THE CAGED BIRD STILL SINGS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO THE
SUSTAINING ELEMENTS OF A BLACK SPIRITUALITY AS MANIFEST IN THE
LEADERSHIP LIVES OF BLACK FACULTY AND STAFF AT PUBLIC
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

A Dissertation
by
CLIFFORD O. POOLE, JR.

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Abstract

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Black faculty and staff play a vital role in creating and sustaining a positive

environment for Black students and other students of color at predominantly White

institutions. Yet, these key university and college leaders experience instances of racial bias,

disrespect, devaluing of talents, and alienation from their institutions. The sustaining

elements of a Black spirituality provide a solid foundation and wellspring of resilient hope in

these stressful and demoralizing instances by offering a depth of community, care, cultivation

of one's call to vocation, and a spirit that resists the coopting of agency.

The literature has indicated these elements of a Black spirituality are useful in

recruitment, retention, and resilience of not only Black faculty and staff but also other

disenfranchised members of a predominantly White institution community. Additionally,

they could prove instructive for senior leadership of these institutions in their creation of

inclusive policies and practices for strategic transformation of their campus environments.

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This study uses phenomenology as the tool of methodological inquiry into the shared lived narratives of participants.

The findings are focused through the lens of tenets of critical race theory and agency to offer perspectives that resist hegemonic narratives of predominantly White institutions; instead, they present a counter-narrative that rejoices in hope and hopeful resistance rather than simply arching toward rebellion. The study asks the reader to allow narratives of a Black spiritualty—in presence and absence—to manifest for them such that people and words comingle in the imagery of the caged bird that remains resolute so hope for community transformation and the call to vocation can be heard. *So, the caged bird still sings.*

Acknowledgements

My acknowledgement begins with deep appreciation and love for that which created me—Holy Wisdom, Holy Word, Holy Grace. Without the accompaniment of this Creator Spirit in my journey, I would surely have fallen short. My heart and mind connect in the beautiful words of promise to me. From the Psalms 37:24 "Though they stumble, they will never fall. For the Lord holds them by the hand." The words of Maya Angelou have also crested upon me for most of my life as well as I remain a "caged bird" still singing in protest, in pain, yet still in love.

> *The caged bird sings with a fearful trill, of things unknown but longed for still, and his tune is heard on the distant hill, for the caged bird sings of freedom.*

These bountiful words call to me with their embrace of the struggles and isolation of my life. They formed me in verse and song as they cascade through my thoughts and actions. "I don't know why the caged birds sings. I don't know why the angels take wing. When I'm so sad, how can you be glad? I don't know why" were the words that continue to flow through my mind to both comfort and console me in the midst of the abuse and discordant moments. May grace and peace continue to bless the legacy of the strong, inspirational Black woman who helps this caged bird keep singing.

The voice within me has morphed and been muted at times in this life. At multiple points, my voice seemed destined to be silenced completely as the journey brought drastic health issues to my threshold and life to the brink. But the caged bird still sings. The support, love, encouragement, and laughter have been gifted to me from so many amazing people who are my family, my community, and my heart. I remain spiritually and eternally grateful to my dissertation committee, who saw the essence of a Black spirituality in my journey within

educational leadership and bravely decided to accompany me through this work—for your patience and mentorship, much gratitude is owed. My thanks and deep appreciation for those who obliged a fearful and tearful scholar to lend their wisdom and strong support as I faced multiple barriers to success in this endeavor.

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Family is at the heart of my Black spirituality, and mine has multiple dimensions. To the Creator, I remain in wonder at how this universe allowed me to survive the struggles of my birth to join this world and walk this path, for a brief while with my beloved parents. To my father, Odell, and my mother, Velma, you were taken from us too soon. But in your

decades on earth, you provided me with hope, with love, with determination, with structure, and with a continual example of grace and goodness. My prayer is that you are watching as I complete this moment in my journey, and that you remain proud of my work. Not every child can say this of their parents, but I say it without reservation. "It was an honor knowing you." To my siblings, also gone from this earthly realm, I will always miss the wondrous days we shared. We were all quite different children and adults, but we had one thing in common— we knew that we could depend on each other, even when we didn't like each other some days. I know you are laughing along with me at that statement even though we are no longer together.

Finally, to the most wonderful and caring group of people that could grace a caged bird's life. I give thanks for your love, dedication, hope, sacrifices, and good cheer. For the men of ELBO (Enjoying Life Before It's Over): Jon, Eric, Bennett, Jack, and William, words only speak a minutia of what you all mean to me. I hope that I have given you all at least a part of the joy you bring to my life. There are not many groups of people who remain friends for 20 or 30 years, but we keep growing and learning from each other year after year. Grace, peace, and love emanates from my heart and soul for the other family in Boone, NC and Atlanta/Decatur, GA who chose to be a part of this life's journey as well. You are loved in ways that others may never understand. The caged bird still sings for and to you all. Much Love.

Dedication

Don't care about no trouble, got myself together
I feel a kind of protection is all around me
This I know, baby
I ain't gonna let it sweat me, baby
I come up hard, but now I'm cool
Didn't make it playing by the rules
I come up hard, baby, but now I'm fine
I'm checkin trouble, sugar
Moving down the line

Excerpt from "Theme from
Trouble Man" (1972)
—Marvin Gaye

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
Langston Hughes (1902–1967)

One of the great needs of Negro children
Is to have books about themselves
And their lives that can help them be proud.
Langston Hughes (1902–1967)

We listen for guidance everywhere except from within.
Parker J. Palmer (1939–)

For my father (Pop), Odell Poole (1939–2008)
For my mother, Velma Shuford Poole (1940–2007)
My siblings, Marcus, Sarah, and Trina (Martha) (gone too soon)
For my grandmothers, Irene and Frances and grandfathers
Thank you for your words, your wisdom, and your love!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Vocation does not come from willfulness. It comes from listening. I must listen to my life and try to understand what it is truly about—quite apart from what I would like it to be about—or my life will never represent anything real in the world, no matter how earnest my intentions.

—Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*

My understanding and deep engagement with the vocation of educational leadership began with the leadership examples set forth by my grandmother, Irene, who epitomized the communal support, call to vocation, critical voice contesting dominant power structures, and honoring of our elders' wisdom in her simple charismatic leadership in our local community. The transformation I hope to see in public predominantly White institutions (PWIs) of higher education is nestled in the arms of this beloved woman and others who reflect this leadership manifest from their varied Black spirituality.

Miss Irene, as she was called as a widow, would carry her sung inspirational narrative with her as we pulled weeds in her garden or as I helped her clean the house where she was raising five of her grandchildren after raising 12 children of her own. And I knew she *had* to be tired. I was tired just following her around. But she would tell me this amazing statement over and over: "The Lord keeps me going so I can keep you all going. You have to keep going even when 'they' [White folks] don't want to let you." Many days, in the midst of my vocation in educational leadership supporting struggling students and colleagues from underrepresented groups, I feel this marvelous spirit in those words because that is also what helps me persist in my leadership. When my journey grows difficult and the struggles are pernicious, I hear those power-laden words, and my sojourn strengthens.

As I conducted research that delved into how a Black spirituality may manifest itself in the professional lives and vocational call of Black faculty and staff at PWIs in higher education, I also found resilience and resistance in the spirituality of inspired Black leadership through other elements of Black culture. Cultural elements, such as the lyrics of my youthful gospel music, soul and R&B music, Black poetry and literature, and Black visual artists' work, combined in the Black spirituality found in my grandmother's sage wisdom. The Lord (and Grand Ma's hands and words) kept me going so I could keep you all going. These dynamic spiritual manifestations put into poetics the insights of Black minister and theologian Carlyle Fielding Stewart III, who stated, "Spirituality is a process by which people interpret, disclose, formulate, adapt, and innovate reality in their understanding of God within a specific context or culture" (as cited in Hayes, 2012, p. 178).

The narrative inquiry that occurs in the manifestation of the phenomenology that links a Black spirituality to lived experiences in the personal, professional, and institutional lives of Black educational leaders who participated in this research deconstructs the processes Stewart (1997) reflected in their writing. The narrative inquiry discloses the movements and impressions of Black culture and aesthetics that takes hold of our spirituality in our educational institutions. In this study, I used the scaffolding of narratives from personal, professional, and institutional experiences to explore not just the participants' diversity in spirituality, but also the varied notions of Blackness and leadership, the call and causes in life, and shared and diverging ethos in leadership. As a participant in my own study, the need for this exploration emanated from me as well.

My inhabiting the intersections between a Black spirituality and educational leadership began even before I could fathom what the power and force intertwined in Black

folks' singing, hoping, loving, resisting, sharing ancient and present wisdom, uplifting each other, and communal solidarity were about for me. My vocational and personal life was thrust into the realm of Black spirituality[1] because my family was engulfed and immersed in this phenomenon through the communal and prophetic work of my elders, both women and men, who represented ancient and present wisdom and rituals in their leadership practices. This communal wisdom from uplifting, motivational voices drew from ancient African spiritual traditions, as Paris (1995) noted in their writing. These elemental values of a Black spirituality grounded in ethical virtues, hopeful resistance, call and responsibility to vocation, and continual renewal shaped my direction in educational leadership and the moral stance I put into action every day.

In truth, this phenomenon of Black spirituality's virtues, rites, and resistance manifested in the very beginnings of my educational path and promise. From my youth, I could feel and hear the power and strength of a Black spirituality, whether at church, in the classroom, or at my father's service station. It spoke of love for our neighbors, but also proclaimed the fire entrenched in a call to responsibility and vocation from the wisdom of our elders and the Holy Spirit.[2] I also felt the strength and intellectual empowerment in my spirituality that vibrantly resounded from the radio stations playing soul music and our tiny theater, which showed Blackploitation films each Friday and Saturday evening. Each encounter provided a diversity of spiritual manifestations in my life, even if unrecognized at the time. As Chireau (2007) stated, "The spiritual lives of Black people in the U.S. have historically extended beyond church, beyond mosque and temple, spilling over into mundane

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[1] I will use the term "Black spirituality" to separate this cultural, physical, and mental devotion and expression of Black folks from general spiritual beliefs and practices and Christology.

[2] The power and fire of Black spirituality are the yearnings for freedoms, an anger that blazes, but also warms and comforts, and a passion that drives to action for transformation toward greatness.

aspects of living and into daily existence" (p. 68). This "spilling over" can occur in Black

folks' workplaces, our educational institutions, our community gatherings, our loves, and

actions that emerge simply by living life as Black folks in the United States (Hayes, 2012).

Experiencing a spilling over in Black spirituality for me flowed in a similar

ideological "river of spirituality" (Hayes, 2012, p. 187). It ebbed, flowed, branched forth, and

at times became "dammed up" in my life; it inherently affected my leadership path and life

choices (Hayes, 2012). This spirituality was not from one faith tradition or one particular

African mythology, but instead extended from the Black cultural and communal lived

experiences in and around my life. Black spirituality, as previous authors noted in this

introduction described and as I shared in the phenomenon of this study, is reflective of the

diaspora of lived experiences of Blacks in the United States. Thus, it may have a diversity of

meanings and interpretations in those experiences. It may also shift, ebb, and flow in diverse

ways based on our presence in educational leadership in higher education.

This research embraced the experiential diversity of its participants as exemplified in

the use of phenomenology as a methodological approach. Phenomenology is the "structured

study of the lived experiences and consciousness of beings" (Vagle, 2014, p. 2). In this study,

phenomenology was used as a methodology because it respects the authentic lived

experiences of those whose lives may have been influenced by the manifestations of Black

spirituality in its intersectionality with leadership development and vocational sustenance.

These lived experiences were presented as they evolved and emerged—as themselves.

"Turning to the things themselves" in phenomenological study allows the researcher to honor

the diverse experiences of participants without being bound to outside conjecture on their

narratives (Husserl, as cited in Vagle, 2014, p. 11). In this research, "the things themselves"

were the manifestations of Black spirituality in the lived experiences of leadership and vocational development among Black faculty and staff participants.

This phenomenological turn also allowed me to not principally use "bracketing" to separate the past experiences of the participants out of the study in a "phenomenological reduction" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 247). Instead the research intentionally is reflexive in allowing space for the phenomenon as it flows between past, present, and future in the lifeworld (Vagle, 2014, p. 57). As an interpretative approach, this research requires the acknowledgement of past experiences while also maintaining the essentiality of phenomenon in its current manifestation. My positionality in this study as researcher and participant creates space for my reflexive analysis to more deeply engage with the intersectionality of the phenomenon and educational leadership in authentic ways. Staying as close as possible to "the things themselves" by being a part of the phenomenological research process supports the validity of the conclusions (van Manen, 2014, p. 11).

It was essential to this research that both participants and those who may encounter this study understand the intersections of racially conscious leadership development and Black spirituality. To clarify the Black spirituality in this study's aim, I offered Paris' (1995) definition, in which they noted, "The spirituality of [Black] people refers to the animating and integrative power that constitutes the framing of meaning for individual and collective experiences" (p. 17). Paris's (1995) definition of Black spirituality also explained, "metaphorically, the spirituality of a people is synonymous with the soul of a people" (p. 18).

This "soul of a people" was, for me, that cultural phenomenon animated at the center of our celebrations, our sorrows, my survival through struggles and negativity from outside forces, the wisdom of our elders and ancestors, and collectivism in the community that arcs

toward uplifting each other. These elements of the "animating and integrative power" (Paris, 1995, p. 17) of Black spirituality were central to this study's inquiry into manifestations of a Black spirituality in educational leadership. This power is not presented in this research as centralized in the Black Church or Christology, but rather from the larger collective and individual experiences of Black people in cultural, social, communal, and prophetic expressions. This stance is essential because the authentic presentation of manifestations of a Black spirituality resisted this religious hegemonic control from outside our lived experiences.

This animating and collective power was evident to me from my grandmothers, my father, and others taking the hands of those who struggled, sharing communal love, ancient wisdoms, calling out pernicious actions around them, and devoting time to connecting other Black folks to something beyond themselves. The phenomenon was entrancing and transformative for me. Their works embraced the "sacred and the profane" of living as Black in the United States, and intimately engaged with shared struggles and celebrations of successes in all facets of life (J. Evans, 2012, pp.83–84). In this research, the manifestations of a Black spirituality reflected in shared struggles with racism, social injustice, inequity, and celebrations of hopeful resistance were where the phenomenon was shown to intersect with educational leadership. These manifestations of a Black spirituality transform ideas surrounding leadership in higher education as reflected in the lived experiences of Black faculty and staff at PWIs.

This hopeful and resistant leadership stance emerged from our Black community's elders' songs of lamentation, whether gospel or soul, that manifested a sense of hope that would soar and surround us all (Hayes, 2012). West (1999) noted this is not a "deferred

hope" (p. 15), even when the songs may seem to reflect such on the surface. West's ideology is reflected in Black spiritual songs such as "I'll Fly Away" (Brumley, 1932), which brought an aura of freedom from worries and woes to the down and out. In my view, Oatman and Gabriel's (1892) "I'm Pressing On" was not simply a phrase in a song with generalized or slogan-like meaning; it carried with its linguistic tone and sense of bold indignation a fervor that shook the timbers of the soul of Black folks, demonstrating the will and force to persevere and overcome.[3] This fervor echoes from my grandmothers' voices forward into my leadership wisdom today. The power and wisdom in the poetics and rhythms of music as it reflects and responds to manifestations of a Black spirituality is why this dissertation also includes a playlist that readers are invited to explore and connect with as they journey through the phenomenon of this work (See Appendix D).

To understand the connections of leadership, wisdom, and care, it is essential to embrace the expanse of ways our leadership formation felt influence from music to the diaspora of Black cultural expressions reflective of a Black spirituality. Alongside the noted spirituals were uplifting soul music and lyrics from songs such as Withers' "Lean on Me" (1972) , "Grandma's Hands" (1971), and Nina Simone's "Young, Gifted, and Black" (1970) to name but a few. Black artists like Bill Withers, Nina Simone, Al Green, and Billie Holiday shared with me, through their powerful musical and lyrical wisdom, a hopeful resistance and resilience that expanded my spiritual and leadership foundations into the Black artistic cultural realm that would continue to frame my vocational identity and call into academia.

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[3] The spiritual-turned-hymn "I'm Pressing On" by Oatman and Gabriel is a masterful mix of aspiration to an elevated life and toward heaven in the spiritual realm. The hymn is part of the narrative of faith into action that sits at the center of Black resistance in the face of oppressors.

As Hayes (2012) noted in *Forged in the Fiery Furnace*, "Song and dance provided critical aspects of African American [Black] spirituality and hold the power to transform and sustain as well as interject into Black lives to define agency and authority" (pp. 24–25). Once again, this defining of the phenomenon of a Black spirituality brings forth manifestations that this research interwove with critical race theory (CRT) and the concept of agency. In this research, contextually understanding and embracing these aspects of the manifestations of spirituality is evidenced in the sustaining power they provided for me and some participants in this research (Newcomb & Khan, 2014).

Further, this research was designed to reveal the sustaining power that emerges from Black music and the diverse wisdom in some of its lyrics as transmitters of agency and comfort in our lived experience as children, which then may connect to our current calls to educational leadership. The study followed the lived experiences narrative of my life and the lives of four other participants; our environments shifted around us, yet, our connection to our particular Black spirituality remained for most of us as we progressed into our roles in higher education at PWIs. These powerful voices are Black faculty and staff from four different public, predominantly White colleges and universities in the U.S. southeast.

The deeply personal lived experiences as Black professors, advisors, mentors, and leaders, reflected from all of us who participated in this research, will gently emerge from our critical reflections upon the manifestations of a Black spirituality from our youth onward Mitchell & Rosiek, 2006). Together, we reflected on how Black art, music, community, family, and Black cultural expressions couched in our Black spirituality offered moments of inspiration and resistance. Struggles reflected in narratives of authentic experiences—such as my journey from being acknowledged as an advanced and gifted student in northern schools

to having my physical being abused and my intelligence questioned in the South—are intricately bound to formation of agency and leadership and play out in the lyrics of our lives.

Black music and other artistic expressions as elements of a Black spirituality are "a well", supplying renewed energy and a space of spiritual reflection that remains vital in the narratives of participants in this study (Hayes, 2012, p. 14). I felt an abiding sense of strength coupled with loneliness while listening to Luther Vandross' (1981) intimate deconstruction of a life left alone with little recourse in "A House Is Not a Home." For other hopeful inspirational and resistant influences, the words of Black poet and author Langston Hughes reverberated in my spirit when I sat with my cousins on the balconies of our homes in the city, drenched by the warmth of the blazing summer sun and inspired by the fire it created in me. "Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly," wrote Hughes (1994, p. 24).

Each of these elemental representations in Black creative culture also reflected elements of a manifestation of Black spirituality that bolstered my faith that my creator God and my Black community had a greater plan for me, even if this Black life was broken and disjointed for a time. This plan is central to the call to vocation in educational leadership that charges me in my duties as a Black member of academia. This leadership stance also reflects the tradition of finding strength in the power of community and in the wisdom of our elders—wisdom culled from African spirituality and cultural examples (Dantley, 2008; Hayes, 2012). These words, music, and figures manifested a spiritually for me and sustained me in my personal and educational journey even into current educational leadership roles.

