SHE'S THE FOUR-LEAF CLOVER IN THE CITY KATRINA TURNED OVER: THE HISTORICAL SISTER GERTRUDE MORGAN AND HER POST-HURRICANE KATRINA SPECTERS

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

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presented by Emily Clark,

a candidate for the degree of master of the arts,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Richard J. Callahan

Professor Rabia Gregory

Professor Kristin Schwain

Dedicated to the irreplaceable city of New Orleans … past, present, and future.

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Introduction

If all the cities in need of good luck and fortune were listed, post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans would sit at the top. In the latter part of 2008, the New Orleans newspaper, *The Times-Picayune*, broke a story about four-leaf clovers spreading throughout the Lower Ninth Ward, a neighborhood still full of bare foundations, overgrown lawns, and empty lots. The clovers originated at the corner of North Dorgenois and Flood Street in the newly (in)famous Lower Ninth Ward, an area in desperate need of a good omen. Though a horticulturist proved the clovers were actually ferns, the infectious hope had already spread.[1]

In the 1960s and 1970s, Sister Gertrude Morgan, artist, musician, street preacher and prophet, lived and ministered one building down from this corner. These four-leaf clovers overwhelmed her yard, a detail noticed by all who remember her. She ministered at her home in the Lower Ninth, on the streets of the French Quarter, and at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. She painted on any surface she could and used these images to accompany her preaching. The Book of Revelation or Daniel typically inspired her artwork, and she painted upon unconventional canvases, such as cardboard, old doors, and Styrofoam meat trays. Her art made her an artistic folk hero in her own time. Her paintings and music denoted a message of urgency and pointed to a unique, literal interpretation of the apocalyptic books of the Bible. Throughout her ministry, she placed herself and New Orleans within the biblical text, playing a significant role in the coming apocalypse.

[1] Chris Rose, "A four-leaf fantasy," *The Times-Picayune*, December 21, 2008, http://www.nola.com/living/t-p/rose/index.ssf?/base/living-0/122987881393960.xml&coll=1.

Today she is a legend, folk hero, and cultural icon for the city of New Orleans. Twenty-five years after her death, New Orleans has seen the emergence of a new Sister Gertrude Morgan, or perhaps more accurately, multiple Sister Gertrudes. In 2005 Hurricane Katrina flooded the streets of New Orleans, and after the waters receded, the city raised Sister Gertrude Morgan from the dead. However, this is not the historical Sister Gertrude as in the 1960s and 70s, but rather re-appropriated Sister Gertrudes.[2] The Sister Gertrudes of the post-Katrina landscape are specters of the historical Sister Gertrude. Her paintings, which brought her recognition in her own time and forged her link to an "authentic" or "folk" lifestyle, are no longer the primary element of her identity. For post-Katrina New Orleans, Sister Gertrude has emerged as a symbol for "authentic" New Orleans culture. This specters and the historical Sister Gertrude complicate each other. She is not a New Orleans native, but after God called her to preach, she came to the city to battle sin and Voodoo. She is now a symbol for the city she identified as the most sinful and most in need of her preaching.

This thesis will explore the various Sister Gertrudes: the historical one that lived between 1900 and 1980 and the specters born since Katrina. By looking at the relationship between her art, her music, her preaching and her identity with the city of New Orleans we can see these various Sister Gertrudes, how and why they emerged, and where they overlap. The historical Sister Gertrude used her artwork and music as key elements in her evangelizing ministry. However, in the post-Katrina context these are divorced from her didactic ministry and become indicators of her "authentic" New

[2] It is a fool's errand to claim to reconstruct the original Sister Gertrude. Therefore, I use the term "historical" to refer to the Sister Gertrude of the 1940s-1980. I refer to my attempt to piece together her religious worldview based upon my close reading of her paintings and music. This is so I can differentiate between the Sister Gertrude of the 1940s-1980 from the post-Katrina specters.

Orleans identity. Each specter has distinct connections to the historical Sister Gertrude, but an ambiguous relationship exists between them. These tensions between the historical Sister Getrude and her specters reflect the complex process of rebuilding New Orleans.

I use the term "specter" as opposed to "ghost" or "after image" for a couple of reasons. Specter has a two-fold definition. According to the online Merriam-Webster dictionary, specter means "1. a visible disembodied spirit 2. something that haunts or perturbs the mind."[3] Sister Gertrude is no longer alive and thus obviously no longer limited to a physical body. Rather she exists in the minds of those who knew her and those who remember her.

I have structured this thesis in four main parts. Following the preface, the first section is a literary review of relevant topics addressing elements of my research. I call the literary review "The Painter's Palette" because I draw upon different research methods similar to the way an artist mixes different colors when painting. The literary review will focus on several key themes that emerge throughout the thesis. Religion scholar Richard Davis provides a model for analyzing the lives and afterlives of images, in his case Hindu statues and paintings, in his book *Lives of Indian Images*.[4] Dovetailing with his idea that images have social biographies, I have included other research issues significant to this thesis, including questions of authenticity and folk art, apocalypticism, visual culture, music, sacred space, and memory.

The second part of this thesis will examine the life and work of the historical Sister Gertrude Morgan. A brief biography of her life and an analysis of her artwork and

[3] Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. "Specter." http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/specter. Accessed 21 February 2009.
[4] Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

music paint a picture of the historical Sister Gertrude, of her own religious beliefs, and of her unique apocalyptic message. Interwoven into this section is information regarding the New Orleans she encountered, as this played a role in her choice to move to New Orleans and the molding of her subsequent view of New Jerusalem.[5] Important throughout this discussion are Sister Gertrude's beliefs, ministry, and the way she created sacred space. This is crucial to understand the tensions and ambiguities between the historical Sister Gertrude and the Sister Gertrude specters of today. Sister Gertrude saw New Orleans as a sinful city and she addressed this in her religious worldview. She integrated her life and New Orleans into the biblical narrative in order to make the city sacred.

This process of sacred space production also runs throughout the third section of this thesis, which explores the Sister Gertrude specters constructed in New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina. By specter, I refer to the way certain people and media imagine, re-appropriate, and/or conceptualize Sister Gertrude in the post-Hurricane Katrina context. Inherent in each specter is an ambiguity or tension with the historical Sister Gertrude. First, there is the work of Philadelphia DJ King Britt and his reinterpretation of Sister Gertrude's album "Let's Make a Record," centering on his association of Sister Gertrude with Voodoo. Sister Gertrude came to New Orleans to fight sin and Voodoo; however, King Britt associates her with the religious system she strove to combat. Second, there is the spectral Sister Gertrude imagined by the *New York Times*, which uses the image of Sister Gertrude herself as a post-Katrina symbol for "authentic" New Orleans culture.

[5] I capitalize the "N" for New Jerusalem for two primary reasons. First, Sister Gertrude did. Second, and more importantly, it highlights the connection between New Orleans and Sister Gertrude's vision for the New Jerusalem.

Sister Gertrude came to New Orleans to save it from sin; yet, this media outlet uses her to construct an icon for a reviving, rebuilding city.

Desires to commemorate her memory, centered on either her former home or her identity create a third Sister Gertrude specter. With her artwork, music, and ministry, Sister Gertrude produced sacred space throughout the city; today people revere these spaces and her memory, not for her ministry but for their authenticity. Finally, current Preservation Hall owner Benjamin Jaffe, who knew Sister Gertrude until she died when he was nine, has his own spectral Sister Gertrude. She is like a friendly ghost who haunts him with a hopeful message, a message disconnected from her literal interpretation of the Bible and instructional ministry. The tensions inherent in each of these specters cannot be understood without their comparison to the historical Sister Gertrude. Despite these tensions, the historical Sister Gertrude and her specters remain connected. Today's specter creators' search for authentic New Orleans by adapting Sister Gertrude runs parallel to Sister Gertrude's efforts to make New Orleans sacred through her religious worldview. The process happening in both cases is similar.

In the Conclusion, I will connect the relationship between the various Sister Gertrudes to the rebuilding process of New Orleans. Despite the ambiguous relationships between the historical Sister Gertrude and her specters, each specter is still authentic. The new Sister Gertrudes help the residents of the city heal from Hurricane Katrina; they provide genuine relief and empowerment to victims of the contemporary crisis. Furthermore, the tensions within these spectral Sister Gertrudes reflect questions concerning the rebuilding of New Orleans. This becomes a lens through which to watch a destroyed city reconstruct after its own apocalypse. Competing specters mirror the

competing memories that structure the rebuilding decisions and ultimately show the connections between memory and sacred space. Before embarking on this journey to the apocalypse, I turn to a literary review to place this thesis within the larger context of the academic research from which I drew my analytical tools.

The Painter's Palette: Literary Review

The only book dedicated to the art and life of Sister Gertrude is art historian and New Orleans Museum of Art curator William Fagaly's *Tools of Her Ministry: The Art of Sister Gertrude Morgan*.[6] While Fagaly conducted extensive background research on Sister Gertrude's life and artwork, his focus is on aesthetics. Due to this concentration, his coffee-table style book provides visual descriptions of the paintings, but fails to fully engage the religious elements of her artwork or relate her work to the surrounding social context. In contrast, my reading of Sister Gertrude's artwork, music, ministry, and specters draws from an interdisciplinary approach utilizing methods from religious studies, art history, cultural studies, and history. As stated previously, many themes run throughout this thesis, and thus many scholarly works set a precedent for my research.

Religion scholar Richard Davis employs a very useful approach in his book *Lives of Indian Images* by combining the work of anthropologist Igor Kopytoff and critical literary theorist Stanley Fish to analyze the afterlives of religious images. In *Lives of Indian Images*, Davis explores "the different worlds of belief that Indian religious images have come to inhabit over time, and the conflicts over their identities that have often surrounded them."[7] He examines the afterlives the images experience after they leave their initial context of the temple and gain new identities in museums. This is similar to

[6] While Fagaly wrote the only book solely about Sister Gertrude, many other works of African-American art or American folk art mention her. These include, but are certainly not limited to: Jane Livingston, John Beardsley, and Regenia Perry, *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi (Trd), 1989). Regenia A. Perry, *Free within Ourselves: African-American Artists in the Collection of theNational Museum of American Art.* (Washington, D.C.: Pomegranate, 1992). Charles Russell, *Self-Taught Art: The Culture and Aesthetics of American Vernacular Art* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001). Florence Laffal and Julius Laffal, *American Self-Taught Art: An Illustrated Analysis of 20th Century Artists and Trends With 1,319 Capsule Biographies* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2003).

[7] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 6.

Sister Gertrude in the post-Katrina context. The Sister Gertrude specters take her artwork, music, and identity out of their original context of her ministry and forge new meanings as they leave this context and enter new "interpretive communities." Throughout the book, he writes the "biographies" of various religious images from India, and to accomplish this, he combines the ideas of Kopytoff and Fish. Davis draws on Kopytoff's essay "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," which investigates the way commodities are "not only produced materially as things, but also culturally marked as being a certain kind of thing."[8] Kopytoff proposes that scholars can write biographies of things, and furthermore that this is useful because "biographies of things can make salient what might otherwise remain obscure."[9] Davis finds this biographical method valuable because it "can elucidate the fluctuations in status, the negotiations of social value, and the transactions that attend and transform an object over time."[10] In adapting Kopytoff's approach, Davis is able to explore the identities of religious Indian images not as fixed, but rather "repeatedly made and remade through interactions with humans."[11] Due to these changes in identity, not only are the images are not fixed and permanent in meaning, rather they also are social beings.

The second element of Davis's method utilizes the work of Stanley Fish and his idea of "interpretive communities." While this is a reader-response literary theory, Davis makes good use of it for image analysis. Davis finds Fish useful because, as Davis states, reader-response theory claims that "meaning develops within the dynamic relationship

[8] Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 64.
[9] Ibid., 67.
[10] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 7.
[11] Ibid., 7-8.

between reader and text established during the act of reading."[12] This requires a sizeable amount of accountability from the reader because "the reader's response is not to the meaning [of the text]; it is the meaning."[13] According to Fish, the meaning of a text is not solely embedded in the text, but rather is developed by a "dynamic relationship" between text and reader.[14] Different readers and different interpretations will lead to the discovery of different meanings within a text. Davis admits that viewing an image is not the same as reading a text, but that Fish's idea of "interpretative communities," or "communities of response" to use Davis' term, is equally effective.

After he combines the approaches of Fish and Kopytoff, Davis sets out to examine the social biographies of various images as they move from their primary social, geographic, and temporal location to another "community of response" to see how "the identities of religious icons are constructed and reconstructed."[15] It is the same statue, but the "communities of response" will view and respond to the image very differently. By employing this model, it is possible to see how the social biography of the image has evolved as the interpretative community changes. [16]

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[12] Ibid., 8.
[13] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 3.
[14] Ibid., 2.
[15] Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 263.
[16] An example used in Davis's book is that of the bronze statue of Siva Vrsabhavahana of the Svetaranyesvara temple from the village of Tiruvengadu. This statue of Siva is from the eleventh century C.E. Visited in his original setting, the Siva image would be treated as the deity himself. He would be bathed, dressed, and fed. The most important element of the statue would be "the divine presence that was invoked into it through ritual procedures and came to animate it" (21). Visitors to the 1985 major art show "The Sculpture of India, 3000 B.C.-1300 A.D." at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. would have viewed a very different statue. Instead of lavish treatment in a Hindu temple, the Siva Vrsabhavahana was placed on pedestal, surrounded by other images in a museum hall. While the temple would be bustling with temple and ritual sounds, the hushed atmosphere of the museum would foster a different environment. Davis states that in addition to the display technique and surrounding objects, what makes the difference between a temple environment and a museum is the "expectations the two audiences bring to their encounters" (17).

This approach used by Davis is particularly appropriate to the study of the work of Sister Gertrude. Her images and music have social biographies that developed as their "communities of response" changed. Like the creation of Indian images, Sister Gertrude painted and sang for a particular purpose. These elements of her ministry fulfilled a specific role that transforms as time progresses. Those who later interact with her work have reconstructed the meaning of her work from its original context. These later reconstructions are both similar to and different from the original meaning as envisioned by Sister Gertrude. Furthermore, the Sister Gertrude specters signify her social biography. After her death, the specters that live on today are the social biography of her personal identity and legacy she left behind.

Davis's book provides a method for analyzing pre- and post-Katrina images of Sister Gertrude, but I complement his methodology with research relating to the key themes of authenticity and folk art, apocalypticism, visual culture, sacred space, and memory. No research pertaining to Sister Gertrude is complete without engagement with the folk art world and the complex and problematic history of the field. Popular, primitive, naïve, folk, outsider, visionary, and self-taught are all terms used in the past to describe the art lineage that includes Sister Gertrude. The dominant terms are folk, outsider, and now self-taught. Much of the troubled history of "folk" art is due to its contrast to "high" art. Whether or not folk artists want to be a part of the "high/fine" art canon, past scholarship on folk art is fixated on this relationship.

Historically, scholars used the term "folk" to describe any art "produced by non-mainstream artists, mainly amateur or semi-professional artists, purportedly emblematic

of a by-gone, highly romanticized era – a pre-industrial, pre-modern America."[17] In addition to the designation of folk art, art historians also use outsider art and self-taught to distinguish this type of art. While self-taught does not marginalize the artist as strongly as the terms folk or outsider, it still clearly keeps the artist beyond the realm of the high/fine art world and emphasizes this "authentic" location of the artist. This binary of high/fine vs. low/folk does not take into consideration the opinions of folk artists or if they even want to be a part of the high/fine art canon. An analysis of this binary is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is here that notions of authenticity become significant. For art historians and collectors, folk art becomes authentic because it is not the high/fine art taught in schools.

Many collectors are attracted to folk art because of the social context of the artists themselves. Religion historian N.J. Girardot argues that folk artists "remind us of something that we too easily forget (in our orderly lives) in our comfortable real worlds: that all human worlds are made from the tissue of the visionary imagination. All our worlds, even the most mundane, were once quite fantastic and unreal."[18] Girardot's romanticized understanding of folk art reflects how many collectors and viewers regard folk art. One folk art collector, Carl Mullis, is attracted to how folk art "moves and affects one on a personal and emotional level."[19] Historically, art aficionados look to folk art to find something "authentic" about life, and this idea spills into the spectral Sister

[17] Charles Russell, "Finding a Place for the Self-Taught in the Art World(s)," in *Self-Taught Art: The Culture and Aesthetics of American Vernacular Art* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 11.
[18] N.J. Girardot, "Where There Is No Vision the People Perish: Visionary Artists and Religious-Based Environments in the American South," in *Coming Home! Self-Taught Artists, the Bible, and the American South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 92.
[19] Carl Mullis, "Notes from a Collector," in *Amazing Grace: Self-Taught Artists from the Mullis Collection* (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art, 2007), 10.

Gertrudes as her authenticity is the reason for making her a rally point for the city's identity.

In the devastation of Katrina and the rebuilding process of New Orleans, issues of authenticity take center stage. Rebuilding the city is not a tabula rasa situation. Rather than a blank slate, memories concerning the "true" meaning of the city become increasingly important, particularly because all residents of the city will invariably not concur on what is "authentic." The specters of Sister Gertrude emerge because some choose to look to her as authentic due to her status as a folk artist. The folk art canon now fully accepts her, as seen by her 2004 solo exhibition by The Museum of American Folk Art. Also, politics of authenticity are important because inevitably, only certain meanings of authentic will prevail. If everything was authentic, authenticity would lose all definition and significance. Each Sister Gertrude specter rightly claims authenticity, but each specter complicates this notion of authenticity as each has an ambiguous relationship with the historical Sister Gertrude.

One element of Sister Gertrude that generates her authenticity is her apocalyptic vision. Her religious beliefs are simultaneously part of a long-standing American legacy of apocalypticism and unique to her own particular prophetic revelations. Daniel Wojcik is a folklorist with an interest in American apocalypticism. Wojcik defines folklore as the "expressive behaviors and forms considered to be traditional and usually communicated in informal contexts or face-to-face interactions."[20] He finds folklore to be a fruitful platform for apocalyptic studies because apocalyptic beliefs have often originated "apart from the official sanction of religious institutions and founded in

[20] Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World As We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America* (New York: NYU Press, 1999), 14.

personal experiences rather than prescribed doctrines."[21] Sister Gertrude falls into Wojcik's categories because she spread her message through her personal ministry, and while some of her beliefs originate from the Baptist church, she constructed her own unique interpretation of the Bible. Wojcik focuses especially on how nuclear arms have affected apocalyptic belief in America and the increase of fatalistic belief. He defines fatalism as "the belief that certain events and experiences are inevitable, unalterable, and determined by external forces beyond human control."[22] Both Catholic and Protestant traditions reflect this correlation between the increase of fatalistic belief and the threat of nuclear annihilation in the twentieth century.

Similar to Wojcik's work is historian Paul Boyer's *When Time Shall Be No More*.[23] Like Wojcik, Boyer does not neglect to look at apocalyptic beliefs at the popular level. In popular America, Boyer states that "the apocalyptic texts remained what they had always been: a vital source of doctrine, reassurance, and foreknowledge. Ordinary believers continued to pore over their pages and to look expectantly for the events they found predicted there."[24] These statements certainly apply to Sister Gertrude, as she used to the apocalyptic texts of the Bible (especially the Book of Revelation) to understand her vision for the world's future. Wojcik and Boyer both trace the legacy of apocalyptic belief in American culture to the country's Puritan roots, and apocalyptic belief remained an integral part of religious communities across America's history, including groups such as the Puritans, Millerites, Baptists, and Pentecostals.[25]

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[21] Ibid..
[22] Ibid., 3.
[23] Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992).
[24] Ibid., 45.
[25] Puritan thought, influenced by Calvin, believed the world to be a sinful place and only God's salvation would redeem the world. The Puritans' apocalyptic writings were structured upon these pessimistic views.

Though Sister Gertrude was not a Millerite, her visual depictions of the Bible's Book of Revelation place her within a legacy of apocalyptic visual culture with strong American roots in the Millerite apocalyptic charts. In his work *Protestants and Pictures*, visual culturist David Morgan argues that the Millerites utilized charts to "demonstrate the simplicity and unity" of their specific reading of the Bible.[26] By "appealing to 'an aesthetic sense of organization,' the Millerites' charts "visualized the image of the Bible as a self-contained, complete, and inerrant document of God's will," thus further legitimizing their interpretation of the apocalyptic texts.[27] According to Morgan, the Millerite charts were also popular among the group because the visual sense stores memory better than the aural sense; therefore the charts provided reliant educational tools to use with their sermons.[28] A chart concretely demonstrated the group's biblical interpretation. Also, for those who had difficulty understanding the complicated and symbolic language of the apocalyptic texts of Revelation and Daniel, the charts fulfilled a practical role of providing an easy explanation to follow. Like these Millerite charts, Sister Gertrude's artwork served a teaching function. Indeed, her apocalyptic paintings map out the Book of Revelation and in one of her personal communications she highlights the instructive purpose of the images.

Jonathan Edwards, with his famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" elaborated upon common apocalyptic beliefs. The postmillennial stance shaped the Great Awakenings revivals, emphasizing the future world that God will create on earth. Later, the first half of the nineteenth century saw the rise and fall of the Millerite movement. The Millerites believed the world was going to end in 1843 and created complex charts and pictorial references to elucidate their beliefs. Also important, the African-American Christian community historically has often emphasized millennial belief, especially in Pentecostal and Holiness movement groups. Unlike Puritans or Millerites, African-Americans have often stressed the importance of sanctification and conversion, rather than the destruction of the world.

[26] David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1999), 133.

[27] Ibid..

[28] Ibid., 143.

Morgan's research on American Protestant visual culture provides a model for engaging images as evidence for religious and cultural research. Visual culture investigates the role images play in the creation of the worlds in which people live, engage, and interact.[29] While an examination of the construction and subject of an image is a vital and important aspect to visual culture, the scholar must go beyond this basic analysis to fully understand an image. Visual culture studies emphasize the relationship that the image has with the culture that created it, the role the image plays in the culture, and the way a person within that culture relates to the image.

