Introduction

*Something 'Bout the Name of Jesus: Racial Meanings and Brazilian Evangelical Musical Scenes*

The Way It Is

I am in the home of Angélica, a gospel singer in her late twenties. It is late afternoon, and the light in her living room is dying, but neither of us is able to get up to turn on the overhead light, because we are in the vortex of a musical whirlpool, swept in circles by the recorded voice of Rance Allen. Angélica closes her eyes as Allen's silvery baritone belts,

There's something 'bout the name of Jesus
It is the sweetest name I know

Angélica's eyebrows rise and knit, as if she is asking a painful question. Allen's voice on the CD continues, shifting from silver to gravel:

Oh, how I love the name Jesus
Oh, how I love the name Jesus  
It is the sweetest name I know

We listen, our eyes shut, and soon the song is over. “I play this all the time,” Angélica finally says, coming up for air. “I don’t know why. I can’t understand the words. But when this voice is here with me, I feel the presence of God.” She presses the old, big CD player’s replay button, and the music swells again. She turns it down a bit so we can talk, and the voice continues to envelop us.

Angélica’s house is located in the neighborhood of Capão Redondo, one of the many gritty, multiclass districts that lie in the sprawling southern zone of metropolitan São Paulo. It was only recently, after a messy divorce, that Angélica returned to this house, the place she grew up, to live with her mother and younger brother. I have known her for a couple of months, having visited her in church, to listen to her church’s well-reputed R&B band, but mainly to hear her sing. Her voice, people say, is anointed by the Holy Spirit. All I know is that her singing raises the hair on the back of my neck.

Angélica’s brother is at school, and her mother is running errands. It is a peaceful time of day, time to tell the story of how she fell in love with music. As she does so, Rance Allen’s voice sounds in the background like a church organ, giving her words the feel of a prayer. She tells me how she felt the call at the age of seven to sing in church and how afterward an old lady had come to her. “You have the gift,” the lady said. “The Lord is using you.”

“How did the old lady’s remark make you feel?” I ask. She looks away. Rance Allen’s vocal cords are pounding full tilt.

“Angélica, we don’t have to talk about this if you don’t want to.”
She shakes her head slowly.

“No, I want to talk about it. Put this in your book. You see, those ladies, they praised my voice. And I went home that day, and my father, he did not praise me. He criticized me. He said I should never get up there again, that no one wanted to hear a little neguinha [little black girl] make noise, that I should be quiet in church.”

Then we are quiet.

Angélica’s complexion is light, but other traits of hers indicate African ancestry. Her hair forms a crinkled halo close around her forehead and ears; her lips are full, her nose broad, her nostrils flared. Although she called herself morena while growing up, she now proudly calls herself negra.¹ The reason for the change in terminology? “The singing,” she said. “When I saw
what God was doing to me, filling me with the Holy Spirit, anointing me, I took pride in that. That gave me the courage to call myself negra.”

That was in an earlier conversation. Today, memories of troubled years are coming back to her.

Finally I say something. “Your father said you shouldn’t sing because you were a neguinha?”

She nods. “Yes. I was the ugly one. My father, a beautiful branquelo [big white guy], was ashamed of how I looked, always asked my mother, how did I turn out to be a neguinha, did she sleep with someone? They would fight; she had always been faithful. My mother is even lighter than I am. You have seen her, you know. . . . My father treated me like a slave. My sister always got to go study in her room after dinner, but not me. I had to do the dishes.”

Rance Allen’s voice is swelling to a crescendo.

“But why, Angélica?”

She looks at me. Allen’s voice comes crashing down.

“Because she was lighter than me. I was the ugly one. I had bad hair. My features were ugly. And I didn’t understand. I would walk around the house with a little pocket mirror. I kept it with me. And when no one was looking, I would take it out, at the age of seven, eight, nine. I would take it out and look at it. And I would cry, looking and asking, ‘Why, God, why have you made me so ugly? Why did you give me this skin, this hair? Why didn’t you make me look like my sister?’ I wanted so badly to be beautiful. But I was ugly, so I did the dishes, while my beautiful sister got to study. That is the way it is.”

A year before my conversation with Angélica, I had gotten to know Django, a dark-skinned negro in his forties, also in São Paulo, who had worked as a bank clerk for fifteen years and was a leading pastor at a Brasil Para Cristo church. One evening, seated in his brick house on an asphalt street in Tiradentes, a lower-middle-class neighborhood at the foot of a favela, he recounted to me moments that had been seared into his memory. As we sat in his living room, the television tuned to a soap opera, his two teenage daughters doing homework in the kitchen, his wife, Magali, preparing dinner, Django explained what had happened to him many years earlier.

“Her family was not happy, I can tell you, about her marrying a negão like me. So I would go over to her house—”

“My father couldn’t stand it!” Magali called from the kitchen. “He wanted me to marry a nice white guy.”
Django knitted his brow, pursed his lips. “Right,” he said, “that’s how it was. Never approved of me. I was too black [preto]. I didn’t come from that pedigree. I remember I would go over there, to her house, and the looks I got from her father. And one time he had called me . . . well.”

Magali entered the room. “My love, he didn’t mean it. You know that. He was just joking.” She looked at me. “One day he called Django a macaco [monkey].”

“That was unacceptable, Magali. You know that. You know that.”

On another day Django spoke to me about his job. “See, I have been there at that bank for fifteen years. Fifteen! I know I do a good job, a very good job. In fifteen years, there has not been a centavo out of place. A lot of the other young ones, these girls, come and go—they don’t have any loyalty to the place—but I do. They know that.” He glanced at his hands. “So there are other tellers, younger than me, girls even. And they get advanced to head teller. Not me. And what is the difference? What is the only thing they have that I do not?” He bent over and grasped his glass of coffee. “Drink your coffee!” he commanded.

I begin with these two stories because they draw us into Brazil’s heart of darkness: its deep, complex mistreatment of people with Afro-descended phenotypes. These stories remind us that discrimination on the basis of phenotype continues to infect the everyday lives of Brazilians, inside and out of families, leaving dull, aching wounds. Their stories remind us that in Brazil, for people with visibly African features, the experience of differential treatment creates scars that never entirely heal. As Angélica said, that’s the way it is.

