8

Research Article

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"At This Age, This Is Who I Am": CeCe Winans, Exilic Consciousness, and the American Popular Music Star System

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Abstract: My paper addresses the intersections of the American popular music star system, Black female Gospel singers, Gospel Music, and the exilic consciousness of the Sanctified Church with special attention to life and music of Gospelwoman Priscilla Marie "CeCe" Winans Love. I argue that CeCe Winans and the marketing campaign for Winans' album *Let Them Fall in Love*, is indicative of the encroachment of American popular music's star system into self-elected "exiled" Gospel Music and into the lives of "exiled" Gospelwomen. Gospelwomen are 20th and 21st century urban African American Protestant Christian women who are paid for singing Gospel Music and who have recorded at least one Gospel album for national distribution. The self-elected exile of Gospelwomen refers to their decision to live a life based on the values of the Kingdom of God while encountering and negotiating opposing values in American popular culture. Gospelwomen and Gospel Music are impacted by the demands of stardom in America's celebrity culture which includes achieved success and branding. Gospelwomen negotiate these components of stardom molding them into mechanisms that conform to their beliefs and needs.

Keywords: Black female Gospel singers; Gospel music; sanctified church

Introduction

This article addresses the intersections of the American popular music star system, Black female Gospel singers, Gospel music, and the exilic consciousness of the Sanctified church with special attention to the life and music of Gospel woman Priscilla Marie "CeCe" Winans Love. I argue that CeCe Winans and the marketing campaign for Winans' album *Let Them Fall in Love*, from October 2016 to its release on February 3, 2017, is indicative of the encroachment of American popular music's star system into self-elected "exiled" Gospel music and into the lives of "exiled" Gospelwomen. Gospelwomen are 20th and 21st century urban African American Protestant Christian women who are paid for singing Gospel music and who have recorded at least one Gospel album for national distribution.

I employ the concept of "exile" as explicated by Cheryl Sanders in the context of theology. Exile as the idea and experience of being "in the world, but not of the world" represents a lifestyle concept ingrained in Christianity and operationalised in specific ways by African Americans of the Sanctified church. I show what this "exiled" lifestyle means in Winans' life as a popular Black female Gospel singer. The phrase "in the world, but not of it," partially hails Jesus' prayer to God, His Father, concerning Jesus' disciples in John 17.16 (English Standard Version): "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." Although the concept of exile suggests an "either/or" response from Gospelwomen to cultural encounters, it is not that simple. For many areas of their professional lives, in particular, Gospelwomen such as Mahalia Jackson, Shirley Caesar, MaryMary, Tasha Cobbs Leonard, Tasha Page-Lockhart, and Jekalyn Carr, express nuanced

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responses to "worldly," or secular, practices. For example, while Mahalia Jackson sang on such secular television programs as the *Dinah Shore Chevy Show* (108) and Dave Garroway's *Wide*, *Wide World* (110), she felt that gospel singing in nightclubs and "pop gospel" records were "blaspheming against the Holy Ghost," or against God (108).

If there is exile, then there is also a "home" to which one is exiled from. The home to which Gospelwomen refer is Heaven which is the "spiritual headquarters" of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God refers to the rule of God in the spiritual realm and is characterised by standards and principles established by God and a code of ethics (Munroe 65-6). The self-elected exile of Gospelwomen refers to their decision to live a life based on the laws and ethics of the Kingdom of God while encountering and negotiating opposing values such as self-promotion and self-aggrandisement in American society and popular culture.

Gospelwomen and Gospel music are impacted by the demands of stardom in America's celebrity culture which includes achieved success and branding. Achieved success is often determined by the pricing and number of concert tickets sold, awards won, popularity, gold or platinum record sales, chart ratings, and the capacity to extend one's brand into other "entertainment verticals" (Lieb xix). Branding is a process used by pop music stars and their managers to offer a consistent identity and persona of pop music stars. The American popular music star system is a loosely-structured system for creating, managing, and promoting pop music stars. The American popular music star system and its practices are in conflict with the practices of Black female Gospel singers. However, Gospelwomen negotiate these components of stardom rather than produce outright opposition to them moulding them into mechanisms that conform to *their* beliefs and needs. For example, one of Kristin Lieb's main arguments is that youth, beauty, and sex still anchor most female pop music stars' careers today (13). This requirement causes female pop music stars to call attention to their bodies and sexual availability (Lieb 89). Typically, Gospelwomen deflect attention away from their bodies by not wearing clothes that highlight their breasts or hips, but they will wear makeup and stylish clothing and fashionable high-heeled shoes, as can be seen, for instance, in Figure 1.

