Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux: his social and political interests and influence

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ELDER LIGHTFOOT SOLOMON MICHAUX:
HIS SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INTERESTS AND INFLUENCE

A Dissertation
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The Faculty of the Department of History
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In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Lillian A. Poe
1975
APPROVAL SHEET

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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The purpose of this dissertation is to conduct the first major study of the nationally famous Elder Michaux who lived from 1884 to 1968. More specifically, it is designed to probe into the nature of the religious movement which he founded in 1919 as well as to determine the extent of his social and political interests and influences in the nation and within the black community.

A number of questions are answered concerning Michaux's background, his self-image, his motives, his psychological and material needs, the nature of his appeal as a minister, dynamics of his leadership, the nature of his members and followers, benefits accrued to him, his movement, and others as a result of his interests and influence. These issues are addressed in such a way as to provide a capsule view of a very complex and multi-talented black minister and his church as he steered through society, especially as he operated in the nation's capital.

Information upon which conclusions are based was drawn primarily from interviews, publications from the Church of God, Michaux's sermons and recordings, newspapers, magazines, archival materials, and the author's observations over many years.

It is concluded from this study that Michaux, a man with a sense of mission, was sensitive to the vicissitudes of black people in the United States. In his preachments, he espoused a desire to help eradicate social-economic deprivations of Afro-Americans and other such dis-inherited people. He used his church as an instrument toward acquiring economic and political power but failed to make it a liberating force. The methods of his operation make it difficult to determine when his motives were self-aggrandizing or altruistic. This study challenges superficial and pathologically-oriented interpretations of Michaux and his Church of God movement; it suggests the difficulty of placing the man and his doctrines in any one religious category, i.e. sect, cult, traditional black church.
ELDER LIGHTFOOT SOLOMON MICHAUX:
HIS SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INTERESTS AND INFLUENCE
INTRODUCTION

Reflecting the broader male-oriented society in the Western World, leadership in Afroamerican institutional life has been, for the most part, male dominated. Although black women have been highly visible participants in education, entertainment, religion, black men usually were titular leaders in these areas. This pattern of female participation and male leadership has been especially discernible in black churches in the person of the male preacher. Black preachers have been the major spokesmen with the longest tenure of leadership in Afroamerican communities.

Their genesis as men of authority was in the slave church where the mantle of leadership was assumed by them, since they were frequently the most clever, literate, and best informed bondmen. The preacher became a central and passionate figure in slaves' lives because of his ability to communicate to them skills in daily survival on the plantation, to deliver protest sermons in opposition to the servants-obey-your-masters dictum, and to help them conceive of how they could be mentally free while physically bound—to endure travails which they could not resolve. After emancipation, when black alienation from the dominant society was continued, black preachers were inclined to secede from major religious denominations and to establish separate churches (along racial lines) as places of refuge for the black oppressed. Through this medium they not only entrenched their leadership in the black community but also acquired a fixed base—the
church, and a perennial constituency—the congregation. Consequently the black preacher and the black church became inseparable for analytical purposes.

Where there were no labor unions and few other social, political, or economic institutions within the racially oppressed black community, preachers frequently assumed a paternalistic posture toward their parishioners. This situation persisted much longer in the South than in the North because racial proscription was more open in Dixie. In the church the preacher created a spiritually and emotionally cathartic atmosphere in which societal pressures were at least momentarily lifted. This environment was made possible because the preacher had a great awareness of the intimate and traditional problems affecting black lives. He was able to speak to those problems since he shared with his members a common racial heritage and experiences.

When black peoples' social customs were interrupted by the mass migrations northward after 1914, they felt overwhelmingly alienated in the unfamiliar and often hostile surroundings. Unable to find customary or surrogate religious institutions and leaders compatible with their needs, many migrants were attracted to new forms of religion. In addition to traditional preachers, abundance of black nationalistic, storefront church, and cultist leaders emerged to help them stem the tide of frustration and alienation. Although these new type religious leaders often tended to give black people racial self-confidence and pride so that they could throw off or temporarily escape white oppression, they frequently were viewed by outsiders as anti-American, racially polarizing, un-Christian, and demagogic. Conditions were ripe for a dynamic preacher to emerge to whom large numbers of traditionally-
oriented and dispossessed people could relate, for especially during the post-World War I period many conventional institutions were in flux.

Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux (1884-1968) was the propitious one who, by his very religious and personal complexity, personified the spirit of the era and articulated needs and hopes of displaced ones who still expressed confidence in the American way. He became one of America's best known international radio evangelists during the thirties. Michaux was the famous "Happy Am I" preacher and widely publicized supporter of the New Deal and President Franklin D. Roosevelt. On the basis of his popular mandate, he established an autonomous religious movement—the Church of God—in Washington, D.C. During the height of his popularity, the movement consisted of seven churches and more than twenty-five branches along the East coast.

The Elder's activism in the secular sphere, however, like some aspects of his gospel made him a controversial preacher. He has been variously labeled a prophet, cultist, showman, businessman, charlatan, and politician because of his blend of social and religious interests. In spite of the rather extensive secular thrust of his ministerial activities and of his ability to articulate the social-economic plight of the dispossessed, Michaux's religious jargon sometimes caused his contemporaries to overlook or misconstrue his social consciousness.

Constance Green, in her study of race relations in Washington, almost discounted his social interests and sociological significance to emphasize what she envisioned as exotic in the movement. She concluded that
The delighted amusement his methods provoked in much of white Washington contained the seeds of a derisiveness damaging to all colored people. The elements in American society which twenty years later would form the core of white citizens' councils naturally looked approvingly upon the Elder as the epitome of the ... Negro whose militance was directed at the devil, not in seeking equality with white men. ¹

Almost two decades earlier the black journalist, Frank Rasky, had referred to Michaux as a Harlem zealot who was vying with a black woman cultist, Mother Rosa, for Father Divine's territorial sphere. ² This writer's observations over many years suggested that the character of Michaux and of his church disputed the tendency of some to identify him with Father Divine and Bishop Grace--post-World War I cultists who were presented in popular and scholarly literature as simple egotists and necromancers. He can not be viewed merely as a cultist of limited social, economic, and political vision, interests, and influence, as a religious leader more bound to defraud than to help the black community. E. Franklin Frazier, the noted sociologist, rightfully perceived that Michaux had more depth than was frequently attributed to him. Frazier sensed that he was searching for broad economic power and political influence and explained that Michaux had "been able to enhance his prestige by association with important public leaders. . . . he has much influence among some government officials who regard him as a

spokesman for many Negro church people." Frequently he was omitted from studies treating black religionists, as was the case in Elmer Clark's *Small Sects* in America, Jessie Fauset's, *Black Gods of the Metropolis*, and Joseph R. Washington, Jr.'s recent *Black Sects and Cults*. Other authors found it difficult to categorize him as a religious leader, and frequently their assessments or omissions raised more questions than they answered and left the Elder surrounded in mystery and exoticism.

In a revisionist manner, then, it is necessary to challenge former pathologically-oriented interpretations of Michaux by probing into the essential character of this black preacher and man. Several questions must be raised when considering such an individual. What was his self-image? Was it one which allowed him to hold a balanced if somewhat qualified view of himself as a mere preacher-minister, a mystic, or a prophet? Did he conceive of himself as a conventional minister who was imbued with a sense of racial, social, and religious mission? Or did he believe himself to be a talented, resourceful, and intuitive entrepreneur? Whether or not the bedrock of his dynamism and appeal as a religious leader evolved from his self-perception is also a question to be considered. Did his basic appeal lay in his gospel of the disinherited or were many of his followers attracted to him because of his charisma? What was the nature of the Church of God? In what respects was it akin to religious movements and traditional churches?

In treating these issues I will offer the first major interpretation of Michaux's church and his direction of its role in society from

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1919 to 1968. Precedence in this direction—that of re-interpreting
black religion in America as a positive force in the black community—
recently has been established by black theologian-scholars, such as
James Cone, William R. Jones, Joseph R. Washington, Jr., and Gayraud
S. Wilmore. They have assessed the variety of black religious institu-
tions in terms of their power potential and creative and liberating
forces. 4 They are a new breed since their predecessors mainly treated
traditional black churches as other-world oriented and non-traditional
ones as nationalistic and cultist religious aberrations which were
exotic and headed by charlatans. Black churches formerly often were
thought to be generally devoid of realistic social and political under-
standing: unable or unwilling to inspire their followers to seek
economic power and an equitable and just life on earth. Having been
impressed with the recent theologians' insights and directed by their
leads, I have studied the social-economic thrusts of the Church of God,
especially as they were based on the personal dynamism of Michaux, in
the manner indicated below.

Chapter I gives insight into seminal influences in Michaux's life—
his ancestry, his hometown, and the social and political thought which
prevailed during his formative years. His evolving sense of mission
and the impact of the Great Migration and World War I on the direction
of his life will be discussed.

4 James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation (New York, 1970);
William R. Jones, Is God A White Racist?: A Preamble to Black
Theology (Garden City, New York, 1973); Joseph R. Washington, Jr.,
Black Sects and Cults (Garden City, 1972); and Gayraud S. Wilmore;
Black Religion and Black Radicalism (Garden City, 1972).
In Chapter II Michaux's style and gospel, as two components of his appeal, will be assessed. The derivation of his gospel from his black experience and his originality and conventionalism in preaching style are presented. This chapter also addresses itself to the question of what made the Elder's gospel and style socially relevant.

Chapter III deals with Michaux's efforts to enhance his appeal while holding his members' attention by providing them with a profusion of church services and functions. Here his exciting radio broadcasts and Annual Baptising will be discussed.

The dynamics of Michaux's leadership will be analyzed in Chapter IV, as will the relationship between the nature of the church and the movement and Michaux and his members.

Chapter V brings together threads from Michaux's gospel of the disinherit and its application to social issues and problems. Here the Elder's major and varied social interests and activism are discussed.

In Chapter VI Michaux's relationships with Presidents Franklin Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower and what he desired them to be will be treated. The connection between his political objectives and social and religious concerns will be explained.

Chapter VII presents a profile of Michaux as businessman. His search for economic power and national influence, at least for his movement, are discussed. It is apparent that he was comfortable in the business world and that in several respects his business pursuits derived from his religio-social concerns.

These considerations should raise the question of the dialectic between Michaux and his members and associates and their re-inforcement of each other.
CHAPTER I

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux was born of Afroamerican parentage in the segregated, entrepreneurial, and physically undeveloped township of Newport News in Warwick County, Virginia, on November 7, 1884.¹ Lightfoot's earliest years coincided with those of his home city. These were shortly after Reconstruction had formally ended and just prior to the time that Newport News became a chartered city.

As a youthful and perceptive observer of the evolving town's pattern and pace of physical, social, political and economic development, he must have been impressed by its entrepreneurial atmosphere. Located at the mouth of the James River, Newport News was a likely place for lucrative shipping enterprises. But in the 1880's when Collis Huntington, the famous railroad and shipping magnate, first envisioned what this area could become, the township was little more than a large section of old farms. Huntington wanted to link Newport News' port facilities directly with San Francisco, the main base of his operations. Working toward this goal, he extended the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad from Richmond to Newport News in 1882 and made the latter city the railroad's terminus on the Atlantic. With the railroad came active coal and other port operations. C&O railroad wharves were

¹Based on information in Michaux's obituaries, Oct. 1968. Copies in author's possession.
constructed along a fifteen block stretch, the site of warehouses, factories, foreign shipping, seafood industry, fruit packing, grain ships, and lumber mills. Huntington had other designs for Newport News which he regarded as the "best location in the world, . . . because it is right at the gateway of the sea. Furthermore, there is . . . rarely ice in winter and it is never so cold . . . you can't hammer metal out of doors." Consequently, he located a shipyard there in 1886, and it was chartered as the Chesapeake Dry Dock and Construction Company to build commercial and naval vessels.

Still largely undeveloped, Newport News was bustling with activity in the late 1880's. To prevent wild real estate speculation and to ensure the orderly development of industrial and commercial enterprises, Huntington's Old Dominion Land Company bought up large tracts of land within the town. Newport News had no paved avenues, streets or sidewalks; there were only occasional brick or wooden walkways. Thoroughfares were traveled by horse-drawn carts or by foot. Light was produced by oil or by gas lamps. Most residents, attracted to the town by its vocational opportunities, lived in brick or frame row houses and Old Dominion Land Company huts near the James River on West, Washington, Huntington, Warwick, Jefferson, and Ivy Avenues, below Thirty-fifth Street, and in Dawson City, a predominantly black residential area. Dawson City was clearly defined on the east by the railroad tracks (a


4Ibid., 3.

5Ibid., 3, 110
tacitly accepted line of demarcation, racially segregating the populace in most communities after the late nineteenth century) and on the west by Jefferson Avenue, on the north by sixteenth Street, on the South by the James River.

Entertainment in the blooming town was varied. Johnson's Opera House and Barton's Theatre, both just off Washington Avenue, provided risqué shows, and houses of "ladies of easy virtue" were close by. Casino Park, the center of recreational activities for white people, lay near the Warwick Hotel and along the shore of the James River. Swimming in the then unpolluted James was always invigorating, as was bicycling along the path which encircled the Casino grounds. Twenty-two saloons were spread over the town, and there was more than a little difficulty keeping order on Twenty-third Street, "Hell's Half Acre," and in Bloodfield; in these areas of notoriously raucous fun a killing every Saturday night was a common occurrence.  

The town had an adequate supply of retail businesses. Hogs and chickens ran loose at butcher shops and most meat was just off the hoof. Chops sold at two pounds for twenty-five cents. In dry goods, grocery, and furniture stores, credit was easy for shipyard workers who averaged forty dollars per month. However, not all townsmen were employed at the shipyard or on the railroad. Some black men were itinerant fishermen who hawked fish, strung on a wire, at ten cents a bunch. Budding commercial opportunities provided townspeople with additional jobs. In the late eighties, there was one bank; it operated out of the Warwick

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6 Ibid., 115-116.
7 Ibid., 122-127.
Hotel and shortly had its black counterpart--the Sons and Daughters of Peace, Penny, Nickel and Dime Savings Bank. Some black men owned and operated a number of saloons and other small individual enterprises. During this formative era, two white men, Tom Benson and Edwin Phillips, opened a successful coal and other fuel supply business, and in 1914 L. U. Noland began his plumbing manufactory which became one of the largest and most successful in the South. 8

Apparently many townspeople were motivated by prevailing nineteenth-century economic themes. These held that profit was the reliable incentive for action, that material growth was the reliable index of progress, and that rapid progress was most desirable. The presence of these economic notions was reflected in the town's commercial and industrial vitality. Newport News developed so rapidly that within two decades it emerged as a viable entity and separated from Warwick County in 1896 to become a chartered city. 9

Although Michaux was impressed by the numerous business opportunities, which were unleashed by the economic consciousness, he must have understood that these were not fully extended to black people. As a perceptive black youth, he undoubtedly recognized the stultifying effects of American racism on his people. Newport News was influenced by several strains of late nineteenth century racial thought. In one respect, these attitudes evolved from the southern experience. Like many other southern whites (some of whom had lost slaves and the franchise during the Civil War and Reconstruction) most residents of that

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8 Alexander C. Brown, ed., Newport News' 325 Years (Newport News, 1946), 76, 133.

9 Jester, Newport News, 124.
city looked back on Reconstruction as having been excessively black, evil, corrupt, and bankrupt, mainly because of widespread black participation in it. By the 1890's, this sectional racism was reinforced by the new national imperialism. Its racial significance was expressed in adages about the white man's burden and was imprinted in the minds of people by legislation and militarism. Oriental exclusion, the southern race system, conquests in the Pacific, and racist Social Darwinism converged to give the close of the nineteenth century and the opening of the twentieth century an interesting configuration in regard to racial relations. This was a negative disposition which permitted agrarian and labor reformers to virtually ignore the plight of ethnic groups in general and of black people in particular; it also allowed Afro-Americans to be pressed out of full participation in American political and economic institutions. The suffrage was practically withdrawn from all southern blacks and lingering black governmental officials were removed from elected and appointed positions. When Newport News was chartered, two black men were still officials in the town's government. James Seals was Commonwealth's Attorney, and M.D. Wright was Commissioner of Revenue. Seals was replaced, in the year that the town was chartered, by E.W. Milstead, a white politician. 10

Spurred by the Civil War's impact on the development of public education in the South, citizens of Newport News had begun to open schools for their children before 1865. Yet, characteristic of the era, its educational system was based on the myth of white supremacy and the practice of racial segregation. Separate schools were built for black

10 Ibid., 124-125.
and white children at Twenty-second Street and Twenty-eighth Street, respectively. Schools were rapidly added as the population increased. The famous Tuskegee educator Booker T. Washington was a hero in Newport News, and in 1901 a black school was built and named in his honor.  

Such was the local physical and ideological climate when Lightfoot Michaux was born and in which he spent his formative and highly impressionable years. It was an atmosphere from which one could perceive that success and power were generally measured by material acquisitions and racial heritage.

II

Although little is known about Lightfoot's forebears, their heritage influenced his self-concept. His father (John Michaux) was racially mixed—French, Indian, and Negro. As a young man John lived near Richmond, Virginia, and with his brother (Henry) he was employed as a merchant seaman. John and Henry were cooks on a ship which sailed from Richmond to New Orleans on its southern route and from Richmond to New York on its northern voyage. On its southern route, the vessel stopped at Newport News whereupon the brothers became attracted to the area and took up residence. They were among the town's first black, post–Civil War settlers. A sister and brother-in-law (who operated a saloon) subsequently settled in the town. 

Before moving to Newport News, John had married May Blanche of King William County. To this couple fifteen children were born. Ten

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11 Brown, ed., Newport News' 325 Years, 80-99.
lived more than a few days: Philip, Lightfoot, Courtney, Lonnel (Louis), Julius Caesar, Margaret, Norris, Benny, Jenny, and Ruth. In 1973 four were still alive. All except Philip were born in Newport News, and the births were spread over nearly a quarter of a century. 13

When Lightfoot was born in 1884, his father was an itinerant fisherman. John, affectionately called "Poppa" by his children, later added produce to his assortment of fish which he peddled around the streets of the town. During the early eighties, the family probably resided on Warwick Avenue across from the Acre (a huge vacant field) and the railroad tracks, an area considered rather slum-like. This residence was near a saloon which John, a man of business ambition, is believed by some elderly citizens to have later purchased and operated. 14

Probably because of his ambition and light skin color, John's family mingled with the "better class" of black people and worshipped with them at the First Baptist Church on Jefferson Avenue. The Michauxs were well-spoken of by people like the Fields and Bassetts, black politicians and educators in the neighboring city of Hampton. The now elderly woman who was Lightfoot's first business secretary remembered a dialogue between her mother and a friend which was favorable to the Michaux family. The friend (a Mrs. Larkins who was proprietor and operator of a boarding house in Newport News) mentioned a job opening in the Michaux business. The mother responded by asking, "Mrs. Larkins, what kind of people are they? I don't let my gal fool around with everybody." Mrs. Larkins described the father and son:

\[13\text{Ibid.}\]
\[14\text{From discussions with members of the Church of God.}\]
"He is a fine boy; I know him . . . , and his daddy belongs to my church. It will be all right for X to work there. . . ."

After the birth of Benny, May Blanche had a nervous breakdown and was sent off to Petersburg (the location of Virginia's black state mental institution) to recover. Upon her return, marital problems either developed or intensified, consequently she and her husband came to occupy separate apartments in the same building. John became increasingly belligerent toward May Blanche. Although she never fully recovered from the mental illness, she survived her husband who died in 1921.

III

Primarily because of his ethnic heritage, the possible course of Lightfoot's life was only vaguely predictable. Yet, his doting mother early reasoned that this (her second) child was destined for a unique mission because he was born with a veil covering his face. The origin of her anticipation was an old wives' tale which augured an exceptional future for infants with that sloughable facial covering. Mrs. Michaux successfully communicated her prognosis to young Lightfoot, and she explained his uniqueness to his brothers and sisters who learned to defer to him. This was a child who was imbued with a sense of mission and conditioned to be introspective and self-directing. Herein

\[15\] From a taped interview with an early Michaux employee (Hampton, Virginia, Jan., 1972). Tapes in author's possession.

\[16\] Ibid., and from a discussion with Michaux's sister, Mrs. McRae.

\[17\] Ibid.
lies the clue to Michaux's individuality, his uniqueness of being which was conveyed to him exclusively and sealed into his soul. This intensely private world dictated his perceptions and responses and caused him to react to his physical and cultural environment in a manner different from his siblings and other peers. He was so influenced by his mother's predictions that Lightfoot considered himself superior, and later in life he claimed that as a child he was visited frequently by little angels with whom he frolicked while playing alone in his crib and before the family fireplace. He said these spectral playmates vanished when others entered into his presence. Although some who heard his claim from the pulpit considered it incredible, his mother probably would never have questioned the veracity of his story. Instead she reasoned that his manner was always quite different from that of her other children, for he early showed signs of gentleness, precocity, pensiveness, and individuality. 18

Michaux, known to family and close associates during his childhood as "Light," was light-complexioned with crinkly hair and strong Indian features. 19 Although it should not be overrated, his light hue probably re-enforced those positive self-images communicated to him by his mother. Pride in light skin was traditionally common among Afro-Americans who defined it as an approximation to whiteness. Furthermore, white people often claimed more affinity—if not kinship—toward light-complexioned Afro-Americans; as a result, light-skinned families and individuals were frequently afforded opportunities prohibited to their

18 From discussions with Michaux's sister, Mrs. McRae.
19 Ibid., and based on author's observations.
darker brothers. Consequently, many fair-skinned AfroAmericans reasoned that they could exploit their skin talents and get ahead. This attitude sometimes raised the ire of darker people who themselves either envied or admired light skin. Undoubtedly, Michaux considered his light skin to be a positive factor. He implied this attitude when he boasted of having had Jewish playmates during his childhood in semi-commercial areas of Newport News. This feeling expressed itself in other situations and was re-enforced by positive responses toward Michaux in his adult years.

Michaux had a considerable religious devoutness, hence, on Sunday mornings he attended the Baptist Sunday School and on Sunday nights was a communicant at Presbyterian services. He never drank or smoked. But of course he experienced amorous infatuations during childhood, and while attending John Marshall Elementary School, he vied with other schoolboys for the affections of girls who caught his fancy. He completed course offerings at John Marshall, and this apparently ended his formal education.

After completing grade school, Lightfoot became a full-time employee in his father’s seafood business. He peddled oysters, clams, crabs, and other seafood to “well-to-do white people in the north end

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21 From discussions with an elderly member of the Church of God.
22 He was, for example, frequently invited to preach to all-white audiences. Pictorial Review, 40-48.
24 From discussions with an elderly member of the Church of God.
Inspired by his father and other local businessmen, he worked hard to become an independent merchant and eventually opened his own seafood enterprise. As an energetic businessman, he had a sideline—a dancing school, where he met the light-skinned woman whom he later married. His marriage further suggested that he was partial to light-skinned people.

Lightfoot married Mary Eliza Pauline, who became a major force in his life around 1906. She was physically attractive, controversial, volatile, and (after her marriage to him) very religious. Orphaned at an early age, Mary was reared by a foster mother on Virginia's Eastern Shore. When she married Michaux, she had no known relatives but occasionally boasted that her father was a white man. She had been married previously and had given birth to a baby to whom she sometimes wistfully referred in Church of God services, saying, "My baby's feet looked just like its daddy's. It looked just like he spat it out."28

After the baby's death and a divorce from her first husband, she spent a hard, aimless, and miserable life—sometimes homeless and hungry, living in such hovels as the one above Gresham's Bar on Jefferson Avenue, until she met Michaux. The extent of her formal education cannot be determined, but she was nominally literate and reportedly engaged a tutor in reading and writing after 1928.29

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27 Ibid.
28 Washington Post (D.C.), Oct. 13, 1956 and from discussions with elderly members of the Church of God.
29 From discussions with members of the Church of God.
Mary demonstrated qualities of thrift and diligence, and she worked closely with her husband in his seafood business. Together they accumulated a small amount of capital and around 1911 built a large three-story house on Ivy Avenue at Pinkey's Beach. In that home, Mrs. Michaux helped rear her young sisters-in-law, Jenny and Ruth, after the senior Mrs. Michaux's mental and physical health worsened. No children were born to her and Lightfoot. But from 1953, they kept an Eskimo girl whom the Elder had brought to the states after a trip to Alaska. When she became a teenage burden to the aging couple, they sent her back to her parents.30

Although Mary was a hard-working and an attractive woman— statuesque and regal in bearing, Lightfoot's family resented his having married a "nobody" several years his senior. Furthermore, the family considered her mean and "bossy," and her father-in-law spoke to her grudgingly.31 Some tensions between her and the in-laws may have resulted from her high-spiritedness and Lightfoot's contrasting mild manner.

The personalities of Lightfoot and his wife differed sharply. This is suggested by an incident that occurred in 1919, after Lightfoot had become a minister in Newport News. Mrs. Michaux exchanged some heated words with one of her husband's female employees. Years later the latter recalled the incident:

30From discussions with Michaux's sister, Mrs. McRae., and Washington Star (D.C.), Sept. 21, 1953. (Some members resented their keeping this non-black child; others showered affection upon her.)

She and I was just talking about each other. Then I wasn't saved, she 'nuf. And . . . I said to her . . .

Mrs. Michaux, you know one thing? People hear you up there in the pulpit almost preaching would think you was a heavenly gift, handed down from heaven. I said you ain't nothing but a unknown devil. Aww she was combing her hair, and she had beautiful hair.

Oh she jumped up to run out; he said, "No, No, No! Come back here!" 'Did you hear what Miss X said to me?' He said, 'You and Miss X talking; when ya'll get through talking, I'll talk . . .' And you know what his talk was? He reached right up on the desk and got the Bible, and he read the scriptures, and he got down and he prayed. He asked her to pray. She said a little something short. He didn't ask me because he knew I wasn't saved then. He prayed. He made us shake hands. He said I don't want to ever hear of you all having a misunderstanding no more, and, Miss X, you come back to work tomorrow morning. The scriptures that he read . . . ooh they were so sweet! That's the way he settled it.

She got mad because he didn't say something. . . . He never would fuss. He wouldn't fuss with his own brothers.32

Whatever her virtues or shortcomings, it was generally agreed that Mrs. Michaux was adored by her husband, and she became a major influence in the development of his religious movement's procedures and discipline as well as in his private life.

32 Ibid.
IV

World War I made a profound impact on Lightfoot's early adult life and strongly influenced the remainder of his years. He had become a premature businessman a number of years before the war began; however, it was during that conflict that he began to acquire very substantial profits because he obtained government contracts to provide provisions for supply ships going to Europe. At that time, Michaux operated businesses in Newport News, Norfolk, and Petersburg. His secretary frequently made out invoices for over $1,600, denoting Michaux's expected reimbursement from the government. Wartime profits enabled Michaux to buy property in several cities.33

Because he considered business his forte, he labored to excel in that vocation. Hoping to make greater profits, in 1917 Michaux extended his business to Hopewell, Virginia, where as a result of the opening of the Dupont guncotton plant in 1915, a phenomenal population increase of over 40,000 had occurred. The company had a large work force and a monthly payroll of over one million dollars.34 In Hopewell, Michaux had a big business with the plant's large number of workers, and he supplied nearby Camp Lee with fish.35

In business, Michaux was an opportunist. He once said, "I put over every scheme I could. I had green peas in winter because I knew how to make dried peas look green." Dried peas sold for ten cents per

33 Ibid.
pound while green peas were twenty cents per pound. Business was so bullish for Michaux during the war that he was using storage cabinets at the Newport News boat harbor with a two million pound capacity. Nor were his business activities limited to foodstuffs. In Hopewell he worked gangs of men on such jobs as well-drilling and building construction.

For several months, Lightfoot commuted to Newport News on weekends to bank his money and to consult with Mr. Washington, an older man who was helping Mrs. Michaux operate the business there. After Mrs. Michaux followed him to Hopewell in late 1917, Lightfoot closed his independent base of operations in Newport News by moving equipment and supplies into his father's place of business. Thereafter he concentrated his activities in the Hopewell area.

Michaux's wife would not permit him to indulge in business ventures to the total neglect of his spiritual needs. Considering the town's social atmosphere corrupting, he later called Hopewell "a wild and wooly place," where nobody cared a hallelujah for Sunday worship. Previously accustomed to attending church regularly, the Michauxs sought a place of worship. They heard that the YMCA had a chapel which could be used for religious services. The empty chapel (one of three rooms in a long frame building) adjoined a crowded center room which was a beer parlor. Next to the beer parlor was the packed gambling hall. Hence, Lightfoot "decided to build a church . . .

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36 Minutes of the Church of God's Elders and Deacons Quarterly Meetings, July 4, 1957. Xeroxed copies in the author's possession. Hereafter referred to as Minutes.


far from the sound of rolling dice," on land donated to him for that purpose by the Dupont company. 39

The church, a small frame structure with about fourteen windows, was inter-racial, non-denominational, evangelistic, and aptly named "Everybody's Mission." It was an instant success; Hopewellians crowded into the services. Mrs. Michaux and visiting elders taught the religious lessons. One of these elders was Brother Diaz, a Filipino evangelist. Thinking Lightfoot should preach, he approached him: "'Brother Michaux, the Lord had you to build the church, and you try to get everybody else to preach. But he wants you to do the job.'" 40

However, Lightfoot was not fully occupied with the church until he was intuitively stirred to open the Bible to St. John 4:35-36, which reads: "Say not ye, there are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together." These verses clearly and forcefully suggested, Michaux thought, that he was to style himself in the fashion of St. Peter, to turn from the materialistic sea and cast down his nets among men to fish for souls. 41 Thus, he began to preach in 1918 and

39 Ibid., and from a discussion with Michaux's brother, Louis, June 1972.


was affiliated with the Church of Christ, Holiness, U.S.A. Convention—a black southern based group of churches. 42

Shortly thereafter the religious and business booms collapsed. At the end of World War I, Hopewell became a ghost town. The DuPont plant had begun closing down in November 1918 and had left twenty thousand men unemployed. In three months the town's population decreased to less than four thousand. By 1919 there were very few people for Michaux to preach to and almost no one for him to sell to in Hopewell. 43 Michaux wanted to preach, and he wanted to be in position to have his sermons heard by large numbers of people. Therefore, he decided to return to Newport News to establish a more secure base for his ministry as well as for his business.

Newport News had grown rapidly during the war. With industrial expansion, a population approaching one hundred thousand, and a building boom, real estate values had doubled and relative prosperity abounded. The city had attracted a sizeable number of permanent residents because some steady post-war employment was available in the shipyard and on the C&O railroad. It was amidst this prosperity that Michaux, then thirty-five, began organizing a church, (for the Church of Christ Holiness Convention) which subsequently became the root of his own autonomous religious movement. This was a decisive moment for the obscure young man who felt spiritually obliged to dissolve his business and to forge a church.

42 From discussions with members of St. Timothy's Church and with members of Michaux's church.

43 Jester, Newport News, 145-146.
Michaux meditated over the task for several months. During that period he exacted the "promise from God" that if he evangelized for the Church of Christ (Holiness) in his native city, he would receive at least one hundred and fifty converts immediately. He launched a tent meeting and conducted what came to be known to many of his followers as typical Michaux revivalism—emotional preaching, exciting and instructive teaching, interspersed with spirited songfest and personal testimony of those who had recently been led to Christ through Michaux's doctrine.