A Century of Struggle

Such is the dull ache, or sharp pain, that has kept the fight against antiblack racism in Brazil going for over a century. Between 1888, the year Brazilian slavery was abolished, and the 1920s, Afro-Brazilians’ effort to survive physically and psychologically in Brazilian society expressed itself in a range of struggles, from anti-immigrant organizing and demands for an end to racial discrimination in education to the racially conscious press in São Paulo and the Frente Negra Brasileira (the Brazilian Black Front; Andrews 1991; Butler 1998; Hanchard 1994). Antiracist activism became more difficult in the 1930s, when Brazil’s national ideology turned increasingly exceptionalist, asserting
that the country's long history of miscegenation had made its people characterologically incapable of racism (Skidmore 1993; Dávila 2003). The 1940s and '50s saw efforts to challenge this ideology, including Abdias do Nascimento's Teatro Experimental do Negro (Black Experimental Theater), but a military coup in 1964 drastically limited all contestatory politics (Hanchard 1994). With political problack activism shut down, Afro-Brazilians who wished to express their racial pride turned to seemingly depoliticized cultural activities. Thus, in the early 1970s, the Black Rio dance movement expressed black pride among young people in Rio and São Paulo, and the Instituto de Pesquisas da Cultura Negra (the Institute for Research on Black Culture) organized symposia about African religions and musical traditions (Alberto 2009; Dunn 2001; Moore 1989; Pereira and Alberti 2007). When the dictatorship loosened its grip in the late 1970s, black political organizing revived in the form of the Movimento Negro Unificado (the Unified Black Movement) (Covin 2006), and after the dictatorship ended in 1985, there arose an expansive network of groups dedicated to combating racism and building a positive black identity (Damasceno and Santos 1988; Domingues 2007). Between 1985 and 1995, the agendas of these groups included challenging the myth of racial democracy, valorizing Afro-Brazilian culture, and ending racial discrimination in the labor market (Gomes 2011). During this period, the Brazilian government agreed to a variety of symbolic steps such as making into a national holiday the anniversary of the death of Zumbi, a leader of runaway slaves in the seventeenth century; but when it came to addressing racial discrimination in the job market, it sat on its hands.

The year 1996 ushered in a new era. That year, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, a sociologist who had studied racism, announced that Brazil was a racist society. Then, during the late 1990s, with the opening of the Brazilian economy to world markets, the desire to attract new investment, the aspiration to increase the nation's prestige on the world stage, the growth of the black middle class, and the increasing influence of international standards of human rights, Cardoso's call for steps to increase racial equality fell increasingly on sympathetic ears (Htun 2005). The tipping point came in 2001, when Brazil took part in the United Nations conference on racism in Durban, South Africa (Bairros 2002; Carneiro 2002). After that, the Brazilian government moved swiftly to institute policies designed to combat racial inequality. In 2003, with the arrival in power of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers Party), these policies came to include support for
affirmative action at public universities, a public school curriculum that included the history of Afro-Brazilians, the creation of a national ministry dedicated to combating racism, and support for the passage of the Statute for Racial Equality (Domingues 2007). Brazilians of African descent are currently positioned to claim greater justice, opportunity, and equality than ever before (Reiter and Mitchell 2009). Today, thousands of Brazilian high school teachers are getting trained to teach about Brazil’s African heritage (Valente 2005). Affirmative action policies have begun to change the racial composition of student bodies at universities across the nation (Cicalo 2012). The presence of Afro-Brazilians on television, in magazines, and in advertising is slowly, haltingly on the rise (Santos 2011). National museums of Afro-Brazilian culture have been founded, and Africanness in Brazil is an important magnet for international tourism (Sansone 2003; Collins 2005; Sansi 2009; Pinho 2010).

Despite such progress, the harsh reality is that the more African one’s phenotype, the more marginalized one is in education, the job market, and health care (Bailey 2009; Reiter and Mitchell 2009; Reiter 2008; Telles 2004; Caldwell 2007; Lovell 2006). At the national level, the percentage of people identifying themselves as nonwhite who are functionally illiterate remains nearly twice that of brancos (whites). Nationwide, brancos average over two years more schooling than do nonwhites. In Brazil’s southeastern region, only 27% of nonwhites have any education beyond high school, compared to nearly 60% of brancos (IBGE 2006, 255). Both male and female Brazilians of African descent continue overall to be poorer than whites, earning on average half the income of brancos. Pretas (black women) die of cerebrovascular diseases twice as frequently and in childbirth seven times more frequently than do brancas (white women). Pretas suffer from higher hypertension than do brancas, and nonwhite women who report having experiences of racial discrimination have a 50% higher rate of hypertension than do women without such experiences (Chor 2005, 1592).

São Paulo echoes these national figures. Here, nonwhites earn between 20% to 40% less than do brancos with the same amount of education (Lovell 2006, 70, 77, 80) and are about twice more likely than brancos to fall below the poverty line. Black women in São Paulo are about twice more likely than brancas to be domestic servants and half as likely to be clerical workers, professionals, or administrators. In addition, Afro-Brazilian men’s and women’s physical and mental health are poor when compared with that of
whites. While the mortality rate from AIDS in the early 2000s in São Paulo was 5% for *brancas*, it was 11% for *pretas* (Cruz 2004; Batista 2002). *Pretas* in São Paulo have higher rates of depression than do *brancas* (Bento 2005; Lopes 2005) and are three times more likely to die than white women due to mental problems (Cruz 2004; Kalckmann et al. 2007; Loureiro and Rozenfeld 2005; Lopes 2005; Batista and Kalckmann 2005). A contributing factor to these contrasts is very likely differential treatment by color in health clinics and hospitals. In a study of 240 people in São Paulo, 60% of the *preto* respondents claimed that they had encountered inferior treatment in these settings because of their phenotype, and they reported comments by medical staff such as “*negras* are stronger and more resistant to pain” and “*negros* don’t get sick” (Kalckmann et al. 2007; Leal and Lopes 2005).

One should also note that new governmental policies that support Afro-Brazilian interests are not set in stone. Affirmative action and the national statute against racism have generated multiple judicial challenges and are currently being seriously tested in the courts of political and public opinion (Heringer and Ferreira 2009; M. Gomes 2009). As recently as March 2011, a public hearing was held in Federal Court to decide the constitutionality of quotas at the federal level. Such legal challenges will no doubt continue (Cicalo 2012, 178; Bevilaqua 2005; Goss 2009; Daniels 2006; Martins, Medeiros, and Nascimento 2004). The issue of racial inequality thus promises to be a source of contention in Brazil for a long time to come. It is clearly too early to declare victory in the war against racism in Brazil.