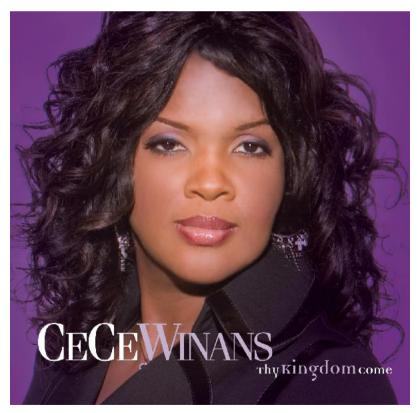


Figure 1. Cover of Thy Kingdom Come.

Exilic Consciousness, the Sanctified Church, and Gospel Music

Exile is a familiar concept in Jewish and Christian religious thought and history. Walter Brueggemann examines the concept of exile as it related to the prophetic poetry of Jewish prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah of the Old Testament in the Bible and their response to Babylonian exile and Israel's homecoming. Brueggemann describes exile as a sense of being in an environment hostile to the values of a community and as a refusal to assimilate (107). Incorporating some aspects of Brueggeman's argument, Cheryl Sanders writes that the exilic consciousness of Judaism has compelling similarities with African Americans in urban cities of the early 20th century who congregated in churches that Zora Neale Hurston named "Sanctified" (Sanders 3). Sanders notes that the "label 'Sanctified church'" distinguishes "congregations of 'saints' from those of other black Christians, especially the Black Baptists and Methodists who assimilated and imitated the cultural and organisational models of European-American patriarchy" (3-4). Sanders defines the Sanctified church as an "African American Christian reform movement that seeks to bring its standards of worship, personal morality, and social concern into conformity with a biblical hermeneutic of holiness and spiritual empowerment" (5-6). The Sanctified church comprises the Holiness, Pentecostal, and Apostolic churches¹ which emphasise the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit and living a life of holiness.

Therefore, living in exile results from the adherence to a life of holiness where, because the believer is "set apart for God," she is literally "made holy" (Sanders 58). Sanders states that the ethical emphasis of the Sanctified church is a critical element because the members follow the holiness mandate in worship, in personal morality, and in society, based on a dialectical identity characteristic of the tradition: 'in the world, but not of it" (5). The "world" in the exilic consciousness of African Americans refers to a broad secular and profane system and organisation governing all sectors of US culture and society. This secular "world" is in opposition to the system and organisation of the Kingdom of God. Gospelwomen express their devotion to God through their ethics, lifestyle, and calling to sing Gospel music. However, being "not of the world" means that Gospelwomen are not wholly intellectually, psychologically, and emotionally committed to the mindsets, mores, and norms of American culture and society because these are not based upon Christian and Kingdom principles. For example, Mahalia Jackson believed that the "principle to singing gospel music" would be broken and that it would be a "mockery to religion to sing religious songs to people who are drinking and dancing" (159). By the 1950s, Gospel groups were singing in nightclubs and restaurants. Jackson would not be building "up God's kingdom" if she sang Gospel songs to this group of people in these locations (159). Therefore, she did not. Gospelwomen are led by the principles and standards active in the Kingdom of God that they have gained through regular church attendance, family norms, and Bible study.

The predominantly African-American members of the Sanctified church are thus inherently living in "internal exile" from the secular world, an exile of the heart, or, what Brueggemann calls, a "theological decision" (93). It is not exile in the political sense in that the "Saints" of the Sanctified church are not banished from their native country, but they participate in a "relational, covenantal reality" (Brueggeman 108). Sanders argues that the Sanctified church's "saints in exile are religious communities of African Americans upon whom the North American Babylon has imposed alien status on account of their race, culture, class, and, in some cases, their sex. Moreover, they have further exiled themselves in significant ways by virtue of their codes of morality and their peculiar liturgies of song, speech, and dance" (143). This exile chosen by the Saints of the Sanctified church has specific outward manifestations in their daily lives in regards to language, dress, recreational norms, and worship practices (Butler 75). Exile, then, for Sanctified African Americans is a practical, lived experience.

