

## God's Economics, Not Reganomics: The Detroit Mix, Transcript

[00:00:01] **Ronald Reagan** It's a pleasure. A great pleasure to be here in Detroit, a city of industry and commerce. A city that exemplifies the energy, creativity, and enterprise of America. A city where so many dreams have come true for so many people.

[00:00:23] **Carlehr Swanson** Detroit, once a place of dreams, was indeed looking for a miracle by the 1980s. To some, that miracle came in the form of an actor turned politician at the Republican National Convention at Joe Louis Arena in 1981.

[00:00:38] **Keith Dye** Ronald Reagan could give a good speech. He could give a good speech and say nothing.

[00:00:44] **Ronald Reagan** America, America was in trouble. The Republicans came here to kick off our campaign to put America back on track and reaching for the stars. And that's exactly what we've done here.

[00:01:03] **Keith Dye** After he gave a speech, it was people clapping and everything, and then they'd say, well, what did he say, and people couldn't tell you what he said. I don't know. It just sounded good.

[00:01:15] **Carlehr Swanson** While Reagan sounded good. Economically things were bad for Detroit during the eighties.

[00:01:21] **Keith Dye** The auto industry was very bad. They had pretty much left. A lot of companies and businesses had left Detroit.

[00:01:32] **Carlehr Swanson** Reagan had promised massive tax cuts that would mean more money and more jobs for average Americans. That wasn't what Detroit got. Instead, the rich got richer, and the poor got poorer, especially Black Detroiters. What seemed like a chance for urban renewal was actually urban destruction. Kyle Brooks remembers...

[00:01:52] **Kyle Brooks** Politically, it was weird because, I mean, in some ways, Detroit had never quite bounced back from the, you know, the right riots of the late sixties and just the sort of civil unrest happening there. So, lots of parts of the city were just decimated.

[00:02:12] **Keith Dye** I think devastating parts of Detroit in the eighties happened in 1970, which was Motown left.

[00:02:21] **Deborah Pollard** Many of those band members knocked on the door and did not know that they had left. That was not a pretty day for them.

[00:02:30] **Keith Dye** It was like a void. People just didn't know how to fill it.

[00:02:34] **Deborah Pollard** But we kept on singing. We kept on singing and kept on making music.

[00:02:39] **Carlehr Swanson** Detroiters like Deborah Pollard and Karl Reid did keep singing in a place they knew best. The Black church.

[00:02:46] **Karl Reid** When you think about Detroit, you think about church. So, coming up, it was just a natural progression for me to go to church.

[00:02:56] **Carlehr Swanson** And there were many churches.

[00:02:58] **Karl Reid** Charles Nicks, who at one point had over 2800 young people as a part of his youth department. And so, he had a large church, and you had Pentecostal churches, Bishop David Ellis. You had Solomon's Temple, which was William L Bonner. And then you had that Bethlehem Temple, which was Bishop Hancock.

[00:03:18] **Carlehr Swanson** Along with Church, a host of young musicians and singers found outlets and school.

[00:03:24] **Karl Reid** Then we went to junior high, and I joined the glee club. Mrs. Jackson got me to join the Glee Club. So I was into music then. So when I got to Mumford, you know, Mrs. Alice Allen was the music teacher, and my friend introduced me to her. So, I started doing music at Mumford.

[00:03:40] **Carlehr Swanson** Many gospel groups came from Mumford High. But it was their combination of the Black churches' sacred texts and the secular sounds of Motown that made Detroit a hub for contemporary gospel music.

[00:03:53] **Karl Reid** Whatever those secular folks were using, we wanted to use it. If they were using synthesizers. We wanted synthesizers. If they were using electronic drums. We wanted to use electronic drums. If they went to Studio A and had 48 tracks. We wanted Studio A. And so that's what we did.

[00:04:11] **Clip of "I'm Going On" by Commissioned, Upbeat Contemporary Gospel**

[00:04:16] **Karl Reid** Where at Mumford High, we had everybody from the Clark sisters to the Winans. We had Earl Klugh. We had Lisa Page. We had so many people that were in the gospel industry that went to Mumford

[00:04:31] **Carlehr Swanson** Commissioned member Karl Reid's story and many others lead back to one lady.

[00:04:36] **Karl Reid** Mattie Moss Clark

[00:04:37] **Kyle Brooks** Mattie Moss Clark

[00:04:38] **Carlehr Swanson** Dr. Mattie Moss Clark, most widely known as the mother of the legendary Clark Sisters, took Detroit by storm when she arrived in 1947 from Alabama. With her appointment as director of the Southwest Michigan Jurisdiction of the Church of God in Christ, she was able to gather the best singers from the whole city and cultivate her signature Clark sound.

