so tightly he had to sit sideways, the seventy-one-year-old Delk was singled out by an Ebony magazine reporter doing an article on the COGIC's golden anniversary for a photo op. The picture of the smiling Delk, the only white face in the crowd around him, was intended to signify the “church's liberal racial policy.” Delk had faithfully attended the convocation for 48 of the 50 years and was noted by the Ebony reporter to have been beaten by the KKK on at least two

occasions for his association with African Americans.<sup>1</sup> While using Delk as a representative of the COGIC's liberal interracial policy may have seemed like a token gesture when comparing the low number of white members in the COGIC to the overwhelming number of African Americans, Delk would likely have considered being used as the symbol of the COGIC liberal racial policy as a badge of pride. For example, a little over a decade before the 1958 convocation Delk wrote that he wished to be remembered after his death as a man "who lived and died loving all people, regardless of Race, Creed, or Color."<sup>2</sup>

Despite Delk's wishes to be remembered for his interracial membership in the COGIC, most of his contemporaries and critics would have remembered him for his controversial reputation as a showy Pentecostal evangelist whose offensive delivery style and theological positions garnered more attention among his fellow white Americans than his interracial stance. What would have stood out to many white Americans (and offended their sense of propriety) would have been how Delk performed acrobatic feats while preaching, stood on top of pulpits roaring fire and brimstone warnings, and shook and shouted in Pentecostal fashion as he decried the evils of alcohol, worldliness, and make-up.<sup>3</sup> Such actions and beliefs were relatively common among early Pentecostals, white or black, and Delk was no exception in that regard.<sup>4</sup> Pentecostalism, an offshoot out of Protestant Holiness

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<sup>1</sup> "CHURCH CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY," *Ebony* 13, no. 5 (March 1958): 54-59. MasterFILE Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed November 27, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> James L. Delk, *He Made Millions of People Happy* (Hopkinsville, KY: James Delk, 1945) 97/7/1, folder 1 FPHC, Springfield MO, 71.

<sup>3</sup> "Delk Platform Poses and Sayings at Big Rink 16th St. and 5th Ave," *Rock Island Argus* (Rock Island, IL), May 24, 1919. From, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Lib. of Congress. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn92053934/1919-05-24/ed-1/seq-7/>. All Chronicling America references from here out will be noted as CAHAN, and all Library of Congress references are abbreviated to LOC.

<sup>4</sup> See Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and the American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); especially chapter eleven. Wacker explains that that Pentecostals were commonly outsiders on the margins of society. They were combative in their religious expression towards mainstream and elite theological, social, class, and political groups. Delk was no exception to this trend.

churches, held many of the same fundamentalist doctrines of the associations it emerged out of, with the addition of controversial religious practices such as speaking in tongues and exuberant worship styles. None of these components of Pentecostalism endeared them to the twentieth century white America mainstream. Furthermore, many early Pentecostals created conflict with former allies when they broke away from Holiness or mainline churches and practiced a “stormy independence” driven by their desire to uphold their own particular interpretation of Holiness Protestantism.<sup>5</sup>

Having developed quite a reputation for his showy and offensive Pentecostal manner in his early years of preaching, Delk was often beaten, shot at, and driven from various towns, again much like his socially controversial early Pentecostal contemporaries. Particularly, his socially offensive delivery style, confrontational manner, and counter cultural beliefs were similar to many early Pentecostals.<sup>6</sup> Early Pentecostals developed a reputation for controversy and confrontation through their “fratricidal brawling” and infighting almost as much as for their antagonistic and offensive position towards mainstream white culture and modernist views of propriety.<sup>7</sup> Early Pentecostals spoke in tongues, shook in worship, and railed against the worldliness of modern American life. When it came to society at large, many early Pentecostals were determined (much like their

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<sup>5</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 28-29.

<sup>6</sup> “Delk Gets Rough Handling,” *Journal Six O’Clock*, (Lincoln, NA), 30 July 1919, 80/5/2, folder 1, Personal Papers—Delk, James Logan, Clip file: 1916-1963, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO. The Personal Papers from here on out will be noted as PPDJL, Clip file and the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center will be noted as FPHC, Springfield, MO; “Girl Makes Charges Against Evangelist Delk,” *Edwardsville Intelligencer*, (Edwardsville, IL), 15 Sept. 1924, 80/5/2, folder 1 PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO. “Jimmy Delk Broke,” *Edwardsville Intelligencer*, (Edwardsville, IL), 27 Dec. 1924, 80/5/2, folder 1 PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO; “Evangelist fired on in Shelbyville,” *Decatur Review*, (Decatur, IL), 26 Nov. 1924, 80/5/2, folder 1 PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO; “Delk in Cell in Shelby Co., Jail,” *Decatur Review*, (Decatur, IL), 28 March 1926, 80/5/2, folder 1 PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), 222.

estranged Holiness cousins) to turn society from its perceived fallen state and were unable to compromise with societies worldliness in the many “conflicts” they provoked “with professional groups and with large or impersonal organizations.”<sup>8</sup> As a result, when it came to battling their worldly foes (alcohol, make-up, modernist social elites, etc) early Pentecostals, as Grant Wacker amusingly observed, behaved “more like John Wayne than Saint Paul, they pushed aside the ones they could and blustered at the ones they could not.”<sup>9</sup> Many early Pentecostals reveled in their conflict with and “persecution” by society.<sup>10</sup> Delk fit this trend of early Pentecostals, converting kindred spirits and facing repercussions from the rest.<sup>11</sup> While many of Delk’s early problems (especially legal ones) involved his troubles paying court fees, nearly all of the attacks during his early years of ministry were preceded by Delk preaching against worldliness, alcohol, and delivering sermons in his controversial style.<sup>12</sup> What is more, Delk’s offensive delivery style and counter mainstream views extended to his opposition of Jim Crow and segregation. Delk would later remember in 1945 having fired off several “Hot Shot” sayings from his earlier ministry railing against segregation and the Jim Crow south.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, it did not help that he was publicly

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<sup>8</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 177-178.

<sup>9</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 191.

<sup>10</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 184-191. Wacker explains the persecutions faced, both real and imagined, were regularly used by Pentecostals to create persecution narratives with themselves as the martyrs oppressed by a hell bound world where God was on their side and all who opposed them opposed God. This empowered them to be even more offensive in their deliveries and style as any backlash was simply seen as vindication of the “martyrs.”

<sup>11</sup> For more on the vast array of repercussions early Pentecostals experienced for their conflict with white mainstream society and sensibilities see Wacker, *Heaven Below*, chapter 11.

<sup>12</sup> For more about Pentecostals being outside the white social mainstream see Mapes Anderson’s *Vision of the Disinherited*. For examples of Delk running into legal troubles see Dean M. Kelley, “Freedom of the Pulpit,” *The Law of Church and State in America: An Analysis and Sourcebook*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 1:307-309. [www.cccny.net/resources/locs.htm](http://www.cccny.net/resources/locs.htm); “Delk Gets Rough Handling,” *Journal Six O’Clock* (Lincoln, NE), July 30, 1919, 80/5/2, folder 1 PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO; “Delk in Cell in Shelby Co., Jail,” *Decatur Review* (Decatur, IL), March 28, 1926, 80/5/2, folder 1 PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO; “Rev. James Delk Sues Police Officers,” *The Daily Capital News* (Jefferson City, MO), Oct. 11, 1933. From Newspapers.com, <http://www.newspapers.com/image/3468886/>.

<sup>13</sup> Delk, *He Made Millions of People Happy*, 91-95.

known to associate with the African American COGIC and held beliefs in common with its leader Charles Mason.<sup>14</sup>

While recognized by his contemporaries as a social outsider due to his Pentecostal beliefs and showman style, what is most historically noteworthy about Delk was what he wanted to be remembered for, and what the Ebony reporter noted about him, his interracial theology and social stance as a long ally and member of the African American COGIC. While some early white Pentecostals also held interracial beliefs, Delk maintained affiliation with African American churches and impulses towards interracial religion long after the overwhelming majority of white Pentecostals had either withdrawn from mixed-race organizations or excluded black members from joining new all-white denominations.

Unlike most Pentecostal figures of his time, James Delk maintained remarkably close ties to the black churches and leaders, such as the COGIC, throughout the first third of the twentieth century. The COGIC is one of the oldest and largest black Pentecostal churches and throughout the first third of the twentieth century the COGIC held interracial beliefs and maintained varying levels of interracial relationships. However, most white Pentecostals associated with the COGIC had increasingly parted ways by the early-to-mid 1900s, except for Delk and a few others. Delk faithfully attended the denomination's annual convocations

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<sup>14</sup> Calvin Jr. White, *The Rise to Respectability: Race, Religion, and the Church of God in Christ* (Fayetteville, AK: University of Arkansas Press, 2012), 109. Some like White have believed that Delk was ordained by Mason in 1914 as a Holiness minister and the later joined the ranks of Pentecostalism. Others, such as Daniel Silliman have suggested that Delk held beliefs mirroring Masons since 1904 and self-identified as a member of Mason's church, the COGIC. Daniel Silliman, "If I did not believe God loved the blackest Negro girl': Responses to American racism among early white Pentecostals" *Blogger* (blog), Google, February 26, 2014, <http://danielsilliman.blogspot.com/2014/02/if-i-did-not-believe-god-loved-blackest.html>. I however have not found any evidence to prove that Delk was ordained within the COGIC ministerial records in 1914, and have had to rely on the dates Delk gave himself for his official membership within the COGIC. Delk said in *He Made Millions Happy* that he was deeply moved by Mason in 1904 suggesting it is likely that Delk's theology did mirror Mason since then, but Delk makes no mention of official ordination within the COGIC until 1935. It is thus most likely that Delk was an ally, even a disciple, of Mason and his theological views, but like many independent and maverick early Pentecostals, Delk resisted official membership in larger church organizations and held loose ties to larger denominations until he officially joined the COGIC in 1935.

from as early as 1908 until his last years before his death in 1963. He was also an ally and useful associate of COGIC senior leader Charles H. Mason.

Delk first met Charles Mason (1864-1961) in 1904 and was powerfully moved by Mason's preaching. Mason was the leader of what was then a Holiness group, which by 1907 would become the COGIC. Following a visit to the Pentecostal Azusa Street Revival, led by African American minister William Seymour since 1906, Mason would move the COGIC towards a Pentecostal position. Having one of the only churches able to provide ministerial credentials, Mason's COGIC would also become one of the only places for Pentecostals, white or black, to receive ordination. In the early years of Pentecostalism Mason, like Seymour, envisioned the potential for Pentecostalism to cross racial barriers and hold interracial theologies. It is probable that Delk adopted his early theological framework for interracial Pentecostalism from his connections to Mason after 1904 and followed behind Mason's own theological evolution from Holiness to Pentecostalism.<sup>15</sup> Delk was more publicly outspoken on his interracial theology than Mason was, due to Mason's belief in gradualism as opposed to Delk's more politically active opposition to segregation.<sup>16</sup> Delk spoke so publicly about the beliefs he had adopted that he published his interracial theology of Pentecostalism in 1945 as part of his book about the building of Mason Temple.

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<sup>15</sup> White, *Rise to Respectability*, 109; Bishop Ithiel C. Clemmons, *Bishop C. H. Mason and the Roots of the Church of God in Christ* (Bakersfield, CA: Pneuma Life Publishing, 1996), 23-24; Raynard D. Smith, *With Signs Following: The Life and Ministry of Charles Harrison Mason* (St. Louis, MO: Christian Board of Publication, 2015), 12, 100-104.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. White, Clemmons, and Smith all cite Delk's *He Made Millions Happy* when examining Mason's views on interracial fellowship and actions reaching across the color line. While Delk likely got the foundations for his interracial theology from Mason, it is Delk's book published in 1945 that clearly indicates Mason's own position that rejected segregation and Jim Crow. Smith points out that Mason believed that through "conciliation" and "gradualism" God would supernaturally intervene in America's race problem. I have found that Delk was more politically active in his approach to segregation through his opposition to lynching, segregation, and espousing the brotherhood of man during his many political campaigns during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, which I discuss later.

Delk's commitment to interracial beliefs and his showmanship style ran so against the grain of his day that his preaching often ran him afoul of white segregationist communities. In addition to the somewhat typical reprisals he received for his offensive Pentecostal style and beliefs, Delk's interracial theology and loyalty to Mason resulted in him being attacked. His views on race caused reprisals by the white towns who heard Delk preach, seen in at least two occasions where the KKK attacked Delk for his association with Mason.<sup>17</sup> Delk's willingness to endure reprisals, not only for his Pentecostal faith but also his interracial theology, was not common to most early white Pentecostals.