A significant part of the Sanctified African American's lived experience is music in worship. Music, in general, is the "deep form, the deep structure" of African American life, culture, and history (Hall 27). Within the broad sweep of African American music, Gospel music, a powerful Black urban religious,

¹ The five "original" groups in Black Holiness-Pentecostalism that constitute the Sanctified Church tradition include the United Holy Church of America (founded in 1886), the Church of Christ Holiness, U.S.A. (1894-1896), the Church of God in Christ (1895-1897), the Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God in the Americas (1889), and the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (1914-1924). Sanders, Saints in Exile, 17. Winans grew up in a church affiliated with the Church of God in Christ denomination.

cultural form, appeared just before World War I and grew exponentially after World War I and just before World War II in the Black church, particularly the Sanctified church. Gospel music was forged out of the mass Black migration to the North coupled with the harsh realities and complexities of the urban city. Inextricably connected to the Black church in the United States, Gospel music functions as "exilic liturgy ... the characteristic twentieth-century African American Christian response to the Psalmist's query: 'How shall we sing the Lord's song [have church] in a strange land [in exile]?" (Sanders 71). Gospel music, or the "Lord's song," represents the centrality of God in a Saint's daily life and expresses the objective to not be of the world. Gospel music, a characteristic element of Black Sanctified church worship, prescribes a specific way of approaching the subject of God and daily lives. As a "performer's medium" (Ennis 72), Gospel Music relies on the voice as primary instrument; and performance is vital to its reception. Gospelwomen have certain performance practices, sounds, rhetoric, idioms, and mannerisms that must be maintained because of the integration of the audience, or the Saints, with its creation and dissemination. The vocality, orality, and emotionality of Gospelwomen's performances set them apart from Gospelmen. The Gospelwoman's ability to scream, shout, and moan demonstrates her personal involvement in her performance (Burnim 158). On the other hand, Gospelwomen rarely play instruments as they sing. Further, they especially set themselves apart from men in their dress. Gospelwomen wear makeup, jewellery, vibrantly coloured and bejewelled costumes and clothes, and elaborate wigs and natural hairstyles (Young 110-11; Pollard 87-9).

If Gospel music had remained within the "walls" of the Sanctified church in particular and the Black church in general, the American popular music star system would not be relevant to CeCe Winans. However, with the advent of Gospel sheet music publishing beginning in the late 1890s and early 1900s, Gospel music from the Black church entered into American popular culture (Spencer 208) and Gospelwomen and Gospelmen entered the American labour force. Furthermore, the onset of radio broadcasts, recordings, and performances in the 1920s and 1930s by Arizona Dranes and Sister Rosetta Tharpe (J. Jackson 44, 77), the Mitchell's Christian Singers, the Golden Gate Jubilee Quartet (Maultsby 176), and Mahalia Jackson (Best 150) fueled the Gospelwoman and Gospelman's entry into American celebrity culture. The intersections of exilic consciousness, the Sanctified church, Gospel music, and the American popular music star system are exemplified in the life and music of CeCe Winans. In her over 30-year career, or "ministry," as Winans describes it (124), Winans shows how these four cultural phenomena intersect in the late 20th and early 21st century through her "ethics of accountability." Winans' accountability ethics, here being personally accountable to God, is demonstrated through a perceived consistency between her public performance and her private beliefs about God. For example, when CeCe and her brother Benjamin, or "BeBe," recorded and released the album Different Lifestyles (1991), their producer Keith Thomas offered this observation about Winans' perspective on song lyrics: "I have called CeCe here a few times to do demos for me. And she's turned me down twice now because maybe one song would have the word 'baby' in it or it was kind of geared towards the secular marketplace. It tells you how strong her conviction is about the Christian marketplace and what she says and what she's all about" (Journeys in Black). In Winans' mind, the "secular marketplace," which is also representative of the world, wants songs that include the word "baby," The word "baby," by extension is connected to the reliance on sex and sexuality in secular American popular music lyrics. Winans would not agree (and has not agreed) to sing such lyrics because her focus is on God and Jesus.