Morgan has written extensively on the theory and history of visual culture and specific examples of visual culture in action, focusing primarily on Christian examples in America.[30] In his book *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*, Morgan outlines a very useful theory of visual culture that provides a framework from which to structure any study of images. Early in the book, Morgan states his purpose in writing, which is two-fold. First seeing is not a passive activity; rather, this act focuses on how the "particular configuration of ideas, attitudes, and customs that informs a religious act of seeing as it occurs within a given cultural and historical setting."[31] Second, he explains that "a gaze consists of several parts: a viewer, fellow viewers, the subject of their viewing, the context or setting of the subject, and the rules that govern the particular relationship between viewers and subject."[32]

[29] David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*, 1st ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 25.
[30] David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images*, 1st ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999). Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze*. Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures*.
[31] Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze*, 3.
[32] Ibid. Second part of book's stated purpose.

Unlike previous approaches to art history that focus primarily on the image itself, its construction, and its content, Morgan highlights the importance of the social function of images. In his analysis, Morgan searches for the social functions and effects of the image, and "the underlying question for scholars of visual culture: how do images participate in the social construction of reality?"[33] He endorses the use of images as data. To reconstruct the historical Sister Gertrude's religious worldview and method of sacred space production, I refer primarily to her paintings and music for evidence. Morgan's work is also important when looking at Sister Gertrude's work in the post-Katrina context to see the social function of her artwork and identity. The creation of the specters proves that images (whether art images or the mental images in a person's memory) play a role in the creation of social networks.

This project uses Morgan's foundational visual culture theory as a springboard and goes in a slightly different direction by examining what happens when social contexts appropriate images different from the creator's original intentions. Sister Gertrude used her artwork and music as fundamental parts of her evangelizing ministry; however since the strike of Hurricane Katrina, Sister Gertrude and her work have become symbols for "authentic" New Orleans culture. Her artwork, her music, and her identity have taken on dynamic roles that go beyond the context in which she created her work, evolving into more complex social meanings today. The various Sister Gertrude specters forge new relationships between her art/music, the viewer/listener, and the city of New Orleans. Furthermore, post-Katrina New Orleans complicates the term "image" as Sister Gertrude painted images, and now she is an image symbolizing the city.

[33] Ibid., 30.

Sister Gertrude was not only a visual artist, but she was also a musician. Therefore in addition to art, she is part of the African-American music community. Coupled with her apocalyptic interpretation of the Bible and her artwork, Sister Gertrude's music played a large role in her ministry. While Sister Gertrude's art originally brought her to folk hero status, her music has assumed a great function in the post-Katrina context. Her music evokes the traditional spirituals, early gospel, and even blues music. Historian Lawrence Levine's landmark text *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* examines "aspects of black expressive culture – music, dance, folklore – to shed light on Afro-American folk thought."[34] Spiritual emerged during American slavery and are "songs of God and the mythic heroes of their religion not confined to a specific time or place, but were appropriate to almost every situation."[35] Spirituals blurred the lines between secular and sacred song. While of religious significance, they were "used as rowing songs, field songs, work songs, and social songs."[36] Sister Gertrude's music, once a part of her ministry, now exists in a secular space, reinterpreted as a pop album.

Through the use of her music, artwork, and preaching, Sister Gertrude created pockets of sacred space around the city of New Orleans, and some of these sacred spaces remain honored today. In her performances, through her combination of music, preaching, and images, she imbued a sacred essence to her surroundings. She drew visual inspiration from New Orleans to create her vision of New Jerusalem. By means of her ministry, she turned her home into her church. She only lived at 5444 North

[34] Irene V. Jackson, "Review: [untitled]," *The Black Perspective in Music* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1978): 93-94.
[35] Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*, 30th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 31.
[36] Ibid., 30-31.

Dorgenois for approximately the last sixth of her life, but the site of her former home is revered as hallowed ground not only to locals and those who knew her, but even to The Edge (guitarist of popular Irish rock band U2).[37] None of her artwork remains at the site today, and the four-leaf clovers filling her yard represent the only vestige that continues at the house. Nonetheless, since Hurricane Katrina, some who know about Sister Gertrude visit her former home.[38] The site is a sacred space. Sacred spaces are not only cathedrals, mosques, and the scenic Black Hills; definitions of sacred space must go beyond the more obvious religious sites. Often built (not natural) sacred space is "intimately entangled" with the profane.[39]

Sacred space and its complexities provide another research conduit for this thesis. Religious studies scholar David Chidester and religious studies scholar and historian Edward T. Linenthal co-wrote a useful introduction piece to their edited volume *American Sacred Space* for any scholar of religion studying the creation and maintenance of sacred spaces in America. In their introduction, they identify three fundamental characteristics of the creation of sacred space. First, sacred space is a "ritual space, a location for formalized, repeatable symbolic performances."[40] Second, "sacred space is a site, orientation, or set of relations subject to interpretation because it focuses crucial questions about what it means to be a human being in a meaningful world."[41] Finally, "sacred space is inevitably contested space, a site of negotiated contests over the

[37] In my interview with Benjamin Jaffe, he spoke of when he took The Edge out to the site of her former home (post-Katrina). At the house, The Edge had "a moment" (according to Jaffe).
[38] The city demolished the house in early December of 2008.
[39] David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, "American Sacred Space: Introduction," in *American Sacred Space*, Religion in North America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 1.
[40] Ibid., 9.
[41] Ibid., 12.

legitimate ownership of sacred symbols."[42] All three of the elements involve negotiations with the sacred, but are also grounded in the profane.

Sacred space and memory work hand-in-hand in post-Katrina New Orleans to construct the Sister Gertrude specters of today. Linenthal has written extensively on religion, memory, sacred space, and American culture. One of his main research endeavors was an examination of the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. In his book *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum*, Linenthal follows the decisions that lead to the construction of Washington, D.C.'s Holocaust Museum. During the museum's dedication, Linenthal notices two contrasting images that "capture the complexity and volatility of Holocaust memory."[43] These are the "massive might of official remembrance," symbolized by limousines bringing the government heads (such as then President Clinton and Vice President Gore) and the "quiet, intimate remembrance of individual survivors" represented by the survivors in the crowd outside the museum.[44] There is both private and public memory, sacred and secular memory wrapped up in this complexity and volatility of national Holocaust memory. Through the "the aesthetics and plan of the building," "the mood of the exhibit," and "the use of artifacts," the Holocaust Museum moves the location of Holocaust memory to the center of American memorial space.[45]

In his conclusion he states that the museum was

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[42] Ibid., 15.
[43] Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (Columbia University Press, 2001), 3.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Edward T. Linenthal, "Locating Holocaust Memory: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum," in *American Sacred Space*, Religion in North America (Indiana University Press, 1995), 256.

> an exercise in officially sanctioned conceptual ordering and control, establishing boundaries both firm and permeable around a way of remembering the Holocaust. Official memory would authoritatively define the Holocaust, provide evidence for its uniqueness, and determine what events, if any, might be compared to it and remembered alongside it.[46]

Linenthal's conclusion engages the political implications of Holocaust memory in the creation of the museum. The boundaries are ambiguous, both "firm and permeable," and this is due to the concurrent secular and sacred elements of Holocaust memory – this was an event horrific by any human standards and specifically religious for the Jewish survivors. Adjacent to the National Mall and Washington Monument, the museum works to construct official memory of the Holocaust. Linenthal's work provides an example of how in the wake of such an atrocious event, survivors and those related to the event feel a need to commemorate it in some form.[47]

The way in which Linenthal engages memory relates to how those who revere her memorialize Sister Gertrude in their minds, through their stereos, and on their walls. Her memory is both public and private. Museums publicly display her artwork, and King Britt has toured the country performing *King Britt Presents: Sister Gertrude Morgan* live.[48] On her front porch her memory orchestrated a life-changing experience for Benjamin Jaffe, and she embodies authentic New Orleans culture for Dr. John's memory of the city he loves. Her memory is both secular and sacred. Interpretations of her religious message abound, curator William Fagaly analyzes the artistic aesthetics of her

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[46] Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 255.

[47] Additionally, Linenthal's work on the memorialization of American battlefields further shows how physical locations of secular American history become sacred spaces of patriotism and American identity (Edward T. Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: AMERICANS AND THEIR BATTLEFIELDS*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993). These places of military battle through veneration and redefinition transform into sacred places that all Americans should regard as a "memorialized, preserved, restored, and purified environment" (pg 1).

[48] Additionally, his remake of "New World in My View" appeared on the 2006 movie soundtrack of Miami Vice.

paintings, and people visit her home to pick the famed four-leaf clovers of her yard. Secular/sacred, public/private, these boundaries are not static or definite. Hurricane Katrina renders their blurriness even more apparent. The Sister Gertrude specters who live on inhabit within each of these boundaries and extend over their borders.

Linenthal's research is not the only work which engages memory, space, and culture. Cultural anthropologist Helen A. Regis has written on second line parades in New Orleans and the fundamental role played by memory in the significance of the famous processions. An ongoing theme in her work is the ongoing adaptations of the parades and how the parades create and re-enforce communal ties.[49] According to Regis true second line parades take place in the city's poorest neighborhoods, which are typically overwhelmingly African-American.[50] Also, Regis finds the term second line to be "ambiguous," due to its multiple meanings. Second line refers to the dance steps performed during the parade, the "distinctive syncopated rhythm" of the New Orleans streets, and the followers who make up the second line of the parade behind the first line (brass band).[51] Second line parades play a very important part in the social networks of neighborhoods and the shared memories of those networks. The parades are typically either jazz funerals or memorial dates commemorating an anniversary of some sort.

By parading together to honor these shared memories, the residents assume a "collective ownership of the streets."[52] This becomes an alternative identity for the poor residents. Many of the neighborhoods in which second line parades flourish are those

[49] Helen A. Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory in the New Orleans Second Line," *American Ethnologist* 28, no. 4 (November 2001): 752-777. Helen A. Regis, "Second Lines, Minstrelsy, and the Contested Landscapes of New Orleans Afro-Creole Festivals," *Cultural Anthropology* 14, no. 4 (November 1999): 472-504.
[50] Ibid., 474. I will directly engage this notion of true or authentic second line parades shortly.
[51] Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory in the New Orleans Second Line," 755.
[52] Ibid., 756.

struck by "poverty, substance abuse, an anemic urban economy, increased juvenile crime, arrests, and imprisonment."[53] For the media, these characteristics are the defining markers for residents. Second line parades give them agency over their identity. Second line social clubs, the typical organizers of parades, provide a positive image for the disadvantaged neighborhoods. Neighborhoods that organize second line parades resemble the neighborhood that housed the Everlasting Gospel Mission, Sister Gertrude's home and church.

When directly addressing the role of memory in second line parades, Regis draws upon the work of historian Pierre Nora stating that spaces are "actively transformed by popular action into places of memory that concretize popular historical consciousness."[54] Memorial parades and jazz funerals are noteworthy examples of the link between memory and practice in New Orleans culture. The physical space of the neighborhood and the parade route show how the use of space in these practices inscribes memory onto the physical landscape in addition to the emotional (and human) community.

The jazz funerals and second line parades "do more than honor the deceased; they are also productive of realities for the living."[55] At this point Regis cites historian Michael Roth because when communities transport "the past to the present, we allow ourselves to experience what we have lost and also what we are – that we are – despite that loss."[56] This relates beyond the second line parades observed and studied by Regis and applies to Sister Gertrude and her specters. The memorializing practices of second line parades sacralize the urban space by combining ritual and music. The historical

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[53] Ibid., 762.
[54] Ibid. Paraphrase of Regis concerning Nora's research.
[55] Ibid., 763.
[56] Ibid., quoting Michael Roth's *The Ironist's Cage: Memory, Trauma, and the Construction of History*," pg 226.

Sister Gertrude produced sacred space throughout New Orleans via her ministry. Furthermore, since Hurricane Katrina and the media attention to the city's poverty, the city itself has struggled for a positive identity. For a culturally and historically rich city, like New Orleans, memories of people and events define physical locations. The Sister Gertrude specters, specifically Benjamin Jaffe's, connect memory and space. There is a definite tie between his childhood memories of Sister Gertrude and her former home, which together operate as a framework for the way in which he lives his life in post-Katrina New Orleans.

Regis identifies New Orleans as a "contested landscape" partly due to the way the tourism and entertainment industries and politics have usurped the tradition for commercial and political interests. Regis calls these "staged 'second lines'" and puts second line in quotation marks when referring to these "unauthentic" parades.[57] She argues that the "increasing use of the second line to represent New Orleans to the world coincides with continued invisibility of the organic, street-based tradition to the mainstream cultural life of the city."[58] The staged parades are disconnected from the tradition of the second line as they do not invoke the community and the shared memory of second line parades. When Harrah's Casino adopted the parading atmosphere, it was to attract people to visit the casino. It is particularly ironic when the tourism industry employs second line parading to entertain and appeal to tourists. These "staged second lines" are supposed to be examples of New Orleans traditions, but the tourism's

[57] Regis, "Second Lines, Minstrelsy, and the Contested Landscapes of New Orleans Afro-Creole Festivals," 472.
[58] Ibid., 473.

industry's use of parades does not acknowledge the neighborhood tradition from which they are adopted.[59]

After Katrina, the city of New Orleans is experiencing an identity crisis where these theoretical foundations became important. New Orleans endured its own apocalypse. The hurricane destroyed large portions of the city, and now the city needs to rebuild itself. The question that emerges is: how should this rebuilding happen? Furthermore, what identity should this rebuilding process assume?[60] This is where traditions such as the second line become important for the residents of neighborhoods with second line social clubs. Also, this is how major players in the city (tourism, politicians) have used the staged second lines to distinguish the city's uniqueness. Memory plays a fundamental role in the rebuilding of New Orleans, and memories of the city before the storm inform the decisions regarding how to rebuild. Should the city be the same? How should the city reconstruct the Lower Ninth Ward? The Sister Gertrude specters are a window through which to view the rebuilding process and ultimately reflect the way a city reconstructs itself after destruction.

Memory and the appropriation of her work play a key role in the creation of the specters. Similarly, Sister Gertrude's artwork and music were integral to her creation of sacred space in New Orleans. These processes parallel each other with their reliance on creative agency and their unique use of available cultural resources. To flesh out the ambiguous relationship between the post-Katrina specters and the historical Sister Gertrude, I now turn to a social biography of Sister Gertrude's life. Utilizing the

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[59] Ibid., 475.

[60] It is interesting to note that there are fears that the city could be rebuilt with a theme park style atmosphere. Manuel Roig-Franzia, "A City Fears for Its Soul: New Orleans Worries that Its Unique Culture May be Lost," *The Washington Post*, February 3, 2006, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/02/AR2006020202746.html.

methodologies laid out here I will attempt to recreate the historical Sister Gertrude through analysis of her artwork and music in order to elucidate her religious worldview.

The Life and Work of Sister Gertrude Morgan

Early Life and Arrival to New Orleans

The Baptist church provides Sister Gertrude Morgan's religious foundation. She grew up in poverty and did not receive any formal schooling beyond the third grade, though, it was enough to teach her to read and write. The Bible was the main text Sister Gertrude read as a child and as an adult. At the age of seventeen, her family moved to Columbus, Georgia, where she became involved in the Rose Hill Memorial Baptist Church, the church that she stayed at until she left for the city of New Orleans. With help at her local church in Georgia, she continued to hone her reading skills and voraciously read the Bible.[61] During this time in the Baptist church, Sister Gertrude was exposed to the many primers and children's Bibles that were printed by the National Baptist Publishing Board.[62] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Bibles were heavily illustrated, particularly the Book of Revelation. Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that Sister Gertrude would have learned to read using illustrated Bibles.[63] Later in her life when she began painting, the images of her early illustrated Bibles likely influenced her artwork, the artwork which God called to create.

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[61] Gertrude Williams was born on April 7th, 1900 in Lafayette, Chambers County, Alabama. She became Gertrude Morgan in 1928 after her marriage to Will Morgan. For a more complete biography of Sister Gertrude, see William Fagaly, *Sister Gertrude Morgan: Tools of Her Ministry* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2004), 4 Much of the biographical information used here refers to Fagaly's book.

[62] Helen M. Shannon, "But Go Thou Thy Way: Sister Gertrude Morgan and the Visual of African American Culture," in *Tools of Her Ministry: The Art of Sister Gertrude Morgan* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2004), 87.

[63] Paul Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880*, 1st ed. (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002). While Gutjahr's book is about the role the illustrations played in the demise of the Bible's popularity, his research includes looking at the increase in illustrated Bibles and how their costs decreased, which made them more readily accessible.

On December 30, 1934 Sister Gertrude received her first revelation from God. She later called this the most important day of her life. Looking back, she described the revelation in this way:

> Sitting in my kitchen one night I heard a great strong Voice speak to me said I'll make thee as a signet for I have chosen thee I got this calling on the 30th day of Dec in 1934 I had to answere to my calling and one day give up and Pack up and go. Are you a chosen vessel of God's its wonderful to Be. God called me a chosed me and turned me into the hands of his son and JESUS said take up your cross and follow me.[64]

However, she did not leave Columbus until her second revelation three years later. God told her "Go-o-o-o-o, Preacher, tell it to the World." She first traveled to Mobile, Alabama, but left for New Orleans in 1939 because she believed "New Orleans is the headquarters of sin … when people get ready to do some evil work, they go to the ninth ward."[65] This belief was, at least partially, in reference to the city's widespread beliefs in Voodoo and conjure. She called the city the "headquarters of sin," a belief complicated by post-Katrina specters that equate her to the city itself. She quickly found her place in the city and later called New Orleans her home because that is where God called her to be.

Sister Gertrude created sacred space in the city of New Orleans; therefore, to recreate the historical Sister Gertrude, it is useful to examine the cultural context of New Orleans. In order to understand how Sister Gertrude created sacred space within the city of New Orleans, I now turn attention to the city itself. In 1939 New Orleans was defined, at least in part, by its traditional "Negro" churches. One year before Sister Gertrude's arrival in New Orleans, the Federal Writer' Project of the Works Progress Administration

[64] Fagaly, *Sister Gertrude Morgan*, 7. I use the grammar and spelling with which Sister Gertrude wrote when I quote her writings. Because authenticity permeates this thesis, I should remain authentic to her writings.
[65] Ibid. 70. Sister Gertrude wrote this in 1973 reflecting on her reasons for coming to New Orleans.

created a city guide in the American Guide Series for this eclectic city. This guidebook provides an image of the city encountered by Sister Gertrude when she arrived, a city well-known for its simultaneous "live and let live" attitude and its pious Catholic past.[66]

The guidebook contains a section on "Folkways." The term "folkways" refers to the everyday, customary use of a social group's folklore, or "body of knowledge, practice, and verbal and material culture."[67] I believe the guidebook chooses this term for its focus on everyday life and the associations of the term "folk." As discussed in the previous chapter's brief review of folk art, "folk" often invokes (problematic) images of traditional life. As a guidebook trying to attract visitors, an emphasis on tradition is a good selling point. For this thesis, it provides a glimpse into the "folk" world of the city Sister Gertrude experienced. This "Folkways" section of the guidebook mentions Voodoo drugstores, which were "occupied by the better class of Negroes."[68] It also mentions the legacy of Marie Laveau, the "most famous, most powerful of all the Voodoo Queens."[69] A brief biography of Laveau on the website of the New Orleans Historic Voodoo Museum lauds her as the "most famous and powerful Voodoo Queen in the world, so powerful that she acclaimed herself the Pope of Voodoo in 1930," and the website calls her a "devout catholic."[70] Laveau's self-acclamation came about ten years before Sister Gertrude's arrival to New Orleans. Figures such as Marie Laveau come to mind when people think of New Orleans, and Voodoo practitioners like Laveau were pervasive in the New Orleans which Sister Gertrude encountered.

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[66] Federal Writers Project, *New Orleans: A City Guide*, American Guide Series (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1938), xx.
[67] George H. Schoemaker, *The Emergence of Folklore in Everyday Life* (Bloomington: Trickster Press, 1990), 235 Glossary entry for "Folkway."
[68] Federal Writers Project, *New Orleans*, 64.
[69] Ibid., 65.
[70] New Orleans Historic Voodoo Musuem, "Marie Laveau," http://www.voodoomuseum.com/Marie.htm. Website's grammar and capitalization.

The guidebook provides a five page "Church Guide" with many Baptist and even more Catholic churches listed.[71] Three Spiritualist churches appear in the guide, but this is the extent of non-mainstream traditions mentioned in the "Church Guide" discussion. If the guidebook reader wants to learn about Spiritual churches, she/he will have to flip to page 199 for the thirteen-page section "Some Negro Cults."[72] Spiritual churches played a large role in Sister Gertrude's decision to come to New Orleans. She believed Spiritual churches and Voodoo traditions were a source of corruption that violated God's word.[73] She came to New Orleans to save souls, and in her eyes, these two religious traditions were great sources of sin. Furthermore, since these two traditions, Voodoo and Spiritual churches, were associated with the black population, Sister Gertrude would also be working against racial stereotypes. Zora Neale Hurston was a folklorist and anthropologist who studied southern African-American folklore. In her book, *Mules and Men*, she explored the world of Hoodoo in New Orleans during the 1930s, by becoming an apprentice to many Hoodoo masters. She opens her section on Hoodoo stating that "New Orleans is now and has ever been the Hoodoo capital of America."[74] Hurston first published this work in 1935, shortly before Sister Gertrude arrived to New Orleans, showing that beliefs in Hoodoo/Voodoo, conjure, and the Spiritual Church were alive and well in the city.

Once in New Orleans Sister Gertrude immediately took to opposing these religious views. She opened a mission house for children with two other evangelical women (Mother Margaret and Sister Cora) and adopted the title Sister. The next

[71] Federal Writers Project, *New Orleans*, xxvii-xxxi.
[72] Ibid., 199-211.
[73] In her painting *SATAN GOD Rebuke you*, she condemns Black Hawk, a popular Spiritual church figure.
[74] Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1990), 183.

significant event came in 1956, when Sister Gertrude received her third revelation from God and began painting as part of her ministry.[75] This revelation carried an important message: God told her that she was to be the bride of Christ. She began to wear all white in reference to this relationship. The year following her bride-of-Christ revelation, she had to abandon her orphan mission house due to inabilities to keep the building up to code.

