

# Flaming? The Peculiar Theopolitics of Fire and Desire in Black Male Gospel Performance. By: Alisha Lola Jones

Patterson, Michelle A.

*License:*

None: All rights reserved

*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Patterson, MA 2023, 'Flaming? The Peculiar Theopolitics of Fire and Desire in Black Male Gospel Performance. By: Alisha Lola Jones: ISBN: 9780190065423 Published By: Oxford University Press, June 2020', *Reading Religion*, pp. 1-2. <<https://readingreligion.org/9780190065423/flaming/>>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

**General rights**

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

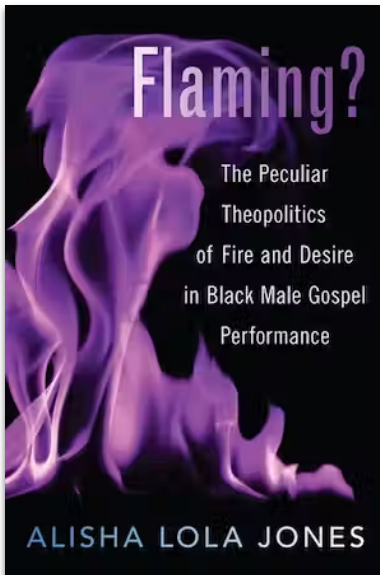
Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

**Take down policy**

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

[Home](#) / [Religion](#) / [Music](#) / [Flaming?](#)


## Flaming?

### The Peculiar Theopolitics of Fire and Desire in Black Male Gospel Performance

By: [Alisha Lola Jones](#)

304 Pages

PAPERBACK

ISBN: 9780190065423 

Published By: Oxford University Press,  
Incorporated

Published: June 2020

\$35.00

FROM PUBLISHER

Alt+Q

**REVIEW**

**AUTHOR(S)**

Alisha Lola Jones's *Flaming? The Peculiar Theopolitics of Fire and Desire in Black Male Gospel Performance* presents her unique theology of fire and desire in black male gospel performances. In her weighty book, Jones explores the complex intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and religion in the Pentecostal church. The book draws on six years of extensive ethnographic research, including interviews and participant observations of gospel performances (27). Jones's main argument is that Black male gospel singers use their voices to articulate a unique theopolitics that challenges dominant understandings of race, gender, and sexuality. She argues this theopolitics is grounded in music's ability to free self-expression.

Jones supports her argument by providing detailed analyzes of individual songs and performances by Black male gospel singers. She also draws on interviews with Black male gospel singers and scholars to offer insights into the meaning of these songs and performances. One strength of Jones's book is her use of interdisciplinary methods. She uses insights from theology, performance studies, and Black studies to develop a complex and nuanced understanding of Black male gospel music.

In the first chapter of her book, "Setting the Atmosphere," Jones explains the history of her work. This allows Jones to offer a more comprehensive and accurate analysis of the subject than would be possible if she had relied on a single discipline. Jones provides a historical and cultural overview of how black male gospel singers use music to create a sense of atmosphere in their performances (30). She asserts vocal style, gesture, and attire are employed to build excitement (13).

Jones's book is comprehensive. She provides a wealth of historical and cultural context for her analysis, which helps readers to understand the significance of Black male gospel music in a broader cultural context. Examples of this include chapter 1, "I Am Deliver!" Jones begins by explaining the Pentecostal tradition and how black male gospel singers use their voices to testify about their experiences with "deliverance" from homosexuality.

🕒 Save 5 min by listening to this article

Also, in chapter 2, "Men Don't Sing Soprano," Jones examines black countertenors' historical performance. She discusses several case studies, including Patrick Dailey, to highlight how his vocal qualities embody gender and queer potential as perceived by society (80). In chapter 3, "Pole Dancing for Jesus," Jones addresses the body movement of dance. Jungle Cat is the featured performer for this chapter, with the discussion centering on his "pole dancing for Jesus" (87). Finally, in chapter 4, "Peculiar 'Til I D.I.E.," Jones argues that gospel go-go is a space where black men can express their masculinity in a traditional and provocative way (124).

Jones also provides detailed analyses of individual songs and performances, which allow readers to appreciate the artistry and creativity of Black male gospel singers. Chapters 5 and 6, "Wired" and "Ritualizing the Unspoken," analyze Anthony C. Williams III. He is known as Tonéx or B—Slade, a Grammy-nominated gospel singer, and is openly gay (150). Chapter 7, "Church Realness," combines previous themes to explore how gospel singers balance masculinity and sexuality in the black church. Jones focuses on Donnie McClurkin, a Grammy award-winning gospel artist and pastor.

Overall, I found *Flaming?* to be an insightful and provocative book. Jones does an excellent job of exploring how black male gospel singers use their music and performances to challenge traditional notions of masculinity and sexuality. Jones's analysis of black male gospel singers is nuanced and insightful. She avoids the trap of celebrating or condemning these singers and offers a complex and nuanced analysis of their work. Her writing is clear and engaging. She successfully pairs her analysis with the voices of the black male gospel singers she interviewed.

The observation regarding this book is that it can sometimes be dense. The topic may not be entirely conducive to the book's key idea. For example, an examination of pole dancing felt out of place and disjointed from the rest of the book, which focused on the vocal performance of male gospel singers in the Pentecostal church. Furthermore, Jones' sample size of Chicago and Washington, DC (28) may not apply to all black male gospel singers.

Jones defines "deliverance" as a queer theology that challenges traditional notions of masculinity and sexuality. However, her view is limited to the Pentecostal church she references. Another observation is regarding men singing soprano. Jones argues that black countertenors' performances are complex yet liberating (85). It would have been illuminating for Jones to provide examples of how a male soprano's voice carries different cultural meanings beyond the Western perspective, which could have strengthened her argument.

Jones argues that the careers of Tonéx/B. Slade and Donnie McClurkin are case studies on how black male gospel singers use their music to express their sexuality. It would have been helpful to examine how the teachings of the Pentecostal black church have impacted gospel singers' performances and how they are perceived. In her concluding chapter, Jones contends that black male gospel singers are important in the struggle for LGBT acceptance in "welcoming and affirming" Christian churches (223). The missed opportunity is that the book does not offer any concrete solution to this challenge facing black male gospel singers. More extensive use of theological resources and more attention to ecclesiology could have strengthened the book. Jones' work could have been enriched by including perspectives from those who disagree with aspects of the Pentecostal faith.

*Flaming?* can benefit anyone interested in the intersection of music, race, gender, and religion. Thus, scholars of African American, religious, and gender studies may find the book particularly informative and insightful. Additionally, anyone interested in exploring the complexity and uniqueness of Black male identity and expression may find value in reading this book. Furthermore, it can be an excellent resource for church communities.

**Michelle Ann Patterson** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Birmingham (UK).

**Date Of Review:**

June 27, 2023

🕒 Save 5 min by listening to this article

## RELATED BOOKS



## READING RELIGION NEWSLETTER

Subscribe to our newsletter and receive updates on new books, new reviews, and more.

**SUBMIT**

You can unsubscribe at any time. We will never share or sell your e-mail address.

[PRIVACY POLICY](#)

[TERMS OF USE](#)

[LOGIN](#)

[MY ACCOUNT](#)



Visit other AAR publications



© 2023 Reading Religion. All Rights Reserved. ISSN 2475-207X

Powered by Supadu