Glory Be Revival of Neighborly Love

Calvin Burgamy
Georgia State University

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Glory Be Revival of Neighborly Love

by

Calvin Burgamy

Under the Direction of Nancy Floyd

ABSTRACT

This project is a video installation that includes filming the worship services of three small African American churches that exist within an area of rapid gentrification. Perhaps because of their tiny congregations, or racial makeup, these particular little churches seem hidden by a cloak of invisibility.

INDEX WORDS: neighborhood, black, African American, church, Hosea Williams Boulevard, gentrification, preacher, community, religion, storytelling, video
Glory Be Revival of Neighborly Love

by

Calvin Burgamy

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts
in the College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
2012
Glory Be Revival of Neighborly Love

by

Calvin Burgamy

Committee Chair:   Nancy Floyd

Committee:    Constance Thalken
              Niklas Volmer

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
May 2012
DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to all the invisible folks around us.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge Martha Rees for being there and whose spirit made this all possible. I acknowledge Christina Price Washington and Candice Greathouse for being two parts of the three Cs. I would also like to acknowledge pastors Hubert Hamilton (Jesus House of Prayer), Richard Williams (True Deliverance Church) and H.T. Brock (Faith Christian Church) without whose cooperation this project would not have been possible. I also would like to thank my parents, R.V. and Ethel Burgamy.
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INTRODUCTION

“Perhaps if I did not have work that I like I would wash my hands all day or do something even more obviously clinically identifiable. Instead I make films.” Frederick Wiseman

This project represents a synthesis of several disparate artistic pursuits that have occupied me for most of my life: performing, photography, scriptwriting and, finally filmmaking. It also involves a further exploration of ideas I have previously investigated via my photography regarding the perception of diversity (including racial) and private and public space as a factor in the evolution of neighborhoods and society.

Storytelling is an integral part of my vernacular. For over 20 years I have performed a comedic commentary on everyday life. In the 1990s, performance artist Paul Botelho and I performed together. What we did wasn’t standup; it was standup theater. For example, we created sketches titled, I Came from Within Me, The Counts of Consciousness, The Western Cowboy Psychiatrist and Six Flags Over Kierkegaard that were based on B-style horror, cowboy and detective films. These performances, as storytelling, eventually led me from photography to videography. While Botelho and I have gone our separate ways, I continue performing with a group called Whirled Headquarters, a salon type theater group that works with original music, poetry and video. Over the last three years we have created six short videos that range from autobiographical to experimental.

Throughout my production career, I have (mostly) refused a standard narration based work preferring instead to let the video speak for itself and make the viewer the

agent of interpretation. Although inspired by the role of the filmmaker “as author and participant,” as were Ross McElwee and Erroll Morris (Rothman, 2009), my preferred method of documentary is to have no narration. McElwee’s and Morris’ strengths are their ability to insert themselves into the narration without detracting from the subject. Indeed their participation enhances the topic. McElwee’s *Bright Leaves* is funny and charming and yet leaves the audience with an indelible knowledge of the effects of tobacco. McElwee and Morris have a rare gift for relating to their subjects and a general lack of pretension that makes their work *Work*. Their narration is refreshing and feels genuine because they form a relationship of mutual respect with their subjects.

Before I knew anything about the process of filmmaking I co-produced and co-directed *Howard Finster: Man of Visions* (1982), a documentary about one of the most well known folk artists in America. One major lesson I learned here was, like McElwee and Morris, I had the ability to gain the trust of my subject. My co-producer had called Mr. Finster and he agreed to talk to us. We met him at his house and place of work, Paradise Garden and in a few short moments it was as if we had known each other forever. We talked and filmed for over 8 hours that first day. I don’t believe Howard Finster ever met anyone he didn’t like, but the ease with which he accepted us made an indelible impression. I was more confident in my ability to communicate with people outside my normal sphere of influence.

In 2006 I met a man who glued toys to his car. From this meeting I created a short documentary about him, titled, *Harold “Too Tall” Jones* (2007). This film was the first documentary I produced where I consciously let the subject tell his story without help/narration. The most important thing I learned was that I didn’t need a clear idea of what the final outcome would be. I approached the process with a “clear and empty head
and discover themes during editing.”  (Siegel, 2010) During the editing ideas coalesced and the narrative, sans voiceover, formed.