The Importance of *Evangélicos*

Given the political importance of the issue of race in Brazil, there is a pressing need to understand what *evangélicos* (Protestants) think about it. But first, a few words as to what I mean by *evangélicos*. In Brazil, the word has been used since the late 1980s as a generic term to cover all Protestant denominations. Among these, I draw four main distinctions. First there are the *históricos*, or historical churches, which include the historical Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, Anglicans, and Presbyterians. These churches, founded in Brazil in the nineteenth century, mainly by non-Portuguese immigrants, are characterized by their rational reading of the Bible and deemphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For most of the twentieth century, these denominations have been based in the middle and upper
classes. Historical denominations such as the Methodists and Presbyterians have sustained major presses and centers of higher learning. Much of the liberal and progressive Protestant elite is based in these churches. The second main division is the classic Pentecostals, which include the Assembléia de Deus (Assemblies of God), the Congregação Cristã do Brasil (Christian Congregation of Brazil), the Igreja Quadrangular (Foursquare Gospel Church), Brasil Para Cristo (Brazil for Christ), Casa da Benção (House of Blessing), and Deus é Amor (God Is Love). These churches, founded in Brazil between 1910 and 1962, are characterized by the enthusiastic embrace of the gifts the Holy Spirit, particularly of glossolalia, prophecy, laying on of hands, discernment of spirits, and prayer healing. These churches were rooted until the 1980s mainly in the poor and working classes, but have in the past thirty years broadened their appeal to the middle and upper classes as well. While the political views of Pentecostals vary, their pastors have adopted official positions that range from complete hostility to this-worldly politics, to centrism, to conservatism, though a growing contingent of Pentecostals have started to lean to the left (Freston 2008). Pentecostals were the fastest growing sector of the Protestant arena until the 1980s, and their style of ritual and music and the emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit have influenced the historical churches, leading to the formation of “renovated” historical denominations. The third main distinction is the so-called neo-Pentecostal churches, including the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, the Igreja Internacional de Graça de Deus, Renascer em Cristo, Igreja Nova Vida, and many more. These churches formed starting in the late 1970s. They rely far more than their cousin Pentecostals on mass media, to create large, impersonal congregations, and use large spaces such as stadia and cinemas to attract large unaffiliated audiences for the delivery of mass spiritual services, such as exorcism. These churches appeal across class lines and invest in outreach to youth, the use of worldly music, and the theology of this-worldly prosperity. Neo-Pentecostals tend to issue politically conservative public statements, though their participants represent the full range of the political spectrum. Finally, there are two main millennial Protestant churches: the Seventh-Day Adventists and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. These have grown considerably over the past fifty years and appeal across most class lines. For this book, I interviewed informants from all four divisions, though most of them were drawn from the Pentecostals, neo-Pentecostals, and Adventists.
According to Brazil's national census, the percentage of Brazilians who identify themselves as members of a Protestant denomination grew from 9% in 1991 to 15.4% in 2000, and more recent data indicate that this growth is continuing. In 2007, Datafolha, the national research institute, surveyed forty-five thousand people nationwide and found that evangélicos constituted 22% of the total, and in 2010, Datafolha estimated that this percentage had grown to 25%. At this rate, one assessment of the number of evangélicos in Brazil by 2011 has placed it at over fifty million; and by 2020, some observers forecast that over half of Brazil's populations will be evangélicos. Whether or not one believes these projections, there is no denying the importance of evangélicos in Brazilian society. They are present in every nook and cranny of Brazilian life, from media to higher education, from electoral politics to public marches, from street-corner proselytizing to being one's next-door neighbors (Freston 2004, 2008; Fonseca 2008; Birman 2006; Pinheiro 2004; Oosterbaan 2008). And it must be emphasized that evangélicos take their faith very seriously. They attend church regularly, try to live according to their understanding of the Bible, seek to spread the gospel, and are active in their congregations. It must be noted that people of African descent are over-represented among evangélicos, particularly among the Pentecostal rank and file: in 2000, 14.2% of all people who identified themselves as preto or negro were members of Pentecostal churches, compared with 11% of all pardos and 9% of all brancos (Pierucci 2006).

The implication of all the foregoing should be clear: any effort to understand and bring about change in Brazilian attitudes and practices about race cannot afford to ignore the evangélicos. Yet systematic research on what Brazil's evangélicos have to say about blackness, black identity, race, and racism is still embryonic. What we know is that when asked point-blank whether racial inequality exists in Brazil, evangélicos say that it does, that it should not, and that the Brazilian government ought to play some role in reducing it (Selka 2005, 2007). To this extent, evangelicals are similar to the majority of Brazilians (Bailey 2009). They do not, however, tend to see a special role for their churches in advancing these goals; indeed, they generally dislike the idea of their churches encouraging public discussion of black issues and rights (Novaes 1985; Freston 1998; Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001; Pedde 2002; Prandi 2004; Carvalho 2006; Pierucci 2006; Reinhardt 2007). “It is not for the church,” explained Mario, a pastor of an Assembly of God church in São Paulo, “to work on these things, to encourage or ask people to talk about..."
such things. There is racism in Brazil, yes, but this thing about debating it and saying, ‘Let’s talk about it!’ and getting involved in the movement against it—that is not a job of the church. Our job is salvation, not talking about negros.”

This lack of enthusiasm for ethnoracial activism has several roots. First is evangélicos’ perennial reluctance to mix religion with politics, a realm they regard as inherently corrupt. “We cannot get too distracted with debates about this-worldly things,” said Francisco, of Deus é Amor. “Our mission is to save souls, not to adopt a cause, even a worthy one like the black cause. If you adopt these causes, you always get your hands dirty.” Second, evangélicos’ insistence on the universal equality of believers leads them to claim that inside their churches they have already achieved racial equality. “Listen,” explained pastor Martin of Brasil Para Cristo, “believers in Christ are already equal! If the rest of the fallen world wants to become more equal, they should convert to Jesus!” Third, from evangélicos’ perspective, the only identity that ultimately matters is the grand worldwide brother- and sisterhood of the redeemed in Christ; thus, feeling too enamored of any this-worldly identity is surely a sign of spiritual immaturity. “If you want to fight for uma identidade,” said Joilson, of the Igreja Batista Renovada in Capão Redondo, “then fight for being a Christian! These other identities don’t redeem you. They don’t save you.” Lastly, devout Christians reject as the devil’s playground all mediumship religions such as Afro-Brazilian candomblé. Hence, black movements’ celebration of these religions as key to authentic black identity gives evangélicos pause. “We Christians,” said Arturo, of the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus, “cannot participate in a movement that says we must embrace these religions.”

There is no denying that the views I have just described interfere with evangélicos committing themselves to championing black pride. Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that their stance toward antiracist struggle is the same everywhere or set in stone. In nooks and crannies across the evangelical landscape, one finds scattered, fledgling ideas that run counter to the religion’s general aversion to ethnoracial struggle. Recent research reveals pockets of evangélicos who are eager to talk about black pride, racism in their churches, the role of Africans in the Bible, and affirmative action (Dawson 2008; Burdick 1999; Collins 2004; Aquino 2007). Evangélicos who want to think about these things can now exchange ideas via social networking sites such as Facebook and Orkut, over e-mail lists, or on the websites of “cristãos...
negros.” Some have started to adopt the causes of antiracism and black self-esteem (Selka 2005), and a few have begun to participate directly in secular black movement organizations. Some have even formed face-to-face evangelical problack movement groups (Burdick 2005; Pinheiro 2009; Branchini and Kronbauer 2011). The existence of such groups raises a core question. To what extent may evangélicos develop black pride from within the ideological matrix of evangelical Christianity? What practices and beliefs embedded in evangelical culture might nourish a proud black identity? Where in an ideological desert so hostile to ethnoracial identity might such an identity find oases?