Sister Gertrude met her main patron, art collector E. Lorenz Larry Borenstein in the French Quarter one day in 1960 while preaching and sharing her paintings. He offered her the opportunity to show her work and perform in his gallery. Borenstein was a fairly wealthy, white, Jewish businessman, a far cry from Sister Gertrude. Borenstein eventually took over The Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz, renamed it Preservation Hall, and brought in Allan Jaffe, a local musician and fellow art collector, to work as business manager.[76] A. Jaffe began to support Sister Gertrude and take a personal interest in her work, and like Borenstein, A. Jaffe was also white and Jewish.[77] They were drawn to Sister Gertrude not because they agreed with her Christian apocalyptic vision. Rather their interest was to promote her artwork and music.

Other than meeting Borenstein, the details of her life are unclear in the few years following the orphanage's closing. She began to live with whoever would take her in, and in return she offered her services as a housemaid. In this manner, she began to live with Jennie Johnson (an elderly widow) working as a nurse and housemaid sometime

[75] The dating of these two experiences are based on quotations of Sister Gertrude taken from Fagaly's book, both from pg 12.
[76] Here I refer to Allan Jaffe as A. Jaffe because his son Benjamin Jaffe later becomes a key player in the post-Katrina context (and I refer to Benjamin Jaffe as Jaffe).
[77] Borenstein and A. Jaffe took personal interests in Sister Gertrude's life. They often bought her groceries. When Jennie Johnson died in 1965, Johnson's godchild became the owner of the home and put it up for sale, which would render Sister Gertrude homeless. Borenstein and A. Jaffe bought the house, allowing Sister Gertrude to continue living and preaching there.

between 1963 and 1965 at 5444 North Dorgenois. This is the house she converted into her Everlasting Gospel Mission. Sister Gertrude turned the front room of the shotgun house into the Mission's "Prayer Room." Reminiscent of her all white clothing, she painted the walls, ceiling, and floor white. Her entire environment gradually became painted or upholstered in white.[78] This focus on the color white likely reflects a concentration on purity and the desire to set apart this space as sacred. Upon the walls were some of her artwork, *New Jerusalem from the Prayer Room, Theres an al seeing eye watching you*, and *CHRiST iS THE HEAD OF THiS HOUSE*. The religious significance of the house did not stop at the front stoop; four-leaf clovers surrounded the house.

The focus of Sister Gertrude's artwork was instruction. In a personal letter to art historian and personal acquaintance Regenia Perry in 1973, Sister Gertrude described her work at the Everlasting Gospel Mission in the following manner: "I'm getting along alright I Just Be Praying and talking with the lord I have my service every night Preaching the bible and singing and Praying teaching the People about shurn the fire and Brimstone Rev. 21:8."[79] This focus upon the Book of Revelation and the coming apocalypse was typical of her preaching style. Art historian and curator Fagaly experienced some of Sister Gertrude's services and described them in the following way: "Her performances were possessed of a unique power to intoxicate, to mesmerize, to rivet, but as they were lengthy, they were often difficult to listen to over an extended period," and that "her religious expression held a certain amount of autonomy and

[78] Livingston, Beardsley, and Perry, *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980*, 100.
[79] Fagaly, *Sister Gertrude Morgan*, 18.

spontaneity."[80] Fagaly's descriptions are vague and leave the reader wanting more; however they do allude to the atmosphere of her preaching style. Her artwork played a big role in her ministry, as did her music. When preaching on street corners, Sister Gertrude painted. At the Everlasting Gospel Mission House, she surrounded herself with her artwork on the walls ready to function as teaching tools. When she preached, she would often break into song accompanied by nothing other than her tambourine or guitar.

When I interviewed curator Fagaly in December of 2008, I asked him to describe Sister Gertrude's religious services as I wanted more than the description in his book. Though he knew her the last twelve years of her life, he did not ever attend one of her official services. He is suspicious (based upon his conversations with her neighbors) that few people attended her official weekly services. Whenever he visited Sister Gertrude at her home, she initiated an impromptu worship service. She would perform, and this would include singing, playing tambourine, guitar, or simply tapping a stick or block to a beat. Following her singing, "we'd get the Bible out and she would read scriptures and then I would read a scripture and that was the service."[81] Her artwork is noticeably missing from this description, which foreshadows how Sister Gertrude becomes divorced from her artwork in the creation of her specters.

Artwork, Music, and Religious Worldview

Her artwork and music provide evidence of the historical Sister Gertrude's religious beliefs. Sister Gertrude's artwork and music are manifestations of her religious worldview. When Sister Gertrude created sacred space, her artwork, music, and preaching played important roles. In preaching about the coming apocalypse, Sister

[80] Ibid.

[81] Fagaly, William. Interview by Author. Tape Recording. New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA. 29 December 2008.

Gertrude used her artwork to insert herself into the Bible. Her life and environmental surroundings structured her reading of the Bible's apocalyptic texts. Her ministry imbued the profane, "sinful" city with a sacred essence. Her use of creative agency in her interpretation of the Bible sought to develop New Orleans into a sacred space. Over the span of her artistic career, her paintings documented her life. Her early works focus on her worship at the Rose Hill Memorial Baptist Church and her mission with Mother Margaret and Sister Cora. Later her paintings of the Book of Revelation maintain this autobiographical attribute.

Her artwork utilizes bright, bold colors, and text often accompanies the images. Sister Gertrude rarely painted on conventional "canvases." She painted on whatever was at her disposal, including: old wood panel doors, cardboard, Tide detergent box panels, strips of weathered wood, styrofoam meat trays, old "for sale" signs, window shades, wood blocks, megaphones, and paper. Her most commonly used media were acrylic or tempera paint, ink pens, crayons, and pencils. She would often sign her work. Her most common signatures include: Black Angel, Bride of Jesus, Bride of Christ, Lamb Bride, The Lamb's Wife, Mother Gertrude, Mamma Gertrude, His Nurse, Nurse to Doctor Jesus, Missionary Morgan, Missionary Morgan Prophetess, Prophetess Morgan Missionary, Everlasting Gospel Teacher, Madam, Bride, Everlasting Gospel Revelation Painter, Your Boss's Wife, Mother Darling, Little Ethiopia Girl, Wife of the Two Gods, and Housekeeper for Dada God.[82] These titles show her close relationship to God; Sister Gertrude is prophet, wife, darling, bride, nurse, and housekeeper.

Two of her most popular subjects were images of New Jerusalem and her Revelation Charters. Both have distinctive iconographies drawn from the apocalyptic

[82] Ibid., 29.

texts of the Bible, popular religious imagery, and even more importantly, Sister Gertrude's life and experiences. The Book of Revelation and other apocalyptic passages from the Bible provided the most significant inspiration for Sister Gertrude's paintings.[83] Sister Gertrude's images of New Jerusalem have a unique illustrative style, which reveals how Sister Gertrude inserted herself into the biblical text. She generally titles the painting with New Jerusalem or includes the phrase in the text in the composition. Her New Jerusalem paintings share iconographic elements that local the biblical text in Sister Gertrude's world. For example, she uses a common cityscape in these paintings, a cityscape influenced by New Orleans. Other characteristics include: allusion to her identity as Christ's bride, the presence of many angels, an image of a Caucasian Jesus,

[83] It is significant that many of the other images by Sister Gertrude engage apocalyptic imagery. Some of these that fall outside the immediate scope of this paper include the following. *Revelation I JOHN* consists of two cardboard panels sewn together with string. On the bottom portion, John is pointing up to a large group of faces; it is hard to tell if these are angels or people. On the top portion Sister Gertrude stands next to Jesus (in dark pants and a white shirt) sitting on his throne. *SEVEN LAST PLAGUES*, upon a large weathered wood door, is of seven (five white, two black) angels bringing the seven plagues of the apocalypse. *Vision of Death* is a small painting of a ghostly white figure on a simple horse, presumably the apocalyptic horsemen of death. Similar to *Vision of Death, Seven-Headed Monster with Ten Horns* is a simple drawing of its title, with a figure riding the monster, sitting atop its seven heads, whom is presumably the whore of Babylon. On *after these things I saw four angels* Sister Gertrude has written out a large portion of the text of chapter seven from the Book of Revelation, followed by an urgent request to viewers to "wake up," "ask yourself a question," and "put down that dirty stuff." *THE TWO BEASTS OF REVELATION 13* depicts the two beasts accompanied by the warning: "FEAR GOD AND GiVE TO hiM FFOR THE houR Of his JUDGMENT IS COME REV 14:7." The beasts depicted in this piece appear to be traced because they are much more defined and detailed than what is typical of her work. This indicates that she drew inspiration from other images of Revelation, possibly reprintings of early Millerite charts. Another painting with a definite sense of urgency is *Rev. 8 chap. Woe Woe Woe*. It is a depiction of the eighth chapter of the Book of Revelation and contains commentary by Sister Gertrude about a falling star or meteor being a "warning sign." Sister Gertrude urges people to "wake up," "Recognize Revelation," and realize that "you cant go no further in the Book you are at the end."
DAN 7.1 is a depiction from the Book of Daniel of the beasts from Nebuzzar's dream that Daniel interprets. The focus upon the beasts connects this image to the other apocalyptic paintings. *THE SAiNTS ETERNAL HOME REV 21:1* is a different depiction of the New Jerusalem city. The building is much longer than it is tall, where the typical New Jerusalem building is the opposite. In this new heaven and new earth, the saints are petting different types of animals (possibly human-size dogs). *Rev. 12 and there appeared a Great wonder in heaven* contains a large portion of the twelfth chapter of the Book of Revelation. The focus of the image is that of the "woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet." Sister Gertrude's representation of this woman is very literal, as is the red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, who is attempting to take the woman's newborn baby. Similar to this painting is *Rev chap 9,* which includes much of the ninth chapter of the book in its image. The image is of the fifth angel opening the bottomless pit, releasing locusts, which appear like dogs with wings.

lines of scripture, and a sense of urgency. This iconography turns the city of New Orleans into a sacred space, for it becomes New Jerusalem. This process, of using her religious worldview to develop New Orleans into sacred space, is parallel to the adaptation of her by her specters' creators in order to develop an "authentic" New Orleans.

After the title, the first indication of a New Jerusalem image is the buildings often outlined in red with red and yellow doors and windows. They are multi-storied, although they are not uniform in their number of stories. Typically New Jerusalem buildings appear to contain separate units, each with a door flanked by a window (sometimes two windows) on each side. These units look like a two dimensional front view of a shotgun house. Sister Gertrude painted outlines around each unit, a door and two windows, to portion these as specific units. Some art historians, like Sharon Patton who sees a modern highrise, and Fagaly who describes an apartment building, liken her New Jerusalem buildings to cheap apartment structures.[84] However, I believe they more closely resemble stacked shotgun houses. This is a logical conclusion because Sister Gertrude lived in a shotgun house and New Orleans surrounded her with them.

The resemblance between her New Jerusalem buildings and shotgun houses indicates the influence from her physical surroundings and her personal interpretation of the world to depict the new heaven and new earth. The shotgun house is the "most traditional vernacular house type in the South and particularly in New Orleans."[85] Historically, shotgun houses have filled and still fill the Ninth Ward (Lower and Upper)

[84] Sharon Patton, "Spiritual Visions and Allegory in Contemporary African-American Folk Painting," in *Self-Taught Art: The Culture and Aesthetics of American Vernacular Art* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2001).
[85] Richard Campanella, *Geographies of New Orleans: Urban Fabrics Before the Storm* (Lafayette: Center For Louisiana Studies, 2006), 127.

and the French Quarter (particularly the northern section). A 1936 geographic study of Louisiana concluded that shotgun houses were dominantly associated with New Orleans and the surrounding area.[86] Furthermore, the shotgun house is an architectural design that is associated with the American South, particularly New Orleans. Folklorist John Michael Vlach traced the history of the shotgun house from its roots in Africa, Haiti, and then the American South, focusing in New Orleans.[87] It is one of the most common building styles in the New Orleans area, ranging from poorer area homes to more upscale models in the wealthier areas, but all coming from this original model.

Sister Gertrude lived in a shotgun house and her neighborhood in the Lower Ninth Ward would have been full of shotgun houses. Therefore, her depiction of New Jerusalem filled with shotgun houses reclaims an architectural style that is associated with poorer communities. The Bible does not describe shotgun houses, nor are shotgun houses innately religious buildings, but Sister Gertrude appropriated the physical buildings of her surroundings to create a unique "vernacular" religious architecture for her vision.[88] The shotgun house that was her home was also the Everlasting Gospel Mission House. The center of her religious life and religious work was a shotgun house, and she made the shotgun house the template for New Jerusalem. Therefore, her vision

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[86] Fred B. Kniffen, "Louisiana House Types," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 26, no. 4 (December 1936): 179-193.

[87] He finds the West African coast to be the origin of this style of home, which then became an architectural design promoted by free blacks in the New Orleans area. While his argument has been challenged, the shotgun house is an architectural style that has become associated with the city of New Orleans (and the south in general). John Michael Vlach, "The Shotgun House: An African Architectural Legacy," in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 58-77.

[88] This is reminiscent of Father Divine's re-appropriation of the existing domestic and commercial buildings at his disposal to develop a distinctive "vernacular" religious architecture for his utopian community. The buildings he purchased were not inherently sacred, but his presence and his annexation of the buildings made them sacred spaces for him and his followers. This topic is explored in Leonard Norman Primiano, ""Bringing Perfection in these Different Places": Father Divine's Vernacular Architecture of Intention," *Folklore* 115, no. 1 (April 2004): 3-24

that the new heaven and new earth will bear physical similarities with her Gospel house reflects her integration of the Bible and New Orleans.

Incorporating her surroundings into the Bible was a way to locate herself and New Orleans in the Bible's apocalyptic texts. Sister Gertrude frequently (if not always) paints herself in New Jerusalem, indicating her physical location in the apocalyptic story. Often she appears in a wedding gown marrying Christ or is simply holding Christ's hand. Unless in his tuxedo for the wedding, Sister Gertrude painted Jesus in a white shirt and black pants. He has sandy-red hair and white skin. Viewers can also identify this figure as Jesus because in paintings such as *Jesus is my air Plane* this is also how Jesus was painted.[89] For example, in its depiction of her marriage, *NEW JERUSALEM REV 21.2* demonstrates how Sister Gertrude represented the biblical text through her lived environment and experience. This painting depicts a New Jerusalem building in the background and a garden in the foreground. In the garden, Sister Gertrude and Jesus are in their wedding clothes, and around the garden Sister Gertrude painted figures holding hands and wearing hats. The title of this painting connects closely with the Scripture verse after which it is named: "And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."[90] When this part of revelation comes to pass, Sister Gertrude, as Christ's bride, will be there. Another common feature in the New Jerusalem paintings is the presence of Scripture verses, as many of her paintings included texts supplementing the images.

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[89] In paintings like, *Jesus is my air Plane*, since Jesus is in the title, we can easily identify the typical iconography of Jesus (black paints, white shirt, fair skinned, red/brown hair). Using this as a basis makes it easy to identify Jesus in other paintings.

[90] Harold W. Attridge et al., *The HarperCollins Study Bible: Fully Revised & Updated*, Rev Upd. (New York: HarperOne, 2006). Revelation 21:2 (NRSV). In this case, I use a lower-case "n" for New Jerusalem as it is in this text.

Another element of Sister Gertrude's New Jerusalem iconography is angels, which appear not only in New Jerusalem images but also in many paintings. In the case of New Jerusalem paintings, often these angels would flank the buildings on the left and/or right. Due to their long hair, the angels are likely women (since her Jesus has short hair). For the most part, the angels have fair skin, and while there are black- and brown-skinned angels as well, these are by far the minority. The multi-racial angels are significant. The 1960s were a volatile time in American history in regards to race, and the Civil Rights Movement brought to light the deep lines of racism in the country. The city of New Orleans runs the gamut of racial backgrounds, and racial diversity surrounded Sister Gertrude. Despite the flip-flopped proportion of fair-skinned to dark-skinned angels, Sister Gertrude's multi-racial angels reflect the presence of diversity in the color scheme of New Orleans.

New Jerusalem from the Prayer Room hung on the wall of the Prayer Room at the Everlasting Gospel Mission and depicts her marriage and angels. In it, angels frame the New Jerusalem building on both sides. She painted her marriage to Jesus, surrounded by a group of people on one side of the building. In front of the building she painted Jesus and herself sitting on a bench swing (she sometimes painted herself in the same image twice). *New Jerusalem with Choir of Angels Around Rim* shows the racial spread of Sister Gertrude's angels. While the most common surface for New Jerusalem images is cardboard or paper; this is an example of a piece on a Styrofoam meat tray. On this tray Sister Gertrude painted a New Jerusalem building with twenty-three of the Book of Revelation's twenty-four elders in an enclosed yard next to the building. Elder number twenty-four is on the New Jerusalem building's roof. The elders are white, like Jesus,

male, and wearing white shirts with blue pants. In front of the building Sister Gertrude marries Jesus (she has on a white dress with a veil and is holding flowers).[91] Around the rim of the tray are busts of angels, forty-two white-skinned, red-headed angels, and eight black angels.

In addition to her unconventional canvases, Sister Gertrude painted on the album covers of her 1971 record. One specific *Let's Make a Record* cover is a simple New Jerusalem building in the background, surrounded by angel busts, and an image of Sister Gertrude in the foreground.[92] She is sitting on a chair with a table on both sides of her. One of the tables has a Bible upon it and the other has a basket of flowers. The image of her is enveloped in white, reminiscent of the Prayer Room in the Everlasting Gospel Mission. This image is a concrete example of how Sister Gertrude would insert herself into the biblical text. This image is set within the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Revelation, which was a beloved section of the Bible for Sister Gertrude.[93] This chapter of the text refers to the creation of a new heaven and a new earth and the descent of a New Jerusalem from heaven. Sister Gertrude turned the city of New Orleans into sacred space seen through the similarities between the New Jerusalem and her Gospel Mission House. By means of her own creative agency, her distinctive religious worldview implanted New Jerusalem on the streets of New Orleans, with Sister Gertrude announcing the soon-coming new heaven and earth. She integrated her life into the biblical text by locating herself and New Orleans into the apocalyptic narrative. Not only

[91] Another New Jerusalem painting that prominently features Sister Gertrude's marriage to Jesus is *THE LAMB AND HiS BRiDE,* which depicts their marriage in a garden with several onlookers.
[92] This specific album cover is in the private collection of Benjamin Jaffe, who showed it to me during our interview on the 29th of December 2008.
[93] Her song "I Got the New World in My View" directly cites the twenty-first chapter of Revelation.

did she believe herself to be the bride of Christ, but she fully submerged her life into the Book of Revelation.

Sister Gertrude found inspiration for her paintings in her immediate environment, including song. In 1930 Mother McCollum recorded a gospel song called "Jesus is My Air-o-plane" at a Chicago recording studio.[94] Sister Gertrude adopted this image in her paintings *Jesus is my air Plane* and *New Jerusalem with Jesus is My Airplane*. Both include an image of New Jerusalem with Sister Gertrude flying through the sky with Jesus in an airplane. In both images, the plane is a simple two-seater, with Sister Gertrude in front. I do not know if Sister Gertrude ever heard Mother McCollum's recording. However, Sister Gertrude clearly had heard this song because she integrates lyrics from the song into her painting. McCollum sings "Jesus is my air-o-plane, He holds the world in his hands."[95] Sister Gertrude writes in her painting "Jesus is my air Plane, you hold the world in your hand."[96] Also the title of her Revelation painting, *John THE REVELATOR* comes in part from song. "John the Revelator" is a gospel song commercially recorded in 1930 by gospel/blues musician Blind Willie Johnson.[97] As is the case with McCollum's "Jesus is My Air-o-plane," I cannot determine if Sister Gertrude ever heard this song, but given "John the Revelator" commercial success and Sister Gertrude's use of McCollum's song, it is likely that Sister Gertrude pulled inspiration from Johnson's song.

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[94] Paul Oliver, *Songsters and Saints: Vocal Traditions on Race Records* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 192-193. For an audio file of this song, see http://www.juneberry78s.com/sounds/14002-14.mp3.
[95] Ibid., 193.
[96] From painting *Jesus is my air Plane*.
[97] Joseph Hickerson, "Alan Lomax's "Southern Journey": A Review-Essay," *Ethnomusicology* 9, no. 3 (September 1965): 318.

The Book of Revelation was Sister Gertrude's main source of inspiration. She painted "Revelation charters" that she would use as teaching tools in her preaching. In them she copied and illustrated most, if not all of the Book of Revelation. For example, the painting *The Revelation of Saint John the Divine* contains large sections of and some entire chapters of the text. When she writes out the biblical text, it often contains misspellings, flip-flopped words, and other simple mistakes. This suggests that she was not copying from text but rather writing from memory.

The charters both further demonstrate how Sister Gertrude incorporated her life and surroundings into the Bible but also clearly show that she saw her artwork as teaching tools. Her Revelation charters educate viewers how to read the Bible and illustrate Sister Gertrude's role in Revelation's prophecy. Just as the New Jerusalem paintings express a particular iconography, similar characteristics exist amongst the Revelation charters. These include Revelation beasts, angels, Revelation 12's "woman clothed with the sun," heavy scripture, a sense of urgency, and (not surprisingly) an image of Sister Gertrude (often with Jesus).

Fagaly calls the Revelation charters, in particular *Book of Revelation* and *The Revelation of Saint John the Divine,* the "crowning achievement of Sister Morgan's career as an artist."[98] Fagaly deems this to be so because the pieces are "complex, highly saturated double-sided compositions … measuring three by six feet … and four to seven feet."[99] Typically her Revelation charters were quite large, in order to contain all the text and intricate images.

[98] Fagaly, *Sister Gertrude Morgan*, 51.
[99] Ibid.

When she sent a charter to Regenia Perry, Sister Gertrude wrote, "I'm sending these on a paper Just like a letter so you can learn how to Read the charter take time to look over and study the first Chap. of Revelation you tack the charter on the wall with thum tacks the first Chap starts from the Right hand corner up top."[100] These charters were for a specific reason: to teach the viewer what the Book of Revelation says, or at least of Sister Gertrude's interpretation, and to persuade the reader to orient her/his life around the Bible. The larger charters include the majority of the text of the Book of Revelation accompanied with images of selected passages from the text. As a teaching tool, the charter contained her view of the apocalypse in one piece, much like the Millerite charts of the nineteenth century. Viewers could see her literal reading of the text (as some of the images are literal translations of the biblical text) and could follow the text.