The revival services were held on the corner of Jefferson Avenue and Nineteenth Street from September to December. In frigid weather, the Elder offered not only a fiery service but attempted to heat the tent with a pot-bellied stove. He gathered, from the Newport News-Hampton area, his congregation of some 150 during the three months and after collecting enough funds, he rented a house one block away on Nineteenth and Ivy Avenue, and moved his congregation there to worship at the end of the year. It was here that the congregation remained for almost two years.

V

Much as conditions resulting from World War I altered the course of Michaux's life, transforming him from businessman to minister, so did the historic Great Negro Migration direct the path of his religious career. It lured him from the chore of pastoring in the Hopewell and Newport News areas and hurled him into the responsibilities of establishing a religious movement. Hence, it is necessary to analyze the dramatic effects of the migration upon this mission-oriented individual.
The Great Migration (Afroamerica's paramount response to World War I and its ensuing crises) had historic roots, traceable to flights of fugitive slaves and black freedmen who escaped northward from slavery. Moreover, it was the swell of fifty years of post-emancipation migration. The Great Migration was sequential, its first phase existing from 1915 to 1920. During those years, hundreds of thousands of black people left the South to resettle in northern urban centers. Most of them initially fled from disasters of a widespread agricultural depression which was stimulated by floods and ravages of the boll weevil. Mainly because this agricultural depression heightened (in 1915) at a time of acute labor shortages in northern war industries, many black migrants relocated in industrial centers to quickly gain employment. Although it was the prospect primarily of economic opportunity which lured many blacks to the North, they fled from southern racial discrimination and violence as well. All migrants did not move North; some sought to better their conditions by merely moving from rural to southern urban areas or from the deep to the upper South.


47 Johnson, "Migration a Flight from Persecution?" 273-274.
Because the traditional black church was customarily their most dependable and comforting institution, wherever Afro-Americans migrated, they sought that familiar structure to lessen feelings of alienation in new urban environments. These traditional black churches, which had evolved out of black folk needs, abounded throughout the South. 48 Where they were absent, the prototypic idea existed upon which migrants drew to form conventional places of worship. Illustrative of this was Michaux's Hopewell Church—a traditional one—modeled after and formed under the auspices of the Church of Christ, a black southern based, association of holiness churches. Theirs was a small and intimate church, conducive to praying, shouting, singing, as well as to Christian charity and communal entertainment.

These southern black folk churches rarely existed in the North. Therefore, migrants mainly reached out for that customary source of comfort when they were confronted with unemployment, class and racial discrimination and violence. In the North, the black church was not "all things" to its communicants. Migrants observed that northern black churches lacked customary paternal and Christian charity and consisted of class-conscious members and relatively unemotional services as well. In their distress, migrants created new types of religious institutions to meet their unique needs in northern cities. 49

Among the earliest of these creations were the nationalistic temples, such as the Black Jewish Church of God and the Moorish Science Temple of America. These appropriately addressed themselves to the issue of black identification during that period of alienation. In the

49 Frazier, Negro Church, 52-67.
post-war period, the most widely appealing nationalist movement was Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association; it espoused racial pride, promoted Pan-Africanism, and encouraged communal cooperation among black people. Also during that period, black religious cults were evolving. They remained submerged while Garvey was on the scene and matured with the Great Depression. Two major cultists were Father Divine and Bishop Charles Immanuel Grace. Although they lacked Garvey's widespread mass appeal, these cultists were popular among black migrants because they identified with a black god, held emotionally charged services, urged unity and charity among their members, and gave psychological uplift in the face of urban alienation and oppression. Nationalistic and cultist movements were often considered a bane, as non-consensus, anti-American, racially polarizing, un-Christian, and demagogic. Therefore, more conformist migrants joined traditionally-oriented storefront churches.

Storefront churches were clearly the most abundant of the new religious creations of the migrants. This organizational form appealed


to Michaux during his formative years. Storefront churches were located in the poorer and more deteriorated areas of black urban communities. As the nomenclature suggests, they were often situated in abandoned stores or houses and were headed by semi-literate, jack-leg preachers (those with no formal theological training or adequate knowledge of the Bible) who often followed migrants from the South to northern cities.

The storefront church was "an attempt on the part of migrants . . . to re-establish a type of church in the urban environment to which they were accustomed" in rural areas of the South. It afforded migrants warm and intimate association with fellow worshippers and preachers as well as freedom of expression and free flow of the spirit during services. Sermons in these churches usually emphasized heaven and lifted the minds of worshippers from their daily plights. The creation of storefront churches was juxtaposed with the arrival of the second wave of migrants, from 1921 to 1924, and with ensuing pressures of burgeoning ghettoes, spreading post-war unemployment, and continued racial friction and rioting.

This second phase of migration had a significant impact on the organization of the Church of God, resulting in Michaux's becoming a nationally known minister. From 1922 on he began to extend his ministry into other localities, as for example, the adjacent city of Hampton where he tapped the population for a congregation. After a series

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53 Frazier, Negro Church, 53-54.
55 Kennedy, Negro Peasant, 212-221 for race relations in the North.
of tent meetings there, he founded a church. Yet, the direction in which he originally intended to extend his ministry beyond Hampton and Newport News is unknown. However, it seems clear that the Great Migration steered the spread northward since Michaux followed his parishioners, in a manner typical of many southern black preachers, to organize houses of worship for them. He was free to chart his own course because his church became autonomous in 1921 when he split from the Church of Christ convention over his disagreement with its new policy of "speaking in unknown tongues." Young, energetic, and mission-oriented, he apparently envisioned building a convention of his own since the majority of his members remained with him. Heeding his intuitive urgings, the Elder established churches primarily in storefronts along the East Coast. The task was arduous and lengthy.

It sometimes took Michaux years to fully establish a new church. Organization of one at Edenborn, Pennsylvania (a small mining community not far from Uniontown), illustrates this point. The first group of Church of God members left Newport News in 1924 to search for employment in Pennsylvania coal mines. Among the seven or eight families were several deacons and their wives and children. Individual families settled close to the various mines in which the men worked in the vicinity of Edenborn. Sometimes the several families were separated by a few miles, yet they gathered to hold prayer meetings in their homes and to conduct street meetings on Sundays. The Elder and Mrs. Michaux visited the migrant members in Pennsylvania and conducted services in

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57 From discussions with members of the Church of God.
the Edenborn Community Hall. In 1926 the deacons and their families moved twenty-five miles away from the nearest Michaux members to work in another Pennsylvania mining area. There they held religious services in their homes under the name of the Church of God and attracted a following. The expanding body rented a building for religious worship. This pattern continued until 1930 when Michaux formally established a Church of God in Edenborn, Pennsylvania, an area central to his entire mining membership.58

A second group of members left Newport News in 1924 to seek employment in Baltimore. After a number of visits there, Michaux established a Church of God in the mid-twenties at 314 North Gilmore Street, in the heart of the black ghetto.59 The Washington, D.C. church was founded a few years later in 1928 after intuition inspired the Elder to "Go . . . to the Nation's Capital."60

In Washington Michaux held a series of well attended tent meetings on Sherman Avenue. He was highly attractive to black migrants, many of whom felt alienated in the capital, which was a den of light-skinned, Negro, upper-class snobs and white racists during the late twenties. Based on his popularity, Michaux looked for a permanent church site and subsequently located one on Georgia Avenue.61 To develop the Georgia Avenue site, Michaux had a unique building plan which reflected the

58 Fiftieth Anniversary Brochure.
59 Ibid.
spirit of the "New Negro" of the twenties. Calling on his congregation for the building funds and showing concern over black unemployment (spreading during the depression), the Elder said he wanted "a church built by Negro masons, Negro carpenters and Negro plasterers, preferably members of his own church." According to one reporter, "A campaign was started for members who were artisans in the various trades. Hundreds joined. Twice weekly for twelve weeks the members went without a meal and devoted the money they would have spent on food to the building fund. The church was built in record time, every brick and every dab of plaster put down by a Negro." Michaux was said to have been very proud of this building which was across the street from Clark Griffith's American League baseball park and in the heart of the city's black business section. The description of the structure by a contemporary newsman suggested that the storefront-like church building emerged out of the current black religious creativity:

It looks like a garage. A nice-looking one with a new brownstone front, but still a garage. Closer inspection reveals a dazzling array of bright lights and five large windows. On each side of the front doorway, which is about 10 feet high and 5 feet wide, two oil lamps ... 8 inches high are lighted.

Across the top of the doorway is a large sign in red lights that reads: 'Keep your lamps Trimmed and Burning.' Just above the sign is one of the windows, and above that is a large cross lighted around the edges by yellow lamps. Across the horizontal

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62 Amsterdam News (New York), Sept. 29, 1934.
section of the cross, in red lights, are the letters WJSV.\textsuperscript{63}

Above the cross is a sign about 15 feet long and a foot wide, with the words, 'Church of God' in green lights. The remaining four windows, about 6 feet long and 7 feet wide, are located on each side of the doorway, a pair of windows on each side, one just above the other.

Inside the church look\textsuperscript{63} brand new. The walls \textsuperscript{are} of milk-white plaster. The interior furnishings consist \ldots of a huge pipe organ, radiators, two electric fans, hanging lamps, and about 600 folding chairs.\textsuperscript{64}

The development of Michaux's religious movement was not owed to his personality alone but to the turning wheels of history. Historical forces projected him progressively upward with the unfolding of local, national, and international events. The Great Migration was especially significant to his ascendancy as it turned him into a spiritual carpet-bagger.

Michaux moved several times and established new church branches and programs. The theological genesis of these was traditional, but the Elder designed and improvised them as social exigencies of the time dictated and within the cauldron of his own personal creativity and flair. His church in Washington was a mere physical manifestation of Michaux's synthesis of his black, traditional, southern background and of his participation in the post-World War I black religious creativity.

\textsuperscript{63} Call letters of the radio station over which Michaux was broadcasting when this church was built. See page 81 below for further explanation of WJSV.

\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Washington Post} (D.C.), Oct. 28, 1934.
Likewise, the Elder's preaching style and theology evolved out of his interpretations of life in the United States from a black perspective.
CHAPTER II

THE MICHAUX APPEAL: HIS STYLE AND GOSPEL

During the years immediately following his arrival in Washington in 1928, Elder Michaux’s behavior as a preacher was not basically different from what it had been in Newport News. He carried with him a unique blend of convention and creativity in preaching style and gospel, and he continued to present himself as a charismatic “man of the cloth,” capable of ministering to his flock because he had been “called” to preach.

This mode of launching his ministry was customary among blacks. Instead of preparing for the ministry in theological seminaries, blacks who wanted to preach waited to be “called.” The “call” was a religious experience which revealed to one that God had selected him to preach. Usually a man’s knowledge of the Bible and his ability to communicate that knowledge qualified him to answer the “call.” Consequently, black preachers were generally self-trained. They often observed veteran ministers to acquire skills and knowledge, and they simultaneously engaged in self-directed Bible study. A denomination could commission or ordain the preacher after his “calling” had made itself manifest through his performance in the pulpit. One reason that many

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2 Ibid., 29.
black ministers entered the Baptist Church in the nineteenth century was that its local autonomy rendered it readier than Methodist and other more episcopal structured denominations to extend privileges of ordination to preachers without formal training.\(^3\)

After the Civil War black denominations began the massive task of establishing church supported theological seminaries to train their respective ministers. However, by this time the "call" to preach was so institutionalized that numerous preachers applied for admission to seminaries only after they had been "called." For many others the "call" precluded any formal training.

When Michaux was "called" into the ministry around 1918, he made known, to his family, his intentions to preach. His father (a man of some middle-class standing and association) assumed that Lightfoot would attend a seminary to prepare for his ministry.\(^4\) Whereupon he urged his son to apply to the black Virginia Baptist supported Lynchburg Seminary and College, promising to pay for the training.\(^5\) Mrs. Mary Michaux dissuaded her husband from attending the Seminary. She declared that God would teach him what he needed to know.\(^6\) While Mrs. Michaux probably was not opposed to formal theological training per se,


\(^4\) John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, Third ed. (Garden City, New York, 1963), 246. Middle-class blacks most frequently received formal theological training.

\(^5\) Based on a taped interview of an elderly member of the Church of God, Jan. 1972, and on information from the retired Reverend Icom G. Gladden, Third Baptist Church, Hampton, Va.

\(^6\) From a taped interview with a member of the Church of God, Jan. 1972.
she disdained Baptist schooling because of her belief that it was secular and morally corrupting. This attitude resulted from her observations in Baptist churches which she had attended. Mrs. Michaux was well acquainted with doctrines of the Church of Christ (Holiness) Convention and had come to prefer its teachings and practices to those of Baptists. In lieu of attending the Lynchburg school, Michaux acted on his wife’s advice and began to preach on the burden of his “call.”

Details of Michaux’s preparation, licensing, and ordination are unknown. However, he did acquire a spiritual adviser and mentor in the person of Elder W.C. Handy who was also a Church of Christ preacher. Handy advised the fledgling Elder Michaux on scriptural interpretations, ministerial duties and practices. Because Michaux was a practicing minister within the Convention, he is likely to have been initially ordained and licensed by that organization. After he left that Convention in 1921, he was re-ordained and licensed that same year into his own pastorate by Handy.

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7 Harry A. Ploski and Roscoe C. Brown, Jr., eds., The Negro Almanac (New York, 1967), 800, and from discussions with members of the Church of God.

8 Handy, a graduate of St. Paul’s Episcopal School in Lynchburg, Va., and of Morgan College, Md., later became pastor of St. Paul’s Colored Methodist Episcopal Church and subsequently director of a Colored Union of Gospel Missions—both in Norfolk, Virginia. Information about the Michaux-Handy relationship is based on an interview with Handy’s nephew (Norfolk, Virginia) and with members of the Church of God, and Ethel L. Williams, comp., Biographical Directory of Negro Ministers (New York, 1965), 157.

Michaux was well-prepared to preach insofar as Biblical knowledge and oratorical skills were concerned. He was especially admired from 1919 on for his skillful use of the Bible. One of his first members in Newport News said she was not "used to people preaching and calling scriptures" as Michaux did. Upon hearing him the first time, she was sufficiently impressed to join the Church of God.\textsuperscript{10} About fifteen years later an observant reporter wrote, "Does the Elder know his Bible? Rather literally backwards and forwards. Sometimes he quotes passages ten to twelve times in a half-hour period, giving the chapter and exact verse number in most instances."\textsuperscript{11} As his scriptural knowledge increased, Michaux quoted from the Bible more frequently; that is, he would have a passage read to substantiate statements in his sermons. The Elder said he adopted that method so that whatever he said could be checked against the scriptures.\textsuperscript{12}

Although in some ways his preaching was stereotypical of black ministers, it also reflected individuality, imagination, and spontaneity.\textsuperscript{13} His style, which was stirring but not vehement, had widespread appeal. He expected and received responses to his sermons. Hence, as Michaux preached, his wife and other members shouted "Yeah!" "Amen!" "That's right, Elder!" "Preach!" "Yeah, praise the Lord." He sometimes evoked response with questions directed to his audiences, such as

\textsuperscript{10} From an interview with an elderly member of the Church of God, Feb. 3, 1972; notes in the author's possession.


\textsuperscript{12} Minutes, Jan. 1957.

"Do you hear and understand that?" The Elder sprinkled "Amens!" throughout his own sermons, and occasionally he felt the Spirit while preaching. He once said, "You can always tell when the Holy Ghost and Power come down. I got burnt this morning myself."

In black sermons repetition is utilized often for emphasis, memory, and effect. Michaux's sermons were given greater emphasis by a Lay Reader, a novelty in the pulpit at that time, who read directly from the Bible while Michaux repeated and interpreted the passages. The following example was typical of interaction between Michaux and his reader.

Read! 'AND THE EARTH DID QUAKE, AND THE ROCKS RENT.'

There was an earthquake and the rocks burst apart.

'AND THE GRAVES WERE OPENED; AND MANY BODIES OF THE SAINTS . . .' (ELDER INTERRUPTS:) Who was that?


How about the Christians? Reader: 'AND MANY BODIES OF THE SAINTS.' What did they do?

Reader: 'AND MANY BODIES OF THE SAINTS WHICH SLEPT AROSE.'

No matter what I ask, it won't change God's words.

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15 From "Second Front in Harlem; Elder Michaux and His Choir," Time, XL (Dec. 1942), 74-76.


18 Sermon, "Death and Resurrection of the Saints."
Sometimes Michaux explained his reasons for reiteration. "I'm repeating it because I don't want you to forget it and I'll have it read again, listen!" 19

Aware that black Christians tend to enjoy mannerisms in preaching if they are not overworked, Michaux was judiciously animate. 20 He did not prance or strut about, hammer on the lectern, or flail his arms, but he sometimes dramatized actions of his "exotic" subjects, such as drunkards. The Elder was widely known for preaching with his eyes closed while "his face took on a rapt expression as if he were . . . getting the Holy Word direct from his Lord." 21 He spoke with much inflection, making his voice subdued and clear, loud and raspy. He moved from an ordinary speaking rhythm to a sing-song cadence, holding certain words longer for emphasis, such as sal-va-shun (salvation), or the Saints "shall rise (rise) first (first)." 22

When he entered the pulpit, the Elder always knelt to pray for divine direction in his sermons for which he had no prepared scripts. 23 In his introduction, Michaux usually quickly moved to establish rapport with his audience. 24 The following excerpt illustrates how he intro-


20 See Mitchell, Black Preaching, 163, for information on mannerisms of preachers.


22 Savoy Record.

23 Author's observations and from discussions with Michaux’s sister, Mrs. Jenny McRae, who was once his secretary.

24 Mitchell, Black Preaching, 179. These are basic components of introductions to sermons.
duced himself, as God's messenger to the world, and his text:

Sin is trespassing the right of your fellowman. God ordained that we live together in love and be happy in this beautiful created world. But we became alienated from God and having become alienated from the commonwealth of Heaven, today we . . . know [not] which way to turn to find peace.

But I present to you . . . that which you need to know and the way you should go . . .

God has a plan whereby man may not understand. But to those whom He has revealed it to as He has to me, I am endeavoring to cause everybody I meet to see the plan of salvation. Salvation from death. . . .

Throughout the body of his sermons, Michaux referred to ideas and experiences familiar to his followers so as to clarify and illustrate his main points adequately. In a fundamentalist-oriented sermon on "Why the Revised Standard Version of the Bible Cannot Be Accepted by A Christian," Michaux said he trembled over the deletion of the word "begotten" from St. John 3:16. He considered that it erroneously made Jesus God's only son. Michaux explained that God had many sons—created sons (Adam and angels), a begotten son (Jesus), and adopted sons (Saints). He explained:

An adopted son is made equal with a son which is born into a family, that is if he is legally adopted. And though I was not a

25 Savoy Record.

26 Mitchell, Black Preaching, 98. Moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar is a typical component of black sermons.
created son like Adam, though I was not a begotten son like Jesus, I am an adopted son and I'm made equal with Christ and the angels. 27

In a sermon on the millennium, Michaux said the world will be judged from records kept in Heaven on men's daily lives on earth. He related this to the audience's labor experience.

Records are kept right here on the earth. If you work for a company of any size, they have your record. They know every day that you work and every hour that you put in; they know the quality of the work done by you—it's on record. If man is that intelligent to want to judge his workers to find out if they are good or bad workers, what about God? 28

Like many black preachers, Michaux used aphorisms in his sermons. 29 Aphorisms were so heavily sprinkled throughout the Elder's messages that one member was inspired to compile a book of them. 30 In the sermon on the death and resurrection of Saints, for example, Michaux said, "God is a Business God—He keeps records"; "God is the Father of People"; "You'll be a devil if you disobey Christ."

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28 Sermon, "The Death and Resurrection of Saints."

29 Mitchell, Henry H., Black Preaching, 156-168, for content of black sermons.

30 Lark, Sparks from the Anvil.
Michaux's followers enjoyed his sermons not only because he was an entertaining preacher but more importantly because they could relate to his message. He had shared in the black experience and could articulate an acceptable interpretation of the misery of blacks and other disinherited people. One of his first members probably spoke for hundreds of others when expressing the way in which she related to the Elder's sermons. "It seemed," she said, "that [he] knew my whole life; [he] pictured it out so that [he] made me interested in hearing [him]."

Michaux had wide appeal among the socially disinherited because he preached about their earthly plight, their potential millennial reward, and their oppressors' destruction. Moreover, as one who was optimistic about his own social ascendancy, the Elder communicated a message of hope to his listeners.

Michaux's theology was both orthodox and reformist. He preached of the need for Christians to return to the ancient faith of Jesus Christ, and he concomitantly expressed his vision of how that could result in a better earth and ultimately in a blissful life in heaven. His teachings, partially apocalyptic, were narrated as follows: A reign of one thousand years in heaven is to be inherited by Saints, people who have

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31 From an interview with an elderly member of the Church of God, Jan. 1972.

32 Michaux's gospel undoubtedly progressed through successive stages of development from 1918 when he began to preach in Hopewell until it was crystalized by 1933 when he began publishing his sermons in Happy News. Interviews and discussions with members indicate that the message always contained the basic ideas and general outline which I have presented here, as I comprehend them, from written sources after 1933 and from interviews with members who joined the church in Hopewell and in Newport News before 1924. His gospel was adaptable to continuously shifting social conflicts and crises.
lived in perfection on earth. The Saint is one whose life completely conforms to the teachings of Christ. At the end of the millennium, the kingdom of God will descend to earth, and the Saints will judge the world. Satan and all of his followers will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone and suffer forever. The Saints, rich and poor, prince and pauper, will reign in heaven in immortality, free from sickness, death, and tribulations. The eschatological aspect of his gospel was similar to that which sects and other minority denominations universally brought to the downtrodden.

Michaux, reflecting his fundamentalist background, believed that the world had grown more wicked since the days of Christ and would become increasingly wicked until the millennium. He thought certain signs indicated that the millennium was near, and he preached, "The signs of the end are here." He saw signs in liberal divorce laws, racial confrontations and discrimination, Biblical translations denying the virgin birth, international wars, rampant sexual promiscuity and perversion, the collapse of family unity, failure of the traditional church to adhere to Christian principles, and banning of mandatory prayer in public schools. According to Michaux, the world was headed for the infamy of Sodom and Gomorrah. He thought the contemporary world was clearly degenerate and needed to undergo radical change to escape destruction.

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33 Minutes, Jan. 1956.
34 Savoy Record.
35 Neibuhr, Social Sources of Denominationalism, Chapters 2, 3, 9.
Yet, this wicked earth was temporary. He viewed it as a stage (and a highway) upon which converted men should rehearse and advance until they reached and maintained a state of Christ-like perfection. Therefore, he referred to all of his followers as pilgrims, implying that they were weary, homeless travelers, searching for utopian rest. "Pilgrims by faith," he said, "see that glory is waiting ahead." The "pilgrims" knowing that path which led away from destruction were obligated to practice exemplary Christian lives so as to preach the gospel of Christ through their daily actions. They were also to lead relatively ascetic lives so as to maintain a state of readiness for rapture and ascension which would occur unexpectedly. The tone of Michaux's teachings on ascetic living is aptly illustrated in two quotations. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate. . . . The gate is so narrow that only that which is good can be brought through. Excess baggage of evil--distracting things--must be left." "The one and only way is through Christ."38

There existed a practicality in these severe teachings which might have aided his followers in improving their daily relations. Michaux's definition of sin had practical application; he said sin "is trespassing the right of your fellow-man."39 Therefore, his members were urged to avoid what is Biblically described as manifestations of the flesh--backbiting, covetousness, stealing, adultery, drunkenness--since these might cause friction with their neighbors. Into this same category,

37 Savoy Record.
39 Savoy Record.
the Elder placed gambling and card playing. Tobacco and alcoholic beverages were taboo because they were considered unclean and defiling to the body. 40 Dancing was banned, not as being sinful, per se, but because it could lead to fornication since it was thought to be sexually arousing. Not only did Michaux denounce sexual and other sins but he also preached that men and women should not tempt each other through their dress; they should dress in a manner becoming Saints. That is to say women could wear wigs and could straighten their own hair but not bob it. Nor were they to wear dresses which were too short or low-cut, slacks, or bathing suits except with skirts over them. 41

To maintain spiritual and group unity, members were cautioned against unnecessary association with sinners. Michaux warned, "You cannot keep fellowship with sinners and not be overcome by sin." 42

Additionally Michaux called for a transformation of human nature. He believed that adherence to the teachings of Jesus and to a stringent code of ethics and morality was beyond the ability of men in their natural state of depravity. Only by a spiritual rebirth (infusion of the Holy Spirit) could men follow a "strait" path to Heaven. He defined the Holy Spirit as that "Spirit of God dwelling within you which knows your desires . . . and controls the flesh, 43 Failure to receive the spiritual birth would preclude one's entering Heaven.

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40 Minutes, Jan. 1959.
41 Minutes, July 1959.
42 Lark, ed., Sparks from the Anvil, 115.
According to Michaux, man could obtain the Holy Spirit from God only after living a sin-free life long enough to prove his sincerity to God. The candidate could fast and pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit, but he was to concentrate only on that goal. (There was no age limit, but people usually sought the Holy Spirit after they were twenty-five or thirty and had begun leading a settled life.) The manifestation of the Holy Spirit was actually dependent upon one's knowledge of the Bible, for its raison d'être was to call to one's remembrance scriptures which were needed to cope with mundane problems or temptations. Therefore, the Holy Spirit was evidenced by that recall. It did not necessarily signal its entrance into a body by causing one to shout, run, or cry for joy.  

According to Michaux, people who allowed the Holy Spirit to direct their lives were Saints.

Optimistically, the Elder forecast an improved earthly life for Saints. He told his members that Saints should be the happiest of all earthly creatures because they had such free consciences and the promise of a good life here and hereafter. Hence, Michaux espoused an old Protestant ethic: "I don't believe in nobody who goes around talking about doing God's will if they are hard up. The way of the transgressor is hard. . . . Anytime you are not making out, you have been messing around."  

Neither did Michaux believe Saints would experience adversities which they could label as derivative of their righteousness. They

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44 Based on informal discussions with members of the Church of God.  
45 Minutes, Nov. 1955.
should consider that their sufferings followed from the Divine promise that all men, as descendants of Adam and Eve would be troubled.

Actually Michaux, through a message bearing great similarity to writings of the prominent black mystic theologian, Dr. Howard Thurman, was calling for massive transformation of human nature much as are current proponents of the Jesus, transcendental and other movements.\(^{46}\) With the new nature, created by the spiritual birth, man could be loving, peaceful, cooperative, equitable, charitable. Michaux believed his "plan of salvation" was one means by which America could guide the world toward building a peaceful kingdom on earth. The plan suggested that human nature is not immutable and that the regenerated man, in the civil realm, can and is expected to help society reach that happy clime.

Realizing implications for social change in his gospel, Michaux emerged as an evangelical activist early in his ministry. He called for other preachers and their followers to exemplify Christian principles in their daily lives. To the annoyance of many residents, in 1922 he dramatized the urgency for spiritual revival in Newport News. There the young Elder led his congregation in pre-dawn marching and singing in the streets on the way to prayer meeting.\(^{47}\) Consequently, he was arrested for disturbing the peace and fined twenty dollars by a municipal judge. Refusing to pay the fine, he appealed to the Virginia State Supreme Court for a writ of error. The Supreme Court turned down the


appeal, and Michaux presented himself to serve a jail sentence rather than pay the fine. 48 The judge was reluctant to imprison Michaux, who was then considered a martyr among his members and sympathizers. Instead he ordered that the Elder's automobile be seized and sold to pay off the fine; Michaux refused to accept money which was remaining. Likewise, he would not pledge to discontinue his early morning street services, saying the judge's orders conflicted with God's mandate that the Elder should dramatically remind citizens to begin the day with worship to God. 49

Later that year, Michaux directly challenged race baiters when he took his gospel to Essex, Maryland, just north of Baltimore, where he found a heavy concentration of Ku Klux Klansmen. Although Essex was predominantly white, Michaux invited its residents to join his congregation in a tent revival. Klansmen answered the call by cutting electrical wires to the tent, burning it to the ground, and threatening to toss Michaux into the river. The Elder's followers rallied to protect their pastor and to help him continue the revival. They illuminated the area with automobile lights and formed a protective circle around Michaux who continued to preach. Some of the town's whites eventually attended the services, and at least one alleged Klansman and his family joined the Church of God. (He became a deacon in the Baltimore church which his daughter still attends.) 50

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49 Ibid.
50 From discussions with Michaux's sister, Mrs. Jenny McRae and with the former Field Representative of the Church of God.
Four years later, Michaux tested Virginia segregation laws to point out vividly that every Christian church should be racially integrated. A 1926 statute required racially separate seating in all places of public entertainment or assemblage. Opposing this legislation, the Elder invited some of his white parishioners from Maryland to visit the Newport News church to worship. Local law enforcement agents arrested Michaux and charged him with illegally holding integrated baptisms, allowing white and black worshipers to sit together in his services, and allowing white people to reside in the church’s home with black members. Michaux challenged the charges by telling the judge that his work was in obedience to the Great Commission from Jesus for preachers to go to all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Michaux further advised the court that the laws of God supersede those of the state, that Virginia’s segregation laws "must stop at the threshold of the House of God." Michaux appealed without success to the State Supreme Court for a reversal of the lower court decision which required that he pay a small fine.

In these actions during 1922 and 1926, Michaux believed he was motivated by a sense of mission. His behavior suggests that he also was trying to attract attention and to expand his influence.

III

Although Michaux had retained traditional theological doctrines and practices, his conduct as a minister was sometimes a bit unorthodox.


52"Elder Michaux," Our World, V (Jan. 1950), 46, Courier Magazine Section (Pittsburgh), Feb. 28, 1953, and Chancellor Williams, the Store-Front Church, 90.
This latter point is illustrated by the fact that he publicly proclaimed himself a prophet around 1934. The Elder apparently interpreted his rapid rise in the ministry, from 1919 to 1934, to be God's sanction for his prophetic role. Additionally, his mother's earliest prognosis of his future, coupled with the seeming comparison of his lowly beginning to that of several Old Testament prophets, caused him to justify and warrant the prophetic mantle. The man from humble origin saw Biblical characters, rising from the menial occupations of shepards, gardeners, and temple maintenance men to fulfill prophetic roles, as his predecessors in the prophetic genealogy.

The phenomenon of prophecy is universal. Since prophecy predates ancient Biblical history Michaux probably found in the accounts of Noah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel and others reason for his assuming the prophetic posture. Thus he presented himself as one who could predict ordinary occurrences as well as serve as the spokesman for God. History reveals that prophets are usually men who predict ordinary happenings, but because of the unsophistication of those to whom they prophecy, these occurrences appear to be extra-ordinary. To these adherents the prophets possess an intuitive sense about human behavior and the future development of national or international events. The prophet, then, cannot be understood without "knowledge of his social and cultural environment" and history. The term prophet is usually viewed within a religious context and is sometimes seen as "a religious manifestation

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53 See pages 79-88 below for information on Michaux's rise to radio fame and popularity.

54 Quoted from J. Milton Yinger, Religion, Society and the Individual (New York, 1957), 305.
of charismatic leadership."\textsuperscript{55} Charisma may be identified as that quality which sets a man apart from ordinary men causing him to be treated as if endowed with super-human or exceptional powers.