It is in these manifestations that aspects of the uniqueness of leadership shaped and inspired by a Black spirituality becomes visible in this introduction. The ebbs and flows

emerge vibrantly in varied forms during this research and simultaneously conjoin with tenets of CRT (a theoretical research tool that offers researchers and practitioners the ability to deconstruct racial and cultural inequities in institutions like education; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and expressions of our agency. These connections are explained in depth in Chapter 2.

CRT highlights racist and institutional injustices brought against Black folks. It also offers instruction to Black folks on methods and strategies to position themselves to better confront these issues as manifestations of Black spirituality can as well (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Through this research, I sought to uncover narratives intersecting with forms of Black spirituality that exemplify, contradict, or clarify this phenomenon's possible positionality in the lived experiences and consciousness of Black faculty and staff in PWIs in higher education.

Because I believe elements of Black spirituality have power to support Black people's ability to "adapt, transcend, and transform" (Stewart, 1997, p. 12) through their sociocultural and sociopolitical natures, my journey toward a life lived in and occupied with educational leadership drew me to this area of research. As it evolved in my life, manifestations of the phenomenon of a Black spirituality transformed my performative[4] identity (i.e., my possible actions, reactions, and purpose) beyond religion, but also my identity as a Black child of a compassionate God gifted with voice to uplift and free others.

The requirements and responsibilities toward community that emerged from this spirituality guide me, like the wisdom of my ancestors and elders, beyond my individual gain. Instead, my call in vocation in educational leadership is to act as a "sword and shield"

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[4] *Performativity* is a conceptual frame that denotes a form of personal agency as embodied within purposeful actions producing power and elements of identity as explicated by Butler (2004).

to educate, aid, and defend others in their life struggles as well.[5] Thus, I hope this study holds implications and applications for the positive transformation of PWIs as their environments and cultures intersect with the lived experiences of Black faculty and staff on their campuses.

This conception of implications for transformation echoes the work of Butler (2004), whose work I read in my later college years. At that time, I saw the concept of performativity and the idea of "becoming, but not yet fully there" in my encounters with institutional leadership (Butler, 2004, p. 21). The public PWIs, which were a part of my educational and work lives, acted at times as barriers to authentic performativity by restricting or ignoring the achievements of Black faculty and staff. In my early years in academia, I did not see my leadership role in confronting campus racial and education equity issues, but I began to exhibit another principal component of Black spirituality iterated in Hayes' (2012) writing, *human agency*, as tied to African cosmology. Hayes' (2012) writing described performative acts, such as my establishing the groundwork for a mentoring program for Black student-athletes, as those of a "chosen apprentice" (p. 26) in African cosmology, which connected me to a future as an educational leader who would act in stewardship for my community.

The "chosen apprentice" agency of my call to vocation began in my youth. As reflected in the lived experiences delineated in the research findings, even at a young age, each performance of a gospel song, high marks on school assignments, or community engagement extolled a bit of my potential beyond the restrictive walls of my life in small-town North Carolina and the imposed limitations that its educational system pressed upon me. My performativity in school, at church functions, and at our huge family reunions—or while deeply listening to my coworkers' and customers' problems while washing cars at my

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[5] From the gospel song, "Wheel in the middle of a wheel" and from Ezekiel as well. "My rock, my sword, my shield...my wheel in the middle of a wheel.

father's gas station—allowed me to perform as a chosen agent through an ancestral legacy of Black spirituality that had power and influence, provided comfort, and manifested itself in ways that transformed me as a Black educational leader with agency (Butler, 2004; St. Pierre, 2011). It also allowed me to confront issues that CRT addresses, such as systemic racism and social inequity, in profound ways (Casteńeda & Zuniga, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2005). My journey into the phenomenon of this research began with a questioning of whether these foundational experiences affected my future as an educational leader at PWIs and why. The communal elements of a manifestation of a Black spirituality invited me to engage with other Black faculty and staff to explore what elements of a Black spirituality might have manifest in their lives as they developed into leaders in education as well.

In light of this early agency and call to vocation, the current research reflects some of the most significant influences on my spiritual being that came from the souls of people around me, people who struggled dramatically yet lived lives steeped in compassion and grace for those in need. Both of my grandmothers lost their first husbands at an early age, yet, were able to raise their children, grandchildren, friends of the family released from prison, and teen mothers through lean times and through their own illnesses. In the midst of these gleaming leadership moments, rooted in the concept of human agency and communal responsibility from ancient African spirituality and brought forth to the United States, these bold women of interracial marriage and love stood proudly in their spirit as they confronted the racism of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s in the United States.

I remember hearing my paternal grandmother, Irene, belting with sassy gusto, "I don't feel no ways tired. I've come too far from where I started from. Nobody told me that the road would be easy. But I don't believe you brought me this far to leave me" (Cleveland,

1980). Before ideas of CRT, such as counter-narrative, were promulgated and elevated in the lives of Black folks, my grandmother was addressing its tenets through her narrative (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). She used her voice, as loud as it was at times, to share narratives that spoke of faith, but also of companionship and community, which ran counter to those espoused by the voices of disenfranchisement around her.

Counter-narrative is a tenet of CRT that positions the narratives of marginalized people above, over, and against narratives told by the dominant society that may diminish, dilute, or deny the positive impacts of the marginalized (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Miss Irene's steadfast, ardent confrontation of the ills of society, offered with grace and compassion and emerging from the agency manifest in the Black spirituality of her life, was a dynamic counter-narrative to those I heard on television and saw in my daily life. The voices of counter-narrative are central to this research and the phenomenon intrinsic to manifestations of a Black spirituality as it both protest pernicious evil actions and promises hope for the beleaguered.

In this research, I spoke from my life's narrative and comingled it with narratives of other participants in the study, knowing and sharing that these narratives do not represent all Black people. And our experiences of Black spirituality are not all people's experiences, for we are a diverse people. As W. Fluker (2009) emphasized in their writing, "African Americans [Blacks] are a diverse people with traditions, religions, and cultural aesthetics reflective of the diaspora of which we are a part. Yet, there remains unity in our diversity" (p.3). With my agency and positionality as researcher and participant, I am entrusted to speak as a Black man through the context of my experiences and knowledge. I am also entrusted to authentically share the lived experiences of the other participants to promote possibilities for

change in higher education. This study shares these lived experiences authentically, compassionately, and ardently.

Therefore, some narratives run counter to the homogenized cultural tropes of the dominant society and also counter to manifestations of Black spirituality in my life. Stylistically, this study embraces the varied expressions that emerged as my voice in this work. Therefore, parts of the writing well be heard in a technical voice, part in the voice of poetics, parts in a theoretical tone, and others quite vividly personal. My scholarly claim for this varied system of research presentation is situated directly in the framework of honoring Black voices and our diaspora of cultural expressions in educational leadership and our journeys in a phenomenological manner.

As Parker Palmer (2000) inspired in the opening quote of this introduction, "[Vocation] comes from listening. I must listen to my life and try to understand what it is truly about" (p.2). This research revolved around deeply listening to a phenomenon that requires reflection on "the things themselves" (Heidegger, 1988, p. 84), rather than how they might be described or sanctioned by others, to properly orient toward hermeneutically engaging with the research findings. Hermeneutics can be described as the act of interpretation and reinterpretation in a contextual setting (Vagle, 2014). Therefore, it is incumbent upon my positionality as researcher and participant, in respect to my calling, to inspire deep listening to "the things themselves" and clarify this research did not have a primarily Christological or religious focus because that was not my method for authentically interpreting and reinterpreting the lived experiences of participants.

My call to resist outside formulations of my research aligns directly with the combative spirituality that West (1999) and Dantley (2008) present in their writings. My

authorial stance is also positioned in some forms of Black spirituality to authentically proclaim ownership of our own Black narratives reflected in the counter-narrative tenet of CRT. The study's openness to the diaspora of counter-narratives also supported the goal of remaining inclusive of the diversity of experiences that are possible in this research, which amplified the validity and reliability of the conclusions and implications.

As Hayes (2012) noted in their research, PWIs have diminshed and demeaned the contributions and distinctive culture of Black Americans as a means of oppression and control for centuries, and their control extended to the realms of religion and Christology (pp. 31–36). Therefore, positioning this research in Christology and religion could have subjugated the lived experiences of Black people in the shadow of dominant White theologies and delineations of Black cultural experiences. By positioning the research in the CRT framework and addressing Black spirituality as a diverse phenomenon, the phenomenological research experienced a "freedom" that Vagle (2014) and Crenshaw et al. (1996) found essential to authentic research practices using phenomenology and CRT, respectively.

As traumatic and difficult narratives were shared, neither the participants nor I were constrained to delimiting tenets or ideologies such as those entangled with Christology and spiritual beliefs constructed by PWIs, which could subvert the authenticity of our lived experiences as Black folks. Further, this respect and honoring of the lived experience descriptions shared in the narratives of this research also required proper acknowledgement of the balance of influences on the manifestations of a Black spirituality in the varied voices.

As a reflective and interpretative qualitative study, the rhythms and flows of this research did not follow the journey of either quantitative or non-phenomenology influenced

qualitative research studies because to remain authentic, work like this must continuously return to the manifestations as its guidance and force (van Manen, 2014; Vagle, 2014). This continual returning to the manifestations themselves and quest for meaning making are central to phenomenological research and also to deepening the research narrative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nealon & Giroux, 2012; Vagle, 2014). As chapters 6 and 7 are experienced, readers may encounter repetition and are invited to remember that returning again and again to the manifestations is a part of experiencing the phenomenology of the research.

Beyond this Chapter 1 introduction, I engage with and reformulate manifestations of the phenomenon of a Black spirituality using CRT and the conceptual framework of agency, both of which are described in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, I provide a review of the pertinent literature to share background information about elements of Black spirituality, how they engage with leadership formation, and their intersections with CRT and the concept of agency. In this chapter, I also explore some of the deficits of current research that seeks to disclose the connectivity between a Black spirituality and leadership in the lived experiences of Black faculty and staff at public PWIs in higher education.

In Chapter 4, I present the methodology I used to explore my research question phenomenologically in depth. Chapter 5 presents the research findings in their narrative format. In Chapter 6, I deconstruct the findings and explore them through discussion in a phenomenological manner through the lenses of CRT and agency. Finally, in Chapter 7, the lived experiences and their connected narratives—as they intersect with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks—inform conclusions and implications of hope and resilience for

educational leaders at PWIs, honoring and elevating voices caught and caged for so very long and encouraging acts of resistance from Black faculty and staff to continue.

With the strength and ardor drawn from participants and from my ancient and present elders, I ensured this study remained entrenched in the phenomenon evolving from manifestations of our Black spirituality even when moments in my self-reflective lived experience and those of the other participants in this study overwhelmed me with mental— and at times physical—stressors. Paris (1995) stated Black spirituality is "embodied" in who Black people are, what they do as community, and why they may persist and resist in a society where their lives are at times devalued and dismissed. The narratives reflected and examined in this research represent this embodied state of being as we share our leadership journeys.

The hermeneutical (i.e., interpretative) and reflective stance of this research aligns with the ethos of a Black spirituality and Black leadership to foster engagement with the creative and resistant spirituality. This resistant stance compels Black people to remain combative and compassionate in their hopeful resistance to outside oppressive structures as fostered by the theoretical framing of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Stewart, 1997; West & Buschendorf, 2014). Engagement by participants, including me, and those who venture to embark on reading and contemplating this work will continuously manifest the process in spirituality "by which people interpret, disclose, formulate, adapt, and innovate reality and their understandings of God within context" (Stewart, 1997, p. 21). Reflecting and engaging with the playlist in the appendices allows for poetic, authorial, lyrical, and intellectual manifestations of a Black spirituality to deconstruct, construct, and embody formations of educational leadership for Black faculty and staff and their institutions.

Finally, it is essential to those engaging with this research to embrace it and understand that it provides a scaffolding of experiences at the personal, professional, and institutional levels of our leadership development. This research is best encountered through envisioning the influences of pertinent traditions and rituals, the Black collective community, Black elder wisdom, inequity in Black education, vocational calls for social justice and racial equity, and authentic voice as counter-narrative in inquiry to "turn to the things themselves," a central element of hermeneutical phenomenological study (Heidegger, as cited in Vagle, 2014, p. 11). Phenomenology, authenticity, and reliability in the manifestations of a Black spirituality encapsulated in this educational leadership study require these elements to be honored with primacy and focus so the narratives of participants are heard throughout this lived experience. An invitation to engage with the curated playlist in Appendix D opens now and continues for the reader at the beginning and end of each chapter. The caged bird sings:

What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?

Or does it explode?

—Langston Hughes (1902–1967)

Chapter 2: Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

My research quest into the possibilities of how manifestations of a Black spirituality in educational leadership could strengthen and sustain the success and retention of Black faculty and staff at public predominantly White institutions (PWIs) began with thinking about theories that could help explain the phenomenon of Black spirituality beyond its tacit, homogenized description.[6] Critical race theory (CRT), with its powerful social justice focus, cultural critique, and hopeful vision, emerged as the centerpiece to my theoretical framework. The work of its historical founders, including Tate (1997), Bell (1980), Crenshaw (1991), and Matsuda (1995) focused on ways in which CRT could work to confront issues of racism, essentialism, and neoliberalism in U.S. society for the advancement of Blacks. These authors presented a "hopeful resistance," an intellectual movement to disclose and illuminate ideas of equity and inclusion that the dominant society seemed to want constricted and obscured, in such a way as to call into question where the civil rights movement had left Blacks. That same questioning stands at the center of issues of Black higher education and the recruitment and retention of Black faculty and staff at public PWIs today.

The same "hopeful resistance" that dispossessed power dynamics and called Black leaders to specific action that inspired Bell (1980), a CRT founder, and CRT writers like Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), is the same "spirit-filled" resistance of my research (Dantley, 2008, p. 6). This "spirit-filled" resistance consists of the actions and will of Black people embodied by the manifestation of a sustaining and driving Creator and collectivism

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[6] My use of the term "Black" rather than "African American" is purposeful as I wish to use the word as a delineating and oppositional force that speaks counter to the dominant "White" institutional powers.

spirit to confront and deconstruct oppressive structures created by those who wish to subjugate them. The hopeful resistance holds promise for new educational leadership education and practices centered in tenets of Black spirituality, which may bridge divides between different racial and ethnic groups in educational institutions. The bridging of these divides calls upon educational institutions to embrace the intrinsic affective attributes of Black spirituality as well as its philosophical center in its interplay with CRT.

This comingling of tenets of a Black spirituality, CRT, and educational leadership can foster uplifting and sustaining power for campus communities as it has for Black people for centuries (Dantley, 2003). This framework centers on Black spirituality specifically because my identity, the identity of the voices I wish to relay and hermeneutically examine, and how our Blackness creates a different dynamic of connections to spirit, call to vocation, and communal/collective responsibilities (Dumas & Ross, 2016). The framework I used supports Black people speaking as Black people, but also reinforces that in our diaspora we are not speaking for all Black people.

In this chapter, I explore the origins, tenets and assumptions, history, and practices of CRT. I critique the theory as it relates to Black spirituality and CRT's uses in educational policy and research. Finally, I delve into the philosophical underpinnings of CRT that allow me to deconstruct the phenomenon of Black spirituality in educational leadership as it relates to achievement and persistence for Black faculty and staff at public PWIs. Beyond these intellectual, academic, and philosophical underpinnings, my direct and essential desire was to produce new analysis of how manifestations of Black spirituality in the professional lives of Black faculty and staff may continually sustain and support educational leaders who embrace its integration into their institutional practices and academic achievements.

C. West (1999) described this hopeful, resistant spirituality as a "practice of those who follow an epistemology that seeks tactics to win against the constraints that bind them" (p. 38). West (1999) used CRT, with its confrontation of the permanence of racism, to substantiate a call to "combative spirituality" that questions power dynamics and offers hope of redemption (p. 39). It is not a warrior stance completely without heart and hope. It is instead about strategy, honor, faith, and resilience, much like CRT at its foundation (Dantley, 2005; West, 1988).

A Historical Review of Critical Race Theory

The philosophical foundations of CRT originate in part in the work of Heidegger, who studied hermeneutics and the phenomenon of meaning making (Vagle, 2014), and Foucault, who explored power/knowledge dynamics (Nealon & Giroux, 2012). These philosophies create the ethos of CRT as an analytical tool that questions interpretations of Black culture, finds meaning away from the dominant society's ideologies, and problematizes control of power and knowledge by a White hegemony, even as the philosophical conscripts are not centered on Black lives in particular (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Vagle, 2014).

Heidegger's phenomenology intersects with CRT concepts such as anti-essentialism. Anti-essentialism in CRT creates arguments in objection to narratives defining the diasporic nature of Black culture with a singular stylized imagery and exoticism of qualities and actions (e.g., stereotyping or eroticizing the Black male as angry, hypersexual, or animalistic) by insisting on a focus on the beings themselves rather than assumptions about them (Vagle, 2014). This deconstruction of essentialism is evident in Heidegger's stance against

subject/object analysis of meaning making (Vagle, 2014).[7] Heidegger's hermeneutical

analysis of phenomena set the stage for using CRT to interrogate how racism continues to

operate in a society many consider postracial by questioning how the dominant society

interprets racism and race to substantiate their power dynamic (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012;

Hiraldo, 2010).

The investigation into Heidegger and Foucault as they interrelate with CRT exists

primarily as foundational reflection on the originators of the theory (Kohli, 2015). They do

play a role in the work of early critical race studies, however. Discussion of Foucault's

philosophy of power/knowledge permeates the tenets of CRT as do reflections on

hermeneutics, and I explore them both in this chapter as I deconstruct each CRT tenet

(Nealon & Giroux, 2012). The history and embodiment of CRT in its formation and

evolution directs this critique.

Critical Race Theory in Origin

CRT originated from a distinct, culturally responsive framework of legal scholarship

that provides a comprehensive ideology from which to frame, deconstruct, analyze, and

evaluate data situated in the experiences of Black people. CRT emphasizes the needs of those

who are oppressed, marginalized, and silenced in a society in response to their ethnicity, race,

color, or national origin combined with their gender and/or socioeconomic status (Tate,

1997). Educational and sociological scholars began examining the intersections of racial

identity and academic achievement through the lenses of nontraditional, race-based

theoretical frameworks such as oppositional culture and "acting White" (Fordham & Ogbu,

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[7] Heidegger's assertion that "the things themselves" are essential to understanding how meaning is made runs counter to other philosophies of the day, which sometimes relegated beings to set labels and actions.

1986), stereotype threat (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), multicultural theory (Banks, 1989) and culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000; Irvine & Hawley, 2011).

Although these theories focused on what were viewed as cultural deficiencies in the Black population, their deconstruction of White hegemonic power practices provided a less-than-ideal model for critical analysis and structural resistance to abusive power dynamics (Griffin et al., 2010, p. 234). CRT emerged, in part, in opposition to this deficit-focused theoretical framing (Carter, 2008; Crenshaw et al., 1996; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Taylor et al., 2016). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) and Ladson-Billings (2005) noted, though CRT has a foundation in legal theory, its tenets allow for integration into educational policy and practice because at the core of critical legal studies (CLS) is the same critical examination of the experiences of Black people in a space controlled by the dominant society. Understanding the legal studies roots of CRT is essential to grasping how the theory frames arguments embedded in analysis of the professional lives of Black faculty and staff at PWIs, which are deeply entrenched in legal precedents (Crenshaw et al., 1996).