American Stardom and the Kingdom of God

To understand the impact of CeCe Winans' early immersion into celebrity culture on her subsequent handling of her achieved success and branding, it is important to understand some of the processes that feed celebrity and stardom. Daniel Boorstin's often-cited definition of celebrity simply states that a celebrity is a person who is "known for his well-knownness" (57). Well-knownness thus is a key factor in qualifying an individual as a celebrity, idol, star, or as famous in virtually any culture in the world. Jack Nachbar and Kevin Lause define celebrities as "real people who are made and kept famous by the news media" (325). Indeed, the media, or mediatization, is an important second factor in the celebrity-making process. Olivier Driessens considers mediatization to be a prerequisite and catalyst for celebritization (643). Stars, on the other hand, are individuals who have achieved success in a skilled profession or field (Shumway 2;

Redmond and Holmes 4). As David Shumway rightly surmises "all stars are celebrities, but not all celebrities are stars" (2). Stars go beyond simply being seen in the media as is the case with celebrities. Stars have a unique talent that is recognised and acknowledged by others.

To fully appreciate celebrity and stardom in American popular culture, the public nature of a celebrity's and star's existence is important. However, being in public and being well-known is not enough to characterise a person as a star. In his analysis of six male rock stars and one female rock star, Shumway argues that their stardom includes five defining characteristics: (1) the star has achieved success in a skilled field or profession, (2) the star is the object of imagined personal relationships by fans, (3) the star has a persona that represents a widely understood cultural specific sign or icon, (4) the persona is consistent and well developed, and (5) a star has personal attractiveness (2). Kristin Lieb identifies "pop star brands" as being "built to capitalise on earnings potential" and to "resonate with the audience" (13). Lieb's use of the word "built" suggests an intentional effort to develop a pop music star which then suggests creating an atmosphere of consistency. I will use Lieb's concept of a "star brand" in the place of Shumway's "consistent and well-developed persona" characteristic because star brand is more comprehensive and representative of the general idea of stardom.

Christianity, by virtue of the religion's name being focused on the humanity and the divinity of Jesus Christ, is directed towards Christ and not his followers. Stardom as experienced in American popular culture necessarily focuses on the person or the star. From a Christian ethos, the star system is a secularised activity that replaces the fame, name, iconic status, "stardom," and "celebrity" of God through His Son, Jesus Christ. When the Gospelwoman becomes a star, her celebrity can become challenging because it creates a conflict with the primacy of God in her life and in her music; such secularisation is problematic because it is "of the world." In the same way that John the Baptist described the authority he has over his life in relationship to the submission that he should grant to Jesus ("He must increase, but I must decrease") in John 3.30 ESV, so, too, Gospelwomen base their daily lives. Winans is decreasing herself when speaking about joining the PTL Club here: "I didn't want to be off to North Carolina to chase after some glory for myself" (90). Winans is demonstrating that she wants Jesus to "increase" in her life when she concludes: "If the Lord was in fact beckoning me to come out to North Carolina to sing for Him, I was prepared to give up everything I had planned for myself to do what God wanted (91).

Succumbing fully to the values and practices of the American popular music star system is therefore antithetical to the exilic consciousness of the Sanctified church. The life of Gospelwomen is a self-imposed and exilic life tied inextricably to her God and to the music she sings: Gospel. One of the secular values she opposes include prioritising being in the news through stories about a pop music star's personal life just for the purpose of being recognised by fans on a regular basis. Founders of the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses in 1933 and as ambassadors for Gospel music, Thomas A. Dorsey and Sallie Martin in the 1930s and 1940s shared their concerns about the encroachment of commercialism. They viewed commercialism drawing in Gospelwomen and Gospelmen who are in the business of singing Gospel music "'for what they can get out of it' or for purely commercial reasons" (Jackson 117-19). Cheryl Sanders notes that Gospel singers have "tended to forgo opportunities to become stars and instead have stayed focused on the music and its message as a manner of doing ministry" (90). This reinforces their decision to live in exile from the American popular music star system. Sanders is speaking of Gospelwomen in local churches and not the Gospelwomen who decide to disseminate their talent through an established mainstream record label or an independent record label that they create. David Buckley and John Shepherd agree that the "cult of celebrity" is eschewed in Gospel as well as other such popular music forms as new age, ambient, and in all genres of dance music (368). This reticence to celebrity is connected to the high level of engagement that these participants have with these musical forms. The communities of Gospel, new age, ambient, and dance music embrace their music as a ritual element of their communities rather than idolising the music alone. If anything, the American popular music star system is quite aligned with the values and practices of secular society including sexualised and profane lyrics, image idolization, a gender hierarchy, and a racial hierarchy. Gospelwomen choose to adhere to the values of the Kingdom of God rather than the values of the star system because adhering to the star system would mean "loving the world" (see 1 John 2.15 ESV). Loving the world in this way could mean losing the Gospelwoman's audience or her Gospel community.