In fact, racial segregation in the history of Pentecostalism often comes across as so inevitable that it seems natural.<sup>18</sup> In the immediate wake of Pentecostalism's widespread growth following its national exposure during the 1906 interracial revival at Azusa Street in Los Angeles many early white Pentecostals participated in interracial religious gatherings and services. However, between 1906 and 1914, most of the white Pentecostals who had participated initially in interracial revivals and sentiments pulled away from African American Pentecostals. W.E. Fuller and the white Fire-Baptized Holiness Church of God of

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<sup>17</sup> "CHURCH CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY," *Ebony* 13, no. 5 (March 1958): 59. MasterFILE Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed November 27, 2016). While other sources briefly mention Delk being attacked by the KKK, none of them seem to be able to provide any details beyond the fact that he was attacked in connection to his racial ties.

<sup>18</sup> For example, see Cheryle Sander's *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996) that introduces the book with the general context of most white Pentecostals naturally conforming to the segregationist society and rejecting invitations for interracial fellowship offered by African American Pentecostals. Similarly, Vinson Synan's *Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971, 1997) observed that white Pentecostals followed the trends of earlier Protestant denominations and were generally segregated soon by the 1920s and that few Pentecostals, white or black, made any official stances on race. For additional reading that also observed that initial interracialism of early Pentecostals quickly faded to segregation see Estrela Y. Alexander's *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011); Smith's *With Signs Following*; or Clemmons' *Bishop C.H. Mason and the Roots of the Church of God in Christ*. While many of these works are focus primarily on biographies, the slave religion roots of Pentecostalism, or economic and class examinations of early Pentecostals, nearly all of them treat the segregation of Pentecostalism as an all but inevitable sliding away of white Pentecostals into the mold of American segregation, even when church splits were officially for theological reasons.

the Americas broke away from the previously interracial Fire-Baptized Holiness Church in 1908 due to violence and threats of violence.<sup>19</sup> The largest “Oneness” branch of Pentecostals, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, also split along predominately racial lines by 1924.<sup>20</sup> The largest group of white Pentecostals segregated into the Assemblies of God (AG) in 1914, some breaking away from the largest African American Pentecostal denomination the COGIC, the only denomination able to issue ministerial licenses in the earliest days of Pentecostalism.<sup>21</sup> Although a few white Pentecostals, such as L. P. Adams, William B. Holt, and August Feick remained in interracial Pentecostal churches or within African American Pentecostal churches for a short period after 1914, the vast majority of white Pentecostals increasingly cut ties with the largest African American Pentecostal denominations, such as the COGIC, and either joined the AG or formed their own independent segregated groups.<sup>22</sup>

The COGIC was initially founded in 1897 by former Baptists turned Holiness preachers C.P. Jones and Charles Mason. In 1907, after visiting the Azusa Street revival in 1906 Mason split with Jones and reorganized the COGIC as a Pentecostal-Holiness denomination.<sup>23</sup> From its earliest days as a Pentecostal-Holiness church, the COGIC was an interracial Pentecostal association of churches and offering ministerial credentials to many white Pentecostals initially, some of whom were on the ministerial rosters of the COGIC

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<sup>19</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 229.

<sup>20</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 231.

<sup>21</sup> Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 235.

<sup>22</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 226-233; David D. Daniels, “Charles Harrison Mason: The Interracial Impulse of Early Pentecostalism,” *Portraits of a Generation: Early Pentecostal Leaders* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 264-269.

<sup>23</sup> For more on the origins of the COGIC read Clemmons’ *Bishop C.H. Mason and the Roots of the Church of God in Christ*, 1-71.

before 1914.<sup>24</sup> Yet a large association of those white ministers left to form their own credentialed denomination, the Assemblies of God, in 1914. While L.P. Adams and some white ministers associated with him remained with the COGIC, they too eventually joined the Assemblies of God after Adams resigned in 1919 and his group of white COGIC ministers joined the Assemblies in 1923.<sup>25</sup> Other white members of the COGIC, such as August Feick who led the white COGIC churches alongside William B. Holt since 1924, remained with the COGIC until 1933. Feick, however, resigned in 1933 and his churches joined the Assemblies of God. Holt, unlike Adams and Feick, had remained within the COGIC in various leadership roles from 1916 until 1933 when he was removed from senior leadership. Holt, a close personal friend of Mason, felt a conspiracy was raised against him and that he had been driven out of the COGIC. After his exit from the COGIC, plans for an official interracialism had failed. White ministers, such as Delk, would remain in the COGIC after 1933, but none would occupy senior level positions and all would be members in a predominately African American church.<sup>26</sup> By 1933 the largest African American Pentecostal churches that had maintained interracial communities in some fashion lost the majority of their white members, even those claiming to hold convictions of interracial Pentecostalism, including former COGIC ministers William Holt, L.P. Adams, and August Feick.<sup>27</sup>

One reason so many white ministers abandoned interracial Pentecostalism is that they did not appear to have a core theology for interracial religion or agreed with segregationists of the Jim Crow era. Without a clear theology of interracial religion, many could not

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<sup>24</sup> David D. Daniels, "Charles Harrison Mason," 265, 267-268.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 264-265.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 267-269.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 268-269.

withstand the internal and external threats of violence or lost respectability that drove so many white Pentecostals to segregate. For most white Pentecostals, “accommodation was the price of status” and social respectability, as historian Grant Wacker writes, compared to African Americans who saw the white exodus as a regrettable reality.<sup>28</sup> For many African Americans, Wacker continues, accommodation was “the price of survival,” particularly in the South.<sup>29</sup> After 1933, most white Pentecostals embraced or accommodated segregation as part of a general trend among white Pentecostals towards social respectability until the civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s. However, the largest white Pentecostal organizations still did not reopen clear ties with African American ones, even after the civil rights legislation, until the gathering of the largest white and black Pentecostal churches in 1994. The Miracle at Memphis, as it was called, brought the Assemblies of God (AG), Church of God (Cleveland), Church of God in Christ (COGIC), and International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC) together in the largest interracial Pentecostal gathering in nearly 80 years.<sup>30</sup> But this movement towards reopening interracial ties was admittedly slow for most white Pentecostals.

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<sup>28</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 226-227.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 245; Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 226-227; Daniels, “Charles Harrison Mason,” 264-269. See also Michael O. Emerson, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Synon’s *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, particularly the ninth chapter; Clemmons’ *Bishop C.H. Mason and the Roots of the Church of God in Christ*, particularly the second chapter; Smith’s *With Signs Following: The Life and Ministry of Charles Harrison Mason*, particularly the first chapter; Alexander’s *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism*, particularly the introduction and fifth chapters; Anderson’s *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism*, particularly chapter 10; and Sanders’ *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture*, particularly chapter one. David D. Daniels’ article “God Makes No Differences in Nationality: The Fashioning of a New Racial/Nonracial Identity at the Azusa Street Revival,” *Enrichment Journal*, The General Council of the Assemblies of God, 2017, <http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200602/200602-072-nodifference.cfm>. also mentions the potential for ideas of racial equality among Pentecostals after the Azusa Street Revival and the eventual failure of that potential.

Delk's life challenges the assumption that this history was inevitable. When most white Pentecostals were segregating for the sake of white respectability, Delk maintained interracial relationships. While Feick's group of leaders finally left the COGIC in 1933, Delk increased his ties to African American Pentecostalism, fully becoming ordained by the COGIC in 1935. While many white Pentecostals did not want to serve under African American leadership, Delk accepted and defended it.<sup>31</sup> When most white Pentecostals could hardly bring themselves to worship in the same gatherings as African Americans in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, Delk was solidifying and declaring his interracial theology.<sup>32</sup> His theology defended interracial marriage, opposed racial discrimination, and argued for African American leadership and civil rights as essential parts of Christianity.

Delk was able to take such a strong public stance in favor of interracial religion arguably for two reasons. First, Delk's religious experiences, personal history, and associations formed a propensity in him towards counter cultural religious movements. These movements were on the edge of social acceptability in their message or typical mode of delivery, such as Christian Temperance groups, the anti-worldliness/modernist Holiness Churches, and the high-spirited style and interracial impulse of Pentecostalism. This counter culturalism was not unheard of among early white Pentecostals, however. What was unusual among early white Pentecostals was the second reason for Delk's interracial stance, his interracial theology, likely adopted from Mason.<sup>33</sup> Delk's contact with counter cultural

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<sup>31</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 229-233; Delk, *He Made Millions of People Happy*, 7-11.

<sup>32</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 229-233; Delk, *He Made Millions of People Happy*, 7-11.

<sup>33</sup> While Max Weber and Karl Marx's social examinations of religion make it clear that ideas and theologies do not occur in a vacuum, and that social factors influence the adoption and evolution of individual theologies/ideas, the lack of sources for Delk's early life make it impossible to say with certainty what exactly were the social factors that determined his theological disposition. But it is likely that his early life of poverty in rural Kentucky, lack of any formal religious upbringing (or religious upbringing at all) predisposed Delk to adopt what Robert Anderson called the religion of the disinherited, Pentecostalism. Furthermore, it is likely that after he ran away from home to join the circus in 1900 at 13 years old, Delk came into contact with African

groups and those on the social margins of mainstream white society conditioned him to adopt an interracial theology and act upon it. The combination of Delk's theology and religious experiences with his naturally strong and independent personality enabled Delk to maintain, pursue, and encourage interracial Pentecostalism when most white Pentecostals were increasingly stepping away from unpopular social positions and moving towards social acceptability in white America.<sup>34</sup> But the very forces which enabled Delk's interracial Pentecostalism often created volatile mixtures and held the danger of tearing Delk's world apart. Eventually, by the time of his death in 1963, Delk's strong personality, roving independence, and contrary theological bent would eat at his accomplishments for interracial Pentecostalism until all that remained was a token of what might have been had he possessed more social decorum. Arguably however, he would not have led the exceptional life of interracial Pentecostalism if he had possessed such respectability. While most white Pentecostals segregated and pursued social acceptability, Delk's significance is in his path to interracial religion which few white Pentecostals took and fewer continued down. Delk's life offers an example of what it might have taken for white Pentecostals to take the path of interracial theology and activism, and the potential pitfalls if they had.

### **Early Years in Kansas, Nebraska, and on the Road, 1908-1920**

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Americans while in the circus and traveled with them and lived beside them resulting in formative contact that predisposed him to be receptive to preaching from Mason that he heard in 1904 after leaving the circus. However, the evidence for Delk's life before 1904 is extremely slim and all that goes back to 1904 is the theology and personal connection to Mason that Delk espouses. Thus, short of educated speculation to the social factors that prompted Delk's theological bent, it is difficult to say with certainty more than that Delk was deeply impacted by the African American minister Charles Mason in 1904 and adopted from him a theology of interracial Holiness-Pentecostalism that evolved into Delk's own activist brand through his continued contact with Mason and the Holiness-Pentecostal COGIC.

<sup>34</sup> Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 14. Stephens points out that following WWII Pentecostals began to fit mainstream conservatism. This is especially true for white Pentecostals in terms of race relations.

Long before the adult years living out his interracial theology, Delk's upbringing had already set him on the course of social marginality. James Logan Delk was born on September 21, 1887. His father and mother were Sherwood Delk, a moonshiner, and Genetta Jane Cobb Delk. At the time the family lived in Fentress County, Tennessee, near the Kentucky border. James Delk was raised with little to no education and no religious upbringing.<sup>35</sup> Already placed on the social fringe at the age of thirteen, James Delk ran away from home in 1900 to join the Wild West Circus. He was a trapeze performer until he left the circus in 1903 after a conversion experience that led him to preach as a traveling evangelist.<sup>36</sup> Yet he continued to associate with those on the social margins even after leaving the circus while preaching as an itinerant minister. In 1904, while in Conway, Arkansas, Delk first met the leader of the African American Church of God in Christ (COGIC), Bishop C. H. Mason.<sup>37</sup> Delk would later recall meeting Mason as a pivotal moment in his life and an unforgettable experience.<sup>38</sup> Delk, however, did not join Mason's COGIC in 1904, but only maintained the stance of an ally. As previously mentioned, this was relatively common for early Pentecostal and Holiness folk who rejected strict denominational lines and conformity.<sup>39</sup> It is probable that James Delk maintained regular ties with Mason from there on, as he had attended the COGIC convocation faithfully since as

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<sup>35</sup> Joann Stephens Graham, "James Logan Delk," *Findagrave.com*, last modified Nov 2, 2010, accessed May 27, 2017. <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=61027734&ref=acom>. For Delk's moonshining father see, 80/5/2, folder 2, Personal Papers—Delk, James Logan, Genealogical records/biographical information, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield, MO (hence forth PPCJL, GR/BI, FPHC, Springfield, MO); also "Delk at close of Lincoln campaign," *Lincoln Sunday Star* (Lincoln, NA), April 30, 1916, p.4, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

<sup>36</sup> "From the smoky hills of Kentucky and Tennessee," *The Chattanooga News* (Chattanooga, TN), May 31, 1920. CAHAN, LOC. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85038531/1920-05-31/ed-1/seq-6/>.