A prophet's "impact is intricately related to the needs and tendencies of the people who come in contact with him."\textsuperscript{56} Prophets usually proclaim themselves during social crises, a time when traditionalism is already being challenged. Michaux emerged as a prophet in the period of social crisis produced primarily by the Great Depression. Within this matrix, he made his first public prediction. It was a safe one about the likelihood that domestic unrest would result from industrial rejection of the New Deal's National Industrial Recovery Administration. The prophecy found favor among Michaux's members and in some administrative circles.\textsuperscript{57} Reasonably assured that it was beneficial to him as a radio evangelist and pastor, Michaux retained and cultivated his image as a prophet. Had it not been an early fluke, he would have discarded it just as he did the posture of faith healer when a sixty-year-old paraplegic was not healed after he had immersed her in the Potomac River seven times.\textsuperscript{58} At any rate, Michaux's church paper labeled him "Spiritual Ambassador to the World" in 1934.\textsuperscript{59} Three years later he spoke of his gift and his mission:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. 303.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} See page 148 below for details on how the director of NRA reacted to Michaux's prophecy.
\textsuperscript{58} Washington Tribune (D.C.), Sept. 7, 1933.
\textsuperscript{59} Happy News (Washington, D.C.), Feb. 1934. A Church of God publication, hereafter referred to as Happy News.
\end{quote}
I don't say I am the only prophet but if any other comes along in this age and doesn't speak in accord with what I speak, he is a false prophet. . . . The Lord said to me, 'I have made you a watchman unto my people. I want you to listen to what I say and give my people warning from me.'" 60

Over the years, Michaux continued to refer to himself as a prophet. When explaining the zeal of President Harry Truman in a radio sermon, Michaux cried, "America! America! Hear ye the words of the prophet!" 61 He opposed Adlai Stevenson's candidacy in the 1956 presidential election campaign and forecast the re-election of President Eisenhower. About this prediction, he told his radio audience, "I'm a prophet! . . . I speak with authority and without fear, without doubt." 62 (It may be significant that one of Michaux's close friends, with whom he dined and who visited his church on special occasions, was the noted seer--Jean Dixon.) 63

Although he believed it was his mission to prophesy to America, Michaux considered it the people's prerogative not to heed his jeremiads. One theory held that "from the first century onward, apocalypticism has always been most at home among the disinherited"; it is not

60 Evening Star (Washington, D.C.), July 12, 1938.


63 Based on a photo in Michaux's Obsequies and discussions with the movement's former Field Representative and members of Michaux's church.
surprising, therefore, that only a small nucleus of poor and socially insignificant people seriously accepted the Elder as a prophet. 64 Those who did were mostly members of the Church of God; some of them had tested the validity of his prophecies over a period of time, and his charisma probably enhanced their belief in the Elder's powers as a seer. 65

Indeed, some members thought Michaux and his wife were special people who were sent to the lowly by God. Whenever he and Mrs. Michaux entered one of the several churches, the congregation rose quickly to honor them. The Elder realized that he could be idolized by them and implicitly cautioned members to temper their esteem, saying, "When you rise to honor me, I kneel to honor God." 66 Members often referred to Michaux in testimonies as "a prophet in the last days," "the Man of God," "the last prophet." Even in death, Michaux was venerated in this manner. 67

He disdained charismatic demonstrations from among his congregation. This attitude was aptly illustrated in his remarks about an incident which occurred in Baltimore.

One day while preaching . . ., a young lady, fairly decent in her appearance, came up as we were about to dismiss and . . .

[asked] me . . . to pray for her baby. And when I bowed over her

64 Quotation from H. Richard Niebuhr, Social Sources, 303.
65 From discussions with members of the Church of God.
66 Minutes, Apr. 1956.
67 Author's observations in Church of God services before and after Michaux's death.
to pray for the child I noticed that although she was not drunk, she had the smell of whiskey on her breath. So I asked her just what was wrong with her baby. And while she was talking I noticed her make a little quick move. . . . Nevertheless, I laid my hand on her. . . . And as I began to pray she dropped the baby and fell sprawling on the floor, shivering and kicking. . . . She was carrying on so that I told the brothers to put her on the bench. I began to preach about how the devil had thrown her down and made her drop her child. . . . I was telling the saints how the devil was in a man's son and how the devil had thrown this man down on the ground and even in fire but that the disciples could not heal this man or even make the devil come out of the man.

Michaux continued on to explain that only Jesus had power to cast the devil out of the man, and that the woman wanted to make him think he, too, had such power.

. . . When she came back up and stood before me, . . . she said . . . 'When you laid your hand upon me to pray, something struck me on the crown of my head and went all through me. You are wonderfull.' But I knew . . . that was the devil trying to praise me and at the same time deceive me by making me think . . . I knocked her out with my power. . . . Anybody you see being knocked out when somebody is praying for them, the devil is using that person.68

Thus, Michaux forcefully disclaimed supernatural powers.

68 Minutes, April 1956.
IV

The Elder was not consistently so highly esteemed in black religious circles outside the Church of God. He was the target of opposition from some black church groups, such as the Interdenominational Ministers' Union, which considered him unconventional. That body proposed that formal action be taken to "stop Michaux" from his attacks on the traditional black church. Not surprisingly, black churches were divided in their attitudes toward Michaux. Some, for example, the First AME Zion Church of Brooklyn, New York, continued to support his religious and social activities until 1940. Yet, in 1956 Michaux was obliged to speak of outside opposition to him. He mentioned to his deacons and elders that a man, arranging to hire a Church of God bus for a community group, turned and said, "Now Elder, I can use your bus a lot of times but when I say it is Michaux's bus none of the preachers want to use it." Recognizing black churchmen's negativity as jealousy, Michaux declared, "They are afraid they will help me." Nevertheless, in the face of such reactions, Michaux was on the defensive.

Unable to prove his social worth as a black prophet, Michaux battled along the color line. He was anxious to disassociate himself from black religious nationalistic thought—the idea of a distinct Afroamerican religion, church or denomination. Generally such churches

69 Washington Tribune (D.C.), July 6, 1936.
70 Based on an admission ticket to a Michaux movie, showing in the Brooklyn church, Oct. 31, 1940. Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library.
71 Minutes, Apr. 1956.
72 Ibid.
and denominations proclaim that God, the Madonna, and Christ were black and that blacks as "God's chosen people" are the source of salvation for the world. Father Divine's Peace Mission Movement, the UNIA-sponsored African Orthodox Church, Bishop Grace's House of Prayer, the Black Jewish and Muslim movements have been classified as religiously nationalistic because they identified with God as a black deity. These movements developed during the period of extensive black racial chauvinism which informed the United States of the "New Negro" in the 1920s—an era of black cultural renaissance and racial militancy. During that decade blacks came to utilize religion creatively; one result was the glorification of the blackness which could not escape.73

Michaux never identified with his blackness to such an extreme; he was a prophet but never a black one. Yet, as a product of the "New Negro" era, he thought his blackness contributed to his social lowness; in this way only was it special to him. Because he associated blackness with social lowness, he nearly limited his appeal exclusively to black people. Michaux believed, furthermore, that God would work through the most lowly to save the "soul" of America; expounding on this the Elder said, "If the Lord dealt with us in a . . . big [person], you could hardly see [Him] . . . for looking at the big man . . . [He] may be using."74


He parted there with the glorification of blackness. Although Michaux did not directly repudiate the concept of black religious nationalism, he did emphasize the Christian idea that God is Spirit. Michaux conceived of this Spirit as able to effect change in man's nature and consequently to eradicate caste and class. According to the Elder, upon the Fall of Adam and Eve, man inherited a corrupt nature, without God's Spirit. Therefore, Michaux thought this explained why man was devoid of the desire to live a life of perfection in accordance with God's will and instead yearned to satisfy the flesh and vanity. "Anything of the flesh," Michaux said, "is not of God, for God is of the Spirit." Moreover, he continued, "As long as people are in the natural, there will be racial and class differences." The Elder believed God originally had created man in His image as a Spirit. Having fallen from this Spiritual state, Adam and Eve and their posterity were left void of the image of God and "were no longer subject to His will since the natural man feels independent of God." Thus, to be like God, Michaux declared that man would have to seek the re-imparting of God's image--His Spirit. This regeneration would create a change in man's nature and allow him to transcend corruption and live in social and spiritual harmony.

Actually Michaux envisioned that black people could enjoy a more harmonious union with their fellow Americans. He hoped his gospel would enhance the black man's chances for acquiring more economic and politi-
cal opportunities. Importantly, the Elder's gospel was psychologically uplifting, especially for disinherited Saints in the Church of God. It not only helped them establish a positive self-identity but also conveyed to them a feeling of moral superiority. This allowed them to accommodate indignities until the latter could be reformed away.

Although Michaux, the prophet and activist minister, was the object of some controversy, many disinherited people related to his gospel; they recognized in it a practicality and social relevancy. Additionally, people were attracted to the Elder because of his innovative preaching style and his charisma. Anxious to strengthen his hold on his followers, as well as to attract new ones, Michaux devised ways to augment his appeal.
CHAPTER III

ENHANCING THE APPEAL

Elder Michaux labored continuously to enhance his appeal among all of his followers, but he was especially anxious to mold his members into a loyal unit. Aware that action is a unifier, he initiated and authorized a profusion of church activities to press them into functioning as a group. Michaux was aided in his efforts by the fact that his members, people of faith, viewed their group affairs as a dedication to righteousness. Therefore, they were anxious to attend church frequently.¹

Habitual church attendance, not an uncommon characteristic of sects, was usually accompanied by decreased participation in activities outside the church.² In this respect, the Church of God was sect-like; its doors were open for worship and programs, prayer meetings, dinners, choral rehearsals, and special programs and pageants, seven days a week.

A routine week offered this regimen of services: daily noon prayer (except on Sundays); evening worship (except on Saturday) 8-10; Sunday morning prayer, 5:30; Sunday School, 9:45-11:30; Sunday noon worship; Young Peoples' Sunday Union, 5:30 p.m. On Monday nights work meetings were held; each member made a report on his week's church

¹Informal discussions with members of the Church of God.

activities, such as offerings paid, services attended, and work done to help the church advance. On Thursday nights, Purity Club was held, and young men and women were taught through Bible study how to live pure and virtuous lives. Worship services usually followed an established pattern similar to those in the Baptist church, except for testimonies. There were the opening song and prayer, a selection by the choir, reading of the scripture, testimonies by the congregation, the minister's sermon or ministers' sermonettes, collection of offering, announcements, and benediction.

This regimen was varied periodically. Every three months, Michaux proclaimed a ten day "revival" for the members. This "revival," held for the first time in 1928, originated out of rumors that young adult members were not adhering to moral standards of the church in Newport News while Michaux was away organizing new churches. To squelch the rumors and "revive" the accused young peoples' spiritual life, Michaux called a ten day "solemn assembly" of fasting and praying. He announced the length of each day's fast at the preceding night's service. These early fasts occurred three times a year. The main purpose of the "revival," later permanently scheduled on the first or second Fridays of January, April, July and October, was for members to pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Those who had been filled prayed for increased spiritual strength. As the "revival" was regularized, members fasted routinely from the time they arose mornings until 4:00 in the

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3 From informal discussions with members of the Church of God, and author's observations.

4 From discussion with a member of the Church of God who participated in that first ten-day fast.
afternoon. Sometimes, they ended the daily fasts by dining together in the church dining hall on dinners prepared by church sisters and sold to raise funds for church activities.5

During these special "revivals," the regular schedule of services was followed, except that instead of Purity Club there was worship, and members worshipped on Saturday night as well. Each meeting was ended with congregational prayer instead of benediction because members were considered to be in service (even after they had left church) until the series ended.6 These "revivals" culminated on the tenth evening, always a Sunday, in an all-night prayer session, from midnight to 5:00 a.m. All-night prayer meetings moved swiftly because prayer was interspersed with communion, foot-washing, testimony, singing, and sermonettes.7

Additionally, Michaux attempted to hold the interest of many of his followers by staging special events which often involved travel. On all national holidays (except Christmas) and several other times a year, members assembled in various cities to worship or celebrate together. During these gatherings, guests visited in host members' homes, enjoyed a feast in the host church's dining hall, and viewed a religious pageant or program which was presented by representatives from the several churches. That was the order of events on New Year's Day in Philadel-

5 From discussions with members of the Church of God and the author's observations.

6 Early in 1960, a special forty-day fast was held to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Church of God. See Minutes, April 1960.

7 Much information on ten-day fasting is based on Michaux telegrams to Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower, Minutes, passim, informal discussions with members of Michaux's church, and the author's observations.
phia, Founder's Day in Washington, Mother's Day in New York City, Father's Day in Baltimore, Michaux's birthday in Washington, and Thanksgiving Day in Newport News. The Church of God's National Memorial Beach in Jamestown was the main center of activity on Easter Monday when an egg roll and fish-fry were scheduled, and on the Fourth of July when Mrs. Michaux's birthday was celebrated. Festivities on two latter holidays culminated in the Newport News church with a pageant and program.

The Annual Baptising in Washington was the movement's principal annual activity. This frequency of travel and special activity was unusual; most traditional and sect churches only occasionally sponsor church trips and special programs and pageants.

These special Church of God events evolved over a number of years after the regularly scheduled services had long been established. Only the Baptising and Easter programs (the latter began around 1922) were established church activities before 1935, the year in which the church at Philadelphia was officially begun. As the Church of God spread, it became necessary for Michaux to knit the far-flung movement together, and older churches first traveled to Philadelphia on New Year's Day in 1936 to encourage the new members there. As early as 1935, members from Maryland and Washington attended Thanksgiving celebrations in Newport News. National Memorial Beach activities were regularly scheduled events from the latter thirties--a few years after that property was

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8 Happy News, Minutes, Church of God brochures, and program booklets, passim.
9 Discussed fully, beginning on page 72.
Although Michaux created some activities, members were inspired in later years to organize new intra-movement events; once organized, these became permanent. Founder's Day, for example, was initiated by a member and celebrated for the first time in 1949. Contents of that year's program and subsequent ones clarified the nomenclature, for Founder's Day programs usually portrayed Michaux's early ministry and the development of the movement, with each church represented on the program. Mother's Day and Father's Day celebrations were created by members during the 1950s and 1960s respectively. These implicitly honored member mothers and fathers but were actually geared, like most special activities, to honoring the movement's founders.

Numerous organizations and groups were formed to conduct the myriad of church functions adequately. In a fashion characteristic of black churches, some of Michaux's members held a "place" in several different church groups. Although increased membership in church activities is a sectarian characteristic, offices and posts in the traditional black churches have always been numerous as well as psychologically and sociologically significant. Through positions in black churches, lowly people traditionally received the opportunity to express themselves and to develop their talents. Thus, a truck driver, a janitor, or a hotel

10 From a discussion with an elderly member of Michaux's church, Minutes, July 4, 1958 and July 4, 1959.
11 Seven Churches, 1 and 26.
12 From discussions with the former member who organized these two activities.
13 Moberg, The Church as a Social Institution, 83.
14 John Dollard, Caste and Class in a Southern Town, Third ed. (New York, 1963), 224.
porter frequently became chairman of the Deacon Board or a trustee in a black church. A socially insignificant boy or girl was likely to become the leading chorister. Although this avenue to the discovery of talent and to training was not exclusively the black church's, it was traditionally through this medium that Afroamericans often received vital training as public speakers and community leaders. In filling church posts, they were recognized as "somebody," thereby satisfying the human need for recognition. As their pride and self-respect increased these black people often acquired a dignity and confidence which they exuded when in contact with the hostile dominant society.

Throughout the several Churches of God, members volunteered to join choirs and choral groups, orchestras, program committees, usher boards, sewing and cooking circles. Young men received training by working with church technicians (who were often skilled and performed such tasks daily on their jobs), on microphones, taping and photographic equipment. Actors and actresses were usually selected by drama directors, who, in turn, were appointed to their offices by veteran directors; these came from a small corps of members considered to have talent for directing, acting, or speaking. The drama production crew volunteered, and church youth worked with veterans to gain experience in creating scenery and in stage lighting. Some young people in the Church of God also voluntarily filled positions in Junior choirs and on usher boards or were appointed, by the Board of Deacons and Elders, to the office of Junior Deacon. Sunday School teachers were placed by the

superintendent who, in turn, received his appointment from the Board of Deacons and Elders.

II

Michaux derived spiritual joy and a measure of gratification as an evangelist for the occasional revival services which he held. Revivalism on a large scale originated in America during the Great Awakening of the 1740's. Then and throughout the nineteenth century revivals were national or regional religious affairs which affected whole communities simultaneously. However, they took on a different context in the twentieth century and became more localized campaigns with limited popular appeal and marginal church and community support. 16

Michaux sponsored twentieth century-type summer revivals, with the old camp-ground meeting flavor, throughout his ministry. These usually lasted ten days in each city where one of his churches was located and were expected to attract new members. In major cities from Virginia to New York, the Elder pitched a huge tent on a large vacant lot from which to blast his gospel. Although these summer services were held occasionally in regular church edifices, tent meetings were Michaux's favorite revival form. 17

The decor of the tent was in traditional camp-meeting style with wooden folding chairs placed in neat rows upon sand or sawdust-covered, earthen floors. The raised pulpit was decorated with red, white, and


blue bunting, and several microphones were positioned beside the rostrum. Loud speakers were placed outside the tent to beam the message to passers-by. Michaux's sermons had catchy titles: "Where did the Devil come from?" "Where is the Devil?" "Where is Hell?" "Where Is Heaven?" "The signs of the end of the world," "Are you a member of a church? If so what profit is it to you?" 18 Michaux, a master revivalist, was sometimes favorably compared to evangelists Dwight Moody, I.D. Sankey, Aimee McPherson, and Billy Sunday. Like them, he knew the value of music to enliven services and to hold audiences' attention. Hence he utilized music lavishly, interspersing gospel songs throughout each meeting. Usually Mrs. Michaux led the congregation and choir in singing from camp meeting song cards. 19 Although a dramatic preacher, Michaux had good control over his emotions. 20 His rather subdued evangelism may have resulted from early Presbyterian upbringing. At any rate to some observers he did not look like a revivalist because he dressed conservatively in dark tailored suits and white shirts.

Reflecting the mood of the minister, the Elder's audiences reacted in moderation. They were given only to frequent "amens" and occasional crying and shouting. He tolerated no excessive emotionalism, such as rolling on the floor, speaking in tongues, or falling into trances. 21 Still tent meetings were comparatively less intense in tenor and

18 Fiftieth Anniversary Brochure.
19 Washington-Post (D.C.), Oct. 28, 1934, and author's observations.
excitement than normal Church of God services.

In his later years, Michaux incurred difficulties in erecting tents, as some communities did not take kindly to having them in their midst. Residents of Harlem raised much opposition to the Michaux revivals, and on one occasion unsuccessfully sought a court injunction to prohibit the erection of a tent on the once prestigious Sugar Hill.  

Difficulty in obtaining permits for erecting tents increased concomitantly with more stringent fire and safety regulations. From year to year Michaux raced against time to meet requirements and to obtain a permit before his scheduled openings. One year he began his tent meeting without a permit and was summoned to court in Richmond, Virginia.  

As costs for raising tents were compounded by other difficulties, Michaux labored to keep one of his favorite evangelical tools alive, and he held his last series of tent meetings in the late sixties, within a year or two of his death.  

Michaux also held other kinds of open-air revivals. These probably were conducted where it was legally difficult or inconvenient to erect a tent. His most famous variations on old camp-meetings were called Block and Street Meetings. In physical effects and order of worship block meetings were similar to tent meetings. They were held on vacant lots where Michaux apparently had planned to erect a tent for which he could not obtain a permit. The lot area, wired for lights and amplifiers, often had poles throughout as if a tent cover were missing. It

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23 Richmond News Leader (Virginia), July 12, 1960.
24 From discussions with Church of God employees.
was replete with seats and a pulpit, and ushers were stationed throughout.\textsuperscript{25}

Street meetings were actually advertisements to a church revival and were conducted early in the evening before regularly scheduled services. A street meeting, \textit{per se}, was very brief. It followed a march and song-fest by the congregation through the streets to a convenient street corner. At that site, selected in advance according to the amount of traffic (pedestrians and automobiles), Michaux or one of his ministers preached soap-box style. At the conclusion of the sermonette, the congregation marched back to the church, hopeful that some of the "street" people would follow.\textsuperscript{26}

Since the main purpose of these summer revivals was to attract sinners to Christ, Michaux enjoyed taking his gospel to what he believed were very wicked sections of large cities. In the comment below, he suggested this attitude and the purpose of his revivals:

At present we are conducting a revival meeting in South Philadelphia which according to the scriptures is equal to Sodom of old. Everything but the name of God can be heard down in that section . . . except when it is taken in vain. The Lord sent us down there too! We had nine persons join the church the other night and everyone of them was drunk . . . We couldn't refuse them, for the Lord says, 'just as I am' and that happened to be drunk for them.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{25}From Michaux's Obsequies, Oct. 27, 1968, Pictorial Review, 49-50, and author's observations.

\textsuperscript{26}Fiftieth Anniversary Brochure.

\textsuperscript{27}Minutes, July 1959. Frequently such "converts" never became members in fact because they did not attend services at the Church of God after the revival terminated.
Revivals were advertised well in advance throughout pertinent cities so as to attract maximum crowds. Professionally printed handbills and posters were disseminated by members to their neighbors or co-workers, and they were visibly displayed in businesses and on Church of God buildings. Advertisements were sometimes run in local newspapers. Occasionally automobiles or trucks were outfitted with loudspeakers and placards to herald the revival. Sometimes a man, dressed as the Devil, perched atop a vehicle with a snake (whose body, Michaux said, housed the Devil's spirit) to advertise the coming "War on the Devil." The best advertisement was the people who annually attended and expected the summer revivals and invited neighbors, friends, and relatives to accompany them to a service.

Until his later years when Michaux's popularity as a radio evangelist had waned considerably, he attracted huge crowds to the revivals. His most devoted supporters were members, and they brought co-workers, relatives, and neighbors with them. Furthermore, curious passers-by frequently stopped and listened. Occasionally the Elder sent special invitations to other local church congregations whose theological beliefs were similar to his movement's, like the St. Timothy Church in Newport News. These congregations attended in a body with their pastor who was sometimes invited to give the invocation and benediction for a particular service. Michaux also invited local officials, military, and

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28 Fiftieth Anniversary Brochure and author's observations.
30 Based on photographs in Pictorial Review, Michaux's Obsequies, and Fiftieth Anniversary Brochure.
civil servants—judges, police chiefs, generals. 31

Apparently revivalism increased Church of God membership rolls significantly. If the number of candidates baptized each year is an accurate gauge, the average summer yield was generally about one hundred. Once they began attending the church and participating in its activities, these new converts seemed inclined to become permanent members. From the beginning of his ministry, Michaux had depended on the revival to glean a new crop of converts, as was the case during his first revival in 1919, when he attracted hundreds from Newport News and Hampton, Virginia. Toward the end of his life, he complained about the sparsity of conversions during revivals. Giving Biblical explanation to his situation, Michaux said fewer people were being converted because as the millennium neared apostasy was predestined to increase.

III

The Annual Baptizing, always held in Washington after 1930, was the first major church outing for new converts. It was a spectacular production which exhibited the movement's viability and Michaux's large following. The excitement and pageantry of this day's activities alone may have permanently bound some new converts to the movement.

Before he established a church in Washington, annual baptizings were quiet religious sacraments, without much fanfare, administered along the beaches of Newport News and Hampton. When Michaux acquired radio fame and a big following in Washington, he moved this annual event

31 From an interview with a Retired U.S. Army Colonel and professor at Hampton Institute who once was a stand-in for a general at a Michaux revival, discussions with members of the Church of God, and author's observations.
to the Potomac River. There a steamer carried Michaux, his wife, and other elders, musicians, and candidates to a barge from which the baptizings were conducted, while crowds lined the bank to observe the service. After 1938 baptizings were performed in Griffith Stadium until that relic was closed in 1961.

Baptism in the Church of God differed from the Baptist ritual in that the latter denomination performed it several times a year. Michaux baptized his new members per annum and en masse, in August or September after ending his summer revivals. He usually baptized over one hundred members, and sometimes as many as four hundred, who ranged in age from seven to seventy.

This sacrament was a derivative of Michaux's affiliations with Baptist and Church of Christ (Holiness) groups. Like those denominations, he baptized new members after they had an understanding of the church's teachings as based on the Bible. Michaux was interested, moreover, in commemorating the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Even before new converts were admitted to membership, ministers asked them three questions regarding the baptism sacrament: "Have you ever been baptized? If you have been, are you willing to be baptized again?

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32 Washington Tribune (D.C), Sept. 7, 1933.
Do you wish to be baptized when the time comes?"\textsuperscript{36} If answers to the last two questions were positive, the petitioner was enrolled. Hence, new members voluntarily became candidates for the next baptism ritual.

About one month prior to the scheduled event, deacons canvassed the audience in their respective churches for names of candidates, and the new members had their names formally listed for baptism. Candidates were then given instructions on what to wear and where to report once they arrived in Washington. Male and female candidates donned white cotton gowns, white, rubber bottomed shoes, and wrapped their heads with white towels. No fees were charged for baptism.\textsuperscript{37}

The rite commenced when candidates, signaled by Michaux's entrance into the baptismal pool, sang "Lead me to the water to be baptized" as they marched to the water. Michaux was responsible for baptizing the candidates "in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." He was assisted by two or three of his ministers who, like him, dressed in black gowns, black hip boots, and black skull caps. The baptism was conducted in a four-foot canvas pool of water.\textsuperscript{38} Sometimes a candidate was overjoyed and splashed around in the pool, but normally the sacrament was received without much outward emotion.\textsuperscript{39}

The baptizing ritual was a mere culmination of the evening service which featured the famous Cross Choir and an impressive pageant. The one hundred fifty-six member Cross Choir (so named because it was

\textsuperscript{36}Author's observations.
\textsuperscript{37}Pictorial Review, 60.
\textsuperscript{38}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., and author's observations.
seated in the form of a cross), dressed in white satin robes and skull caps, was always splendid. From each of the several churches male and female, young and old members came to perform in the choir. After Elder and Mrs. Michaux and their special guests had made their entrance, the choir marched onto the ball park field to the tune of "Hear the Tramp, Tramp, Tramp of the Army," played by the choir's accompanying orchestra. Choir members carried deftly concealed miniature international flags, handkerchiefs, crowns, and other accouterments. The choir's performance was akin to that of a drill team. Appointed members moved to form letters as their director, usually Michaux who for that occasion dressed in a white suit, cued them. Michaux often rehearsed the Cross Choir to perfection all night on the eve of the Baptizing. It performed with precision and compared favorably with the Hall Johnson Afroamerican theatrical choir which was popular during the 1930's.40

Pageants were often spectacular and memorable. One occasion, in Griffith Stadium, portrayed the Second Coming of Christ. "From behind a 40 x 50 foot cloud . . . a figure (one of the Elder's parishioners) representing Christ emerged and descended as the dead were resurrected in the center field bleachers and chorus and congregation sang, 'There'll be shouting on the hills of glory.'"41 Another noted pageant illustrated the "Broken heart of Christ"; an electrical bleeding heart spilled crimson fluid on twelve penitent females while the Cross Choir sang, "There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's vein."42

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42 Ibid., and Annual Baptizing Souvenir Program, 1966.
On other occasions, audiences were entertained with portrayals of the Devil's funeral and the Ascension of Christ.43

These annual services were conducted within a patriotic atmosphere. Red, white, and blue bunting covered the canvas tank and the pulpit, and the crowds sang "God Bless America." The United States flag figured prominently in Cross Choir drills. This was Michaux's opportunity to welcome all Americans to his movement and to display the fact that he, too, was an American.44

Annual baptizings were widely advertised. Major newspapers and businesses, in cities in which the movement's churches were located, usually cooperated in the advertising drive by displaying advertisements and placards. Sometimes the press carried features on a special attraction of a coming baptizing as in 1950 when Our World carried these headlines: "Cotton-Clad Candidates for World's Biggest Baptism Will Be Buried in the Jordan's Water." This same article informed readers that Michaux had shipped in twelve barrels of Jordan River water and that the filling of these had been certified by a Scottish Presbyterian missionary in Israel. Additionally, one thousand vials of the water would be given away.45 Michaux had some ingenious methods of advertising. Each baptizing, for example, was preceded earlier in the day by a parade-sightseeing-advertising tour of Washington. Buses and cars with placards, floats, bands, and choirs formed contingents of the parade and

reminded interested Washingtonians that the day for the annual event had arrived.  

Each year the Annual Baptizing was attended by thousands. Church officials estimated attendance by counting seats, corroborating the count with ticket receipts. Sometimes a racial breakdown was printed, as in 1933 when it was estimated that 50.3 per cent blacks, 48.1 per cent whites, and 1.3 per cent others were in attendance that year. Early baptizings drew a heavy sprinkling of whites, but their attendance waned considerably after World War II.  

Heavy attendance attracted press scrutiny, and newspapers and magazines printed their own estimates: "20,000 Applaud As Elder Michaux Baptizes ...." "15,000 Sing Old Hymns at Stadium" "20,000 Witness Baptism in River of Jordan Water" "19,000 See Religious Portrayal" "23,000 See Elder Michaux Baptize ...."  

Twenty-seven thousand was probably the largest crowd that any of the baptizings attracted. The evangelist Billy Sunday, noting the large attendance during his declining years, said, "Any man who had to hire a national baseball park, seating 35,000 to hold ... meetings is the man to preach the gospel."  

Frequently celebrities and government officials attended baptizings. At various times this included District of Columbia Commissioner George Allen, Mrs. Mamie Eisenhower, foreign diplomats, press representatives, 

47 "Second Front in Harlem," Time, XL (Dec. 1942), 76.  
48 Washington Public Library, News clippings on Michaux, passim.  
50 Happy News, March 1934.
congressmen, military personnel, judges, police chiefs, and ministers.\textsuperscript{51}

The most avid baptizing fans were members of the Church of God. They often traveled long distances with friends and relatives to participate in and to observe the eventful day. To encourage attendance, the several churches arranged for mass transportation. In 1948 a train excursion of twelve coaches took "pilgrims" from the Tidewater, Virginia, area to Washington. Sometimes Michaux's members and other followers traveled in automobiles, or in the movement's old double-decker bus—"Happy," and most frequently in public buses. Some members still remember that one year twelve Greyhound buses went to the baptizing from Newport News, only one of the movement's several departure points.\textsuperscript{52}

Evaluating the legendary and historical significance of the Annual Baptizings, one black journalist observed that "it was with spectacular annual ball park baptisms, in Washington's old Griffith Stadium that Elder Michaux became a legend."\textsuperscript{53} Another reporter, of the sometimes liberal Washington Post, observed, "Michaux has made headlines for many feats, but the 'Happy Am I' preacher probably will be remembered longest for his ball park meetings, religious extravaganzas that qualify him as a great showman."\textsuperscript{54} The drama and extravagance of these baptizings led some cynics to say "Michaux No Example of Intelligence, ... Only Showman." He "outdoes Barnum and Bailey's circus"; they did not comment that many preachers are showman who often lack Michaux's flair.

\textsuperscript{52}Happy News, July 1938, Oct. 1948, and author's observations.
\textsuperscript{53}Bernard Garnett, "Elder Called 'Most Unbelievable Black Businessman in History,'" Jet, XXXVI, No. 3 (April 24, 1969), 24.
Whether Michaux created the Annual Baptizing extravaganzas as one of the multiple activities designed to maintain his members' attention and loyalty, or to attract publicity for his movement, or to enhance his stature, his ingenious design—unique in United States religious history—accomplished all of these results.

IV

Radio broadcasting was another means used by Michaux to broaden his appeal. The first religious radio service was beamed from Pittsburgh in 1921 by Reverend Edwin Van Etten, an Episcopal minister.55 A few years later, Michaux began to broadcast services occasionally from his church in Newport News where he used an old-fashioned portable station.56 Recognizing its potential boon for evangelism, he aspired to shout his religious battle-cry of "War on the Devil" through more impressive and longer-ranged microphones. Mainly he wanted to establish a Radio Church of God "so people might have religion at home. Then they would have no excuse for not going to church... They couldn't say they were tired or didn't have the right clothes. They could get God and His teaching right in their own parlors."57 Michaux tested his intuitive urges.