Critical Legal Studies

In response to what some legal scholars deemed to be the disempowerment of the civil rights movement, CLS came into prominence during the 1970s (Bell, 1987). CLS exposed the institutionalization of class-based ideologies in purportedly neutral contexts and pointed to the relationship between power and law, questioning the U.S. role in the legitimization of oppressive structures. Similar to Marxist theory, but not identical, the central concerns of CLS are class and market forces (Bell, 1987; Roithmayr, 1999). CLS scholars were the first to challenge traditional liberal ideologies such as universality and legal

autonomy—the notions that truth is static rather than relative and legal reasoning is objective and impartial (Bell, 1987).

Critical scholars, also referred to as "Crits," seek to debunk the myth that the law is "neutral, value-free, and unaffected by social and economic relations, political forces or cultural phenomena" (Brown & Jackson, 2013, p. 12). As Bell (1992) noted, they also refute the ideological notion that justice is blind. By revealing the political nature of legal and economic practices, CLS assumes law and politics are one in the same rather than treating them as separate forms of reasoning (Crenshaw et al., 1996). The central foci of CLS are material inequality and class relations, and its proponents foreground the role of law in creating and perpetuating social inequality.

Some scholars have argued CLS has been marginalized in recent years by its failure to address the rise of neoliberal discourse and its narrative of analytical decline (Blalock, 2015). CLS theorists hold that neoliberalism, a "post-political discourse" (Blalock, 2015, p. 73) in which the condition of individuals and society as a whole is measured in terms of market values, is ubiquitously manifest in the dominant society. Because neoliberalism has been adopted by political conservatives as well as progressive legal scholars, it has effectively replaced liberalism and become invisible while maintaining ubiquity.[8]

Critical Race Theory

I begin the brief history of CRT with its roots in late 1970s Chicago and D. Bell's critical essay, *Serving Two Masters*, which sought a "race conscious perspective focused on the effects of integration on the Black community" (Bell, 1987, p. 2). Unlike other theoretical foundations, CRT can trace its origin to a place and time that distinctly frames its ontology.

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[9] My discussion of neoliberalism and its negative effects on Blacks in academia continues in my examination of the tenets of CRT.

Beginning with Bell, Crenshaw, Matsuda, and others' work in CLS in the 1980s, the early history of CRT was filled with legal analysts, philosophers, and feminist writers (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Taylor et al., 2016).

The critical power of place is exemplified in the transformational culture and ethos of Chicago in the 1980s, which featured a deep frustration from Blacks stemming from objections to actions of White liberals who continually misunderstood and misinterpreted cases like *Brown v. the Board of Education* that were used in a performative manner for Black America (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997). Legal cases began to reflect a post-racial outlook while Black Americans still suffered setbacks in employment, education, housing, and social reform. Incorrect analyses of landmark cases led some civil rights advocates to claim victory even though battles continued.

Bell (1980), in the *Interest Convergence Dilemma*, noted it was "interest convergence" (i.e., White interests in protecting a positive image of the United States at a crucial time) and "material determinism" (i.e., actions of those who supported agendas where they knew they could not lose their status or material gains because of control of outcomes) that pushed the agenda of the previous landmark education rulings (pp.518–520). High levels of empathy, compassion, and liberalist actions, as touted for years, did not propel rulings in cases surrounding civil rights according to CRT theorists like Bell (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 14).

If not for the dominant society's fears over growth of communism and the reputation of the United States on the world stage, the affirmative decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* perhaps would have ended differently (Bell, 1980). The interest of dominant power structures converged with those of minoritized people in the United States, according

to Bell's critical race analysis of the events of that era (Giles, 2010; Tate, 1997). Conversations and critical analysis from A. Freeman at Harvard Law School and Bell in Chicago led to studies such as Delgado's *The Imperial Scholar*, which deeply questioned why civil rights scholarship only included a "closed circle of White scholars" (Crenshaw et al., 1996, p. 12).

The emerging work of CRT with Black intellects and souls represented was centered at the University of Chicago, the site of many social reform movements of the era. University of Chicago was also one of the sites where CLS caught fire. The setting, alive with social and political reforming minds, provided fertile ground for the growth of both a theory and a movement (Bell, 1980). The first large-scale critical legal studies meeting aligned with the first critical race conference held at a convent in Canada. The setting for the conference is telling: the group, much like predecessors such as DuBois and those who formed the NAACP, had to leave the United States to work for change in their own country (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

The debates and interactions were dynamic with the spirit in a space where intense discussions centered on the philosophy of racial inequality and the dangers of misconceptions of equality versus equity in education and society as a whole (Crenshaw et al., 1996). The collective of scholars worked to develop defining tenets of CRT and establish foundational ideologies of how CRT could "interact with and resist other theories" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, pp.11–12). This emergent event occurred in 1989, which means the movement has existed for only 30 years. The fervor of evolution of ideals and youthful vigor still permeate CRT work, even as it is "borrowed, bartered, and betrayed" by those wishing to arbitrate their own issues using it (Crenshaw et al., 1996, p. 47).

Even in its vocal and infantile stage, the intellectual and integral voice of the movement and theory reflected an intrinsic desire to move away from some of the era-defining tones of the civil rights movement concerning understanding and supporting legal and civic racial issues of the time. As the "gains" of the civil rights movement were visible only as incremental steps that were slowly being eroded by lower court decisions, the founders of CRT made moves to develop a systematic way of critically analyzing social, political, and humanistic issues in the United States (Brooks & Newborn, 1994; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Masquelier, 2013; Taylor et al., 2016). But the foundational work of civil, racial, and gender rights leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, Ida B. Wells, Booker T. Washington, Audre Lorde, and Dennis Chavez remain fixtures in the discourse of CRT that help define the struggle for racial and civil equity with hopeful resistance and the combative spirituality that West (1999) also promoted. These authors and activists visualized racial issues from multiple angles but viewed the success of Blacks as a central call for each of them, especially in education.

Echoes of King, DuBois, and Lorde resound in the writings and speeches of CRT era theorists such as Ladson-Billings' (2006) call for education with a "culturally relevant pedagogy," which echoed DuBois's (1903) sentiments on educating Black people for successes rather than utility. The words and theoretical musings on education also come from major authors and contributors to the theory and its activism, including Bell (1980), Delgado and Stefancic (2012), Matsuda (1995), Lopez (2002), Crenshaw (1991), and others. Founding members of the CRT collective brought a varied, inspirational vibe and voice to critical theory and its possibilities (Taylor et al., 2016). Their quest was in direct opposition to the neoliberal (Ayers, 2005) voice propagating an ideology that advances in the civil and

feminist rights arenas had made lasting, deep improvements in institutional systems that had oppressed minoritized groups for decades (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2012). They questioned the presentation of the counter-narrative of a Black perspective on social justice issues such as equity in education. CRT reflects that shifts in the market value of a Black education did not alleviate the oppressive policies that constrain their educational progress.

CRT scholars' incisive ideological and theoretical interpolations of legal and race studies and feminist rhetoric, and their challenge of issues of racism and racial inequity, were united in critical analysis. These interpolations served points of deconstruction of previously dominant epistemologies and ontologies and called into question how interpretations of civil rights actions and rulings actually functioned for Black America (Demery, 2013; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The recent analytical work and wisdom of Ladson-Billings (2013) and Harper (2013) have brought CRT deep into the discipline of education from its legal-critical roots by expanding questioning into culturally relevant pedagogical analyses of Black students, further informing examinations of the professional lives of Black faculty and staff (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Irvine & Hawley, 2011).

Principles and Assumptions of the Theory

The tenets of CRT are fomented in principles and assumptions that provide the framework for discussion and analysis of experiences of Black people using the theory. The theory directly reflects on anti-essentialism, the continual struggle with race and racism in the United States, Whiteness as property—and from this issue, material determinism, the importance of counter-narrative, and finally, interest convergence. All of these tenets are confounded by a structural system that CRT seeks to deconstruct and authentically examine.

Anti-Essentialism: Black Voice, Black Life, and Spirit

Anti-essentialism is the action of resisting stereotyping and cultural misrepresentation by the minoritized segment of a society (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The minoritized group reclaims or lays claim to their identity through epistemology as they use cultural hermeneutics (interpretation of culture and cultural aspects) to set their own symbols and signs (Vagle, 2014). As Dantley (2008) noted, in the diaspora some Blacks work on identity interpretations that strengthen personal and community bonds even as a dominant society and educational structure lays claim to what being "Black" or "spiritual" means. This essentialism may be intentional or unintentional, but as Mattis (2002) and Wingfeld (2007) noted, it has lasting effects on how Black people see themselves. DuBois (1903) also posited this dilemma in *The Souls of Black Folk* as they reflected on the "double consciousness" that Black people struggle under (p. 21). In being forced to exemplify certain characteristics in one world as defined by the dominant society, and struggle to maintain selfhood in their internal margins, Blacks must continually reinterpret their lives.

In a reflection through the lens of Foucault's power/knowledge epistemology, it can be surmised the dominant culture's actions position the minority culture (in this case, the Black culture) into a state of exoticism to claim knowledge and gain control over the disbursement of cultural capital (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Nealon & Giroux, 2012). This exoticism is not about elevating the minoritized people as beings to be celebrated or rarified (Paris, 1995). The same power structure and dynamic that prioritizes other cultural elements as property of the dominant society situates and supports this line of thinking. The role of those claimed in the essentialism is only to present those elements of cultural capital that the dominant culture sees as useful to their asset building (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

As Ladson-Billings (2005) and Hiraldo (2010) noted, essentialism has grown as cultural appropriation and assimilation have conspired to blur the lines that make up the essence of meaning making for Blacks. Anti-essentialism, as a tenet in CRT, seeks to expose the misinterpretations of experience that "borrow" the expressions of culture in a minoritized group (Taylor et al., 2016). This tenet creates a particular space for resisting claims to Black spirituality that tell Blacks not only can anyone with an "open mind" understand the essentialized Black experience, but the experience is common enough to be stereotyped and copied (Demery, 2013; Tate, 1997; Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009).

The anti-essentialist call of CRT confronts this assimilative and homogenizing effect of co-opting experiences with the stark reality that Black lives are different—and the African diaspora differentiates these lives even more (Taylor et al., 2016). That stark contrast reflects the phenomenology and epistemology of Black lives in a restrictive and isolating society. CRT resists the capture and enslavement of teleological and ontological understandings of the Black life as lived (West, 1988). Anti-essentialism brings forth the unique character of voices of color in the United States; for these individuals, their uniqueness comes with authority to speak for themselves—something lost in dominant culture rhetoric that aggregates the Black experience into a series of movie clichés and pernicious stereotyping (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Stewart, 1997).

Whiteness As Property

To understand how CRT looks at "Whiteness as property" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 41) requires a historical turn along the timeline of U.S. and world history. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) noted property ownership rights in Europe created a caste system that held those who owned land as those who possessed power and prestige. This idea of land

holdings also included people held in debt to them and, for husbands, their wives and children. This understanding of property carried over into the United States when Europeans settled in this country. Those who owned property were White because they came in with the force and power to control and dominate (Tate, 1997). Property (e.g., land, other people, goods, and chattel) all ended up in White hands. These possessions transmitted their value to the societal controls of the racial/ethnic group that held them. Whiteness evolved from the characteristics of a group holding power to being power personified in the political, social, economic, and religious realms of the country.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), the concept of "Whiteness as property" emerged in the arena of civic and political rights during the formation of power structures in European countries, and the leaders in the United States sought to emulate them (p. 43). Those who held the power held the rights (Crenshaw et al., 1996). The continuing fight for civil rights brought this objectionable idea into the forefront of what CRT was seeking to expose as serious inequity in our society in the United States (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Parker, 1998).

This tenet of CRT questions how one's phenotype could place a value on a person or delineate who has influence as people may view money or land (Tate, 1997). The answer that scholars like Tate (1997) and others found in CRT centered in institutional and systemic racism that saw Whiteness as valuable and Blackness as not valuable (or less valuable). Critical analysis has revealed Whiteness pervades so many of the power structures in U.S. society that it is not just monetized; it also becomes a systemic tool to claim authority to set value to other things (e.g., minoritized groups, economic structures, education, entertainment) without being challenged (Gillborn, 2013; Smith et al., 2007; West, 1988).

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Watkins (2001) remarked on this idea when writing on Black education in the United States and its White dominant power brokers. They noted Black education was controlled by Whites through a power dynamic that placed ownership of education with Whites—dictating not only content, but also the intrinsic value of those educated.

CRT writers present Watkins' (2001) analysis of the tenet of "Whiteness as property" as taking this understanding of value and status and juxtaposing it with the devaluing of those who do not fit into this equation. CRT also closely examines the methodologies in which "Whiteness" takes ownership of people and their traditions or cultures (i.e., cultural appropriation and borrowing) based on the "right to obtain and hold property," which works in tandem with possessing property by right of existence as White beyond cultural phenomenon. (Crenshaw et al., 1996, p. 64). This conceptualization projects an ideology of a state of "Whiteness" that has value and can be traded, commoditized, and engendered, meaning those who do not live in Whiteness lack this valuable state of being (Tate, 1997). It is important, as Solorzano and Yosso (2002) and Tate (1997) discussed, that we also understand appropriation of this value is unattainable by those who do not fit into this classification.

In the context of Black spirituality, Whiteness as property allows a White dominant society to exercise control and power over how Black spirituality is understood by the larger society and how individuals' expressions in the spirit are considered in their norms (Mattis, 2002; McGuire et al., 2014). The dominant White hegemony considers the spirituality to be "borrowed," which allows them to contain it because this systemic racist stance considers Black spirituality to be equivalent to Black religion (Paris, 1995). Further, the belief that Black spirituality and Black religion are equivalent means, for this hegemonic stricture,

because some elements of Black religion are viewed as originating in the White church, they can further claim ownership (Hayes, 2012). The conceptualization that Whiteness as property could strip away the power of Black spirituality from Blacks because of conflation with constrictive ideas of Black religion's subservient positionality to White religion exemplifies the reasoning behind CRT's role in the examination of this phenomenon in this research.

Whiteness as property is promulgated in our educational systems as Black faculty and staff receive hordes of dominant culture information and experiences at PWIs; yet, few Black culture affirmations are received in the workplace (Dantley, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009). From Woodson's (1933) critique of the education of Black Americans from before slavery and reflected through the modern era, we see that Whiteness as property allows the dominant society to limit the educational opportunities of Black people by devaluing their abilities relative to those of White people (Bondi, 2012). Education for Blacks operated as training rather than expanding opportunities for intellectual exploration and critical analysis that foster upward mobility and social equality (Watkins, 2001; Woodson, 1933). This epistemology remains a detriment to the scholarly, administrative, and equity gains of Black faculty and staff.

Material Determinism and Interest Convergence

Delgado and Stefancic (2012), along with feminist authors like Mattis (2002) and Butler (2010), examined the ideas of material determinism and interest convergence. Material determinism is the concept that possession of materials (e.g., goods, land, ideas, sociopolitical power) in a society determines who has control. Interest convergence describes how minorities in society only obtain what they want or need if it works to the advantage of the dominant society (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Taylor et al., 2016). These authors sought to

shed light on how socioeconomic and political decisions made by the dominant society marginalize Black Americans and other minority groups, which is reflective of Marxist examinations of social/political/economic power dynamics (Bell, 1992).

The authors reflected through CRT on how segregation, equality in opportunity, and social welfare programs have constituted ideologies from the outgrowth of the political or economic interests of hegemonic society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Beginning with enslavement, dominant society members' need for a stable workforce has caused them to create social and political structures and programs that would bring first slaves, then lower-wage workers, into the workforce and reproduce educational systems that limited those individuals' educational, political, and economic growth potential (Watkins, 2001; Woodson, 1933). The assets, or materials, they wished to acquire or sustain determined how they went about bringing their interests and the interests of minoritized populations into alignment. Both DuBois (1903) and DeCuir and Dixson (2004) have pointed out "altruism" is not a primary factor in how, when, and why subjected peoples receive help or their social characterization changes.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) and Tate (1997) discussed Bell's CRT dissection of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case with respect to the idea of "false altruism" and self-interest. These authors illustrate through case review and critical social analysis how interest convergence and material determinism in CRT calls motivations repeatedly into question to foster a deeper understanding of how social issues persist or receive mitigation. Tate (1997) noted this analysis is central for minority group members to understand where changes in their lives occur in community and their community's collective spirit.

Black spirituality, the intrinsic cultural, social, political, and communal tie to a creator God and God's love and power in this world, as viewed through the lens of CRT's interest convergence, calls motivations into question as well (Stewart, 1997). It asks why higher education officials at PWIs tout the strength and dynamic motivation of their Black educational leaders while holding back promotions and investment into the culturally transformative ideas of Black faculty and staff. White institutional power structures receive national attention from the accolades garnered by Black faculty and staff, and lauds Black educational leaders without giving heed to what motivates these leaders to perform in their creative, dynamic, and illuminating ways as they do (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

White hegemonic structures in higher education, through self-interest, acknowledge the promotion of their status while superficially crediting Black leaders' works in affirming their own positionality (Dantley, 2008). The same building and affirming of reputation, and defense of their position of power that the United States received with the court ruling over school desegregation that occurred in the 1960s, is embodied in higher education institutions practices. These practices promote the ideas of minority success to disguise their continued dependency on the promulgation of the dominant ideology (Harper, 2015). The need to be reflective on what these successes mean for the professional lives of Black faculty and staff, who strive to retain emblematic works for the institution, has received little attention (Crenshaw et al., 1996).

Educational inquiry into how Black spirituality can sustain and support Black faculty and staff as they work to attain a deeper level of respect, promotion, and acknowledgement of creative excellence may not seem to have a direct correlation to the dominant society. However, CRT offers an opportunity to explore this knowledge in the interest of the

dominant society and that of Black faculty and staff and educational leaders at PWIs (Dantley, 2003; Harper & Harris, 2012). Historically, top educational administration leaders supported and even applauded spirituality in leadership for Blacks in higher education, as long as it did not stray from the institutional stereotyped norms (Watkins, 2001).

Today's institutional leaders promote what they feel will benefit them in acquiring their goals (e.g., diverse faculty, staff, and student body; a social sense of higher morality; a dynamic of caring and inclusion) and will allow the institution to still govern as a cultural and intellectual determinate in the lives of their minoritized faculty and staff (Giles, 2010; Gillborn, 2013; Mattis, 2000). West (1999), in a reflective analysis of social construction and CRT as they intersect with Black America, pointed out there are "demons that lie in this way of subservient engagement" (p. 79) with Blacks in education and society, claiming to assist in the success of Blacks but in actuality continuing to substantiate the power/knowledge constructions of the hegemony. This critical analysis brings the deconstruction of theory to the critique of neoliberalism.

Critique of Neoliberalism

Liberalism, or neoliberalism as it is more properly cast (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Williamson & Land, 2006), suggests the biggest battles have been won and now our best practice is to seek lives in a "colorblind" world. A colorblind world does not see color as an issue or as a concept used in power dynamics in society (Schofield, 1986). It negates the historical and pernicious nature of racism and racial disparity (Ayers, 2005).