<sup>37</sup> Delk, *He Made Millions Happy*, 6.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 28-29. Wacker points out that most early Pentecostals resisted conformity and it was not until they started organizing into denominations that they increasingly were grafted into the mainstream, especially during the Cold War years (which Wacker discusses less than the closing chapters of Stephen's *The Fire Spreads* do).

early as 1908.<sup>40</sup> Despite his regular attendance, Delk traveled independently and preached without any official church affiliation for many of his early years and would not officially join the COGIC until the 1930s.<sup>41</sup>

Delk's travels and independent streak took its toll on him. Married sometime before 1905, and having a young son around the same time, Delk's preaching took him far from home for long periods of time. The strain wore on his young marriage, and by 1907 his wife Sarah had divorced him.<sup>42</sup> At 20 years old, Delk remarried in 1908 to Bonnyline Clark, a recent "grass widow" (someone widowed due to the prolonged absence of or prolonged physical distance from their partner), from Kansas. They were married in Springfield, Missouri, a move they employed to get around Kansas marriage laws that limited the period between remarriages. When James and Bonnyline moved to Topeka, where James had already been operating out of, they established the Pentecostal Nazarene Mission in 1908. This made James and Bonnyline Delk targets and enemies of the leading Kansas newspapers in Topeka, such as the *Topeka State Journal*, and their mainstream upper middle class white allies.<sup>43</sup> Delk was already viewed as offensive to the elites in Kansas, although the exact

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<sup>40</sup> "CHURCH CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY," *Ebony* 13, no. 5 (March 1958): 59. MasterFILE Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed November 27, 2016). By 1958, Delk had attended all COGIC convocation for the past 50 years except 2. He was in jail from 1926-1927, so it is probable that Delk missed both convocations during that time as he was in prison from Spring to Winter in each year. Yet it isn't certain that the 1926 and 1927 convocations were the ones he missed as he was an independent ally of the COGIC in these early years and not on any of the attending ministerial rosters until after 1935. Thus, while it is probable Delk was an ally attending convocations since 1908, it is safest to say since 1910.

<sup>41</sup> Delk held ministerial credentials before the COGIC, but his role as an independent Pentecostal-Holiness evangelist resulted in him often having loose affiliations (at best) with those groups he held his credentials from. It wasn't until he settled down to lead a COGIC church in Hopkinsville that his ordination appears to have drawn any sense of loyalty.

<sup>42</sup> Bruce York, "James Logan Delk," *York's Fentress County Tennessee*, Rootsweb an Ancestry.com Community, last updated Aug 12, 2014, accessed Mar 31, 2017. <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=bruceyork&id=I44028>.

<sup>43</sup> "Cadet Clark Romance," *Fort Scott Daily Tribune and Fort Scott Daily Monitor* (Fort Scott, KS), Nov. 4, 1907; From Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/5844967>. For proof of Delk's marriages see 80/5/2, folder 2, PPDJL, GR/BI, FPHC, Springfield MO.

reason is unclear. While it is possible his ties with Mason might have been involved, it is more likely that the respectable citizens of Topeka did not like his long hair, personality, the way he conducted his services, his gestures and physical contortions, or the fact he ridiculed women wearing stylish dresses to his meetings as being too worldly. In retaliation, Delk received death threats and was told to leave town, before he even broke Kansas law and married Bonnyline.<sup>44</sup> More typical than attacks employing threats of violence against Delk were implications dropped into newspaper articles which undermined his legitimacy as a minister. For example, the Delks' marriage as recent divorcees was used as a subtle implication that the two had an affair, necessitating a speedy marriage. Such implications were enough to enrage the Topeka white middle class's sense of propriety and respectability. The Delks' marriage was only a foundation stone upon which later implications were used to undermine their legitimacy and indicate their undesirability.<sup>45</sup> One of the clearest examples of the newspapers using innuendo and the community's own commentary as an attack against Delk was when he went to trial over a lawsuit with a former member of his church, who he accused of stealing the mission's instruments. The *Topeka Daily State Journal* described Delk's entrance into the court room on March 3, 1910, by commenting that his manners seemed "to say 'Here I am, the great Delk.'" The paper then reported a twisting of Delk's words to imply that he was "the man who ought to be locked up for he is a crock imposing upon these susceptible people." Then the paper, in a totally unrelated side commentary to the case, included implications that the Delks were stealing the money they raised for charity and that Delk, who married "the divorced wife of a Salvation Army

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<sup>44</sup> "Pastor Threatened," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), Feb. 13, 1907. CAHAN, LOC. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1907-02-13/ed-1/seq-8/>.

<sup>45</sup> "Trouble for Mr. Delk," *The Topeka Daily State Journal* (Topeka, KS), Apr. 16, 1908. CAHAN, LOC.

captain” was a lecherous hypocrite.<sup>46</sup> With such commentary, it is no wonder that Delk found little sympathy with the magistrate who sided with Delk’s opponent and awarded him the ownership of the instruments. To add insult to injury, Delk was thrown in jail after he was unable to pay the court costs. He was in the Topeka, Kansas jail for several weeks in 1910 while he worked off the court costs. Undaunted by the attacks in the press or his time in prison, Delk continued preaching just as offensively as he had before he served time. If anything, the evidence that he was leading interracial services while in prison indicates that the time only multiplied the ways he was willing to offend white expectations of propriety and respectability. Enduring these and many similar struggles, James and Bonnyline Delk ministered together for the majority of Delk’s early career from 1908 until the late 1920s.

Not counting his imprisonment in 1910, James Delk traveled and preached or helped establish missions in towns outside of Topeka from 1908 until 1917, such as in Fort Scott, Lecompton, Leavenworth, and Wichita, as well as in states beyond Kansas, such as Tennessee and California.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, Bonnyline, who had missions training through the Salvation Army,<sup>48</sup> maintained the mission with the other members at wherever the couple called home. Bonnyline would also travel with Delk from time to time until the couple had

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<sup>46</sup> “Delk in Bad Order,” *The Topeka State Journal*. (Topeka, KS), March 3, 1910. CAHAN, LOC. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1910-03-03/ed-1/seq-9/>.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. “Holding Big Meetings,” *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), March 25, 1909. CAHAN, LOC. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1909-03-25/ed-1/seq-3/>; Delk, James L., *Nazarene Songs for the Nazarene Revival Mission* (Topeka, KS: James Delk, 1913?) 97/7/1, folder 1 (FPHC, Springfield MO), 13; “Had Plenty of Titles,” *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), June 29, 1910. CAHAN, LOC.

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1910-06-29/ed-1/seq-7/>; “Mt. Pleasant,” *Sequachee Valley news*. (Sequachee [Sequatchie], TN), April 05, 1906. CAHAN, LOC.

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn89058250/1906-04-05/ed-1/seq-1/>; “East Side Notes,” *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), Dec. 05, 1910. CAHAN, LOC.

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1910-12-05/ed-1/seq-12/>.

<sup>48</sup> “Asserts work is all for charity,” *Lincoln Daily Star* (December 18, 1917), p.4, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield MO.

their two sons in 1909 and 1911.<sup>49</sup> The two were plagued by frequent moves and financial troubles, such as the inability to pay bills or court costs.<sup>50</sup> Their financial hardships only added to their social marginalization. This was not uncommon to rank and file Pentecostals, who were stigmatized by middle-class suspicions of financial misdealing's from the typically lower-class Pentecostals.<sup>51</sup> Even in hardship, James and Bonnyline Delk were able to maintain the pattern of establishing missions and itinerant preaching beyond their early Kansas years (1908-1916) into the later years of their marriage while living in Lincoln, Nebraska (1917-1920). Eventually between 1920 and 1924, their usual mode of mission and traveling preaching would begin to fall apart when Bonnyline grew sick and had to move with one of her sons to California, where they stayed with her mother. James Delk would remain behind and preach in the region around St. Louis and central Illinois, near to where their other son attended military school in Alton, Illinois.<sup>52</sup> Yet during the Lincoln years, despite the continued strain of distance while on the preaching circuit, legal and newspaper attacks, and financial instability, the Delks continued much as they had before moving to Lincoln.

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<sup>49</sup> "East Side Notes," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), Dec. 05, 1910. CAHAN, LOC. "State against Delk," *Lincoln Daily Star* (January 9, 1917), p. 2, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield MO.

<sup>50</sup> For example, see "Delk Tells Story," *The Topeka State Journal*. (Topeka, KS), March 14, 1910. CAHAN, LOC. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1910-03-14/ed-1/seq-7/>. See also the *Topeka State Journal* articles from June 30, 1910 and June 3, 1911.

<sup>51</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 184-194. See also Anderson's *Vision of the Disinherited*.

<sup>52</sup> It is unclear exactly when Bonnyline left, but sometime by Dec. 27, 1924, she had grown sick and she went to live with one of her two sons in California with her mother while Delk continued to preach in the region around St. Louis Missouri while his son attended the military academy in Illinois. "Jimmy Delk broke," *Edwardsville Intelligencer* (December 27, 1924), p.?, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield MO; "Rev. Delk is Bankrupt," *Fort Scott Tribune and The Fort Scott Monitor* (Fort Scott, Kansas), January 8, 1925. From Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/58954114/>.

While in Lincoln from 1917-1920, Delk and his wife conducted their mission in much the same way they had in previous towns while based out of Kansas.<sup>53</sup> They continued to raise funds for the poor, provide meals for them, and served the disadvantaged and marginalized. Though the scarcity of sources provides no specific references to interracial gatherings, it is likely that the Lincoln mission was no different in this regard either. The Delks also continued to encounter legal and newspaper resistance while in Lincoln, especially from the mayor, who opposed their fundraising efforts. The mayor and local press, such as the *Lincoln Daily Star*, used the reputation developed around Delk to suggest that his financial troubles made him a crook and also used earlier accusations that he led a cult to declare him illegitimate and unsuitable to raise charitable funds for the poor, despite his mission having been incorporated.<sup>54</sup> Some theological resistance also came from local Holiness churches in Nebraska attempting to distance themselves from the Delks' emerging COGIC-styled Pentecostalism. The Delks were forced to establish their own mission independent of the Pentecostal Nazarenes, with whom they had previously associated before 1917. Their new mission was named the "Christian Union Burden Bearers."<sup>55</sup> Even with this opposition, Delk's mission in Lincoln appeared to be sustainable until around 1920, when the Delks left for unknown reasons. It is possible that opposition to Delk in Lincoln finally forced him to leave. The newspaper attacks had continued in Lincoln much as they had in Kansas, with Delk's enemies being given liberties to publish "alleged" letters of Delk

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<sup>53</sup> "Stopped charity workers," *Lincoln Daily Star*, (Lincoln, NE), December 16, 1917, p.?, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield MO; "Ray Taylor's story told by friends at city mission," *Journal Six O'Clock*, (Lincoln, NE), May 25, 1920, p.1, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield MO.

<sup>54</sup> "Asserts work is all for charity," *Lincoln Daily Star*, (Lincoln, NE), December 18, 1917, p.4, 80/5/2, folder 1, PHDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO; "Stopped charity workers," *Lincoln Daily Star*, (Lincoln, NE), December 16, 1917, p.?, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

<sup>55</sup> "Incorporate Christian union," *Lincoln Daily Star*, (Lincoln, NE), July 12, 1917, p.2, 80/5/2, folder 1, PHDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO; "Answer in slander suit," *Lincoln Daily Star*, October 23, 1917, p. 2, 80/5/2, folder 1, PHDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

and repeat “ugly charges” undermining him because of “opposition to the man and his methods.”<sup>56</sup> He also could have fled town with his family because the violence he experienced in Rock Island, Illinois while preaching on the road had followed him home to Lincoln.<sup>57</sup> Both the controversial reputation Delk had in the press and the violence he suffered were the result of his fierce counter cultural preaching, particularly his attacks on worldliness and alcohol, which often put him at odds with white American respectability.<sup>58</sup>

### **Controversies and Counter Cultural Core, 1904-1931**

Although he is remembered within Pentecostal circles for the interracial stances he maintained, Delk’s contemporaries in Kansas and Nebraska would have known him instead for his offensive showman style and controversially outspoken positions on beliefs common to many Holiness and Pentecostal people, such as his attacks on alcohol and worldliness. Delk was a fire and brimstone preacher.<sup>59</sup> He was called the “greatest sin fighter of modern times” by revival attendees when he preached throughout Kentucky in 1914-1915.<sup>60</sup> Despite such accolades and nearly always preaching to a packed house of poor working-class folk in Kansas and Nebraska, Delk was rarely well received by the elites and the local presses

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<sup>56</sup> “Opposition to Mr. Delk,” *Evening State Journal* (Lincoln, NE), Jun. 7, 1919, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield MO.

<sup>57</sup> “Ray Taylo’s story told by friends at city mission,” *Journal Six O’Clock*, (Lincoln, NE), May 25, 1920, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield MO. Delk preached in Rock Island Illinois in 1919 and was beaten by a man with brass knuckles. The police did nothing to help Delk, but instead to him to leave town. Within a year the same man who had beaten Delk had traveled to Lincoln and was living there. It is not certain that Delk left town because of him, but the coincidental timing of Delk’s exit from town at around the same time as his attacker’s arrival is worthy of note.