Sister Gertrude's Revelation charters reflect a literal reading of the Bible. She did not view the apocalyptic beast of chapter 13 or the woman clothed in sun chapter 12 as metaphors. Her paintings accurately depict the text. For example, the charter *John THE REVELATOR*, which is a little under two by two-and-a-half feet, contains the image of a woman wearing the sun like a long, loose dress, standing atop the moon with a crown of white dots (stars).[101] In addition to the woman bathed in the sun, monsters, and angels, this image includes an image of a very large (proportionally speaking) Sister Gertrude with Jesus in front of a New Jerusalem building. The angels in the charters and the angels of the New Jerusalem paintings are the same.

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[100] Fagaly, *Sister Gertrude Morgan*. A letter from Sister Gertrude to Regenia Perry, this specific quotation obtained by Fagaly in his research. The specific image is unknown.

[101] Attridge et al., *The HarperCollins Study Bible.* Revelation 12: 1 "A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." (NRSV)

Sister Gertrude's Revelation beasts have the correct number of heads or horns, according to the Bible, including an accurate depiction of the whore of Babylon upon her animal escort. The charters are not the only paintings that reflect her literal renderings of biblical text. In *Rev. 12 and there appeared a Great wonder in heaven*, Sister Gertrude paints the woman clothed in the sun and the dragon with seven heads and ten horns coming to devour her baby after its birth. Both the beast and the woman are near identical to that of *John THE REVELATOR*.

Revelation charter Read Wake up and get up is an example of a charter that possesses a sense of urgency. The name of the painting shows the call to urgency. In the title of the painting, Sister Gertrude warns viewers of the need to "wake up and get up." In this painting, Sister Gertrude depicts several different scenes from Revelation, packed together with no blank space (any open space is filled with biblical text), and this busyness of the painting conveys its stress. This urgency is typical for her work in both her paintings and in her songs. In an image of the ninth chapter of Revelation (*Rev. chap 9*) instructs observers to "WAKE UP Read Run," illustrating another example of her apocalyptic urgency. This sense of urgency in her work suggests that she believed the apocalyptic events of the Bible would take place in the near future.

The Revelation charters reveal Sister Gertrude's literal reading of biblical text; however it is a unique literal reading. The coming New Jerusalem bears physical similarities to New Orleans. Furthermore, she saw a distinctive role for herself in the coming apocalypse. Similar to the New Jerusalem paintings, Sister Gertrude appears alongside Jesus in many of the charters. A small image by charter standards (only a foot-and-a-half by two-and-a-half feet) *SISTER GERTRUDE MORGAN Revelation charter*, is

just as full as other images. This one contains two depictions of Sister Gertrude with Jesus, one in which she is in a black and white outfit (appearing in the middle of the image), and one near the bottom right where the two appear in front of a New Jerusalem building in a similar manner as *John THE REVELATOR*. These two images reflect different times in Sister Gertrude's life. Before God told her that she was the bride of Christ, Sister Gertrude wore black and white, as opposed to the all white wardrobe she adopted after this vision. This painting depicts both Sister Gertrude's spiritual education and its role in the narrative of the biblical text.

In all of her paintings, whether or not they are apocalyptic, the most common element is herself. Painting herself in the image was a visual reflection of her religious worldview. She placed herself into the biblical text. Sometimes she played the role of John in the Book of Revelation, by calling herself prophet and painting herself and John in analogous roles.[102] Their strikingly similar stances reflect how Sister Gertrude inserted herself into the Bible as prophet. As the bride of Christ in the Book of Revelation, she saw herself taking center stage in the apocalyptic narrative. She frequently depicted her marriage to Christ in the New Jerusalem paintings and in the Revelation charters. If not her marriage, a simpler image of the two of them together is also frequent. Furthermore, she placed the city of New Orleans in the Bible by using its architecture as a template for the New Jerusalem. She adopted the familiar style of the shotgun house to create her heavenly city.[103]

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[102] For example, in *New Jerusalem*, Sister Gertrude walks down a road in New Jerusalem preaching from a book pointing towards the rest of the painting. In *Revelation I JOHN*, John's location in the painting is the bottom left (as Sister Gertrude in *New Jerusalem*) and he points towards the rest of the painting. Their placement in the paintings and the orientation of their bodies are very alike.

[103] Not only did she stack shotgun houses for her New Jerusalem building, but her image of Noah's ark follows the same style. When I interviewed Benjamin Jaffe at his New Orleans home, he showed me his

New York Times art columnist Michael Kimmelman deems ego the reason for her recurrent "self-portrait-ing," however, not in a negative way.[104] She was an egotist in the sense that she had no doubt in her purpose on earth. God called her to minister, and she was the bride of Christ. In reflection upon her life, Benjamin Jaffe who knew her when he was a child described her in the following way: "This is what it is, this is the word of God, this is what it's supposed to be. What don't you get?"[105] Her paintings were an expression of her personal prophecy of the future. She often integrated inspiration from the Bible with autobiographical content. She believed that she was the literal bride of Christ in the Book of Revelation, and she was not shy to illustrate this.

Considering that her paintings were often autobiographical from the beginning, these biblical paintings are an extension of the immediate future she saw for the world and her life. Other non-apocalyptic images clearly show the autobiographical nature of her paintings. These include a painting of her at age eight fetching water from a water pump. She also painted herself and Jennie Johnson on the front porch of 5444 North Dorgenois at the Everlasting Gospel Mission. These images are direct reflections of her physical life on earth as visible to observers. Her prophetic images of the Book of Revelation show her important role in the coming apocalypse. She believed that her life, the world and the Bible were connected.

In addition to the visual arts, Sister Gertrude was a musician, and in April 1971, Sister Gertrude recorded *Let's Make a Record*, fourteen tracks of herself singing hymns,

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Sister Gertrude pieces, one of which is a painting of Noah's ark. It has an overall boat shape outline, though the inside is structured exactly like her New Jerusalem buildings.

[104] Michael Kimmelman, "ART REVIEW; With an Ear for God and an Eye for Art," *New York Times*, February 27, 2004, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F00E6D8133CF934A15751C0A9629C8B63.

[105] Benjamin Jaffe. Interview by Author. Tape Recording. Jaffe's home, New Orleans, LA. 29 December 2008.

preaching, and shaking her tambourine in the French Quarter.[106] Borenstein created True Believer Records for the purpose of releasing her album and produced an estimated five hundred copies of the album.[107] Sister Gertrude custom-painted the album covers for buyers if she happened to be near.[108] Just as her artwork has a distinct iconography, her music has a certain style. Furthermore, due to parallels between her music and paintings, her music further reflects her practice of reading her everyday life into the Bible. She adapted musical styles familiar to African-Americans in New Orleans (spirituals and gospel) and focused the lyrics to the needs of her ministry and particular religious message.

As the recording for the album started, Sister Gertrude told Borenstein "Let's make a record for our Lord," and then created the first track on the album (the title track "Let's Make a Record") on the spot.[109] This spontaneity runs throughout the album, as she will stop singing between repeated choruses and quote scripture. She frequently recites Scripture verses or simply says the book, chapter, and verse (i.e. John 3:16 as opposed to reciting the verse). Also, she often preaches during the songs.

Her songs continue a unique tradition of African-American Christian music. In spirituals, slaves adopted particular biblical motifs to their contemporary context; such as the identification of their condition in slavery with that of the Israelites in Egypt. The

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[106] Preservation Hall Website. Information on Sister Gertrude's album. http://www.preservationhall.com/label/letsmakearecord.htm

[107] Joel Rose, "Preacher-Artist Gertrude Morgan Remixed," All Things Considered (National Public Radio, September 30, 2005). This segment won an Excellence in Journalism Award through the Philadelphia Chapter, Society of Professional Journalists. It was the first place winner in 2005 in the Best Radio Arts and Cultural Report category. (http://www.whyy.org/about/awards2006.html).

[108] Keith Spera, "Folk artist's tribute heightens Voodoo's homegrown flavor," *Keith Spera, Music Writer, The Times-Picayune*, http://blog.nola.com/keithspera/2008/10/folk_artists_tribute_heightens.html.

[109] "History," in Ropeadope Records, "king britt presents sister gertrude morgan," http://web.archive.org/web/20061118011922/http://ropeadope.com/sistergertrudemorgan/. Ropeadope last updated this website Nov. 2006 and removed the webpage sometime in 2008. I regenerated the webpage using archive.org's Internet Archive Wayback Machine.

spirituals took certain biblical motifs, such as the Hebrew slaves as God's chosen people, from their historical position and made them manifest in the contemporary context of the slaves. They would also look forward to prospects of the future with lyrics such as "We'll walk de golden streets Of de New Jerusalem."[110] This is the key element of spirituals which apply to the music of Sister Gertrude. Some of the lyrics of Sister Gertrude's songs come from various versions of spirituals. Furthermore, spirituals invoked religion into their immediate of their everyday lives. This mirrors Sister Gertrude's reading of her life into the biblical text. Sister Gertrude read the Bible literally, but also saw her life as a ministering prophet as an element of the text (for example, she was the bride of Christ).

Unlike gospel songs, where the focus takes "place in the future in an otherworldly context," spirituals focused on immediate change (e.g. identifying with the Exodus story of the enslaved Hebrews obtaining freedom).[111] The spirituals used language and motifs applicable to their physical surroundings, and Sister Gertrude continues this phenomenon. For example, one Sister Gertrude song labels Jesus as a doctor.[112] Sister Gertrude's music also ascribes to the style and performance of spirituals. With the exception of her tambourine, she sang acapella on her record. Also, according to historian Lawrence Levine, the spirituals viewed the world as a sacred place, which reflects how Sister Gertrude inscribed her immediate environment into her literal reading of the Bible.

Like her paintings, Sister Gertrude's music fulfills a ministerial role. More importantly, similar to the way her paintings imbued New Orleans with a sacred essence, her music furthers this process. Adapting elements from African-American verbal

[110] Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, quoted from a spiritual, page 41.
[111] Ibid., 176.
[112] "Take the Lord Along With You."

discourse and musical past, Sister Gertrude uses these resources to create sacred audio space. For the tracks, Sister Gertrude is the only performer, singing and playing the tambourine. In many of her songs, she repeats certain lines many times. Common additions to her songs are the words "hosanna," "glory," "amen," "praise," and "power." These are all terms that flow from the African-American tradition of call-and-response; however, there is only one performer in Sister Gertrude's songs. Although it is possible that Sister Gertrude meant for those later listening to the record to respond to her, linguist Cheryl Wharry provides another possibility. In an article on the functions of sermonic discourse, Wharry suggests that when used in sermons preachers are often not searching for a response. Rather they have adapted the tradition of call-and-response to the pulpit. The functions of these discourse markers include "textual boundary marker, spiritual maintenance filler, rhythmic marker, and the infrequent call-response marker."[113] These descriptions fit for Sister Gertrude. For example, in many of Sister Gertrude's song, she uses her repetition to keep a rhythm.[114] These words when not repeated take on the role of filler or switching from a verse or bridge to the chorus. Raised in a Baptist church, Sister Gertrude encountered elements of African-American sermonic discourse and early gospel music. She interacted with other Christian music, as seen through her appropriation of Mother McCullom's "Jesus is my air-o-plane," and therefore it is not surprising that she incorporated folkloric elements into her music. Just as she integrated her life into the biblical narrative, she incorporates the African-American tradition of call-and-response, but in a manner that serves her needs.

[113] Cheryl Wharry, "Amen and Hallelujah Preaching: Discourse Functions in African American Sermons," *Language in Society* 32, no. 2 (April 2003): 203-225. From abstract.
[114] A clear-cut example of this is the song "Power," in which power is the main lyric that is repeated to a beat.

Mirroring her artwork, many of Sister Gertrude's songs focus on the Book of Revelation; songs such as "I've Got a New World in My View," "He Wrote the Revelation," and "New Jerusalem" have apocalyptic themes. The chorus of "I Got a New World in My View" is: "I got a new world in my view/ On my journey I pursue/ I said I'm running, running for the city/ I got the new world in my view." The "new world" is referring to the "new heaven and new earth" of chapter twenty-one of the Book of Revelation. During the song, she breaks into preaching explaining: "Twenty-first Chapter Revelation/ John talking about the new world/ Said I saw a new heaven and a new earth/for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away."

Also, in the preaching she connects herself in her role as the bride of Christ to Revelation when she preaches "and John said I saw a New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven/ prepared as a bride." Considering that many of the New Jerusalem images include her and her marriage to Jesus, there is a direct connection between this song and her paintings. It is also a reflection of the connection she saw between her life and the Bible. As in the painting *Revelation charter Read Wake up and get up,* this song has a sense of urgency as she tells listeners, "Don't get the Bible mixed up." Instead, she urges listeners to continue with the faith of their grandparents and be ready for the new world. Another example is the song "Power," in which she preaches, "Troubling people, don't let 'em rest continue. Let them know they got a soul to save. Shake 'em up and wake 'em up." She implores people to realize that they need to wake up and work on saving their souls.

"He Wrote the Revelation" repeats some of its few lyrics, again reminiscent of the legacy of call-and-response. In this song she is referring to Saint John writing the Book

of Revelation, which also demonstrates the connections between her Revelation charters and her music. The song "New Jerusalem" directly relates to her paintings. In the song she repeatedly asks "have you heard of a city, streets are paved with gold? Twelve gates to the city, hallelujah." She tells listeners to meet her in the city and that "it's a wonderful city John saw, New Jerusalem, coming down from God." In her music, she draws upon the vernacular musical culture of African-American Christian folksongs. As she makes use of "Jesus is my air-o-plane," some of the lyrics from "He Wrote the Revelation" come from the gospel song "Twelve Gates."[115]

Both her paintings and songs produced sacred space in New Orleans and they provide evidence for recreating the historical Sister Gertrude's religious beliefs. She represents an interesting melding of religious influences. Scholars have linked Sister Gertrude to the Holiness and Sanctified movements due to her worship structure and focus on the Bible.[116] She condemned Spiritual churches and especially rebuked the Voodoo tradition.[117] Her condemnation of the Spiritual church movement stems from the conservative beliefs of her Baptist upbringing. However, she did adopt social elements of this movement. Small church buildings led by a charismatic leader, who was often black and female, typify the Spiritual church movement.[118] Art historian Helen Shannon finds influence from both the Baptist background of her youth and the Spiritual movement surrounding her in New Orleans – restraint from the Baptist and expressiveness from the Spiritual.[119]

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[115] http://www.music-lyrics-gospel.com/gospel_music_lyrics/twelve_gates_4791.asp. Accessed 23 January 2009.
[116] Fagaly, *Sister Gertrude Morgan*.
[117] Jason Berry, "New Orleans in the Years of Sister Gertrude Morgan," in *Tools of Her Ministry: The Art of Sister Gertrude Morgan* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2004), 76-83.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Shannon, "Sister Gertrude Morgan," 86.

Her songs and paintings directly reflect her beliefs. Her focus on the Book of Revelation and her personal location within the text are clear. One of Sister Gertrude's main focuses was the creation of the new world of the Book of Revelation, and at first glance, this seems like a completely happy, hopeful message. This is true in the sense that the end result of the new world will be a blissful thing. However, her paintings of the Book of Revelation (specifically the charters) demonstrate a literal reading of the text, complete with apocalyptic monsters, woe, and death.

Sister Gertrude believed in a literal interpretation of the Bible, but a unique literal reading. Her paintings are literal depictions of the biblical text and its prophecy. For example, her paintings that include the woman clothed by the sun with the moon under her feet from the Book of Revelation closely follow the description in the Bible. Biblical studies scholar Mark Reasoner maps out two main "interpretive choices" that a reader faces when approaching the Bible.[120] Reading the Bible either literally or symbolically is the first interpretative choice facing a reader. If the reader chooses a literal reading, there are two main approaches that one can take with Revelation. The first believes Revelation was a literal interpretation of the persecution experienced by early Christians during the reign of Nero and Domitian.[121] This stance states that John wrote the book about events contemporary to him. In this interpretation, the events of Revelation already occurred during the first century.

The second group within literal readers of the Bible is the group within which Sister Gertrude resides. This group believes the Book of Revelation explains future

[120] Mark Reasoner, "What Does the Bible Say About the End Times? A Biblical Studies Discussion of Interpretive Methods," in *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 72.
[121] Ibid., 78.

events and does so literally. The prophecy written by John will happen as described. These "futurists" view Revelation as a roadmap of approaching events of human history. Sister Gertrude falls into the category, as she believed in a literal interpretation of the Bible and believed it to be a prophecy text. Many of her paintings of Revelation charters include images of her marriage to Jesus Christ; thus the Book of Revelation was not about Nero, but rather about a time period far in Saint John's future. Her location within the apocalyptic story makes her interpretation of the Bible unique. She creates a unique New Orleans-inspired New Jerusalem. It is a literal reading (as shown through her paintings and their accurate depictions), but it is also through the lens of her personal revelations. As the bride of Christ, she is part of the Book of Revelation. Not only is she a part of the text, but as seen through her New Jerusalem paintings, she brings New Orleans with her.

Sister Gertrude's apocalyptic beliefs are very different from the prevalent apocalyptic beliefs of contemporary America. Her beliefs were in line with a post-millennial outlook, while today, the most popular millennial beliefs are those of the pre-millennial dispensationalist strand.[122] Post-millennial beliefs are overall more positive than pre-millennial beliefs. Even with this positive post-millennial end result she preached about, to get to that ending, the destruction of the Book of Revelation must first come to pass. The beasts of the apocalypse were frequent figures in her paintings. The painting *Rev. 8 chap. Woe Woe Woe* depicts the angels blowing their trumpets to open the seals described in the eighth chapter of the Book of Revelation. The blowing of these

[122] The pre-millennial framework believes that the coming tribulation will happen before the thousand year reign of Jesus. Post-millennial Christians believe that positive human actions will usher in Jesus's millennial reign. Post-millennial beliefs were more popular in the early twentieth century, as seen by social reformers. Post-millennial beliefs were more popular in the early twentieth century, as seen by social reformers.

trumpets brings much destruction to the earth. *SEVEN LAST PLAGUES, Vision of Death, THE TWO BEASTS OF REVELATION 13,* and *Seven-Headed Monster with Ten Horns* are also examples of images that focus upon the more frightening and macabre aspects of a literal reading of the Book of Revelation.

Sacred Space, Performances, and Later Life

Sister Gertrude's artwork, music, and preaching worked together in her performances. Wherever she performed, Sister Gertrude created sacred space. She integrated her visual and audio surroundings into the biblical text, turning her New Orleans into a sacred place. At the Everlasting Gospel Mission, her artwork, which she considered to be teaching tools, surrounded her as she sang and preached. Though it is a poor section of New Orleans, previous to Hurricane Katrina, the Lower Ninth Ward was a neighborhood and community. Formally a swamp, the Lower Ninth Ward has a high risk for flooding. Historically home to some of the city's poorest, the Lower Ninth attracted residents "desperate for property but unable to afford housing in other areas of the city."[123] Until Hurricane Katrina, the Lower Ninth Ward was a "solidly working-class neighborhood with strong family ties and a high home-ownership rate."[124] This created a familial community in the neighborhood. Despite its economic deficiency, "the porches, stoops, and yards of the homes extended into the streets of the Lower Nine and people walked about, talked, and visited each other in these spaces."[125] This extension of the home into the community's shared space worked to Sister Gertrude's favor. She could literally take her ministry from the Prayer Room and into the streets of the Lower

[123] Joyce Marie Jackson, "Declaration of Taking Twice: The Fazendeville Community of the Lower Ninth Ward," *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 4 (December 2006): 765-780, 773.
[124] Ibid., 774.
[125] Ibid.

Ninth as there was already a precedent for this type of activity. Not only could she take her preaching to the streets of her neighborhood, but also she created sacred spaces in other parts of New Orleans.

When she performed at Preservation Hall, her preaching interwove with her musical performance. For example, in a 1959 performance at Preservation Hall Sister Gertrude performed the song, "I Don't Want to be Buried," in which she sings of her willful desire to work for her Lord. Furthermore, as it was typical for Sister Gertrude to begin quoting scripture in the middle of her songs (as heard throughout her full length album *Let's Make a Record*), when she sang, she also preached. In the 1960s when she performed in the French Quarter of New Orleans, she would often "set up shop somewhere on the street and start preaching."[126] She would do this not only in the French Quarter, but also along the busy Canal Street and in restaurants that Borenstein or one of his friends owned.

Through Borenstein's efforts, Sister Gertrude performed at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival from its debut in 1970 to 1974.[127] When it began in 1970, performers and attendees described it as a "grassroots movement" with a "close-knit family feeling."[128] Locals often housed out-of-town musicians, contributing to the Festival's family feeling. Festival producer and director Quint Davis reflected on the inaugural Festival via singer Mahalia Jackson's impromptu performance of "Just a Closer Walk with Thee." He thought the performance

> defined the whole tone of everything that the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival could ever do and be – a New Orleans Gospel singer making a bridge

[126] Fagaly, Interview.
[127] Michael P. Smith, *New Orleans Jazz Fest: A Pictorial History* (Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 1991).
[128] Ibid., 11.

> between Gospel music and traditional New Orleans jazz, singing a hymn with a marching brass band. To me, that was the eternal spark of what the whole festival was forever going to be.[129]

The significance of Davis's description of Jackson's performance is his allusion to the atmosphere of the festival. He saw the festival as a location where the music's sacred and profane genres could meet and generate an atmosphere of musical cooperation. The family environment of the festival and its bridging of jazz and gospel linger in memories today. This familial atmosphere casts Sister Gertrude as a musical matriarch defying social and religious boundaries. When Jaffe recalls his childhood memories of Sister Gertrude, they are with this impression.[130]

At the festival, she called her space the "Sister Gertrude Morgan Tabernacle Booth," and sang, preached, and sold paintings. The Festival provided Sister Gertrude with a new forum to conduct prayer services, preach, and sing, surrounded by her paintings. Her artwork was on display to view and purchase. She preached and sang to her audience from one of her personally decorated megaphones. She often used string and attached the megaphone to the ceiling above her, this way her hands were free to play her tambourine. Her booth was her own mini stage. In 1972, she had a few benches set up in front of her booth. As her popularity continued to grow in the Festival, the area in front of her booth also had to increase to hold all the people who came to see her perform and view her artwork. At least in 1974, at times a tuba accompanied her voice and tambourine.[131]

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[129] Ibid., 10.
[130] Sister Gertrude's artwork played a role in the Festival's promotion, likely due to promotion of Borenstein. The 1970 program included two of her paintings with the caption: "For over three decades Sister Gertrude Morgan used the streets of our city as her church." One of the Festival posters featured a Noel Rockmore portrait of Sister Gertrude playing her guitar.
[131] Ibid., 46. I draw this conclusion based on a photograph documenting the festival in this book.