Looking for Oases

I mulled over these questions in May 2002, during a series of conversations with Hernani da Silva, a leader of the fledgling black evangelical movement and longstanding member of the Pentecostal Brasil Para Cristo church. Hernani had started a black Christian website in 1999 and had accumulated several dozen virtual and real allies, but he needed more. Where to find them? How to turn this little network into a broader movement? I was committed to developing a project that could help him do this. I had for some time conceptualized my role as an anthropologist as codesigner of investigations that might help reveal hidden allies and constituencies, clusters of people who shared political activists’ attitudes without clearly articulating them, either among themselves or in public. I had offered to come that spring and start conceiving an ethnographic project with Hernani that I would undertake over the next few years in order to help him expand his movement (Hale 2006; Burdick 1995; Speed 2006).

We talked late several nights in a row, wrestling with questions of strategy: where were the audiences of evangélicos who might be sympathetic toward the movement’s message? Where were the people who might have an affinity with the notion that love of Jesus and love of black identity were mutually reinforcing? “We need something more focused too, something targeted,” he said to me. But who should the targets be? (Snow and Benford 1988; Snow et al. 1986).

One evening, we had a breakthrough. Hernani was telling me about a recent meeting he had organized of black Christian theologians and activists in São Paulo and mentioned offhandedly that as part of the event he had
invited several musical groups to perform. Only one had shown up, and it was one of the usual suspects, the Black Resistance Choir, made up of congregants of several historical churches. Hernani told me that the groups based in Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches were very hard nuts to crack. “They just don’t want to participate in anything like this,” he said.

Music! Of course! It had been staring me in the face, but I had not seen it. My visits to Brazilian churches for nearly twenty years had taught me that music was utterly central to the ritual and emotional lives of evangélicos. I had listened for two decades to stories of religious conversion in which the key moment of change was prompted by a hymn. I knew that in any three-hour church service, all three hours were filled with some kind of music. I had heard congregants hum religious arias in the street, on the bus, on the job, in their kitchens. I had spoken with ministers bursting with pride about their musicians, bands, and choirs (cf. Corbitt 1998; Harris 1992; Chitando 2002). By studying music, I knew I would be opening an important window onto evangélicos’ worldview.

What other groups had he invited? I asked.

“All rappers,” Hernani replied. “Gospel rappers. If any groups are going to be sympathetic to our message, it’s going to be them. They are confrontational, they have that connection to black culture. But I keep inviting, inviting, and they don’t come. I don’t get it.”

“Gospel rappers? You mean kids rapping about their love of the Lord?”

He nodded.

“Are there a lot of them?”

“Hundreds, maybe thousands. There are lots and lots of gospel rappers. It is very big among young people in the periferia.”

“Perfect!”

Hernani laughed. “John, you’re not listening. It isn’t perfect. I have been inviting them, and they don’t want to come.”

“Yes, yes,” I said, “I get that. But it must just be in the nature of the outreach. We have to figure out how to invite them so they come. Once they are here, that is a natural audience.”

Hernani was unconvinced.

The next day, we took a walk near Hernani’s house, in the neighborhood of Guianazes, in the farthest reach of São Paulo’s eastern periphery. We talked about gospel rappers, and I was feeling animated. Then, turning a corner, we suddenly came face-to-face with a billboard announcing a megaconcert at
a local Assembléia de Deus, with the words “Come to the 5th annual Black Gospel extravaganza! Come and hear the greatest acts!” The billboard graphic was of five black singers in suits. I asked Hernani what we were looking at. “Oh, that. You aren’t going to find any black consciousness there. They just use music to fish for souls. They have no interest in the black cause. They know the music is appealing. They sing to missionize. Trust me, you won’t find any interest in black pride there [você não vai achar consciência negra lá]. If we want to find consciousness, we’ll need to stick to the gospel rappers.”

Now I was looking at not one but two musical genres that might, in ways that were still obscure to me, be loci of evangelical problack sentiment. Surely, I thought, an arena of Brazilian evangelical culture that highlighted blackness was worth a closer look. What did blackness mean for the evangélicos who played black gospel music? Was Hernani right that we would find no black consciousness there? Was he right that we would find it instead among gospel rappers?

In the following days, I began to focus more on what the research project would look like. What gospel rap and black gospel had in common was that they both belonged to a broader domain, that of the evangelical version of música negra (black music), that encompassed a wide range of genres, all laying claim to participating in the multiple traditions of the African diaspora in the Western Hemisphere. There were, I learned, evangelical versions of all these genres and their hybrids: samba, samba-reggae, reggae, American funk, R&B, soul, blues, gospel, black gospel, and rap. But they were not all equally popular. Given limits of time and my desire to be useful to the black evangelical movement, I wanted to stay focused on the genres that had the largest audiences. “No question,” Hernani said, “gospel rap and black gospel. If anything, black gospel is the biggest of all. The biggest. They pack in people in auditoriums and churches, much more than gospel rap.” Later, I started to think that I had also to include gospel samba. Samba was, after all, the national music of Brazil. But how popular was it? “I think there are only a handful of gospel samba groups,” Hernani said. “Far fewer, for sure, than the rappers and black gospel groups.” But samba was deeply Brazilian, and I needed to include it in any comparison with US-originated genres. By the end of the week, I had decided to undertake a three-way comparison, of gospel rap, black gospel, and gospel samba.

As I contemplated these plans, and talked about them with Hernani, the nature of my questions began to shift. Initially I had seen myself as on a
hunt for “black consciousness” in an effort to unveil hidden allies for Hernani’s movement. But as I pondered the three-way comparison, my thinking evolved. Why limit the project just to finding allies? Equally useful would be to understand the ideological resistances to blackness as well. Should I not try to portray as sympathetically as possible different meanings of blackness, even if some were not about pride? Might there not be a convergence between the activist and academic agendas by framing the project as seeking to paint as realistic a portrait as possible of the role different kinds of music played in the formation of different kinds of blackness? (cf. Jackson 2005).

The more I learned, the more I came to understand how rich the arena of evangelical música negra was, how thousands of Christian artists throughout São Paulo played religiously themed soul, funk, gospel, R&B, gospel blues, rap, and samba. São Paulo was home to more than thirty black gospel choirs, over one hundred Christian R&B bands, dozens of gospel samba groups, and over two hundred Christian rap groups; and I had chosen the three scenes that might articulate the issue of black identity in different ways. How did making music in different scenes influence the music makers’ sense of blackness?