Winans' Background, Exilic Consciousness, and Gospel Music

CeCe Winans was born on October 8, 1964, and raised in Detroit, Michigan. She is the eighth of ten children and the first of three daughters of a musically endowed family with a rich Gospel music tradition tied to the Sanctified church and the northern urban city. As Winans notes in her memoir *On a Positive Note* music was a "natural part" of her household:

My parents passed on their love for music to their ten children, as God would have them do.... Just about the time other children were sitting on their parents' laps learning to talk, each of David and Delores Winans's children were sitting around learning to sing. Singing was always such a natural part of our Winans household that I never gave it much thought. (9)

Winans sang at home, in church, and in her family's public concerts held during the Christmas season (Winans 52-6). Winans viewed her family's Christmas concerts as positively impacting her ministry as a Gospelwoman: "Sponsoring those concerts for us was the greatest gift Mom and Dad ever gave us. Those concerts gave us the experience we needed to be able to go off in our own directions later on and become the musicians and performers God intended us to be" (54). These concerts prepared Winans for the "path of opportunity" that presented itself shortly after she graduated from high school at the age of 17 (Winans 83-4).

Winans began singing professionally with her brother BeBe as a PTL Singer from 1981 to 1984 on the religious-variety-talk-music show *The PTL Club*² (Winans 92, 117, 124-5, 143, 147). In 1984, CeCe and BeBe recorded their first album *Lord Lift Us Up* released by PTL Records (Winans 151, 159). After *The PTL Club*, BeBe and CeCe sang, toured, and recorded albums together from about 1984 to 1995. Known as the Gospel music duo BeBe & CeCe, their first collaboration on songs on *The PTL Club* formed the foundation for their professional working relationship. In addition, BeBe and CeCe's appearance on the television program brought on their initial exposure to American celebrity culture.



Figure 2. Winans on PTL Club record cover

² *The PTL Club* was a syndicated television program from 1974 to 1989 broadcast on the "Praise the Lord" (or "People That Love") Television Network. At the time Winans was a PTL Singer, the program was co-hosted by evangelists Jim Bakker and Tammy Faye Bakker.

³ Between 1984 and 1995, BeBe and CeCe Winans performed and toured together and recorded six albums: Lord Lift Us Up (PTL Records, 1984), BeBe & CeCe Winans (Sparrow/Capitol, 1987), Heaven (Sparrow/Capitol, 1988), Different Lifestyles (Sparrow/Capitol, 1991), First Christmas (Sparrow/Capitol, 1993), and Relationships (Sparrow/Capitol, 1994). Winans, 158-60.

More valued by Winans than American celebrity culture is an exilic consciousness. Winans is very familiar with exilic consciousness because of her upbringing in her home and in her membership in the Mack Avenue Church of God in Christ Church during the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s (Winans 37, 71). The Church of God in Christ, Inc., traditionally comprised of African Americans, is the largest Pentecostal denomination in the USA. The Church of God in Christ denomination is part of the Sanctified church tradition that embraces the "in the world, but not of it" consciousness. In high school, Winans' family moved to Shalom Temple, a "nondenominational Pentecostal church in West Detroit" (Winans 73), which is also a church in the Sanctified tradition of worship and music. Winans' home and church afforded her a training ground for the formation of exilic consciousness.