The Jazz & Heritage Festival complicates Sister Gertrude's ministry. This was not an inherently sacred space; Sister Gertrude had to make it as such. The festival was geared to musicians and artists trying to make a name for themselves in the market. She did not see her work as a profession or as a way to make money; rather her ministry was her calling from God. This foreshadows later tensions that emerge between the historical Sister Gertrude and the specters of post Katrina New Orleans. The music and working musicians at the Jazz & Heritage Festival reflect an "genuine" element of New Orleans, and her specters' creators use Sister Gertrude's image to create an "authentic" New Orleans.

Performing at the Jazz & Heritage Festival provided Sister Gertrude a new public forum to spread her message. The environment she fostered in her booth mirrors the Everlasting Gospel Mission, integrating music, art, and preaching. She created her own sacred space in the festival. In the Lower Ninth Ward, Sister Gertrude took her message to the streets, knocking on her neighbors' doors asking if she could teach the Bible to their children.[132] She did the same at the festival. Festival attendees might not visit the Everlasting Gospel Mission, and so she brought it to them.

Sister Gertrude stopped painting in 1974. She told Borenstein:

> Painting now? Oh no, I'm way too worried. Worrying about what time it is, and praying on people's cases. I get so tired. Sometimes it's like that. Sometimes I come in here at night and lay some pillows down on the floor and I lay face down on them and cries and prays. You don't have to look far these days to see fire and brimstone. No sir, it's just like it was in the days of Noah, only it's worse, because there's more people. Tell em God's wife told you that.[133]

[132] Fagaly, interview.
[133] Fagaly, *Sister Gertrude Morgan*, 26.

She also believed that her fame was unacceptable to God, as was the money she made off her paintings. Fagaly speculates that her decision to stop painting was also a result of her failing eyesight.

Sister Gertrude passed away on July 8th, 1980.[134] Her funeral at the House of Bultman funeral home on St. Charles Avenue celebrated her work. Her paintings decorated the walls and her music played throughout the funeral home.[135] She was buried in Providence Memorial Park Cemetery on Airline Highway in Metairie, Louisiana, not far outside New Orleans. Her grave was unmarked and located near the cemetery's rear. On April 7th, 1997, there was a memorial service held for her and a marker placed on her grave. A recording of her singing "He Wrote the Revelation" played, and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band performed "Just a Closer Walk With Thee." Art dealers and collectors purchased the new marker placed on her grave.[136]

When those who knew Sister Gertrude describe her, words such as "presence," "aura," "energy," "radiance," "power," "intimidating," "authority," "formidable," and "confident" are frequently used.[137] In fact, Fagaly is convinced that Borenstein was "spooked" by Sister Gertrude.[138] She was a woman described as being both full of love but also as a formidable preacher who would shout scripture at people. This complexity is one of the causes of the post-Katrina specters.[139]

Prophetic Foreshadowing of Specters

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[134] Fagaly reports that she died "peacefully in her sleep." However, on the same page he reports that "she evidently passed away quickly and unexpectedly, for an uncooked steak was found on the kitchen counter."
[135] Sam Dickinson, "Sister Gertrude Morgan and David Butler: Portraits of Two South Louisiana Folk Artists," in *Special Issue: African American Folklife in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Folklife, 1993), 33.
[136] Gary Alan Fine, *Everyday Genius: Self-Taught Art and the Culture of Authenticity* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2006), 175. Fine does not identify the benefactors of the gravestone.
[137] From interviews with Ben Jaffe and William Fagaly.
[138] Fagaly, interview.
[139] The other is Hurricane Katrina itself.

When the specters envision Sister Gertrude, they adopt and adapt certain elements of the historical Sister Gertrude. The contemporary specters emerge from certain aspects of her work, particularly embracing her identity and status as a folk artist. Though the main specters of this thesis appear after Hurricane Katrina, as Sister Gertrude attracted the attention of art collectors, disconnects formed between her and others' perceptions of her. Once her purchased art left the context of her ministry, the buyer attached new meanings to the painting and to the woman who made it. Even scholars obscure her identity by disagreeing on her life's details.[140] The second memorial service in 1997 indicates her lingering presence for the collectors and locals who knew her. In 1970, three art shows featured her work.[141] However, acquiring local art fame was not her focus. Borenstein entered her in the 25th Annual Louisiana State Art Exhibition for Non-Professional and/or Student Artists in 1971, and she was one of ten finalists to win a silver trophy. However, she declined the prize by citing Exodus 20, stating that she would not receive a graven image. When the exhibition "Louisiana Folk Paintings" at New York's Museum of American Folk Art featured her work in 1973, Sister Gertrude declined to attend the opening. She did not want to leave her mission work in New Orleans. Those who bought and viewed her art were not interested in her because they

[140] While Fagaly cites that Sister Gertrude received the word from God that she was to become the bride of Christ in one of her later revelations in 1956, Sam Dickinson reports that God told Sister Gertrude this in the initial 1934 revelation (Dickinson, "Sister Gertrude Morgan and David Butler: Portraits of Two South Louisiana Folk Artists," 33). The anthology *Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980,* by Jane Livingston, John Beardsley, and Regenia Perry, agree with Fagaly's 1956 or 1957 dating for the bride of Christ revelation. Oddly enough, Regenia Perry's *Free Within Ourselves: African-American Artists in the Collection of the National Museum of American Art,* reports that the bride of Christ revelation did not occur until 1965 (Perry, *Free within Ourselves,* 141). This revelation was one of the most important, tide-turning experiences of Sister Gertrude's life. The fact that scholars disagree by as much as thirty-one years is significant. The details of Sister Gertrude's biography until the exposure of her artwork are fuzzy and make it difficult to pin down exact details.

[141] "Twentieth-Century Folk Art" at the Museum of American Folk Art, "Dimensions of Black" at the La Jolla Museum of Art in CA, and "Symbols and Images: Contemporary Primitive Artists" at the American Federation of Arts. Fagaly, *Sister Gertrude Morgan,* 23.

believed in her message. Rather, what they took from Sister Gertrude was her aesthetics and a sense of authenticity, the latter of which will only continue to rise in significance.

In her own time, a main reason Sister Gertrude's work interested art enthusiasts was her perceived proximity to the "folk" world. This is one of many examples of Americans' attraction to folk culture. Historian T.J. Jackson Lears argues in *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920* that by the late nineteenth century many Americans became "dissatisfied with modern culture in all its dimensions: its ethic of self-control and autonomous achievement, its cult of science and technical rationality, its worship of material progress."[142] Lears states that this led to a subsequent desire for "a freshening of the cultural atmosphere."[143] Especially for the educated bourgeoisie, this "freshening" was found in the culture of the "folk." They searched for a more "authentic" life and uncovered it in a romantic interpretation of the simple, "rustic" lifestyle. For these Americans, the more authentic life was associated with the rural, "childish" way of life. This lifestyle was "earthy" and seen as an embodiment of "pure experience."[144] In the face of material and technological progress, there was a yearning for the nostalgia of the "real life" of the "premodern craftsman, solider, or saint."[145]

This mindset is applicable to many folk art collectors.[146] Folk art was seen as an expression of this more "authentic," "pure," "earthly" existence, but more importantly,

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[142] T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1994), 4.
[143] Ibid..
[144] Ibid., 5.
[145] Ibid., 6.
[146] Furthermore, this can perhaps be applied to the time period of Sister Gertrude's ministry. In the 1960s and 1970s, there was an explosion of counter-culture in the United States. For example, this is apparent through the increase in the popularity of communes and the desire to get back to a natural way of life. As

the folk artists themselves were seen as an embodiment of this "folk" lifestyle. The art itself had value to collectors, but the real worth of the art came from the artists themselves. Those disillusioned with "high" art and avant-garde art were searching for something more "real," something associated with a simpler time. In the case of Sister Gertrude, she was a connection to the "folk" lifestyle. This is not to say that there was no real interest in her art, but a large part of the appeal of her work was her identity as a representative of "authentic" life. Having this perception, collectors started a spectral trend, only to intensify after 2005's Hurricane Katrina.

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people became discouraged with the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and the materiality of the 1950s, there was a similar appeal to "folk" culture.

Post-Hurricane Katrina Sister Gertrude Specters

Hurricane Katrina

The attitude in New Orleans regarding hurricanes before Katrina was one of ease. Tourists and locals strolled the length of Bourbon Street drinking hurricanes (the icy mixed drink) and enjoying the atmosphere of the French Quarter. The area was not a stranger to previous hurricanes, and many residents remember waiting through storms such as Hurricane Betsey.[147] As Katrina came closer to landfall at the end of August of 2005, many residents did not evacuate, despite being urged to do so. This was not because locals disregarded their safety, but rather 100,000 residents did not have means of personal transportation, which was about a fifth of the city.[148] Also, almost 30% of the city lives in poverty.[149] For this large portion of New Orleans, funds are especially short at the latter part of the month as welfare checks run low. Therefore, with no means of getting out of the city, many residents had no choice but to stay and wait out the storm. As the storm strengthened and approached the gulf coast, the weather advisories did not downplay the storm's force. The National Weather Service issued an advisory, later described as an "apocalyptic advisory" by a National Geographic Channel special, which warned that Hurricane Katrina would render some areas of the city of New Orleans "uninhabitable for weeks."

[147] *Inside Hurricane Katrina* (National Geographic Channel, 2005).
[148] Associated Press, "Katrina Heads for New Orleans," *FOXNews.com*, http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,167270,00.html I use the past tense because the population of the city has yet to bounce back to its pre-Katrina level.
[149] Bob Faw, "Katrina Exposes New Orleans' Deep Poverty: Media images of looters shed light on city's issues regarding race, class," *NBC Nightly News*, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9163091/.

The Superdome opened as a local shelter the day before Katrina hit land, and around 30,000 people came to stay. At 2:00 am on Monday, August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina struck the gulf coast of Louisiana and Mississippi. At first, the media gave inaccurate reports of the city's devastation not only to the everyday American, but also to government officials. Journalists staying in the higher areas of New Orleans told the nation that the city "dodged the bullet," and that luckily, the levees were holding. Michael Chertoff, then Secretary of Homeland Security and in charge of federal rescue, told Tim Russert of *Meet the Press* "I remember on Tuesday morning (the day after Katrina came ashore) picking up newspapers and I saw headlines, 'New Orleans Dodged The Bullet.'"[150] However, in reality, the situation was much different; the floodwaters breached the levees around the city. Soon floodwaters submerged the Ninth Ward under twelve feet of water, and the average city home under six to nine feet of standing water. These horribly erroneous reports enraged the residents of New Orleans who stayed for the storm. They felt the country either forgot about them or did not care for their well-being.

The city was without electricity and running water for days. The Superdome, which experienced leaking during the storm when the wind ripped off fifteen-foot sections of the roof, hit unbearable temperatures inside as daytime highs were in the nineties. The media estimated that nearly twenty percent of the city's population of five hundred thousand did not leave the city, all of whom were left without power, food, or

[150] Tim Russert and Michael Chertoff, "Transcript for September 4 - Meet the Press, online at MSNBC-msnbc.com," http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9179790/ It was not until midday Tuesday that he knew the levees had failed.

drinking water.[151] An atmospheric apocalypse hit New Orleans, leaving the city with the task to rebuild in a post-apocalyptic world.[152]

Sister Gertrude engaged the apocalypse in her paintings, music, and preaching, and twenty-five years after her death an apocalyptic event happened to the city she chose as her home. Hurricane Katrina laid waste to a large part of New Orleans, including Sister Gertrude's former neighborhood, the Lower Ninth Ward. While residents of the city do not remember hearing the trumpet of an angel opening a seal, the apocalyptic story is one that people have applied to the destruction of the city in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.[153] Not only have conservative Christian preachers applied the apocalyptic story to Hurricane Katrina, the National Geographic special on Hurricane Katrina called the National Weather Service's warning an "apocalyptic advisory."[154] Even for those who do not agree with evangelical views of applying biblical text to current events, the destruction of a city resonates with the apocalyptic story.

For the specters, Sister Gertrude's work and legacy played a major role in their conceptualization of the city and its meaning in the aftermath of the storm, and it is in these specters that I see the development of Sister Gertrude's social biography. These specters relate to her original ministry, but they are also individualized contemporary interpretations, all shaped by the physical, structural, and emotional devastation of Hurricane Katrina in one form or another. Each has an ambiguous relationship with the historical Sister Gertrude that I reconstructed. The first is King Britt's specter and his re-

[151] Editors of Time Magazine, *Time: Hurricane Katrina: The Storm That Changed America* (New York: Time Books, Inc., 2005), 8.
[152] This is similar to post-apocalyptic science fiction, where survivors are left with the task to endure a world that was destroyed by some sort of catastrophe.
[153] Deborah Caldwell, "Many believe Hurricane Katrina may be a sign of the coming Apocalypse - Beliefnet.com," http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/2005/09/Did-God-Send-The-Hurricane.aspx.
[154] msnbc.com, "Disasters fuel doomsday predictions - Katrina, The Long Road Back," http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9731623/ and National Geographic's *Inside Hurricane Katrina*.

interpretation of Sister Gertrude's album *Let's Make a Record*. While he completed this project before Hurricane Katrina, its release date was near the time of Katrina, and the storm impacted the way he now interacts with and talks about the album. More importantly though, Britt's specter is part of the legacy of New Orleans Voodoo (a religion she condemned). Second is the spectral Sister Gertrude of the *New York Times*. Two particular post-Katrina *New York Times* articles printed about New Orleans use Sister Gertrude as a symbol for the city she came to save. Third is the spectral Sister Gertrude related to desires to commemorate her through a ballet, play, museum, and even Flickr albums.[155] The site of her former home plays a significant role in this specter. Finally, there is the way current Preservation Hall creative director Benjamin Jaffe relates to Sister Gertrude today. Sister Gertrude passed away when Ben Jaffe was only nine years old, but her memory and message play fundamental roles in his life today.

The production of each specter parallels the work of this historical Sister Gertrude. By means of her unique interpretation of Revelation, her distinctive iconography's portrayal of New Jerusalem as New Orleans, and her songs' connection with African-American music, the historical Sister Gertrude created sacred space within the city of New Orleans. The production of her specters relates to the creative agency of her particular religious worldview. Each of the specters pulls at a specific element of Sister Gertrude's life, work, and/or image. King Britt uses her music to create a popular Voodoo Sister Gertrude. The *New York Times* draws upon her status as a folk artist to focus on her specter's role in a post-Katrina revival of "genuine" New Orleans heritage. The commemoration efforts adopt the sacred spaces the historical Sister Gertrude produced in order to create contemporary sacred space. Finally Jaffe uses his personal

[155] Flickr is a forum to share photo albums on the internet.

memories to construct a specter that guides his understanding of life. The specters rely on their own creative agency and depend upon Sister Gertrude as a tool for understanding New Orleans and the storm.

Each specter has a valid relationship with the historical Sister Gertrude. The specters are true for their creators, but they are also personalized imaginings of her. This creates a tenuous connection between the historical Sister Gertrude and each specter. Britt, the *New York Times*, commemoration efforts, and Jaffe use elements of Sister Gertrude and her ministry in order to understand artistic creation, life, destruction, and the meaning of New Orleans. Sister Gertrude's ministry brought her to New Orleans, and the city became a part of her prophetic vision. The relationships between the contemporary specters and the city engage how she came to represent what people consider "authentic."

Bringing Out the Swampy Vibes and Voodoo: King Britt's Specter

King Britt released an album that reinterpreted Sister Gertrude's 1971 release *Let's Make a Record*. The beats he mixes with Sister Gertrude's tracks and the way he speaks about her and her music create a spectral Sister Gertrude. To Britt, she is an optimistic, open-minded prophet living in a culture of Voodoo, a version of Sister Gertrude that clashes with her condemnation of Voodoo and its practices. Ropeadope Records label chief Andy Hurwitz introduced Britt to Sister Gertrude's music. Hurwitz met Preservation Hall owner Jaffe at the New Orleans Jazz Festival, where he first heard Sister Gertrude's album.[156] Jaffe re-mastered and re-released *Let's Make a Record* on Preservation Hall's label in 2004. Hurwitz believes Sister Gertrude to be the "best-kept

[156] Doree Shafrir, "MUSIC: Preaching the Gospel," *Philadelphia Weekly Online*, http://www.philadelphiaweekly.com/view.php?id=10420.

secret in blues and gospel music," and found it hard to believe "that her voice wasn't world famous."[157] After gaining permission to use the album from Jaffe, Hurwitz called producer and D.J. King Britt.

After "Googling" Sister Gertrude, Britt was "blown away" and "felt like she was someone I should know – and more people should know her."[158] When asked what attracted him to the project of reinterpreting Sister Gertrude's work, Britt answered that it was the "pureness of her vocals and the relevance of her message."[159] Not only was Britt interested in Sister Gertrude's music, but also her paintings. "What really captured me was the visuals of her paintings," Britt said. "If you look at the paintings and listen to her, it just makes sense."[160]

The album was released only days after Hurricane Katrina hit the Louisiana coast, which made not only for a prophetic release date, but it also means that Britt's work was completed long before any knowledge of Hurricane Katrina. In regards to the creation of the album, Britt prefers not to refer to the project as a remix. He feels as though calling it a remix points away from what the project really is, which is a new production.[161] Britt used Sister Gertrude's original recording like another band member more than anything else. Britt and his partner Tim Motzer wanted to respect her work, her message, and her style. In approaching the project with this mindset, Britt believes that he and Motzer were able to keep "the integrity of what she was singing about" intact.[162]

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[157] Andrew Parks, "Revelations," *Philadelphia City Paper*, December 4, 2005, sec. Cover Story, http://www.1krecordings.com/press.asp.
[158] Shafrir, "MUSIC: Preaching the Gospel."
[159] "GIANT STEP™ | Feature - Interview with King Britt," http://www.giantstep.net/features/38/.
[160] Apple, Inc., "Apple - Pro - Profiles - King Britt, p. 1," http://www.apple.com/pro/profiles/kingbritt/.
[161] David Dye, "King Britt Marks a Big Year," World Cafe (National Public Radio, June 1, 2006).
[162] Apple, Inc., "Apple - Pro - Profiles - King Britt, p. 1."

King Britt Presents Sister Gertrude Morgan consists of fifteen tracks, nine of which are full length tracks and six short tracks called "Scenes." These "Scenes" consist of voice recordings of King Britt, Ben Jaffe, or other interviewees about Sister Gertrude or New Orleans. In "Devil's Music [Scene 1]," Jaffe remarks that Sister Gertrude did not have an aversion to jazz, which was sometimes called the "devil's music."[163] The second scene, "Religion From Her [Scene 2]," alludes to a belief that Sister Gertrude shows that there can be many ways to be right (in the religious sense).[164] While I cannot speculate in regards to Sister Gertrude's feelings towards jazz music, she was sure that her religious message was the right one. "Scared [Scene 3]," consists of Jaffe and Britt agreeing that Sister Gertrude is more approachable than other religious figures. [165] Particularly in this track it is apparent that Jaffe's memories of Sister Gertrude pervade Britt's project and helped shape Britt's perception of Sister Gertrude. "Celebrate [Scene 4]" refers to the celebratory holidays of New Orleans (Mardi Gras, New Year's). [166] "Unceremonious [Scene 5]" is part of an interview between Jaffe and Britt in which Jaffe tells him how Sister Gertrude's burial was very low key. [167] "You Alright [Scene 6]" is Britt's voice asking "you alright?" multiple times; my assumption is that he is referring to a belief that Sister Gertrude was always concerned about others' well-being.[168] These six short tracks denote Britt's opinion of Sister Gertrude, as he searched "for Sister Gertrude Morgan in myself."[169]

[163] Track is fourteen seconds in length
[164] Track is nine seconds in length
[165] Track is eleven seconds in length
[166] Track is thirteen seconds in length
[167] Track is thirteen seconds in length
[168] Track is twenty-three seconds in length
[169] "In King's Words" in Ropeadope Records, "king britt presents sister gertrude morgan."

Britt's reinterpretation and Sister Gertrude's music are similar processes. The historical Sister Gertrude drew upon elements of African-American verbal traditions, such as spirituals, call-and-response, and sermonic discourse, to create her music. She used these legacies in such a manner that suited her needs. Coupled with her preaching style and artwork, her music produced physical and audio sacred space. Britt's project reflects her creative agency. He uses the cultural resources at his disposal, such as DJ techniques and "Voodoo" harmonica, to produce his album.

There was initial interest and some buzz about Britt's reinterpretation of Sister Gertrude's music. However, it was not until after making sense of Hurricane Katrina's destruction that the media and public became interested in his work. After Hurricane Katrina, National Public Radio had three broadcasts that featured snippets and discussion of Britt's work. He and those who interviewed him saw and established connections between his work, her original recordings and artwork, and the city of New Orleans. One of his interviewers asked for his thoughts about her songs, Hurricane Katrina, and New Orleans. Britt sees the importance for Sister Gertrude's message and songs more than ever before and stated that "her message is important to bring spiritual awareness to those in desperation."[170] Motzer echoes Britt's opinion:

> I think Sister Gertrude speaks something that people need to hear in these times we're living in. Iraq, tsunamis, all the stuff that's been happening. It gives people solace, gives people strength and hope that the whole planet isn't going down the dumps. There's a real joy and power in her voice.[171]

Britt envisions Sister Gertrude as an approachable figure. He believes she showed that there is more than one right way to be religious. However, based on her paintings, music, and religious beliefs, she urgently insisted that people read the Bible

[170] "GIANT STEP™ | Feature - Interview with King Britt."
[171] Shafrir, "MUSIC: Preaching the Gospel."

and realize that the events of the Book of Revelation will soon come to pass. This seems to be hardly a negotiable stance. Britt does see Sister Gertrude as a prophet, though as I will show, a prophet mixed with Voodoo.