Studying Music in São Paulo’s Periferia

Over two years, between 2003 to 2005, I studied the influence of music on paulista evangelicals’ attitudes about blackness. During this time, I carried out nine months of fieldwork in ten different neighborhoods in São Paulo’s periferia. This vast territory, home to some ten million people, lies like an enormous tattered blanket over the hills and plains of the northern, southern, western, and eastern zones of this huge metropolis. The territory includes middle-class, lower-middle-class, working-class, and very poor areas. I spent most of my time in areas known locally as asfalto (lower-middle and working class) and favela (working-class and poor). Since so much of what appears in this book originates in the everyday experience of these environments, it is important for the reader to get a feel for them. Let us therefore visit São Paulo’s periferia.

Taking a bus through the periferia, we are surrounded by the smell of diesel, interrupted occasionally by the aroma of fresh sweet rolls. We hurtle past a blur of three- and four-story red-brown brick buildings with white plaster
façades, gray concrete pillars, blue and red metal garage doors, and black iron verandas covered by dark green vines. At every intersection hang banners advertising festivals or businesses or electoral campaigns or gospel or forró or samba or hip hop dances (“Women enter for free!”). On every white, cracked plaster wall are spray-painted calls to support local political candidates. Over pitted asphalt, we pass Fiat sedans, VW bugs, and flatbed Chevy trucks with “Deus Seja Louvado” (God Be Praised) on rear mudflaps and the Lord’s Prayer on bumpers. We pass pharmacies, toy stores, shops with shiny silver pots, crowded Internet cafés, video rentals, butcher shops, cell-phone outlets, construction material suppliers, supermarkets, car repair shops, and an endless parade of those most social of places, churches and beauty salons. Many of these buildings are adorned by brilliant hand-painted murals: a handyman brandishes an oversized wrench; dark red sofas and chairs surrounded by an orange aura; and everywhere sunrises, sunsets, moons, and clouds, adding the natural and the fantastic to a harsh concrete landscape.

Getting off the bus and walking away from the asphalt, into the favela, we find ourselves in an alleyway ten feet across, surrounded by walls four
stories high, topped with shards of broken bottles, the blue sky above but a sliver, crisscrossed by electric ganglia. As we walk, an old man dangling plastic bags greets us as “irmãos.” We pass by metal gates, small churches that hold twenty congregants, overhanging walls on either side, roofs graced with gray water reservoirs, and white satellite dishes. Middle-aged women sit on stoops, smoking. In a corner bar, two young men in sunglasses sit shirtless at a yellow plastic table, elbows spread, before four tall, empty bottles of beer. Someone has placed a television in front of his house, and a cluster of people are standing, chatting, watching the soccer game. Young men walk by in hooded jackets with basketball insignia, knitted ski caps, Bermuda shorts below the knee, and sandals; and young women in tight-fitting jeans revealing the tops of hips. Everywhere we hear mothers calling for children, motorcycles whining, dogs yelping, the thud of feet meeting soccer balls, and the thump, thump, thump of radios—from each house a different music: forró from this one, sertanejo from that, funk and samba from this, reggae-samba from that, axé from this, gospel from that, and everywhere, rap, rap, rap.

In order to study black gospel music, gospel rap, and gospel samba in these places, I attended musical performances several times each week. On any given day, it was possible to attend a performance of some group in a church, hall, home, or street. I thus came to know the work of nearly thirty black gospel artists (soloists, duos, trios, quartets, choirs, and bands), fifty gospel rap artists (soloists, duos, and groups), and half a dozen gospel samba groups. I witnessed rehearsals, backstage gatherings, and everyday transits. Among black gospel groups, I accompanied the comings and goings of Raiz Coral, Link-4, and Banda Azusa; among gospel rappers, I hung out with Pretto, Sexto Sello, Rimas Proféticas, Profetas do Apocalipse, and Pregador Luo; and among gospel sambistas, I became involved in Deus Crioulos. I sat, hours on end, in garages and churches and basements and living rooms, as artists practiced, rehearsed, I climbed into and bounced around in minivans surrounded by cables and speakers, hung out back- and off-stage, gossiping, kibbitzing, and shadowboxing, and stood elbow to elbow with fans, bobbing, clapping, stretching, and pointing. I participated in workshops, classes, seminars, and trainings, led by directors, conductors, coaches, and teachers. And I became a regular visitor to several churches with particularly energetic musical groups: Pedra Viva in the neighborhood of Vila Mariana, Deus em Cristo-Azusa in Vila Matilde, Mintre in Guarulhos, Assembléia de Deus Kadoshi in Bom Retiro, Brasil Para Cristo in Freguesia do Ó, and Pão da
Vida in Morumbi. In all of these, I recorded digital audio files, videotaped, and took copious notes.

In addition, I gathered posters, announcements, websites, published interviews, and feature stories. And I scoured lyrics. I found that to get at racial identity, evangelical lyrics were an opaque resource, since they almost always treated of the universal themes of salvation and redemption but rarely of blackness. It was only when I paid attention to other discursive contexts—explanatory comments made during rehearsals, lectures during music workshops, informal interpretations shared informally among artists, study groups, verbal introductions to performances, onstage commentaries between musical numbers, media interviews, liner notes, and artists’ offhand comments—that I began to encounter ideas about blackness, black identity, and racism. I thus join other cultural analysts of music who recognize that much of a scene’s discourse takes place not in lyrical composition but in other discursive contexts (Bennett 2004; Frith 1996b).

Early on, I decided to interview artists rather than audiences. To examine the relationship between a specific musical scene and particular constellations of ideas, beliefs, and identities, it is of course desirable to conduct audience studies, as some ethnomusicologists have done (e.g., Brooker and Jermyn 2002). Yet for many audience members—inveterate fans aside—listening to music is an evanescent activity. While lines of influence exist between that activity and identity, they tend to be crowded out by other factors. Dedicated musicians, in contrast, devote large parts of each day to thinking about music. If I wanted to see the linkages between musical activity and ethnoracial consciousness, these connections would be most evident among people in whose lives music plays a pivotal role. Thus, by the time I had completed the study, I had conducted in-depth interviews, ranging from one to three hours, with thirty black gospel artists, thirty-five gospel rappers, and twenty gospel sambistas.

I limited my interviews to individuals who, when asked “Qual é a sua cor ou a sua raça?” (What is your color or race?), responded, “Sou negro” (I’m negro) or “Sou preto” (I’m black). My focus on such people does not mean that I regard as unimportant the experiences of people who call themselves by other terms, such as branco (white), moreno (brown), or mestiço (mixed). The focus on pretos and negros was motivated by my desire to achieve ethnographic depth. Like other recent writers on ethnoracial consciousness in Brazil, I understand that ser negro (to be black) does not correspond to a
single identity but to a range of sentiments and ideas, from casual signifiers to deep-seated political beliefs (cf. Bailey 2009; Sansone 2003; Roth-Gordon 2008; André 2008; Pravaz 2008). Among evangelical Protestants, I wish to capture the range of what being negro or preto means to those who use the term. Keeping my sample limited to self-identified negros and pretos allows me to examine how meanings of blackness vary and how involvement in different musical scenes contributes to this variation.