Winans' time with The PTL Club challenged Winans' childhood training but also demonstrates how Winans exercised her understanding of being "in the world, but not of it" as a young adult away from home: "I was growing up right before my own eyes... I was really testing boundaries, discovering for myself what things I, Priscilla 'CeCe' Winans, thought were inviolable and dear to my soul and what things I respected, but no longer held as sacred. I still had boundaries: sins like drinking, cursing, and sleeping around were out of the question" (123). For the Saints of the Sanctified church and as noted by Winans above, exilic consciousness is especially manifested when it regards the recreational aspects of the "world."

Raised in the Pentecostal tradition, my parents were determined that they would raise their children in the way of holiness and sanctification. This meant no parties, no clubs, no smoking, no drinking, no makeup, no jewellery, no finger popping, and above all no secular music.... Both parents threatened to brand us if they ever caught us playing "worldly music," in the house or even in the car. (Winans 37-8)

The activities listed by Winans are considered to be "worldly" because participation in them ignore important Christian and Kingdom tenets. Promiscuity, smoking, and drinking minimise the tenet of observing the body as a temple of God (see 1 Corinthians 3.16-17 ESV). Going to parties and clubs are related to smoking, drinking, and finger popping because these three activities occur in clubs and at parties. "Sleeping around," or sexual intercourse outside of marriage goes against the marital norms prescribed by the Kingdom of God (see Hebrews 13.4 ESV). Women wearing makeup and jewellery ignore the tenet of dressing modestly so as not to participate in self-aggrandisement or calling attention to one's self (see 1 Peter 3.3 ESV; 1 Timothy 2.9 ESV). However, interestingly and ironically, Winans' work on the PTL Club forced her to reevaluate her stance on not wearing makeup and jewellery: "Now I was wearing makeup, earrings, and eventually pants... I got over the guilt. I could feel God doing something new in me" (Winans 123-4). The prohibition of "secular music" and "worldly music" is not so much about the key changes, instrumentation, vocal performance styles, or "origin of the particular style or technique" being used by Gospelwomen (Sanders 89). Rather, in the Sanctified church, as Sanders argues, intention and motivation are of greatest importance. The primary question is this: Will the "performance encourage emotional release, spirit possession, shouting, conversion experiences" (89). Winans knows where her devotion lies and it is with God. Her proclaimed intent and motivation for her life and purpose is with Him. Therefore, when Winans describes creating the music she recorded with her brother BeBe, she focuses more on what she "liked" rather than on "worldly" practices such as recording techniques: "When we went into the studio, we just produced and put out what we liked, what appealed to us" (Hight).

Winans and the American Popular Music Star System

Following Shumway's characteristics of stardom, Winans is regarded as a star because she has achieved success in the profession, or ministry, of Gospel music. She is the object of imagined personal relationships by fans, or Believers and Saints. Winans has created a persona that represents a widely understood cultural specific sign, particularly Christianity. She is a brand, has personal attractiveness, and called a star, a legend ("CeCe Winans Signs"), megastar (Hight), and superstar ("CeCe Winans Set") in articles and interviews. However, Winans herself speaks of stardom not as a status or identity but as a belief or value that an individual can or cannot possess. Winans explains how she separates her heart, or her beliefs and values, from the "tyranny" of stardom or being classified as a star.

I know firsthand how easy it is to become so drunk by this carousel called stardom, so dazed by your own ambitions, hungry for the next conquest, that you lose sight of what's really important. Christians can get so caught up in the business that they can neglect their spiritual needs.... I've always been afraid that if I ever ... get caught up in the glitter and glamour of being a singer and a star, then I might lose my way and my purpose. I might get so far out there that I might not be able to find my way back. I pray to God that before that ever happens, I can get on a red-eye and come home to my family. (Winans 128)

Maintaining her distance from the secularism ("so drunk by this carousel") of stardom by prayer and maintaining close interactions with her family, Winans is thus negotiating with the pop star system so that she can share the Gospel of Jesus Christ through her music in a genuine, heartfelt way with her audience.