<sup>58</sup> What was most counter cultural about Delk, like many early Pentecostals, was his delivery and religious practice which offended white senses of propriety and respectability. However, before prohibition was established and especially after it ended in the 1930s, many of Delk’s Holiness views were controversial in and of themselves, part of broader cultural debates over alcohol and modernist society.

<sup>59</sup> “Delk in Bad Order,” *The Topeka State Journal*. (Topeka, KS), March 3, 1910. CAHAN, LOC. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1910-03-03/ed-1/seq-9/>. Delk got himself into trouble for condemning drinking and worldly dressed women to hell in offensive ways, such as calling the well-connected Topekan Mrs. Brubaker a “regular devil” and refusing to pray with her when she tried to speak out in the meeting declaring, “I don’t pray with devils.” Delk, *He Made Millions Happy*, 91-96.

<sup>60</sup> *The Topeka State Journal*. (Topeka, KS), 02 Jan. 1915. CAHAN, LOC. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1915-01-02/ed-1/seq-3/>.

wherever he preached. These enemies were in correspondence with each other to gather fodder to use against Delk, printing attacks from sources in far off places.<sup>61</sup> This was usually in response to the things Delk said and how he said them.

When he later published his views on faith, in his account of the building of Mason Temple (the COGIC national headquarters), and his theology on interracial religion in 1945, Delk included several “hot shot” quotes he was known to use throughout his ministry. The quotes demonstrate how Delk’s personality and theology valued being counter cultural, such as his views on alcohol and worldliness. His theology valued counter culturalism itself. For example, when he attacked worldly dress and the use of makeup with statements like “Some girls would be pretty, if they didn’t try to make themselves pretty” or “The best way for women and girls to manicure their finger nails is to manicure them in the wash tub,” Delk was recalling something deeper than any single counter cultural aspect of his theology. He thrived in bucking the social norms of the day through his theology. He saw his rocky reputation as a righteous vindication of his actions, seen in remarks that there were “three ways to avoid criticism, be nothing, say nothing, and do nothing,” or his criticism of mainline churches and socially respectable white Protestants saying that “in earlier days, ministers preached hell-fire and brimstone and kept their churches awake, they have quit and their churches are asleep.”<sup>62</sup> Delk was noted in services to pray “God save me from being the average dignified preacher.”<sup>63</sup> Though it is uncertain exactly how often Delk used such

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<sup>61</sup> *The Topeka state journal*. (Topeka, KS), 06 Feb. 1914. CAHAN, LOC. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1914-02-06/ed-1/seq-7/>. The same articles and people referenced in this Topeka 1914 were in contact with people referenced in “Slander suit by Mrs. ‘Jim’ Delk,” *Lincoln Sunday Star*, (Lincoln, NE), June 18, 1916, p. 9, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield MO. There were other instances where prior articles or people were referenced in articles attacking Delk for his offensive ways.

<sup>62</sup> Delk, *He Made Millions Happy*, 92-96.

<sup>63</sup> “Delk Platform Poses and Sayings at Big Rink 16th St. and 5th Ave,” *Rock Island Argus* (Rock Island, IL), May 24, 1919. CAHAN, LOC. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn92053934/1919-05-24/ed-1/seq-7/>.

sayings, the fact that he prided himself on saying them, and faced many reprisals for speaking in similar ways on the topics of alcohol and worldliness demonstrated the value Delk placed on being a social outsider.

As a result of Delk's naturally offensive style and preaching against his detractors, alcohol, and worldliness, Delk and his family suffered attacks was attacked or chased out of various towns. While preaching with his usual offensive exuberance Delk incited reprisal in one Kansas town where he was chased off with eggs. Delk even received a death threat to leave town in 1907.<sup>64</sup> His wife was also targeted by the press by Delk's enemies in several states who conspired together to attack her using "insinuations" about her medical history and personal reputation as a way of getting at her husband.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to these struggles, his strong personality led to Delk face violence in Kentucky during one of his many long preaching tours away from Kansas. His "fervid" preaching against moonshiners in 1914 gained regional attention when he incited violent reprisals. One evening, the moonshiners he preached to shot at the piano he was standing on before he vaulted atop the pulpit and "compelled" them to lay down their guns before the altar (which they did).<sup>66</sup> That same preaching tour in Kentucky, Delk also faced legal action for his controversial delivery style and eccentric condemnation of alcohol and worldliness. Early on in the yearlong preaching tour, he was arrested and fined by the Kentucky district court in 1914 for disturbing the peace after he delivered a sensationalized sermon against worldly dress and the sin of impurity associated with modern society. The fine was for the

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<sup>64</sup>"Jimmy Delk in the race," *Evening State Journal*, (Lincoln, NE), March 27, 1919, p.10, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield MO.

<sup>65</sup> "Slander suit by Mrs. 'Jim' Delk," *Lincoln Sunday Star* (Lincoln, NE), June 18, 1916, p. 9, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield MO.

<sup>66</sup> "Delk After Devil," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), June 2, 1914. CAHAN, LOC. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1914-06-02/ed-1/seq-7/>.

provocative attacks on such impurities when Delk said, “Some men will stand around the depot, stores, the post office and street corners, and watch the women pass, and size them up, the foot, ankle, and form, and they would be willing to give five dollars for the *fork*.”<sup>67</sup> His language was deemed inappropriate for women and children and he was labeled a disturber of the peace.<sup>68</sup>

Soon after Delk finished his preaching tour in Kentucky, he moved to Lincoln, Nebraska in 1916 and his family soon after. He continued to preach regionally, even as far away as Illinois. His preaching and the public’s reactions to it were similar to when he was based out of Kansas or traveling in Kentucky.<sup>69</sup> During one of Delk’s preaching tours beyond Nebraska into Illinois, Delk preached for a summer in Rock Island, Illinois in 1919. Despite the fact that none of the local pastors supported him, Delk preached in Rock Island because he could still draw a large crowd of local supporters from the local laity.<sup>70</sup> He preached in Rock Island against worldly dress and moonshiners, where his confrontational style yet again got him into trouble. He baited the moonshiners there, declaring “I defy the

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<sup>67</sup> Dean M. Kelley, “Freedom of the Pulpit,” *The Law of Church and State in America: An Analysis and Sourcebook*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 1:307-309. [www.ccnny.net/resources/locs.htm](http://www.ccnny.net/resources/locs.htm). Kelley’s case briefs and interpretations content was current as of 1997, but the case precedence may have evolved since then. “Fork” was either Kentucky slang or “a bowdlerization of a common four-letter Anglo-Saxon term for fecundation.” Delk was convicted on the grounds that “all right thinking persons” would be “indignant” at his defense that he was using such language while “merely rebuking the sin of impurity” as it was clearly meant to “disturb or embarrass” his listeners.

<sup>68</sup> While Delk was labeled a disturber of the peace for his unconventional and socially offensive delivery style (such as using the “Fork” to attack men ogling women dressed in the modern fashion), it is almost equally certain that Delk’s attacks on worldliness were full of sexualized preconceptions. Analysis into Delk’s controversial reputation and attacks on worldliness, while simultaneously maintaining friendships and alliances with strong female leadership such as his associations with Carrie Nation, Aimee Semple McPherson, and Lizzie Robinson deserves further study. Sadly, a full gender critique of Delk’s life is beyond the scope of this project as it would easily double it.

<sup>69</sup> *Lincoln Daily News*, “Revival meetings...,” 15 March 1916, p. 10, 80/5/2, folder 1, Personal Papers—Delk, James Logan, Clip file: 1916-1963, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield MO; *Lincoln Daily Star*, “Awards Schooley \$34,” 10 January, p.2, 80/5/2, folder 1, Personal Papers—Delk, James Logan, Clip file: 1916-1963, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, Springfield MO.

<sup>70</sup> *Rock Island Argus*. (Rock Island, Ill.), 28 June 1919. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn92053934/1919-06-28/ed-1/seq-14/>.

dirty gang,” to which a local man responded by beating him with brass knuckles. Delk was told to leave town by the police after the incident.<sup>71</sup>

The most notorious instance involving Delk in Illinois, however, came in 1924, sometime after his family had moved away from Lincoln, through several small towns in Illinois, to St. Louis, Missouri, between 1920 and 1924.<sup>72</sup> While in St. Louis during the early 1920s, trying to run a restaurant Delk had established in an attempt to gain financial security, he tried to simultaneously travel throughout eastern Missouri and Illinois preaching. Struggling financially, especially after his wife and one of his sons had to move to California, Delk had to declare bankruptcy in 1924. Despite his fragile social and economic position, Delk continued his independent, outspoken, and often offensive preaching and was shot at in 1924 in the home of one of his church members in Shelbyville, Illinois.<sup>73</sup> He was also put on trial in Shelbyville in 1924 and 1926 on allegations of kissing and hugging a minor. His church members said it was a frame up, and even his enemies agreed it was designed to punish Delk for his offensive manner of preaching.<sup>74</sup> Due to his negative reputation going

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<sup>71</sup> *Rock Island Argus*. (Rock Island, Ill.), 24 May 1919. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn92053934/1919-05-24/ed-1/seq-7/>.

<sup>72</sup> There are no records which verify Delk’s residence before moving to St. Louis, but sources in St. Louis indicate he had moved throughout towns in Illinois, such as Edwardsville, before arrive in St. Louis. Bonnyline moved in with her mother sometime between Lincoln and Delk moving to St. Louis, but there is no record to prove exactly when. She was there by 1924, but she could have moved in with her mother anytime between 1920 and 1924, though it likely occurred on the later end of those years.

<sup>73</sup> “Evangelist fired on in Shelbyville,” *Decatur Review* (Decatur, IL), November 26, 1924, p.12, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

<sup>74</sup> He was acquitted in 1924 in a case even his enemies admitted was likely a frame up, but was convicted on the same charges in 1926 after a trial one paper described as a “kangaroo court” which means the case was predetermined. Most of Delk’s witnesses were not even able to show up in for the trial where he was convicted, including his two lead witnesses that provided his alibi. “Indictments in Shelby Released,” *The Decatur Review* (Decatur, IL), December 5, 1924. From Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/7165443/>; “Convicted Pastor Asks Friends for Help Financially,” *The Daily Republican*, (Belvidere, IL), April 15, 1926. From Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/69903164/>; “Delk in cell in Shelby Co., jail,” *Decatur Review* (Decatur, IL), 28 March 1926, p.11, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO. At some point after Delk’s eventual imprisonment in 1926, Bonnyline would divorce James. It is unclear if she divorced him because she no longer wanted to deal with his long absences and the financial instability that went with James’ itinerant preaching or if she divorced him due to allegations of kissing a minor in Shelbyville that resulted in James going to jail from 1926-1927. The reasons for the uncertainty are the controversial nature of

back to his marriage to the divorcee Bonnyline, exacerbated by various presses, a jury would have easily been able to believe such accusations. The magistrate acquitted Delk of the 1924 charges, but new charges were brought in 1926. He was brought to trial in Shelbyville in 1926 after he was held on an existing Shelbyville warrant by police in St. Louis.<sup>75</sup> Although convicted on the second sexual misconduct charges in 1926, many of his church members, and even some of his religious detractors who hated his offensive methods, believed Delk was innocent. They believed the case was a frame up built upon Delk's negative reputation instead of any actual crime. This was most evident in the closing argument of the trial. The prosecution "assailed" Delk not on grounds of sexual misconduct but on his reputation as a minister, saying Delk was "pretending to be a minister of the gospel, was a wolf in lamb's clothes," and that despite being married he had "two Shelbyville women...paying his expenses" implying that he was not a legitimate minister but simply on a "pleasure trip." The prosecution played upon Delk's negative reputation to convince a jury that they needed to "send the 'sky pilot'" and corruptor of souls to the state penitentiary.<sup>76</sup> Believing himself a wrongfully convicted martyr, Delk's imprisonment only emboldened him to preach as wildly

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the court case, that some contemporaries and even enemies of Delk held to be a frameup to drive him out of the region, and the fact that any clues within the divorce proceedings have been lost as have the proceedings from the 1924 and 1926 trials. While the frequency of ministers and men in power abusing that power to satiate their sexual appetites is not uncommon, the fact that even Delk's enemies thought it was a frameup is cause for reconsideration. Did Delk's negative reputation predispose a jury to convict him, was his reputation for offending social decorum and white sensibilities enough to slant the jury? Was the jury's decision correct with or without his reputation? Without the missing Shelbyville court records from 1924-1926, it is impossible to know for sure and speaking one way or another requires more evidence.