Theorizing Music and Collective Identity

I focus in this book on three distinct musical scenes. I understand a musical scene to be an identifiable bundle of durable music-making practices and discourses, including routines of participation and performance; lyrical thematic emphases; distinct sonic patterns; routinely deployed musical instruments; typical training practices; how, when, and where rehearsals take place; how musicians balance individual with group performance; what parts of their bodies get skilled to produce desired sounds; and what preexisting social relations and networks get mobilized into the formation of the scene’s music-making groups (Bennett and Peterson 2004; Turino 2008; Murphy 2006; Kaemmer 1993). My focus in this volume is on the practices and discourses of musicians and performers. I was drawn to musicians because of the centrality of music in their lives and thus the possibility that their lives might be windows onto the connections between music and identity. I take identity to refer to a set of beliefs held by a person that focus on the idea that he or she possesses values, experiences, or essences that are salient and central in his or her life and are durable over time. Values, experiences, or essences of the person him- or herself, without reference to others, are the person’s individual identity; values, experiences, or essences held in common with some larger group of people are the person’s collective identity. It is the salience, centrality, and durability of these values, experiences, or essences that render them definitive of the person’s identity (Brubaker 2004; Mohanty 1997; Stone-Mediatore 2003, 149; Moya 2006, 46).

In this book, I examine how specific practices of music-making help generate collective identities. To do this, I build on the view that music-making practices are not simply reflections of preexisting identities but are catalysts of new ideas and practices of selfhood (Frith 1996a, 1996b; Wade 2000, 2002; Reagon 2001; Bell 1999; Phelan 2008; McGann 2004). As anthropologist
Peter Wade writes, “Music is not just an expression of identity; rather it helps to form and constitute that identity. . . . Music—listened to, danced to, performed, talked and written about—is part of the process of [identity] formation and change” (2002, 22). Or, as musicologist Naomi Cumming has argued, practices of musical training and performance shape not only musicians’ identities as performers but their broader, extramusical identities as well (2000, 13ff.).

The challenge is to describe the specific ways that musical practices form, shape, and constitute these identities. First, we need to ask how and why music serves as a medium for people to think of themselves as sites of continuity over time. Here the writing of musicologist Tia DeNora is instructive. She draws our attention to the capacity of music to evoke strong, visceral, even visual memories and thus to assure listeners of their own continuity (2000, 64ff.). As she puts it, “music simultaneously helps to recapture or construct a sense of the capacity within which one once acted (one’s aesthetic agency); in so doing, it helps dramatize to self a set of heightened life experiences. Through this vicarious review of past experience, this stock-taking of ‘who one is’ or ‘where, interpersonally, one has been,’ one registers one’s self to one’s self as an object of self-knowledge, in the aesthetic construction that is memory” (ibid., 65).

But what about the social, collective side of this? How does music get us to think of ourselves as bearers of collective identity? One clue is that, while DeNora is interested in how music strengthens individual identity, her description of this process is eminently social: for her, as we listen to music to strengthen our own identities, we do this not as atomized individuals but through participating in the circulation and sharing of ideas with others. As people consider, reflect, and talk about music together, they learn shared ways of thinking about their own lives. To understand this process, I build on philosopher Elizabeth Grosz’s (1994) notion that place, body, and time are key ingredients in the constitution of identities and on Aaron Fox’s observation that musical practices swirl around the “themes of emplacement, embodiment, [and] the organization of temporal experience” (2004, 21). My core theoretical argument in this book is that in order to understand the role of music in the formation of collective identities, we must attend to how musical practices and discourses articulate and generate ideas and feelings about history, place, and the body. While these are certainly not the only dimensions of human experience pertinent to the development of group
belonging, they are sufficiently broad in scope and appear with sufficient frequency as themes in music that they merit examination as key forces in the formation of collective identity. This book examines how historical narratives become claims about what in a group stays the same, places become sites of enduring collective attachment, and bodies become sites of enduring “natural” and “cultural” qualities of “peoples.”

Temporal narrative. Music can stimulate feelings of collective identity by announcing and disseminating—in lyrics, training, rehearsal, commentary, informal conversation—a shared, emotionally charged narrative of a group’s origin, ancestry, glory, rights, endurance, suffering, resistance, and interaction with other groups. When Australian Aborigines sing about their kin group’s mystical pasts, they point to the origin of each group’s current land claims; while singing, they experience an overflow of feelings of group loyalty (Magowan 1997, 135ff.). When praise singers among the Kalasha of Pakistan sing of the glorious achievements of their ancestors, they experience, they say, a strengthened common bond (Parkes 1997, 172). Paul Gilroy points to the “special fascination with history and the significance of its recovery by those who have been expelled from the official dramas of civilization,” a fascination that infuses much of identity-construction work of black music in the Western Hemisphere (1991, 98). A host of practices are central to the scene of reggae music, including reading works of historical nonfiction and speaking to each other of past African civilizations and the history of slavery, and these are key ingredients in the deepening of Afrocentric black identity (Daynes 2005, 26). Ideas about the collective past are also available in ways that are not verbal: thus, Armenian singers say that the timbre of their voices—a dark, gravelly tone acquired through years of training—“sounds Armenian” because it preserves the cry of agony that originated in the Armenian genocide at the start of the twentieth century (Eidsheim 2006, 6).

In this book, I emphasize a certain kind of narrative: stories told by musicians about the founding and unfolding of the musical scenes of which they are practitioners. I argue that a key way musicians create and reinforce their own identification with a larger ethnic group, nation, or “race” is by learning and recounting narratives about the history of their art. Such recounting is embedded in musical cultures throughout the hemisphere. Ingrid Monson has argued that knowledge of the details of jazz history—in particular, knowing and talking about its involvement over the years in international flows of people and ideas—is central to black jazz artists’ idea of themselves as “black
cosmopolitans.” As she put it, “When jazz musicians learn traditional repertory, quote a particular musician’s solo, play a tune with a particular groove, or imitate a particular player’s sound, they reveal themselves to be very aware of musical history” (1996, 97). Similarly, when Brazilian musicians in the early twentieth century spoke of their art’s rootedness in a layered historical encounter between Amerindian, European, and African peoples and cultures, they reinforced their own sense of music as the carrier of their national “soul” (Reily 1994, 81–82). Taking my cue from such examples, I pay attention to the narratives artists tell about the history of their music and to the way these narratives relate to the solidification of a sense of black identity.

