

Let the Record Play!: The Phonograph in the Making of Modern American Religion

Lerone Martin with responses by Gerald Early and Laurie Maffly-Kipp

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Washington University in St. Louis

Marie Griffith

Good afternoon. I think we'll go ahead and get started. Welcome to this afternoon's public lecture by Lerone Martin, with two distinguished respondents, professors Gerald Early and Laurie Maffly-Kipp. I am Marie Griffith, I am the Director of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics here at Washington University in St. Louis, and all of us here at the Center are delighted that you're here with us today. I want especially to thank our Communications Specialist, Debra Kennard, there in the back, and our Associate Director, Rachel Lindsey, right there, for their great work in putting today's event together, making it both possible and productive. We owe so much to both of you. And let me just remind you at the outset, if you haven't yet silenced your cell phones or other buzzing devices, if you'd be kind enough to do that now we'd all be grateful.

Lerone Martin currently serves as a postdoctoral research associate at the Danforth Center. He earned his BA from Anderson University in Anderson, Indiana, and his Master of Divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary, before completing his PhD in Religion at Emory University in 2011. From 2010 to 2013, Lerone was an Assistant Professor of American Religious History and Culture at Eden Theological Seminary, right here in St. Louis, where he taught courses in American and African-American religious history. He is currently completing a book project with New York University Press, entitled *Preaching on Wax: The Phonograph and the Making of Modern African-American Religion*. *The Phonograph*, which is now in press, and I think slated for a Fall release, if that's correct, tracks the role of the phonograph in the shaping of African-American religion, culture, and politics during the first half of the 20th century. Lerone has received numerous research fellowships from institutions such as the Louisville Institute for the Study of American Religion, Emory University's Howard Hughes Medical Institute, The Fund for Theological Education, and Princeton University's Center for African-American Studies. He currently serves on the American Academy of Religion Steering Committee, for the Afro-American Religious History Group, as well as the Committee on Teaching and Learning. In the past, he has worked as a research consultant for continuing education and recidivism at New York's Sing Sing State Prison, as well as an instructor at Georgia's Metro State Prison. His commentary and writing have appeared in numerous popular media outlets, such as CNN, Religion Dispatches, Charisma, St. Louis

Post-Dispatch, and the Atlanta Journal Constitution. Above all, though, I'm very pleased to announce that just a few days ago Lerone accepted an offer from Washington University to serve as an Assistant Professor on Religion and Politics in the Danforth Center on Religion and Politics and Arts & Sciences. Starting in July then, just as his postdoctoral fellowship ends, Lerone will continue to be with us for what we hope will be many fine and creative and collegial years of working together. Our formal public announcement is still forthcoming—again this news is just a few days old, just about four days old at this point—but for now I just want to say to Lerone how thrilled all of us at Washington University are, and how truly honored we are that you've accepted this offer and that you're joining us as faculty here today, so thank you.

We're very grateful today also to have two eminent faculty members responding to Lerone's lecture. Our first respondent will be Gerald Early, who serves as the Merle Kling Professor of Modern Letters and Professor of English and of African and African-American Studies here at Washington University. He's held many many roles at Washington University, of the many years most notably, perhaps, he's served as the Director of Wash U's Center for the Humanities, which he built into an extraordinary intellectual community here. He also served as a fellow at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, an honor that all of you know is reserved for only the most esteemed scholars in the humanities, the social sciences and the sciences. Last year, President Barack Obama nominated Gerald to the National Council on the Humanities, the 26-member advisory board to the National Endowment for the Humanities. The U.S. Senate confirmed his appointment and he was sworn in on November 14, 2014. And if you don't know, the National Council on the Humanities meets three times a year to review grant applications and advise the NEH chairman. Needless to say, it is a very high position that helps shape future generations of humanities scholars and the scholarship of generations to come. Gerald is a prolific writer of essays and books, and the author of numerous works that include, but are not limited to, the following, *A Level Playing Field: African-American Athletes and the Republic of Sports*; *One Nation Under a Groove: Motown and American Culture*; and *The Culture of Bruising: Essays on Prizefighting, Literature, and Modern American Culture*, which won the 1994 National Book Critics Award. The recipient of a Whiting Writers Award and a General Electric Foundation Award, Early is currently finishing a book about Fiske University. He serves on the board of advisory editors for the Oxford Companion to African-American Literature. He has served as a consultant to five Ken Burns films, trustee of the Missouri History Museum and of the National Humanities Center, and he's been a longstanding advisory board member of the Antioch Review. And I have had to leave out three times

that amount of items from his longer CV. So we're so thrilled that you're here as a respondent today Gerald.

Our second respondent today will be Laurie Maffly-Kipp, who joined the Danforth Center last July as a Distinguished Professor in the Humanities. A widely-renowned historian of American religion, her research and teaching focus on African-American religions, religion on the Pacific borderlands of the Americas, and points of intercultural contact. Laurie's publications are also quite numerous, and include *Religion, Society, and Frontier California*, where she explored the nature of Protestant spiritual practices in gold rush California,

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