<sup>75</sup> "Jimmy' Delk held for Shelby court," *Decatur Review* (Decatur, IL), March 26, 1926, p.4, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

<sup>76</sup> "Jimmy Delk is Convicted," *Decatur Daily Review* (Decatur, IL), Apr. 9, 1926, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO. The paper's suggestion that it was a pleasure trip was part of the media buzz surrounding the case and while it seems to imply Delk had sexual affairs with the ladies financially supporting him and the Pentecostal gatherings he led, it is hard to tell if the paper's implications had any substance or simply was yellow journalism attacking Delk's fragile reputation due to his confrontational and offensive style. The fact that even his enemies criticized the trial proceedings in general as a frame up, convicting Delk for his offensive manners based on his reputation, implies he may not have been having affairs. Again, without better records, it is impossible to say for sure.

as before, as was demonstrated by his showy preaching at the Interdenominational Mission in St. Louis on December 16, 1927 after his release from prison.<sup>77</sup>

Despite suffering time in prison and a long history of opposition in Kansas, Kentucky, Nebraska, and Illinois, Delk seemed to relish in his controversial and edgy reputation. Even before Illinois in 1920, Delk boasted that he had been “arrested 16 different times, shot at twice, had 4 fist fights, throwed in jail 4 times for preaching on the streets...but all the opposition that I have met with has only been encouraging to me to fight that much harder.”<sup>78</sup> Though it might seem odd to boast of such things, it is less odd with the understanding that Delk’s Holiness and Pentecostal theology glorified persecution and thus Delk saw his actions as a form of martyrdom for his faith.<sup>79</sup>

Since Delk reveled in being controversial, his return to society after being in prison from 1926-1927 showed that the only lesson prison had taught him was to continue his association with the fringes of social respectability, namely his Pentecostal and African American allies. He intentionally was dressed in prison garb and he had procured manacles and chains to wear on his wrists for his first sermon back in society, demonstrating his continued proclivity for the sensational.<sup>80</sup> After leaving prison in 1926, and being divorced sometime before 1930, Delk began traveling and preaching with other Pentecostal evangelists associated with Aimee Semple McPherson. Now a bachelor preacher, Delk

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<sup>77</sup> “Convicted Pastor Asks Friends for Help Financially,” *Belvidere Daily Republican* (Belvidere, IL), Apr. 15, 1926. From Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/69903164/>.

<sup>78</sup> “Rev. Jim Delk, Late of Topeka, Now ‘Evangeling’ in the Solid South,” *The Topeka Daily Capital* (Topeka, Kansas), September 5, 1920. From Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/64878830/>. The various papers critical of Delk, preferred to quote him in ways which implied that he was ignorant and backwards, such as quoting his folksy Kentucky language when saying “throwed.”

<sup>79</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 184-191. For more on persecution narratives and ways early Pentecostals battled with society see Wacker, *Heaven Below*, chapter 11.

<sup>80</sup> “Jimmy Delk Out of Pen on Parole,” *Decatur Daily Review*, (Decatur, IL), December 16, 1927, p.?, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield MO.

traveled even further and to new regions with these Pentecostal evangelists still on the edge of social acceptability.<sup>81</sup> Delk traveled to preach with a Pentecostal Four Square Gospel group in Oklahoma in 1928 and then began a Four Square Gospel religious colony (a collection of farms owned by Pentecostal members of his church) in Missouri by 1930.<sup>82</sup> Delk's movement towards the edges of Protestant acceptability was not only when he publicly embraced Pentecostalism, but could also be seen when he gained ordination within the Christian Spiritualist Church in St. Louis for a time in 1933. This was an additional ordination to his existing Baptist one, which he had since at least 1921 after his split away from the Nazarenes in Nebraska.<sup>83</sup>

While Delk was willing to go to the edges of social acceptability through his ordination, association, and outspoken views against alcohol, worldliness, and elite respectability, none of this was significantly different from other early white Holiness and Pentecostals. Many Pentecostals experienced ostracism from white American respectability for their expressive theological beliefs and practices, their counter cultural social views, class conflict from the place of marginalized lower-classes, and unpopular political positions.<sup>84</sup> What was most significant about Delk's willingness to buck trends was that it extended to his views on race, unlike the majority of his white Pentecostal contemporaries. Delk not only participated in the initial interracialism of early Pentecostalism after the movement's

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<sup>81</sup> As noted earlier, it is uncertain when Delk's divorce occurred with Bonnyline, but it was by 1930 at the latest. 80/5/2, folder 2, PPDJL, GR/BI, FPHC, Springfield MO.

<sup>82</sup> "Evangelist Will Run for Governor," *Moberly Monitor-Index and the Moberly Evening Democrat*, (Moberly, MO), February 8, 1932, p.1, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield MO.

<sup>83</sup> "The Rev. J. L. Delk Freed," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, (St. Louis, MO), July 30, 1933. From Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/138891595/>.

<sup>84</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 178-188, 189-190, 191-194, and 195-196. Wacker convincingly describes how many early Pentecostals had theological conflicts with society at large and within (178-188), were social outsiders both fighting to be respected while also speaking out against mainline social respectability (189-190), and were frequently combative towards the upper classes and people in power because of their beliefs and practices (191-196).

explosion following the 1906 Azusa Street revival, but he maintained and pursued ties with African American Pentecostals. This was because of his interracial theology and his willingness to act upon it as he increasingly rebelled against the white segregationist society following his first encounter with Mason in 1904 until his official ordination in Mason's church in the mid-1930s.

### **Interracial Theology, COGIC Ally, and Early Public Interracialism, 1904-1933**

After first meeting Mason in 1904 and following in his theological footsteps, Delk developed, as he later remembered in 1945, an interracial theology that evolved as he maintained and increased his ties with Mason and the COGIC from 1904 until his ordination in 1935. Delk's interracial theology contained several features relatively rare among white Pentecostals and white Americans of his day, including stating that segregation and racial discrimination were sins, advocating interracial marriage, declaring that white men should serve under African Americans, and saying that people who used racial slurs did not have Jesus in their hearts.<sup>85</sup> He began his theological discussion by saying that he understood the Biblical passage John 3:16, especially the line "God so loved the world," to mean that all were equal and deserving of salvation regardless of race.<sup>86</sup> He then declared that interracial theology and equality was not a negotiable or secondary theological point for him, saying that "if I did not believe that God loved the blackest Negro girl as much as he loves my own daughter, I would stop writing books, throw my Bible aside, and never preach another sermon."<sup>87</sup> Delk then concluded his renunciation of all forms of racial supremacy by saying that God loves all nationalities and people equally.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Delk, *He Made Millions Happy*, 9-11.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 9.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 10.

Following his establishment of the theological baseline that all forms of racial supremacy and segregation were wrong, Delk defended interracial marriage as biblically sanctioned. He said that “God told the man to marry, he did not tell him what color wife to get.” He then used Moses as an example of interracial marriage, stating that Moses married a woman of color.<sup>89</sup> He explained that the American claims to be a democratic nation while denying full “social equality,” such as interracial marriage, was committing the sin of preferential treatment when the scriptures said not to be a respecter of one person over another.<sup>90</sup> By stating this, Delk was implicitly referencing verses in Acts 10:34 stating “God is not a respecter of persons” and Romans 2:11 “there is no respect of persons with God.”<sup>91</sup>

Delk next went from a defense of interracial marriage to a defense of his belief that white men should serve under the leadership of African Americans. He began this defense with the example of King Solomon, from the Bible, who he held was a “black man” and “the wisest man in the world.” He then expanded upon this introductory example from the Bible to explain with a World War II example of black and white boys dying in the same war but with inequality at home. Delk said that the inequality was wrong and that African Americans should be able to vote and hold political office, even be President. He also seemed to imply that the reasons the war would go on until “Armageddon” was because of Jim Crow and segregation in the United States.<sup>92</sup> He went on to say that as long as famed segregationists like Senator Bilbro of Mississippi (1877-1947) were in power and people lacked “the Spirit

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., pg. 10.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., pg. 10. This may be an indication that some of Delk’s theological outlook contained elements of social theology or liberation theology.

<sup>91</sup> Acts 10:34 (New King James) and Romans 2:11 (New King James). It should be noted that when the verses say God is not a respecter of persons it is more easily understood in other translations that the New King James to mean God does not show “favoritism,” Acts 10:34 (NIV) and Romans 2:11 (NIV).

<sup>92</sup> Delk, *He Made Millions Happy*, pg. 10.

of Christ that will bring love to our hearts, for all races of people” the world would never “be free from war and trouble.”<sup>93</sup>

Delk then concluded his advocacy for interracial theology by attacking discriminatory slang. He attacked white Southerners for using “the slang word ‘Nigger.’” He explained that whenever people truly had Jesus in their hearts (meaning they had real salvation experiences) that “nick-naming people and hating people, segregation and Jim Crow vanish away like the smoke of the hour.”<sup>94</sup> Near the end of his book he noted that it was a shame for Pentecostals that they should not oppose discrimination and segregation when even atheists, Catholics, and Episcopalians opposed them in the South. He mourned his and other peoples’ experience that when “other smaller churches try to worship together, white and Colored, the white minister is ordered out of town and a deep warning given to the colored people not to worship God with white people” especially in the South.<sup>95</sup> Delk resolved that, unlike white ministers that compromised with segregationists, he believed in the brotherhood of man and wanted to be remembered as “James L. Delk who lived and died loving all people, regardless of Race, Creed, or Color.”<sup>96</sup>

Simply believing was not enough for Delk, however, as he spoke and acted upon his interracial theology. When he recalled the “hot shot” saying of his earlier years of ministry before 1945, he remembered not only raging against alcohol and worldliness, but also against segregation and racial injustice. Such quotes included declarations against white American discrimination, that “Segregation and Jim Crow are unconstitutional,” and that “As soon as the white people realize the Negro was not put here to be solely a servant but to live as any

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pg. 11.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pg. 11.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 71.

other Nationality, the better that will be for their nation.” He also frequently included quotes attacking Bilbro for his white supremacist political career.<sup>97</sup> Though it is uncertain how often he made such statements during his career, similar to the use of his other “hot shot” catch phrases against worldliness and alcohol, the fact that he found them worth including in the conclusion of his book implies they were of great significance to him.

The significance of such statements and beliefs were not limited to words, as Delk put them into action since the earliest years of his ministry. When James and Bonnyline Delk started their first mission together in 1908, Delk likely was attending the national COGIC convocation regularly. *Ebony*, in a 1958 article on the COGIC, noted that Delk had faithfully attended every convocation for the past 50 years except for two.<sup>98</sup> It is likely he missed the 1926 and 1927 convocations while in prison. Regardless of when he started attending, Delk was certainly an ally of the COGIC and interracial religion at least since 1910.

While living in Topeka, Delk’s 1910 term in prison served as a rare documented glimpse into his preaching and interracialism. It was during his early days of ministry in Kansas that Delk’s interracial beliefs began to come to the fore. Outside of any undocumented or lost personal interactions between Delk and Mason in the 1910s and 1920s, or the documented involvement of Delk at the annual COGIC conventions after 1910, Delk’s preaching itself showed his propensity towards interracial religion as early as 1910. That was the year Delk was sent to jail in Topeka due to his inability to pay court costs incurred from a lawsuit against a man accused of stealing instruments from the Delk’s mission.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Delk, *He Made Millions Happy*, 91-92.

<sup>98</sup> "CHURCH CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY," *Ebony* 13, no. 5 (March 1958): 59. MasterFILE Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed November 27, 2016).

<sup>99</sup> "Delk Tells Story," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), 14 March 1910. CAHAN, LOC. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1910-03-14/ed-1/seq-7/>. Delk was out of jail by June and did not maintain these interracial services after his release in 1910 as he was driven out of Topeka for a time

Delk was in jail for a couple months, at which time he preached to the other inmates. Instead of segregating the meetings, Delk preached to an interracial gathering of inmates. Nearly a third of the inmates Delk preached to were African Americans.<sup>100</sup> Though the scarcity of documentation prohibits knowing if Delk continued to preach to interracial gatherings with any regularity, it is clear from the other examples of interracial relationships and actions after 1910 that Delk maintained some level of interracial contact.

Following his release from jail in Topeka in 1910, Delk left the town for a time and moved to Leavenworth, before returning to Topeka sometime before June 1911. Despite frequent attacks by the Topeka press and opposition from local enemies of his Holiness preaching and showman style, Delk remained in Topeka and built upon the earlier interracial work he had begun during his time in prison. After bell ringers and mission members raised funds (yet another source of public ridicule and character assassination in the press),<sup>101</sup> Delk's mission hosted a multi-racial Christmas dinner for the poor and provided financial assistance with any additional funds raised. The group who gathered to eat together that Christmas was described by the *Topeka Daily State Journal* as "a cosmopolitan crowd, nearly every race except the Mongolian being represented."<sup>102</sup> The interracial religious group activities of holding interracial services in 1910 and the interracial mission event in

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and he preached in Wichita and California until he returned to Topeka sometime by June 3, 1911. There is not documentation to prove he went back to preach at the jail.

<sup>100</sup> "Brief Correspondence to/from President Harry S. Truman, 1945," 80/5/2, folder 3, *Personal Papers—Delk, James Logan, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center*, Springfield MO (henceforth PPDJL, FPHC).

<sup>101</sup> "Bell Ringer Complains," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), Dec. 21, 1911. CAHAN. LOC. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1911-12-21/ed-1/seq-11/>.