Praise for the album includes a *World Café* piece "Modern Duets, from DJ's to World Music," during which NPR reporters David Dye and Tom Moon discussed recent duet recordings, including one less traditional duet, *King Britt Presents Sister Gertrude Morgan*.[172] Moon felt that Britt "recontextualized" Sister Gertrude for the contemporary environment. Just as Britt does not like the term remix for this work, the reviewer said that on the album Britt is "just embellishing around the edges" of Sister Gertrude's recordings. Britt is "sometimes messing with the idea of what she was going after but still keeping its original flavor and still honors it."[173] Another review of his album applauds him for his exploration of Voodoo rhythms and the jazz heritage of New Orleans and also for his ability to tap into the "spiritual themes that lay at the heart of her music."[174] However, the spiritual themes for Sister Gertrude were not Voodoo. Through Britt's project, Sister Gertrude's song undergoes a conversion from strict evangelical Christianity to an open-minded strand of Voodoo.

In the eight minute broadcast "Preacher-Artist Gertrude Morgan Remixed" from September 2005 on *All Things Considered*, NPR played portions of Sister Gertrude's music, Britt's music, and discussed her life and artwork.[175] When asked about the legacy of Sister Gertrude in post-Katrina New Orleans, Britt and Motzer pointed to the

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[172] David Dye and Tom Moon, "Modern Duets: From Djs to World Music," World Cafe (National Public Radio, November 18, 2005).
[173] Ibid.
[174] FlyGlobal Music, "KING BRITT - PRESENTS SISTER GERTRUDE MORGAN | FLY | US/CANADA: REVIEWS," http://www.flyglobalmusic.com/fly/archives/uscanada_reviews/king_britt_presents_sister_ger.html.
[175] Rose, "Preacher-Artist Gertrude Morgan Remixed."

optimistic air in her paintings and music and the importance of that optimism in the face of disaster. "We need some sort of spiritual calling," Britt said, "we need some sort of sign of hope, her message coming from New Orleans, it's even more powerful."[176] They believe her message helps a person feel as though they are not alone in their suffering, which gives solace in the face of pain.

One song mentioned often in reviews of Britt's album is "Power (Voodoo Version)." The eight and a half minute track is the longest song on the album by nearly three minutes. Two weeks after Hurricane Katrina, during an interview and album review Britt discussed the making of the track "Power (Voodoo Version)." Britt told the reporter that G. Love, the track's harmonica player, "brought the dirty swamp vibe out. It *was* total Voodoo. A groove that continually builds and turns into a complete trance."[177] Britt use of the terms "dirty swamp" and "Voodoo" to describe the song hearken to its New Orleans heritage. For Britt, one of the most important aspects of "Power (Voodoo Version)" is the connection the song has with its New Orleans roots.

Britt is not the only person to remark upon the links among his album, Sister Gertrude, and New Orleans. In another NPR interview, when asked about the naming of "Power (Voodoo Version)," Motzer replies that "the track conjures so much Voodoo."[178] He and Britt were "just trying to take it back to New Orleans and the swamps."[179] Motzer and Britt finished the album before Hurricane Katrina hit the gulf coast and wrecked New Orleans, but they conclude that their aim to strengthen the bond between Sister Gertrude and New Orleans was unmistakably prophetic.

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[176] Ibid.
[177] Parks, "Revelations."
[178] Dye, "King Britt Marks a Big Year."
[179] Ibid.

Sister Gertrude's opinion regarding Voodoo complicates Britt and Motzer's choice of "Voodoo" in the song's title. In addition to the memories of his personal acquaintance, Fagaly researched letters of Sister Gertrude's for his book cataloging her life and art. He concludes that her viewpoint on Voodoo was not one of favor. She saw it as a threat to Christianity and to New Orleans. While Sister Gertrude held her services in small home church, a practice common among Spiritual and Voodoo churches, she looked unfavorably upon the Spiritual movement. She denounced the Spiritual Church, known for its Voodoo influences and condemned Spiritual Church saints as demons.[180] Sister Gertrude directly attacks Black Hawk, a prominent Spiritual Church saint, in her painting *SATAN GOD Rebuke you*, as she wrote "stop looking and depending on Lucifer cause he's using that witch craft Black hawk trickery stuff his time is out now he got to go." Fagaly attributes her harsh disapproval of Voodoo and the Spiritual church to her early days in conservative Baptist churches. This brings up the question: why would Britt and Motzer call the track the "Voodoo Version" considering Sister Gertrude's poor opinion of the Voodoo religion? I believe this indicates how Britt perceives her connection with the city of New Orleans. Motzer and Britt wanted to highlight this relationship by connecting her with a piece of culture that people see as authentic New Orleans, Voodoo. Voodoo provides the distinct departure between the historical Sister Gertrude and Britt's specter.

Britt's specter of Sister Gertrude has an ambiguous relationship with the historical Sister Gertrude. Sister Gertrude came to New Orleans to rid the city of sin, and in her eyes, Voodoo was a major source of the city's sin. Britt's mixes his specter with Voodoo beats. In their project, Motzer and Britt have further established the relationship between

[180] Berry, "Sister Gertrude Morgan," 77.

her and the city, connections only furthered by the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. A strong similarity between the historical Sister Gertrude and Britt's specter comes from their creativity. Sister Gertrude constructed a unique reading of the Bible, finding inspiration from her surroundings. Likewise, Britt reinterprets Sister Gertrude's music through his own creative lens and sense of her relationship with New Orleans.

Britt views Sister Gertrude as a prophetic voice with a positive, optimistic message. He overlooks her literal reading of the gruesome events of the Book of Revelation. There is no mention of apocalyptic beasts or the inevitable destruction that the world must face before reaching New Jerusalem. Britt's specter is not located in the Bible, the place where Sister Gertrude placed herself. Sister Gertrude believed in an inevitable apocalypse and urged sinners to repent because it was coming soon. Instead Britt's specter plays Voodoo beats and assures listeners that there is more than one way to God.

"An Outsider City:" The New York Times

The *New York Times* (*NYT*) created a spectral Sister Gertrude who represents authentic New Orleans culture. Similar to the previous specter explored, this Sister Gertrude is not without tension. As the bride of Christ, Sister Gertrude knew she had an important role to play in the world; however, she came to New Orleans to fight sin, not become a symbol for the city.

Two *NYT* articles recently published engage Sister Gertrude in a post-Katrina context. Native New Orleans musician Mac Rebennack, also known as Dr. John, spoke to *NYT*'s reporter Jon Pareles about the city before and after Hurricane Katrina. The

focus of the article was the release of his new album *City That Care Forgot*.[181] As he walked with the reporter through the streets of New Orleans he "had a story for every street corner." Pareles wrote in reflection: "There was the Circle Food Market, where, decades ago, Sister Gertrude Morgan, as gospel evangelist shaking six tambourines – on her hands, her feet and her dress – used to sing like James Brown, to redeem sinners." Pareles wrote about Sister Gertrude and two other memories that Dr. John shared with him about New Orleans. Of all the unique elements and stories of New Orleans culture that Dr. John chose to tell, Sister Gertrude was one of them. This surely cannot be solely because she was memorable. He not only saw her out in public, but must have visited her house at least once, for Pareles also wrote: "The front yard of her home in the Ninth Ward, Dr. John recalls, was all four-leaf clovers." When describing New Orleans and the city's meaning, Dr. John calls upon Sister Gertrude.

The *NYT* also uses Sister Gertrude's life and work to understand a Lower Ninth Ward performance of *Waiting for Godot*. New York artist Paul Chan traveled to New Orleans to direct and produce a production of *Waiting for Godot*, using the Lower Ninth Ward and the storm-ruined houses as the set.[182] Using debris, his set choice conjures Sister Gertrude's artistic spirit (for she was an artist who painted upon cardboard, signs, old doors, lampshades and whatever else she could find as canvas). The article's author, art critic Holland Cotter states that Chan is well-suited for New Orleans. Cotter calls Chan an outsider inspired by outsider artists before him. When Cotter describes New Orleans, he alludes Sister Gertrude:

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[181] Jon Pareles, "Dr. John Still Loves New Orleans, and Now He's Mad," *New York Times*, June 7, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/07/arts/music/07john.html.
[182] Holland Cotter, "A Broken City. A Tree. Evening.," *New York Times*, December 2, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/02/arts/design/02cott.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=a%20broken%20city&st=cse.

> And New Orleans, an outsider city if ever there was one, where the self-taught artist Sister Gertrude Morgan (1900-1980) preached in the streets and painted biracial heavens and hells at her home in the Lower Ninth Ward – the house is still there; it survived the flood – is right for him.

When explaining to readers why Chan fits in with New Orleans culture and the city's art scene, Cotter likens the city itself to Sister Gertrude. To describe the "outsider" eclectic atmosphere of the city, Sister Gertrude becomes a stand-in for New Orleans.

Issues of authenticity swirl about the spectral Sister Gertrude constructed by the *NYT*. In Cotter's piece on the production of *Waiting for Godot*, he equates Sister Gertrude with the city of New Orleans. Unless one is an avid reader of the *NYT* Arts section or is familiar with the folk art scene, one is likely not to have heard of Sister Gertrude. Jaffe (current Preservation Hall owner and creative director) speculates that there are many residents in New Orleans who have not heard of Sister Gertrude, and thus it can be presumed that many Americans and readers of the *NYT* have never heard of her.[183]

Of all the available New Orleans figures, Cotter chose Sister Gertrude, and so this decision is significant. The short biographical information that Cotter supplies about Sister Gertrude hits the important elements of her life as they apply to his article and may provide some of the reasons for Cotter's choice. He mentions that she painted biracial heavens, that she lived in the Lower Ninth Ward, and that she was a street preacher. First, the play's director Paul Chan is originally from Hong Kong and described as "a cultural polymath."[184] Second, this production of *Waiting for Godot* was set in the Lower Ninth Ward, her former neighborhood. Finally, her life as a street preacher is mirrored by this production's location on the street. Regardless of Cotter's reasons for choosing

[183] Jaffe, interview.
[184] Cotter, "A Broken City. A Tree. Evening.."

Sister Gertrude as the epitome of New Orleans, they raise concerns of authenticity and defining what is authentically New Orleans. The article about Dr. John by Pareles also engages authenticity. She was a memory that Dr. John chose to tell the reporter about and then also a story the reporter chose to use in the article. The memory of Sister Gertrude and the personal stories mentioned before the reference to Sister Gertrude also allude to New Orleans as he remembers it, the "authentic New Orleans."

Thus both of these *NYT* articles create a spectral Sister Gertrude concerned with maintaining the authenticity of the city's culture. In neither article is there a line that states: "Authentic New Orleans culture is …" However, the articles' engagement with the arts insinuate this. As a New Orleanian and musician, Dr. John's memories will be trusted as authentic visions of the city. Neither article prints images of her paintings, nor do the articles allude to her religious message in the print. The *NYT* specter focuses on her status as a folk culture hero. The articles mention her various involvements with folk arts: art, music, street preaching, but only briefly in passing. With the destruction of the city, New Orleans has to rebuild not only buildings, but also culture. Via her ministry and the available resources, the historical Sister Gertrude created sacred space throughout New Orleans. The *NYT* uses her status as a folk artist to reconstruct the cultural heritage of New Orleans. She is an accepted member of the American folk art canon, as apparent from the large-scale exhibition of her work in 2004 at the American Folk Art Museum and the permanent residence of a collection of her paintings at the museum. The art world has long connected folk art, authenticity, and culture, and this makes her a logical choice for grounding a cultural revival.

The *NYT*'s specter poses as an authentic symbol for the city of New Orleans, and this was a connection only made after Hurricane Katrina and the city's destruction. To discuss what New Orleans means to its residents, the *NYT* calls upon Sister Gertrude's unique style, but only briefly and only as needed. Tension exists between this specter and the historical Sister Gertrude. Sister Gertrude saw New Orleans as the best place for her to preach, as it was a city of sin. The city was not sacred on its own. Only through her distinct religious worldview does the city transform into sacred space as seen in her iconography's adoption of New Orleans as the model for the coming New Jerusalem. Her preaching plays an integral role in this process. The *NYT* created a spectral Sister Gertrude to represent the "authentic" city itself. Her *NYT* appropriation divorces her image from her didactic paintings and religious message. Without these foundational elements, the sacred space she created in New Orleans dissipates and loses its power. She is now a symbol for the city she came to save; she is a stand-in for "the headquarters of sin." The historical Sister Gertrude and this specter appear non-negotiable, as the media took only the pieces of her identity it needed to make its story.

Commemorating Her Legacy: Home, Museum, Musical, and Ballet

Commemoration efforts produce another Sister Gertrude specter. Those who knew her described Sister Gertrude as a commanding presence, and therefore it comes as no surprise that people wish to commemorate her. I now turn to avenues of memorialization for Sister Gertrude that use her former home or memory, that exist on the stage or live only in the hopes of who want to memorialize her. The historical Sister Gertrude used her ministry to create sacred space, and today this specter uses the memory of her to set apart space. This can be both physical space, as in the case of her former

home, and artistic space, in regards to the ballet and desired musical. The specter created by these memorializing efforts has an ambiguous relationship with the Sister Gertrude of the past, as these new efforts utilize the sacred space Sister Gertrude created, but in a way that is somewhat disconnected from her religious message. To elucidate some elements of this specter, I will first explore the treatment of her former home since the flood.

Sister Gertrude's house survived Hurricane Katrina, but not without extensive damage. The floodwaters pushed the house off its foundation and smashed it, still intact, into the adjacent building. Jaffe applied for historic landmark status for the house with the New Orleans Preservation Resource Center (PRC). The mission of the PRC is "to promote the preservation, restoration, and revitalization of New Orleans' historic architecture and neighborhoods."[185] Despite efforts by Jaffe, the city demolished Sister Gertrude Morgan's former home at 5444 North Dorgenois in early December of 2008. Jaffe terms the demolition as "one of my greatest shames."[186] It was Jaffe's hope that the PRC would recognize Sister Gertrude's former home a landmark and the city would remove it from the demolition list. Unfortunately, he lobbied for historic status with very little help. The New Orleans Museum of Art was unable to aid in the effort as the museum had suffered damage from Katrina that brought its own challenges. The PRC ended up committing its resources to the Holy Cross Neighborhood in the Lower Ninth Ward. In regards to Sister Gertrude Morgan's former home and surrounding neighborhood, the PRC and those involved "washed their hands of it."[187]

Though the structure no longer stands, it is possible to find pictures of 5444 North Dorgenois on a few different Flickr sites. One of the Flickr users who uploaded pictures

[185] "Preservation Resource Center," http://www.prcno.org/. Accessed 12 January 2009.
[186] Jaffe, interview.
[187] Ibid.

of Sister Gertrude's is M. Styborski, who added photos of 5444 North Dorgenois to his photo set on the Lower Ninth Ward.[188] Accompanying some of the photos are captions providing scant background information for the website visitor.[189] In order to rebuild what New Orleans means post-Katrina, these Flickr users turn to the old, former space of Sister Gertrude. This space, imbued with the memory of her, becomes a place charged with significance.

The Preservation Resource Center's Advocacy Department also operates a Flickr account with photos of Sister Gertrude's home.[190] The photos on Sister Gertrude refer visitors to "Squandered Heritage." Another Flickr user, Karen Gadbois (known as Karen Apricot New Orleans on Flickr) co-operates "Squandered Heritage," where she shares her photos and thoughts on post-Katrina New Orleans. She has loaded images of Sister Gertrude's house on her Flickr (in a photo set "Sister Gertrudes House") in addition to posting about Sister Gertrude in November of 2008. She dubs Sister Gertrude's home an "unseen treasure of New Orleans" and shares a very brief biography of Sister Gertrude.[191] The article opens:

> Even the most humble house can hold more history than it's gutted and hollowed out walls would have you believe. The fist (first) time I saw this house I was wondering why someone had spray painted DO NOT DEMOLISH on it. The house had floated off it's piers and was resting against the house next door.[192]

The person who spray-painted "DO NOT DEMOLISH PRC HISTORIC LANDMARK" was none other than Jaffe. In an interview I conducted with Jaffe in late

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[188] In December of 2007, one year before the home's demolition.
[189] One of which is inaccurate, informing that Sister Gertrude opened the Everlasting Gospel Mission with Mother Margaret Parker and Sister Cora Williams. M. Styborksi, "5444 N Dorgenois on Flickr - Photo Sharing!," http://flickr.com/photos/41144694@N00/2096638306/
[190] Preservation Resource Center, Advocacy Department, "Dorgenois 5444 Sr Gertrude Morgan's House - a set on Flickr," http://www.flickr.com/photos/prc-advocacy/sets/72157608653021335/.
[191] Karen Gadbois, "Sister Gertrude Morgan | Squandered Heritage," http://www.squanderedheritage.com/2008/11/03/sister-gertrude-morgan/.
[192] Ibid. Typo in original posting, "fist" should read "first."

December of 2008, he said over the previous three years, his bi-weekly graffiti style spray-painting activities was the main element that delayed the house's demolition. He and his friend Noel would hide cans of neon orange spray paint near the house and tried to keep the paint job looking fresh so that it would be impossible to miss.

Of all the homes on her block of North Dorgenois, Sister Gertrude Morgan's home was the only structure not completely washed away. When the floodwaters came crashing through the area, her home was the lone house that retained its physical shape; however, the water pushed it into part of the neighboring building, the Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church at 2428 Flood Street. The decision between demolition or restoration of the house became a decision of economics. It would have cost approximately $150,000 to pick up the house and put it back on its foundation for a home that would have sold for about $20,000 before the flood.[193] This matter of economics was what stood in Jaffe's way to successfully adding the house to the landmark list. Considering that the amount of money it would cost to move the house was almost eight times the home's original value, Jaffe had difficulties convincing others of the justification to save the structure.

After Hurricane Katrina, cultural anthropologist Rebecca Carter argued houses and the condition of a person's home became a part of the religious experience.[194] In the act of rebuilding, the house became a "site of integration and mutual (re)constitution of person and place occurs."[195] She concurs with anthropologist Joelle Bahloul that the house functions as a "key symbolic structure."[196] I agree with Carter's analysis because

[193] Jaffe, interview.
[194] Rebecca L. Carter, "How's Your House?: Portraits of Spiritual Dwelling in post-Katrina New Orleans," *Journal of Southern Religion* XI (2008), http://jsr.fsu.edu/Katrina/Carter.pdf.
[195] Ibid., 2.
[196] Joelle Bahloul, "The Memory House: Time and Place in Jewish Immigrant Culture in France," in *House Life: Space, Place and Family in Europe* (New York: Berg Publishers, 1999), 239.

especially for a city like New Orleans where many neighborhoods suffered devastation, the home would become more important. Carter asks: "How do religious practices relate to the ongoing preservation of one's social and physical environment?"[197] The Flickr sites' devotion to Sister Gertrude's house and Jaffe's efforts to preserve the house demonstrate the religious significance of her home for those who remember her.

While in New Orleans in late December of 2008, I visited the site of the former Everlasting Gospel Mission. The only remains of her home are the concrete foundation of the front porch. Where the house once stood, there are small bits of brick and concrete on bare dirt where grass has yet to grow back. One could still make out the tracks from the bulldozer where her home rested for the past three years, adjacent to the Baptist church. All around the foundation are large patches of the famous four leaf-clovers. Not only do they grow in her former yard, but they have spilled over into the neighboring lots and even across the street.

The clovers were the subject of a December *Times-Picayune* article on the 21st of December, just a week before my trip. The epicenter of the clovers, the intersection of Flood and Dorgenois, is the former location of the Everlasting Gospel Mission. *Times-Picayune* reporter Chris Rose sadly writes that "the four-leafed clover-like specimens, which indeed are spread far and wide across these Fields of Broken Dreams, are actually … ferns."[198] Breaking the news saddened Rose as he did not want to be the one to dampen anyone's spirits. The clover is a symbol of hope and luck, something desperately needed in the Lower Ninth Ward. A local art therapist who alerted the media about the four-leaf clovers went from excitement and hope to disappointment when informed of the

[197] Carter, "How's Your House?: Portraits of Spiritual Dwelling in post-Katrina New Orleans."
[198] Rose, "A four-leaf fantasy."

bad botany news. Rose wanted to believe in the hope for the Lower Ninth, as do other New Orleanians. He ends the article with an exchange between a local and himself. After agreeing that the plant in question both looks like clover and has four leaves, the local tells Rose matter-of-factly "there you go."[199]

At the site of her former home Jaffe's friend Noel, who had spray painted "DO NOT DEMOLISH" on the side of the house along with Ben, told me about Rose's article. Noel never met Sister Gertrude, but her presence forcibly affects him. He vehemently defended the large clumps of green in Sister Gertrude's yard and said that the newspaper was wrong. Regardless of what the *Times-Picayune* may write and what any horticulturalist may say, they will always be four leaf-clovers for Noel and for New Orleans Museum of Art curator Fagaly. In the interview I conducted with Fagaly while in New Orleans, he also brought up the recent *Times-Picayune* article, and had a similar conclusion. While more light-hearted about the matter than Noel, Fagaly concluded that they would always be four-leaf clovers for him. "I like to think that they're four-leaf clovers," Fagaly told me, "I don't care if they're called ferns," he added with a chuckle.[200]

After Hurricane Katrina, Fagaly and Jaffe journeyed (independently) to Sister Gertrude's former home. For both, they remained uncertain about the house's location until they found the clovers. The Lower Ninth was utterly destroyed, with houses either in the roads or completely washed away. Streets were not readily identifiable, let alone individual residences like 5444 North Dorgenois. However, the four-leaf clovers were the feature of the property that confirmed they were at the site of the Everlasting Gospel

[199] Ibid.
[200] Fagaly, interview.