[00:05:00] **Clip of "On My Way to Heaven" by Mattie Moss Clark, Upbeat Traditional Gospel Shuffle**

[00:05:19] **Carlehr Swanson** Her 1958 recording efforts are claimed to be the first recordings of the modern gospel choir. In these recordings, Clark utilized three-part harmony, which became the staple sound in gospel music. Whether it was the riot of the sixties, the oil crisis of the seventies, or the socio-economic issues of the eighties, Moss Clark was determined to bring people together through gospel music. In 1968, she was

appointed the President and Minister of Music of the International Music Department for the Church of God in Christ. She spent over 30 years in that position, taking gospel music all over the world.

[00:05:55] **Mattie Moss Clark** We have done workshops on college campuses across the country. In England and Germany. You name the place we've been there.

[00:06:02] **Carlehr Swanson** Not only did she share the music, she encouraged others to believe beyond what they saw.

[00:06:08] **Mattie Moss Clark** Gospel means spreading the news. Well, I said I could go out and buy me a Rolls Royce, and that's some news to spread. (All right now.) But we need to talk about Jesus Christ and what he's done to us. (Amen). And what he's done for us and how it keeps up.

[00:06:20] **Carlehr Swanson** Meanwhile, while Mattie Moss Clark was spreading the good news, her daughters had a message to share, too, and that they did on their album, *Mattie Moss Clark presents The Clark Sisters*.

[00:06:31] **Clip of "Expect a Miracle" by The Clark Sisters, Upbeat Gospel**

[00:06:40] **Carlehr Swanson** While the Clark Sister's career took off, Mattie Moss Clark, with her infectious enthusiasm, continued to cultivate young talent, including Detroit greats Vanessa Bell Armstrong, Rance Allen, and later Commissioned with Karl Reid.

[00:06:52] **Karl Reid** Mattie Moss Clark. Dr. Clark was the first person to give us a chance on the big stage at the Church of God Christ convocation in Memphis, and once we sang that one night back in 1984, 85, I think it was 85. I mean, it was on then. We didn't get out of the building until 2 hours later, from shaking hands and people asking for autographs.

[00:07:18] **Carlehr Swanson** Clark's dedication to mentoring young artists led her to open the Clark Conservatory of Music, the first conservatory of its kind that trained singers and instrumentalists in the gospel idiom.

[00:07:30] **Mattie Moss Clark** This is the one thing to impress me that I had to have somebody to steer me where I am. I did my daughters the same way. I started them off at the age of three and four-five years old, training them. And today, I have three of my girls plays and they play for churches.

[00:07:49] **Carlehr Swanson** Clark became a staple not only in Detroit music but the Detroit community as she conducted a choir of Cadillac Motor Company's workers for their Christmas concert, conducted community-wide mass choirs for the prestigious NAACP Freedom Fund dinners, led seminars and masterclasses, and continued to present new talent. By no means new to gospel fans in the eighties, the Clark sisters soared with their breakout hit "You Brought the Sunshine." Loosely based on Stevie Wonder's "Master Blaster."

[00:08:22] **Clip of "You Brought the Sunshine" by The Clark Sister, Upbeat Contemporary Gospel Reggae**

[00:08:26] **Carlehr Swanson** With their mother as an example, when the current political stage was dark and cloudy, sisters Jackie, Twinkie, Dorinda, and Karen continued to shine a light.

[00:08:36] **Deborah Pollard** You know, it's still about the joy.

[00:08:38] **Carlehr Swanson** Dr. Deborah Pollard is a host on Detroit's mixed 92.3 and the gospel scholar.

[00:08:44] **Deborah Pollard** and keeping the faith, and I mean, in some ways, I could even tie it to what we hear a lot of in gospel radio right now.

[00:08:55] **Carlehr Swanson** Most gospel songs during that time, including those of the Clark Sisters, did claim that everything was going to be all right. But the group's leading composer, Twinkie, "Elberita" Clark, boldly proclaimed what that everything was.

[00:09:10] **Clip of "In Good Hands" by The Clark Sisters, Mid-tempo Contemporary Gospel**

[00:09:22] **Carlehr Swanson** Just like their mother, the Clark sisters reminded Black Detroiters that they were in good hands. They spoke to many Detroiters' situations while appealing to the musical stylings of the youth.

[00:09:33] **Clip of "Expect a Miracle" by The Clark Sisters, Upbeat Gospel**

[00:09:37] What could have been a finale to Detroit's musical vibrancy provided the genesis of contemporary gospel music as we know it today. Mattie Moss Clark and her daughters sent a message to the world about Detroiters.

[00:09:50] **Keith Dye** So Detroiters are resilient. They would do things in the midst of adversity.

[00:10:02] **Carlehr Swanson** This audio project was produced for the Religion, Race and Democracy Lab at the University of Virginia with help from the lab's senior producer Emily Gadek and the lab's editor, Kelly "Hardcastle" Jones. Special thanks to Dr. Bonnie Gordon and Dr. Deborah Pollard. Music for this project comes from Blue Dot Sessions and JR Gaiter. You can find more documentary research on religion, race, and democracy at Religion Lab.Virginia.edu.