<sup>102</sup> "Nazarenes Feed Poor," *The Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), Dec. 25, 1911. CAHAN, LOC. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82016014/1911-12-25/ed-1/seq-5/>. I am not sure if the Topeka Daily's reference to "Mongolian" was a specific reference to a population of Mongolians in the town or a racially derogatory colloquialism for Asians, but it is clear the gathering was seen as diverse all the same.

Topeka during Christmas 1911 were not isolated events for Delk, as is seen most clearly by his continued contact with the COGIC through the convocations and personal interactions.

At the same time Delk was building interracial groups on the ground, he was also involved in building an interracial coalition with black church leaders. For example, Delk fostered ties with African American Baptists, such as Lizzie Woods Robinson, matron of the Baptist Academy in Dermott, Arkansas, whom he introduced to Mason and the COGIC. Robinson was made the senior overseer over women in the COGIC in 1911, indicating contact between Robinson, Mason, and Delk since at least that year. Robinson was cast out of the Baptist association for speaking in tongues after Delk introduced her to Mason. She then joined the COGIC and, as a church mother (a leadership title for women within the COGIC), she was elevated to higher levels of leadership. By 1926, Robinson organized the Home and Foreign Missions Department and remained active in evangelizing and leading in various capacities within the COGIC.<sup>103</sup> Though scarcity and limitations of existing records hinders definitive statements about Delk's personal relationships with African American Baptists and members of the COGIC, it is clear that he maintained some level of personal relationship and alliance with individuals, such as Robinson into the 1940s and with Mason until his death in 1961.<sup>104</sup>

The records of Delk's interracial contact with the COGIC and other African Americans during his years in Lincoln and St. Louis, outside of the annual convocations, becomes scarce. Records of the Delks' time in Lincoln do not have any documented evidence indicating specific instances of interracial religious activity. Yet there are indications that the Delks may have continued such actions, although the Nebraska

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<sup>103</sup> 80/5/2, folder 2, PPDJL, GR/BI, FPHC, Springfield MO.

<sup>104</sup> Delk, *He Made Millions Happy*, 40.

newspapers may not have deemed it worth noting. While local newspapers did not recount specific examples of interracial religious services at the Delks' mission such as had occurred during the Kansas years from 1908-1916, it is unlikely that James Delk regressed away from his personal convictions for interracial faith during these years. This is most clearly seen by the fact that he continued to operate his missions in much the same way as he had in Kansas, raising funds for the poor, giving food to the poor, and likely assisting the poor of any race. Additionally, he was still attending the annual African American COGIC convocations throughout all of his time in Nebraska and was rejected by some Holiness folk for the Pentecostal theology that he drew from Mason and the COGIC.<sup>105</sup> Even after leaving Nebraska and the relatively undocumented years from 1920 to 1924, Delk fostered some level of interracial ties through his contact and advocacy for fellow racial progressives. The reason Delk was seized by the police in St. Louis in 1926 and held for his eventual trial and imprisonment in Illinois was because Delk had come in to speak on behalf of the then St. Louis mayor, the relatively racially progressive Vincent Miller.<sup>106</sup> Miller had established his early political career in St. Louis when he was the president of the St. Louis Police Board. Before he came into office, African American officers were not allowed to wear uniforms and were not treated equally to white officers. The Republican Miller, in an act of racial progressivism, tripled the number of African Americans on the police force and overturned the restriction prohibiting them from wearing official uniforms. Miller marketed his success to become Mayor of the city. In his early years in office, Miller was indicted on suspicions of fraud and financial misdealing due to a city building contract he was involved in (he was

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<sup>105</sup> "CHURCH CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY," 54. Delk, *He Made Millions Happy*, 7.

<sup>106</sup> "'Jimmy' Delk held for Shelby court," *Decatur Review* (Decatur, IL), March 26, 1926, p.4, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

found innocent of the charges). It was during the scandal and Miller's impeachment hearings that Delk came as a character witness and spoke on his behalf. This was prior to Delk's trouble with the law for the bench warrant issued in Illinois.<sup>107</sup>

Following his release from prison in 1927 and his work with the Four Square Gospel Pentecostals, Delk invited Mason and members of the COGIC to stay at his home and preach at the Four Square religious colony in 1931. Mason and Overseer D. Bostick of St. Louis stayed with Delk for a ten-day camp meeting at the Four Square colony in White City, Missouri.<sup>108</sup> Delk recalled instances of Mason providing mentorship, teaching, and prayer while touring the farm. Delk praised Mason for being a man who was "not interested in worldly things; his whole life is spiritual things" after recalling a particular day where they spent six hours walking and praying on the farm before hearing Mason preach for four hours that evening.<sup>109</sup> He would also later recall having gone through hard times in his ministry from 1904-1945 and finding peace after praying with Mason. This was meaningful enough to Delk for him to say that he loved Mason as much as he loved himself or his own family.<sup>110</sup> While possibly a little hyperbolic, the statement still demonstrates the importance Delk placed upon the leadership of Mason, his comfort in following Mason's leadership, and the growing interracial alliances he was forming.

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<sup>107</sup> "'Jimmy' Delk held for Shelby court," *Decatur Review* (Decatur, IL), March 26, 1926, p.4, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO; "Victor J. Miller," Revolv.com, accessed May 28, 2017. <https://www.revolv.com/main/index.php?s=Victor%20J.%20Miller>. While it is possible that Delk's relationship with a relatively racially progressive politician might have created a worse reputation for him in Illinois for the 1926 trial he was convicted in, there is not enough evidence to suggest that Delk's relationship to Miller had any direct impact on his case. What is clear is that Delk was publicly maintaining relationships with people who were relatively racially progressive, in the public eye, and under scrutiny. Combining this with Delk's existing reputation for offensive preaching and bucking racial boundaries certainly didn't help him in his 1926 trial.

<sup>108</sup> Delk, *He Made Millions Happy*, 11-12, 55.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* Despite the fact that Delk was not what one would call a family man, and the statement could be seen as hyperbolic, it is still noteworthy that Delk published statements likening his admiration and affinity for Mason to that of family.

Following Mason's visit in 1931, Delk received encouragement from his Pentecostal followers to embark upon the unfamiliar waters of social respectability, and run for office in the 1932 in the Missouri Democrat gubernatorial primary race.<sup>111</sup> Ever the showman, Delk attempted to appear respectable to both cities and rural towns, dressing the part wherever he was.<sup>112</sup> Yet even Delk's attempts to appear respectable were tempered by his usual abrasive counter cultural core. Believing in the brotherhood of man (Delk's way of saying he was an anti-segregationist), Delk ran on a ticket that endorsed the abolishment of capital punishment, old age pensions, prohibition, and to "treat all people alike" under the law.<sup>113</sup> Delk's platform was so out of step with the contemporary culture in the Democratic primary that members of the Kansas City Pendergast political machine could not believe he was truly running as a Democrat. His positions were such an odd combination that they actually suspected he was a Republican spy and they planned to use controversial past support of prohibition as a tool to sink Delk and the Republicans in Missouri and in states where Delk was not known.<sup>114</sup> While the most controversial point to many of his contemporaries would

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<sup>111</sup>"Evangelist May Run for Governor," *Monitor-Index and Democrat*, (Moberly, MO), Oct. 22, 1931, p.4, 80/5/2, folder 1PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield MO; "Evangelist Will Run for Governor," *Moberly Monitor-Index and the Moberly Evening Democrat*, (Moberly, MO), February 8, 1932, p.1, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

<sup>112</sup> "Evangelist Out For Governor," *Fitchburg Sentinel*, (Fitchburg, MA), April 9, 1932, p.11, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO; "Evangelist Will Run for Governor," *Moberly Monitor-Index and the Moberly Evening Democrat*, (Moberly, MO), February 8, 1932, p.1, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

<sup>113</sup>"To Run for Governor," *Monitor-Index and Democrat*, (Moberly, MO), May 2, 1932, p.3, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield MO; "Rev. James L. Delk Letter to Francis M. Wilson," August 5, 1932, State Historical Society of Missouri (here after SHSM), C1039, F479. It is likely his platform to treat all people alike served a double purpose of both a demand for class equality and racial equality in his campaign of the "masses against the classes."

<sup>114</sup>"Letter to Mr. Leedy from the Hannibal Missouri Democratic Club," Aug. 18, 1932, SHSM, C1039, F.674. Mr. Leedy worked for the Pendergast Machine and the campaign to elect Francis M. Wilson as governor who was associated with the United Confederate Veterans and similar organizations. It is unclear why Delk ran as a Democrat in Missouri, especially with his pre-existing relationship with Republican politicians like St. Louis Mayor Miller. It is possible that Delk was a Republican plan, but unlikely as Delk would continue to run as a Democrat for the rest of his life. His support for candidates was even odder, as he almost never supported a mainline winning candidate except for his support of Roosevelt and Truman in 1944. His simply might have seen an opportunity to get more votes by running Democrat in Missouri's evolving political climate.

have been his support of unpopular prohibition enforcement, one year before prohibition was repealed, what was most significant in his platform was his view on equal treatment under the law. While Delk had fostered personal interracial ties and even some level of activism within the context of his church ministry before 1932, there is no record of public declarations and activism for an interracial society outside the bounds of the church. With his political platform advocating equal treatment, however, Delk was moving beyond his already exceptional interracial theological views to promoting those core values in the public discourse by advocating equality under the law, regardless of race or class.

Because of his controversial political platform and theology, Delk found it a challenge to be acceptable to most Missouri voters when he spoke on the campaign trail. He was unable to separate his preaching and his campaigning (if he even desired to separate them) and was described in local and regional press, such as the *Athens Messenger*, in Athens, Ohio, as “preaching and praying and seeking to ‘harvest votes and souls’” wherever he went.<sup>115</sup> His own reason for running for political office was also odd to many non-Pentecostal voters, as he described to the *Athens Messenger* that he had prayed for a vision from God concerning if he should run or not and that he had a dream about flying in an airplane to the Governor’s Mansion. He told the papers he took this as a divine endorsement of his political aspirations.<sup>116</sup> The papers also remembered his early association with prohibitionist Carrie Nation while in Kansas and described him as one of her “hatchet bearers” due to his stance on temperance.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Athens Messenger, “Hat in Ring After Dream,” June 13, 1932, p.2, 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. Delk, *Nazarene Songs for the Nazarene Revival Mission*, 13. Delk can be seen in pictures from his early hymn books standing in a group of Carrie Nation supporters. His fierce attacks of alcohol throughout his early ministry (the style of delivery often landing him in hot water) makes it likely that he was not only a

In the election, Delk's political enemies ultimately humiliated him and destroyed his chances at social and political respectability. They ran pictures of Delk in prison cloths and labeled him the "Ex-Convict" who "combined religion and politics" in articles across the nation.<sup>118</sup> Unsurprisingly, Delk's preaching campaign in the Democrat primary on the prohibitionist, anti-death penalty, anti-discriminatory law enforcement, and Pentecostal platform did not resonate with the voters. He came in last with 5,484 votes compared to the Pendergast candidate winner, who had 303,410 votes.<sup>119</sup>

After losing the race, and any chance of social respectability among most white Missourians and those white Americans who saw pictures depicting him as the "Ex-Convict," Delk went back to his former mode of preaching (if he ever truly left it). He spent a brief period of time in Kansas City during 1933, preaching Pentecostal theology, before he was arrested for said preaching. He was picked up by three police officers who claimed he was telling fortunes, not an ordained minister, and was a suspicious character based upon his earlier conviction in 1926 in Shelbyville. He was beaten severely by the officers before arriving at the police station where all the charges were then dropped. He was able to prove he held two ordinations and was not a fortuneteller. He was still held overnight on a

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follower of Mason in his early years, but also a follower of Nation's temperance movement, even a "hatchet bearer."

<sup>118</sup> *The Coshocton Tribune*, Feb 29, 1932 and *The Port Arthur News* March 2, 1932 displayed such pictures and blurbs from as far from Missouri as Ohio and Texas. Delk became something of a national oddity, running in a Democrat primary while espousing ideas previously associated with Republicans or generally seen as unpopular positions to run on. The fact that he was a former convict also made him stand out as and oddity.

<sup>119</sup> "Winter to be Wilson's Opponent," *Moberly Monitor-Index and Moberly Evening Democrat*, August 4, 1932, p.1, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

vagrancy charge and then released.<sup>120</sup> He then left Kansas City and continued preaching before establishing a church in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, sometime between 1933 and 1935.<sup>121</sup>

### **COGIC Ordination and High Point of Interracialism, 1933-1945**

After moving to Hopkinsville, Kentucky, Delk's interracial religious beliefs and relationship with Mason's COGIC moved from the stance of ally and friend in 1933 to an officially ordained Elder, the COGIC term for a pastor, in 1935.<sup>122</sup> Delk was not only associated with Mason in 1933, but also was "personally acquainted" with the Bishop of the Eastern Diocese, O.T. Jones of Philadelphia, since 1933, among other COGIC ministers.<sup>123</sup> What is more, while there was another all African American COGIC church in Hopkinsville during the 1930s, about the time Delk's church was founded, Delk was still made an Elder of a predominately white COGIC church in Hopkinsville. While a predominately white church, Delk's congregation was interracial during his leadership in the 1930s, 1940s, and until the church folded sometime after 1952. It closed when Delk left to pursue itinerant ministry without a home church.<sup>124</sup> At some point before the church folded in 1952, a nephew of Delk's remembered him having "two three-story houses built that housed African women"

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<sup>120</sup> "The Rev. J.L. Delk Freed"; Houston Herald, "Prison Doors Yawn for Evangelist Delk," (Houston, MO), Jun 15, 1933. From Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/166648662/>.