The video installation, *Glory Be Revival of Neighborly Love*, is an historical inscription designed to open discussion on the nature of the small church phenomena from Candler Road along Hosea Williams Boulevard to Cabbagetown corridor. Within this four mile area there are over 50 small churches in this four-mile area.

One of the goals of this project is to raise awareness of racial divisions that still occur in an area of Atlanta and Decatur that is rapidly gentrifying. The African American community is still the majority population, but their voices are not a prominent part of the neighborhood conversations. Another purpose of this project is to celebrate diversity along the corridor. This is a wonderful area, rich in history and culture and it would be a shame if it were to become another bland upscale inner city neighborhood.

The churches filmed are: The Jesus House of Prayer, True Deliverance and Faith Christian Church. It is important for the viewer of the installation to understand the time and place these houses of worship inhabit.

**THE WORK**

*O, come you pious youth: adore*

*The wisdom of thy God.*

*In bringing thee from distant shore,*

*To learn His holy word.* Jupiter Hammon²

In May of 2011, while pedaling my bike along Hosea Williams Boulevard, from Candler Road through Moreland Avenue and into Cabbagetown, I began to notice a few

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² Hammon, Jupiter. An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatly, Ethiopian Poetess, in Boston: Who Came from Africa at Eight Years of Age and Soon Became Acquainted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ… Hartford, CT: [s.n.], 1778.
small churches. My route included the communities of East Lake, Kirkwood, Reyn-oldstown and Cabbagetown. I didn’t pay much attention at first. But gradually I saw that it wasn’t uncommon for two small churches to be located across the street from one an-
other. I started counting churches. Sometimes there were six or seven within three blocks of each other. Why, I wondered?

The why has been studied as far back as 1903 when Atlanta University commis-
ioned the sociologist, historian and activist W.E.B. Du Bois, to do a study of the Negro church. In The Negro Church: A Social Study, he wrote, “The great engine of moral up-
lift is the Christian church. The church is a mighty social power.”(Du Bois, 1903, p. 207)

He had discovered that the church was not only a place for prayer, but also a haven from racism and injustice. Through the church a community could find service to their God, their race and their country. It was a means to organize, empower and to provide oppor-
tunity. (Du Bois, 1903)

I carried out research on these churches. I created a map, recorded interviews and church services and photographed the people and the buildings that comprise this “large” small church culture.

While there are many references to Atlanta’s famous Ebenezer Baptist Church and the role of the church as a focal point of the civil right movements, in my research I found that there has been little recorded, outside of Du Bois’ study, about the small neighborhood churches that exist east of downtown Atlanta. Given the dearth of record-
ed material about churches in this area my project can be seen as part of an ongoing in-
vestigation of the practices of churches in the Atlanta area. The project can preserve knowledge and illuminate “the cultural meaning of church, which plays a significant role in African Americana.” (Brown, 2007)
To understand the area in which my project takes place it is necessary to provide background information on the extraordinary racial and economic shifts within the area. The socio-economic structure of East Lake, Kirkwood, Reynoldstown and Cabbagetown has shifted dramatically since the 1960s. “The white folk moved out and are now paying anything to move back. – Frank Edwards, Atlanta Resident” (Williams, Adelman, 2003)

Right down the street, next door, over there and over yonder gentrification is creeping through our neighborhoods and along our streets. Gentrification is a class phenomenon, a euphemism for real estate hustlers, urban pioneers seeking deals, bulldozers and soaring home values. Atlanta is a city whose population is 54% black and 38% white. While the churches in the Hosea Williams to Cabbagetown corridor are predominantly black, the neighborhood is rapidly becoming gentrified becoming mostly white.