Neoliberalism's colorblind worldview, where society is devoid of racial categorization, fails to analyze critically how acting in a colorblind manner affects the continued aggressions and oppressive experiences of Black Americans and disregards the

privilege and racism embedded in our institutional systems (Tate, 1997; Taylor, 2016). Colorblind analysis of the daily living of minorities of color does not take into account the hegemonic and historical mistreatments of Blacks and its perniciously negative educational, political, economic, and societal effects (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Kim, 2011; Schofield, 1986).

A pervasive discontent with neoliberalism also resounds in West's (1999) critical writing and theory analysis of how the dominant society meters and assesses the "prophetic spirituality" and other culturally distinct portions of Black lives. Prophetic spirituality, as West explained, calls Black leaders to proclaim that their rights to equality and claims to a hopeful future filled with promise for the oppressed exist beyond the power of institutions or political bodies (West & Buchenwald, 2014).

Racism that permeates the educational, work, health, wealth, and relationship lives of a minoritized person of color is not tenable if society simply ignores the person's color. The systematic and historical imprisonment of Black males and the enslavement of Black families to high interest rates and debt does not disappear when stripping color away because embedded racism does not serve the dominant interest to change (West, 1999; Wilmore, 2004). In this way, the CRT tenet analyzing neoliberalism ties into that of interest convergence in powerful and painful ways by questioning motivations and power-laden structural issues. It allows those critiquing CRT to analyze and illuminate how the theory's intersectionality converges from multiple angles as Ladson-Billings (2009) and Harper and Wood (2016) pointed out in their insightful writings on opportunity gaps and culturally relevant teaching.

This intersectionality, with its critique of neoliberalism, also reveals the permanence of race and racism as ubiquitous issues in U.S. society. To uproot racism, one has to delve into the depths of the issue and not be satisfied with overarching symbols of success because this treatment misses the pernicious roots (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In this way, neoliberalism, as seen through CRT, views images of equality (i.e., giving everyone the same portions or chances) as true equity (i.e., giving each person what they need to be successful) when no such parallel exists (Harper & Wood, 2016).

A critique of neoliberalism, especially when examining its place in education, demands questioning the use of empirical goals as a colorblind way of making decisions—especially when it comes to advancing Black faculty and staff retention and achievement. Neoliberalism and colorblind educational interventions may be central to offering opportunities to minoritized groups, but those opportunities become problematic when they are only about balance or parity without regard to pernicious racism and historical injustices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).[9] Nealon and Giroux (2012) expressed well-founded hesitation when it comes to how liberalism understands and embraces inclusivity of cultures and identities. According to these authors, differences are essential to attaining identity in our world, unclouded by neoliberalist thinking that seeks to homogenize disparate peoples in a vain attempt to combat or mediate social and political ills. Black spirituality, like CRT, allows analysis of issues through the uniqueness given to the diaspora of people (Stewart, 1997).

CRT can confront the neoliberalist homogenization that occurs when a dominant group equates the experiences of Black educational leaders, such as Black faculty and staff,

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[9] *Pernicious racism* is racism that not only promoting biases, discrimination, and prejudice; it also damages others' lives within its scope. I use pernicious because of its "evil" undertones when viewed through spirituality.

and other minoritized groups to their own experiences (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Hiraldo (2010) and others have pointed to this co-opting of culture as a liberalism trope of trying to align oneself with a minoritized group to project empathy. What is actually observably projected is false empathy tied to a sense that the liberalist group feels they can only support that which they are able to feel for themselves (Hiraldo, 2010).

Importance of Voice and Counter-Narrative

The distinct voice and narratives of Blacks differentiate their lives and groundings from the dominant society through their character, charisma, and cultured existence (Bell, 1987; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Hiraldo, 2010). Interpretations of Black voices must take into account the diversity in the diaspora of Black lives and thought (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). CRT interrogates the dominant society; questioning its efforts to make all Black voices sound the same and originate in the same experiences, as both Ladson-Billings (2005) and Dixson and Rousseau (2005) have remarked. This ontology reflects the homogenizing effects of White neoliberalism previously outlined in this critique.

Voice is more than what the members of a group may say or project out into the world (J. Evans, 2012; Harper, 2015). In its semiotics, the voice of Black folks has both sign and symbol in its cultural expressions. The voice of Black people reverberates with the echoes of struggles from our past, of triumphs in the face of adversity, and with the truth of how cultural aspects of our lives, like spirituality, aid in our striving toward success (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Mattis, 2002; West, 1988). The voice of this minoritized people reflects an epistemological turn away from how others may know them. Instead, voice emerges as narrative and counter-narrative ways of honoring self and Black selfhood, essential in the

achievements and engagement of Black faculty and staff at public PWIs (Delgado &
Stefancic, 2012).

The complexities of identity swirl in this dynamic as CRT speaks about the
difficulties inherent in living into expressive Blackness and resisting the stereotype of the
narrative created for them. The double consciousness DuBois (1903) spoke of, which belies a
life lived immersed in dueling ontologies, presents another angle in the complex web that
Spivak (1999) pointed to as living as "margin and center" in a society's composition.

Spivak's (1999) margin and center examination of this positionality directs analysis
of Black consciousness as being both placed outside the lived space containing social norms
controlled by the dominant culture and also situated center to Black lives as a tool of
survival. What this perspective comes discussions of narrative for Black educational leaders
is a contestation of how PWIs move Black faculty and staff around in their institutions
without respect for their cultural and intellectual centers. They ask Black faculty and staff to
perform as members of the community, but never truly make successful moves to bring their
voices from the margins (Dantley, 2008). Black spirituality in educational leadership offers
critical connections that erase margins by delineating all of the community as part of one
communal collective, bringing margin in as center (J. Evans, 2012; Spivak, 1999).

Narratives that culminate in the gathering of collective voices of Blacks can produce
rich hermeneutical opportunities when engaged through the lens of CRT (Vagle, 2014).
When designing and conducting research into the spirituality manifest in the lives of Black
educational leaders in higher education, spirituality that promotes retention, respect, and
creative achievement, the narratives can be central to critically engaging with leaders'
experiences. This shift brings the margin into central focus and offers institutional power to

those on the margin (margin-as-center) (Butler, 1997).To understand the phenomenon in its prophetic form that calls to action, as West (1988), Dantley (2012), Giles (2010), and Ellison (1993) have presented it, research must continually navigate between understandings of a collective culture and interpretations of selfhood in the margin-as-center technique of analysis (Spivak, 1999).

Confronting Race and Racism with Love

These narratives lifted up in protest bring out another tenet of CRT, which is confronting issues of race and racism in the United States. Blacks who work in higher education are not immune to the issues of race and racism as they push to advance in their careers and educational pursuits. Our Black faculty and staff remain locked in this struggle as well—a struggle that continues from before slavery (Watkins, 2001; Woodson, 1933). CRT interrogates how racism permeates an area (e.g., education) that presents itself as a bastion of enlightened thought and enhanced freedoms (Crenshaw et al., 1996). The face of racism in higher education prevails even on the hallowed intellectual grounds of esteemed PWIs (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Giles, 2010).

Hopeful resistance to this institutionalized racism shows up in the form of combative spirituality, as defined by West (1999) and expressed by Blacks in higher education seeking to mediate with love and spirit. This spirituality confronts racism, as CRT calls us to do, by aggressively establishing the prophetic call to positive social justice action as center and foundation in efforts to upend racism (Dantley, 2008; West, 1999). Hopeful resistance offers a critical voice that calls out instances and structures of racism in our educational systems, creates opportunities to discover ways in which our Black faculty and staff can confront and expose racist microaggressions and embedded racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Taylor et

al., 2016). This philosophical movement can unmask the subtle manner in which racism embeds itself into the environment of higher education and gives Black leaders the strength in purpose and vision to challenge institutional affronts (Taylor et al., 2016).

Racism and issues of race may thrive in environments where the liberalism of the institution tells minoritized faculty and staff that their voices already reside in the homogeneous bureaucracy of equal employment and promotion policies (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). The combative spirit West (1999) has often spoken about does not take the policies of White institutional power structures in higher education as having unobscured vision beyond their liberal ideal selves. Institutional practices, though striving for equality, are not offering equity in outcomes (Bell, 2004; Dantley, 2008; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005).

The permanence of race and racism as issues in U.S. culture strike at the heart of the spiritually grounded and directed strivings of Black faculty and staff as they pursue greater achievement or, at the very least, institutional survival. So much hope and resistance is called for, and yet, stands as a dream deferred for many Black faculty and staff at PWIs. Combative spirituality exercises spiritual agency to confound the permanence of racism, but these issues tend to exert a tremendous drain on the professional and intellectual lives of Black faculty and staff at PWIs (West, 1999). Embedded racism also acts as a trap laid in an institution of higher learning for people to fall into unknowingly (Watkins, 2001). Therefore, CRT calls upon Black higher education leaders to save PWIs from racism's obstructive powers and demand real change (Dantley, 2008; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005).

The social justice impetus of CRT requires Black leaders to take on the charge to hold institutions accountable until there is positive change seen and felt by Black faculty and staff (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harper, 2013). This change does not happen easily; hence, there

is need for a combative stance that brings spiritual hope to bear in a fearless manner against the dominant culture's negative power structures in education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). It is important to ask if the calling out of institutionalized racism, the lifting of voices in narrative witness, and the shouting directed to critically deconstruct neoliberalist thought can be enough to spiritually support the success of Black faculty and staff leaders in higher education. An analysis of CRT and its possibilities for educational inquiry require examination from this point.

Critique of Critical Race As a Theory in Relation to Educational Inquiry

A critique of CRT in relation to educational inquiry must account for its ramifications for issues of social justice, its power to bring light to the narrative of Black educational leaders as faculty and staff, and its open critique of the liberalism that permeates higher education. The relative youth of critical race studies and deconstruction as a theory does not allow for the depth of critique that would be possible with more senior theories like social constructionism. However, one can see Foucault's (1995) use of the power/knowledge dynamic. One can also see Heidegger's "principles of interpretation and meaning-making" in this theory, which provide solid roots from which to grow (Heidegger, 1988, p. 27).

CRT's interrogation of how meaning making for Black faculty and staff offers insights into retaining them through understanding Black spirituality's strengths can inspire transformation of campus cultures (Vagle, 2014). Using CRT also brings forth questions about the power and shape of knowledge in higher education. CRT produces research that makes tangible, ideological points for educational study that can facilitate evolutions in thinking and creating at the institutional level as well as for prompting action among practitioners (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

As An Instrument of Social Justice

West (1988) remarked that environments couched in CRT could produce "communities of hope" that would guide and sustain Blacks and other minoritized peoples. These communities of hope are a central idea in the social justice fight for equity and freedoms for oppressed groups of people in the midst of their struggles. CRT can act as an instrument of social justice for activists seeking positive change for those subjected to the dominant society's inequities, including inequities perpetuated in higher education. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) made an important point when they stated, "Critical race theory should be used alongside social justice practices" and "was not built to replace the work of the practitioner" (p. 104). This point is essential to understanding where CRT and educational inquiry can intermingle because the theory is not a fix-all for the ills that come out of educational inquiry. CRT is an active theory that requires participants to immerse its tenets into their inquiry (Lynn et al., 2002).

Social justice issues, such as inequities in employment and job status as well as cultural essentialism for Black faculty and staff, fall in the scope of educational inquiry and CRT can be used in these cases to draw respect for the narratives of disenfranchised populations (Crenshaw et al., 1996). Educational inquiry can benefit from CRT by using it to cull the truth of experience from the statistical analyses of program-mandated reporting and pairing and comparing the statistical data with data from counter-narratives (Harper, 2013; Tate, 1997; Tillman, 2002; Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009). Farber and Sherry (1997) after earlier objections, recently reiterated their objections to CRT, stating it does not go far enough to keep institutions actively involved in social justice issues and movements. They previously made claims that CRT left its legal activist roots behind and is now as removed

from the lives of the oppressed as its interpretivism predecessors (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Supporters and theorists who confront this criticism speak of all the possible advances that would be possible by fusing the tenets of the theory into strategies to combat the social justice issues of racism, issues with community structures, and cultural appropriation in educational inquiry. They see CRT as a set of tools an activist may use to counteract the power dynamics of dominant institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Current theorists point to the veracity of using tenets, such as exposing Whiteness as property and anti-essentialism to create oppositional thinking and action against practices built to subjugate experiences of Black faculty and staff (Taylor et al., 2016). Educational inquiry using CRT can strengthen hopeful resistance for the affected populations by showing the promise of equal success needs to be coupled with equity in resources and institutional achievement (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Hiraldo, 2010).

As An Illuminator to Truth in Counter-Narratives

Judges Michael Roberts and Arthur Leiman, along with author Daniel Farber, are among the critics who take issue with the use of stories and narratives as evidence of the struggles of oppressed and marginalized groups (Farber & Sherry, 1997). They claim the "voices" held up as examples and for validity are either anomalies or taken as an overarching representational sample of the experiences of minoritized peoples (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Taylor et al., 2016). Critics have also argued the qualitative work of narratives leaves too much room for interpretation (Glesne, 2006; Kvale, 1996; Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 2014). They point to misstatements by early CRT writers as proof the foundational work of the theory is not stable (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Legal authorities

like Roberts have led the charge on CRT as simply a tool of racial and separatist propaganda that promotes the agenda of a segment of society not versed in theoretical thought. Yet, theoretical traditions flow throughout the work in CRT as previously discussed (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Taylor et al., 2016).

CRT also stands up against these critiques by casting light on how the disparate voices of a minoritized community come together to form the narrative that combats social injustices and brings hope in its critique (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harper & Harris, 2012). The amalgam of counter-narratives from many voices of protest that makes up the critical response to social and educational issues shows promise in the midst of struggle for inquiry. Contrary to what the critics of CRT put forth, the tenets of the theory pull from analysis that has depth beyond what statistical reporting and analysis alone can tell a researcher (Creswell, 2009; Esterberg, 2002; Giles, 2010; Glesne, 2006). Supporters of CRT, especially in education inquiry, point to this depth of data in experiential analysis as they show how experiences with tracking, racial discrimination in workplace practices, and the resegregation of public schools affects the education of Blacks and also Whites (Guerra & Nelson, 2010; Hall, 2006; Lynn et al., 2002).

The experiences as told are not simple "stories" that hold only mythical understandings and spurious data. This power-laden criticism speaks to the ways the dominant society seeks to control and denigrate systems of resistance that threaten their hegemonic institutional structures (Dantley, 2008; Harper, 2015; Ladson-Billings 2013; Watkins, 2001; West, 1999). The critics' analysis may be obscuring their entanglement into the same system that CRT combats and contravenes (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). The value of counter-narrative emerges as even more salient when cast through Black spirituality as it

integrates with educational leadership practices, as they intertwine to restore power and identity to a marginalized people. This systemic entanglement can obscure the relevance of the lived experiences of Black faculty and staff at PWIs as well as the manifestations of a Black spirituality.

Educational Inquiry and the Critique of Neoliberalism

CRT's criticism of neoliberalism causes issues for this group of theory analysts as well—especially when the critique is of liberalism in education.[10] They present defensive arguments grounded in anti-deconstructionist thought because "they come from the same liberal agenda that seeks to help those oppressed by other institutional systems" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 64). Neoliberals see CRT as disrupting the institutional structures of higher education without providing solutions other than those already affirmed. The neoliberals in higher education left the forefront of the fight for equity years ago and now devote far too much time and effort reminiscing about past victories while neglecting the present woes according (Bernal & Villalpando, 2016; Dantley, 2005; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

In *The Apartheid of Knowledge in Academia*, Bernal and Villalpando (2016) argued neoliberalism allows the dominant society to meter what counts as "legitimate" knowledge in academia by claiming universities exist above systems of racism and subservience. Instead of joining the battle cry over the struggles of Black scholars and faculty and staff, neoliberals believe the system already evolved with respect to equality in opportunity for advancing

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[10] *Neoliberalism* will be used in this context to characterize those promoting and supporting free-market policies that restrict the influences of state regulations and trade restrictions to the perceived detriment of those who are not socioeconomically able to take advantage of policy shifts. It carries with it the idea of a free market in education, which would problematically disenfranchise the poor, minorities, and those with less social capital.

ideas and sharing the power of knowledge, thus negating the necessity of confrontation (Taylor et al., 2016).

CRT asserts the narrative of neoliberalism perpetuates an insidious fallacy—a dangerous error in critical thinking and logic (West, 1999). Critics present stances founded on neoliberalism's past ties to transformative activism as a response to the questions CRT raises (Kumasi, 2011). Theorists in CRT state they are not seeking to destroy neoliberalism, but instead to disrupt neoliberalism's erring logic to renew support for the voices that abound in minoritized populations—especially in our educational systems (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Finally, those who use CRT critique the neoliberal stance of "Haven't we done enough?" as a self-serving attitude (Tushnet, 2016). Black faculty and staff continue to struggle against stereotypes and for promotion and acknowledgement of creative endeavors at PWIs (Harper, 2015). Researchers report that Blacks at PWIs see the education policies and programs failing to fulfill promises of victories from the past (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). Narrative responses to these continued struggles contradict the conceptualization of the work of equity as being finished by saying "We have not done enough and must seek other solutions." In their quest for Black faculty and staff success, educational leaders seek revisions to obscure and sometimes occluded racist benchmarks (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Mattis, 2002; Tate, 1997).

Implications for Critical Race Theory As a Framework

CRT provides a sound backdrop for analyzing issues of racism in education and institutional power differentials, critiquing how leaders inform institutional practices that foster success in Black faculty and staff, and critically researching how Black spirituality

works for educational leaders in their best practices (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Donner, 2005; Stewart, 1997; Tate, 1997). This critical analysis actively pursues counter-narratives and shifts in interest convergences to reveal areas of social justice reform that liberate the achievements of a subjected group—in this case Black faculty and staff (Wood & Hilton, 2012). CRT's implications for serving as a foundation for understanding and analyzing the intricacies of Black spirituality in educational leadership point to a central unifying element, which is the (re)formation of Black higher education in the United States. Black spirituality and CRT both resonate with hopeful resistance and tensions with dominant power structure issues in social justice narratives and educational equity with deep historical lineages (Watkins, 2001).

CRT provides a foundation for analyzing the struggles of Blacks in higher education to generate insights into how Black spirituality's strengths, when exemplified by Black educational leaders, present best practices for the advancement of Black faculty and staff. Using the theoretical framing of CRT allowed me to look at issues surrounding Blacks in higher education and Black spirituality in leadership from a culturally relevant narrative point of view. The research participants' narratives and the hopeful critical analysis of the tenets of CRT critically supported a transformative climate at PWIs. These counter-narratives emanated from their authentic position in the lives of Black folks as lived and revealed practices that aid in elevating the recruitment, retention rates, and acknowledgement of scholarly creativity for Black faculty and staff.