After establishing a church in Washington in 1928, he sought a spot for a program at almost every local radio station but could not even get an appointment to meet with most program managers.58 His difficulty

indicated his obscurity and newness on the Washington scene and pointed up that city's racial cleavages. The pattern of race relations in Washington during the late 1920's resembled that of the years following Reconstruction when black people were scarcely considered citizens and were denied equitable participation in the capital's activities. Even those blacks who endeavored to break into Washington's business world met with obstructions. The capital was described by one of that city's historians as socially disorganized, "setting apart white from Negro, Gentile from Jew ... clique from clique, and cave-dweller from upstart."59 After numerous futile attempts to obtain an audition, the tenacious Michaux went to radio station WJSV in 1929. The owner was James S. Vance, printer of Fellowship Forum, the Ku Klux Klan paper. According to one reporter,

The idea that a Klan associate should sponsor a Negro's devotional enterprise occasioned some amusement in the Washington office of WJSV, but Michaux sold himself so thoroughly to Vance . . . that the owner of the station agreed to foot the expense of [Michaux's] broadcasting an hour a week from the vacant store-front on "U" Street, which was the first Church of God [building] in the national capital. 60

Michaux's idea about radio broadcasting was logical and opportune, and despite the pervading social thought and racial prohibitions, he became so popular that his program soon attracted millions of listeners.

Within two years, he was broadcasting daily. In appreciation to Vance, Michaux coined the station call letters into a slogan—"Willing Jesus Suffered for Victory." Many contemporary observers explained Michaux's mounting popularity by the uniqueness of his program format and his theme song—"Happy Am I." Each broadcast began with an instrumental presentation of the chorus of "Happy Am I," enabling listeners to identify his program easily. As an immediate sequel, Michaux called out each letter in the song's title; his forty-voice "Happy Am I" choir (in unison) repeated the letters in staccato-like fashion and immediately after this, sang the theme song's verses and chorus. This opening and the program which followed were consistently the same throughout the years. The format included several choral arrangements (accompanied by assorted musical instruments), reciting of the Lord's Prayer in unison—led by a "Prayer Girl" in her pre-teens—more choral music, instrumental solos, a solo by Mrs. Michaux, and the Elder's sermon; each service ended with choral music.

After attracting his radio audience's attention, Michaux proceeded to make it a voluntary captive. He offered a message which had widespread appeal and special meaning to the American people as they entered the throes of the Great Depression. Perhaps his greatest appeal lay in the message of "Happy Am I with my Redeemer." Because it transcended race, time, and creed, its words carried conviction and symbolized the

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63 *Savoy Record.*
needs of the 1930's. Michaux stepped onto the national scene at the propitious moment with a "New Thought" gospel which abounded with implications for national spiritual and social uplift. At that time of dire psychological discontent and physical discomfort, Michaux accompanied his appealing radio message with an infectiously happy mood. Most mornings he asked his audiences to "wipe off the Sun and start the day clean and smiling."

The number of concrete manifestations of Michaux's radio celebrity and widespread appeal mounted. In recognition of his theme song, the Elder became known as the "Happy Am I Preacher." Although that composition had been written by two white Georgians in 1927, Michaux made it famous, and in 1932, he purchased its copyright. "Happy Am I" became so popular that the "United States Marine band had it arranged for its musical presentations and included on its nationally famous programs. One could hear it being whistled by people walking along the streets." The theme song reached Hollywood, and Eddie Cantor's staff put new words to the music and introduced it as a new arrangement on Cantor's NRA Kentucky Colonel Broadcast. Michaux recognized it as the tune of "Happy Am I," and protested. Cantor's writers admitted similarity and agreed to squelch their ditty.


66 Pictorial Review, 21-22.


The popularity of Michaux's program was gauged by the size and response of its radio audience which was considerable. CBS officials conservatively estimated in 1934 that not less than twenty-five million Americans tuned in on Saturday nights and over two million daily. As his popularity soared many people voted for Michaux by writing to him from many parts of the world. From October 1933 to September 1934, Michaux was reported to have received not less than one thousand pieces of mail a day, necessitating delivery in a special Post Office truck and fifteen secretaries to sort and read them. He received letters from as far away as California, Kansas, Rhode Island, and Ontario.

Broadcast networks reacted enthusiastically to the attention Michaux earned. Soon after giving him a spot, WJSV began broadcasting him daily. The "Happy Am I" program received an additional boon in 1932. When the independent station (WJSV) was sold to CBS that year, Michaux's hour was the only program retained. Harry C. Butcher, then a top CBS official, was responsible for keeping the Elder and giving him national coverage, and for this Michaux paid tribute to Butcher in a *Happy News* feature article and made him an honorary Church of God deacon.

69 *Amsterdam News* (New York), Sept. 29, 1934, and *Happy News*, Nov. 1933.

70 *Amsterdam News* (New York), Sept. 29, 1934.


Early in 1933, Michaux's "Happy Am I" service was not only heard daily but also weekly; on Saturday nights, it was beamed from coast to coast over at least fifty-two stations. By that time he was broadcasting from his edifice on Georgia Avenue—the Washington church's permanent site.\textsuperscript{73} In addition to the national hook-ups, a short wave took the program to Europe and South Africa, making Michaux "one of a handful of persons whose opinions \textsuperscript{74} ever been aired over the international short wave."\textsuperscript{74}

His popularity was at flood-tide in 1936. At that time a representative of the British Broadcasting Corporation drew up plans for the evangelist to broadcast to the British Isles, naively expecting stereotypical Negro services. These programs were aired over the BBC until 1938, and hundreds of appreciative letters poured into Michaux's headquarters from British listeners.\textsuperscript{75} A recording of Michaux's last BBC broadcasts was placed in that corporation's permanent library.\textsuperscript{76}

Many listeners went to Washington to observe a broadcasting session. Buses and heavily laden automobiles journeyed from Maryland, Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, New York, and Massa-

\textsuperscript{73}One historian of the Washington scene speculated that Michaux paid for his broadcasts in the midst of the depression, but his daily hour had sustaining status which at least in those years meant that the broadcast was free of expense to his organization. Sustaining status indicates that a program is continuing and pays its own way or has its tab picked up by some agency or person. It does not solicit funds for broadcasting or carry commercials. See Cantril, \textit{Psychology of Radio}, 73-84.

\textsuperscript{74}\textit{Daily Press} (Newport News), Oct. 21, 1968.

\textsuperscript{75}\textit{Happy News}, Dec. 1936 and Jan. 1937.

\textsuperscript{76}Winifred Phillips, Programme Correspondence Section, BBC to author, Oct. 19, 1971.
chusetts to Washington weekly to watch the radio preacher. 77 One man who went up from the South in 1933 said, "I just wanted to know if it was a radio affair or whether it was real. I have never seen anything like this. I am happy that I traveled 500 miles." 78 Members of the Church of God always began their day at the Annual Baptizing observing their pastor conduct a broadcast. They were among Michaux's most enthusiastic radio fans. 79

There were fitting "testimonials" from celebrities to the radio evangelist's national and international fame. Lord and Lady Byng of England, a group of Oxford University scholars, the former Secretary of State and Mrs. Stimson, and other capital dignitaries attended a broadcast service in the church. 80 Mrs. Mamie Eisenhower frequently listened to the Michaux broadcasts on Sunday mornings, because she "was impressed that he always had something good to say on any subject." 81

Within five years after he began broadcasting, some newsmen were calling Michaux the "world's greatest radio evangelist, radio evangelist extra-ordinary, best known colored man in the United States today." 82 Several went to observe the radio services and interpreted them to their readers. They recognized a blend of the qualities of Billy Sunday,

77 Happy News, Nov. 1933.
78 Ibid.
79 From discussions with members of Michaux's church.
81 Mrs. Eisenhower's office (Gettysburg) to author, Nov. 23, 1971.
Benjamin Franklin, Aimee Semple McPherson Hutton, Seth Parker, and Father Coughlin in Michaux. One reporter wrote, "Elder Michaux goes Billy Sunday one better." Another countered, "That really isn't accurate. There's not a trace of the 'sliding down a bannister and hitting the saw-dust trail' sort of thing" in Michaux's style. 83

Some giant enterprises tried to capitalize on the Elder's fame. Recognizing a money-maker, Paramount and Warner Brothers offered to make a movie based on the broadcasts. Michaux refused and produced his own film (when black film production was in a slump)—"War Declared on the Devil," which was rather widely viewed along the East Coast. 84

Accolades came out of New York as well. A New York booking agency offered Michaux $3,000 per week to appear in a daily show with his choir. Michaux showed the letter from the agency around, but he refused the offer. 85 In 1934 the Madison Square Garden Corporation made an unprecedented move by granting Michaux free use of its facilities to run a revival. That marked the first time the Garden had failed to collect $3,000 for daily rental. 86

Michaux realized other dividends from his radio fame. Not only did he have access to huge arenas, but based on his popularity, he was also packing public auditoriums beyond capacity. He held a special revival to welcome President Franklin Roosevelt to Washington with an overflow

84 Happy News, June 1935, and admission ticket to movie at the First AME Zion Church, Brooklyn, New York, Oct. 31, 1940. Circular files, Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library.
86 Amsterdam News (New York), Sept. 29, 1934.
crowd at the Belasco Theatre. "Fire and police squads had to call for reserves to handle crowds during his meeting . . . and a request had to be made that no more songs be sung because of the fear that the swaying of the crowd in time to the singing would actually bring down the crowded balconies."87 Michaux also enjoyed huge and enthusiastic crowds in 1934, when he held a revival in the Philadelphia Arena. Throughout the remainder of the decade, he was invited by various church groups, primarily white, to conduct revivals in Roanoke, Richmond, Greensboro, Hanover, and other cities.88 When his travel on the evangelistic circuit accelerated around 1936, Michaux's daily broadcasts were discontinued; yet, his weekly programs were continued—without cessation until his death in 1968. Hence, Michaux's was the longest uninterrupted radio broadcast in United States history.89

Cognizant of his need to nurture continuously loyalty and semblances of unity within his movement, the Elder urged his members to support his weekly radio services. At his persistence they met in their respective churches at the hour of the Sunday Broadcast, about six a.m., to listen to their leader. During the sixties, many radio stations dropped their options on the "Happy Am I" hour so as to accommodate demands of local ministers for radio spots. Hence, some branches of the Church of God could not pick up the program. Resourcefully, the Elder improvised by sending tapes of the previous week's broadcast to affected churches so

they could be played at the same hour as the live broadcast in Washington.90 This activity was part of the Sunday morning prayer meeting, and it is continuing at present (1974) as members listen to tapes by Elder Wendell Green who now conducts the radio services.91

In his senior years, Michaux was a veteran among a field of newcomers to religious radio evangelism. With the perspective of a former national celebrity, the Elder assessed the spiritual success of the new celebrities. Although he did not question the fundamentalist gospels of Billy Graham and Oral Roberts, Michaux considered men such as these too transient to provide steady Christian nurture to their new converts. This assessment reflected Michaux's belief that preachers should be examples for their followers. Because Graham and Roberts constantly moved to new locations to hold revivals, they could not be present to serve as models of good Christians; therefore, they provided their followers with only vicarious lessons through radio broadcasts. Despite his criticism, Michaux was pleased to see many evangelists on the radio scene.92 Before his death, he saw the field of radio evangelism flooded with an array of denominational and sectarian preachers of all creeds and races.

VI

Michaux utilized other media to spread his religious ideas. In November 1933 he launched publication of a twelve-page monthly paper--

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90 Author's observations and discussions with members. It is impossible to obtain any specific data on the decrease in programming or dropping of Michaux options because networks' files do not date back far enough.

91 From discussions with members of Michaux's church.

92 From discussions with members of the Church of God.
Happy News—to supplement his radio broadcasts. Happy News was the vehicle through which Michaux aired ideas and advanced programs without restrictions frequently imposed by radio networks.

Consistent with his desire for inter-racial appeal, Michaux selected a white man, William T. Amos, as the paper's first editor. Amos, a native Virginian and veteran journalist, apparently was recommended to the Elder by James Vance who was then president of WJSV and printer for Happy News. Under Amos' management, the church paper sometimes reprinted materials from popular magazines and newspapers, carried interesting blurbs on sites around the capital, editorials on contemporary social and political topics, such as feminism and the New Deal.\(^9^3\) The tone of Happy News was more religious under the management of Edwin F. Lark—a black attorney and member of the Church of God—who succeeded Amos in 1936. Lark published more original articles based on the theology and activities of the church and its leader.\(^9^4\)

In its first (1933) issue twenty-five thousand copies of Happy News were printed, but at ten cents per copy the paper did not sell well during the depression. Thereafter, the printing was decreased to fifteen thousand. Some members volunteered to sell the church paper, and a few unemployed Washingtonians sold it in exchange for free meals during the depression. Still piles of unsold papers mounted, and Michaux required each member to sell (or give away and pay for) twelve papers per month. This policy for disseminating Happy News continues.\(^9^5\)


\(^9^5\)From an interview with Attorney Edwin F. Lark, Nov. 1971.
Additionally, to spread the gospel and to augment his appeal, Michaux cut several recordings of his broadcasts; these were produced by commercial firms and made available to the general public. Moreover, Michaux aired his gospel over Washington's television station WTTG for about two years (1949-1951). Although he never achieved national recognition as a television evangelist, his relatively brief series remains a source of pride and warm memory for his members.

Throughout his ministry Michaux faced the reality that a man's appeal climaxes and subsequently declines. In a bid to delay the inevitable, he tried to attract and sustain a loyal following through sundry church activities and mass media presentations. Yet, a visible and well-disciplined membership was central to Michaux's perception of himself as a successful religious leader. Therefore, while he strove to broaden his appeal generally, the Elder was constantly attentive to the task of entrenching his authority within the Church of God.


97 Seven Churches (Washington D.C., 1950), 21 and 23, a Church of God program booklet, and Michaux's Obsequies.
CHAPTER IV

DYNAMICS OF LEADERSHIP

The dynamics of Elder Michaux's management are assessed most properly against the background of the membership that formed the base of the Church of God. Members might well be divided into two groups--those who joined the church before the Great Depression and those who were enrolled from the depression on, after Michaux had a movement underway.¹

Converts to Michaux's ministry prior to 1929 considered themselves to be joining a traditional black holiness church. These first members joined because they were attracted to the Elder's preachments--a blend of fundamentalism and "New Thought." Most of these converts were lower class people who recently had migrated to Newport News from various southern states and from other areas of Virginia, such as Hopewell and the Eastern Shore. Because Newport News continued to have a booming economy until the early twenties, many of the men among them were employed in the shipyard, on the C & O Railroad, in dock yards, and in the seafood industry. Women found jobs mainly as domestic servants and as operators of boarding houses. Members also were represented in other areas of employment. There were a jailer-sheriff, skilled laborers, and housewives, such as one who was the wife of a local physician.

¹I have acquired some insight into the composition of the membership from a series of informal discussions with members, a survey of church materials, and observations. This analysis is based on these sources.
With the exception of a sprinkling of white members, the Church of God was a black church in 1924, numbering about three hundred converts. For the most part, they were poor, propertyless, and without much formal schooling. Some had completed fourth or fifth grades and were functionally literate. One early member, however, testified recently that he had never learned to read; whispers circulated that he was not alone.

During those seminal years, Michaux attracted many young adults who ranged in age from nineteen to thirty. Apparently the Elder's gospel attracted them because it re-kindled and articulated their youthful aspirations for upward mobility by encouraging them to work hard, be frugal, and self-respecting.

As the young people married and began to rear families, the Church of God had a natural population increase. Some of these offspring remained in the church after they became adults. Hence, there were many varied family connections in the church and much intermarriage among members. Despite the relatively large number of family units present, the Church of God counted a disproportionately small number of males among its members. Probably because of its moral strictures, some young husbands did not join along with their wives; they undoubtedly believed membership would prohibit them from exhibiting aggressive characteristics of masculinity. Such men tended, however, to enroll after retirement.

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2 From discussions with members of the Church of God, Fiftieth Anniversary Brochure, and Daily Press-Times Herald (Newport News, Va.)

3 From author's observations, summer 1972.

4 From discussions with members of the Church of God.
Most of Michaux's first members previously had been Baptists and Methodists. Unable to find adequate spiritual fulfillment within those denominations, they converted to the holiness faith. This tendency among many migrants to join black holiness churches derived from their search for psychological stability in the new urban settings. These churches often afforded them intimate association with fellow worshipers and preachers, and they permitted freedom of expression during services. In these respects they were akin to some rural churches in the South which in addition frequently provided social-welfare services and foretold a millennium of eternal bliss for those who were holy. Such churches reassured the converts: "You are not alone, life is not as baffling as it seems, your lowly status can be improved, if not on earth, then in heaven." A sizeable portion of the black population in Newport News and Hampton was composed of migrants. Because some of them recognized these characteristics in his church, Michaux had some success in attracting their attention.

That some of Michaux's members had long been searching for meaning and stability in their lives is explicit in their statements. One elderly member, whose family had migrated from Nansemond County, Virginia, and had periodically traveled to the Eastern Shore of Virginia to engage in migrant farming, told of her long search for a church like Michaux's. Although she was a Baptist, at the age of fourteen, she


began attending a holiness church, whereupon the Baptist pastor requested that her mother compel her to resume the initial fellowship. After her return the pastor inquired of her reasons for leaving. The young girl replied that the holiness church had higher standards and that she wanted to be baptized and to live right. She was promptly baptized and remained in the Baptist denomination until Michaux began to preach in Newport News. This same girl joined the Church of God in 1921 at the age of eighteen. She was anxious to join that church:

I heard a member talking to my mother about the church and prayer band. I told her that I wished they would come to our house, and she arranged for this. When the band came, my mother and older sister sat with them and heard the prayers and lesson and testimony while I passed back and forth through the living room. Eventually Mrs. Michaux said, 'Maybe the girl would like to join.' I said I would, and she invited me to church so that 'Brother Michaux' could take me in.

One of Michaux's first one hundred and fifty members, a migrant from rural North Carolina, told of her long search for a church and gospel which would add meaning to her life.

I heard about Elder Michaux from a woman who lived in Dawson City and said to me, 'Mrs. X, holy people are on Nineteenth Street preaching, and you should hear them.' I told her I wasn't thinking about those tongue people. I had seen plenty of them with their black robes, on the beach with tambourines.

?From a discussion with a member of the Church of God.
Two other Dawson City women and I decided to begin visiting a number of churches until we found the right one. At a Baptist church, they took up collection before preaching, and the preacher said he would not preach before he got $25. He got it. When he started preaching, he said, 'Close all the windows; nobody is going to hear who did not pay.' And when he preached, you didn't hear nothing. One of the women with us got 'happy' and fell out--women often got 'happy' in church and would run and fall out on some man. This woman fell out, and I said she is not 'happy' don't hold her. On the way home she said a bad word.

The third woman traveling on our circuit went to hear Elder Michaux. This Sister came back and told me I should 'go and hear those people preaching what you want to hear.' I decided to go to see what they were talking and singing about. That first night Sister Michaux was singing MY SAVIOUR NOW IS FEEDING ME WITH HONEY FROM THE ROCK. It was so sweet, and I said I am not getting fed like that. Elder Michaux was preaching 'the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.'

Other pre-depression members have related similar stories. Either because of their youthfulness or feeling of alienation in the new urban setting, they searched for a new meaning in their lives. Many believed they found in the Church of God vehicles to social refuge and psychological uplift.

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8 From an interview with a member of the Church of God, c. Jan. 1972.
As a result of the Great Depression and of his charisma, Michaux's following increased rapidly from a few hundred to several millions, mainly radio fans.9 Those who actually joined the Church of God from 1929 on were seeking an immediate panacea for their ills. Unlike earlier members who also were among the dispossessed but not the economically destitute, these newer converts joined a movement rather than a traditional church. The Church of God, a social (religious) movement, represented to them an avenue toward psychological and material help. A social movement may be defined, after all, as "an effort by a large number of people to solve collectively" pressing social-economic problems.10 At its inception, therefore, the Michaux movement drew converts from those who were dazed by the rapid onslaught of depression miseries. As individuals they had been unable to resolve their problems and so joined this cooperative venture to protest against their miserable existence and to fulfill their hopes and desires. They did not follow Michaux because of their faith that he was leading them to a heavenly promised land, as did many members of his early church, but rather because they thought he was leading them away from their immediate social miseries. Consequently, earlier members frequently noted how different the newcomers were. They were more active in church affairs. Old timers thought such zealous activity was evidence of a spirit to monopolize

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9 See page 99 below for an estimate on membership.
posts and places. They could not understand it to be a psychological mechanism for escape from troubles.\textsuperscript{11}

Except for the psychological and physical urgency of the Great Depression, the converts of the 1929-1939 years were not substantially different in terms of class from the initial ones. They were, in the main, poor, frustrated migrants from the South or from the West Indies, but their sources of employment were more varied. Many of those in Washington were civil servants. Some were in the employ of the capital's political elite, as for example, maids in the Eisenhower household and in homes of congressmen. Some members were porters and chauffeurs for large banks.\textsuperscript{12} A sizeable number were self-employed as beauticians, barbers, photographers, automobile mechanics, taxi drivers, tailors, carpenters, and junk dealers. One new member was an attorney who became Michaux's private secretary and editor of \textit{Happy News}.\textsuperscript{13} A few school teachers joined the movement as well.

Photographs of the Cross Choir, which was composed chiefly of Washingtonians converted during the depression, indicate that during the early thirties most of the choir's members were relatively young, in their thirties. One church booklet reported that "the Church of God in Washington . . . in 1934 . . . was full of young people who were fired

\textsuperscript{11}An idea expressed in Eric Hoffer, \textit{The True Believer} (New York, 1966), 104-110, and from discussions with members of the Church of God.

\textsuperscript{12}Author's observations and from discussions with members of Michaux's church, and Mrs. Eisenhower's Gettysburg, Pa., office to author, November 23, 1971.

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Evening Star} (Washington D.C.), July 12, 1938, \textit{Journal and Guide} (Norfolk), April 28, 1934, author's observations, and discussions with members of Michaux's church.
with enthusiasm to build a mighty gospel work." This supports the contention that young adults are often the most zealous participants in an active movement. They have little to lose and much to gain through social or religious protest. Apparently this was most true of women also, for photographs of the congregations suggest that they continued to outnumber men.

During the depression years Michaux's converts frequently were backsliders from traditional Afroamerican denominations. If any had previously followed Garvey's, Divine's, Grace's or other nationalist and cultist groups, they hesitated to voice that fact, fearing Mrs. Michaux's vituperative attacks; she believed these groups were all un-Christian. She was especially antipathetic toward people who were former "Graceites or tongue people," believing that they were forever spiritually deluded and were not to be trusted to live a righteous life.

The Michaux movement attracted a few Caucasians during the thirties. One white woman, who joined in Washington, busied herself by working on the Happy News staff. In Philadelphia, William and Mabel Wood were active members; he was a deacon. A converted Jewish family, the Louis Gutmans, joined during a tent meeting in New York City. Other churches had a few white members also; they disappeared as the depression eased off, leaving the movement almost completely black.

Although its nature generally was known, the size of Michaux's membership remained a guarded secret. Many social and religious movements

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14 Souvenir Program, 1948, 2.
15 Pictorial Review, 30-31, 41, 56.
16 From discussions with members of the Church of God.
17 Pictorial Review, 57, 64.
leave such figures unpublished so that the group will seem more influential and expansive. Characteristically, the Elder preferred to estimate his following—the composite of visible members of the church and of his regular radio listeners—for reporters. Thus, he claimed to have had about thirty million followers. That projected figure benefitted Michaux in numerous social and economic dealings throughout the remainder of his years, since it projected the image of an influential leader.

III

Having attracted a large following and established the basic structure for a movement, Michaux utilized methods necessary for harnessing frustrations of socially disinherited folk. His goal was to forge these people, who were obviously anxious to divest themselves of a wretched existence, into a collective drive toward producing an improved social-economic condition. He expected his church members to be in the vanguard of the movement. Michaux, therefore, managed the Church of God zealously, as one propelled by a sense of mission. Leaving nothing to chance, he initiated all of the Church of God's administrative, legislative, and adjudicative directives.

With respect to his far-ranging power, he explained, "As your leader, I am trying to set up a constitution for the Church to be governed by through officers . . . after I am gone.\footnote{Chancellor Williams, The Socio-Sociological Significance of the Storefront Church Movement in the U.S. Since 1920 (unpublished dissertation, American University, 1949), 51. Some church officers conservatively estimated that the membership fluctuated from 1933 (when Happy News was first published) to 1968 between 15,000 and 100,000.} In a constitution written during the sixties Michaux established a "puppet" Board of Directors.

\footnote{Minutes, Jan. 1954.}
He assumed the position of president and directed and managed affairs of the church without supervision. 20

As their leader, Michaux expected a deferential relationship to exist between himself and his members. This was a probable extension from his relations with his brothers and sisters and was indicative as well of his intuitive grasp of group psychology. Illustrating his determination to maintain an atmosphere of deference, he told his deacons and elders:

Any intelligent person knows that you must respect your leader.  
... Nothing but a lot of ignoramuses disrespect leadership.  
When intelligent people come together with a mind to accomplish something, the first thing they do is to elect a leader. And whatever the leader says is to be done they do it. And if they don't like the leader they get rid of him. But you can't get rid of a leader as long as he follows the standard of the organization. 21

Michaux reminded his congregation, moreover, that he could not be fired because he was unsalaried. Nor, he contended, did his power originate with them; it was derived from God, and under divine authority he had called them out. They had not sent for him. 22

Likewise, when he deemed it expedient, Michaux discarded the mantle of deference for a more egalitarian one. He endeared himself to his members by proclaiming his high regard for them as Saints. He would say


21 Minutes, Jan. 1954.

22 Evening Star (Washington, D.C.), July 12, 1938, Minutes, Nov. 1953, and discussions with members of the Church of God.
for example, "Now precious ones . . . I am always honored when I find myself in the midst of holy brethren, that is a class that has out-classed the world."\textsuperscript{23} The Elder nearly always referred to his converts as "My precious ones" and explained that he meant no condescension.\textsuperscript{24} When moving behind the lectern, he often shaded his eyes and looked over his audience, asking about missing members who were usually very faithful or very old and were absent on that evening.\textsuperscript{25} Sometimes he gave special greeting to those whom he had missed on previous trips to that church or who had recently recovered from a serious illness or problem. After services ended, he moved among his congregation speaking to and shaking hands with first one and then another member, pausing to listen as they burdened him with their individual financial problems, illnesses, family crises.

As he circulated among them, the members were impressed that Michaux seemed unassuming and humble but also like an inscrutable prophet. Although most members probably thought he was of patrician stature because of his avowed influence with persons of national or local importance, they delighted in hearing him deny it. He did so at the end of one Annual Easter Fish Fry:

I was . . . glad to be . . . giving those folks that fish and bread even though they attacked me, \[\text{were}\] up on top of me, grabbing me and kicking me . . . I didn't get mad because they acted as they did. I was their servant. I am not interested in being

\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Minutes}, Nov. 1955.
\textsuperscript{24}\textit{Michaux sermon, "Death and Resurrection of the Saints."
\textsuperscript{25}He knew many members by name or family resemblance.
a big shot like Bishop Grace. If he were down there, his followers would have to take him up on their shoulders and carry him around. 26

The members enjoyed a psychological satisfaction in believing that they had surrendered themselves into the charge of such an unobtrusive yet prominent figure. 27

In addition to inspiring devotion because of his authority and charismatic qualities, Michaux forged the converts into a loyal collective body through his use of symbols, slogans, services and ceremonies. 28

The Elder often alluded to the transitory nature of this life by calling his members "pilgrims." The status denoted, he said, that "this life is temporary and the one to come is permanent." 29 Additionally he reminded members that they belonged to a universal, invisible Church of Saints which dated from the days of Christ. Consequently, they were to be "on one accord" (in harmony) with the spirit of the early church so as not to disrupt the universal link. 30

The Elder rallied his members to battle symbolic foes. He designated himself "General of the forces of right against wrong," dedicated to help stamp out evil by showing sinners how to do good. Because

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26 Minutes, April 1956.

27 From discussion with members of Michaux's church and author's observations.

28 Such appeals may be considered forms of advertisement as well as unifying agents according to Toch, Social Movements, 16.

29 Savoy Record, Minutes, Jan. 1954, author's observations at Michaux's radio broadcasts.

30 Seven Churches, prefatory statement, and Minutes, passim.
Michaux likened his members to an army; he coined such slogans as "war declared on the devil" and "We've got the devil on the run." He considered satan to be a spirit which inhabits and motivates people who "trespass the rights of their fellowmen." This spirit, he believed, was the source of segregation, adultery, murder, drunkenness, war, hunger, poverty, and other human sufferings.

The primary symbol of the Church of God was the sign of the cross, a remembrance of Jesus' sacrificial crucifixion. Hence, Michaux dubbed his members "soldiers of the cross." In each church a banner bearing four words--obedience, love, reverence, respect--urged converts to apply these virtues in their relationships to God, their leaders, and each other--in that order.

Michaux utilized these slogans and symbols to unite his converts into a closely knit and like-minded group. The members not only communed together frequently but were continuously reminded of the need for unity and obedience to prevail among them under Michaux's authority.

IV

To help him entrench his position of leadership Michaux enforced a strict discipline. In an effort to effect control over his members' behavior, he demanded obedience to the Bible. The Elder said, "We are endeavoring to keep a leadership for those who may join in to follow us.

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32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Church of God publications, passim, and author's observations.

35 Minutes, Nov. 1955, and Moberg, Church As A Social Institution, 82.
in perfect oneness, by accepting the Holy Scriptures as a rule. The Scriptures are used to rule those who make up our body.

Michaux emphasized the importance of obeying Biblical commands regarding sacraments as well as those concerning morality. The three sacraments celebrated in the Church of God were baptism, communion, and foot-washing. The latter two were observed every three months. As in other Christian denominations, communion represented the crucifixion of Christ as atonement for man's sin. In the Church of God its substantive contents were grape juice (served in miniature communion wails) and broken crackers, symbolizing Christ's spilled blood and pierced flesh. Appropriate scriptural reading accompanied this service. As a sacrament, foot-washing was symbolic of the humility of Christ who, Michaux pointed out from the Bible, bathed his disciples' feet "not withstanding His position as Lord and Master.

Sacraments were considered important unifying agents in the Church of God. They were viewed as rituals for congregational communion. Only Saints were expected to participate in these rituals, since anyone who unworthily partook would bring damnation and physical impairment upon himself, Michaux explained from the Bible. Members present during these rituals but not participating were assumed to be apostate. Thus, those who were serious about their position in the movement were persuaded to conduct their lives in a manner which would enable them to partake of the sacraments.