Mission House. Upon reflecting about the Lower Ninth Ward and finding Sister Gertrude's former home post-Katrina, Fagaly said,

> It was a totally different neighborhood and when I finally found her house it was all, the whole landscape was grey and black and brown and just. But there were this bright emerald green four-leaf clovers in her front yard … And I said there she is! There's Sister Gertrude! She's not dead.[201]

In the face of all the desolation of the Lower Ninth Ward, her lingering presence and the clovers both still existed.

This leads to the question: what is so important about the house? Sister Gertrude was no longer alive, no art lingered on the walls of the home, and the floodwaters had violently shoved the house off its foundation. What remained was the physical structure of the house, four-leaf clovers, and memories. For Jaffe, the importance of the house was its status as a symbol. Symbol was a word frequently used by Jaffe when discussing Sister Gertrude. Her artwork is "all just symbols of hope" and "we all need symbols in our lives."[202] The house at 5444 North Dorgenois is an "incredibly important symbol," and it greatly frustrated Jaffe that his efforts failed. "Her house," he continued, "that's what really bothers me about it, is this incredibly important symbol was being, its survival was being considered in human terms, you know in practical terms. This has nothing to do with practical matters, this is a symbol and symbols don't have a price."[203] Sister Gertrude made her home a sacred space through her preaching, artwork, and music. The home (until demolition) remained a sacred space due to the memory of the woman who evangelized there. Even without the house structure, this space remains set apart as

[201] Ibid.
[202] Jaffe, interview.
[203] Ibid.

sacred; however, this is not by means of Sister Gertrude's ministry, but rather the memories attached to the "authentic" folk artist and musician.

The way these examples discuss Sister Gertrude's former house reminds me of religious pilgrimage sites. Pilgrimage sites are sacred spaces that hold significance for travelers. The existence of the Flickr users who posted images of her home demonstrate the powerful hold the site holds over some people. The *Times-Picayune* article by Rose about the four-leaf clovers includes a short narrative from Chandra McCormick, the owner of the L9 Gallery (a Lower Ninth Ward art gallery), who took a group of New York art aficionados on a tour of the Lower Ninth. At the site of the former home of "famed folk artist and evangelist Sister Gertrude Morgan," the New Yorkers noticed the four leaf-clovers and began to excitedly pick them.[204] Despite the lack of physical art at the former site of the Everlasting Gospel Mission house, the art collectors wanted to see where the artist once lived. Not only did they see the site, but they wanted to take a token, some of the clovers, home with them. Though they could not buy any of her pieces there, their trip certainly cannot be called meaningless. Therefore, there was some purpose to visiting the site of her home, where she created so much of her artwork. Whether it was a sense of hope or luck from the clovers or a feeling of authentically connecting with Sister Gertrude, these art aficionados "swooned" when they arrived to 5444 North Dorgenois.[205]

Despite his failed attempt to landmark her home, Jaffe hopes to one day build a living monument to Sister Gertrude in the Lower Ninth Ward. He had hoped to have her home restored and transformed into "a museum in her honor and a place that promoted

[204] Rose, "A four-leaf fantasy."
[205] Ibid.

African-American folk-art and tradition, whether it was music or painting or preaching."[206] This is important to Jaffe because these African-American folk-art traditions (music, painting, preaching) "are all folk art traditions that exist in New Orleans, and very few people know that that was the location that it all came from."[207] "One of the most important artists of the 20th century lived in this very simple little house in the Lower Ninth Ward," he continued on to say.[208] Her status as New Orleans resident plays a large role in the creation of the post-Katrina specters, because she chose this city as her home. Later in the interview, Jaffe came back to his hope of creating a living monument to Sister Gertrude at the site of her former home. He is happy when people encounter Sister Gertrude for the first time, filled with the same amazement he experiences.

> I mean people here still don't know who she was and it would be a shame, I mean when you go to France or parts of Spain you go to the home of Matisse. It's a celebration of Matisse, it's a celebration of Picasso, everything. There's Picasso cafes and Picasso street and Picasso this and Picasso that, and then you come to New Orleans and, we don't have that here.[209]

When thinking of art's greatest 20th century painters, Jaffe puts Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and Sister Gertrude Morgan in the same category. Most people have at least heard of Picasso and Matisse, and many can probably associate cubism with Picasso and fauvism with Matisse. However, most people, even the very educated, have never heard of Sister Gertrude Morgan. The Flickr sites' reverence to Sister Gertrude, the pilgrimage for four-leaf clovers, and Jaffe's desire to convert her home into a museum indicate the sanctity of her former home. Sister Gertrude made 5444 North Dorgenois

[206] Jaffe, interview.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.

sacred through her ministry and through placing herself and New Orleans into the Bible. Today, those who revere her former home make it sacred not because of her ministry, but rather because of her. The memories of her, either personal remembrances like Jaffe's or communal memories linked to city pride, and her status as folk art hero, as seen through the swooning art dealers, create the sacred space today.

Also linked to the reverence towards her house are the various stage commemorations to her legacy that have either come into being or still only exist in the minds of those who knew her. For both Fagaly and Jaffe commemorating and memorializing Sister Gertrude is important. Fagaly would like to see a play created about Sister Gertrude's life. When working on the 2004 exhibition of Sister Gertrude's work in New York, he expressed desire to have Broadway production about Sister Gertrude. He asked his friend writer, singer, actor, and director Vernel Bagneris if he would be interested in working on this project. It never came to pass because Bagneris found the topic "too religious."[210] Fagaly still thinks a play would be very successful as Borenstein and Sister Gertrude are "the original odd couple."[211] While they were opposites in a lot of ways, Fagaly believes "they really were a good combo, they respected each other and depended on each other in a way."[212]

A play focusing on Sister Gertrude's relationship with her main patron would take Sister Gertrude out of the sacred space she created for herself. First, if writers fear the play will be too religious, it is safe to assume that (if the project materializes) her religious message and her unique biblical interpretation will take a backseat (as they so often do with the various specters). Second, since she refused to accept the "graven

[210] Fagaly, interview. The quotation is Fagaly's words concerning the reaction of Bagenris.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid.

image" award from the Louisiana State Art Exhibition for Non-Professional and/or Student Artists, she would likely refuse Broadway acclaim. While the world certainly influenced her (as seen in her use of shotgun house architecture and folk songs), Sister Gertrude's main concern was the sacred space she created through her ministry. A Broadway play, which will likely gloss over her religious message, falls outside of those boundaries. Sister Gertrude's religious message was heavily instructional. She preached that the events of Revelation would soon come to pass. The Broadway community would probably deem a play about Sister Gertrude that fully explains her worldview as "too religious." However, a play focused on her relationship with Borenstein, while keeping popular appeal would lose the strong hold on her didactic message.

Jaffe used some of her music in a ballet tribute choreographed by Trey McIntyre. The Trey McIntyre Project created and performed "Ma Maison," a twenty minute dance, in late November of 2008 at Tulane University in New Orleans.[213] Live jazz courtesy of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band and a prerecorded soundtrack that included "excerpts from the performances of Sister Gertrude Morgan, a 9th Ward folk artist, self-styled local preacher and Preservation Hall regular" accompanied the dance.[214] *Times-Picayune* writer Chris Waddington labeled the decision to incorporate a preset soundtrack the "evening's riskiest gambit," as the sounds filling the auditorium were a mix of "improvised music with a fixed soundtrack of street preaching and gospel from Sister Gertrude Morgan."[215] McIntyre wanted to use jazz in the performance because it "speaks

[213] "Ma Maison" is French for My House or My Home.
[214] Chris Waddington, "Rising star Trey McIntyre premieres his N.O.-inspired jazz ballet this weekend," *Chris Waddington, Contributing Writer, The Times-Picayune*, November 19, 2008, http://blog.nola.com/chriswaddington/2008/11/the_trey_mcintyre_project_will.html.
[215] Chris Waddington, "Trey McIntyre jazz ballet a triumph; final show tonight, Nov. 22," *Chris Waddington, Contributing Writer, The Times-Picayune*, November 22, 2008, http://blog.nola.com/chriswaddington/2008/11/post_3.html.

to the spirit of New Orleans, how the city has always moved from adversity to celebration and back again."[216] Jaffe explained his view on the ballet to Waddington by saying, "This isn't just about jazz and dance, it's about seeing that New Orleans culture goes beyond Bourbon Street, about seeing that we can do all kinds of things here that no one expected from us. New Orleans is a cultural treasure that inspires artistic visitors."[217]

These two theatrical productions, one still in the mind and hopes of Fagaly and the other on the stage with the help of Jaffe, demonstrate how those who knew Sister Gertrude want her legacy and message to continue on into the twenty-first century and move beyond simply those who knew her while she was alive. Furthermore, in the case of "Ma Maison," the project aspired to show that New Orleans housed more than just Bourbon Street, and the inclusion of Sister Gertrude in the soundtrack calls to mind the specter created by the *NYT*. To produce a more authentic New Orleans artistic creation, Sister Gertrude's identity found itself representing "authentic New Orleans." In many of these post-Katrina conceptions of Sister Gertrude, Jaffe's memories and beliefs bubble to the surface, and now full attention goes to him.

"I Don't Want to Be Buried:" Benjamin Jaffe's Specter

Jaffe's personal Sister Gertrude specter materializes through three avenues: first, the life-changing experience he had at her house after the storm; second the way he envisions Sister Gertrude's message; and third the Preservation Hall compilation he released after Hurricane Katrina. Jaffe's specter is optimistic, rather than didactic, and a symbol, rather than a prophet. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Jaffe turned to Sister Gertrude to understand the disaster. Jaffe was on his way to New York when

[216] McIntyre as quoted in Waddington, Waddington, "Rising star Trey McIntyre premieres his N.O.-inspired jazz ballet this weekend."
[217] Jaffe, as quoted in Waddington, Ibid.

Hurricane Katrina hit, and he was immediately on the phone finding places to relocate Preservation Hall musicians. All the while, though, he kept thinking about Sister Gertrude's lawn.[218] His mind raced through childhood memories in her four-leaf clovers covered lawn, but now all he could think about was water. After her death, the Everlasting Gospel Mission House was sold and no longer a church, but Jaffe "still considered North Dorgenois Street sacred ground."[219]

He returned to New Orleans as soon as he could. He was relieved to find her former home still standing. It had moved off the foundation by ten or fifteen feet, but the building itself was still intact. It was on the porch of her former home that Jaffe let out his emotions. He told Douglas Brinkley, historian and author of *The Great Deluge*:

> I never have really felt that alone in New Orleans, sitting on her stoop for hours on that Sunday afternoon. Nobody was around. It used to be a busy block – everybody out and about in church clothes. Everything now was still. It was the first time that I cried … it was cathartic, though.[220]

Seeing the four-leaf clovers filled him with the dedication to try to keep the house standing. Despite his failure to get the house landmarked through the PRC, Jaffe still looks at the site of the former house as a sacred site. When I interviewed him in December of 2008, he spoke about his experience at her house after Hurricane Katrina. For Jaffe, this was an experience that truly changed his life. When I mentioned to Jaffe that I had begun to think of her home, now an empty lot, as a pilgrimage site, he told me about his first trip back to the house after the floodwaters receded.[221]

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[218] Douglas Brinkley, *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast* (New York: William Morrow, 2006).
[219] Ibid., 430.
[220] Ibid..
[221] This entire answer by Jaffe is remarkable for the language he used to describe the experience. The entire response is appendix 1.

Jaffe attributes his trip to her house as the source of his "energy to move forward" after the storm.[222] He said, "There was a lot of doubt in my mind whether New Orleans was going to make it, and whether I should pack up my roots and move somewhere else."[223] Had it not been for the experience at her house, Jaffe might have left New Orleans, and this shows the power of his memories of her home. To get to the Lower Ninth Ward, Jaffe had to drive through some of the city's worst devastation. As he drove over the Industrial Canal he remembers "not necessarily losing consciousness, but at that point, not even thinking anymore, it was a very meditative state."[224] This meditative state continued as he drove through the neighborhood, turning at streets now without street signs. When he got to her house, "the car stopped, and I was sitting there and I was like no, this can't be it."[225] The fact that he was able to find her house in a neighborhood where houses were in the streets as opposed to on their foundations, seemed like divine providence. Since the house was no longer properly standing, he was not convinced that this was her former home until he "bent over, just closed my eyes, and picked something. And I knew immediately it was a four-leaf clover."[226] After sitting out at her house for the next couple hours, Jaffe found his inspiration to stay in the city and his inspiration for all his work since Katrina. "It was a turning point for me," he told me indicating the personal connection that he feels to the site.

Above all else, Jaffe finds Sister Gertrude's former home to be a symbol. He believes it is "a holy place, not just for Christians alone, but Catholics and Jews and

[222] Jaffe, interview.
[223] Ibid.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid.

Buddhist and Hindu – whatever you're into."[227] For Sister Gertrude, 5444 North Dorgenois was sacred because of her ministry; for Jaffe its sacred status translates across religious borders. The sanctity of the site is visible by the four-leaf clovers. When he brought The Edge (U2's guitar player) to the house, they talked about the significance of the four-leaf clover, and they concluded that it symbolized "the gold at the end of the rainbow." This conversation further solidified Jaffe's reverence towards the house, because The Edge "who had absolutely no relationship with Sister Gertrude Morgan had an epiphany at the site of her house." The space was sacred not just because of Sister Gertrude, but on its own, the location had something special about it.

When I asked about the definitive memory he has of Sister Gertrude, he responded not with an event, but a place. "One defining memory would be actually not of her so much but of her house and the four-leaf clovers in her yard. That's the one image I have that recurs over and over when I think of her. Absolutely the first thing that pops into my mind."[228] He expanded upon this saying, "my fondest memory, the most prominent memory of her, is being at her house and her inside singing and I'd be outside playing in the yard. I don't have any memories of her being at Preservation Hall. All my memories of her are in the Lower Ninth Ward at her house."[229] Sister Gertrude's home was more than a pilgrimage site for Jaffe, it was a life-altering space. He believes none of the projects he has done since Hurricane Katrina would have been possible before the storm. He is sure that he is a different person after the storm, and if not for this experience at her home a few months after the storm, his life post-Katrina would have developed very differently. The way he describes this experience is noteworthy. He said

[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid.
[229] Ibid.

that as he drove over the bridge over the Industrial Canal and into the Lower Ninth Ward, he went into "a very meditative state." It was an experience that pulled him out of a possible post-traumatic depression and opened up new doors in his life.

In addition to the importance of her home, one of the most pertinent elements of Sister Gertrude that Jaffe sees is her message. When describing his interpretation of her message Jaffe puts emphasis on the inclusive worldview that she held. "I think the beauty of her message was the simplicity of the message … you can make it as complicated as you want to but when you break it down it's very simple; let's just get along and everything will be okay."[230] Even though the implementation of this message could be difficult, Jaffe admires it greatly; "She always broke it down to the simplest and basic root common message of love and not so much it was interesting, she doesn't really talk about peace much but she talks about the new world and things being better tomorrow and something to look forward to."[231]

His reading of her message is also the part of Sister Gertrude that can frustrate Jaffe: "She had this message of complete acceptance, whatever happened, happened for a reason and we don't know all the answers."[232] He was very frustrated with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: the lack of help, the delay of that help that came, and the destruction that surrounded him in his city. In talking about these consequences of the storm and its floodwaters, Jaffe finds it difficult to follower Sister Gertrude's philosophy of complete acceptance. While he has trouble grappling with what happened, he was sure of Sister Gertrude's reaction.

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[230] Ibid.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid.

> She would have said that then it was either a lesson for the people were at fault or there was a message from God creating this, it was a wake-up call for something … There would not have been a question, even if she was the one stuck in her attic or on her roof at the those last moments, you know she would have been praying and she would not have looked for much reason in what was happening.[233]

The frustrations that he has had since the storm would not have been frustrations to her, "but that's why there's one Sister Gertrude," he concluded. Sister Gertrude's message as reconstructed by Jaffe is distinctive. He finds a message of complete acceptance, which does not seem to come from her paintings. Her multi-racial angels are her only image of liberal acceptance. While she did sing that "the gift of God is eternal life," her paintings indicate that the only people who will receive this gift are the sinners who "wake up" and follow her ministry.

The third fundamental feature to Jaffe's specter relates music. In April of 2007 Preservation Hall released *Made in New Orleans: The Hurricane Sessions*. It is an album compiled of previously unreleased tracks from Preservation Hall's master tapes at New Orleans' Seasaint Recording Studios and contemporary tracks. Jaffe used this project to preserve New Orleans music. He mixed Sister Gertrude, New Orleans, and jazz, similar to the way Sister Gertrude merged the Bible, New Orleans and herself. Both processes led to the creation of sacred space, though sacred for different reasons, one due to ministry, the other due to commemoration.

When Jaffe arrived to the Seasaint in January of 2007, he expected to find the studio destroyed because the water in the neighborhood had risen to six feet. He entered the studio with boots, a mask, flashlights, and tools with which to move flood debris and later wrote:

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[233] Ibid.

> I went in the entrance where the front door once was. I knew exactly where the tape vault was. I had been there many times before. The floor of the studio was still damp from the flood waters. I had a terrible feeling come over me. If the tapes had not been moved, then they would have been destroyed – another casualty of Katrina. I entered the tape vault where all the master tapes were stored. Row after row of our history now gone. As I reached the top row of tapes I saw the Preservation Hall masters, to my astonishment, inches above the water line! Without a second thought I removed the tapes and immediately had them restored. One of the songs I uncovered is "Over the Gloryland." A fitting title.[234]

The Hurricane Sessions consists of tracks found by Jaffe from the 1960s and 1970s alongside a few recent recordings since the August of 2005. Buyers could also purchase a corresponding DVD that has footage from the 1960s as well as some recent footage from the French Quarter. There were also specially hand-made Deluxe Edition and Limited Edition Deluxe packagings, which came in a small box full of memorabilia from the Preservation Hall office. (The Limited Edition Deluxe box sets were also autographed, numbered, and contained additional items, such as a seven inch vinyl record from the early days of the Hall). In regards to his choice to include items from Preservation Hall, Jaffe tells the buyer:

> It is only chance the Preservation Hall archives were not destroyed. I feel a responsibility to share our unique history with the world. This is why I went back into our collection and included hidden items I've enjoyed my whole life. It is time for others to experience and embrace our precious histories.[235]

The memorabilia in the Deluxe Edition I ordered contained: a few pictures from 1980, a few recording studio photos, an old invitation to an event at Seasaint Recording studio, a Preservation Hall sticker, a couple business cards from friends of the Jaffes, an old invoice from an order of oysters made by A. Jaffe for a Preservation Hall event, a Polaroid photo Jaffe took of city hall in 2007, a Mardi Gras token, a Preservation Hall

[234] Benjamin Jaffe, *Made In New Orleans: The Hurricane Sessions* (Preservation Hall, 2007). Deluxe Edition Booklet.
[235] Ibid.

Jazz Band lanyard, stationery for Preservation Hall musician Sweet Emma, and a 1961 music contract made between Preservation Hall and Kid Punch. Knowing that these were hand-packaged give the recording a much more personal feel.

Jaffe made *The Hurricane Sessions* a special and personal project. Growing up in New Orleans, he has a very close tie with the city, particularly the music scene and local musicians. The destruction from Hurricane Katrina affected him deeply. In addition to what he told me in our interview, he wrote in the booklet for *The Hurricane Sessions* about the difficulty he faced when he returned to New Orleans after Katrina. "It took me weeks of living back in New Orleans before I felt I could venture outside of my neighborhood. Not because I feared for my safety, but rather the sight of miles of devastation had such a negative impact on me emotionally."[236] However, after his trip out to the former Everlasting Gospel Mission, Jaffe found the inspiration to move forward and continue creating music in his beloved hometown. Sister Gertrude inserted her life with the Bible through her ministry, and through *The Hurricane Sessions*, Jaffe combines Sister Gertrude with his vision for New Orleans.

Another source of the emotion for the project came from Jaffe's father. A. Jaffe died in 1987, and some of the tracks included were recordings with his father that were previously unreleased. Especially personal is "Over in the Gloryland." The instruments for this track were originally recorded when his father was in charge of Preservation Hall; however in the original, the vocals did not record. Jaffe added recorded vocals in the 2000s and thus created a track with his father.[237] Despite the devastation of Katrina, without it, many of these old tracks would have been lost forever. If it had not been for

[236] Ibid.
[237] Michele Norris, "Preservation Hall Recordings Survive the Waterline," All Things Considered (National Public Radio, December 19, 2007).

the hurricane, Jaffe is not sure he would have ever uncovered these old master tapes at the Seasaint recording studio or a handful of old Sister Gertrude recordings.

In his selection of the tracks, Jaffe decided to include four tracks that pertain to or include Sister Gertrude, one song that is solely her, one that features her preaching, one that mixes her with other Preservation Hall artists, and one track that is an introduction of her by her original patron Borenstein. Within an album of seventeen tracks, it is significant that four relate to Sister Gertrude. Track one is an introduction to the project called "Radio Intro." It sounds as though a person is twisting a tuning wheel on a radio and when a station comes through the static, it is part of a Preservation Hall recording. The first song that comes into focus is Sister Gertrude's "Let's Make a Record." Track eight is a short introduction of a Sister Gertrude's performance at Preservation Hall by Borenstein. The next track is a recording of Sister Gertrude and her guitar performing the song "I Don't Want to Be Buried" in 1959, a song which according to the Preservation Hall website (maintained in part by Jaffe) "now seems prophetic."[238] Track twelve is "Blow, Wind, Blow," which is a mixture of twenty seconds of Sister Gertrude preaching (recorded in 1959) that feeds into a 2005 recording of the song by current Preservation Hall musicians. The Preservation Hall website's press release announcing the release of *Made in New Orleans: The Hurricane Sessions* continued with their prophetic stance, calling the "Blow, Wind, Blow" collaboration "prescient."[239]

Jaffe did not find "Blow, Wind, Blow" to be a prophetic or religious song until after the hurricane. It is a fairly popular song among jazz, blues, and rhythm and blues musicians, and many New Orleanians had recorded the song. Therefore, to include it on

[238] Preservation Hall News, "Made in New Orleans: the Hurricane Sessions," http://www.preservationhall.com/news/index-mino.htm.
[239] Ibid.

the project in this innovative manner was, for Jaffe, a way to honor the history of the song in New Orleans. After Katrina, lines such as "Blow, wind, blow 'til that judgment day/ Blow, wind, blow all my troubles away," began to take on new meanings for Jaffe that are closely connected to the recent hurricane. The new context of post-Katrina New Orleans infused new significance into the song. The short, twenty second clip of Sister Gertrude preaching is a caution to listeners to realize that the Lord is sending warnings, such as tornadoes and hurricanes, to "make ready," "consider your ways," and "realize what time it is." Knowing the images of Revelation she painted, the "time" she is referring to is the time of the apocalypse. Jaffe would not have included the song "Blow, Wind, Blow" on the original project until he began combining the song with the snippet of Sister Gertrude's preaching.[240] He attributes his idea to mix the music with the preaching to Britt and working with him on that project. Jaffe's re-interpretation of "Blow, Wind, Blow" not only honors the song's history in New Orleans, but honors his memory of Sister Gertrude.