Atlanta, a city of 420,003 in 2010, has a history colored by cross cutting issues of race and class. Specific neighborhoods have and continue to change. The population in Atlanta was 67% white and 31% black in 1960 (1960, US Census Data). Starting as a white working class neighborhood housing mill workers, Kirkwood’s white residents moved to the suburbs in the 1960s. “Between 1960 and 1970, Kirkwood changed from being almost 100% white to almost 100% black. In Kirkwood, for example, 91% of residents were white in 1960; by 1970, 97% of the population was black.” (Shaw, Samuel, Sullivan Daniel (Shaw, 2011)

With the return of whites to the neighborhood property values have skyrocketed and driven lower income blacks out of the neighborhood (Williams and Adelman, 2003). As the white population increases and the black population decreases, one thing is noteworthy: in spite of this encroachment a vestige of the African American popula-
tion (in the form of at least 50 community churches) remains firmly entrenched within the rapid changes brought on by gentrification.

My challenge as a filmmaker was to represent a picture of this area and its churches so that viewers would walk away with knowledge and understanding about this invisible community. Like I did in *Harold “Too Tall” Jones* I elected to shoot first and ask questions in the editing room (Siegal, 2010).

The world is an everything-is-happening-at-once reality and is difficult to grasp or comprehend. But documentary film is a fantastic medium for bringing the invisible, the unknown and the unthinkable into the world’s living rooms. I have been captivated by the amazing heroics of filmmakers and inspired by quiet homegrown personal narratives. Frederick Wiseman (*High School*, 1968) and the Maysles Brothers (*Salesman*, 1960) make documentaries that are shocking and riveting. Seemingly simple and narrationless their films open doors into important cultural institutions. The fly-on-the-wall camera style gives the audience an intimate view of authority (*High School*, 1968) and pursuit of the American dream (*Salesman*, 1960). Even *National Geographic*, although steeped in outsider point of view filmmaking, makes the world a smaller place.

Documentary film in its early years was considered a document that documented—an impartial true tale of the facts. Today most people have come to view the idea of a totally impartial documentary as folly, recognizing that everything in the process comes from some point of view. The subject, the P.O.V. of the camera, the narration and the editing are all subjective and in some way leads the viewer down an avenue of meaning. Most documentaries lead the viewer along with the help of a narrator.

Documents on film have a long history. Eadweard Muybridge’s 19th century animated photographs and Auguste and Louis Lumière’s scene’s of urban life and Vertov’s
Man with a Movie Camera were early experiments in documentary filmmaking. The early filmmakers were inventive and employed innovative techniques that are still used in avant-garde and documentary film today. In the 1921 film, Manhatta, Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler juxtaposed images of Manhattan with title frames containing Walt Whitman’s poetry. (Figure 1)

![Figure 1. Scene from Manhatta](image)

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

I began my project by photographing and cataloging the churches in the neighborhood. I then created an interactive map using Google Maps (Figure 2) and a QR code link to the maps for those with smart phones (Figure 3). Pins indicate churches. When the viewer clicks on a pin, a photograph and address of the church appears. For the three churches I documented, there is also a link to a short video of the pastor and a service.
I also created a database of the churches (see Appendix 1). The online database kept track of the ever-expanding number of churches. Two of the pastors I was asking to participate asked me what other churches were involved. I showed them my list and the list helped convince them that the undertaking was legitimate and they were part of a larger project. The database was also handy as a phonebook so I could easily contact a church.

In addition to the database I created a written introduction to the project that I could give out in person as the occasion arose (Appendix 2). If someone wasn’t at the church I left the letter in the mailbox.

While not included in the final installation, I felt it was important to gather his-
torical background on each of the churches, so I interviewed the three church pastors: Huber Hamilton (Jesus House of Prayer), Richard Williams (True Deliverance Church) and H.T. Brock (Faith Christian Church). I learned that the Jesus House of Prayer is a combination of two congregations. The original pastor became ill and asked Hubert Hamilton to help out. Mr. Hamilton and his congregation were looking for a new building and ultimately the two congregations merged.

In the case of True Deliverance Richard Williams and his congregation took over a church that was no longer in use. Ms. Brock and her flock are renting a storefront, next to small sundry store on Hosea Williams.

Each of the pastors agreed, after our interview, that I could videotape one the services. This took some scheduling as each pastor wanted to tape a particular date or event. In the case of Richard Hamilton at True Deliverance, he wanted me to tape the youth related service. Mr. Hamilton wanted the week after communion. Ms. Brock’s taping was delayed first because it conflicted with Mr. Hamilton’s taping and then further compounded by the Christmas holidays. It was my impression from each of the pastors that some of the scheduling had to do with convincing the congregation to allow me to tape their service.