Stardom generally assumes a certain level of arrogance, presumption, and self-sufficiency. It is a cultural status bestowed upon a person that requires them to live a specific lifestyle to continue to have the right to remain in that status. Once labelled a star, individuals tend to become focused on themselves and their fans. Gospelwomen refrain from such practices as self-aggrandisement because they understand that both their life and talent are granted to them by God. According to Winans, humility is one of the most important virtues to live by. She addresses the issue of thinking highly of one's self as opposed to being humble or possessing humility, in the song "Lowly," from her *Let Them Fall in Love* album. Written by Winans' son Alvin III, "Lowly," according to Winans, is "something that I would sing to young people to use wisdom" (Scott). Humility is a Kingdom value that Winans asserts is "always the way to take" because pride, the opposite of humility and a value connected to stardom and the world, "is one of those things that will mess you up—relationships, it'll mess you up in careers, in any area of life" (Scott). You have to "come down" to receive the blessing of God.

Winans clearly has achieved success by the music industry's standards, as evident in the number of albums recorded, chart ratings, and awards she has received. Since 1995, Winans has recorded 10 solo albums and has won 12 Grammy Awards, 21 Grammy Award nominations, 23 Gospel Music Association (GMA) Dove Awards, 15 Stellar Awards, three Soul Train Awards, two National Association for the Advancement for Colored People (NAACP) Image Awards, and one Detroit Music Award. She joined with her brother BeBe again to record and release the album *Still* (Malaco Records) in 2009. Almost ten years after *Still*, Winans' current album *Let Them Fall in Love* (released by Winans' record label Puresprings Gospel and Thirty Tigers) was inspired by Winans' son Alvin Love III. *Let Them Fall in Love* contains ten songs with eight of those songs written by Winans' son. Released on February 3, 2017, the album debuted at Number 1 on the *Billboard* Gospel Albums chart and the lead single "Never Have to Be Alone" was Number 4 on the *Billboard* Hot Gospel Songs chart and in the Top Ten of both the Nielsen Broadcast Data Systems (BDS) Gospel National Airplay and Mediabase Gospel charts (Belle Report).

A star is characterised by their skill and proficiency in what they are known for. Winans' church background provided the foundation for her skill and proficiency in singing Gospel music which led to Winans' achieved success. Her choir singing helped to instruct her.

Choir singing was our delight because it was the one place in the church where we enjoyed an element of independence. ... As we matured, the lessons we've learned from singing matured. We learned how to sing four-part harmony, how to blend of our voices without losing our own special timbre, how to appreciate the talents of a good accompanist because of his or her ability to help you pace yourself. Best of all, we learned the creative, artistic, and heartfelt aspects of singing: if you don't feel what you're singing, neither will your audience; always give your best when are you're singing to a "packed house" or to a "slack house." (Winans 74-5)

The Black American Gospel vocal performance style is distinctive. Above, Winans outlines key aspects of this style. Becoming proficient with this learned style along with her natural vocal talent, Winans was set to do more than remain in the choir of her childhood church.

Adding to Winans' achieved success is her star brand. Winans's *Let Them Fall in Love* received two Grammys for Best Gospel Album and Best Gospel Performance/Song in 2018. UGospel.com's statement gives a sense of what Winans' brand is, a "veteran [who] continues to make her mark on the music industry and all those who have embraced her [...] message of love" ("CeCe Winans Snags"). A brand (for a product or service) is "the sum total of what everyone who has experienced [the] brand in some way thinks about

it" (Keinan and Avery in Lieb 36). In other words, you do not have to "drink a Starbucks coffee to have an opinion about Starbucks" (Lieb 36). The "sum total" of Winans' consistent and well-developed persona, or brand, is her name, her longevity, her experience, her proficiency, her talent, her motility, and her message. Clearly aware of the processes of branding, in October 2016, Winans signed a distribution agreement with Thirty Tigers, a music marketing, management, distribution, and publishing company based in Nashville, Tennessee, to manage the physical and digital distribution of Winans' music including *Let Them Fall in Love* ("CeCe Winans Signs"). Furthermore, Winans launched "The Fall in Love Tour," between May and July 2017, kicking off in New Orleans, Louisiana, and concluding in Cincinnati, Ohio. All nine of the venues were secular entertainment settings with her performance at the MotorCity Casino at Sound Board in Detroit, Michigan, perhaps being the most perplexing because it is clearly a location where gambling occurs.