CRT also created a space in my research for the anti-essentialism that would not have been possible with another theory or a quantitative approach. Data-driven analyses such as those developed by the National Center for Education Statistics fulfill a purpose, but limit

analysis by essentializing aspects of the experiences of Black faculty and staff without examining underlying factors that emerge in qualitative narrative research (Clandinin, 2013; Glesne, 2006; Harper, 2015; Merriam, 2002). CRT supports a validity of difference that shows the elements of Black educational leadership, Black spirituality, and Black faculty and staff achievements at PWIs are unique. Institutions that ignore or diminish the importance of critical narratives miss cues for best practices that could help revive and transform higher education. Anti-essentialism tells us quantitative data on Black spirituality (what little exists) only reveals a partial reflection of Black spirituality's power to help transform leadership and experiences in education because these data focus on elements that align with the dominant society (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Hiraldo, 2010; Stewart, 1997).

CRT offers insight into how dominant institutions negate the value of Black spirituality in educational leadership. The theory highlights the unique narratives of Blacks in response to limited viewpoints from the dominant society that discount the ability of Black spirituality to dispossess power from human control. CRT's tenet of counter-narrative provides a clarifying and distinguished vocal presence juxtaposed with the dominant society's narrative of racial and cultural identity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Nealon & Giroux, 2012; Stewart, 1997).

CRT can counter ideas of race-neutral objective analysis and Whiteness as property by using analysis of Black spirituality's concepts of truth to look to other sources of validity. Holding to the power of truth beyond human self-interests directly resists the hegemony that routinely tells the world there is only one "truth" to be learned, known, and promoted— "White truth" (Harper, 2015; Mattis, 2002). Opening up the complexity of truth to deeper investigation is pivotal for deconstructing issues in education, especially for Black

educational leaders seeking to use their experiences to strengthen their success. CRT can direct them to ask questions about how knowledge is given and received in the Black community.

Issues of embedded racism and educational inequality lie under the surface at PWIs (West, 1988). CRT unmasks the "two-headed hydra" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 88) of covert racism and ordinariness of White privilege to expose them to critique and look past them for educational solutions. These foundational understandings are useful in discussion of how Black leaders in higher education will understand their Black spirituality as a tool to expose covert obstacles by establishing their God-given freedom to question institutional practices (Stewart, 1997; West, 1988).

In a critique of institutional work, CRT unmasks the privilege embedded in neoliberalism as well (Ladson-Billings, 2005). This action requires a research positionality that uses an anti-neoliberalism stance as an impetus to examine how some researchers believe they can critique the wrongs of others in education without examining their own practices. Continual reflexive work, like that inherent in the deep reflective practices of Black spirituality and CRT, brings forth this issue—not to noncritically deconstruct but instead to be instructive in how to use this incisive privilege to foster a better educational environment for all faculty and staff (Wood & Hilton, 2012).

In addition, the theory is reflective, critical, and respectful of cultural voice, offers a call to action, and addresses institutionalized issues of racism, privilege, and equity, as does the narrative in my own life. CRT also calls out the essentialism of a dominant power structure that views the experiences of Black educational leaders in one or two ways, each way being only the views coming from the dominant society's epistemology (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2012). The double-consciousness that Black educational leaders must operate under to be successful resonates in CRT and in the resistance of Black spirituality (DuBois, 1903). Either the dominant sector of society promotes the experiences reflective of the White hegemonic representation of Black spirituality, or they present the spirituality as actually theirs, but borrowed and re-imagined by people of color (Stewart, 1997). CRT reflects on these challenges and produces resistance that interweaves with the combative stance of Black spirituality to deconstruct and disaffirm the narrative of the prevailing hegemony.

Conclusion

CRT emerged as a pivotal movement and theoretical force in the cultural and racial politics of education from the 1980s forward. With the election of former President Obama, critics quickly pronounced the completion of the work of CRT and the "overstatement of the continued ills of race in America" from critical theorists (Taylor, 2016, p. 5). Lagging recruitment, retention, and supportive work environments for a majority of Black faculty and staff tell a different story. They reveal the incomplete nature of race work in the United States. CRT's social and racial justice aims remain essential to the uplifting of Black faculty and staff.

The examination of a phenomenon such as Black spirituality as it relates to strengthening access and achievement for Black faculty and staff requires this critically and culturally intuitive theory. CRT respects the nuances of Black spirituality and leadership while providing "rigor in analysis for the educational policy issues" that interact with them (Crenshaw et al., 1996, p. 87). CRT's "racial analysis can deepen understandings of educational barriers for faculty and staff of color as well as explore how these barriers are resisted and overcome" (Taylor, 2016, p. 8). By challenging the Eurocentric epistemology

and resisting White normative notions of objectivity and knowledge in education, CRT presents opportunities for educational inquiry, sustained dialogues toward deeper cultural understandings, and transformational acts. However, as Bell (1987) noted at the beginning of CRT's development, "Critical race theory will not magically transform this world" (p. 12). With hope, though, come DuBois' (1970) words: "Here is the chance for young men and women of devotion to lift up the banner of humanity and march towards a civilization that is free, intelligent, healthy, and unafraid" (p. 153).

Conceptual Framework: Agency As Liberation and Constraint

The concept of agency relates to spirituality and to those who have spirituality as a distinct historical, social, ethnic, racial, political, and critical part of their lives in two transformational ways. Agency can be a tool that shapes and forms liberation of thought, action, and self in freedom from outside forces. But agency may also be signified by ideas of constraint as to who a person is. Gertrude Stein used the term in the poem "Identity" to describe that which remains defined by forces from outside (Nealon & Giroux, 2012, p. 255). In this bi-fold manner, agency can be said to place the person in a "double bind" that both exists in a free state at the margins and one of concealment under the pressures of constraining forces declaimed but still in power (Spivak, 1993). The current research conceptualized agency through my personal narrative stance.

In this examination of Black spirituality and agency, it is essential to understand the perspective from which my analysis and conceptualization flows. For me, agency is that ability of individuals or groups to respond to hegemonic restrictions, denials, and oppression using their capacity to make choices and give voice in objection within contexts. This ability to act and respond is complex when viewed through the elemental experiences of a Black

spirituality, which for some provides a conviction to purpose and an amplification of their central ethos derived from ancestral wisdom. Within the context of lived experiences of leadership developed through these elements of a Black spirituality then arises the possibilities of a "performativity" of agency that will be further explained throughout this examination of conceptual framework (Butler, 1997, p. 17). But, put simply, the agency that I is the focus of my research is the power and authority to choose and respond endowed and supported through a Black spirituality.

A primary issue with this defining and deconstruction of binary discourse and thinking is, for some ethnic and racial groups, constraints of agency in spirituality actually give them freedom and agency's liberative properties offer them obligations that hold them. Derrida (1997) cautioned people to be wary of such definitions in this case because they tend to work from an exclusionary angle or "not this but that" (p. 11) ways of thinking and knowing. Agency is, therefore, an essential concept that must be investigated in a manner that takes into account its multiplicity of attributes when deconstructed into its multidimensional effects and signifiers. The efforts to understand spirituality of persons of color through the concept of agency requires the same level of work amidst the deconstruction of how particular agency is constructive in identity.[11]

Thinking Differently Through Agency

Agency constitutes a multidimensional means to unveil ourselves to the world around us in our spirituality as distinctive of a people and a practice unlike others. The action of agency allows Black people to be the subject of constraint by the dominant other and enjoined to freedom in one's own intellectual and emotional sanctuary of self (Hegel, trans.

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[11] I denote "persons of color" as Black people in this instance knowing that persons of color come in a range of racial/ethnic backgrounds.

1977). But in this same light, agency provides a piece of the development of selfhood that builds us as responsible beings through our freedoms and frees us by constraining the ways in which the outside world can approach and drape over us.

This other aspect of our double-bind perspective adds another plane of understanding and insight into how we create and respond to the world around us and interweave with the beings we encounter at the margins and in their space—both freed and protected and protected and freed (Nealon & Giroux, 2012). The interaction should not be thought of as involving simply an actor and a director, or as one who controls or is controlled, because there is so much more at work in this interplay. Factors of self-reflection and public duty offer both freedom and constraints in the case of spirituality (Bellah et al., 1990). The structure and agency debate is misinformed, as it seeks to describe a dialectic that has only two sides. Agency functions in a conversation with structures, with itself, and with the intrinsic moral value of person(s) as examined and understood (Nealon and Giroux, 2012).

The interplay between all these deconstructed factors is where I find agency as freedom to be at its most dynamic and intriguing. When the agency of the person says, "I lay claim to this way of knowing spirituality" and the structures around reply, "Yes, this is your claim to make," I see a simple interaction with great depth. The power structure has not interfered with the person. At the same time, the person has not denied their marginal stance and shunned their power to claim. This power to claim power is essential in what happens in another dimension of agency (Butler, 2004).

When I claim power, I also claim responsibility for that power. In this way, I accept the constraints tied to that claim and also the claims of the structures that are then placed on me (Bellah et al., 1990). In my freedom, I find a point of obligation similar to how those who

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do feminist research find freedom in their disclosure but also feel responsible to those included in their disclosure (Davies & Gannon, 2012). The freedom coming to me through the auspices of agency have placed me at the center of my margin, but in the margins of others who now may make claim to part of my identity (Spivak, 1999).

This doubling over of constraint onto liberation in agency provides a space for me to give away some of my control and liberation to enable the freedoms of others. In the realm of spirituality, this move is one that helps define the moral character and fortitude of an individual (Bellah et al., 1990). The push and pull between liberation and constraint goes up and down and back and forth just as the planes of morality and fortitude in resistance continually reconfigure in the same patterns. Those with a center in spirituality are constantly in the double bind of being servant to and being served—are they to spend their lives reaching up and around to that which is said to control them, are they to reach out to those around them who are seen as in need of them, or are they called to reach in themselves to produce a self that fosters an internal peace and wisdom (DuBois, 1903)?

The both/and crisis of identity for Blacks in spirituality comes with what may be an innate knowing that their agency is tied to more than a scriptural rubric or religious institutional dogma (West, 1988). The multidimensionality of Blacks' agency must mean more because it has so many different forms when deconstructed in line with their identities. The power structures that applaud their inclusion of spirituality as a practice seek to control by draping an agency over this group of people by describing and prescribing only certain practices as faithful to spirituality (Stewart, 1997). This control marginalizes the inherent historical, cultural, ethnic, and devotional differences that are central to the margin of Black people (Wood & Hilton, 2012).

Academic and Personal Centrality of Agency

This marginalization of agency resonates as a central issue for me in higher education because it detracts from the experiences and socio-intellectual capital of Blacks across a range of identity factors, stripping away moments of power for us. The academic world can be a hostile environment for agency in general. It can be even more hostile in the case of persons of color and their agency in spirituality. At primary issue may be the distaste for mixing what some see as religious expression with intellectual pursuits. For others, the issue may be that mixing the academic and the spiritual makes them uncomfortable and suspicious of others' motives. Whatever the groundings, the outcomes have power to marginalize a sector of people already marginalized by institutional controls.

The liberation of agency in education, when looking through a cultural identity such as spiritualism, comes from an understanding that the center (i.e., educational institutions) is reacting to itself feeling like it has been marginalized. It begs the question: Is my control so disrespected or weak that this person would choose to express themselves in their own right without bending to my power? Fear, as Sue (2003) has pointed out when speaking of racism, works in both directions. The person being controlled fears for something (e.g., their life, their job, their family), and the institution also fears it will lose control. In each case, agency is at play. A system like education cannot afford to lose control, so it doubles down on agency whenever possible. Yet, some of us take this constraint of agency and turn it into a way of finding support for our students and creating new spaces for knowledge on our campuses—once again, constraint turns into freedom.

The concept that a person can both have agency and also be controlled in its agency is part of what makes power structures and the analysis of them quite dynamic as co-

rationalities (Butler, 1997). How is an overarching power schema both giving orders and being coerced (not in the pejorative sense) into taking them? We must always also look at the "social and historical context of events and actions" to meter how agency played out (Nealon & Giroux, 2012, p. 264). In education and in my life, the power to rend from power structures the things that I and others need has come many times from giving the institutions what they want while maintaining my identity. I let them know me as they need to know me while simultaneously pulling new ways of knowing me back from them. This way of interacting has also been helpful in my classroom and in my work as a minister.

To Know Beyond How We Are Known

The co-rationalities of agency open up new ways of considering the nature of knowledge and reality for me, as a person of color, in my quest to better understand how spirituality operates on multivalent levels—what is positive at one point may be negative at another and vice versa. The quest to know not only how people wish to be known, but also how to know them and myself beyond where and how we are known presently, brings agency and its core force in identity formation into play. The social constructs, as noted by Davies and Gannon (2012), tend to restrict and confine the individual realities of our lives in such a way that our stories are replaced by a grand narrative that speaks nothing to our ways of knowing and being.

Nowhere in spiritual expression is this idea as prevalent as in the dominant Christian society's portrayal of Black people in their self-expression. If we are not stomping on the floor and singing praises, then we are not being spiritual if we are Black. Our social construct as defined by the dominant culture deems it "unfaithful" if our celebrations of spirituality are quiet mediations, or long walks, or writing out our feelings (Hayes, 2012). Agency is

constrained even as the outside tells us that we are free to express ourselves (Nealon & Giroux, 2012). What an understanding of agency as multidimensional affords us is the ability to see the work of the power structure in defining our "self," take control of that definition, and turn it on its head. The power claimed comes from disruption of the grand narrative. It vibrates and resounds at the marginalizing of that narrative and the centering of actual experience and expression from persons of color. Freedom has come from constraint and the constraint has led to an even greater freedom. Agency to choose when and where these actions happen within our lived experience contexts springs forth from intra-action in the manifestations of a Black spirituality or elements that can be seen as tied to this cultural, social, intellectual, and cosmological force (Dantley, 2005; Stewart, 1997).

Chapter 3: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature surrounding the understandings of manifestations of Black spirituality by Black educational leaders (i.e., faculty and staff) in strengthening and sustaining their lived experiences at public predominantly White institutions (PWIs) of higher education. This practice is a significant educational issue because there is wisdom in the belief informing the practices of these faculty and staff, which may offer perspectives that elevate the retention and resilience of Black faculty and staff struggling in their minoritized and sometimes essentialized positions (Dantley, 2008; Harper & Wood, 2016; West, 1999).

The purpose of this review was to investigate the research that explored how the integration of manifestations of Black spirituality in educational leadership practices might transform this critical issue (Herndon, 2003). The overarching directive was to further the research agenda and pedagogical applications in education to advance the knowledge base for educational and institutional leaders at public PWIs (Granberg-Michaelson, 2004). The chapter addresses areas of future research so these groups can create dimensions of authentic engagement through advances in programming, greater cultural and personal understanding in campus climates, and resistance to college systems that obstruct equity in education (Dantley, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2013; West, 1999).

An educational and campus community crisis exists for Black faculty and staff at public PWIs because their experience in academe reflects institutionally oppressive structures and practices that delimit opportunities to elevate their achievements and authentic narratives (Brown, 2005; Harper, 2013; West, 1999). Administrations at PWIs have found difficulty recruiting, retaining, and supporting Black faculty and staff who have solid educational

credentials, because they encounter ontological conflicts with the White hegemony of the university (Granberg-Michaelson, 2004; Harper, 2015; Humphries, 1994; Lynn et al., 2002; Tushnet, 2016).

According to higher education leaders from PWIs, Black faculty and staff do not succeed because of issues spanning from lack of preparation for scholarly research, to choosing roles as student advocates and mentors over national recognition, to issues encompassed in finding community in their institutions (Harper, 2013; Tillman, 2002). Although these issues do exist for some Black faculty and staff, they can exist for White faculty and staff who still achieve advanced status at these PWIs. Descriptions of the issues surrounding Black faculty and staff achievements and retention remain surface-level statistical analyses based on outcomes rather than research into experiential, formative evaluations, and are similar to the constraints of research on the Black college student experience (Lynn et al., 2002; Parker, 1998; Taylor et al., 2016).

Research into the inclusion of specific cultural identity issues, inquiry into the ontological process of the academy for Black faculty and staff, and the community/cultural essence that pervades the Black experience at PWIs stands at the center of critical inquiry for higher education. The examination of elements of Black leadership practices (specifically Black spirituality) grounded in their culturally relevant experiences may provide new epistemologies for educating Black faculty and staff and intersecting with their achievement issues (Giles, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Irvine & Hawley, 2011; West, 1999). This gap in research practices and knowledge is why future inquiry is necessary.

Clarification of cultural aspects that affect the education of Black faculty and staff such as ideologies of Black spirituality; comparative research involving best practices of

highly selective institutions, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU)s, and regional universities; and inquiry into how Black educational leaders use their enculturated perspectives is needed (Herndon, 2003; Hikes, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2013). We know little about the perceptions and experiences of manifestations of spirituality in Black educational leadership in relation to Black faculty and staff recruitment, resilience, and retention, especially at PWIs (Harper, 2013; Parker, 1998; Taylor et al., 2016). This chapter addresses the historical perspectives surrounding Black education in the United States and the social justice power of the ideologies of Black spirituality as manifest in best practices of Black educational leaders, examines the historical and contemporary scholarship surrounding the issue of Black faculty and staff achievement, and presents areas for future inquiry.

The chapter also presents analysis of scholarship exploring the perceptions and experiences of manifestations of spirituality that shape the issues facing educational leaders as they seek to strengthen Black faculty and staff achievements at PWIs. This critical review provides an opportunity to deconstruct one aspect of Black cultural experience as it relates to education. Black educational leaders will benefit from the anti-essentialist freedoms that exposing the myth of neoliberalism allows them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Their new knowledge will allow them to push for culturally relevant pedagogies in their leadership roles (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The ability to promote places where they need additional cultural responsiveness, respect for the call to lead, or space for identity formation will aid in the redesign of environments and interactions for Black faculty and staff at PWIs and in doctoral education leadership programs.

Background

Blacks are still only attending college at a rate of 13.7% per year, which amplifies the issue of Black faculty and staff acquiring positions in higher education leadership (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Sadly, that number is the same as it was in the 1970s. Education officials at all levels remain out of touch with what hampers progress for Black faculty and staff before and after they attain their degree(s). Education policy makers and institutional leaders present a recurring laundry list of issues that their statistical analyses and quantitative research deliver such as inequity in pay, which causes financial issues, lack of preparation for scholarly research, hostile campus environments, and family constraints (Harper, 2015). Reviewing research on the highly selective U.S. universities has shown mitigating these factors is only the beginning of constructively and justly addressing the restraints on recruitment and retention of Black faculty and staff, much like it is for Black college students (Harper, 2015; Ladson-Billings 2013; Pope, 2006).

Counter-narratives from articles like Harper's (2013) "Am I My Brother's Teacher?" and Dantley's (2010) "Successful Leadership in Urban Schools: Principals and Critical Spirituality, a New Approach to Reform" reflect deep differences in community and culture. Dixson and Rousseau's (2005) culturally relevant analysis of embedded racism in higher education presents the argument that something else exists under the topography of finances, previous formative education, and family issues. Black educators have long stated historically hegemonic-controlled elements of Black life, such as secondary and postsecondary education, function to shape the achievement spectrum for Black faculty and staff.

Contextualizing the Historical and Current Literature

The literature on pedagogical solutions built to support Black student achievement, and Black educational leaders' integration of cultural identity ideologies such as Black spirituality in practice, is sparse compared to discussions of educational capital issues for Black faculty and staff in general. Though information exists on this issue, the research is usually redundant, never excavating the core of the experience for Black faculty and staff as they seek to be uplifted. Quantitative writings tend not to give the voices of these leaders the "performative space" they need to be fully understood and examined (Butler, 1997, p. 22). This act of performativity, as Butler noted, is where depth and culturally relevant answers to issues of persistence and achievement exist. Research must look at the Black leader in college education holistically—in their perceptions and experiences with leadership in relation to manifestations of Black spirituality as they work with faculty and staff successfully (Dantley, 2003; Ellison, 1993).