*Place.* Music possesses a stunning capacity to evoke textured memories of and feels for places (Stokes 1997; Whiteley, Bennett, and Hawkins 2005; Peddie 2006; Layshon, Matless, and Revill 1998; Saldanha 2002). Listeners readily recount the experience of being returned in their imaginations by particular passages of music to specific settings and locations (Finnegan 1989; DeNora 2000; Sancar 2003). “The musical event,” writes Stokes, “from collective dances to the act of putting a cassette or CD into a machine, evokes and organizes collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power, and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity” (1997, 3). This relationship between music and place may have to do with music’s peculiar phenomenological capacity to “fill” space, like a liquid taking on a container’s shape. Music “floods” places as liquids do and, by surrounding the occupants of these places, unites occupant and place. “Music fills and structures space within us and around us,” writes Sara Cohen, “inside and outside. Hence, much like our concept of place, music can appear to envelop us” (1995, 444). The places evoked for us by music are charged with social meanings, such as a home, a street, a cemetery, a family’s farmland, the site of a birth or a wedding or a burial, a church, a battlefield, a government building. “Places,” writes Cohen, “reify or symbolize social relationships” (ibid., 438). Thus, when music symbolizes a place, it evokes feelings of relatedness to the group for which that place is socially significant (Blacking 1995, 39). As Kevin Dawe and Andy Bennett have argued, “a shared connection with a locally created musical style becomes a metaphor for community, a means through which people articulate their sense of togetherness through a particular juxtaposition of music, identity and place” (2001, 4). But note: the places evoked by music do not need to be immediate or real: they can be abstract, distant, fantasized, and
mediated by intervening images, such as movies. Anyone who has watched a music video, seen a film with a score, or listened to lyrics describing a place he or she has never seen knows that imagination takes over where personal experience leaves off. This point is particularly important for diasporic populations (Bennett and Peterson 2004; Bowen 1997). Therefore, in this book, I attend to how artists think about and relate through their music to particular places, and I argue that ideas and practices that connect their music to places—such as neighborhoods, churches, the nation, the transnation—shape their attitudes and ideas about black identity.

*Body.* Finally, there can be no doubt that music is experienced both in production and reception through the body. As Aaron Fox (2004), John Blacking (1987), Tia DeNora (2000), Richard Middleton (2006), and Simon Frith (1996b) have all insisted, producing and listening to music are occasions for heightened physical experiences, from intense pain to extreme pleasure; from deep, heavy breathing to rapid shortness of breath; from highly accelerated to slowed heart rate; from hot sweat to coolness on the skin; from limb-aching exhaustion to viscera-energizing arousal; from warmth to tingling; from throbbing to goose bumps; and more (DeNora 2000, 99; Gilbert and Pearson 1999, 44–51). The intensity of such bodily experience prompts reflection on why some bodies seem to be more open, receptive, or attuned than others to such experiences. Music is, as Susan McClary suggests, “a medium that participates in social formation by influencing the ways we perceive our feelings, our bodies, our desires, our very subjectivities” (1994, 211). In cultural contexts with readily available racializing discourses, such reflection frequently leads to patterned talk that attributes particular musical aptitudes and affinities to particular “races” (Frith 1996b, 131; Wong 2000, 67). It is important to underline that while such talk claims that particular “races” “naturally” possess particular music-related aptitudes, it also frequently claims that these aptitudes were caused by “culture” or “history.” Sometimes all these causal claims (of nature, culture, and history) are combined in complex hybrids—hence the utility of the broader term *ethnorace.*

Two kinds of ethnoracial discourse about music that focus on bodily aptitudes are especially common: those about bodily *rhythm and movement* and those about *voice.* Examples of the former are legion. “My mom was born in Cuba,” writes a young Cuban American, “and she has pure Latin American blood. When she hears some of her native music, she just can’t control herself” (Aparicio 2000, 103). Thus, too, the racializing assumption about rhythm
underlying Eric Clapton’s declaration, “I’m no longer trying to play anything but like a white man. The time is overdue when people should play like they are and what color they are” (qtd. in Adelt 2007, 62). Or consider Deborah Wong’s interlocutor when she reports on listening, along with an African American musician, to a tape of jazz musicians that included Asian American musicians: “He wasn’t listening blind;” she writes. “He knew that the musicians were ethnically diverse but mostly Asian American. . . . At one point . . . he observed that the musicianship was technically good but ‘stiff’—that the musicians consistently maintained a rather close metronomic sense of the beat that ‘revealed’ them as not African American. He even stopped the tape at one point to demonstrate how an African American musician might realize a particular phrase with a looser, more fluid sense of rhythm” (2000, 71).

The other primary way that ideas about the body intersect with music is through voice. Thinking about the human voice is often accompanied by ethnoraacializing claims, partly because, as Frith has argued, “the voice seems particularly expressive of the body; it gives the listener access to it without mediation.” He continues: “The voice is a sound produced physically, by the movement of muscles and breath in the chest and throat and mouth; to listen to a voice is to listen to a physical event, to the sound of a body” (1996b, 191). This is no doubt partly why people so often claim to be able to “hear” race or ethnicity (Eidsheim 2009, 2011, forthcoming). A familiar ethnoraacializing notion is that European voices are “cool,” “rational,” “cerebral,” “smooth,” “controlled,” “unemotional,” and otherwise somehow “bodiless,” “conceal[ing] their own means of physical production” (Frith 1996b, 191). Voices “south of the equator,” in contrast, are all too often conceptualized as “thick” with corporeality: “hot,” “warm,” “emotional,” “ragged,” “throaty,” “free,” and, in a convergence between musical and racial language, “dark.” One US voice teacher, commenting about the “Latin American voice,” stated, “I think [Latin Americans] naturally have that connection. . . . They’re connected to their bodies and their guts, and they make music from their hearts. . . . That’s how their music sounds. It’s very gut” (Eidsheim 2006, 5).

These examples suggest some of the political complexities I will be navigating in this book. While views about the racial naturalness of rhythm are commonly complicit with racist politics, Ronald Radano has argued that ideas about body rhythm can also serve as a positive political resource for people of African descent. “Rhythm,” he writes, “has typically been inscribed as something beyond the grasp of whites; accordingly, it offers
performers and insiders a powerful tool for inventing an exalted racialized space” (Radano 2003, 1–2). Robin Sheriff (1999) and Natasha Pravaz (2003) have argued that racialized discourses about rhythm in Brazil have been deployed by Afro-Brazilians as sources of pride. The politics of vocal ethnoracialization cut in different ways. In the mouths of white Europeans, allusions to “dark” voices may be exoticizing, imperialist nostalgia and fantasy; but as Radano suggests, for black singers, finding “blackness” in their voices is frequently a matter of pride. When African American opera singer Reri Grist says she recognizes “blackness” in a voice as a distinct sound—“throatier, a sound placed lower with a very low larynx, a sound that can be . . . warm and rich and with a very open throat” (qtd. in Eidsheim 2006, 11)—is she using, as Radano might insist, “a powerful tool for inventing an exalted racialized space” (qtd. in Wong 2000, 72)?