Figure 3. Winans' Let Them Fall in Love album cover.

Ministry is how Gospelwomen describe their creative, expressive "work" of singing Gospel music. Ministry is based on and activated by the Christian concept of agape, an unconditional love that has no reason. Gospel singing is a service rendered for God to help other people. Winans has always considered herself to be engaged in ministry. "Music allowed us to spread the gospel to a broader audience than we otherwise might have been able to reach. Through music the Spirit wooed, convicted, saved, and set people free, and to think that my voice was one of the instruments for doing this was humbling. Singing was a ministry, a calling, a gift from God" (Winans 61). The PTL Club gave Winans the first opportunity to minister on a national scale: "Working at PTL for almost three years was one of the best things that ever happened to me. It opened my life and my ministry to a whole new world" (124). Gospelwomen are not "built" in the pop music star brand mould to capitalise on earnings potential. Horace Boyer, commenting on the birth of Gospel music, notes that the purpose of Gospel music "was not to entertain, not to satisfy, not to merchandise, but to express the pent-up emotions, whatever they might have been, of the participants" (Boyer 7). However, it is understood that Gospelwomen must "resonate" with their fellow Saints (Lieb 22). In so doing, it is a given that Gospelwomen "always give" their "best." Ministry is an activity that allows the Gospelwoman to serve her "gift" to others. This regular servicing of her gift makes her persona consistent. There is consistency because when an audience comes in contact with Winans, they know that she will sing, that she will share her gift with them. In this way, ministry, then, can be thought of as branding for the Gospelwoman. The consistency of Winans' God-inspired singing is her brand. Even with a well-established brand, or ministry, Winans is not deterred concerning whether her music is accepted by new listeners:

"Earlier on in my career, or when I was a lot younger, maybe it would've made me nervous...At this age, this is who I am. Either you're gonna really like me or you're not." (Hight).

Conclusion

I discussed Cheryl Sanders' concept of exilic consciousness, Gospel music as exilic liturgy, CeCe Winans, and juxtaposed them against the American popular music star system, in order to reveal connections between women, race, religion, and stardom. Specifically, I used the moment of the release of Winans' *Let Them Fall in Love* album in order to show how Winans maintains an exilic consciousness lifestyle. I described the ways in which Winans embraces Gospel music's and her own "exile" within the boundaries of personal sanctification and spiritual empowerment yet holding at arm's length the unending demands of achieved success, branding, and self-aggrandisement common in the popular music star system. While a critical popular cultural perspective is not readily apparent in discussions of Black female Gospel singers, this is precisely where my work makes an important intervention. Studying African American women's spirituality through Black female Gospel singers shows women who make decisions regarding the centrality of the pop music star system in their daily lives based on what they believe the "immaterial world" (Kingdom of God) has to say about the "material world" (the "World") (Frederick x).

In conclusion, this paper sheds new light on how a Black female Christian (CeCe Winans) operationalises her faith and her exilic consciousness in her daily life. In other words, how Winans "walks the walk and talks the talk" of her sanctification. This examination contributes to an understanding of the empowering role of the Gospelwoman in the American popular music industry in general and in African American Protestant Christianity in particular. The exilic consciousness of Gospelwomen neatly places this group of Black women in a clearly defined, even circumscribed space that does not openly challenge Black men or the male-dominated religious hierarchy in American Protestant Christianity or heteropatriarchy in general. Even so, Winans had to confront her own gender role stereotypes regarding singing professionally: "I was content to retreat into the background, out of the spotlight, where good, modest Pentecostal girls like myself were expected to dream and live out their existence. It was enough to be able to sing at church" (Winans 68). Working on the PTL Club proved that Winans could do more. Black female Gospel singers do not challenge Black male-dominated religious hierarchy in the Black church because they feel essentially in their "place" singing Gospel music. In other words, they are doing what the Lord has called them to do. To the Gospelwoman, doing what the Lord has called you to do is your place. Shirley Caesar says "I will always believe that I escaped because there was a calling upon my life, a God-commission to fulfill" (10). However, that space and place that Winans and other Gospelwomen now occupy, because of its public nature, also places the Gospelwoman in an empowering and influential position to impact and possibly change the lives of her spiritual and musical community through Gospel music.

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