THE INSTALLATION

Included in the installation is a drive-by video of the churches in the neighborhood, a projection of a Google Map page with church locations in the neighborhood, a table with the names and addresses of the churches (See Appendix 1) and three four-foot banners of the three churches. The banners are attached to a curtain that divides the
room. Behind the curtain is a single projection of the three church services and a church pew for viewers to rest while watching.

The outer room, which contains everything except the videotaped sermons, is designed to give the viewer a feel for the neighborhood: the Google map projection on the left wall, gives the area a spatial overview sensibility, orienting the viewer to the location in space of the “drive by” video of the churches, which is located on the right wall. I wanted the viewer to see the churches as most viewers would—from their car. The pedestal and viewer resource material, located to the right of the Google map projection, is where the viewer can pick up a program and enter the intimate and private black curtained area, where voices and singing can be heard. In this darkened space, a single church pew invites the viewer to sit down and see, feel and hear the direct impact of the preachers and the sounds of the congregation. My hope is that the experience is transformative. (Figures 4-9)

**ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Most art projects sooner or later are confronted with the question: “Why would anyone be interested in this piece of work?” My belief is that a primary goal, as an artist, should be to observe and present that which normally goes unseen and to notice what’s going on right under our noses. The significance of this project is to make a contribution in making visible an invisible constituent of our communities.

There is a desire in this installation to express to the viewer more complex notions of community rather than just recording events. In presenting this project, I view myself primarily as an artist and a filmmaker who is trying to tell a story with a movie
camera. My hope is that the installation is a source of discovery for both the art crowd as well as the church participants.

*Glory Be Revival of Neighborly Love* will, hopefully, allow people to step back and think about the process of gentrification and to reflect on the power of memory as they revisit these neighborhoods. I have attempted to turn the gaze away from a dominant, directing gaze (although certainly there in the editing) and give a voice to those in the film.
Figure 4. Illustration of Gallery Installation
Figure 5. Entry Banner
Figure 6. Curtains with vinyl church banners
Figure 7. Pedestal with Resource Material and Program
Figure 8. Church pew
Figure 9. Screen Shots from Services
Bibliography


Hammon, Jupiter. An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatly, Ethiopian Poetess, in Boston: Who Came from Africa at Eight Years of Age and Soon Became Acquainted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ ... Hartford, CT: [s.n.], 1778.


## APPENDIX 1. CHURCH DATA BASE

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<th>Church</th>
<th>Pastor</th>
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<th>Street</th>
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<th>Zip</th>
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<td>Hubert Hamilton</td>
<td>404 786 1855</td>
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<td>Free Church of God in Christ</td>
<td>Dr. Costello Lowe (404) 378-8131</td>
<td>70 E. Lake Av</td>
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<td>Robert S. Welch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church</td>
<td>Reverend Dewayne M. McGuire</td>
<td>(404) 377-1143</td>
<td>2677 W. Pharr Rd</td>
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<td><a href="http://mountzionbapt.org/">http://mountzionbapt.org/</a></td>
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<td>True Deliverance</td>
<td>Richard Williams</td>
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<td>Greater Community Baptist Church</td>
<td>Rev. A.J. Cooper</td>
<td>404-688-7613</td>
<td>121 Flat Shoals Ave SE</td>
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Link to Map: [goo.gl/YNkJf](https://goo.gl/YNkJf)
APPENDIX 2. LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO CHURCHES

Calvin Burgamy  
Georgia State University  
Welch School of Art & Design  
10 Peachtree Center Avenue  
Atlanta, GA 30303  
678-557-9855  
October 1, 2011

Dear Community Church

I am making a video documentary about the community churches of this neighborhood for my Masters in Fine Arts at Georgia State University. I selected this topic because I think the community churches form an integral, but often overlooked, part of the greater Atlanta community.

The first step is to map churches map [http://g.co/maps/k7wp4]. Then, I’d like to talk to church leaders to ask what you would like to see come out of this project. I’d like to get some history and other facts about each church. Finally, some participating churches may be interested in filming or having a service filmed.

The timeline for this project is to complete mapping and interviews in 2011 and to complete the final project (editing, mapping, etc.) by March, when there will be a public presentation.

