

## B lack H istory M onth

**B**y Janus Adams

On September 26, 1954, there was a brand new sound in the air. As the first gospel singer to host a national broadcast, Mahalia Jackson premiered her show on CBS Radio. Joining her as regulars were pianist Mildred Falls, organist Ralph Jones, and Jack Halloran as music director conducting a white quartet. The show was such a success that it ensured her future and widened the audience for gospel music. Two

months later, her debut recording session for the radio giant's sister company, Columbia Records, catapulted her to the world stage. Criticized, as many a legend before her and since has been, for letting success "change" her, Jackson felt the charge had merit. But it was the repertoire that had changed, not the woman. In the days when she was ascending to the pantheon where she now firmly reigned, she had rallied a following with "Move On Up a Little Higher" and Dorsey's "Precious Lord". Now she sang Rodgers and

## The Queen of Gospel

Hammerstein's Broadway hit "You'll Never Walk Alone." But the strength of her Columbia contract was the company's vision of her as a crossover artist — one who could move music lovers "the world over," meaning one whose sound was black but whose artistic comfort zone was white. In fact, it

was Columbia Records that had dubbed her and promoted her to international stardom as "the World's Greatest Gospel Singer." Cognizant of where she had come from and where she was going, Mahala, as she had been christened, pragmatically resolved what might have become a stand-off dilemma

to the otherwise less inspired, less seasoned. Remaining true to her musical voice and identity, she developed a sort of *musicological bilingualism*, as Dr. Horace Clarence Boyer notes, "creating two performance styles: one for the recording studio and the other for live performance."

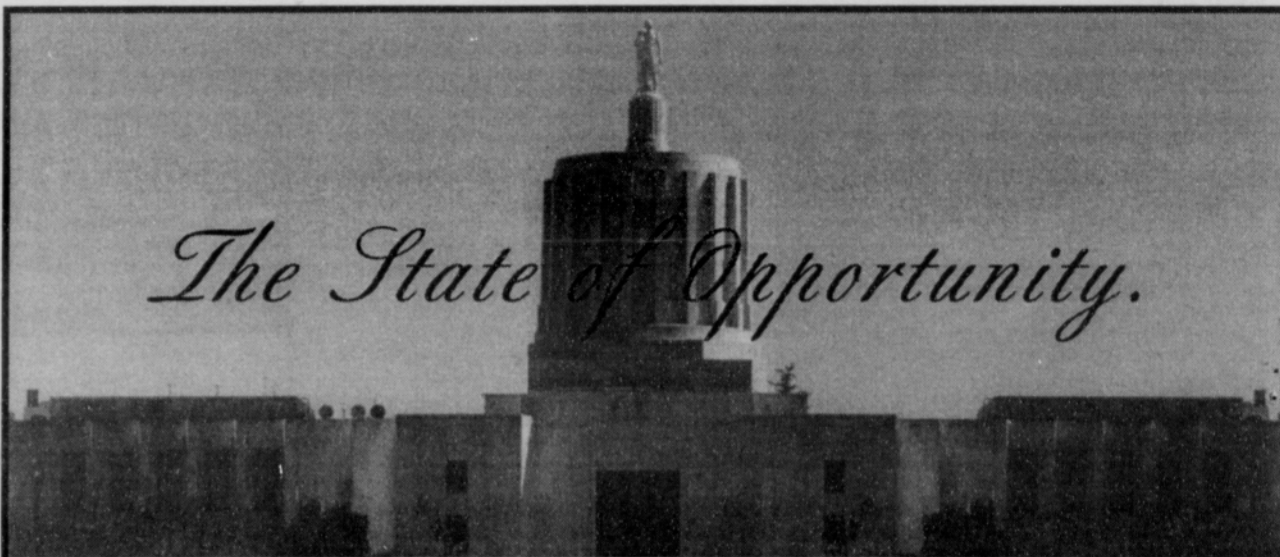


Mahalia Jackson, the "Queen of Gospel Music," left a legacy of gospel recordings and performances that remain unmatched to this day. As Martin Luther King's favorite singer, she was chosen to perform at the March on Washington on August 28, 1963. She graced the mood just before his historic ascent with the spiritual "I Been 'Buked and I Been Scorned."

## Women from page 5

the impact of this ordination transcended Church boundaries. Small's ordination and the continuing debate over women's right to preach created interdenominational and gender tension that caused other denominations to reconsider legislative restrictions on women's roles. Despite the vigorous debate, changes in women's status would come much later in the twentieth century. However, the possibility of changing rules encouraged many women to seek careers in the ministry. These shifts occurred at a time when suffrage and other rights of women were being strongly contested throughout American society.

Whatever their struggles have been, the reality is that legions of black women have preached for almost two hundred years. Despite the Church's failure to recognize their spiritual gifts and their work, they have exercised leadership in Christian mission and have spoken out on the issues of race, sex, class, and color. They have embraced the Church and joined their sisters in the pew in defending and supporting it. Their faith has been strengthened and their wits sharpened by the struggle that they and their foremothers have endured. They have been eloquent in the articulation of their faith and constant in their belief in the Holy Spirit.



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A rich legacy to be left for our children and their children.

## Black History Month 2000

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