Michaux measured his members' devoutness by their obedience; he called the most devout ones Saints. He said mere professing Christians were not recognized by God, mainly because they were only so-called

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36 Pictorial Review, 19.
Christians and did not adhere strictly to the teachings of Christ. Furthermore, Michaux concluded, the name Christian was used in early Rome to cast aspersions upon followers of Christ. This division of Saints and Christians came late in Michaux's ministry. Until July 4, 1964, he used the term Christian interchangeably with Saint to denote his members. Michaux said it just suddenly dawned upon him that he was not calling his members what God would prefer them to be called. He based his new nomenclature on the numerous references to Saints in the Bible in contrast to the few times Christian is utilized.37

Not only did Michaux demand strict adherence to Biblical commandments but nothing short of complete obedience to his own directives was tolerated. He formulated church rules and cautioned members of the consequences of violating them. Disobedience to Michaux would be equivalent to disobeying God since the Elder was God's prophet. Michaux taught his congregation through the example of Adam and Eve, saying, "The price for disobedience is . . . annihilation, extermination . . . extinction. . . . Adam, the first disobedient man brought the sentence of death upon all men." The reward for obedience is eternal life. "There must be obedience to the letter. Obey the prophet! When the word goes out, no matter what the cost may seem to be to you, be ready to do it or die. . . . Forsaking wife, land, property, children . . . leaving everything to obey the command of the prophet."38

37 For earlier use of Christian in Michaux's sermons, see a sermon on "Why Christians Cannot Accept the Revised Standard Version of the Bible" which was probably preached between July and November 1952, Minutes, July 1952, April 1954, July 1957. For the beginning of statements referring to Saints, see Minutes, July 1964.

38 Minutes, April 1955 and Jan. 1959.
practically, Elder said such blind obedience would make the church more than a "sect, another little gang in a storefront, another little shouting, noisy, fuss-making group of folks."39

Some of Michaux's directives regulated his members' conduct in civil relationships, as in marriage and divorce. Converts were forbidden to marry non-members, and there were rigid rules regarding divorce, which the church allowed only on the grounds of adultery. Some members are alleged to have trumped up charges against their wives and husbands to enable them to get a divorce and remain in the movement.40

Michaux tried to lessen his members' need or desire to sue for divorce. He described the proper relationship which he thought should exist between a husband and wife in the following passage:

You want a wife no other man can touch. The Lord says you got to sanctify her to yourself, take her away from . . . everybody else and let her be one with you. When you marry a woman, if you don't have nothing but a box to carry her into, move in the box. Some folks let others stay in their home; that's all right if you can take it, but you're going to have trouble. . . . So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh. . . . No misgivings, no let-up, not just taking things for granted after you're married. Before you married it was all honey pie this and darling that and sweetheart the other. But just as soon as the honey-moon was over, you did everything else but nourished, cher-

40 Ibid., Apr. 1953.
ished], or petted her. Brother you've got it to do. 41

He also advised members on the relationship that should exist between parents and children. His main edict to parents required that they not allow their children, through disobedience, to bring a "reproach on the family's name." He taught that a disobedient spirit could spread to younger children and so urged his members to put their daughters who were unwed mothers out of their homes, to visit their jailed sons but not to bail them out or pay fines for them. 42

Michaux demanded that members of the Church of God never take intramovement frictions into civil courts. "Any matter that comes up must be settled among you and never in a court room among ungodly folks because . . . the Saints shall judge the world. And if the world be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters . . . that pertain to this life?" 43

Whenever they deemed it necessary to place charges of disobedience or apostasy against each other, members followed a specific Biblically-inspired procedure, which follows:

(1) The eye-witness to the violation was instructed to go privately to the offender to discuss the charge.

(2) If the offender did not repent or if he committed the violation a second time, the eye-witness was to take a second member to discuss the charge with the offender.

(3) If the offender remained unrepentant, he was then to be taken, by eye-witnesses, before the church (actually a body of deacons and elders) which would act as jury and judge.

41 Minutes, April 1953.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., Nov. 1952.
That body of church officials would decide how to punish the offender, basing their decision on the Bible and on Michaux's previous decisions in similar cases.44

The church's moral standards, as well as its demands for group loyalty and unity, tended to generate suspicion and spying among members. Thus they tried to suppress their own potential defects by detecting and condemning them in others. Implicit in this atmosphere of suspicion was the attitude that all members have sin-potential and that each must act as his "brother's keeper." In this respect suspicion is a unifying element. "Knowing themselves watched, the faithful strive to escape suspicion by adhering zealously to prescribed behavior and opinion."45

The major reason that strict orthodoxy results from suspicion is the members' fear of being purged from the group or of being demoted from a status-position within the movement. Frustrated and insecure people who are attracted to movements, such as Michaux's, usually join with the belief that through a cooperative effort they can acquire security and self-confidence. They recall their former failings and insecurities when they faced life alone, and the psychological benefits derived from the cooperative effort cause them to never want to be alone, for that would be equivalent to death.46 Michaux, using the analogy of a tree, sometimes touched the well-spring of that fear of excommunication, as when he said, we will "cut them off. A limb is not any good if it is off the tree."47

44 Ibid., and author's observations.
45 From Eric Hoffer, True Believer, 114.
46 Based on Hans Toch, Social Movements, 137-138.
47 Minutes, Nov. 1958.
Members were sometimes excommunicated from the Church of God for violating church standards. The following quotation illustrates the kind of conduct which Michaux considered probable cause for excommunication.

Brother X was speaking to me . . . about Brother Y in the Church, who was reported to have conducted himself in an unduly familiar way with some woman while sitting around in a car. . . . Now Brother X was very upset about this matter and said . . . he didn't want to worry me with it too. I told him that was no worry for any time anybody isn't right . . . Put Them Out and then send for me to come . . . . The rule in this church is whenever you find uncleanness or sin . . . you don't have to wait for the Elder to put the person out.\(^{48}\)

One of the most serious offenses was that of trying to divide the members or split the church. When excommunicating two members for that violation, Michaux undoubtedly pricked other members' fears. He announced,

We're going to excommunicate Mr. _____ and Mr. _______ . . . as heretics—those who would divide. . . . They began to openly rebel against the church and your leaders . . . going around secretly trying to divide. . . .

Now you watch those who go out from among us. I've seen them go time and time again, but I have yet to see one of them prosper. Satan blinds them.\(^{49}\)

\(^{48}\)Minutes, April 1954.

\(^{49}\)Ibid., Jan. 1952.
Every effort was made to make the purged ones feel alone. Members were warned not to associate with them.

Sometimes one who was excommunicated could be re-instated, depending on how the Elder felt about the person's atonement. But if he had held any position of authority in the church, such as that of a preacher or deacon, he could not hold that place upon his return. Michaux explained that such a person could not attract followers after he had once fallen, even though momentarily, out of the race for eternal life. 50

Silencing was more frequently applied by Michaux as a punitive measure. Errant members would be silenced, that is, not allowed to testify or preach in church for a determined period of time. One might be silenced for failure to keep his children under control, or for having a daughter in his home who was an unwed, expectant mother. (Such rulings kept illegitimacy at a minimum.) A silenced person was likely to be shunned but not entirely banned from communing with other members. Frequently his close friends stuck by him.

Sometimes members were rebuked by Mrs. Michaux. Her vituperations were searing. She singled out suspected apostates for public tongue lashings and prayed that "God burst their heads wide-open." At a propitious moment during the tirade, she flicked her nose with her finger and said, "They stink in God's nostrils." Members generally agreed that the Elder's chastisements were more palatable than hers. 51

50 Ibid., April 1954.

51 Based on interviews and discussions with former and current members of the Church of God.
Although this attitude toward serious violations was clear, members realized that Michaux was more anxious to maintain his rosters than to lessen them through wreckless punitive measures. One way of retaining his members was to prohibit them from visiting other churches. He established the rule that "We don't go into sect churches" because they cannot teach us anything good. His definition of a sect church was one which deviated from the primal teachings of Jesus. Some members were not permitted to attend funerals of relatives in other churches, while others whom Michaux thought loyal, devout and spiritually discriminating were.\(^{52}\)

Realizing that his hold on some of his members was weak, Michaux predicted doom for potential backsliders:

> When you find yourself saying that you are going to get out and go getting mad with something that doesn't suit you, . . . watch out unless you bring about your own destruction. There is no need to allow yourself to become angry with the body \(\text{church}\) you are in because if you look back you'll see that if you are anything with God, the body has made you what you are.\(^{53}\)

Continuing on this subject, Michaux said, "Now you can leave the truth if you wish but your judgement will go from you, your last state will be worst \(\text{sig}\) than before you knew God."\(^{54}\)

\(^{52}\)M\(\text{inutes, April 1957.}\)

\(^{53}\)I\(\text{bid.}, July 1956.}\)

\(^{54}\)I\(\text{bid.}\)
Such admonitions did not deter some who were inclined to backslide or defect. Numerous disenchanted ones withdrew their membership over the years. Sometimes husbands and wives resigned over disciplinary measures. Illustrative of this group were a Newport News couple who left the movement around 1945 because of Mrs. Michaux's abrasive personality. The wife said they joined another church—a Baptist one for the benefit of a church funeral. Apologetically she said they did not believe any other pastor could teach them to live as righteously as Michaux had. Having been reared in the Church of God, they apparently had reservations about leaving. In contrast a young Hampton woman was pleased that she was excommunicated during the late forties for attending the theatre. Although she, too, had been reared there, this woman considered church strictures confining and had wanted to leave for a long time. She apparently was more confident than the couple that some external source, such as agreeable associations with non-member friends and relatives, could sustain her.

Michaux had lieutenants who helped him control members; they were called deacons and elders. Deacons presided over services and handled business affairs of the local church, such as collecting offerings and attending to financial obligations. They never preached. Each church had several deacons, depending on the size of that church's membership.

55Based on conversations with this couple's daughter and with members who had been their intimate friends.

56From discussions with members and author's observations of this woman.

57Dynamics of disaffection are discussed in Toch, Social Movements, 157-181 and Robert F. Weiss, "Defection from Social Movements and Subsequent Recruitment to New Movements," Sociometry, XXVI (1963), 1-20.
Elders or ministers preached and assumed no responsibility for the church's business affairs; they assisted Michaux by preaching in local churches during his absence. Because there were approximately four ministers in each church, most of them had an opportunity to preach each week.  

To groom them into being loyal and able lieutenants Michaux held quarterly indoctrination sessions for his deacons and elders. The Elder said he held these meetings because he wanted them to receive directions from him "as one body so as to speak and act as one from the same authority ... and to avoid division." The sessions were considered so important for these men, in daily contact with local members, that Michaux made rulings on attendance. According to one, "Anyone not present because of sickness must send a report to the effect that he is inactive. . . . Your wife's illness is not a reasonable excuse." A later rule confirmed that "any minister not meeting quarterly . . . unless because of sickness or death (or for some reason which this board considers a reasonable excuse)" could not preach.

Michaux, moreover, dictated the length and general content of sermons. Elders were limited to forty-five minute sermons but could be given a grace period of ten minutes by local deacons. Elders were directed to encourage members in their sermons and never to rebuke them. Rebuking was reserved for Michaux, who explained, "I'm their father in

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58 Based on informal discussions with elders and deacons of Michaux's church and author's observations.

59 Minutes, July 1952.

60 Ibid., April 1954.
the gospel. Now when you preach, all of your sermons must be based on preaching the humility of Christ, the wonders of the Lord, and the beauty of the Saints."\(^{61}\) He was afraid local ministers might drive members from the churches if they rebuked them. At one point he emphatically stated, "If you insist on correcting and instructing, go out in the field and gather someone together whom you can beat up. . . . Don't beat up mine. I know how to deal with my children."\(^{62}\)

Michaux was determined to keep his ministers and deacons humble and in their "places" so as to minimize the likelihood of a split. He told them, "No deacon or elder is to consider himself a head official in his local church." The only head official was the founder, Michaux.\(^{63}\) If ministers desired to start their own missions, they were free to do so. Yet, because Michaux made it clear that these missions were to be founded under the auspices of the Church of God, they could never be autonomous.

Elders had to submit to the authority of their leader or leave the Church of God. To those who thought they had acquired sufficient knowledge and skill under his tutelage to split off Michaux cautioned,

Don't you pay any attention to the things your imagination tells you you can do--how you can preach, how you can do this or that--about the only thing you can do is to blow your top. . . . Remain one and you will be powerful. . . . I don't care how secure the limbs seem to be on a tree . . . they are no good if the trunk of

\(^{61}\) Ibid., Nov. 1953.
\(^{62}\) Ibid.
\(^{63}\) Ibid., July 1953.
the tree doesn't hold them up... Cut one of them off and
throw it down, then you watch it and see if it doesn't wither and
die. 64.

VI

The most devout members of the Church of God accepted Michaux's
brand of leadership because they believed it improved their lives.
Hence, they perceived of themselves as newborn persons. This new self-
perception issued from a psychological reorganization which permitted
them to reject their former life styles to accept standards, practices,
and discipline of the Michaux movement. 65

The phenomenon of rebirth, not unusual in sects and religious and
social movements, is well illustrated by Black Muslims who denote conver-
sion by dropping the old slave surname, replacing it with the letter X.
In Father Divine's Peace Mission Movement, converts also assumed new
names such as New Hope, Happy Joy to symbolize the dropping of their
slave corrupt status. 66 While converts to the Church of God did not
change their names, they considered themselves to have experienced a
rebirth. One elderly member poignantly voiced the views of many when
she spoke of her old self.

As a youth I had attended church, but people did not preach what
even I had in my mind [about how a holy person should live]. I
would look up at the sky and ask the Lord to help me. Sometimes

64 Ibid., July 1956.
65 See Toch, Social Movements, 125-129 for effects of conversion.
66 Robert A. Parker, The Incredible Messiah (Boston, 1937), 157-158,
and Lincoln, C. Eric, The Black Muslims in America (Boston, 1961),
110.
after taking a bath, I would ask the Lord to teach me to be clean inside like I was outside. 67

Mrs. Michaux delineated the burden of the converts. "What you are speaks so loud," she sang, "the world can't hear what you say. They're looking at your walk not listening to your talk. They're judging by your actions everyday." 68 Each member theoretically was an individual proselytizer, exemplar par excellence, trying to convert others to "war on the devil." 69 Consequently these members manifested a new life in the way they dressed, adorning themselves according to the Bible's edict—modestly. However, their Saintly adornment was within conventions of regular American dress. It was not exotic like that of Black Muslims or Bishop Johnson's "Jesus Only" sect members. In the two latter movements, women do not straighten their hair, use any make-up, or wear dresses which allow their legs to show. What Michaux considered Saintly adornment was illustrated in a directive concerning beach attire. Men were to wear a shirt and trousers over bathing trunks and women "old-fashioned bathing suit" with bloomers underneath and a skirt on top. 70 Devout members were always anxious to show that the conversion was consummate. Those who were formerly prostitutes and gamblers renounced that life style. Others married partners with whom they previously had lived in

67 From an interview with a member of Michaux's church, Jan. 1972.
68 Author's observations.
69 They proselytized mainly by selling Happy News and by discussing religion on their jobs or by inviting friends to church services; none of this could prove effective if others did not see Christ in their lives according to Michaux and his wife.
70 Minutes, March 1959.
fornication. All attended church more regularly and studied the Bible daily.  

Despite the emphasis on morality, conversion had practical application. Members said in testimonies that they had acquired psychological solace. They spoke of sin as an illness which had made them moan and groan, as one which had caused mental illness and physical impairment. They no longer worried, for example, that the policeman on the beat was coming to arrest them since they had committed no crimes. As Saints, then, they were generally happier. Some of them believed they were better off economically because they no longer squandered money on liquor, gambling, women, and jail fines. (Furthermore, because they were expected to pay church offerings, many learned to budget their incomes.) Some members who rented houses and apartments when they joined the church, later purchased homes and other property. A few acquired winter homes in Florida and property in the Bahamas. Some made wise investments in local property and various stocks and bonds. The movement's current president, Rudolph Jones, acquired his lucrative junk business during the forties after he came to the church. He was initially very poor, but in 1972, he was the employer of approximately fifty workers, secretaries, and a full-time professional accountant.  

Prior to joining Michaux's movement, these dispossessed ones had been hopeful of upward mobility and improved morality. Many of the first members' aspirations were realized by their descendants. Because of

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71 Based on author's observations in the Church of God.

72 Discussions with Rudolph Jones and his employees, and other members of the Church of God, and author's observations.
their improved economic conditions, second generation members were inclined to give their children higher educations. From the 1940's on, many of the members' children completed high school. In the 1950's large numbers attended business and trade schools and colleges. Many of those whose forebears were among Michaux's first converts are now school teachers, college professors, civil servants (some with grades of G.S. 13 or better), professional ball players, dentists, scientists, nurses, engineers, secretaries, bank managers, lawyers, and recording artists. One, Cecilia Hobbs, is a widely acclaimed child musical prodigy; at twelve, she had already made guest appearances as a violinist on nationally and internationally renowned philharmonic symphony programs. Some members' children have studied in Europe, and others are currently teaching abroad in United States Dependents' schools. A few are trying to make inroads into politics and several are members of local Boards of Education. In the Church of God, there has been little aversion to military service, and some men made careers in the Army, Navy, and Air Force. However, this relative material and educational success has caused a drain on church membership rolls, as these young adults move into middle and upper-class status and leave the movement. The older members' thrift, frugality, and hard work have paid off; the upward social mobility of their children and grandchildren, many of whom have left the church, is partial proof of this.  

73 From interviews and discussion with members of Michaux's church and based on author's acquaintance with members and their children.
Most of the members believed they owed thanks to God and loyalty to Michaux for pointing them to avenues of gradual material prosperity and healthy mental outlook. Some felt that their continued success was dependent upon their loyalty to the collective group, and many vowed "not to bring any reproach on the Church of God" by reverting to their old selves. Most members showed their dependence on Michaux as one who had rekindled their hope and as one who could empathize with them in their troubles or offer advice and prayer for them during adversity. A Happy News article informed the public of some members' childlike dependence. They "come to him with all manner of cares. . . . They seem to think he can do all things. They even come with their headaches, pains and sicknesses. . . . He lays his hands on them, closes his eyes and calls on his heavenly Father to heal these sick hearts." Such dependence insured leaders like Michaux of loyalty because individual members feared that any show of disloyalty might cause them to be thrust out of the movement and force them to meet their problems independent of the leader and of the group.75

Eager to entrench his authority in the Church of God, Michaux mastered techniques which gave him a relatively effective leadership. Mainly he centralized power so that all authority issued from him. He augmented his charismatic qualities by appealing to his members' faith in him as one ordained by God. Michaux's position was somewhat assured after he convinced most of his members that affiliation with the church would benefit them spiritually and materially.

75 An idea expressed in Toch, Social Movements, 136-138.
CHAPTER V

SOCIAL INTERESTS AND INFLUENCE

To a great extent the Church of God's organizational success emanated from Elder Michaux's authoritarianism. This was a reciprocal arrangement; besides many of Michaux's converts manifested a devoutness because they in turn expected to derive various benefits from their membership. The Elder's "New Thought" gospel, social interests, and influence (expressed in his ability to implement plans and ideas) convinced them of the validity of his social and religious creed.

Michaux, sensitive to blighted social conditions in society, discovered his mandate for social involvement in the teachings and practices of Christ as they pertained to assisting dispossessed people. Each Easter Monday Michaux dramatized Christ's compassion for the needy by re-enacting His feeding of the multitude with fish and bread. The Elder also continuously reminded his followers of Christ's admonition that rich nations (people) which neglected to assist the indigent (even strangers) would be damned on Judgement day. After diligently studying the New Testament, Michaux concluded that Christian churches should be dedicated to resolution of social ills.

His ideas probably evolved out of twentieth century Social Gospel preachments against uncontrolled capitalism, exploitation of laboring

\[1\] See Minutes and Happy News, passim.

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classes, neglect of the impoverished, and the rising tide of socialism. Some Social Gospelers called for a reconstruction of American society along the lines of New Testament teachings, and this inspired several religious denominations to initiate social action programs, as for example, settlement houses and the Federation of Church of Christ of America. This gospel evolved out of a spirit of noblesse oblige. Consequently, masses often were repelled by the paternalistic and theological approaches of upper and middle-class reformers who were ill-prepared to eradicate causes of industrial and urban ills. To many the Social Gospel, then, seemed to pale into Gospel of Wealth preachments.  

In the post-World War I era numerous urban, upper-class black churches adhered to the dominant practice of benignly neglecting the dispossessed. Their dilettantism was especially disconcerting when the economic recession heightened into depression in 1929, intensifying already widespread indigence among recent migrants.  


excuses were compounded by economic crisis. Even black southern traditional churches, storefront and other non-traditional ones, which historically had been oriented toward welfare services, had to restrict such programs as their members' offerings dwindled. Because this void was not filled adequately by civil rights and other social organizations, at a time when governmental social security benefits were virtually non-existent, masses of blacks were distraught. Communist leaders tried to capitalize on widespread unrest to attract blacks into the party's ranks. They held rallies at which schemes for black political and economic self-determination within the United States were discussed. Spurning the foreign ideology, thousands of AfroAmericans sought relief from more indigenous sources, such as black religious sects and cults. These either operated well-organized welfare programs and/or offered psychological succor throughout the Great Depression. Like them, the Church of God mobilized to alleviate depression ills within its sphere of influence.

Michaux's gospel was relevant to needs of the jobless, hungry, and homeless—black and white. This fact was reflected in the rapid growth of the Church of God and of Michaux's radio audience. To many his social consciousness was implicit in his definition of religion which he said "meant an active daily effort to improve life." It was under this mandate, the Elder explained, that his church "entered the sacred domain

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4 Ibid.

of private enterprise in order to help people" before and during the depression. 6

As early as 1924 his congregation was thrown into economic crisis when the shipyard—the Tidewater area’s most reliable source of employment—cut back production. One result was excessive unemployment. Some members of the Church of God migrated North to search for employment while others, attached to the vicinity for various reasons, took piecemeal and temporary jobs. To help feed and house those who remained and to keep his church viable as members’ offerings diminished, Michaux established a program of welfare relief. Basing it on principles of communal living and sharing, he called it the "Common Plan." Following is Michaux’s description of that program.

We came together and began to live on the common plan 7 during the twenties . . . just as the apostles of old. And we never hun-
gered. . . . All who lived there either in the building on 19th Street and Jefferson Avenue or in a church home on 22nd Street worked and brought their money together every week; we put it on a big table in the living room and counted it out. Some made $25, $30 . . . Some made $10. Some had no outside employment and so earned no money; we paid all the bills. 7

Michaux and Elder Howard Poole, the church’s treasurer, parceled out equitable shares of remaining money after bills were paid. The equally refunded share was never more than $4.50. However, because rent, food,

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6 Ibid.
7 Minutes, Jan. 1956.
and utilities were supplied by the Gospel Spreading Association, any refund was "pocket" money.8

Because of insufficient housing accommodations, more than half of Michaux's members were not full participants in the "Common Plan." All who were unemployed, however, and their families received free meals from the church's café. As the depression set in, this privilege was extended to non-members, who were unemployed or handicapped. They "didn't have to say anything but just come on in there and eat . . . not just soup and beans . . . but we gave them plenty of good food. . . . They ate like we did," Michaux recalled.9 Although these meals were not sumptuous feasts, they were well-balanced with adequate variety. Boasting of the "Common Plan's" effectiveness Michaux said, "Not one member from the Church of God ever went into the bread line."10 Against this background it is easy to understand Michaux's chagrin when he heard that a member, who was not living on the Plan, was seen standing in a public charity line to obtain foodstuffs. For that unseemly behavior the man was called before the church and chastised.11 The Elder preached that God would provide all that Saints needed, and he was determined to prove the certitude of that creed. A significant aspect of his discipline, therefore, was to keep his members from requesting or relying on outside

8 Based on discussions with a member of Michaux's church who participated in the "Common Plan." For a discussion of the Gospel Spreading Association, see pages 167-168.

9 Based on discussions with members of Michaux's church and Daily News (Washington, D.C.), Feb. 9, 1933.

10 Minutes, Jan. 1956.

11 Based on a discussion with member of the Church of God whose family was involved in the incident.
aid. He hoped others would recognize in the church's self-sufficiency a special blessing from God.

The Church of God was the only black church on the Virginia Peninsula which is known to have offered routine charitable aid during the depression. Although there were public assistance services in Newport News and Hampton, some black residents in the area ate so regularly at the church's restaurant that one wonders how they would have survived the crisis without that service. But the "Common Plan" was a mere rehearsal for Michaux's more ambitious social welfare program in Washington during the Great Depression.

II

In 1930 Washington was a city split along racial lines. The depression heightened black awareness of social injustices there and created new tensions. Unemployment was especially acute for not only did black people lose traditional jobs to whites but unskilled work was also difficult for them to secure and maintain. By the end of the year, however, all of Washington was painfully aware of the depression, as local businesses were bankrupt and banks went in receivership. Civil servants were furloughed without pay, and salaries of active employees were cut 15 per cent. Hundreds of families were evicted. Congress offered only temporary relief by appropriating emergency doles for the unemployed and a specified group of resident-families in the District. Private assistance, too, was inadequate as even the Community Chest curtailed its services because of depleted funds. Some self-help schemes, as for example family gardening in vacant lots, were fostered by the Council of Social Agencies. But there was little cooperation between
participants and sponsors, and most schemes were of limited success.\textsuperscript{12}

Washington's Afro-Americans were especially destitute because aid to mothers of small children was parceled out on a discriminatory basis, and migrants often could not meet residency requirements for government assistance. Futility pervaded the black community as distinguished black Washingtonians tried unsuccessfully to coordinate Negro welfare services.\textsuperscript{13}

Michaux had one of the most effective private welfare assistance programs in the capital. The Good Neighbor League which operated out of his Church of God headquarters in Washington helped thousands. President Herbert Hoover's speech at Fort Monroe, Virginia, early in 1932 inspired Michaux to organize the League. During the speech Hoover asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" and made a friendly reference to good neighborliness. Michaux thought the words good neighbor made a "catchy phrase which would attract followers and make clear his aim." He founded the League in 1932 to feed, house, and clothe the depression poor in the Washington area, and it adhered to a Progressive idea—that "it is better to help a man help himself than to help him outright."\textsuperscript{14}

Michaux launched his Good Neighbor League by helping the Bonus Army of 1932. As many as twenty thousand unemployed World War I veterans had converged on Washington \textit{en masse} to urge Congress to make their bonus certificates negotiable immediately rather than after a number of years.

\textsuperscript{12} Constance M. Green, \textit{The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital} (Princeton, 1967), Chapter X.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Evening Star} (Washington, D.C.), July 13, 1938.
Lodged in tents on Anacostia Flats and in government buildings the army was in desperate need. The Good Neighbor League raised over two hundred dollars to purchase meat for the racially mixed veterans, and it gave them ten thousand pounds of potatoes. This made Michaux's church one of the largest black contributors to the Bonus Expeditionary Force.

The League is also reported to have published a paper for the veterans to help them present their cause to Congress and to the people. As many as seventy-five thousand copies were sold weekly. Michaux was so closely allied to the Bonus Army that when Hoover forced it out of the city, he also drove Michaux away from the Republicans, into political league with the Democrats.

Operating on other fronts the Good Neighbor League provided homes for numerous evicted families in several three-story buildings at 7th and T Streets, N.W. A local white attorney, Rudolph Berry, extended the League free use of the buildings for one year if the church group agreed to make them habitable. The church spent thousands of dollars plastering walls, replacing fixtures, windows, window lights, and doors, and papering walls. Seventy or eighty evicted people were moved into those buildings and were said to be "crowded but comfortable, without a land-

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15 Williams, Store-Front Church, 72, Courier Magazine Section (Pittsburgh), Feb. 28, 1953, and Roger Daniels, The Bonus March, An Episode of the Great Depression (Westport, 1971), 322.

16 Pelham Glassford (Chief of the District of Columbia Police Force) to Michaux, June 14, 1932, Glassford Papers, UCLA Library.

17 Evening Star (Washington, D.C.), July 13, 1938, and Williams, Store-Front Church, 72.

18 Pictorial Review, 58, and Courier Magazine Section (Pittsburgh), Feb. 28, 1953, 5.
lord to see on Saturday night" as long as they were unemployed and without adequate funds. 19

The League served free and inexpensive but nourishing meals to the hungry in an old MacFadden Café on 7th Street, N.W. Bernarr MacFadden, philanthropist and publisher of Physical Culture magazine, had established a chain of restaurants which sold cheap health foods. When the restaurants suffered severe financial losses through mismanagement and pilfering, MacFadden was prompted to donate the 7th Street restaurant to the Michaux League. 20 The church renamed it the Happy News Cafe'. Families ate there, and some individuals received meals in exchange for performing chores around the restaurant. Michaux appealed to his radio "audience to send to his café any persons approaching them begging," so he could employ and feed them. All who came for work were given meal tickets and sent out onto the streets to sell twelve copies of Happy News. If they sold the papers, they not only received free meals but also were given free lodging. 21 In a single year, the Happy News Café supplied over 250,000 meals to black and white Americans, excluding 13,140 served to its eighteen regular employees. 22 The café's patronage increased after the depression, and MacFadden eventually gave the Michaux movement the equipment and continued use of the building. 23

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20 Pictorial Review, 58.
21 Ibid., and Happy News, 1934-36, passim.
22 Pictorial Review, 62, and from Williams, Store-Front Church, 78-79.
23 Happy News, July 1934.
The Good Neighbor League also operated a free employment service to
the dismay of numerous private employment agencies. Defending this ser-
vice Michaux explained that "He was unable to see why jobless people
should be required to pay from $2 to $4 for a job or how they could pay
it." He successfully secured employment for many by using a portion of
his radio broadcast to appeal for jobs.24

Although Michaux solicited contributions for its philanthropic
causes by way of radio and Happy News, the Good Neighbor League operated
at a financial loss. For the most part, his radio listeners responded
enthusiastically to his requests for funds. Once Michaux requested
$50,000, and "a leading citizen" promptly pledged $35,000.25 The Elder
reportedly received money from people in many parts of the country who
were anxious to further his charitable work. However, Michaux noted
that he received his greatest financial support from the members of the
Church of God.26

The League's philanthropy and the resultant publicity boosted
Michaux's popularity and may have indirectly profited him in other ways.
How the charity affected his church membership rolls is not known,
although it was stated that "many of the people whom the League aided
never set foot inside the Church of God."27 However, the Church grew
during the depression, and some of its new converts may have been bene-

24 Williams, Store-Front Church, 73.
26 Pictorial Review, 27, and Amsterdam News (New York), Sept. 29,
1934.
27 Pictorial Review, 27.
ficiaries of the League's charitable services. Several observers thought Michaux through his social-welfare activism became familiar with congressional legislation and government agencies, which he later tapped to advance other Church of God social and business interests. Whatever the resultant advantages to him or to his movement, Michaux's church made a significant contribution toward dispelling fear and inculcating hope among thousands of Washingtonians during the early thirties. This was a noteworthy benefaction during a period of change.

III

Through his close friend Major Richard R. Wright Michaux heard about widespread indigence in Haiti and was disturbed about it. He accompanied four other black men—among them Major Richard R. Wright (then President of the Negro Bankers' Association) and Charles Spaulding (President of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company)—to Haiti on April 1, 1937, ostensibly to determine how the economy there could be upgraded. The idea of making a good-will trip probably originated with Major Wright who had vacationed in Haiti after his wife's death in 1933. He was anguished over poverty among the islanders and pledged to help boost Haiti's economy. Upon his return to the United States, he initiated an individual effort in that direction by forming the Major Wright Haitian Trading Company to import and ship Haitian coffee throughout the country. Hence, Wright became the largest


29 Sumner Welles, Under Secretary of State, to Marvin McIntyre, Assistant Secretary to President Roosevelt, Feb. 26, 1937, Roosevelt Papers, Hyde Park, New York.
importer of Haitian coffee. He tried to interest more of his friends in helping that Caribbean nation.

The major not only wanted to improve the depressed economy but discordant U.S.-Haitian relations as well. The immediate history of this discord commenced during World War I. From 1915 to 1934 U.S. Marines occupied Haiti to insure economic and political stability. After a White House conference between officials from both countries, terms were agreed upon for U.S. troop removal, but agents of U.S. creditors remained in Haiti and prevented autonomy there. Coffee and banana exports to the United States were increased in 1935, and the Haitian economy showed signs of improving. By 1936 a considerable amount of the debt to American bondholders had been decreased, but another crisis occurred when in 1937 the market for Haitian exports fell after Brazil dropped its artificial price ceiling on surplus coffee. Haiti was nearly devastated and U.S. concern heightened.