<sup>121</sup> Delk's quoting of papers and discussion of news articles throughout indicates he was living in Hopkinsville as early as 1933. Yet, articles like *The Courier-Journal*, "Men Who Seek Democrat and Republican Senatorial Nominations," (Louisville, KY), July 28, 1946. From Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/108400106/> claimed he had moved to Hopkinsville in 1935.

<sup>122</sup> James L. Delk, *Philosophy and Democracy: Philosophy of God as Been Preached Through Senior Bishop C. H. Mason for the Past 62 Years*, 1945, p.13, 77/6/1, folder 1, FPHC, Springfield MO.

<sup>123</sup> Delk, *He Made Millions Happy*, 43.

<sup>124</sup> Bruce York, "James Logan Delk," *York's Fentress County Tennessee*, Rootsweb an Ancestry.com Community, last updated Aug 12, 2014, accessed Mar 31, 2017. <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=bruceyork&id=I44028>. I also drew from a phone interview/conversation and the notes from that conversation with historian and COGIC expert Dr. David Daniels. David Daniels, phone conversation with author, March 31, 2017.

and their families in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>125</sup> “They did come to the revivals” he recalled. He remembered this clearly because when he first saw one of the African American women and members of Delk’s church she was the “first black person” and “for sure the first black woman he ever saw.”<sup>126</sup> Sometime before this Delk married for a third and final time in 1936 to Virdie Brawner, who conducted a Pentecostal evangelism broadcast on a local radio station. They had a daughter in 1937.<sup>127</sup>

While a minister in Hopkinsville, Delk led interracial services and hosted African American COGIC ministers and bands, such as Utah Smith in 1935 and potentially as early as 1933. Utah Smith, a former humorist, clown, and traveling entertainer, much like Delk, was a frequent guest of Delk’s in Hopkinsville. He regularly preached at Delk’s meetings after 1937 when Delk worked with him on a twelve-day long camp meeting in Pall Mall Tennessee, near Delk’s birthplace.<sup>128</sup> Delk also hosted a group from Los Angeles in 1937, where Delk was seen singing, swaying, and preaching with the band in an interracial worship service of “more than passing interest.”<sup>129</sup> Delk also hosted COGIC ministers into the 1940s, such as COGIC reverend R. D. Baby Jones of Cincinnati who hosted a three-week revival at Delk’s church in 1943. Delk also preached at Jones’ church.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> It is possible that this house was something similar to Delk’s earlier “colony” in Missouri, and was a house provided for members of his church to stay in. He did not continue to live in the house after 1952 however as it was noted he had gotten sick while staying in a trailer before his death in 1963.

<sup>126</sup> Bruce York, “James Logan Delk,” *York’s Fentress County Tennessee*, Rootsweb an Ancestry.com Community, last updated Aug 12, 2014, accessed Mar 31, 2017. <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=bruceyork&id=I44028>.

<sup>127</sup> Joann Stephens Graham, “James Logan Delk,” *Findagrave.com*, last modified Nov 2, 2010, accessed May 27, 2017. <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=61027734&ref=acom>; “Men Who Seek Democrat and Republican Senatorial Nominations.”

<sup>128</sup> Delk, *He Made Millions Happy*, 44. The account of when Delk first met Utah Smith is unclear on the dates listing the first encounter as 10 years before 1945 and also as 12 years before 1945.

<sup>129</sup> This is taken from a clip of the Fentress Co., newspaper in 9-23-1937 within an email to Dr. Bill Hunter contained in 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

<sup>130</sup> Delk, *He Made Millions Happy*, 48.

Similar to the example of Jones, Delk frequently was not only the host of African American ministers in his interracial church in Hopkinsville during the 1930s and 1940s, but he was also a guest of African American churches within the COGIC across the country. As an official minister in the COGIC, Delk preached with African American Pentecostals throughout California in 1935-1936. He was a guest of COGIC reverend L. E. Cleaver of San Francisco, California preaching with Sister Lorena Parker and her son Tip Parker in 1935. He was also in Los Angeles in 1936 where he first was introduced to Mrs. L. O. Hale, the Supervisor of Women's Work in Southern California.<sup>131</sup> He continued to preach at various COGIC churches locally and nationally until his large preaching tour of the Eastern United States in 1942, where he preached in "New York City, Brooklyn, Boston, Philadelphia, Burlington, Vt. and other cities."<sup>132</sup> He followed up this large preaching tour by working locally in Hopkinsville, Kentucky with COGIC reverend Peter Stoner of the COGIC in 1943 to host outdoor meetings that helped raise funds for the construction of a church building.<sup>133</sup>

Going back on the road again in 1944, Delk followed the path of his successful 1942 tour of the Eastern United States, and became involved in another building project, which would be one of his greatest contributions to the COGIC. Starting June 7, 1944, Delk began his preaching tour of COGIC churches in Cincinnati with Elder P.J. Bryant, Brother Wiley, and Mother Wiley. He then preached throughout Ohio, hosted by various COGIC ministers, and then went to Pennsylvania to preach in the COGIC churches there.<sup>134</sup> From Pennsylvania, Delk went to New York City and then attended the state convocation in Brooklyn. It was at this state convocation in August 1944 that Mason approved a committee

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 74 and 85.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

to meet for the purpose of attempting to secure a steel priority for the building of the national COGIC headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee. Although Delk regularly attended the national COGIC conventions throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the 1944 New York convention was the first regional convocation Delk attended in New York, as he had not been invited to the convocation until that year. In 1944 at the New York convocation, Elder Delk<sup>135</sup> was placed on the building committee with Overseers Shipman, John E. Bryant, O. M. Kelly, and fellow Elders Herring and Reed.<sup>136</sup> Due to war rationing during World War II, the steel priority to finish the construction of the African American COGIC national headquarters had faced three years of roadblocks and delays.<sup>137</sup> Delk set about achieving the steel priority throughout the rest of his preaching tour through New York, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Connecticut until he reached Washington D.C. Upon reaching the national capital Delk set about procuring the steel priority using the political contacts he had made since his run in the Democratic gubernatorial primary race in Missouri in 1932.<sup>138</sup>

Thanks to his connections with the Democratic party and activities campaigning for the Democrats in 1944, Delk was associated with Senators Alben W. Barkley, Happy Chandler, Harry S. Truman, and Tom Stewart.<sup>139</sup> He went to them first to try and procure the steel priority for the COGIC, but was sent in endless circles between the different Senator's

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<sup>135</sup> Elder, the COGIC term for a reverend, thus Delk went by Rev. in the white press and among whites because the term Elder was relatively foreign to whites in Jim Crow America.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

<sup>139</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 194. Although it may appear that Delk's connections to these powerful people undermines his outsider status, the fact is that many Pentecostals courted the attentions of the very people they opposed and their social betters. Wacker explains that Pentecostals frequently tried to gain attention from theologians and people of power and respectability at the same time they railed against them. The fact that Delk had these connections is more a reflection of the common Pentecostal duality of trying to gain respectability while also condemning many of the very people they tried to gain recognition from. As Delk would later run in hopeless political battles against the same Democrat machine he briefly supported and was supported by in 1945, it is more than likely that Delk's success was the result of a brief window of useful connections which quickly withered away under Delk's typical outsider and counter cultural mentality.

offices and the War Production Board (WPB) where he discovered the “battle” that had been waged “for nearly three years, asking for this priority.” Finally, after discovering that even Mason had been to Washington D.C. and dismissed by the WPB, Delk was informed that the trouble with getting the priority was in Memphis. Delk then flew from D.C. to Memphis to meet the District Attorney General William Gerber, and the Chairman of the WPB in Memphis, Mr. Harrison. By September 20, 1944, Delk received a letter in his home from Mr. Gerber stating that it had been “impossible for me to impress the local Board to the extent that they will be willing to permit the purchase of the desired steel.” Delk received this news while Mason was at his home in Hopkinsville as a guest preacher for Delk’s birthday. Delk was so upset by the letter that he did not tell anyone what it said; not Mason who was there, nor his own wife.<sup>140</sup>

Resolving to overcome the rejection letter, Delk again set himself to the task of achieving the steel priority. He called Senator Steward and arranged to meet him at his home concerning the steel priority. He informed Mason that he would be in Memphis to meet Stewart later that week and was told by Mason to come the very next day. After arriving in Memphis Delk sent a letter September 28, 1944 to Senator McKeller also requesting to meet. Then after meeting with Senior Bishop Mason, reverend U.E. Miller, and reverend H.C. Mims who encouraged him for the task ahead, Delk went to meet Mr. Harrison of the WPB, followed by Memphis Mayor Chandler. Both gave Delk no hope of receiving the steel priority as he prepared to meet McKeller and Stewart. He then went to the Tri-State Iron Co. with U. E. Miller and secured a brand-new contract for \$48,000 worth of steel. He then took the application to Tom Steward, who was not at home but in Washington D.C., on

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 17.

October 4, 1944. Despite being given no hope in Memphis, except for the words of Mason and the COGIC leaders there, Delk waited for the next three days as Steward worked on procuring the steel priority. On October 7, 1944, Delk received confirmation from Steward that the COGIC would be granted the steel priority. Delk remembered this notification as the fulfillment of the “greatest aim” and accomplishment of his life until that point.<sup>141</sup> In excitement over the support of national Democrats like Senator Stewart, Delk wrote Donald M. Lathrom, the Director of the Democratic National Committee, on October 14, 1944 and informed him that he was ready to “cancel my church engagements and go down the line a hundred per cent for” the next election of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman.<sup>142</sup>

After achieving the steel priority for the COGIC in 1944, what Delk called his greatest achievement, Delk had the honor to represent the COGIC at several conferences in 1945 and published a book detailing his involvement in procuring the steel priority and his interracial theology. Delk represented the COGIC at the United Nations Conference in San Francisco in 1945 and was a delegate to the Pentecostal World Conference and another unspecified church conference in Toronto in 1945.<sup>143</sup> Though the honor of being a white minister representing the African American COGIC at different conferences in 1945 and having achieved the steel priority are both worthy of note, his most exceptional contribution in 1945 was the public stance he took on interracial theology in his book. Delk’s interracial theology advocated positions publicly few other white Pentecostal pastors took, much less

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 18, 60.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 22. It is unclear if Delk followed through with this as FDR died before the next election and Delk ran on a similarly controversial ticket to his 1932 one in the 1946 Kentucky Democrat primary for Senator. “Men Who Seek Democrat and Republican Senatorial Nominations,” *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), July 28, 1946. From Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/108400106/>.

<sup>143</sup> Another news clipping within and email to Dr. Bill Hunter, who wrote that it was from the *Upper Cumberland Times* (Jamestown, TN), in April 1963. 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

published, at that time. While he would continue to act upon the interracial beliefs he published in 1945 until his death in 1963, Delk would never again reach the level of notoriety and success that he experienced surrounding the steel priority.

### **Consequences of Counter Cultural Interracialism and Final Years, 1946-1963**

Delk's moment of glory was not without its costs, nor was it universally felt. Beyond being chased out of towns by segregationist in the South as his 1945 book described, Delk was also beaten by the KKK on at least two occasions between 1935 and 1958 for his association with Mason and the COGIC.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, despite the apparent success and positive reception of Delk by elites and senators in 1945, such sentiments did not extend too far or for very long. In 1948, Delk attempted to secure the probationary release of the African American Ingram family. The Ingrams were a mother, Rosa Lee, and two sons, Sammie and Wallace, who were convicted for killing a white men who they said tried to attack them and were held in Georgia.<sup>145</sup> Delk claimed they were unfairly tried and that the fact the judge mitigated their sentence from the death penalty to life imprisonment indicated second thoughts about the verdict and qualified the Ingrams for early parole.<sup>146</sup> Delk offered his farm (possibly the same property described by Delk's nephew) and said that his church and others were raising money as collateral for the Ingram's parole, and he asked the parole board to release the Ingrams to his church in Hopkinsville. Yet Delk's actions and statements did not have the support of white churches in Hopkinsville, but only the African American ones, as the white Ministerial Association had renounced association with him by

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<sup>144</sup>"CHURCH CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY," 54. It is unclear when or where exactly Delk was beaten by the KKK as the Ebony article did not specify and the illegal actions of the KKK don't naturally lend to a useful paper trail.