Emulation of this holistic viewpoint (including context, critique, and conclusions) is the foundational form for this review. The beginning includes a brief history of Black education and an overview of the ideologies of Black spirituality to put the issue in proper context. This section presents the historical, political, and cultural context for viewing the literature on Black educational leaders integrating ideologies of Black spirituality in their practices to strengthen Black achievement in the academy.

Brief History of Black Education

The history of Black education in the United States remains fraught with issues, with hegemonic ideals holding Black success in their power (Harper, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006). These issues were prevalent in the beginning years of educational systems for Blacks,

as noted in the politically and culturally insightful work of both DuBois (1970) and Woodson (1933) in his critical writing on *The Mis-Education of the Negro*. The power/knowledge dynamics disclosed by Foucault's theories run deep in the paradoxes of Black education because social control always lies under the surface of how institutions manage their minority populations (Crenshaw et al., 1996). Watkins (2001) noted, quoting Emile Durkheim, that education is a "social" thing, and as such resides under the social controls of the majority (p. 5). The author builds off this theory to understand education as also a "political thing" and to deconstruct the entanglement of power (Watkins, 2001, pp. 6-7). To understand the issues surrounding institutions using best practices of Black educational leaders who integrate ideologies of Black spirituality into strengthening Black achievement in the academy, a review of the literature must begin with some history. The history of Black education and the sociopolitical foundations that still constrict progress for Black Americans set the stage for examining the research and reverberates through its strengths and weaknesses.

Black Education in the United States

In their writing on Black education, Watkins (2001) stated "issues and questions surrounding the education of Blacks date to 1619" (p. 11). They also noted that "four centuries later the 'negro question' still remains at the heart of the social and educational conundrum" for the United States (Watkins, 2001, pp. 11–12). White America continues to ponder what to do with this minority population (while still obtaining what they need from them). The colonial period saw this question emerge even before the growth in slavery and the civil war. Settlers grouped African and Caribbean "outsiders" into assemblage with the

Native populations in many cases. Education, therefore, resembled the "civilizing" work that missionaries conducted in Africa and the South Seas during this time (Woodson, 1933).

The expansion of slavery brought the idea of civilizing to the plantations and working farms of the South. Plantation owners wanted slaves to be able to facilitate operation of the owner's holdings, so they promoted basic skills for their "slave aristocracy" as well (Woodson, 1933, p. 58). These skills fit the needs of owners as the slaves learned to count, read/recognize writing on bills, and manage other plantation operations. Interest convergence by the slave owners was reflected in Black education as "favored slaves" (Watkins, 2001) gained skills that could help them advance in an outside world while the owners garnered knowledgeable assistance that they controlled.

These slaveholders, as "good Christians," also wanted their slaves to have some sense of morality. This morality included ideologies that warned against the sins of stealing and lying (especially to slave owners who promoted themselves as next to God). This moralistic control continued in Black education and remains apparent in some vision statements of small southern colleges (Woodson, 1933). Laws in many southern states prohibited any education of slaves, even Bible lessons that came from abolitionist-minded souls. Watkins (2001) and Giles (2010) have pointed out that missionary societies and Christian humanists did infiltrate some plantations by appealing to the plantation owners' Christian virtues, but the slaves only received recitation-type education centering on scripture.

As the 19th century in the United States brought the country through slavery into the era of Reconstruction, this morality became "a central theme associated with the triumphant 'White American character'" (Watkins, 2001, pp. 12–13) and the basis from which Black education would transition. The Freedman's Bureau, founded in 1868, offered freed slaves

the opportunity for advancement to help the country recover from its internal insurrection. Missionary aid societies and the Freedman's Bureau provided power structures with a platform for governance and control of this now free population of people (numbering over 4 million) (Watkins, 2001). These "helping" organizations supported the country's need for "reform without revolt," a topic that remains on the agenda of our educational systems even today (Woodson, 1933, p. 17).

The Industrial Age

The Industrial Age would take advantage of the work of these organizations as they sought to form a compliant workforce that could also facilitate growth in the industrial complex with their labor (Watkins, 2001). Vocational training, as espoused by these industrialists and some Black leaders such as Booker T. Washington, would hold the future for a population still viewed inferior to the White majority in most aspects. The beginnings of HBCUs also emerged during this time. Socially and politically minded industrial philanthropists aided in the creation of many colleges leading up to 1915 in the midst of huge wealth-building in the United States (Dantley, 2003; Watkins, 2001). These philanthropists looked to transmit more than reading, writing, and lessons on morality. They aimed for "transmission of social ideology" to the Black population—what Watkins (2001) called "cultural hegemony."

This cultural pedagogical move on the part of industrialists and the government led to what Woodson (1933), DuBois (1903), and Watkins (2001) termed *accommodationism*—to have Blacks accept their place in the world and in their relations to the majority. This accommodationism remains an issue for the institution of U.S. education currently (Bell, 2004; Harper, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Tate, 1997). This training was part of the

functions of the Hampton Institute that prospered with corporate support. It produced a

sociopolitical order that changed economic fortunes for the holders of power, changed social

relations for minorities and the majority, and left the larger society intact (Watkins, 2001).

Watkins (2001) wrote that this hegemonic ideal met with resistance from some Whites who

noted, "Eternal vigilance will be the price of success" as they remained in distrust of Blacks

(p. 49). The White dominant society would always have to keep watch over the lesser Black

population.

Black Education in the Civil Rights Movement

The distrust lingered on both sides of the color line in the United States and erupted in

the actions of the civil rights movement of the late 1950s and 1960s across the country. The

intellectual work of W.E.B. DuBois resounded in this struggle as Black Americans began to

seek political, social, and economic strength on a larger scale (Woodson, 1933). The

emphasis in Black education, even after the G.I. Bill and the first Higher Education Act were

law, centered on vocational training over "book learning," and resistance grew against this

epistemology of Black life. Issues of structural functionalism (i.e., institutions promulgating

resources and ideologies toward what they needed to maintain social cohesion rather than

allowing conflict to formulate change) hampered progress (Taylor et al., 2016; Watkins,

2001).

In the midst of the civil rights movement and changes in the needs of U.S. society, the

education of a Black middle class emerged. This class of Blacks would go beyond the

localized needs of their neighborhoods and provide a national character for other Blacks to

emulate (McGuire et al., 2014). The arbiter of this transformation of a minority population

would be a college education (Watkins, 2001, p. 181). College attendance by Blacks grew

during the 1970s and 1980s only to level off for the next 3 decades with small fluctuations during economic downturns (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Academic careers today range from the medical, law, and ministry professions to computer and HVAC training at community colleges. However, institutional systems remain in control of where Black faculty and staff go to college, what they learn, and when/if they graduate and move on to positions in higher education (Harper & Wood, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2013).

The history of Black education continues out of the control of Blacks with student loan debt for Blacks reaching points of destabilization for faculty and staff in their economic futures (Watkins, 2001). With the need for higher education attainment to achieve greater income levels, social status, and security of health and welfare, the concept of Blacks controlling their own educational destiny is more prominent than ever. DuBois (1903) proclaimed this right of predestation years ago in *The Souls of Black Folk*, and it echoes true today. As this review of the literature exposes, majority institutions have not opened their practices to this ideal on a large scale—and our Black faculty and staff continue to struggle toward their potential.

Black Spirituality on Campus

The well-documented struggles of Black faculty and staff are indelibly linked to many sources on PWI campuses (Giles, 2010; Harper, 2013). The work of Black educational leaders to strengthen other Black faculty and staff through recruitment and retention efforts goes beyond programs they support and design. Because the struggles are a shared experience, these Black leaders produce actions that link to their cultural identities and are exemplified in their personalized practices. Cultural identities rooted in Black spirituality inform some of these resistance-based practices. To critically analyze scholarship on the

integration of Black spirituality's ideological concepts into the best practices of Black educational leaders to strengthen achievements for Black faculty and staff and those used by the faculty and staff themselves, an understanding of those concepts is essential.

One central issue to understand when unpacking Black spirituality is that it is not simply or completely Black religion or religious practice (C. Evans, 2008; Giles, 2010; Stewart, 1999; Wilmore, 1998). Grouping and interweaving Black spiritual ideologies with religious ideologies is problematic as Black religion is a "diaspora of thought, expression, and experience" (Wilmore, 1998, p. 17). Black spirituality exists in its own ontology as an ethos and reality apart from strict religious dictates—except for that of holding God as sovereign. Black spirituality consists of elements of African Creation Cosmology (e.g., a belief in one central God and a stewardship to the earth), Biblical hermeneutics (e.g., life-sustaining interpretations), acknowledgement of the binary consciousness of Black Americans, and an embrace of freedom (including creative, intellectual, and spiritual; Stewart, 1999). Each element of Black spirituality adds to the connections Blacks have with the creator, who is not simply a being to be worshipped, but a force wholly involved in their lives. This creator, nature, soul force God provides refuge, inspiration in creativity and self-expression, and strength to surmount obstacles in life (Palmer, 1993; Wilmore, 2004).

African Spirituality Influences

African spirituality should be carefully examined in its connections and influences on the tenets and elements of Black spirituality in the United States. As Hayes (2012) described in *Forged in the Fiery Furnace*, "In its diaspora, Black spirituality has filled its people whether they followed different gods or no gods" is an insightful precaution against the essentialist defining of Black spirituality as a single iconic practice (p. 12). The inclusion of

African spirituality, with its cosmology and infusion of the knowledge of Elders permeating its contents, allows for sustaining and nurturing of Black spirituality from a segment of its ancestral roots. Elements such as the mentoring and wisdom sharing of elders and the persistence inherent in the prophetic call to vocation traveled with the enslaved peoples taken from their African homelands to the United States.

Stewart (1997) stated, "God is the source of spirituality in African spirituality. But African spirituality is also a socially functional process or praxis that creates an ethos and culture" (p. 49). It is, therefore, a creative process and practice whose by-products are creativity, adaptation, ritualization, innovation, improvisation, transcendence, and transformation, which are all evident in elemental expressions of Black spirituality. African spirituality's ethos can also be said to provide part of the dynamism that forms the Black human consciousness in such a way as to enable Black people to accommodate and adapt to the dominant society and culture while simultaneously resisting assimilation and annihilation from sociopolitical oppressive structures (Hayes, 2012).

Black spirituality's ideologies stem from these elements. The ideologies include always placing other power structures in reference to God's sovereign power to deconstruct political and social controls (Giles, 2010). These ideologies also open up the double consciousness DuBois (1903) examined to confront reflections from the majority back to them to ask, "Is this what you see when you see me?" and answer, "This is what God sees." This dialogical interface produces learning opportunities and is one of the reasons for future inquiry as well.

This ideological move operates in tandem with the interpretative action of using hermeneutics spiritually to find ways of knowing oneself in the scripture as an affirming

practice (C. Evans, 2008). Finally, the ideology behind exploring the gift of freedom beyond human control allows Black spirituality to offer solutions to problems and situations when others fall short, create new epistemologies, and see past current struggles (Stewart, 1997; Wilmore, 1998). It is in the discussion of these struggles that Black spirituality can intersect with education.

Black Spirituality and Education

Black spirituality and Black education intertwined from the moment empowering and sustaining scripture was used in "brush arbor meetings" in the woods beyond the slave plantations to bolster the mental and physical states of slaves, who were intently listening. These educational, yet spiritual, meetings were also teaching slaves prohibited reading skills (Giles, 2010; Stewart, 1997). The spiritual leaders of these meetings helped bring comfort and strength to those in attendance just as Black educational leaders' callings direct them to do today. They also defied the "White man's rules" that precluded Blacks from the freedom offered by education (Woodson, 1933, p. 84).

As Dantley (2005) and West (1999) noted in their writings, the Black educational leader needs to remain a spiritual center for their community, to nurture their campus environment for all other Black faculty and staff, and to remain purpose driven and call directed. Research by Giles (2010) and Mattis (2002) found Black leaders produced practices such as culturally sensitive mentoring based on stewardship, alternative avenues for creative expression for Black faculty and staff, personal counseling on family/institutional balance based on interpretation of scriptural and ancestral wisdom, and resistance to institutional power dynamics based on sovereignty of their God. This respect for sovereignty is not just

combative; it is also very hopeful as the creator's power goes beyond our human limitations to facilitate transformative change.

Black Faculty and Staff and Black Spirituality

For Black faculty and staff, surveys examining mitigating factors for recruitment, resilience, and retention show peer reference, mentoring, and community interactions as central to understanding their institutional environmental experiences and struggles in ways similar to Black college students (Pope, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012). The creation of close ties with other Black educational leaders on their campuses that espouse a spiritually-based ethos of caring also contributed to their persistence through career struggles (Giles, 2010). Research by these authors suggests impactful sociocultural experiences have levels of deep interpersonal influence that can produce wide-ranging positive effects on Black faculty and staff in their career journeys at PWIs.

The struggles and obstacles Black faculty and staff face in all facets of university life are real. They are seen and discussed by faculty, staff, and leaders at all levels of higher education, and yet, not tackled in a manner that reaches out to the one source that actually knows and perceives what is going on in the minds and hearts of these faculty and staff— Black educational leaders on their campuses who share in the journey.

Cultural Identity

We do know that many Black faculty and staff university leaders face identity and appropriation obstacles that halt their drive for advancement (Bell 2004; Dantley, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2009). These impediments to success have been cited as the cause of Black faculty and staff not acquiring advancement and the daunting perception of a lack of institutional power to assist each other more fully. Ladson-Billings (2013) noted Blacks

report they feel inauthentic on PWI campuses because they struggle between the identity reflected from their environment and their own self-perceptions—otherwise known as imposter syndrome (Feagin et al., 1996; St. Pierre, 2011). This struggle is identical in form to the double consciousness DuBois (1903) deeply reflected upon in writings over a hundred years before. This same double consciousness is one of the elements addressed by Black spirituality. Through Black spirituality, Black faculty and staff can see that their authentic self is what the creator has given them, and that self holds primacy in life.

Trends and Debates

The lack of historical scholarship in the area of Black spirituality's integration into the practices of Black leaders in higher education means the trends and findings have been few. However, the trends and findings that do exist are mostly current and vibrant in their argumentation. The debates surrounding Black spirituality and education date back to the power-laden resistance plantation owners had toward slaves acquiring education that the owners could not control. Debates also reflect the sustained power/knowledge struggle that has continued to plague Black education in the United States since the 1600s. Trends in research continue to position the dominant power's statistical analyses over the intrinsic knowledge situated in the Black narrative and the phenomenon of the Black aesthetic.

Trends in Scholarship

Trends in scholarship surrounding Black spirituality's ideologies integrated into best practices of Black educational leaders center around the building of cultural identities for Black faculty and staff (Ellison, 1993; Mattis, 2002; McGuire et al., 2014). Mattis (2002) noted a strong cultural identity especially aids Black female college leaders in persisting in

their college environment whether at HBCUs or PWIs. Hikes (2005) made the same conclusive analysis from their research on females at an HBCU.

An additional trend in the scholarship targets efforts to identify the structures and epistemic changes required to produce culturally relevant pedagogies in curriculum and in retention programming in the beginnings of education for Blacks entering academe (Giles, 2010; Harper, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2005). Giles (2010) directly focused on spirituality as Black educators infuse ideologies into how they interact with Black faculty and staff in their formative education and how they help form community. Giles (2010) framed their argument as a culturally dependent analysis of practices stemming from the inherent desire of Black educators to infuse manifestations of Black spirituality into their pedagogical practices.

A final trend in this research centers on the use of counter-narrative to confront institutional policies and practices that reinforce the dominant societal structures (McGuire et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2016). McGuire et al. (2014) positioned the counter-narrative as the defining tool Black educational leaders should use to challenge policies they see constraining the success of Black faculty and staff on their campuses. Their research examined shifts in institutional practices and the overall campus climate when the voices of Black counter-narratives have a more favorable position in administrative discussions.

Debates

A polarizing debate in the scholarship surrounding Black spirituality and efforts to strengthen Black faculty and staff retention and recruitment at PWIs centers on issues of identity. As Nealon and Giroux (2012) noted, identity and culture intermingle in people's lives. The debate in research involving Black spirituality revolves around researchers overstating the traditional or ceremonial cultural aspects of this spirituality versus its place in

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identity formation (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ellison, 1993). For education, this intellectual stance discloses that institutions who ground themselves in an individualistic point of view may see Black educational leaders use of spirituality in their practices as merely an individual act meant to support only that particular Black faculty or staff member.

Another point of debate in the scholarship involves the contentious issue of using counter-narrative in data-gathering practices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Taylor et al., 2016). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) found people in the dominant society rejected counter-narrative as "storytelling," which culturally implies some form of lying or altering the truth from the perspective of many Black people. As noted in the examination of critical race theory (CRT), counter-narrative offers resistance against hegemonic traditions that discount Black spirituality in addition to the narratives of struggling Black faculty and staff when quantitative data reflect different results (Crenshaw et al., 1996). The trend in qualitative research positions itself in support of the counter-narrative and thematic analysis of its elements and voice (Merriam, 2002).

Critique of the Scholarship

The scholarship surrounding integration of Black spirituality's ideologies into leadership formation practices and development of a call to vocation for Black faculty and staff contains weaknesses, strengths, and has some gaps. This critique illuminates not only what defines them, but also reflects their interactions to provide robust and vibrant areas for future research.

Weaknesses of the Scholarship

The statistical analyses reflecting issues of identity that have been used to uncover circumstances at work beneath the surface of Black faculty and staff career and institutional

environment deficits have not provided the educational institutional community with the most effective answers and have only added to policy confusion (Dantley, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2012). As Harper (2013) and others have pointed out, the need for "culturally sensitive research into identity and institutional practices related to Black selfhood" has been sorely missing as the predominant research only treats the issues superficially (p. 26). Educational programming and policies require further investment of time and inquiry because of the paucity of research into important cultural identity aspects such as the ideologies of Black spirituality that disclose practices in community building, divine gifts, and questioning of humanity's "truths" (Dantley, 2010; Giles, 2010).

Statistical facts presented as "truth" and institutional traditions disguised as best practices have not proven to be useful tools in assisting Black educational leaders or other minoritized populations in attaining higher levels of achievement and advancement at PWIs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Glesne, 2006; Tate, 1998; Taylor et al., 2016). One institutional obstacle may be related to understanding cultural identity for Blacks on PWI campuses.

A weakness in the literature has been a lack of deep reflection on cultural identity issues. Responses run the gamut when upper administration at PWIs reflect upon how they understand the advancement and retention issues of Black faculty and staff on their campuses (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Humphries, 1994). As b. hooks pointed out, Black women hold a separate identity from their Black male counterparts, but still struggle with identity issues surrounding expressions of intellectual prowess and Black feminism at the same time (hooks, 2000). According to Mattis (2002), these Black female faculty and staff struggle because "their separate identities remain unacknowledged or subjugated" (p. 78). This research only began the inquiry.