Consequently, when Michaux informed the White House of his group's impending mission, there was considerable interest in U.S. diplomatic circles. Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles told Michaux "that anything he and his associates could do to increase trade between Haiti and the United States would be something this Department would favor enthusiastically and that . . . a 'good-will' trip of this kind might

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be productive.\textsuperscript{33} Dramatizing the high priority, President Franklin Roosevelt met with the delegation before it sailed, as Michaux had requested.\textsuperscript{34} Plans were made through the Department of State to secure Haitian approval of the trip, hospitality, and cooperation. Tours and dinners were planned by the Department of State. George Gordon, a member of the U.S. Legation in Haiti "arranged with the president [of Haiti] and with the Chief of Protocol for a program of sight-seeing and calls" upon President Vincent, the mayor of Port-au-Prince, officials of the Chamber of Commerce, and for dinner in the Gordon home.

One might conclude from these gestures that the Roosevelt administration was cautiously optimistic about the good-will group's avowed mission, as the administration conceived it. That such optimism actually existed seems unbelievable, however, since the professional diplomatic corps itself was in a quandary as to how to help Haiti resolve its economic problems. The black principals--certainly Michaux and Wright--wanted to help uplift black and poor people. Reminiscent of Progressive reformers, they had implemented self-help schemes but within limited spheres. Although both were undoubtedly sincere about their mission, neither was socially or intellectually prepared to abate interminable poverty on the international scene. Primarily they were constrained by their inability to understand that Progressive-type idealism was counterproductive for the dispossessed in a hostile world of economic and political imperialism since it presupposed that masses of dispossessed people could advance on their own merit.

\textsuperscript{33} Welles to McIntyre, Feb. 26, 1937. Roosevelt Papers.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
In any event the mission was unfruitful, and some U.S. diplomats were allegedly disappointed. Searching for reasons, George Gordon looked askew on the delegation's composition. Because one of the men was an insurance official, two lawyers, and one a minister, Gordon, in retrospect, thought they would not have interest or influence in increasing Haitian-American trade.  

But Haiti's President Stenio Vincent had never expected the politically powerless delegation to produce tangible results. He merely issued a post-mortem when he said, "although [I] had been trying all week to elicit some definite suggestion or proposition from [them], [I] completely failed."  

Actually the delegation's accorded goal was to spread good will. This agreement was variously defined by them. One unidentified member wanted to create a Haitian market for his soap product.  

C.C. Spaulding thought the group made the trip to study economic conditions and report on them, so he shared his findings with his Durham staff in a series of lectures.  

Michaux and Wright, realizing that Haiti needed to balance its trade since the United States alone drained off eleven million dollars annually and in return purchased only one million dollars worth of Haitian products, wanted to see that country increase its exports. Hence, Wright increased his coffee shipments, and Michaux

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35 Gordon to Welles, April 19, 1937, Roosevelt Papers.
36 Ibid.
37 Welles to McIntyre, Feb. 26, 1937, Roosevelt Papers.
opened a Haitian Cafe, specializing in coffee. These were admirable individual efforts though no boon to Haiti.

IV

Michaux also sought adequate means for countering racism and its effects on AfroAmericans. It was through his National Memorial to the Progress of the Colored Race in America plan that his race consciousness was most obviously manifested. The Memorial was necessary Michaux reasoned, "to develop in the Negro a pride in his race, and to educate him in economic independence." He thought this end could best be attained "in a place where the achievements of... are preserved and held before..." Reflecting black middle-class economic ideologies during the thirties, the Memorial was to include a cooperative farm as well as a park. Significantly, it was to be located off the Colonial Parkway—a highway connecting historic Williamsburg and Jamestown—on approximately five hundred acres in James City County, Virginia. Michaux thought that site was "in close proximity to the spot where... the first slaves landed."

According to architectural drawings the Memorial park was to include a hall of fame (housing portraits, busts, and written data on black leaders), college buildings, a monument to Booker T. Washington, non-denominational church, radio station, Bethune Hostess House (a way-

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40 Based on taped interview with Emmanuel C. Wright, Nov. 1971 and from discussions with a former Field Representative of the Church of God.
41 Daily Press (Newport News), July 8, 1937.
42 Ibid.
43 Pictorial Review, 34-36.
side inn), and a statuary group depicting racial progress. Its projected cost was from fifteen to twenty million dollars. 44

To help him implement the design Michaux invited influential Afro-americans to serve on the Memorial Advisory Board. Emmett Scott (a former B.T. Washington associate and Howard University Dean), Judge James A. Cobb (of the District of Columbia court system), A.S. Pinkett (an official of the District of Columbia NAACP), William J. Tompkins (Recorder of the Deeds in the District of Columbia), Mary M. Bethune (of the National Youth Administration), and Julia West Hamilton (Director, Phyllis Wheatly YWCA) were among its members. This board held its first meeting near the end of 1936, and Michaux began serious planning for the memorial shortly thereafter. 45

To raise funds for his ambitious project, he launched a national fund-raising drive in Newport News on July 2, 1937. 46 Prominent black and white businessmen, educators, lawyers, ministers, and Michaux followers on the Penninsula rallied to the cause. 47 They contributed or pledged sums from one to five hundred dollars, but by mid-July only two thousand dollars in cash and in pledges had been raised. 48

Soon plans ran afoul as some National Board members became disgusted with the memorial drive, calling it "only ... a real estate

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45 Ibid.
48 Daily Press (Newport News), Sept. 11, 1937.
promoter's project," partly because Michaux did not give them full and frequent accountings. Their disaffection is not surprising since it was generally known that many black "divines" had acquired great wealth by the mid-thirties from contributions of people sympathetic to their cause. Conspicuous consumption revealed their personal opulence, as when Bishop Grace, for instance, purchased a "sumptuous country estate and fruit farm" in Cuba in 1936 for more money than the realtors had been requesting. As a black prophet and founder of a religious movement, Michaux was identified with them. Therefore, his handling of financial matters was always suspect. The Board members' statements to the press discredited the project, and the Elder terminated the fund-raising drive.

Meanwhile the memorial project was under attack from national government officials and agencies who threatened to confiscate the memorial lands. The Superintendent of the Colonial National Historical Park in Yorktown, Virginia, Floyd Flickinger, observed the progress of Memorial activities which he considered a threat to National Park Service developments in and around Jamestown. He was concerned that Michaux would try to link his Negro memorial to Colonial National Historical Park developments. Although Flickinger's protestations were not given serious consideration, other troubles plagued Michaux's memorial plans.

49 Journal and Guide (Norfolk), Nov. 13, 1937.
50 "Daddy Grace's Cuban Paradise," Ebony, IX (Nov. 1953), 86.
51 Journal and Guide (Norfolk), Nov. 13, 1937.
52 Cammerer to Flickinger, July 16, 1937, Department of the Interior Correspondence, File No. 610, Box 118, National Archives.
The Elder had suggested late in 1936 that the federal government construct a road to link the National Memorial to Jamestown and Williamsburg. It was from this conversation, Michaux thought, that A.E. Demaray, then Acting Director of the National Park Service, initially acquired the idea for a Colonial Parkway. Demaray, not intending to accommodate Michaux, then moved to get a bill passed in Congress for such a highway. When the bill was enacted Michaux was thrown into a six year fight with the National Park Service which tapped some of the memorial land for the Parkway and refused to award Michaux a fair price for it. Michaux used all of his assumed prestige as a radio evangelist and Roosevelt supporter and intimate to stall for a fair price and for exemption of the memorial land from condemnation after he would not accept the Park Service's offers.

Proving himself a formidable opponent, the Elder attempted to build national support for the memorial idea by staging a Diamond Jubilee Celebration of the Thirteenth Amendment under its auspices on October 20, 1940, at the New York World's Fair. He urged President Roosevelt to order the Post Office to issue a commemorative stamp for the celebration. Franklin Roosevelt, Jr. presented certificates of merit to such outstanding black Americans as Marian Anderson, Paul Robeson, Major Richard R. Wright, Mary Bethune, Walter White, Bill Robinson, George W. Carver, Bishop David H. Sims, and Elder Michaux. Each honoree was also presented with a pane of the commemorative stamps (which depicted Lincoln

53 Parke Rouse, Jr., "Happy Am I," The Commonwealth, XXXII (July 1965), 32.

54 Department of the Interior Correspondence, File No. 610, Box 118, National Archives.
towering above a kneeling slave) by the Postmaster General Walker.\textsuperscript{55} Despite this display of the Memorial Association's avowed commitment to celebrating racial progress, the National Park Service did not settle with Michaux until 1945.\textsuperscript{56} These difficulties converged with the Elder's Board troubles to seal the fate of the Memorial. Although the concept was never implemented, it remained hauntingly alive for Michaux until he died.\textsuperscript{57}

V

There were times when he explicitly castigated oppressors of his people. On one occasion he called the white man an illogical oppressor whose peace has been taken away because he "fear[s] the uprising of those who ... have been oppressed."\textsuperscript{58} Michaux reasoned, furthermore, that America had lost its judgement and was hypocritical; it had allowed itself to become divided over the issue of integration. "Illogical! No judgement!" he said. "Negroes are employed in the homes of white people, cooking their bread, and as the Chinese saying goes, 'spitting in their soup tasting the soup with a spoon and putting that same spoon back into the soup and stirring it up. Yet they are well thought of [in this servile position]."\textsuperscript{59} Through homey and unsci-

\textsuperscript{55}Pictorial Review, 63.

\textsuperscript{56}Memo, Attorney General's Office to Department of Interior, Sept. 1945, Department of Interior Correspondence, National Archives.

\textsuperscript{57}Happy News, July 1953 and August 1957, and Parke Rouse, Jr., "Happy Am I," Commonwealth, XXXII (July 1965), 32.

\textsuperscript{58}Minutes, April 1960.

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid.
entific philosophy, Michaux explicated the illogic. "Why they even
nurse the breast [sic] of black mammies. Whatever you nurse becomes
your food, and the food you eat makes your blood which flows through
your veins and gives you strength. . . . Therefore . . . many a white
man . . . has the blood of his black mammy in his veins."60

The Elder believed that Jewish people who historically had suf-
fered much oppression should have compassion for down-trodden people.
But his observations convinced him that wealthy Jews grossly exploited
black domestics.

Folks who are not, in my judgement, receiving the consideration
. . . they should receive are domestic workers. A domestic worker
is an important person but [considered] so unimportant by the
employer. They receive the least benefit for their work. They
have less time off [for vacations although they work for] people
who have plenty of money. [The rich] need several servants but
they try to make one servant do the work of many. The Hebrew
people are especially those who work their people for so long and
pay so little wages. They feel that as the Egyptians did them,
that is the way they should do the Negro here in America. 61

This quotation is not intended to ascribe anti-semitism to Michaux,
for he may have been only addressing himself to an immediate personal
concern. He had recently organized the Gospel Spreading Association
Washington School of Household Arts to train and place domestic ser-
vants for a "small tuition" of thirty-five dollars. One of the school's

60 Minutes, Nov. 1957.
61 Ibid., April 1956.
main promotional features was a notation on the advertising brochure: "YOU--will be paid more."\textsuperscript{62} Perhaps Jewish people who had hired some of the school's alumni had required too much work for minimal wages.

While Michaux desired compassion from Jewish people, he expected moral leadership from the President. He urged President Eisenhower to take a positive stand on the issue of civil rights. In 1954 he invited the President and his wife to attend the Annual Baptizing. More than an invitation, his letter to them was gratuitous and chiding. On the one hand Michaux thought the President who had promised in 1953 to "use whatever authority exists in the office of the President to end segregation in the District of Columbia, including the federal government, and any segregation in the armed services," had carried that promise out.\textsuperscript{63}

Yet, Michaux wrote:

There is one thing more that you can do (that is) to help lift the scales from the eyes of the most powerful organization in earth, THE PROFESSIONING CHRISTIAN CHURCH, that needs to, as a whole, approve the abolishing of segregation unanimously by throwing open their doors to every American citizen and extend the invitation to them, regardless of race or color.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{62}Minutes, Nov. 1953, and based on a brochure from Michaux to Mrs. Eisenhower, filed March 19, 1954 in the Eisenhower papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

\textsuperscript{63}Dwight D. Eisenhower, The White House Years: Mandate for Change, 1953-1956 (Garden City, 1963), 235. Actually Eisenhower employed Executive Power to begin desegregating installations which utilized federal money, and he ordered desegregation in the army, navy, and air force. Segregation was practically ended in Washington's theaters, hotels, and restaurants. This was in some respects a continuation of Truman's Fair Deal program.

\textsuperscript{64}Michaux to Eisenhower, Sept. 14, 1954, Eisenhower Papers.
By 1960 Michaux was less optimistic that racial harmony could be attained. In this he reflected the general disillusion among black people at that time. Their blighted hope resulted in part from massive white resistance to school desegregation and the dearth of national legislation on civil rights. In addition, Michaux believed the federal government wanted to exploit his organization by pressuring it into selling waterfront property in Jamestown along the Colonial Parkway. In this regard he asked National Park Service officials, "Where will we go? ... You can't help us. You won't let us go to school with them."65

Michaux did not affiliate with any civil rights organizations. He was, however, associated with a group dedicated to commemorating racial achievements— the National Freedom Day Association. The association included such luminaries as Channing H. Tobias, Rufus E. Clements, John W. Davis, Bishop David H. Sims, Charles Wesley, Benjamin Mays, Horace Mann Bond, Rayford Logan, and Martin Luther King, Jr. It was founded by Michaux's friend, Major Richard R. Wright, in 1940 to celebrate annually the anniversary of the Thirteenth Amendment.66

In general the Elder disapproved of black nationalists and civil rights activists because he thought they contributed to racial polarization. He was especially critical of the Black Islam movement. In a debate between them in Griffith Stadium during 1961, he assailed Elijah Muhammad as the leader of a "cult of hate."67 Yet, he lauded Martin Luther King, Jr. After the 1963 March in Washington, Michaux called Dr.

66Elizabeth Ross Haynes, The Black Boy of Atlanta (Boston, 1952), 137.
King a "Saint" whose dream would not be realized until the millennium.68 One year later the Elder emerged as a racial conservative when he sent King a critical open letter.

King had accused J. Edgar Hoover, Michaux's personal friend, and the FBI of dereliction of duty in not bringing Georgian civil rights violators to justice. In the letter, Michaux told King that he had personally investigated his complaints against Hoover and had found them baseless. Michaux further explained that the FBI served as an investigatory body and left local government to punish and maintain law and order. The letter cited civil rights investigations conducted by the FBI and the positive results thereof. In 1964 alone, Michaux wrote, the FBI investigated 3,340 civil rights violations. The Elder suggested that Dr. King had not done his homework before speaking out. "Your statement based on suspicion only was a grave error . . . and Mr. Hoover, knowing the strenuous efforts . . . put forth by his department to do all in [its] power to bring every violator of Civil Rights to justice, was provoked to call you a notorious liar."69 Michaux suggested that King, as recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, which branded him contemporary "Prince of Peacemakers," should apologize to Hoover. Both men should "bury the hatchet that could result in America's downfall."70 There is no evidence that either man responded to Michaux's letter. However, the Elder did not leave the matter there. In a 1965 interview he said, "Unless the policy of Martin Luther King is curbed, we are in

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70Ibid.
for trouble. I don't approve of King's manner in defying local government. He must conform to local government. . . . His methods are getting publicity for him but not for the human race." 71

It is impossible to ascertain the Elder's motives in this situation; even his members were chagrined by it. Michaux in any event apparently had forgotten that some forty years earlier he, too, had defied local and state laws on racial segregation, arguing then that they were superseded by spiritual laws.

Although Michaux will never be accused of militancy, neither can he categorically be labeled as impervious to social and racial interests. His efforts to eradicate poverty and to enhance black pride can no longer be discounted despite his basic conservative social thought. Undoubtedly actions which emerged from his missionary zeal, Progressive-type idealism, and lack of racial aggressiveness caused some of his contemporaries to hold him in contempt. Consequently, his social interests and influence were infrequently recognized.

71 Rouse, "Happy Am I," Commonwealth, XXXII (July 1965), 33.
CHAPTER VI

THE PROPHET AND THE PRESIDENTS

The inevitable extension of Michaux’s varied activities and social interests was a desire to participate in politics on the national level. He energetically campaigned for the elections of Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Dwight Eisenhower. Although his political interests and influence, like his social concerns, were multi-faceted and defy a monolithic interpretation, they evolved primarily from the Elder’s awareness of black social and economic impotency.

From the beginning of his ministry, Michaux tried to form his congregation into a self-sufficient unit and to help other dispossessed people beyond his church. He was driven continuously by this ambition. For years he was preoccupied with the task of garnering political and economic power for powerless people, the frequent victims of uncontrolled capitalism and white racism. He believed these foundations could be razed by socially sensitive and morally upright Presidents. It was out of his desire to see such men elected to the office of President that Michaux’s initial activism in national politics evolved during the late twenties. His perception of himself as a prophet augmented his moral dedication to that task, inducing him to assume the role of spiritual adviser to the nation.

On the surface his perspective seems audacious for a black minister in a predominantly white society. But for a time Michaux was a national
religious phenomenon, popular and much esteemed. One result of this celebrity was his presumption that he had a mandate from the people and from God to counsel the nation. The Elder was primarily inspired to commend to the American people presidential candidates whom he believed were sympathetic to their needs and to counsel those men who were elected to the presidency.

To Michaux a close relationship between religion and government (especially Christianity and democracy) was ideally practical. He thought both properly should be concerned with advancing the social welfare of the masses of Americans. Accordingly he defined democracy as that system of government designed to protect the natural and acquired rights of people by upholding righteous laws which are founded upon a Christian moral code and dictated by God. Because he perceived an affinity between religion and government, Michaux believed prophets and incumbent presidents should assume their natural alliance. Consequently, he insisted that presidents should be receptive to moral utterances inspired by God through His prophets so as to receive proper guidance in recommending and executing democratic legislation. Michaux thought, moreover, that presidents, like prophets, were divinely anointed since God authorized their election through the people. As a result presidents were obligated to minister to the people's needs. Their failure to be counseled by prophets could doom the presidents to corruption and abusive use of authority to the benefit of a favored few. Thus, such an unfortunate one must expect to be rejected by God and condemned by God's prophet. Michaux used a Biblical passage to illustrate his role:

\[1\text{Happy News, Jan. 1953.}\]
God gave to Israel King Saul because they requested a king. He sent Samuel the prophet to anoint Saul, King. As long as Saul obeyed God, Samuel, the prophet, commended him to the people. But the day that God commanded Saul to ... destroy the Amalekites and all their cattle, for they were enemies of Israel, and Saul disobeyed God by sparing King Agag and the best of his flock, God sent Samuel to condemn Saul before the people and to tell him that God had rejected him because he followed not in the footsteps of the commandments of God.²

Michaux's ambitions for a political role were not without precedent. He merely continued the historical role of the black church. Traditionally it had been the most important avenue toward political activism among black people. The tradition had grown out of anti-slavery and anti-racist preachments and activities of black ministers such as Nat Turner, Samuel R. Ward, Bishop Henry M. Turner, and more recently of Dr. Martin Luther King. Their political activism was necessary because masses of black people were under-represented in the usual political decision-making bodies. With a congregational base, experience through intra-denominational struggles, and knowledge of conditions among Afro-americans, black ministers were the most likely candidates for trying to influence local and national political developments.

Michaux's political interests emerged during Herbert Hoover's administration when the Great Depression stunned the country. An earlier admirer of that president, Michaux had advised him through his

²Pictorial Review, 46.
radio sermons on how to best resolve the depression. The Elder believed his proposals were received with mere presidential courtesy.  

However, until Hoover drove the Bonus Army out of Washington and allowed a big gospel tent to be burned to the ground, Michaux considered the President to be one of God's anointed. "That day," the Elder exclaimed, "I knew God had rejected Mr. Hoover." Michaux followed suit.

In 1932 he advised his black members and followers to break their traditional Republican ties to vote for Franklin Roosevelt. For this reason, some political journalists have credited Michaux "with leading the first swing of Negro voters to the Democratic party." After his election, Michaux enthusiastically supported Roosevelt, and he dramatized his favor by staging a massive program to welcome the President to Washington in 1933. During that affair seven thousand looked on as the Elder prayed that Roosevelt be given dictatorial powers and the guidance of God to use them to the nation's best advantage. And later that spring Michaux opened his Belasco Theater revival with a special prayer for the President.

From its inception, Michaux heralded the New Deal over the radio and in the press because he believed it would inaugurate a new social

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4 Ibid., 72.

5 Pictorial Review, 46, and Evening Star (Washington), July 13, 1938.


7 Washington Post (D.C.), March 6, 1933.

8 Washington Herald (D.C.), May 1, 1933.
order which would benefit the masses. In fact it was to promote New
Deal legislation that Michaux made his first political prophecies and
publicized his concern over a potential Russian communist threat to
America. In the summer of 1933, Michaux had his dream about three
eagles. The first eagle (white) represented the National Revival Admin-
istration; its program was war on the devil which was to be waged by
Michaux. The second eagle (the National Recovery Administration, a blue
eagle) waged war on the depression by establishing hundreds of codes to
regulate competition and production in industry and labor. These two
eagles were to join forces, Michaux said, to fight the third eagle (a
red one) which Michaux called the National Revolution Administration
which was waging war on society. The Elder interpreted the dream to
mean that he and Roosevelt were to help each other rid the country of
political and social-economic discontent. Michaux prophesied, "If we
reject the New Deal offered us by God . . . there is nothing left for
us but chaos." His support of NRA was given at a time when that New
Deal agency was under intense fire from dissident factions of business
and labor, and it so delighted Hugh Johnson (the NRA director) that he
arranged a White House appointment to have Roosevelt meet Michaux.10
The substance of that meeting is unknown.

II

Most insight into Michaux's political motives is gleaned from his
letters to the Presidents. He did not write to Roosevelt until 1936.

9 Evening Star (Washington), July 13, 1938, and Pictorial Review,
10-11.

10 Evening Star (Washington), July 13, 1938.
He initially wrote to commend the President on his Brotherhood Day Address, from Hyde Park in 1936, which incorporated the good neighbor concept. In that letter Michaux exclaimed,

Hello Neighbor, this greeting is sent to you in the spirit of your address. . . . In a drive instituted today by the Radio Church of God of America to do its part in reviving the good neighbor spirit throughout the nation a resolution has been adopted as follows:

With the usual greeting on meeting which is good morning, the word neighbor will be added.\textsuperscript{11}

Michaux also responded favorably to suggestions, made shortly after that presidential address, that a political coalition—the Good Neighbor League—be formed to re-elect Roosevelt in 1936.

The Good Neighbor League was the brain child of Stanley High. A white, forty year old native of Chicago, High had previously worked in fields of religion, reform journalism, and politics. He had earned a divinity degree, and despite the fact that he was never ordained, he was pastor of a church in Stamford, Connecticut, for four years. Having stumped the country for Hoover in 1928 and 1932, High was considered a Republican. Later, however, he saw much good in the New Deal. In 1934 High told a group of students:

The fundamental objective of what we call the New Deal is religious. I think it is safe to say that this is the first time in modern history when a government in any nation has set out to give practical application to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. And the tragedy is that the Church, the organization that takes its

\textsuperscript{11}Michaux to Roosevelt, March 10, 1936, Roosevelt Papers.
charter from the New Testament, is so generally silent or criti-
cal.\textsuperscript{12}

At that time High was a lecturer for NBC in religion and current events.\textsuperscript{13} He apparently made his decision to cast his support to Roosevelt when he, like Michaux, was inspired by the President's Brotherhood Day Speech. High got a leave from NBC to work for Roosevelt's re-election by organizing the non-partisan Good Neighbor League.\textsuperscript{14}

The League was a coalition of racial minorities, churchmen, feminists, liberal Republicans, and loyal Democrats. High went to Washington to see Michaux to acquire the Elder's support and his consent for the coalition to use the name Good Neighbor League.\textsuperscript{15} From the start Michaux cooperated with High who expressed religious and social sentiments similar to his.

The League was officially launched on April 24, 1936, and earlier that month the Church of God's Happy News ran an account of the league, notifying readers of its future monthly coverage of the coalition's news and progress.\textsuperscript{16} In September High prepared to capture the black vote by meeting with Afroamerican churchmen like Richard R. Wright, Jr., (A.M.E.)

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} "High: Roosevelt's 'Spokesman Disowned,'" \textit{Newsweek}, IX (Feb. 13, 1937), 14.
\item \textsuperscript{13} "Democrat's St. Paul," \textit{Time}, XXVII (June 1, 1936), 27.
\item \textsuperscript{15} \textit{Evening Star} (Washington), July 13, 1938. Michaux previously had operated a social welfare organization under the name Good Neighbor League, a derivative of a Hoover speech.
\item \textsuperscript{16} April 1936.
\end{itemize}
of Philadelphia and the Reverend Dr. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. 17

As one of the League's main organizers, Stanley High was a vigorous publicist. He sponsored rallies in twenty-six major cities throughout the country to attract black votes to the Democratic ticket. He launched nine series of nation-wide mass meetings on September 21, 1936, at Madison Square Garden rally. 18 Inspirational and political activities of the rally were carefully interspersed with entertainment from the then popular Elks Band, Cab Calloway and his orchestra, W. C. Handy, and Michaux and his Cross Choir. 19 According to High, the stage almost sagged with black bishops and other church dignitaries. Despite the many performances, the "biggest cheer of the evening," High wrote, "came at the moment when Michaux dramatically unveiled a vast portrait or painting of the "Three Emancipators"—Abraham Lincoln, Jesus Christ and Franklin Roosevelt. 20 That Madison Square Garden rally was credited by political analysts with getting out the Harlem vote for Roosevelt.

Some observers consider the Good Neighbor League "one of the most successful auxiliary party organizations of the past three decades." 21 This is especially true of its "colored committees'" success in marshalling the black vote for Roosevelt in 1936. Michaux was satisfied that


20 High, Roosevelt--And Then?, 201.

he had contributed, if only in a small way, to the President's re-election. In a show of self-aggrandizement, Michaux publicized his participation in the re-election effort by publishing photographs of himself and the Cross Choir at the Madison Square Garden rally. But apparently his participation brought him criticism from some quarters because two years later, the Elder defensively contended that the rally was a religious, rather than a political, meeting. Because of his contributions to the Democratic victory, Michaux was invited to serve on the League's National Board of Directors.

In 1940 Michaux again supported Roosevelt for re-election. During this campaign, however, Michaux evinced a shift in motives for participating in presidential politics; the shift was from general concern for the dispossessed to those more specific to his movement. Causes of the change can be discovered in several disappointments which the Elder suffered between 1936 and 1940, failure to implement plans for a National Memorial, wranglings with the National Park Service, and declining popularity as a radio evangelist. He was primarily interested then in preserving his own renown and in attaining economic benefits for his movement. This stance was evident in his political utterances and activities.

He delivered an address at the 1940 Democratic National Convention and billed himself as a radio evangelist and "a leader of [his] people . . . the colored people of America." No official representative,

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Michaux told the delegates he attended the convention because he was authorized by the delegates of the State of Happy Minds to nominate Mrs. . . . Roosevelt . . . wife of the greatest President who ever lived, for Vice President. . . . The number of delegates . . . consist of those of my race that are protected from Social injustice by the Social Security Act, old age pensions, by the NYA, the WPA, and who have a little savings in safe banks.\textsuperscript{25} Michaux wanted the President to intercede in his case with the National Park Service, and his address undoubtedly was intended to convince the Chief Executive that Michaux merited such consideration.

Following the convention Michaux sent President Roosevelt a telegram, reminding him of his sizeable following. He wrote, "After sitting in the . . . Convention . . . listening to the delegates . . . and also to your acceptance speech . . . I was moved to call the seven churches over which I am overseer in special prayer to God for your health and strength." Pointing out that he was probably in the vanguard of that Christian deed, he continued, "We trust that other churches will follow the example."\textsuperscript{26} The President responded, telling Michaux that he was grateful for his prayers and for "the prayers of the seven churches under his leadership."\textsuperscript{27} Nevertheless, the Memorial lands were still threatened with federal condemnation.

Michaux's myopic interest in politics was clearly illustrated in his five year struggle, beginning in 1939, to save the National Memorial


\textsuperscript{26} Michaux to Roosevelt, July 21, 1940, Roosevelt Papers.

\textsuperscript{27} Roosevelt to Michaux, July 30, 1940, Roosevelt Papers.
site from condemnation. He hired Attorney Clarence J. Owens, who was prominent in national political circles, to defend him. The Elder then proceeded to help his own case by preaching radio sermons which lauded the New Deal; some of these were forwarded to Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, who had jurisdiction over the National Park Service.28 Michaux also threatened to use influence to acquire a favorable decision from agents under Ickes, saying he would call the case to the attention of the Secretary and President Roosevelt if necessary. When the nation entered World War II, Michaux reneged and consoled himself with the belief that the war effort was the President's major preoccupation.

When a settlement favorable to Michaux was rendered in the fall of 1945, some observers mused that Mrs. Roosevelt had influenced her husband to intervene in Michaux's behalf;29 to him it seemed that the decision was issued posthumously, reflecting the former President's sentiment. Whatever the source of the decision the Elder's image as a man of consequence was enhanced.

This was no mean feat, for Michaux was recognized by blacks, even early in the thirties, for his authority in high Washington circles. When the black Washington Industrial Savings Bank was reopened in 1933 after the bank holiday, under a provision that depositors be paid only 35 per cent of their frozen deposits, many people considered that a favor extended to the Elder in return for his support of the administration. Under regulation of the Emergency Bank Act, the Treasury Depart-

28 Owens to Chapman, Oct. 25, 1939, Department of Interior Correspondence, National Archives.

29 Parke Rouse, Jr., "Happy Am I," The Commonwealth, XXII (July 1965), 32.
ment rarely permitted banks to re-open before they could make at least a 50 per cent pay-off. Since Michaux was a major client with the I.S.B., blacks credited his influence in high places for that coup.\textsuperscript{30}

Subsequently some of Washington's prominent black citizens sought Michaux's aid in behalf of their projects. Albert Cassell, a Howard University professor of architecture, provided an example. Around 1940 he asked Michaux to help him acquire federal funding for a multi-million dollar black housing development.\textsuperscript{31}

Michaux utilized his support of the Roosevelt administration to good advantage and reaped significant benefits. Recognizing his ostensible influence, the Elder's members presented him with a loving cup for "doing such great work among prominent people . . . as a pastor and a Negro leader." The program chairman requested a message of appreciation from Roosevelt to be read at the Thanksgiving Day presentation.\textsuperscript{32} Two years later another church group requested another presidential message from Roosevelt whom they "knew" to be "a friend and well wisher of the Elder."\textsuperscript{33} On both occasions the President honored the requests.

III

After Harry Truman took office, Michaux seemed anxious to advance the ethnic cause, to enhance his prestige in national circles, and to

\textsuperscript{30}\textit{Evening Star} (Washington), July 13, 1938.

\textsuperscript{31} Michaux to Mrs. Bethune, Jan. 27, 1944, Roosevelt Papers. See pages 182-188 below for fuller explanation of this housing project.

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ferman Little to Roosevelt}, Nov. 2, 1940, Roosevelt Papers.