Other than publicly available information, I will not include any information you do agree to in the final product, but I think that collaboration with local churches will make the outcome much more valuable.
If you have any questions about me or this project, please feel free to contact my professors at Georgia State: Constance Thalken, Nancy Floyd and Niklas Volmer (main office: 404.413.5221).

Thank in advance for your time and attention. I look forward to talking to you.

Sincerely

[sign]

Calvin Burgamy

Address

Phone

cburgamy@gmail.com
APPENDIX 3. INSTALLATION PROGRAM

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the following:

invaluable help and support in all aspects from encouragement to hemming the banner: Martha Rees

indispensable information on these Atlanta neighborhoods: Assoc. Professor of Sociology, GSU, Lesley Williams Reid (The Double Edged Sword of Gentrification in Atlanta)

camera and camaraderie: Christina Price Washington

great help with banner: Nell Ruby

moral support: Neta Counts, Emily Gwynn

technical support: Tami Stanko

installation assistance: Lisa Alembik, Jon Marcus, Matt Rosenberger, Hauken Washington

the pastors: Hubert Hamilton, H.T. Brock, Richard Williams

my parents: R.V. & Ethel Burgamy

(church on front of program: Bible Way Temple True Holiness, 207 1st Avenue at Memorial Drive)

March 19-23 10am-6pm
Reception Thursday, March 22, 2012, 5:00--8:00pm
Ernest G. Welch School of Art & Design Gallery
10 Peachtree Center Ave., Atlanta, GA 30303

48+ small community churches exist along the Hosea Williams Boulevard/Memorial Drive corridor from Candler Road to Cabbagetown. Three of these churches are featured in this installation. Scan the QR code on the left with your smart phone and it will take you to the google map of this project. The one on the right takes you to a neighborhood history of Kirkwood by members of the community.
Program

The race problem will be solved when Christianity gains control of the innate wickedness of the human heart, and men learn to apply in dealing with their fellows the simple principles of the Golden Rule and the Sermon on the Mount.

--Mary Church Terrell,
--Kelly Miller,
--W. E. B. Du Bois (Atlanta University Press, 1903)

Order of Videos:

Service 1......................................................Jesus House of Prayer pastor, Hubert Hamilton
Service 2.....................................................Faith Christian Church pastor, H.T. Brock
Service 3...................................................True Deliverance Church pastor, Richard Hamilton

Total time: 22:07

The Neighborhood

This project was conceived in May 2011 while I was riding my bike along Hosea Williams Boulevard and I began to notice the number of small churches.

This installation takes notice of the largely invisible community of small churches in this area that are holding out against the march of gentrification through their neighborhoods. They are historically important to Atlanta and to each of their neighborhoods.

The neighborhoods in this project are East Lake, Kirkwood, Reynoldstown and Cabbagetown.

• According to the 1960 US Census the population in Atlanta was 61.7% white and 38.3% black. In 1960.
• In the 2010 census the population of Atlanta was 64% black and 36% white.
• Between 1960 and 1970, Kirkwood changed from being almost 100% white to almost 100% black: 91% of residents were white in 1960; by 1970, 97% of the population was black.
• In Kirkwood white residents increased from 1% to 14% of the population between 1990 and 2000 and then to 37% by 2010.

All of us grow up in particular realities - a home, family, a clan, a small town, a neighborhood. Depending upon how we’ve been brought up, we are either deeply aware of the particular reading of reality into which we are born, or we are peripherally aware of it.

--Chaim Potok
APPENDIX 4. INSTALLATION INVITATION

a video installation
by Calvin Burgamy

GLORY BE REVIVAL
OF NEIGHBORLY LOVE
MAR. 19 - MAR. 23
ALL WELCOME

March 19 - 23, 2012
Reception March 22, 5-8pm
Walter Reade Art & Design Gallery
Georgia State University

INVISIBLE - 48 - 48TH CHURCHES FROM CANDLER RD TO CABBagetOWN

10 Peachtree Center Avenue, Atlanta, Georgia 30303
March 19 - 23, 2012
Reception March 22, 5-8pm
Gallery Hours 10am - 6pm, Monday - Friday