Quantitative research tends to negate the diaspora of Black experience by highlighting generalized cultural ideas about Blacks such as lack of motivation or self-efficacy, or a lack of educational preparation (Harper, 2015). In addition, PWIs lack research into the perceptions of the manifestations of Black culturally rooted, call-centered, community-driven, and spirituality-grounded formative experiences that have shaped Black educational leaders' identities as possible mitigating factors in their practices. These experiences require research that explores the broad context in which Blacks form their identities as well as cultural centers of expression and epistemologies (Constantine et al., 2002; Crenshaw et al., 1996).

These qualitative epistemologies and ontologies empirically represent central factors in how Black faculty and staff function, engage, and connect in their university academe experience (Harper, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Lynn et al., 2002; Lopez, 2002; Wood & Hilton, 2012). This research falls short in helping the education community examine the foundational leadership best practices of Black faculty and staff in their pursuit of success in the academy.

The centralizing and elevation of institutional knowledge as the only "legitimate" knowledge viable and respected in the college environment stands as a congenital weakness. (Bernal & Villalpando, 2016). As Foucault (as cited in Rabinow, 1994) stated in their power/knowledge analysis, the issue is not simply that having power is knowledge, but that inherent power exists in controlling the formation of knowledge and the material benefits that come with that knowledge. The scholarship on recruitment, resilience, and retention of Black faculty and staff lacks representation of the different ontological practices of these faculty and staff based on critical cultural experiences and development (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

This weakness in the scholarship stems from an issue that both DuBois (1970) and Watkins (2001) presented in their writings on Black education in the United States. DuBois (1970) pointed out Black faculty and staff will always struggle as long as their knowledge and experiences remain disrespected and unacknowledged. Watkins (2001) noted the knowledge that Black faculty and staffs possess does not fit into the power structures created by the dominant society and therefore White institutions exclude this knowledge to maintain control of how educational institutions function for their betterment.

Another weakness of the scholarship emerges in how it treats the counter-narratives of Black educational leaders and Black faculty and staff. Direct impact from this fault in research continually appears in the scholastic careers of Black faculty and staff (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). They are situated to inform and illuminate issues on college campuses, but institutions and their programming relegate their experiences to the level of folklore (Crenshaw et al., 1996). The scholarship hesitates to include counter-narratives that penetrate into the essence of retention and scholastic freedom issues in meaningful ways because these data present contentious ideas and culturally integrative concepts that are hard to quantify (Ladson-Billings, 2005; West, 1988; Wood & Hilton, 2012). Literature on Black faculty and staff success in the academy also resists the counter-narrative because of a lack of researcher training in what to do with the data when received—especially if the data are not in the best interests of the institution (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Interest convergence, as CRT reveals, stands as an embedded practice of the majority power structures that control organizations such as education in the United States (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Taylor et al., 2016).

Blacks in leadership positions in higher education reflect a depth of cultural identity that the research misses as well. Inquiries into the emotional, critical, and spiritual experiences of these educational leaders may lend insight into the formation of cultural identities for others they encounter and support in their work. The experiences of anxiety and frustration at institutional policy, misjudgment of skill levels, and requirements of assimilative actions of Black faculty and staffs turn into poor policy decisions that haunt Black education leaders (Giles, 2010). These issues require a depth beyond that which quantitative research can provide.

Previous research for PWIs centered primarily on quantitative analysis to investigate the experiences and issues of Black faculty and staff and their lack of advancement and support in academe (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Harper, 2015). In Harper's (2013) research focusing on issues of persistence for Black males at PWIs, they reflected that the responses students provided on surveys were often "guarded answers" because of fear of the system—a practice that brings into question the reliability of purely quantitative research for college students and the Black faculty and staff who serve them.

Quantitative research on the national and institutional levels fails to show the goals of the institutions and its ideas on how analysis and inquiry into ideologies based on the spirituality of their Black educational leaders could affect the lives of their minoritized faculty and staff reflects culturally narrow traditions. Lack of research in this area exacerbates ignorance toward the utility of Black leadership's professional skill set integrated with Black spirituality. It also limits the institutional mission and its methodologies of assessing possibilities for Black faculty and staff advancement. The scholarly response from Black leaders in education questions why Black spirituality, which can be a vital segment of

their sociocultural life and a powerful asset for intercultural research, remains closed to them as they critically address issues of inclusion and community on their campuses (West, 1999). The literature has yet to respond in meaningful ways so far.

Finally, research fails to investigate the institutional systems' reactionary and exclusionary foci that shun many of the previous qualitative studies because they reflected findings restricting the ideas of advancement of Black faculty and staffs touted through neoliberalism. This literature review investigates research with insights that open new avenues for deeper understanding and productive problem solving at the institutional level. An analysis of major trends and debates explores the insights of the narrative analysis of the perceptions and experiences of Black educational leaders, faculty, and staff, and the influences on these trends (Constantine et al., 2002; Harper, 2015; Tillman, 2002). These debates extend past the disagreements on practices of the academy to issues of the sources of knowledge, and research into how Black cultural identity participates in the achievements of Black faculty and staff and their work as Black educational leaders (Constantine et al., 2002; Dantley, 2005; Ellison, 1993; Rabinow, 1994).

Strengths of the Scholarship

A strength in the research shows the cyclical manner in which colleges have responded to concerns of success and struggles of Black faculty and staff by setting up reactive programs (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Examination of the institutional effects of using statistical analyses that represent a picture of the externalities of the narrative of Black faculty and staff and describe it poorly provides areas for rebuttal from critical race theorists (Dantley, 2003; Giles, 2010; McGuire et al., 2014). The scholarship that follows questions the research on self-efficacy that does not actually investigate or inform inquiry from the

critical sociocultural narrative that is the grounding of performance and obscures the idea of Blacks' scholastic and institutional achievement. As writings on CRT have shown, Black experiences (especially the spiritual ones) need to be respected and understood in any college environments, programs, or initiatives centering on Black faculty and staff to support their success (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Tillman, 2002).

An additional strength of the literature on Black educational leaders' ideological experiences is the exposure of embedded flaws in the higher education system. The research discloses prescriptive analyses of the performance of Black faculty and staff, and the institutional systems in higher education that have reproduced mitigating "Band-Aids" for these issues. The research has also delineated practices that produce missional statements about supporting diversity without garnering insights from the breadth of knowledge ensconced in the lived experiences of Black educational leaders (Brown, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2013).

Another strength of the scholarship has been its exposure of the incongruence between institutional perceptions of the cultural needs of Black faculty and staff and how PWIs meet those needs. This incongruence exacerbates frustrations for these Black leaders (Giles, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2005). As reported by Dixson and Rousseau (2005), many Black educational leaders feel material determinism (i.e., the belief that because institutions hold the power, they hold the answers) in the majority power structures overtakes their ability to advance causes, including efforts to strengthen Black faculty and staff achievements for themselves and others. This situation begs the question as to why those in power do not see the identity and cultural power of ideologies such as Black spirituality as possible tools for engaging the issues of their Black faculty and staff. Because Black

spirituality and other racial/cultural ideologies are beyond their control is the answer West (1999), Dantley (2005), Humphries (1994), and Giles (2010) have pointed to in their scholarship.

In addition to this emotional methodological issue, literature on the process of leadership and Black faculty and staff success at PWIs exposes an incongruence in interests. This incongruity stems from questions of what institutions need from Black educational leaders, what they offer to institutions, and spirituality's effects in their leadership dynamics (Dantley, 2008; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The types of leadership development and training currently being used to enhance different abilities and different strengths for varied populations, but they still do not take into account the cultural/identity factors involved in the spiritual call to vocation of Blacks (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). They miss the larger scope of Black leadership's success potential. A more encompassing style of leadership analysis could expose powerful elements of the prophetic call of spirituality that springs from the transformative experience and perceptions that then promote advancement and success for Blacks in higher education (Wood & Hilton, 2012).

Research provides insights into the development of Black higher education leaders' experiences, their perceptions of manifestations of spirituality strengthening achievement for Black faculty and staff, and their subsequent reactions to White hegemony that denies their critical identity. A few studies from Giles (2010), Mattis (2002), and Harper (2015) produced results that have lent insight into the pivotal experiences that can have potentially instructive influences on the educational power structure and open up the prophetic leadership style of a Black leader to better understanding and more intrinsic respect. These insights offer an entryway into deeper discourse that centers on authentic listening to lived experiences.

Gaps in the Scholarship

The past shortcomings of research studies and reports created to engage fully in the debate and reconciliation of issues that affect Black educational leaders present the task of finding new ways to embrace the interplay of theory and practice. The tools for doing a better job of helping to uncover these valuable pedagogical assets for Black educational leaders include CRT. The review of CRT as espoused by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), Harper (2013), and Ladson-Billings (2013) ventures to bring society, and educational institutions in particular, into conversation on how experiences, cultural differences, and racial identity create who people are and how they function in this world.

Research, whether quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods, that endeavors to explore issues in a racialized context benefits from the inclusion of the tenets of CRT (i.e., acknowledgement of the permanence of racism in society, anti-essentialism, analysis of interest convergence, and deconstruction of counter-narratives in their studies). Inclusion of CRT in research involving Black people allows the researcher to cast their results in a more culturally relevant manner with an open acknowledgment of race and difference (Glesne, 2006; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2005).

Counter-Narratives

Possibly the most prominent tenet from CRT that has potential for impact on research on the topic of education is counter-narrative. Counter-narrative analyses provide ways to reflect critically on best practices of Black educational leaders (i.e., Black faculty and staff). In addition, researching a Black educational leader's cultural experiences on campus through counter-narrative allows an institution to create cultural competencies in their leadership and programming structures. These competencies critically develop pedagogies that can improve

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current retention and resilience practices for faculty, staff, and students (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Parker, 1998). The work of countering the hegemonic narratives that permeate our educational system has a central position in the transformation of educational environments for equity and inclusion.

Cultural Consciousness

As Dantley (2003), Granberg-Michaelson (2004), and Ladson-Billings (2013) have recounted, the work being done in universities and community colleges to address the specific needs of Black faculty and staff regarding retention, advancement, community formation, and creating culturally responsive working environments is reactive at best. Black leaders in higher education creating culturally responsive working environments is the research perspective that will fill this gap. Culturally conscious research studies the internal ideologies of the Black leader in higher education as well as their external best practices. It answers questions of how mentoring elevates beyond providing advice, guidance, and a person to emulate to become a relationship of shepherding and prophetic promise for success for a Black member of the academe—practices that lead to greater achievements (Giles, 2010; Mattis, 2002; Stewart, 1999).

The Scholarship and Education Practitioners

The scholarship that frames and shapes the Black spirituality/leadership practices issue for education practitioners centers around three areas: (a) new ontologies of cultural identity, (b) expansion of ideas on community and collegial relationships with faculty and staff, and (c) understanding the power of Black spirituality's ideologies as coping and conquering tools in education. Within the comingling of these areas exists of nexus of opportunity for transformation and community sustenance in higher education.

Culture and Black Spirituality

The scholarship has shown the cultural aspects that are formative for Blacks are intrinsic to the issues of perception and experience with Black spirituality (Giles, 2010; Stewart, 1997; Wilmore, 1998). This shift in perceptions permeates the life of Black faculty and staff in higher education. However, the cultural incongruence between where and how Black faculty and staff came to this level in the institutional system, and how they have been raised and where they may move in the education experience, are miles apart (Harper, 2013). This incongruence, which may have roots in identity formation aspects such as Black spirituality, meters their worldview on education—an important issue for education practitioners to understand and acknowledge (Ladson-Billings, 2005, 2013; Tate, 1994).

Harper's (2013) examination of the experiences of Black college males demonstrates that Blacks come to the university setting with internalized traditions, stories, and ethnically derived experiences that require honest approaches to capture the details of their perceptions. The racial and ethnic critical theories that bind educational and societal interactions provide a solid venue for exploring the perceptions and experiences of Black faculty and staff. As Tillman (2002) and Ladson-Billings (2006) have stated, the affective analysis of self in spiritual background, socioeconomic status, career aspirations, family identity, and other life circumstances are key factors for discursive action by education practitioners.

The scholarship provides a backdrop for this dialogic work that can lead to more culturally responsive policies. Black spirituality's ideologies factor into research that informs any critical analysis of the Black self, including the identities tied to education (Giles, 2010). These approaches in scholarship must always be couched in the understanding of the

diasporic dimensions of Black lives and those of other community members that are not simply reflections of stereotypes, and do not yield to them.

Black Faculty and Staff and Community As Shelter and Intentional Connectivity

The scholarship also presents ideas with respect to community and the Black educational leader. As Pope (2006) stated, "Community for Black faculty and staff consists of more than just the area in which they live" (p. 48). It includes the people, places, and events that have shaped their lives (Harper, 2013). The primary community agents in their formation as Blacks are their spiritual and community leaders, their families, and their peers (Dantley, 2003; Harper, 2015). The depth of loyalty to all these community members impresses upon the Black leader in higher education the inherent responsibilities for success and achievement in academe that go beyond the parameters of many others at these institutions (Humphries, 1994; Wood & Hilton, 2012).

Giles (2010) pointed out the Black leader in higher education has responsibilities in this spiritual/communal order that require them to seek out ways to assist other Black faculty and staff in their achievements beyond what other cultures do. This requirement is essential for other education practitioners to research and affirm for the success of their Black faculty and staff. Practitioners who give attention to these connections routinely motivate their Black faculty and staff to seek out other Black leaders for mentoring, collegial relationships, and expanding areas of creative expression, all of which promote retention and future recruitment (Ellison, 1993).

The obligation to community previously discussed in the scholarship hinges on maintaining the roles and responsibilities bestowed upon the Black educational leader. If a failure of any type occurs, the leader risks losing face in the community and losing honor in

the family and with peers (Harper, 2013). This loss of honor and status breaks down the structure created in the culture and climate of the Black community (Pope, 2006). Therefore, failure and loss of status are impermissible. These stressors cause pressure that shapes the spiritual experiences of Black faculty and staff, binding them closer to the ideologies of Black spirituality with its assurance of grace.

Black Spirituality As Educational Phenomenon

Scholarship supports the idea that Black spirituality represents one way Black educational leaders cope with the stressors of life (DuBois, 1903; Wood & Hilton, 2012). Spirituality is the tie that binds the community and bolsters the Black faculty and staff in their academic pursuits through the strengthening of self and community—emotionally, mentally, and many times even physically. It is not simply the expression of religious beliefs or tenets. The presence of Black spirituality in the Black community brings a support, which is universal and empowering from a space external to books (other than scripture) or one singular event (Giles, 2010). The resistance to power structures that emerges from ideologies in Black spirituality runs directly in line with social justice efforts for equity in power relations—especially in education (Paris, 1995; Wood & Hilton, 2012).

Education practitioners would benefit from the scholarship surrounding the traditional sending forth service that many Black churches conduct for their congregants who are headed off to college, which creates a very impactful community environment as a transitional element of the larger spiritual experience. Scholars such as Mattis (2000) noted the ceremony also has an underlying demarcation of responsibility that comes with its celebration of achievement. It is important in education to examine the impact this

responsibility brings to a Black faculty and staff member's life and what this community responsibility means for their Black colleagues.

The event, in its offer of community support, also takes control of some facets of identity and self-worth in Black faculty and staff. The community responsibility element is inclusive of promises made and promises kept on all sides. These promises can hold powerful emotional and mental weight as a student is put to the test—literally—when encountering the power structures of college and the sometimes culturally hostile environments of PWIs (Dantley, 2008; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Wood & Hilton, 2012).

Research by Wood and Hilton (2012) described Black spirituality as both directive and instructive in these situations and throughout the university experience in that it provides guidance for how Black educational leaders should act as people. It also directs them to work toward performing in such a way as to support their community for the betterment of all. It is instructive that spirituality in the Black culture assembles ideologies for survival in other cultures and provides strength to Black educational leaders when they encounter institutional and personal struggles (Dantley, 2005; West, 1999). Education practitioners studying leadership, who also struggle, may benefit from reflecting on these ideologies as survival mechanisms for them as well.

Finally, education practitioners need to understand from the scholarship that the words and writings centering on Black spirituality lend themselves to success proclaimed from forces outside of human control (Bell, 2004; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Wood & Hilton, 2012). This promise of sustenance for success is also impressed upon Black faculty and staff by the identities their spirituality imprints upon them (Harper, 2015). As Harper (2015) described, the inspirational effects that come with this imprint from the spiritual realm

not only provide the "strength to survive difficult times in the university experience" (p. 41); they also provide the mental tenacity to press through cultural obstacles that institutions present to Black faculty and staff.

Future Inquiry

Because the goal of inquiry into the topic of manifestations of the phenomenon of Black spirituality into the lived experiences of Black faculty and staff at PWIs is to let the voice and narrative of Black educational leaders come through in its direct state rather than mitigated by numbers or neutrality, or filtered through a religious lens, the research took a hermeneutic phenomenological and critical perspective. The manifestations of spirituality in leadership practices that have direct effect on these Black faculty and staff are the central point of concern and interest to research seeking ways to strengthen achievements and persistence for these faculty and staff (Harper, 2013). Investigations into effects these manifestations have had on how Black leaders in higher education develop their best practices and how they facilitate faculty and staff becoming responsive to them require further research. It is also crucial for education that future work on the presence of Black spirituality ideologies in the practices of Black educational leaders comes from a place of respect for cultural identity formation—using an anti-essentialist perspective (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2005).

Further research also requires respect and response to the concept of an ever-shifting and changing reality for Black faculty and staff and their institutions (Giles, 2010). In this same line of thinking, research must view knowledge as also evolving and as such, researchers cannot use static tools on all occasions to find answers to questions in their studies. Embracing fluidity and openness to how people and situations shift brings deeper

perspectives and levels of understanding to research—especially on a topic so intrinsically

tied to fluid ideologies and creative practices (Berg, 2007; Somekh & Lewin, 2012; Van

Maanen, 2011; van Manen, 2014).

This creative perspective aligns well with addressing social justice issues in education

and equity issues in society through the lens of spirituality for Black leaders in higher

education because it rejects control by White hegemonic structures (Newcomb & Khan,

2014). Viewing the questions of prophetic call and cultural identities when it comes to

engagement practices that strengthens achievement for Black faculty and staff through a

creative social justice lens allows the researcher to analyze critically what current practices

are doing for them.

Research findings can then be used to deconstruct institutional decisions that exclude

the cultural and communal assets of Black education leaders garnered through reflection

from their prophetic narratives in a clear and accurate manner (West, 1988). Further research

using CRT tenets such as interest convergence and others can dismantle the institutional

structures that persist against the ideologies of Black spirituality and the cultural identities of

Black educational leaders to foster a higher level of achievements and advancement (Brown,

2005; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Tate, 1998; Taylor et al., 2016).

This research inquiry answered three questions that emerge from this review of the

literature:

1. What are the formative events in the lives of Black educational leaders in relation to
   Black spirituality?

2. What are the factors that have contributed to the integration of Black spirituality into
   the best professional practices of Black faculty and staff at PWIs?

3. How can Black faculty and staff better use this integration on the campuses of predominantly White institutions to promote recruitment, resilience, and retention to further greater achievements?