\textsuperscript{33}\textit{Morris C. White to Roosevelt}, Nov. 4, 1942, Roosevelt Papers.
reap economic power potential for his movement. Michaux's most interesting political activism during the Truman years centered around the 1948 presidential election. On January 22, 1948, Michaux was granted an audience with the President, ostensibly so that a delegation from the National Freedom Day Association could present a photograph of the late Major Richard R. Wright, Sr., to Truman. Michaux, Emmanuel C. Wright, and Emmett Jay Scott were among those making the presentation. The next day Michaux announced to the Washington press his decision to back Truman for president. By making this announcement, the Elder believed he was signaling to the American people that Truman was God's choice whether the President had determined that himself or not. Apparently he felt assured that Truman was interested in black advancement, which also could be interpreted to mean the Church of God's progression.

Michaux tested Truman's concern for the black cause in other ways. Five months after the initial audience, the Elder telephoned the White House to request that a delegation from the National Freedom Day Association be present on June 30, 1948, when the President signed a Joint Resolution of Congress. The Resolution provided for "Emancipation Day" to be celebrated throughout the United States on February 1 of each year. Michaux thought "it would be awfully good publicity (from the President's point of view) to ... have them photographed when the President signed the Bill ... since all the Negro papers would carry" the photograph and story.36 Truman complied.

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36 White House memo, June 23, 1948, Truman Papers.
On that occasion Truman requested the "Three Emancipators" cartoon which Michaux had used as a backdrop in the 1936 Madison Square Garden Democratic rally. Michaux was so moved that he sent a letter to General Eisenhower explaining why Truman would be re-elected. "Mr. Truman is God's anointed for the position he now holds;" the Elder explained, "for he was not placed there by any political party, but by Divine providence . . . brought about by the death of Mr. Roosevelt.

... President Truman has done a wonderful job up to this time."

Michaux made it clear that Truman was continuing the Roosevelt policies and was elevated to that position by God who directed Roosevelt to select Truman as Vice-President. Michaux believed Roosevelt had chosen Truman carefully "in case of his death, which God made him to know; for he told me personally of his fears." Since Truman was elevated by God, he would continue in that position for seven years. He would be responsible to God and not to a political party; therefore, Truman must heed the advice of God through His prophet (Michaux) as did Roosevelt.

Alluding to his own NRA and Supreme Court prophecies, Michaux wrote, "I was the late Mr. Roosevelt's prophet. We never failed God. Through us, God broke all precedence to carry out His purpose to lift up the common people and show His love to them." Because Michaux believed he foresaw that Eisenhower could not win a 1948 election, he advised the general not to allow himself to be drafted as a presidential candidate.

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37 Michaux to Matthew Connelly, Secretary to Truman, July 1948, Truman Papers. Truman had the autographed cartoon placed in his personal collection.

38 Michaux to Eisenhower, June 20, 1948. Copy to Truman, Truman Papers.
at either political convention.\footnote{Michaux to Eisenhower, June 20, 1948. Copy to Truman, Truman Papers.}

It is significant that this letter was written to Eisenhower with such certitude in June of 1948. Spring public opinion polls showed that hardly more than a third of the voters favored the Truman candidacy, and he was losing the "solid" South's support of the Democratic party because he had raised the issue of civil rights to a national level. When creating a committee on civil rights early that year, he said, "I want our Bill of Rights implemented in fact. We have been trying to do this for 150 years. We are making progress but we are not making progress fast enough."\footnote{Harry S. Truman, \textit{Memoirs: Years of Trial and Hope}, II (Garden City, 1956), 181.} Therefore, he proposed that Congress pass legislation to abolish segregation and discrimination in transportation and insisted that a strong civil rights plank be included in the 1948 Democratic platform.

Impressed by Truman's actions at the convention and convinced that he could win, Michaux campaigned vigorously for the President. He broadcast a pro-Truman election rally. Chimes were sounded and an announcer bellowed, "Prophet and prophetic words!" Subsequently a reader recited from Amos 3:5-8, and Michaux defined the nomenclatures Dewey and Truman. According to him Dewey signified chaos; Truman denoted salvation. Dewey would "vanish" under heat. "If Dewey is elected," Michaux warned, "our government will vanish under pressure from Russia" because communists will infiltrate labor unions, causing strikes and depression which will lead to revolution. Truman is a
substitute to the people for Roosevelt. Then Michaux called for laborers, Negroes, and Jewish people to go to the polls to vote for Truman.41

Black voters played a significant part in Truman's election. Henry Lee Moon, the NAACP's public relations director, had speculated early in 1948 that the black vote in certain pivotal states could swing close national elections.42 Approximately 75 per cent of the three million AfroAmericans who voted cast ballots for Truman.43 Possibly a 15 per cent switch in black votes in California, Illinois, and Ohio would have thrown the election to Dewey.44

Michaux was so elated over the Truman victory that he paraded through the streets of Washington on a bandwagon proclaiming, "God did it and we thank Him." His choirs sang, "'H' is for Harry, the man of the hour; 'S' is for strong in might and power. 'T' is for Truman, whom God gave a hand. Hurrah, Hurrah for Truman."45

Whether from his support of President Truman or not, numerous benefits accrued to Michaux and his business associates. His prophecy increased his appeal among his members. Some reportedly leaped with joy when Truman was elected and their leader's prediction had been fulfilled.46

41Program script found among remnants of Michaux's personal papers and based on discussions with members of Michaux's church.
42Henry Lee Moon, The Balance of Power (Garden City, 1949).
44Henry Lee Moon, The Balance of Power (Garden City, 1949).
45Michaux's Obsequies, and Song, "Tru-\(\text{man}," 1949, placard in author's possession.
46From discussions with members of Michaux's church who had observed this reaction from other members on their jobs and in church.
Many were unquestionably convinced that they were under the command of a prophet, ordained by God, and their devoutness was quickened. The Elder also retained his influence in some Washington circles and so continued to acquire financial aid for his movement's projects. He received a loan from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation in 1949, for example, to build a shopping center (adjacent to Mayfair Mansions) despite the fact that his initial (1944) Mayfair mortgage was in arrears.47 There was some evidence for speculation that Michaux's contacts in the Truman administration permitted him such advantages. Although a Senate banking sub-committee studied the loans for possible administrative favoritism to Michaux, the august group never held a formal investigation of RFC loans to the Elder.48

IV

Michaux never claimed one-party allegiance although many people thought he was a registered Democrat. Therefore, when circumstances dictated, he willingly shifted his political support to a Republican President—Eisenhower. The general was unpopular among the black electorate mainly because he had endorsed the Army's Jim Crow policies during World War II. Nevertheless, Michaux promoted Eisenhower's candidacy during both of his presidential campaigns. He did this with impunity because he assured his members that he always acted in the interest of the church.49 Moreover, he reminded his congregation during

47 See pages 185-188 below for details and Sunday Star (Washington), Nov. 11, 1951.
48 Ibid.
49 From a taped interview with a former Field Representative of the Church of God who believes Michaux never generated much enthusiasm for Eisenhower among his members. Tape in author's possession.
the fifties that he was a long-time friend of the Eisenhower family. Michaux had known Mrs. Eisenhower at least since the early forties and had sent prayer messages to the general during the war. Later in 1945 Michaux wrote to inform Eisenhower that the Radio Church of God had named him an honorary deacon, and he sent the general a Bible to seal the appointment. Acknowledging the honor, Eisenhower forwarded Michaux an autographed photograph of himself in appreciation of the Elder's assistance in the United States' war effort amidst much black opposition and indifference toward that conflict.

Based on this relationship with Eisenhower, Michaux decided that the general should become president. He claimed to have been the first person to mention the idea to Eisenhower. But in his memoirs, Eisenhower credited Virgil Pinkley, a newspaper correspondent in the North African Theatre of World War II in 1943, with making the suggestion. Pinkley had reminded the general that war heroes were often elected to the presidency. Eisenhower made no mention at all of Michaux in his memoirs, and the earliest known correspondence between them is dated 1945, two years after the Pinkley comment. In 1948 Michaux wrote Eisenhower to inform him of the direction he thought God wanted him to take. "God raised you up to save His people. . . . Your humble and unselfish spirit declares this to be true."
After Eisenhower became president, Michaux tried to stay in touch by sending him telegrams and letters, but the presumed acquaintance did not win any special courtesies for the Elder. Michaux read this as a bad omen for his movement's social and economic projects, and he began to consider the administration to be at odds with his interests. In 1954 he advised Mrs. Mamie Eisenhower that her husband should not run for another term although he had done a "wonderful job in a very short time." Michaux said he thought Eisenhower had already fulfilled his mandate from God by "stopping the Korean war" and trying to desegregate Washington.

Still hopeful of fomenting a cooperative relationship with Eisenhower, Michaux continued to forward prayer telegrams and sermons to the White House. He held a special prayer meeting for the ailing President in 1956, and Eisenhower responded favorably by sending Michaux an invitation to visit the White House. The President wanted to thank him for the all-night prayer meetings during his illnesses. Michaux carried a copy of Sparks from the Anvil to Eisenhower, was photographed with Eisenhower, and the visit made news for the press. After this visit Michaux changed his mind and decided that Eisenhower should run for a second term, and he campaigned for the incumbent's re-election. At his

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57 Ibid.
58 Michaux to Shanley, Counsel to the President, Sept. 6, 1956; Eisenhower to Michaux, Sept. 6, 1956, and White House Memo, Eisenhower Papers.
59 Newspaper clipping in author's possession. Sparks from the Anvil is a collection of Michaux's epigrams.
Annual Baptizing September 1956, he displayed a six-foot photograph of the Eisenhowers and entitled it "Our Peace-Loving President and His Wife." He sent a copy of a Washington Post article to the President, informing him of the photograph and the sizeable gathering that year.  

Michaux did other campaigning, too. He went to Detroit to campaign for Eisenhower and to interest "the rest of these colored Democrats . . . In returning to their first love--the Republican Party." Ignoring earlier complimentary epithets to Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman, he called Eisenhower the "second emancipator"--one who had "done more for the Negro in the last four years than . . . the presidents who have been in office in the past twenty years." He took this campaign message to Detroit, Flint, Saginaw, Bay City, Pontiac, and Lansing, Michigan, and sent copies of press releases on his tour to Eisenhower. Michaux did not campaign in any official capacity for the Republican Party; however, he did have a minister-friend in Pontiac, Michigan, who may have invited him to that area for political or other reasons.  

A week before he went to Michigan, Michaux had broadcast a sermon entitled, "Who Will Be Elected--Mr. Eisenhower or Mr. Stevenson?" He not only answered the question with a resounding No! for Stevenson but the Elder also carefully pointed out that he was no political adviser to Eisenhower. Indicating that all was not harmonious between the prophet and the President, Michaux explained,

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60 Michaux to Shanley, Sept. 18, 1956, Eisenhower Papers.
61 Ibid., Nov. 3, 1956, Eisenhower Papers.
Since my visit to the White House many people have asked me, 'Do you think that Eisenhower will be elected?' Because of my constant visits to presidents, they think I'm a politician. I'm not a politician; I'm a prophet. . . . I am here to tell you that Mr. Stevenson cannot be president. . . . It is because he has been rejected of God. Whenever a man runs for the presidency once, there's no need for his running again. . . . Every man seeking the office . . . who has once been rejected has never been elected.

. . . William Jennings Bryan . . . Mr. Dewey. 62

Then Michaux reiterated that he was no political adviser to Eisenhower only to allude subtly to his contact with the President. "When I went to the White House, I didn't talk politics, I talked about Heaven." 63

Michaux was unable to establish the kind of personal relationship with Eisenhower that he desired. That southern-oriented President seemed, in fact, to consider Michaux to be more of a political liability than asset. This is ironic because the Elder expected to have a closer association, as friend and minister, with Eisenhower than he had had with either Roosevelt or Truman.

Although there is no conclusive evidence that the Elder was not partially motivated by a sense of religious mission to befriend presidents, he certainly had other motives as well. He thought his success in acquiring finances and favorable government decisions, necessary to the advancement of his movement, depended upon his having useful contacts with national leaders, especially with presidents as their counselor.

62 Radio Sermon, Oct. 28, 1956, Eisenhower Papers; Michaux did not live to see Nixon elected in 1968.
63 Ibid.
He failed actually to cultivate the kind of personal rapport with presidents which he presumed to have. Michaux did realize, nonetheless, some personal and church aspirations from his avowed associations with them and other national leaders.
CHAPTER VII

BUSINESSMAN IN PROFILE

Elder Michaux's reputation as a shrewd businessman was as widespread as his image as a man of influence in national political circles. After his death, he was eulogized in a popular black periodical as the "Most Unbelievable Black Businessman in History." Actually this headline was misleading since the article presented more balanced treatment of the Elder's business pursuits, explaining them as extensions of his religio-social concerns. He understood the inter-relatedness of the three spheres and believed that the best determinant of a successful ministry was substantial financing. Michaux, however, was not compelled to grapple with such economic practicalities until he returned to Newport News to organize a church in 1919.

During those first months of post-war demobilization, his congregation was poor, and having recently divested himself of the seafood business, he had no reliable income. Reflecting these financial straits, Michaux held services, from September to December, under a tent which he tried to heat with a pot-bellied stove during the frigid winter. After collecting enough funds to rent a house, he moved his congregation there for worship at the end of the year.

Apparently Michaux was constrained from devising a functional financial system for his parish by his superiors in the Church of Christ Convention, and immediately upon seceding from that body he launched a campaign to manage his church's business more satisfactorily. An outgrowth of this effort was the Gospel Spreading Tabernacle Building Association which the Elder had incorporated under Virginia laws on February 26, 1921. It was the church's business organ, designed to receive funds, pay debts, and purchase property. The GSTBA's immediate task was to accumulate funds. During this initial phase, neither Michaux nor other church officials were salaried. As pastor, the Elder received a monthly free-will offering, and Elder Howard W. Poole (the GSTBA secretary-treasurer) was given free room and board in the building. Other officials (trustees, deacons, elders) supported themselves and their families by working full time outside the church.

To fill its coffers the GSTBA relied mainly on traditional sources for church funding, such as offerings and tithing among members. Between 1921 and 1925, Michaux instituted a series of routine weekly and quarterly offerings and other occasional ones: Half-Day (one-tenth of each member's weekly earnings), Sacrificial (a week's salary every four months), Building Fund (twenty-five cents per week), occasional vouchers. After the depression, he set up travel and burial funds into which each participating member paid seventy-five cents per week; this

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2Pictorial Review, 37.

3Evening Star (Washington), July 12, 1938).

4From discussions with members of the Church of God.
entitled them to a church financed burial and two annual round-trip tickets to a branch church for special occasions.⁵

These tithes, offerings, and funds were brought to a table before the altar. Two deacons accepted and counted them before the congregation as a local secretary recorded names of contributors. Each branch was responsible for attending to its expenses; however, an accounting and surplus monies were sent to Washington, the business headquarters by 1929. This was also done when the name of the GSTBA was changed to Gospel Spreading Association.⁶

This method of raising funds, and its ensuing rationale, was no different in the Church of God than it was in the more traditional black churches. The late noted sociologist, E. Franklin Frazier, explained that "in order to establish their own churches . . . Negroes began to pool their meager economic resources and buy buildings and the land on which they stood" after seceding from inter-racial denominations.⁷ Directing his remarks toward more recent southern black denominations, Dollard also noted the great extent to which AfroAmericans continued to donate part of their earnings to their churches.⁸

There were additional ways, besides monetary donations by which members contributed to church coffers. A group of women, for example, formed a circle in the late thirties called the Willing Workers. They made various articles of clothing and linen, cooked dinners and baked

⁵Minutes, passim.
⁶Minutes, Jan. 1955.
⁷The Negro Church in America (New York, 1964), 34.
⁸John Dollard, Caste and Class in A Southern Town (Garden City, New York, 1964), 235.
pastries; all of these were sold to benefit the church. Whenever necessary, members donated their labor as well to build and repair church property or to service church activities.9

Regardless of their volunteer services members, except those with no incomes, were expected to tithe and give offerings. Michaux said the self-employed ones were to be governed by an average salary base, and a similar principle was applied to those who worked on commissions. But no member could be dismissed from the church for not making monetary contributions.10

Michaux explained that his members could be materially and physically blessed by tithing and giving offerings. He sometimes told anecdotes about how God blessed members who gave their offerings freely. One of his best concerned a very successful member in Hampton who was a scrap iron and metal dealer--Deacon Rudolph Jones. (Jones is currently 1974 president of the Gospel Spreading Church Board of Directors.) He was present when Michaux related the story:

I wish I had time to let Brother Rudolph Jones tell his story pertaining to his first sacrificial offering. I'll tell you as much as I can remember. When he came into the Church he had a wife who is a godly woman. . . . When Brother Rudolph first faced a test concerning his sacrificial offerings, he didn't have money enough to pay his rent. He only had $11.00. His wife told him that sacrificial was due and for him to pay that and let everything else go until they got some more money. . . . He told her

9Fiftieth Anniversary Brochure, Seven Churches, 5, 25, and from discussions with members of Michaux's church.

10Minutes, Nov., 1951.
all right but insinuated that they would have to go out in the street. . . . Nevertheless he brought it in. He was just starting in the junk business and he had an old truck.

After he had given his sacrificial, the spirit of the Lord came upon him and gave him foolish boldness. . . . Brother Rudolph went down to the place where they were selling brand new trucks. There he told the man he wanted to get a truck. The man talked with him, telling him the price required for a down payment, told him all about the truck just as though Brother Rudolph was ready to close the deal. After the man got everything lined up Brother Jones told him that he didn't have any money. The man said . . . You mean to say you're trying to buy a brand new truck and don't have any money. Why you must be crazy. . . . The man somewhat admired him. . . . [and looked on] as Brother Jones and the big boss were talking. Then the manager turned to the salesman and said . . . I'm going to let him have that truck. Go on and write it up for him. . . . When Brother Rudolph got ready to go, he told the man he didn't have any gas. The man said why don't you have enough money to pay for gas? . . . Go on and let him have some gas too. Let's see what is in him. . . . When he got ready to pull-off he didn't have tags. Lo and behold the man even went ahead and paid for the tags and Brother Jones left there with a brand new truck. . . . Not a cent! But he had paid his sacrificial. 11

11 Minutes, Jan., 1958.
Not only could one expect to have his material possessions increased if he paid his offerings, but he could also expect to be healed of illnesses. One old sister gave the following testimony in the Washington church which Michaux reiterated:

'The Lord told me that if I paid my sacrificial, He was going to bless me, for I always pay my sacrificial. And I paid ... last Friday. ...' She said that she had been wearing glasses because she could not hardly see very good. So while lying down in the bed in the room ... by herself, she said the Lord told her to pick up her Bible, which was laying over on the other pillow, and read the 91st Psalm. She picked up the Bible and read that. Then He told her to read the fiftieth Psalm, where it says, Pay thy vows, call upon me and I will deliver you if you get in trouble. And still ... another passage. Then all at once she realized that she was reading without her glasses. In her testimony she said 'Look here, I don't have my glasses on; for I could hardly see even with them on, but today I can see even better than ever before!' She said she jumped out of the bed and began to shout and praise the Lord all around the room. She said she got to the place where she felt that she could run through troops and leap over the walls. And while she was feeling that way the devil said jump out of the window. ... 12

Additionally offerings were necessary to help individual members in financial crisis, whether because of illness, death, or physical

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12 Minutes, Jan., 1957.
handicaps. Dollard noted how extensively southern black churches helped their members financially when he stated that "if there are any who get their money's worth from the churches, it must be the lower-class southern Negro group."\(^{13}\) Frazier described the black traditional church's financial aid to its members in more detail in his book, *The Negro Church in America*. But members of the Church of God could only expect to receive financial help commensurate with their contributions to the movement when employed. Michaux said, "When anybody applies or claim they need, we go to the record . . . I ask what is his record? If he has sung and prayed and did nothing else, I'll say let's go around and sing and pray with him."\(^{14}\) This implied that by showing a prosperous and united front, the movement could attract members and command respect in the community.

Michaux also exhorted his members to pay offerings to enhance the image of the movement. He reminded them that collectively people, like God, are known by their works. He said, "The glory of God is the Work of God. He is glorified by His works. What you do makes you what you are."\(^{15}\)

Furthermore, future benefits would accrue to members who paid offerings. They were considered, by Michaux, to be making an investment for later economic security. The Elder told them the "entire wealth of the church was theirs as . . . individuals or collectively."\(^{16}\) Therefore, he was much concerned that the movement should maintain its

\(^{13}\) Dollard, *Caste and Class*, 235.

\(^{14}\) *Minutes*, Jan., 1958.


estate for members and their posterity after his death. He frequently articulated this concern, as when on one occasion he said:

Now precious ones, we are getting things straightened out so that if at any time I should pass (they will remain in order), for I am experienced and well versed in business, for another may not be able to manage things as well as I. We are selecting a trust company to take care of a trust fund and our properties, in order that nobody may come in as a stranger, get among you and divide you and separate your properties. We have fixed it for all of your properties, all of our resources. We are trying to build them up so that our children, our children's children will come along with the spirit and be secure.

... In our next meeting we will go through it in detail so that you will understand it and know as a body what you have, what you own and what the values of them are in order that nobody can come along and give you any misleadings. 17

Michaux also was concerned about economic impotency within black communities. He believed economic power was a requisite to more rapid and meaningful black social and political advancement. Some contemporaries recognized his broader social perspective, and one reporter referred to him as "the practical watchman who works vigorously to improve the lot of the black man." 18 To this extent he was an economic nationalist who espoused ideas of racial solidarity and economic accumulation for black betterment. Michaux wanted his movement to exemplify

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17 Minutes, Nov., 1955.
18 Evening Star (Washington, D.C.), July 12, 1938.
how a black religious group—or any black unified group—could build an economic power base. He urged his members to work as a unit to inspire others toward black economic solidarity. He once asked, "Do you see all the skyscrapers, street cars and airplane lines owned by white people? Want to know why they have them—because they work together. . . . They are not owned by one man but by a group of people who came together as one and pooled their knowledge, finances and built." 19 He not only chided black people for not uniting but also for failing to resist economic exploitation. "Today," he said, "our earning power is fifteen billion dollars. . . . All we need to learn is how to get together and use our money. . . . Every other nationality comes with a shovel piling up our money." 20

II

Apparently few of Michaux's members were inspired enough by his advocacies of congregational self-help and economic nationalism, to make regular contributions to the movement. Consequently, he had constantly to appeal to them for money to bail the church out of financial difficulties. Several times valuable property was almost lost because the church was delinquent in mortgage payments. An early example of this involved the church's purchase of the Lincoln Theatre at Newport News in 1929. 21 Actually the old GSTBA had contracted terms for purchasing the theatre as a place of worship prior to that year. The

19 Minutes, Jan., 1952.
20 Ibid.
GSTBA, suffering from overextending itself as the church expanded, was in a moribund state. In an effort to bail out of the crisis, Michaux reorganized the business organ in 1929 and named it the Gospel Spreading Association. New deeds were written and financing terms were readjusted for the new GSA, and delinquent mortgages on church property were not foreclosed.\textsuperscript{22} Less than a decade later the Superintendent of the National Historic Park at Yorktown, Floyd Flickinger, said he was "informed from very reliable sources that . . . there would probably be a foreclosure on the property Michaux was acquiring" in Jamestown.\textsuperscript{23} Flickinger's assessment of the situation seems valid since Michaux fervently petitioned his banker friends, the Wrights of Philadelphia, to negotiate a loan for \$10,000 to pay on the Jamestown tract in 1937.\textsuperscript{23} In subsequent years, Michaux probably alluded to similar financial difficulties when he asked members if they would sacrifice all of their possessions to help save the movement if it became necessary.\textsuperscript{25}

According to Michaux and some other officials, the Church of God was occasionally in financial straits because everyone did not contribute equitably to the movement. Weekly donations were reported to be

\textsuperscript{22}From a discussion with a Gospel Spreading Church secretary.

\textsuperscript{23}Flickinger to Director of the National Park Service, Dept. of the Interior Correspondence, Colonial National Park, File No. 610, June 25, 1937, National Archives.

\textsuperscript{24}From taped interview with Emmanuel C. Wright, Nov., 1971.

\textsuperscript{25}From discussions with members of the Church of God.
small. As late as 1956 Michaux bemoaned the fact that half of his members did not tithe and give offerings. Some members were reluctant to make contributions because they questioned the GSA's secrecy in financial matters. On this account the GSA was suspect both by members and non-members. However, financial records were apparently opened to some news reporters in 1938, for an assessment of the church's property valuation was run in Washington's Evening Star. In succeeding years, the GSA sealed its records, and one can merely speculate on reasons for such behavior. Since some journalistic accounts of the movement's financial status were inflated, Michaux probably feared that his members, upon seeing them, would be contented with what he considered to be relatively miniscule accumulations. It seems likely then that he tried to keep the vision of socioeconomic advancement as a group before them by denying them official information on the movement's financial progress. Almost facetiously, however, Michaux cautioned local trustees to be careful with financial records so they could be open to public examination. Nevertheless, some members left the movement after World War II and complained of GSA officials' refusal to make comprehensive financial reports to them. (This secrecy has persisted to 1974. No reports are given on church

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27 Minutes, Apr., 1956. This statement was corroborated by the former field representative of the Church of God.

28 July 12, 1938.

29 Minutes, Jan., 1955.

30 From discussions with former members of the Church of God.
income and disbursements, nor on the movement's real estate holdings.) \(^{31}\)

Many people who were distrustful of the GSA called it Michaux's puppet creation and feared that he used it deviously to fatten his own pockets. Michaux met reporters' queries about the organization's financial position by telling them he never discussed or counted money. \(^{32}\) In earlier years he sometimes fielded questions about his life-style with levity, as for example, when a banker said to him,

Elder, that is a mighty good car you drive. What is behind it all, is it psychology? If your Lord were here, do you think he would ride in as good a car as that? Like a flash the Elder replied, "No, He would not ride in that car, He would ride in a chariot through the air." \(^{33}\)

Throughout the years the Elder attracted much attention when he was chauffeured about the East Coast in his Cadillac Limousine. Mrs. Michaux had access to a Buick and various parishioners' automobiles when she was not with her husband. \(^{34}\) Members knew the Michauxs owned a house and held an apartment in Newport News and in Washington. When visiting in other cities where Churches of God existed the Michauxs boarded with officials of the local church or with relatives. In their private homes they were serviced by a chauffeur-valet, a cook, and a

\(^{31}\) From recent discussions with members of the Church of God.


\(^{33}\) *Happy News*, Nov., 1933. The banker may have been referring at that time to Michaux's Pierce-Arrow.

\(^{34}\) Author's observations.
maid. Neither the Washington residence, a row house at 1712 "R" Street, N.W., nor the home on Pinkey's Beach in Newport News was lavishly furnished. Each contained most modern conveniences, and the Washington residence had a grand piano, a collection of crystal, silver, gold, and china dishes and curios. In the sixties a portable elevator was installed for the convenience of the movement's elderly founders.\(^{35}\)

Michaux recognized that there was grumbling inside the movement about how he used church funds. He told his ministers and deacons that some members did not want to give him an offering each month and grumbled that he did not need it. He countered these protests by telling members that he did not want $1,000 to hide away; he wanted it to invest in real estate for the church. He sometimes defended himself against accusations of financial mismanagement while accusing other religious leaders. "I neither see nor handle sacrificial. I am not Father Divine nor Bishop Grace," he announced on one occasion.\(^{36}\)

Although cumulative financial records of the Church of God are not currently open to researchers, it seems likely that offerings, tithes, and collections were necessary primarily to finance revivals, baptizings, building of new churches, remodeling, recurring church expenses, charitable services, and church affiliated businesses, such as markets and cafes which frequently were not solvent.

\(^{35}\)Washington Post (D.C.), Oct. 13, 1956, from discussions and interviews with members of Michaux's church, author's observations.

III

When he began to make real estate investments to advance his religio-social interests, Michaux proved to have a considerable knack for finding capital and valuable property. He also had a great deal of success in turning business deals. One magazine article explained that he should "not be passed off as just another gospel spreader . . . but should be regarded as a shrewd businessman." He had started from a patched-up tent to build a Church of God estate which after his death was valued at at least twenty million dollars. The church's holdings consisted of temples for worship, apartment dwellings, housing developments (in Newport News and Washington), eighteen hundred acres of land in Jamestown, 636 acres in Charles City County, Virginia, and scattered buildings, houses, and lots.

Several acquisitions held symbolic significance for his members. The corner lot on Nineteenth Street in Newport News was the site on which the movement began, while the Jamestown purchase was in close proximity to where some of the first "bound" Africans arrived in North America. In contradistinction, each purchase was a major business deal for Michaux to be evaluated in terms of immediate profit and future worth. Michaux evinced this attitude when he said on one occasion,

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38 Garnett, "Unbelievable Black Businessman," Jet, Apr., 1969, 20-21, and Afro-American (Richmond), Apr. 3, 1970. This was a most conservative estimate of the value of the estate.
39 Ibid., and Daily Press (Newport News), Dec. 10, 1964 and Oct. 2 1968, and from discussions with the president of the Gospel Spreading Church.
"We have property all over, and I have been wise enough to get... [it] on commercial thoroughfares, so that no matter what comes the property will increase in value rather than decrease." 40

The Elder sometimes acted in seeming duplicity to obtain property. Illustrative of this is the manner by which he acquired the land upon which Mayfair Mansions, a black middle-class housing project, was built. Formerly the old Benning Race Track had been located on that site when horse racing was legal in the District. In March of 1940 a bill calling for lifting of prohibition was pending in Congress, and the Senate District Commission had held hearings on that proposal. Repeal of the law seemed certain since it had widespread backing. One "sponsor" was George Allen (then Commissioner of the District of Columbia) an honorary junior deacon in the Radio Church of God. Allen owned a race horse and was scheduled to testify before the Senate committee in favor of the bill's passage. Informed of this, Michaux, who was in opposition, took steps to prevent Allen's testimony; he dispatched the following telegram to the commissioner:

It has been brought to the attention of the membership of the Church of God at Washington of which you are an honorary deacon that you own a race horse and that you are to appear today for the Senate Committee hearings on the passage of the bill introduced by Senator Reynolds which, if passed, will permit racing and betting on races in the District of Columbia. Though some may not consider betting on horses a vice, it is considered so by all.

40 Minutes, Nov., 1955.
religious bodies and orthodox churches. Therefore, knowing your respect for all such bodies, you are requested to register your objections to the passage of this bill and also to offer your race horses for sale at this hearing to Senator Reynolds or William C. Murphy or any of the supporters of this bill at 50% of what the horses cost you. Done by Order of the Church now convening at Philadelphia. Please read this telegram at the hearing, answer if possible and also publish the same in all local papers so they know our stand and yours.

Exactly what the relationship between Michaux and Allen was at that time is unknown, and so, on the face of it the telegram seems audacious. Interestingly enough Allen reversed his position, making headlines in newspapers. He also offered his horse for sale to Senator Reynolds. Needless to say the bill was defeated without the commissioner's support. Whether in coincidence or not the GSA subsequently purchased the race track for its housing project in which Allen held one of five shares.

Such contacts were highly beneficial to Michaux. They were apparently his main source of information on important land sales and on private and government lending agencies. This possibility is signifi-

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cant when one realizes that virtually all AfroAmericans were constrained from investing in real estate on a large scale by conspiracies among realtors, funding agencies, and their politician allies. Even the New Deal's Federal Housing Administration, which was formed to stimulate the construction industry by insuring loans from private lending agencies to project developers, discriminated against black applicants. Michaux used his political contacts to try to surmount this sort of institutional racism. Despite his influence, forays were made on several of the Elder's projects by federal agencies, as for example the National Memorial land. His trials with federal funding agencies were best illustrated by the Mayfair Mansions situation.