<sup>145</sup> "Pastor Offers Farm to Three Life-Termers," *The Lima News* (Lima, OH), Dec. 22, 1948, 80/5/02, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

1948.<sup>147</sup> The greater sign of social rejection, however, was the Georgia parole board outright dismissing Delk's offer with statements and innuendos that he was not fit to get involved. They said that the Ingrams would not be eligible for parole until 1955.<sup>148</sup> Even though Delk came as a representative of six African American churches in Hopkinsville to help the Ingrams, Sheriff Devane of Schley county, Georgia would not even allow Delk to speak with the Ingrams, though he persisted for two weeks. The Sheriff said that the Ingrams received letters in the mail and "that should be enough religion," while Delk replied that the Ingram's "human rights are being violated." Despite these efforts with the Sheriff and the parole board, Delk was not recognized by whites, especially in the south, such as Sheriff Devane and the Georgia parole board.<sup>149</sup> Ultimately it was not until 1959 that the Ingrams were granted parole thanks to the efforts of the NAACP, white lawyer S. Hawkins Dykes and the Civil Rights Congress, and the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family led by Mary Church Terrell who won their freedom. It is unclear if Delk participated in any of the fundraising to free the Ingrams as he is not mentioned in the records of the Ingram case after 1948.<sup>150</sup>

Following the 1940s, Delk's work for the steel priority in 1945, and his attempts to free the Ingrams in 1948, he increasingly faded from public notice inside and outside of the COGIC. This was especially true after a falling out between Delk and several major COGIC

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<sup>147</sup> "Way 3 Negroes Treated Disgusting, Georgia Told," *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), Dec. 23, 1948. From Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/110472836/>.

<sup>148</sup> "Farm Offered Woman if Court Gives Chance," *The Daily Notes* (Canonsburg, PA), Dec. 24, 1948. From Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/53848972/?terms=James%2BDelk%2BIngrams;> "Preacher Offers Farm to Negro 'Miscarriage of Justice' Victim," *The Anniston Star* (Anniston, Alabama), Dec. 22, 1948. From Newspapers.com, [https://www.newspapers.com/image/115210703/?terms=James%2BDelk%2BIngrams.](https://www.newspapers.com/image/115210703/?terms=James%2BDelk%2BIngrams)

<sup>149</sup> "Visit to Doomed Trio is Denied," *Kentucky New Era*, (Hopkinsville, KY), April 5, 1948.

<sup>150</sup> "Rosa Ingram, Teen Sons Sentenced to Electric Chair on This Day in 1948," by D. L. Chandler, accessed 2/2/2017, <https://newsone.com/2862078/rosa-lee-ingram>.

Bishops in 1949. In 1949 Delk reacted to rumors that had been circulated by several of the COGIC leading Bishops accusing him of defrauding the church of \$16,000. Though there is no evidence that the Bishops pursued legal action against Delk, that Senior Bishop Mason was involved in any way, or that there were even any such rumors circulating, Delk retaliated by filing a suit against 10 Bishops, several of them former allies and associates during his many preaching tours. The charges appear to have been dropped or settled out of court as they are not mentioned again.<sup>151</sup>

The consequence of such a public falling out, however, did Delk's fading reputation no favors within the COGIC. Although he was still an ordained COGIC minister, attended the annual convocations, and preached in various churches during the 1950s, the mention of Delk's name distinctly declines compared to his earlier years with the COGIC in the 1930s and early to mid-1940s.<sup>152</sup> By 1954, Delk's church no longer existed and he left Hopkinsville to live in Frankfurt, Kentucky.<sup>153</sup> He was still an itinerant minister within the COGIC, but he had no supporting congregation. Without Delk leading his church, the interracial nature of the group fell apart and the white members generally went to white churches and African

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<sup>151</sup> "Kentuckian Sues Negro Church for \$242,600," *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), Dec. 16, 1949. From Newspapers.com, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/110463721/?terms=James%2BL.%2BDelk%2BMcEwen>. It is unclear the motivation behind conflict between Delk and the Bishops. The fact that it was not mentioned again publicly and that Delk remained in the COGIC indicates that the conflict over funds was resolved somehow. Without court records detailing if the Bishops forgave Delk the debt or Delk forgave the Bishops the slight it is impossible to see further into the conflict, especially now that Delk is dead and can't be interviewed. Further records would be needed to know if the rumors were circulated by the Bishops as a way to keep Delk from getting too big within the COGIC, similarly to how William Holt thought he had been removed, or if Delk (who had a long reputation of financial troubles and controversial methods) was guilty of financial misdealing. I lean towards Delk being guilty of financial problems, but I can't say for sure.

<sup>152</sup>"The Whole Truth (Newspaper), vol. 32, no. 4 (1957 April) [partial]," Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Archive, University of Southern California Libraries, Center for African American Church History and Research. <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15799coll14/id/244871/rec/33>; Salina [KC] Journal, "Revival Announcement," Dec 10, 1954, 80/5/02, folder 1, PPDJLCF1916-1963, FPHC, Springfield, MO. There could have been more preaching tours not mentioned during the 1950s, just as many of the preaching tours from 1942 and 1944 received relatively limited press outside of Delk recording them in his book.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

Americans similarly went to African American churches.<sup>154</sup> Even without a church, Delk was still registered as a minister in Hopkinsville from 1953-54 and was officially called an “Elder Without Charge.” This meant he was recognized only as an approved minister, but he had no church, and with a wounded reputation among some of his former allies inside the COGIC, Delk did not receive much public attention for his itinerant ministry after 1954.<sup>155</sup> The only exception to this was in 1958, when *Ebony* did the feature article on the COGIC for its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Within the article, church leaders reflected on why they felt the church had grown so successfully under Bishop Mason’s leadership. Among the reasons listed was the “liberal racial policy” and the fact that the church had “no plan of segregation in our work.” It was in connection to this that a picture and brief description of Delk was included in the *Ebony* article covering the fiftieth convocation. Delk sat smiling, the lone white face in a crowd of African Americans. *Ebony* noted that Delk lived in Frankfurt, Kentucky and had been beaten twice by the KKK and was attending his forty-eighth convocation since the COGIC’s inception.<sup>156</sup> While noting Delk’s long standing presence within the COGIC, the lack of comment on his role as an ally or official member during those years or any of his contributions to the COGIC before 1958, demonstrate the peripheral role Delk now found himself in. He was in many ways a shadow of his younger years and seems to have been more of a token of the church’s liberal racial policy than anything else.

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<sup>154</sup> Dr. David Daniels, phone conversation with author, March 31, 2017.

<sup>155</sup> “Yearbook of the Church of God in Christ (47th-48th: 1954-1955),” Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Archive, University of Southern California Libraries, Center for African American Church History and Research. <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15799coll14/id/245474/rec/35>.

<sup>156</sup> “CHURCH CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY,” 59. The article did not mention why Delk had not been at two convocations, or when, or the circumstances of the KKK beatings. Delk’s inclusion appears to be more of a token example of the “church’s liberal racial policy” without any serious regard for his role in the COGIC.

Delk's role within the COGIC was not the only thing that appeared as phantoms and caricatures of his past during his decline. Both his marriage and attempts at political office appeared hauntingly familiar to earlier trends. At about the time of his public decline, Delk's final marriage began to go the direction of his previous two, as Delk was increasingly gone from home, especially with no local church to sustain him. By 1954 the distance between Delk and his wife Virdie grew to the point that they separated.<sup>157</sup> Though there is no proof she divorced him like his previous two wives, it appears that Delk's third wife was likely another "grass widow."

Delk's political career received more attention, though far less success, than his marriage or later ministry. Delk attempted to win several offices in Democrat primary races in Kentucky. He tried to win the Democrat nomination for U.S. Senator in 1946, 1950, 1956, 1960, and 1962 as well as for Kentucky Governor in the Democrat primary in 1959. He lost every nomination, and in the years of his highest percentages in 1962 and 1950 (just shy of 5.75% and just over 2.25% of the voters) the gap between Delk and the primary race winner were at their highest level of separation.<sup>158</sup> Delk's frequent political attempts regularly featured platforms built on pro-labor, anti-segregation, anti-lynching, anti-colonization, anti-draft, and increased pay for pensioners and teachers. Delk generally continued his earlier platform of the "masses against the classes" from 1932, with equally dismal results.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> She kept his name until her death in 2002. Joann Stephens Graham, "James Logan Delk," *Findagrave.com*, last modified Nov 2, 2010, accessed May 27, 2017. <https://www.findagrave.com/cgibin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=61027734&ref=acom>.

<sup>158</sup> "Delk, James L.," *Ourcampaigns.com*, last updated May 27, 2017, accessed May 27, 2017. <http://www.ourcampaigns.com/CandidateDetail.html?CandidateID=160656>

<sup>159</sup> There are photocopied examples of Delk's platform and campaign card lying loose within 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJLCF1916-1963, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

During his final failed attempt in 1962, Delk grew sick and ceased his travels and attempts at political life, returning home to live with his daughter until his death in 1963.<sup>160</sup>

Most newspapers after Delk's death in 1963 remembered him primarily for his frequent failed political attempts, his divorces, and the families he left behind, usually with some mention of his membership within the COGIC.<sup>161</sup> Many of Delk's detractors from 1908 until 1935 would likely not have been surprised by his failed marriages, failed political aspirations, or his counter cultural membership in the African American COGIC as a white minister. Delk on the other hand, might have wished to be remembered differently. He had suggested in 1945, at the height of his success, that he wanted to be remembered primarily as one who "lived and died loving all people, regardless of Race, Creed, or Color."<sup>162</sup> Few people remembered him in the days following his death in the noble way he would have wanted. Yet, the very controversial showmanship, independence, wanderlust, and loud personality that often resulted in Delk alienating those around him and disqualifying him in their minds from "loving all people," did contribute to making the man who was "possibly the most visible white minister associated with the largely Afro-American COGIC."<sup>163</sup>

Delk's long history as an ally and member of the COGIC shows us that the assumption that segregation of early Pentecostals was a forgone conclusion is a false one. Delk shared much with early white Pentecostals, such as his willingness to take countercultural stances on alcohol and worldliness. His expressive worship and showman style was not uncommon. Even his origins among the lower classes was common to the

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<sup>160</sup> "Noted Tennessee Evangelist Dies; Dream Unfulfilled," *Kingsport Times* (Kingsport, TN), April 11, 1963, 80/5/02, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

<sup>161</sup> 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

<sup>162</sup> Delk, *He Made Millions Happy*, 71.

<sup>163</sup> 80/5/2, folder 1, PPDJL, Clip file, FPHC, Springfield, MO.

early Pentecostal rank and file.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless, Delk took a path of interracial Pentecostalism few white Pentecostals embarked upon. Even fewer maintained his long history of interracial ties and fewer still developed a core theology of interracial Pentecostalism that submitted to African American leadership. Delk's life shows us why other white Pentecostals may not have taken his path. While segregation was not inevitable, the resistance to interracialism was costly and required an equally costly and potentially volatile personality, willing to be counter cultural and combat social respectability. Most white Pentecostals were not willing to pay the cost Delk paid nor stay on the road of lost respectability for the long term and instead increasingly conformed to the expectations of white respectability after World War II.<sup>165</sup> Most white Pentecostals increasingly pursued respectability and accepted segregation as the cost for that respectability.<sup>166</sup> They compromised with segregationist racism so much so that very few Pentecostals broached the color line until after the 1964 civil rights legislation.<sup>167</sup> It was not until the "Miracle at Memphis" in 1994 that the largest white and black Pentecostal churches intentionally reopened ties and elected an African American chairmen to the newly formed Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches of North America to try and recapture the potential for racial egalitarianism possible within the birth of Pentecostalism at Azusa Street.<sup>168</sup> Delk on the other hand stayed on the road of the counter cultural and was never socially respectable, so much so that he died in relative obscurity while staying with his daughter in 1963 in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Yet, through the broken road of Delk's life, lies a path that led to

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<sup>164</sup> For more, see Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited* and Wacker, *Heaven Below*. Wacker contends that there was a greater level of middle class Pentecostal leaders than Anderson describes in his earlier work, yet even Wacker admits that the majority of average Pentecostals were from the lower classes.

<sup>165</sup> Stephens, *Fire Spreads* 14.

<sup>166</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 226.

<sup>167</sup> Stephens, *The Fire Spread*, 244.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 245-246.

outspoken interracial beliefs and a lost history that Pentecostals in recent decades have only now tried to reclaim.

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## VITA

Kenan Brown was born on March 11, 1989 in Kansas City, Missouri. He was homeschooled until middle school when he began attending the Parkway South district and graduated from Parkway South High School in 2007. He attended St. Louis Community College-Meramec and then transferred to Southeast Missouri State University where he received a Phi Theta Kappa Scholarship. He graduated, Phi Kappa Phi and magna cum laude, in 2011. His degree was a Bachelor of Science in Education with an emphasis in Secondary Social Studies Education.

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In 2017, Mr. Brown assumed a position teaching history at Maranatha Christian Academy in Shawnee, Kansas. Upon completion of his degree Mr. Brown plans to continue teaching in secondary education, though probably in public education. He plans to continue in his research interests.

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