The Book’s Chapters

By focusing on how ideas of history, place, and the body are embedded in musical practices and discourses, this book investigates how those practices and discourses cultivate different modes of black identity among evangelical black musicians in Brazil.

Chapter 1 provides a historical and ethnographic overview of the three music scenes which are the book’s main foci. I treat each scene in turn, tracing its emergence and describing its main current performative practices. Gospel rap appeared in the early 1990s with the conversion to Protestantism of influential rappers. Gospel samba arose in the 1990s as well, as several neo-Pentecostal churches sought to bring their missionary message into the belly of the beast during Carnaval. Black gospel began in the 1960s, in the efforts of Brazilian church singers to bring North American Negro spirituals into their midst, and took off in the 1990s with the arrival of videos of North American black churches. For each type of music, through an ethnographic account of an exemplary performance, I seek to convey each genre’s appeal. I end the chapter by describing several key ideas shared by artists across the three genres: the religious value of music, its role in spiritual life and evangelization, and the meaning of spiritual anointing in music. These ideas infuse gospel musicians with remarkable intensity.

I turn my attention in chapter 2 to the ethnoracial ideas and practices of gospel rap. I find, first, a preoccupation among rappers with the
periferia. This is a place marked by class deprivation and ethnoracial diversity. Despite claims by the black consciousness movement that the periferia is homogeneously negro, gospel rappers know that this is not the case: they identify with a place defined not by race or color but by poverty. Meanwhile, their intense interest in the present, their general mistrust of things North American, and their disinterest in justifying themselves to their churches lead them to have little enthusiasm for black musical history. Finally, gospel rappers have an ambivalent relationship to the essentialized black body. In Brazilian rap, a spoken form, there is little emphasis on the melodious, decibel-packing voice. At the same time, the gospel rap scene emphasizes flow and rhythm, which in Brazil have been racialized, though not with the same depth and consistency as they have in the United States. Indeed, because of the ideology of miscegenation, the view is widespread in Brazil that a racial predilection for rhythm has been distributed widely throughout Brazil’s population, making it possible, in this view, for most Brazilians to rap effectively. Hence, I argue black gospel rappers, though identifying themselves as negros and Brazilian, place greater emphasis on their class and on their transnational commonalities with all who are poor and oppressed than on their racial identity.

Chapter 3 focuses on the ethnoracial meanings of gospel samba. This scene’s self-identified negro musicians place little emphasis on ethnic blackness. To explain this, I show that gospel samba is closely associated in the imagination of its artists with the imaginary place of the Brazilian nation: the “Brazil” that has been constructed for the past eighty years as a mestico (racially mixed) nation has found its way into the heart of gospel sambista identity. As for how gospel sambistas narrate history, the story they tell echoes the national myth of “race mixture,” a story not of conflict or domination but of exchange, creativity, pleasure, and cordiality, with a correspondingly weak interest in Afro-Brazilian heroism. More complex is gospel samba’s relationship to the body and its attendant ethnoracializations. On the one hand, the gospel samba scene has no need for a highly developed, spectacular, timbre-marked voice. This is a scene of melody and beat, not vocal skill; consequently, there is little room for the development of thinking about the “raced” voice. On the other hand, ethnoracialized ideas about rhythm remain present in gospel samba but coexist alongside rejection of mixed-sex dancing. The scene has marginalized such dancing and thus has reduced the influence of the rhythmic ethnoracialized body. Together, these cultural
forces mean that in gospel samba, evangelical Christianity’s general lack of enthusiasm for ethnoracial boundary marking has maximum room for play. The identity that emerges from the gospel samba scene is less a bounded blackness and more a nationalist mixedness.

In chapter 4, I show how three main features of the melody- and voice-centric scene of black gospel contribute to the formation of a strong, self-aware, and politically committed negro identity. One feature is that the place which occupies the imaginations of black gospel artists is that of the North American black church. To be trained as a black gospel artist means watching videos and DVDs of black churches, thus coming to cherish as the key symbolic location of one’s chosen musical scene a place that is unquestionably, homogeneously, black. Self-construction as a Brazilian black gospel singer thus includes celebration of an institution that is profoundly different from what exists in Brazil, where the very idea of a homogeneously black church is taboo. The second feature is that, because black gospel artists ardently desire to be accepted and embraced by their churches, they expend copious amounts of energy on mastering the details of North American black musical history, thereby teaching them that their musical scene has long been at the forefront of the struggle for racial equality. Finally, the extreme physical demands of black gospel singing place front and center the racialized, essentialized black voice, thinking about which fills black gospel artists’ days and nights. The outcome of these three features is that for black gospel artists, black identity is a strong, sinewy priority.

Chapter 5 considers how the identities cultivated within each of the musical scenes influence musicians’ attitudes toward struggles for racial justice, including negro leadership, the formation of a primarily negro church, the development of negro theology, the articulation of racial issues inside the church, the encouragement of churches to act in solidarity with the secular black movements, support for policy initiatives such as affirmative action, involvement in educational programs for negro youth, and support for local negro-owned businesses. Gospel samba artists have a weak record of supporting any of the causes just mentioned; rather, their mode of reaching out to the world remains fixed on religious evangelization. Gospel rappers, in contrast, have become involved in a variety of racial justice projects but, significantly, do not take a leadership role in promoting them. Their identities as poor and young motivate them to lead projects intended to help the poor; when it comes to race-based initiatives, they participate primarily in
secondary roles. At the end of the day, it turns out that it is the melody-based black gospel artists, catalyzed by their strong black identities, who are best represented as leaders of racial justice projects.

I conclude by reviewing the book's chief findings, then arguing that these raise questions of broader significance. First, I argue that the fact that black gospel music sustains a richly textured oppositional ethnoracial consciousness should provoke us to ask how much more sympathy toward black identity might be buried just beneath the surface elsewhere in the evangelical landscape. Second, I suggest that the fact that blackness has markedly different meanings for musicians of the three scenes indicates the need to examine the multiple meanings of blackness in the African diaspora, as well as the need for more investigations into the meanings of whiteness and mixedness. Third, I point out that the usefulness of the categories of history, place, and body to ferret out the underlying ethnoracial meanings of different musical scenes suggests the value of applying them to other musical scenes and arenas of expressive culture, to unearth ethnoracial meanings. Finally, I discuss how and why the fact that expressive culture sometimes supports and sometimes dilutes ethnoracial identities among evangelicals may contribute to the improvement of strategy by black evangelical movement activists. The study thus seeks to realize its mission as action research, by showing how a nuanced analysis of society may make not only good scholarship but good social action as well.