Construction of that housing project was begun during the winter of 1942. At that time the general contractor was personally assured by the National Housing Agency that the project was an administration job and that all funds necessary for its completion would be provided by the appropriate government agencies. That next year Michaux informed the Commissioner of the Federal Housing Agency and the administrator of the NHA that the initial mortgage of $2,478,000 was insufficient, and he requested additional financing. Commissioner Abner W. Ferguson (FHA) denied the request, stating that the World War II emergency precluded further financial assistance to such projects. Michaux protested, and when he finally received additional funding, job costs had surpassed the amount requested. Instead of $337,000, Michaux's project required $682,578 for completion. FHA officials referred Michaux to

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the Reconstruction Finance Corporation for funding above $337,000. However, Michaux charged Ferguson with trying to dissuade RFC from granting him the additional funds. Michaux thought he "smelled a rat," and he sought help from people close to the President and other high government officials to rout it out.

He wrote to his friend, Mrs. Mary Bethune, former Director of Negro Affairs in the National Youth Administration, about the matter. Our dealings with the RFC Mortgage Company to get this additional net sum of $345,000 were progressing satisfactorily until Commissioner Ferguson injected the view that foreclosure of the project would be the best way out. . . . We feel that through Mr. Ferguson's attitude, the door of RFC Mortgage Company has been shut in our faces. . . . We have only until February 2, 1944, to get the $345,000 because Mr. Ferguson plans foreclosure at that time.

Michaux had less than one week to ward off foreclosure, and he asked Mrs. Bethune to solicit help from their "Mutual friend, Mrs. Roosevelt." He also wrote to Steven Early (Secretary to the President and an honorary Junior Deacon in the Church of God) about the matter.

Michaux's cause was ethnic as well as economic. In writing to Mrs. Bethune, he said, the building of Mayfair Mansions was the "first and only opportunity Negroes had in any administration to establish and

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45 Michaux to Mrs. Bethune, Jan. 27, 1944, Roosevelt Papers.
46 Ibid.
47 Philip M. Klutznick, Asst. Admin. of the NHA to Mrs. Roosevelt, Feb. 2, 1944, Roosevelt Papers.
prove their ability to build, occupy and pay for a project costing $3,160,000 and insured by the Federal Government... Should this project be foreclosed, it would ruin the chances of the Negro Race's ever having such an opportunity again for at least a generation." He charged Ferguson with ill will toward Afro-Americans since the Commissioner had said on many occasions the housing project was too good for Negroes. The letter continued, "In this case I feel that his object is solely to deprive Negro leadership of the accomplishment of successfully executing such a project and give it back to Negroes at a greatly increased cost to the government... just to prove that Negro leadership is a failure in large matters."49

Responding as Michaux believed she would, Mrs. Bethune forwarded the Elder's letter to the First Lady and asked her to intercede in the matter. Eleanor Roosevelt contacted the proper officials who held a meeting with Mayfair Mansions directors. After denying charges of racism, FHA officials skirted the issue to defend themselves by pointing out that that agency had insured numerous housing projects occupied by Negroes. They again referred Michaux to RFC. That time, however, he received necessary funding to complete the project, despite the fact that such leading white liberal New Dealers as Will W. Alexander (a Co-Director for Race Relations at the Julius Rosenwald Fund) had protested to Mrs. Roosevelt that the housing development was being financially mismanaged.50 This undoubtedly was a milestone for black people.

48 Michaux to Mrs. Bethune, Jan. 27, 1944, Roosevelt Papers.
49 Ibid.
Not only was Michaux apparently the first black man to receive federal insurance on a three million dollar loan but he also paved the way for other black real estate developers to operate at the national level with fewer obstacles.\(^{51}\)

**IV**

Michaux was a poor business manager. Throughout the years he continuously applied for loans to expand Mayfair Mansions and to extricate the project from financial difficulties. On the surface this was routine in business. What confused the issue was Michaux's success in obtaining loans from RFC for the project, despite his delinquency in making payments on them, which was the concern of a Senate Banking Subcommittee in 1951.\(^ {52}\) The committee was suspicious of favoritism toward Michaux because his friend, George Allen, was a director of RFC after 1946.\(^ {53}\)

George Allen was not available for comment on the matter.

Michaux's friend, former D.C. Judge James Cobb, said, "Mr. Allen and Michaux were very close, and Mr. Allen helped manipulate these loans."\(^ {54}\) Stopping just short of implicating President Truman with intervening in RFC matters in the Elder's behalf, Cobb claimed "he had once accompanied Michaux to the White House to see President Truman"; the former judge did not say what was discussed, nor has any evidence emerged to explain

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\(^{51}\) Minutes, April, 1955.

\(^{52}\) *New York Tribune* (N.Y.C), Mar. 11, 1951.

\(^{53}\) *Sunday Star* (Washington, D.C.), Nov. 11, 1951, and George Allen's 1946 press release, Moorland-Spingarn Collection, Howard University.

\(^{54}\) *New York Tribune* (N.Y.C), Mar. 11, 1951.
his motives in making these statements.\(^{55}\) Michaux issued a refutation, exclaiming that "he was 'sure' ... Allen never helped obtain any RFC loans for the housing development."\(^{56}\) Apparently the matter ended there so far as the Senate Subcommittee was concerned, for there are no records of an investigation into the loans to Michaux. Records showed that Michaux had not successfully negotiated RFC loans after 1949.\(^{57}\)

After that commotion Michaux's difficulties with various financial agencies and departments increased. On September 8, 1953, foreclosure on Mayfair Mansions was authorized and maturity on the 1949 loan was accelerated because payments on it were in arrears and no taxes had been paid on the property from 1948-1951.\(^{58}\) Foreclosure was not completed, and early in 1960 the Treasury Department still was trying to collect the delinquent taxes and to close the 1949 loan which had matured in June of 1959.\(^{59}\)

Late in 1960 Michaux wanted to build another housing project on land adjacent to Mayfair Mansions. The Redevelopment Land Agency challenged the proposal, saying that no Michaux project would be approved

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\(^{56}\) Washington Post (D.C.), Mar. 12, 1951.


\(^{59}\) Ibid. Available information on this subject does not indicate why the Mayfair Mansions group was in arrears on loan payments and taxes.
until his fiscal problems were resolved with the Treasury Department. The Elder needed RLS support for the housing plans, as an urban renewal project, to qualify for federal mortgage insurance. Therefore, his lawyer, Arthur Chaite, promised that Michaux would settle all delinquent accounts when RLA approved the project. Details of how Michaux arranged his business to qualify for RLA approval are hazy, but he did make some organizational changes in the church. On March 13, 1964, he changed the name of his religious movement from Church of God and The Gospel Spreading Association to Gospel Spreading Church, Inc. This action has been interpreted by some corporation lawyers as making members of the church congregation legal owners of the church holdings and as making the movement's business enterprises non-taxable. Yet, there are indications that certain pieces of property, i.e. Mayfair Mansions, may have been placed in Michaux's name so that he could be free to utilize them to the movement's financial interest without jeopardizing all of the church's property. Indeed, Mayfair Mansions, Inc. was not transferred to the Gospel Spreading Church, Inc. until February 1, 1972, more than four years after Michaux's death. By 1966 Michaux had complied with federal requisites such as paying his taxes and notes and was loaned six million dollars by the FHA to build Paradise Manor—a 617 apartment complex on twenty acres adjacent to Mayfair Mansions—which was completed after his death.

61 Recorder of Deeds Files, Washington, D.C.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., and author's observations.
In spite of his financial entanglements, Michaux managed to stall foreclosures and to avoid prosecution for income tax evasion. Probably he convinced authorities that he was innocent of criminal intent by conjuring up his image as a minister. He sometimes extricated himself from difficulties with authorities by saying in essence: I am a preacher who knows nothing about business. What am I doing over here in the business world anyway? Let me get back over to preaching where I know what I am doing. On some occasions he took businessmen friends and legal experts along as his spokesmen. Then he "dealt himself out" of discussions while his "spokesmen" drove hard bargains at his behest, and he dramatized his feigned withdrawal by sitting with his eyes closed. He chuckled over the victories won through such deviousness later, as he reclined in the back seat of his limousine.

Michaux constantly kept the vision of providing for his members' collective economic security before him. Hoping to make the movement's business enterprises secure for the members and their posterity, he drew up a constitution and by-laws in 1966--two years before his death. This legal document divided the Gospel Spreading Church into two spheres--religious and financial. The religious sphere was to be conducted by a Board of Deacons and Elders. The entire corporation was to be directed, controlled, and managed by a Board of Directors with seven members. The president of the Board as the executive officer of the

64 Taped interview with Emmanuel C. Wright, Nov. 1971.
65 Interview with Mr. Odell Walker, Executive Director of Mayfair Mansions, Nov. 1971 and with former Field Representative of the Gospel Spreading Church.
corporation, was to represent the Board "in directing and managing affairs of the corporation" and to sign checks, deeds, and other important papers. The secretary was to keep records and the treasurer, the only bonded official, received and deposited all corporation funds. These officers and board members were not to receive any monies from the corporation's assets or dividends. They could be paid only for expenses accrued while on corporation business. 66

Ironically after struggling to build a viable economic base for his black congregation, the ailing and feeble Elder appointed a white administrator to direct his predominantly black religious movement in his vaguely worded 1968 will. Much mystery and concern surround this will. Michaux had filed at least two earlier ones—in 1958 and 1966. In those he bequeathed personal property to his wife, to his brothers and sisters, to his secretary and chauffeur, and in the 1958 will he appointed his brother (Louis Michaux) and the National Bank of Washington executors and trustees of his estate. In 1966, he appointed his wife executor of his estate and dropped his brother from the will, leaving Louis' share to the latter's former wife, Willie Ann Michaux. Louis was generally considered financially independent, and the omission may have resulted from an understanding between the two brothers. Because Mrs. Michaux had died in 1967, the court deferred to the 1958 will and appointed Louis executor of Michaux's personal estate which the Elder had listed at about $250,000. 67 The 1966 will, however, was held

66 Constitution and By-laws of the Gospel Spreading Church, Inc., Nov. 13, 1966. It has been amended several times since Michaux's death in 1968; these revisions are not accessible.

in suspension temporarily when one filed by Michaux in New York City during the summer of 1968 was brought to the attention of the court.\textsuperscript{68} In that will Michaux bequeathed all of his worldly possessions to the congregation of the Gospel Spreading Church and appointed the self-styled Jewish Reformed Rabbi Abraham Abraham the estate's executor. This was a bizarre situation in which Michaux behaved peculiarly. An explanation for his alleged rationale was included in the will:

> My deacons and elders of the Church know why I selected Rabbi Abraham Abraham, so that peace may reign within the church. His assistance and aid in bringing about serenity and peace in and among the church members, because of no material gain by anyone, will satisfy all the church members.

> So long as he shall live, he shall administer these church funds, and I trust that he will select a successor prior to his demise. He is a man of God, and I know he will not fail me or my congregation, because he will be serving God.\textsuperscript{69}

Important social-economic stakes were involved for Michaux's members, and most of them resented the Rabbi. Some deacons and elders were displeased with him because they believed his motives for making friends with Michaux were sinister. He was an alleged liar who had once claimed to be in Israel, phoning the Elder so that he could be heard on radio there via telephone; the Rabbi was spotted in a nearby Washington telephone booth.\textsuperscript{70} Besides he was a newcomer on the move-

\textsuperscript{68} The 1968 will was not presented for filing by the New York lawyer until Jan. 23, 1970. The others were filed in Jan. 1969.

\textsuperscript{69} Contested will of 1968.

\textsuperscript{70} Discussions with members of the Gospel Spreading Church.
ment's scene, and many suspected that he was a fortune hunter.

Michaux's behavior was uncharacteristic. He had known the Rabbi for only a couple of years, yet, he delivered all that he and other black people had labored so long to accumulate and to administer into the hands of that Caucasian. Besides Abraham would be free to appoint a white successor to himself. Michaux's preachments, his relative interest in black economic nationalism, and his previous precautions to keep the movement primarily black caused his members and acquaintances to believe he was pressed into making the mysterious 1968 will.\footnote{Washington Afro-American (D.C.), Feb. 17, 1973.}

Fortunately Judge Charles Richey (U.S.District Court, Washington, D.C.) thought similarly and denied that will probate.\footnote{Ibid.}

It is quite clear that Michaux enjoyed being a businessman. He operated his business concerns under the umbrella of the Church of God into which much capital went for the movement's growth and development. Because of his modus operandi, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between what was self-aggrandizement and a sincere effort on the Elder's part to secure real economic power for his congregation. Consistently Michaux espoused interest in the welfare of his membership, and he often used church funds to rescue them from some temporary economic disaster. This was a most effective way of increasing their loyalty to him and of psychologically committing them to return to the Lord a portion of that which He had given them through tithing. While these tithes did not amount to much because Michaux kept the size of his membership and finances secret, he could use what others perceived...
to be a powerful business operation as collateral to secure additional funds.

It was unnecessary for Michaux to amass a personal fortune because he held the unique position of being general overseer of all Church of God funds, business and property. Thus, it is quite proper to conclude that as he went so went the church. Hence Michaux had his personal fortune under a tax-exempt shelter which was labeled Gospel Spreading Association, Inc. With this kind of management no one could judiciously charge Michaux of having used the church to accumulate a personal fortune since legally everything was owned by the church. In order to fully appreciate the Elder's interest in business, one must understand that he came from a business background into religion. He later found religion to be an avenue to some of the business visions he was unable to realize as a black individual.

Michaux, though, was not an astute business man, and this fact pre-determined the bounds of his success. He was a man with good and practical ideas, an initiator. Unfortunately he refused to effectively employ people with expertise in business to help him implement programs and projects which he started. Michaux was insecure and always needed to satisfy himself that any accomplishments connected with the Church of God derived from his talents. Ironically the pattern that made him somewhat successful—his success-oriented nature and compulsion to oversee or manage all church affairs—also limited that success.

It is to Michaux's credit, however, that he left his congregation a measure of economic security. The church remains a viable financial and religious operation. It is serviced by a black board of directors which is cautiously trying to map out new business directions without
creating a congregational split.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{73}From discussions with members of the Gospel Spreading Church, and from the author's observations.
CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUSIONS

The preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil. A leader, a politician, an orator, a 'boss,' an intriguer, an idealist,—all these he is, and ever, too, the centre of a group of men, now twenty, now a thousand in number. The combination of a certain adroitness with deep-seated earnestness, of tact with consummate ability, gave him his preeminence, and helps him maintain it.

W.E.B. DuBois

There was nothing obscure about Elder Michaux's early life. He was reared in a southern, Christian home which was located in an entrepreneurial town. This combination of atmospheres together with his mother's predictions that his was a special mission helped shape the course of his life. Michaux early aspired to become a successful businessman, and when he became a minister and religious overseer, he formulated his movement upon business aspirations and ideas as well as upon theological postulates. Michaux made a business of religion and religion a lever for secular business. In these respects he was a thoroughly American minister, representing the "New Thought" Protestantism which advised the convergence of moral and economic improvement for society's downtrodden.

Not only was he true to the historic black religious tradition of trying to attain a modicum of economic security and independence but

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1The Souls of Black Folk (Greenwich, Conn., 1961), 141.
also to his own conviction that people of faith should pursue excellence on secular as well as on spiritual planes. Michaux believed material assets were obvious manifestations of God's blessings upon his chosen people. This line of reasoning was attractive to many black people because it was in contradistinction to realities of the Afro-American experience with poverty and powerlessness. The belief that economic affluence could be utilized as a lever to political and social influence was at least as old as Booker T. Washington's 1895 Atlanta Compromise pronouncements. It was an idea that was modified by Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960's which showed that institutional racism was as much a proscription against black progress as was economic impotency per se. With the legacy from late nineteenth and early twentieth century black social thought Michaux believed that God was in alliance with the underprivileged who worship Him and so assured them of economic and political power. Except for these ideas on God's beneficence toward disinherited Saints, it is difficult to discern whether Michaux's aim, even during the Great Depression, was to help only his members, black people in general, or American society as a whole.

Undoubtedly the Elder was interested in racial uplift as was exemplified in his Haitian mission and National Memorial project. His racial uplift had a paternalistic ring, for he considered himself to be a father to his members. He was his followers' Ambassador who made contacts with people of power to try to elicit what he deemed necessary memorials or policies for the disinherited. This father image was important to these displaced, lower class people in urban centers.
From the earliest days of his ministry, Michaux showed concern over racism. Although the degree of his race consciousness is difficult to establish, it is evident that Michaux grappled with questions about the extent of black suffering, the rationale for it and its causative factors. The era, his ancestral background, and religious experience dictated a different recourse to the issue of black suffering, therefore, Michaux did not openly raise obvious controversy about the nature of God with regard to racism. In any event as one from a Holiness tradition, such articulated thoughts would have been considered blasphemous during Michaux's heyday. For this reason, Michaux interpreted racism and suffering as tools used by God to work miracles among the dispossessed. Consequently, the dispossessed were agents by which the Holy Spirit led them and their oppressors to become more moral and egalitarian. Hence, Michaux made his members feel as if they were active participants in the unfolding religious and historical drama.

What is apparent, then, is that Michaux's non-definitive statements on racism and suffering could be interpreted differently by the various segments of the American community. He helped white racists soothe their consciences for they heard him say to blacks, "You are suffering because it is God's way to help you be fit for salvation and to use you as a model." Blacks heard him say, "Suffering provides us the foundation on which we can build greater spiritual and material prosperity." Both interpretations bespeak of peaceful reaction on the part of blacks in living with the question of racial segregation and social-economic discrimination.

That Michaux took such a diplomatic stance is not surprising. Race consciousness during the formative years of Michaux's movement was
geared toward integration and dependence on white philanthropy. Black intellectuals were illustrative of this. During the twenties and thirties they took cues on the creation of black culture from white patrons, whom they sought to indulge, so as to be financed, socially integrated and accepted. Michaux, then, was not unique when in his effort to acquire financial support and political influence, he emphasized his American racial heritage and patriotism. Many black civic and social leaders, who were his contemporaries, utilized similar methods in their efforts to eradicate caste tensions. When taken out of this context, the Elder's race consciousness has been viewed as having taken a back seat to his interest in acquiring economic and political power. When considered contextually, it is easier to understand that his race consciousness and his quest of economic power were interdependent. Michaux did not believe that he could derive the ends which he sought by espousing a rhetoric of black power; instead he reflected, throughout his career, polar desires—social and political integration and economic segregation. Because of his racially motivated urgings, he is not to be compared, without qualification, to leading white religious figures like Garner Ted Armstrong and Oral Roberts. Their religio-economic strivings did not derive, as did Michaux's, from the socio-political insecurities of an ambitious black minister in a white world. Michaux understood that only two avenues to fame and fortune—religion and business—were open traditionally to black men.

One result of the Elder's life-long experiences with the traditionally widespread social-economic deprivation of AfroAmericans was his sensitivity to the more extensive and profound sufferings of all Americans. This concern was most obvious during the Great Depression. His social interest and activism germinated from his concern for his
own parishioners and was within the tradition of the southern black
church experience.

Michaux's gospel of happiness was intended to remind the downtrod-
den that they could find succor and uplift through faith in God. That
message seemed to be practically applicable to needs of millions--
black and white--during the Great Depression, but it was less appealing
during prosperity. After World War II it appeared to many to be too
idealistic or conservative, impractical or visionary, materialistic or
other-worldly, or exotic. Michaux's preachments were paradoxical and
frequently misunderstood. In them was a tension between the "old" Pro-
testant ethic and the "new" reform spirit. It was difficult, therefore,
for Michaux's contemporaries to determine whether he favored social
retrenchment, assistance, or reform. Consequently, his "Happy Am I"
gospel frequently was considered obsolescent by journalists and scholars
or was snubbed or misinterpreted by them. Michaux was aware of this
tendency and of its potentially negative effect on his image as a
famous radio evangelist and social activist.

Despite the numerous positive elements distinguishable in Michaux's
gospel and social and political activism, most black leaders and members
of the black middle-class were intellectually impervious to them and so
did not receive the Elder well. Observing from the outside, they con-
sidered him too exotic and unorthodox in such church activities as the
baptismal extravaganza and in his interest in politics and business.
Mainly they thought religion should be other-world oriented, with
special organizations set up for handling black social and political
affairs and problems. Some black leaders, however, like Mary McCloud
Bethune and Richard R. Wright, Sr., recognized the merits of Michaux's
social and political interests and cooperated with him.

Attacks to the contrary Michaux, the politician, struggled to sustain his image as a man with influence. The Church of God was Michaux's leverage in political arenas. He sought to increase the movement's religious and business growth. He used it and his radio fame as a veiled hint that he controlled or represented millions of black votes. For this reason, it became expedient for him to keep the size of his membership a secret. In his bid for political influence, Michaux's posture as a radio evangelist was very important to him as was the frequency of coverage on him in various other media. He relied very heavily on the mass media to maintain his position of leadership within his movement and his image of being influential with national figures. Accordingly, he maneuvered to get coverage in major newspapers, and he established church papers and booklets to report to his followers his activities and contacts with prominent people and his participation in national and ethnic affairs. Such visibility was important to his image as a black spokesman and religious leader; media coverage was deftly used by him to build influence among powerful white men. The Elder juggled his hand well, playing off powerful business and government leaders and his church followers against each other.

Michaux's activism in politics derived from his social interests and was accelerated by his radio fame. Because he was a famous black radio evangelist when the Roosevelt coalition was put together in 1936, Michaux was asked to help campaign for the President's re-election. It was also at that time that he began to write letters to presidents and to imply and articulate the idea that his ultimate success in the religious and social spheres would depend upon his economic affluence and
political influence. In a bid to realize both of the latter, he tried to build seminal influence with Presidents Roosevelt, Truman and Eisenhower, as his letters to them and other powerful Washingtonians illustrated. It seems unlikely that he naively believed he could influence presidential policy, but he may have hoped he could effect some attitudinal changes in line with his own multi-interests. Michaux was audacious enough to publicize contact with presidents and other establishment leaders in such a way as to enhance his appeal within his movement and to build influence in government and business circles. He was bold enough to press for meetings with presidents and to publicize any vestiges of contact with them.

Michaux was at heart an entrepreneur. Like most black ministers, he was a businessman engaged in one of the largest industries in the black community—religion. He was especially business-oriented, for he had moved from a business base to a religious one, carrying the former perspective with him. Ingeniously using the name of his movement and contacts with influential figures to acquire private and government financing, Michaux built a multi-million dollar religio-business enterprise. He wanted his members and their posterity to retain and to increase the church's holdings and to use them for political leverage and for social and economic security after his death.

Michaux was a complex personality. He was a charitable but practical man, given to much introspection. He was audacious and exuded confidence and purposeful action. But the Elder also realized his limitations, especially in the area of formal education. He sometimes evinced the mentality of the self-made and insecure man, as in inept business practices and in the authoritarian leadership of his congregation.
Michaux had a giant ego which was evident by his consistent refusal to acquire competent assistance in implementing his ideas, by his neglecting to appoint or acknowledge a successor, and by his domination of the Church of God. The church took a back seat to his personality and image. While its name was unheard of or slightly remembered, the name Lightfoot Solomon Michaux emerged more and more. Clearly Michaux needed the church as much or more than it needed him. He obviously received great personal satisfaction from managing the church and its business operations. In that arena he satisfied his manifold self-relegated obligations as a black American-minister-businessman and received widespread recognition and acclaim in the process. This diminished his insecurities and magnified his talents.

The Church of God had an enigmatic nature. It was a relatively exclusive and closed movement which defies definitive labeling as either church, sect, or cult. Church represents the dominant religious institution with its elders, sacraments, and organization catering to the predominant society. It naturally seeks to maintain the status quo—to guard morals and to uphold religious traditions for society.

The sect is generally a group which seceded from the church either because of ethnic or doctrinal differences. Although it is usually exclusive, it often seeks to proselytize. It usually espouses a stringent moral code that aims at the sanctity of the individual and strict group discipline. While the church is outward oriented, the sect is inward oriented. At the center of the sect are the doctrine and discipline.

The cult represents the extreme in religious movements. Its members are usually the oppressed of society or those who have psychologi-
cal needs which are not fulfilled by church or sect or other social groups. It emerges with an ideology that is perceived as the answer to deep psychological needs or as a way out of depraved social situations. It frequently takes on dimensions of a revitalization movement to bring about social change. Such movements are the breeding ground for prophets and charismatic leaders, and they often fold or splinter after the founders die. They are also the source of new ideas, creeds, rituals, and involve a considerable portion of the population. The cultists' preachments usually are millennial. 2

The Church of God fits a number of cultist and sectarian descriptions. The Elder was its charismatic founder-leader. He was the driving and cohesive force of the organization, and his members submitted to his control. Michaux was so exacting with nurturing his churches that they were necessarily limited to a small area of Middle Atlantic states along the East Coast. While he made no provisions for a successor by naming or laying hands on one, he did provide for an office similar to his to be filled by constitutional edict. However, he apparently considered that the movement might not remain viable after his demise, and so he provided for its possible dissolution. The movement's significant point of identity with a cultist definition was the Church of God's interest in social problems and societal issues. It had a sectarian bent in that there was the tendency to acquire strict adherence to doctrine and discipline.

Despite the fact that Michaux's influence and control of the movement were ubiquitous, observers must watch longer to ascertain adequate knowledge of the direction it will take. In 1974 it was directed by a Board of Directors, two of whom were Michaux's sisters. Their presence seems to have established some vicarious ties between the founder and the members. There are other factors which seem to be engendering loyalty to the movement independent of the veneration of Michaux, per se. The National Memorial Beach and other church property fit into this category. Many members cherish the cooperative ownership of these valuable properties and would not risk losing their "share" in the church estate by relinquishing membership in the movement.

Thus, for the present it will be sufficient to label the Church of God a sect in its religious essence and a cult in social significance.

Like numerous other new Afroamerican urbanites representing various areas of cultural creativity, Michaux was a migrant who emerged into his role from out of the productive womb of the black masses. His charisma and his gospel were reflective of this. His members, who were mostly black, supported Michaux because they were proud of their preacher, leader, and religious organization. The Church of God was a black institution which they could nurture and maintain as theirs. It was a healthy socio-religious organism in which harmony prevailed and internal disputes rarely occurred or persisted. Members had complete confidence in the ministerial and business competence and the moral integrity of their Chief Elder. Furthermore, a sense of belonging was instilled in them. They were part of the church, participating in its myriad of services, holding offices, and communally sharing in vast properties. They believed Michaux was a prophet who was divinely inspired to lead
them and to advise non-members—from street drunkards to presidents of
the United States. They believed the Elder was especially interested
in helping them better their social-economic and spiritual condition,
and so individual members credited him with helping them become more
morally upright, socially mobile, and economically prosperous. In
addition, members of the Church of God enjoyed a vicarious prestige
through Michaux's avowed influence and contacts among national leaders
and personalities.

Although he emphasized congregational unity along with his espousal
of a Protestant ethic, Michaux was able to contain individualism among
his members largely because they believed themselves to be temples of
God's Holy Spirit. It was mainly to that leveling attitude that he
appealed for democratic oneness. Yet, the tendency toward individualism
still manifested itself through a competitiveness among the members. They
were anxious to prove their individual alliance with God by acquiring
material wealth, good health, or education about which they testified,
saying that God was so pleased with their Saintly lives that he had
blessed them with more than they had consciously desired. This indi­
cates that along with self-respect and dignity, members had gained a
kind of existential perspective through the belief that they were heirs
to God's earthly as well as His heavenly riches. This was easy for them
to believe when they considered that Michaux, a man of fame and fortune
was like them, of rather humble origins.

With little formal and no seminary education, Michaux became a
paradigm to his members and some followers of what disinherited people
could achieve if they were in touch with God and communing with a body
of Saints. Michaux successfully conveyed to his members the idea that
they were dependent upon him and membership in his church for maintaining their salvation and material acquisitions. He emphasized the group concept as a historic Christian principle. While individuals were answerable to God, and, like Michaux, Saints were able to commune directly with Him, the Elder considered himself to be the Chief Spokesman and Interpreter for God to his members and to the nation. His members yielded to that position. Michaux was aware of his power of persuasion over his members, and he used it to keep them in sway for the benefit of the movement.

Although Michaux merely considered himself a prophet, some of his members almost believed him to be a hexer. They generally thought that if one committed an act against him or another member, it was considered an act against God for which the perpetrator would be punished. Many members also believed the Elder could prophesy evils which would befall them. Michaux was a master of group psychology, and much of this kind of attitude among his members resulted from his facility in this area. He realized that certain natures would react to certain things in certain ways and made frightening predictions about behavior within that vein. Although Michaux seemed awesome to them, members considered him compassionate and thoroughly concerned about the plight of underprivileged people.

Strains of varied religious thought permeated his preachments. Yet, no more than the black experience can be pigeonholed, can Michaux, with his social consciousness, be theologically or socially categorized, since he maintained a doctrinal affiliation with the Judaeo-Christian heritage and variously extolled virtues of black nationalism as well. His long life and wide range of interests in many ways exemplified the
unique complexity of the black experience and aspiration.

Michaux and his members forged the Church of God into a religio-social movement, with eschatological as well as sociological concerns. Based on this orientation Michaux maintained a practical relationship between religion, economics, and politics within the Church of God. Perhaps its continued spiritual viability and economic prosperity stand as a memorial to the Elder's dynamism, vision, and leadership. He succeeded ultimately, then, in providing a collective identity and a core of economic security for his movement rather than in making a lasting impact upon black America in general. Yet, the various social functions which the Church of God undertook bespoke the plight of urban blacks in the United States and individual ministers' desires to alleviate it.
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Although not really expecting to, I hoped to find substantial information or leads to sources on Elder Michaux and the Church of God movement in published books and articles on religion and on the history of Afroamericans. This expectation was especially heightened when I approached published studies on black and small religious groups. However, authors who mentioned him limited their sources to one or two references. E. Franklin Frazier's opinions, in The Negro Church in America, were derived from Frank Rasky's popular article, "Harlem's Zealots." Constance Green based her interpretation of Michaux, in The Secret City, on a Church of God publication and an interview of one of its members, and the Virginia Writer's Project, The Negro in Virginia, edited by Roscoe Lewis, did not list its sources of information. The most satisfactory, scholarly study on Michaux was presented in Chancellor Williams' unpublished dissertation which was well documented but much influenced by interviews with Michaux and his church officers.

Whereas secondary sources, on a whole, were not too valuable, newspaper articles and Church of God publications were a boon. They pointed the way to other creditable primary sources, such as materials in the National Archives and presidential papers. Of invaluable help was oral information from members, former members, and officers of the Church of God and from Michaux's relatives, friends, and business acquaintances and other contemporaries. Here was the lodestar which not only directed me to important written sources but also gave me the
opportunity to observe people's feelings and impressions of Michaux and his religious movement.
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D. Articles


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E. Interviews

Most of the interviewees requested that they remain anonymous. However, a former Field Representative of Michaux's church, a member and former Michaux employee, Attorney Edwin F. Lark, ed., Happy News, Emmanuel C. Wright (a Michaux friend and business associate), and Odell Walker (Manager of Mayfair Mansions and Paradise) consented to taped interviews which are in the author's possession, 1971.

Numerous interviews and discussions with Members of Michaux's church and with non-members were engaged in informally.

F. Letters

The author engaged in correspondence with many Michaux associates; some of his acquaintances never replied. However, the author considered two letters of reply highly significant; some others were interesting but not informative, such as that from J. Edgar Hoover, the late director of the F.B.I.


G. Miscellaneous

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II. SELECTED RELATED MATERIALS

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