The song "I Don't Want to Be Buried" relates to a self-portrait of Sister Gertrude's titled *Lord, I Don't Want to Be Buried in the Storm*.[241] It is one of the paintings of Sister Gertrude the Jaffe family received when she died. This song is about Sister Gertrude's desire to do the Lord's work though others may not heed this call. She sings for the Lord to remain with her even if she falters while trying. The 1959 song, in which she was singing about living in the Lower Ninth Ward, becomes even more

[240] Jaffe, interview.
[241] According to Douglas Brinkley, the painting is of Sister Gertrude escaping from the flooded Lower Ninth from the wrath of 1965's Hurricane Betsey. However, this is inaccurate; the painting was not done until February 18th, 1970 (this is one of few paintings to include a date). Therefore, this painting is referring to Hurricane Camille, which struck near the Mississippi delta on August 17th, 1969. Brinkley, *The Great Deluge*, 430.

prophetic when compared with the portrait painted eleven years later in addition to the destruction of Hurricane Katrina. In our interview, Jaffe told me that this song is "one of those messages that resonated very strongly."[242]

To release such an emotionally charged project, Jaffe adopts a role in reviving New Orleans, and this release attaches meaning to New Orleans. When negotiating what New Orleans means post-Katrina, Jaffe creates a project that includes two key words or phrases: "hurricane" and "made in New Orleans." The title points to the most important aspect of the project, that the songs were created and recorded in New Orleans. The important part of the title is the implied relationship between the hurricane and New Orleans and the identity of the city that emerges from that relationship. The source of an object's creation plays a large role in the authenticity of the object. People joke about cheap American flags made in China; being a symbol of the United States, it seems illogical to produce it in a foreign country. This fact takes away from the flag's meaning, enough to cause people to laugh. For Jaffe to draw special attention to the origin of the tracks, New Orleans, makes the project legitimate.

There is a sense that something made in New Orleans can better embody the city's culture. The second part of the title *The Hurricane Sessions*. One of the definitions of session is "period of playing music: a period during which musicians play together, especially in a recording studio."[243] The tracks on this album were not all recorded in the same recording studio at the same time, let alone in the same decade. Using the term "session" implies continuity over the history of Preservation Hall; while the recordings are from different times and elements of the same tracks are from different

[242] Jaffe, interview.
[243] MSN Encarta Dictionary, "session," http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary_Session.html.

time periods, there is a connecting link that ties the tracks together. That link is the city itself and the relationship that the different musicians have with the city. Jaffe purposefully chose a title with a double meaning.[244] The early master tapes survived either Hurricane Betsey (1965), Hurricane Camille (1969), or both. Therefore, all the tracks either survived a hurricane or were created in reflection of one.

In addition, the title of the project allows connections with all the destructive hurricanes of New Orleans's past without pinning it down to any one chronological moment. He did not want listeners to forever link the project to Hurricane Katrina because he does not think that "morbidity is something that reflects the true spirit of New Orleans."[245] In reflection he believes that *The Hurricane Sessions* "has a good balance of reflectiveness and homage to our past and is uplifting."[246] He wanted the project to reflect the true spirit of New Orleans, and in this process he included Sister Gertrude on roughly a quarter of the tracks. Sister Gertrude is a big part of what is New Orleans for Jaffe, and this is further apparent from his post-Katrina experience at the site of her former home.

Jaffe's memories of Sister Gertrude and her work have played a fundamental role in his life today. He attributes his experience at her house a few months after the hurricane as the reason for his decision to stay in the city and as the inspiration of all his projects since the hurricane struck. She is a vital element inside his home. He has multiple images of her artwork on his walls and a framed childhood picture of him in her home on his kitchen wall. Her message, as he takes it, is an ever-present part of his life;

[244] Jaffe, interview.
[245] Ibid.
[246] Ibid.

it is the religious message that gives meaning to his life.[247] His choice to use recordings of her in the "Ma Maison" ballet tribute, his decision to use her extensively in *The Hurricane Sessions*, and the Preservation Hall website itself reflect this.[248]

This is in part due to Jaffe's childhood. Music, specifically Preservation Hall, was a dominating presence throughout his life starting at a very early age. In a piece with National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, Jaffe called Preservation Hall his church: "This was my church, these were the bands I grew up listening to, and they gave me all the joy in my life."[249]

His Sister Gertrude specter is highly influenced by his childhood memories of her. When he speaks of her message, he focuses on love, peace, and the creation of a new world. Her message has become an integral part of Jaffe's life. "What I realized is after you've experienced her artwork for sometime, its message becomes ever present in your life," Jaffe told me. "So it's in a lot of ways, it's like referencing the Bible or the Torah or any sort of religious message or whatever it is for you that gives you purpose in life," he explained; "Her artwork for me is a constant reminder of this message of a better tomorrow, of joy, of glory."[250] Jaffe focuses a lot on glory. For him, glory is not a religious thing, but the moment when everything in life is perfect. He sees her message as a desire to extend that feeling of glory forever.

A large part of the historical Sister Gertrude's message, though, is the Bible, and this is the part of her message that Jaffe seems to neglect. Many of the words in her

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[247] Ibid. Paraphrase of his words regarding her message and his life.
[248] http://www.preservationhall.com/band/index-photos.htm. Accessed 16 January 2009. On the Preservation Hall website is an extensive Photo Gallery. The album cover for the "Archival Photos" album is the same picture he has framed in his kitchen.
[249] Norris, "Preservation Hall Recordings Survive the Waterline."
[250] Jaffe, interview.

songs and the images she painted had a sense of urgency in them. Her Revelation charters explained what would have to come to pass in order to get to the new world. These events included the opening of the seven seals, and many included images of the beasts of Revelation.

For Sister Gertrude Morgan, the Bible held extreme importance. She memorized large portions and entire books of it. She saw her life in the text. Her message was clear: follow the word of God (the Bible), repent, and be saved. Jaffe takes a more optimistic message from her that overlooks her harsher, didactic message. Jaffe's specter is a loving matriarch who accepts everyone. I do not doubt that she would allow everyone through the door to the Everlasting Gospel Mission and preach to them, but she did not foresee everyone reaching New Jerusalem. For example, her painting *Calling the Dry Bones*, commands local New Orleanians to "rise up from the beer tables card partys domino games to. God take no part with your worldy lust People whats wrong with you."[251] In the bottom left corner, she painted a table of gamblers. She adopted the architecture of her city into her depictions of New Jerusalem as she placed herself within the Bible, but she did not take the sinners with her. Images of New Jerusalem contain herself, Jesus, angels, and onlookers. These onlookers do not engage in "sinful behavior," but rather look towards Jesus and Sister Gertrude. Jaffe's specter ignores this element, and he integrates Sister Gertrude into his vision for a new, rebuilt New Orleans.

[251] This painting also integrates lyrics from the spiritual "Dry Bones." Information about this spiritual can be found at http://www.negrospirituals.com/news-song/dry_bones.htm.

The Authenticity of Multiple Sister Gertrudes

Every Sister Gertrude, the historical and each specter, raises issues concerning authenticity. Sister Gertrude's original songs and her paintings have an obvious claim on authenticity. As an artist and musician, Sister Gertrude is a not a surprising figure to invoke when describing New Orleans. Historically, the folk arts conjure descriptions such as authentic, personal, truthful portrayals of identity, especially folk art and folk music. In his work on self-taught artists and authenticity, sociologist Gary Alan Fine argues that the biographical stories of self-taught artists lend authenticity to their works. Their identity and the unique elements of their lives "infuse the content of the work."[252] What artists lack in formal training, they make up for with a combination of their "experiences" and their "creative talents."[253] The artists' life stories legitimize their work, which makes them "real." Sister Gertrude is an authentic voice coming from New Orleans, because she is a folk/outsider/self-taught artist who created her work within the confines and context of New Orleans. A local apocalyptic voice, who preached about the coming destruction and the joy of New Jerusalem to come, has been re-discovered.

All of the specters originate from issues of memory and desires of preservation. Jaffe's childhood memories at the home of Sister Gertrude heavily impact his conception of her today. Both Fagaly and Jaffe express desire to have her memory commemorated permanently, through either a living memorial or a play, to ensure people will know Sister Gertrude long into the future. Britt relied upon information from Jaffe (as apparent in the "Scene" tracks on his album). Britt's specter is authentic (for him) due to her

[252] Fine, *Everyday Genius*, 6.
[253] Ibid., 14.

connection to New Orleans Voodoo, a unique element of the city. The *NYT* uses the memory of her as a symbol for New Orleans's long-standing history of eclectic personalities. Even the Flickr users who have uploaded images of her former home indicate a reverence to the site, not because they subscribe to her message, but rather because they see in her a symbol for their city.

The creators of the specific spectral Sister Gertrudes each see theirs as an authentic Sister Gertrude, though each has both connections and disconnects with the historical Sister Gertrude. Britt focuses upon her music and chooses to see only the hope in Sister Gertrude's message. The *NYT* focuses on Sister Gertrude's legacy as a folk hero as a symbol for New Orleans culture. The way her house has become a symbol for authentic New Orleans and the desire to commemorate her legacy relates to the *NYT*'s image of her as authentic New Orleans culture. Finally, Jaffe's specter, like Britt's, focuses primarily on only certain parts of Sister Gertrude's work and message.

While tensions exist between the historical Sister Gertrude and her specters, a similar process happens in both parts of this thesis. The creation of the contemporary specters parallels the way the historical Sister Gertrude created sacred space in her ministry. Sister Gertrude drew upon the cultural resources at her disposal, e.g. contemporary music and unconventional canvases, to create the artistic elements of her ministry. Her unique, literal interpretation of the Bible interprets the New Jerusalem through the lens of New Orleans. Using her neighborhood as a template for New Jerusalem, she relied upon her surroundings to help her conceive of her unique reading of the Bible. Her specters' creators reflect her creative agency when they appropriate particular elements of her work and identity to create a contemporary specter. Sister

Gertrude adopted the architectural style of the shotgun house to model New Jerusalem. Likewise, her specters focus on certain elements of her work or identity to reach conclusions about the heritage of New Orleans. She is an "authentic" cultural resource by which to define the city.

In many of these spectral Sister Gertrudes, specifically Britt's, the *NYT*'s, and the Flickr sites, her artwork seems to have taken a backseat in the conversation. It was her artwork that drove her to her status as a folk hero. The canon of American folk art now fully accepts her paintings, as seen through her 2004 exhibition at the American Folk Art Museum and the permanent residence of some of her work in the museum. Her artwork gained her recognition and propelled her to her folk hero status; yet the paintings are not the focus of the discussion now. For Sister Gertrude, her artwork was integral to her ministry, as it served a teaching function, depicting her religious beliefs and prophecies that she received. Divorced from her artwork, her didacticism is gone. Instead, in the post-Katrina context, Sister Gertrude becomes the icon. The image of her identity and the different interpretations of that identity become the focus rather than her imagery. Even for Jaffe, whose kitchen is heavily decorated with Sister Gertrude's artwork, her identity, how he interprets her message, and especially the site of her former home have begun to eclipse her paintings.

The questions arise: what is the relationship between these specters and the historical Sister Gertrude, and what is the significance of her re-appropriation? What does it mean for her to become a symbol for the city she came to save from sin? In a way, this re-appropriation of her began years ago when her first painting sold. When art collectors and dealers bought her art and the pieces left their context of her ministry, the

pieces began to lose its highly charged religious significance. She painted as a supplement to her preaching and prophecy, but many buyers did not buy her art for that reason. Buyers came to her for "folk" art, because it was authentic art, authentically related to the human condition. To answer this question concerning the relationship between the various Sister Gertrudes, the work by Davis in *The Lives of Indian Images* can become very helpful. While the specters are not identical to the historical Sister Gertrude, the social biography approach becomes a valuable tool for analysis. The meaning of the images adapt as the community of response changes. In the case of Sister Gertrude, as her community of response changes and deals with the destruction of Katrina, people forge new meanings from her work and her identity.

I want to make it clear that I am not criticizing those who created the specters. Hurricane Katrina brought New Orleans its own apocalypse, devastation impossible to rationalize and understand. In the rebuilding process, people need a rally symbol, something to focus upon as they turn the debris back into a city. Not only did Katrina destroy homes and lives, many residents of the city felt they lost their dignity. Early media reports about the hurricane horribly underestimated the damage and badly overstated the violence, further disenfranchising the people of New Orleans who already experienced the physical destruction of their city. While looting became a common occurrence in the city, many were looking for food and supplies in lieu of aid trucks that were unable to get into the city due to the floodwaters. More shocking though, inaccuracies permeated the reports concerning the state of affairs at the Superdome and Convention Center shelters. Rumors were spreading of two hundred homicides in the Superdome with numerous counts of gang rape. These rumors were highly inflated. In

actuality, the Superdome reported six deaths: four of natural causes, one drug overdose, and one suicide.[254] At the Convention Center, only one of the four deaths was homicide.[255]

The combination of the skewed media reports, first of the incorrect levee information and second of the highly exaggerated violence, with the lack of sufficient aid supplies left many New Orleans residents frustrated and angry. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina found a city devastated and lost. News reports began to call the dislocated residents, either before or after the storm, refugees. The word refugee means "a person who flees to a foreign country or power to escape danger or persecution."[256] Today's American society typically associates this word with third world countries, not its own citizens. To use this word to refer to New Orleanians was certainly problematic and, combined with the abandonment felt by many New Orleanians, post-Katrina New Orleans has been a very emotional place full of questions regarding rebuilding.[257] In this turbulent time the symbols for the city have become more and more important. Sister Gertrude Morgan emerges as one such symbol.

The specters' creators imagined her in an environment of despair, confusion, and anger. While each has an ambiguous relationship with the historical Sister Gertrude, each specter is simultaneously authentic. Through the specters, New Orleans and her residents reclaim their city and their personal agency. The rebuilding process has not been without conflict, an issue poignantly shown by The Yes Men in their documentary

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[254] Brinkley, *The Great Deluge*, 193.
[255] *Inside Hurricane Katrina*.
[256] Merriman Webster, "refugee." http://mw1.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/refugee. Accessed 23 January 2009.
[257] For more information concerning the problematic use of the term refugee, see Adeline Masquelier, "Why Katrina's Victims Aren't Refugees: Musings on a "Dirty" Word," *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 4 (December 2006): 735-743.

The Yes Men Fix the World. The Yes Men are political activists who "infiltrate the world of big business and pull off outrageous pranks that highlight the ways that corporate greed is destroying the planet."[258] Recently, one half of the duo impersonated a Department of Housing and Urban Development spokesperson announcing that residents could now return to the public housing structures, which were slated to be demolished, and furthermore that HUD would put forth extra effort to provide basic services to all residents. Though severely criticized by government officials, the Yes Men interviewed one local woman who applauded them for drawing attention to their forced homelessness by the government.

New Orleans will inevitably be rebuilt, but how? Some locals want to see their city as it was and move back into their former neighborhoods. Many New Orleans residents want to take the power from the government's hands and make the choices concerning the city's rebuilding process themselves.[259] For example, social communities in the Ninth Ward thrived (perhaps not economically, but socially) before Hurricane Katrina, and without rebuilding the neighborhoods, residents cannot easily revive these social networks.[260] Many former Lower Ninth Ward residents cannot move back because they are "tripped up by paperwork, stuck in housing limbo, or are waiting for the schools and grocery stores to return so their once vibrant communities can rise again."[261] The slow re-opening of public housing leaves displaced residents feeling ignored by their

[258] The Yes Men Official Website. *The Yes Men Fix the World* movie description. http://theyesmen.org/theyesmenfixtheworld.
[259] Naomi Klein, "Let the People Rebuild New Orleans," *The Nation*, September 5, 2005, http://www.thenation.com/doc/20050926/klein.
[260] Rachel Breunlin and Helen A. Regis, "Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map: Race, Place, and Transformation in Desire, New Orleans," *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 4 (December 2006): 744-764.
[261] Christina Bellantoni, "Obama taps N.O. for U.S. blueprint," *The Washington Times*, March 9, 2009, http://washingtontimes.com/news/2009/mar/09/obama-taps-big-easy-for-us-blueprint/.

government and detached from their homes.[262] Government officials want to integrate public housing into middle-class neighborhoods to bridge the economic gap. These competing views on how to rebuild leave New Orleanians without a solid city identity. Sister Gertrude nicely fills the role of rally symbol. The specters, despite their tensions with the historical Sister Gertrude, provide authentic relief for New Orleanians trying to rebuild.

In the destruction that Katrina left behind in New Orleans, some have used Sister Gertrude to understand something about not only the storm, but also about themselves. One element of her life never ignored is her yard of four-leaf clovers, property line to property line. These mysterious plants have since spilled over into neighboring lots, filling the holes left by former homes, Sister Gertrude herself has broadened beyond her original niche. In her own time, Sister Gertrude worked to save souls and warn people that the events of the Book of Revelation would soon pass. Now post-Katrina, through the specters, she has assumed a more universal function as a hopeful symbol. She has become the four-leaf clover in the city Katrina turned over.

[262] Breunlin and Regis, "Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map."

Appendix 1

The following is a transcription of part of my interview with Benjamin Jaffe. When I told him that I felt Sister Gertrude's former home had become like a pilgrimage site, he told me about the life-changing experience he had at her house after Hurricane Katrina. He spoke this in a continuous narrative with no interruption from me. I tried to transcribe as close to his speaking style as possible.

It was my trip back to her house for the first time after the hurricane that first gave me the energy to move forward. There was a lot of doubt in my mind whether New Orleans was going to make it, and whether I should pack up my roots and move somewhere else. What was survival – I was going through a divorce at the time. I made a trip out there to her house probably in, like November or December of 2005 after the hurricane, and you just can't even imagine what the city looked like. No street was passable. There was debris everywhere and I didn't really leave this little neighborhood here in the French Quarter because I didn't really want to drive anywhere. You had to be careful of what you subjected yourself to because you could easily find yourself slipping into a depression by seeing a house or a car that was overturned or you know the streets lined with refrigerators for miles. So you had, there was a lot of self-preservation that people had to do. Some people didn't and some people have different tolerance levels. Some people's level was a lot less tolerant than mine. I generally have a pretty high tolerance level for destruction, but this time it was overwhelming.

I remember one Sunday morning, I woke up really early. I couldn't sleep and just went for a little drive about seven in the morning. Decided that I was going to go back to the Lower Ninth Ward, it was time for me to go back and see what was going on back there. And I remember, see, you come across this bridge over the Industrial Canal and you can see over to the left off the bridge, you can see the whole Lower Ninth Ward and it used to be, it wasn't an economically prosperous neighborhood, but it was a neighborhood that was inhabited by thousands of people and schools and corner grocery stores and churches and activity, playgrounds. And, uh, it was just gone. You couldn't make out the blocks anymore because all the houses had been washed into the streets. So it just looked like one gigantic junkyard from the bridge.

I remember not necessarily losing consciousness, but at that point, not even thinking anymore, it was a very meditative state, and I hadn't been to Sister Gertrude Morgan's house in probably, fifteen years or so and I didn't even know what street it was on, cause we always had landmarks that we would turn at to get there and you would just drive around until you found it. I didn't know it was on North Dorgenois and um, I made a left and then another left and the car stopped. And I was just sitting there and I was like "no this can't possibly be it." And you're out there, I mean you're used to seeing kids, on a Sunday morning you would hear church services going on, you would just hear activity, something going on. Ice cream, something would be going on, the fruit man would be driving around, and I got out of the car and I went up 'cause the house wasn't there anymore, it wasn't there and I knew that there was only one way to really know whether

or not that was her house.[263] So I bent over and picked just closed my eyes and picked something, and I knew immediately it was a four leaf clover and it was.

And then I just sat out there for the next couple hours. It was just a turning point for me in, I mean, it was the inspiration for me coming out with *The Hurricane Sessions* [a post-Katrina Preservation Hall project released in 200 mixing old tracks with new], it was the inspiration for staying in the city, uh, it meant a lot. I mean, it meant a lot for me that day, I don't know if I would be in New Orleans today if I didn't have that experience, back in 2005, just a few months after the hurricane. I mean, I think everyone has to have those moments, it doesn't necessarily have to be at her house, but it has to be somewhere that resonates with you, and uh, that was what it was for me.

So, it meant a lot to me and uh, and feeling like I had my, my restraint because of the economics, this stupid economic thing and knowing how much money was wasted here in this city and here was something that is a holy place, I mean for everybody, not just for Christians alone, but I mean Catholics and Jews and Buddhists and Hindu – whatever you're into, I mean it's a very special place, and the four leaf clover is something that resonates with everybody. I think every, in every society, the four leaf clover represents something special. Whether it's the gold at the end of the rainbow or making a wish, or what it is and uh, I remember, I brought the guitar player from U2 out there and I brought him out there because I was asking him about the significance of the four leaf clover and he's like it's a symbol of the gold at the end of the rainbow, its something that's there but nobody can ever get to it, it's a symbol more than anything. I was just like ok, if I brought him out there and uh, he had never seen in his whole life,

[263] It was no longer on the foundation. At this point, the house was pushed back into the adjacent building, about fifty feet off its original foundation.

had seen anything like this and that was a moment for him. So I realized that someone who had absolutely no relationship with Sister Gertrude Morgan had an epiphany at the site of her house, you know, and uh, so then I knew that, it's not just her, there's something special here in the this place.[264]

[264] Jaffe, interview.

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