Conclusion

The work in this literature review was about exposing the lack of in-depth study that has gone into helping educational institutions gain insight and understanding into how the ideologies of Black spirituality are integrated into best practices of Black educational leaders to strengthen their achievements at PWIs. This review also focused on how to bring critical analysis of Black spirituality in education practices to the forefront of educational research and inquiry. With the continuing career gap between Black faculty and staff and the majority at PWIs growing each year, the education system cannot remain complicit in the social injustice implicit in their continued failure to address the needs of Black faculty and staff in culturally relevant ways (Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2013). This review provides an opening for narratives about the phenomenon of Black spirituality manifest in the practices of Black leaders in higher education to offer hope for new inquiries.

A final piece of this review of the scholarship is to bring critical additional information and insights to educational leaders such that they are able to develop successful intervention strategies for their recruitment and retention initiatives aimed at Black faculty and staff. This additional information came from the brief history of Black education and the descriptive deconstruction of the ideologies of Black spirituality—especially in its connections to education.

Through this review, I provided a space to learn more about the literature surrounding Black spirituality's integration into practices of Black leaders in higher education. In

addition, the weaknesses, strengths, and gaps in the scholarship provided ample areas for future inquiry as to how these leaders work in their university systems to use Black spirituality in their lives and help Black faculty and staff cope with, overcome, and become more strident in the face of career and institutional environment issues. The review creates grounds for an epistemological shift in how institutions approach, analyze, and institute policies and initiatives aimed at their Black faculty and staff. This literature review may also incite a major shift in perceptions from the general culture about what makes meaning and how meaning is made for Black leaders in education.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This methodology chapter addresses my use and understandings of phenomenology as a means to gather data through a qualitative, hermeneutical study. The phenomenon involved is that of a Black spirituality as experienced in leadership formation for Black faculty and staff at Predominantly White Institutions of higher education (PWIs). The chapter will use critical and creative understandings of phenomena to explain why phenomenology was the necessary and pivotal choice for methodology and philosophy for the study. The chapter intends to also achieve the following: a) introduce my research questions, b) describe the research design, and c) discuss phenomenological interplay and intentionality toward critical race theory (CRT) in my theoretical framework.

The methodology encompasses "that which becomes manifest for us" (Husserl as cited in Vagle, 2014, p. 11) as an interpretive encounter with ideas of interconnectedness, counter-narrative, anti-essentialism, and a turning to the experience of a Black spirituality in leadership formation as lived, not as conceptualized. These descriptions and explanations of the methodology will include a purposeful "turning to the things themselves" as Heideggerian philosophy asserted as central to hermeneutically exploring a phenomenon (Heidegger, 1988, p. 82).

Pause

As I sat listening to the murmurs in the hallway outside my office door, I took a deep breath in and held it. Catty words and dismissive mumblings echoed from one office to another. Centered in the midst by my office's position and by my lack of alliances between office factions, my heart raced and broke at each word of betrayal— languishing in nerves and bitter tensions. I take another breath and hold it. The damp,

cool air from the plant-draped window hits my face and flusters me. Heart racing

again toward stillness. "Must calm down Lord. Must calm down." (Pause) Sweat

beads on the backs of my hands then dribbles down onto stacks of forms and student

pleas for educational forgiveness and sanctuary from their tousled and burdened

pasts. Compassion calls out to me, but not <u>for</u> me. A voice from the other side of my

threshold growls insult to my injury. "He should have been fired. He wasn't that

sick." My heart trembles. "Must breathe Lord. Must breathe." Pulse races in my ears.

Bile surges into my throat and onto my tongue. The familiar ache in my arm spreads

upward to my chest. But not like before. Some deep presence turns it back down into

my elbow then to my fingers, my nails. Lightness—and it is gone. Grace be with me.

(Pause) I stood and crossed to the threshold. Opening the door the rest of the way, the

woman on the other side jumped with a startled but blustery turn. "Didn't know you

were in there. How are you?" I smiled and shook her hand. "Still in the midst of

grace, but struggling to remember why I got a second chance in this life." "Well you

know we were praying for you." A tear formed in the corner of my spirit and grew to

a torrent of sadness. She really does believe that this is the truth. She does not seem to

know what prayer means. I turned to look at my colleague and her compatriots from a

tunneled view at the end of the hallway. My heart and spirit sank into song and lifted

up into a laugh. "Funny thing how prayer works in so many different ways depending

on what you pray for and why you do it." She turned to me with a blank expression,

dumbfounded by what this could mean. (Pause; Poole, 2007)[12]

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[12] This "Pause" is from a collection of narratives that I wrote after suffering two strokes during my employment at a PWI. The words go beyond sentiment, and speak to my inherent spiritual being which dynamically bolsters my survival and resistance to the pernicious evil of others.

This excerpt from a longer piece was created when I had returned to my senior-level administrator position at a major university in the South. The experience of having two strokes a few weeks prior, while advising a student in my office in which no one would come to help me when I sought assistance, had made deep alterations in my workplace ideology. The words above may seem like a simple poetic tale of office politics and lack of personal integrity.

But as van Manen (2014), referencing Heidegger, would note, our being and becoming in this lifeworld experience (and experiment as I call it) is not a "mere" appearance or just an "event" (p. 27). The phenomena of my illness had subsequent "intersubjective and intentional relationships" with others which manifest themselves in conversation, in physical associations, in cultural reflections and assumptions, even in the stack of readmissions forms piled on my desk that had not been touched since I was out in the hospital (Vagle, 2014, p. 18). Intertwined with this phenomenon was another prescient one—a Black spirituality that provided sustenance, clarity, hope, and wisdom to the phenomenon of affliction.

The phenomenon in a Black spirituality is "that which becomes manifest for us" rather than something we make ourselves and that happens in our interconnectedness, not in our individual unconsciousness (Vagle, 2014, p. 20). What this philosophical and methodological stance means for a researcher who chooses to work within these parameters is that there is a becoming and an "intentionality" inherent in the dynamic of phenomenology that Sartre would claim "bursts toward" us (Moran & Mooney, 2002, p. 24). The experience of an encounter with a Black spirituality in my leadership formation manifest in the excerpt indeed bursts toward me and the reader. But it also goes past us, through us, and for some, it sits on top of us like a weight that shifts but never lifts off. This phenomenon can be seen as

existing "in" me and in my intersubjectivity with others (Vagle, 2014, p. 39). This "in-ness" is described by Heidegger as humans finding themselves in states of being, not from directing meaning out into the world from their being or with their being as subject (Vagle, 2014, p. 38–40).

The experience of a phenomenon does not simply have an appearance, and is not constructed, designed, or defined by my own autonomous mind, existing in a separate space than the world in a Cartesian sense (Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 2014). This chapter will explore how a phenomenology-based methodological approach can offer space for interpretation of experiences, such as in my excerpt, as appearances become real, as interrelatedness becomes manifest, is made evident, claiming truth and bearing witness (Vagle, 2014, p. 23). This "bearing witness" and "claiming truth" will tie into my use of CRT as a theoretical framework for exploring and interpreting the experiences of Black faculty and staff in higher education at PWIs. The phenomenological stance will also be revealed in this methodology as intersecting with my conceptual framework, which centers on the agency in manifestations of a Black spirituality evident in "prophetic fire" and "call to vocation" as presented by West and Buschendorf (2014), and Dantley (2010) as characteristic of Black faculty and staff's educational leadership in PWIs.

In my research, the participants, including me, found ourselves deeply reflexive in our experiences as will some of the readers of the study. But as Vagle (2014) notes, the "unit of analysis" in this methodology of phenomenology is not the individual experiences, but the phenomena themselves (p. 29). Our experiences gained power and validity from the phenomenon. My work in this research claimed reliability and validity from this stance. These understandings aided me in explicating my research question of "How do their

encounters with a Black spirituality manifest in leadership formation and resilience for Black

faculty and staff in higher education at PWIs?" The research design using interviews,

introductory surveys, and van Manen's Lived Experience Description autoethnographic

narrative protocols were developed in a Heideggerian "in-ness" of intersubjective

relationships (Vagle, 2014, pp. 37–39).

The final comingling of these elements in the research design culminated in the

research findings rich, authentic, interpretations of layered and complex lived experiences.

The work to gather the data and its formation was both collaborative and co-constructive

within our communal existence, which is reflective of an element of a Black spirituality. The

delineation of the research question and design, along with the examination and positioning

of phenomenological history and traditions with a CRT theoretical framework and

conceptual framework rooted in agency, offer a deep and intrinsic rationale for the use of

phenomenology as a methodology in my research. And with a single pause, we begin the

manifestation of a research methodology.

The History and Traditions of Phenomenology

Is there something like a phenomenological tradition? Opinions are divided.

According to one view from philosophical thinkers, phenomenology counts as one of the

dominant traditions in twentieth century philosophy. Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) was its

founder, but other prominent followers and developers include Martin Heidegger (1889–

1976), Alfred Schütz (1899–1959), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80), Maurice Merleau-Ponty

(1908–61), Simone de Beauvoir (1908–86), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), Paul

Ricoeur (1913–2005), and Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) (Vagle, 2014, p. 9). Both Derrida

and Gadamer have been cited as pivotal in promoting deeper philosophical understandings of the phenomenon through the linguistic turn.[13]

This opening up of the relationship between situated thought and expressed words created transformational ideologies in interpretation. Given that phenomenology has been a decisive precondition and persisting interlocutor for a whole range of later theory formations, including hermeneutics, deconstruction, and post-structuralism, it rightly deserves to be considered as the cornerstone of many narrative methodologies.

Husserl was the founding philosopher of phenomenology, but it has often been claimed that virtually all post-Husserlian phenomenologists ended up distancing themselves from most aspects of his original program. So-called "modern" phenomenologists such as van Manen, Dahlberg, and Giorgi still hold to the central tenets of phenomena as "that which is made manifest for us" and "turning to the things themselves" which are Husserl's foundational philosophies (Vagle, 2014, p. 8). But as Husserl's grand pupil Heidegger moved away from his mentor's philosophical knee, there have been a multitude of renovations and innovations to phenomenology. It has no common method and research program. It has even been suggested that Husserl was not only the founder of phenomenology, but also its sole true practitioner (Vagle, 2014, p. 22).

A historical perspective begins with Diogenes and his cynicism as a philosophical stance that created an environment counter to the prevailing logos of Socrates and others who internalized the human condition (Heidegger, 2002). This thinking that held the experiences of the world as outside of humanity and yet flowing through our beings was pushed into the background as "unevolved" as the age of Enlightenment brought us Descartes' influences of

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[13] The linguistic turn in this case is the focusing of philosophy on the relationship between philosophy and language, which is a central mechanism of interpretive analysis within hermeneutics.

a philosophy that placed all things as constructed, defined, and divined in the human mind and consciousness (Vagle, 2014, p. 21).

The Purpose(s) of the Methodology

The purpose of phenomenology is grounded in the exposure of manifestations of our lifeworld experiences as they really intentionally appear and interconnect all things. This purpose makes claims against where consciousness lies and the basic subject-to-object interplay that exists in positivism. Phenomenological purpose also lies in unearthing the truth of experiences as really lived and decrying dominant narrative falsehoods of existence in its methodology. Phenomenological studies facilitate the disclosure of authentic experiences that counter the power exerted from dominant interpretations of lived experiences as well (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Vagle, 2014).

This qualitative study used an interpretive paradigm which, as Glesne (2006) notes, provides a view of reality as "socially constructed, complex and ever-changing" (p. 48). In this role, phenomenological aspects of the power of intentions and appearance uncover the complex and changing ways in which a Black spirituality manifests in leadership formation for Black folks.[14] Another purpose of phenomenology is to redefine consciousness as conscious "of" something rather than "conscious in and of itself" as Descartes and Hobbes would claim (Vagle, 2014, p. 28). Consciousness of spirituality in its complete essence and real appearance in leadership formation shifts away from the idea that spirituality is contained in our minds alone or in an institution alone. Black spirituality as studied through phenomenology brings intentionality and a varied manner of manifestations to understanding of the world and how/why some Black people may exist in it.

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[14] The use of the term "folks" is purposeful as it engages with the ideals of DuBois (The Souls of Black Folks) and also creates a reminiscing toward Black spirituals and idiosyncratic linguistics.

Relationship to Theory

As phenomenology resists essentialism, a dominant White hegemony that claims ownership of the true knowledge of Black cultural, intellectual, personal, and communal narratives, and promotes Black counter-narratives, it correlates with CRT in deep and abiding ways. CRT and phenomenology are bound together in an agreement that flows from the tenets of counter-narrative and anti-essentialism's power to disclose truths of experience for minoritized persons that contend against the dominant narratives on their Black spirituality. Phenomenology and CRT also work to open up the complexity of beings becoming as they grapple with material determinism as they both require attention to who actually possesses and encounters a phenomenon. It is in the complexities of appearance and intention that phenomenology and CRT contradict the socially constructed ideas of Whiteness as property, the dominant hegemony, and the essentializing of a multiplicity of experiences of Black faculty and staff in higher education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

The Methodology of Phenomenology As Practiced

The phenomenological methodology used in this research study was based in a Heideggerian philosophical realm that is at the center of van Manen's research design. This hermeneutical phenomenological approach is an attempt to construct an interpretative description of a lifeworld experience with full understanding that any such construct is partial, complex, active, and never final (van Manen, 2014, p. 27). Vagle notes that this methodological approach has as one of its points of interpretive fruition—poetics. Poetics speak to giving voice. Voice calls out to expression of the soul. The soul speaks within a Black spirituality; and this spirituality raises its voice in poetics. This spirited approach is hopeful in its reach for interpretation of what manifest the "in-ness" of our voiced and lived

experiences. The voice also resounds in resistance and empowerment that can emerge from a phenomenon.

van Manen (2014) suggested six research activities that are at interplay in his hermeneutical phenomenological approach: 1) Turning to a phenomenon that seriously interest us and commits us to the world; 2) Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; 3) Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; 4) Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting (using hermeneutics to open up and disclose the grafted relationship between intentionality and linguistics); 5) Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; 6) Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (pp. 58–60). The fourth research activity will be vividly brought to life in the discussions of Chapter 6 as the voices are recalled in refrain to amplify and clarify the elements of a Black spirituality as connected to purpose and potential. It is important to note that this "writing and rewriting" activity was also a part of the gathering of the lived experience data as the work was co-constructed with the participants throughout our research journey.

Research Question

These research activities deliver an approach that embraces the research question and subsequent additional questions by offering intentional thoughtfulness, and an intentional investigation of the lived experience manifestations of a Black spirituality in the lives of Black faculty and staff as it evolved into their leadership formation. Many writers and researchers in leadership for the past decade have been specifically interested in how various types of spirituality and other markers of authenticity have formed intentionalities with the lived experience of educational leadership. Phrases and concepts such as "transformational

leadership," "developmental leadership," and "holistic leadership" have been stock and trade for those seeking titles for what they view as an evolving enterprise in leadership and leadership formation (Wood & Hilton, 2012, pp. 23–28). This hermeneutical study used these ideas of intentionality and the philosophy of phenomenology to investigate what is happening in the "in-ness" in the interconnection of a Black spirituality and leadership formation.

This study gathered purposefully selected participants who were engaged using the proven method of snowball sampling for their enlistment (Creswell, 2009; Esterberg, 2002). The snowball sampling was facilitated by starting with connecting to participants from a previous brief study involving Black faculty and staff in higher education that I conducted in 2016. In the snowball sampling, two of the participants in the previous study offered contact information for other Black faculty and staff, which then lead to connections with a larger sphere of perspective participants from various universities and colleges. The prospective participants were emailed an initial brief survey and invitation to participate in the research (See samples in the appendices). From those who replied to the survey and invitation, I followed up with an email to further describe the needs and requests of the research. My goal was to engage participants with an authentic interest in not only discussing their Black spirituality, but who also had at least five or more years in higher education. The interest was also there for inclusion of voices that did not align with a Black spirituality in their lived experiences.

I made the methodological decision to focus upon PWIs because my previous reading and inquiry presented information that reflected possible differences between how Black spirituality might be encountered at PWIs versus private or religiously-based higher education institutions. Focusing on PWIs was also consistent with remaining directed to the

manifestations from my own professional background from which this research question emerged. Additional information on the method and process of participant selection is presented in the research design portion of this methodology chapter.

Introductory surveys, semi-structured interviews, and shared lived experience narratives were used as tools for gathering data (Clandinin, 2013; Glesne, 2006; Kvale, 1996). I used the term "gathering" as Vagle (2014) did to invoke the epistemological and ontological stance of the harvesting of information with and from the participants. Gathering is also used to elicit the imagery of "coming together" with purpose in the spiritual and cultural sense. The distinction between gathering and collecting data is essential to the ongoing phenomenon of a Black spirituality as my goal was to share communally rather than to take from participants. This gathering also supported our reflexive engagement with our process of collaboration and LED construction. The manifestation of this gathering begins with the central question for my research:

- How do their encounters with a Black spirituality manifest in leadership formation and resilience for Black faculty and staff at predominantly White institutions?

Additional questions that evolved are:

- How do Black faculty and staff view Black spirituality in its context with their roles on their campuses?
- What role does some manifestation of Black spirituality play in the experiences in academia for Black faculty and staff?
- Do the origins or practices of their Black spirituality make a difference in the manifestations in their work in academia?

- What evidence exists in the performative aspects of the Black faculty and staff activities that implicate an interconnectedness to Black spirituality?

The questions emerge from a phenomenological philosophy that suggest things are brought into being through our living in the world (anti-Cartesian) (Heidegger, 2002) and critical race theoretical framework fostered in my own intentionalities as a Black academician. The research questions have unique salience to me as a person whose Black spirituality was manifest in academic and career development as I persisted through struggles that caused others to flail and falter. But the questions also rest outside my individual experience within the phenomenon of the research.

Research Design

The elements of the methodology flow through the intentionalities that frame my research design. As van Manen (2014) and Vagle (2014) suggested, the elements include thoughtfulness, pedagogy, and poetics. A phenomenological endeavor of the hermeneutics variety requires "mindful, heedful, and caring attunement" (Heidegger, 1988) to the actual lived experiences of life. A "turning to the things themselves" is central to the elements of thoughtfulness and is distinctly pedagogical as Husserl (as cited in Vagle, 2014) pointed out in his philosophical stance and to which Heidegger agreed. The pedagogy of hermeneutics resides in the interpretive actions that move from researcher to participant to data to researcher to reader and any mixture in the 'in-ness' of the phenomenon. This continual discourse of intentionalities moves the data into a rhythm that erupts as poetics in its linguistic expressions. The phenomena that I researched lead to a phenomenon of its own. This wrapping entanglement produced intersubjective moments that break the bound

Cartesian subject-object narrative of consciousness and freed them to an open, attentive, search for meanings as we live them.

Vagle (2014) cited van Manen and Heidegger as reinforcing eight main features and characteristics of hermeneutical phenomenology that include this open, attentive stance toward interpreting life as it is lived—not conceptualized. The characteristics are as follows:

1. Openness: an inclining toward unrestricted reflexive engagement with a phenomenon

2. The attentive practice of thoughtfulness: Continual reflection

3. Study of lived experience: Life as lived, not as essentialized

4. Explication of phenomena as presented to consciousness: Experienced being

5. Study of essences: Encountering the fullness of things themselves

6. The description of experiential meaning we live as we live them: Narrative

7. A search for what it means to be human: Meaning-making

8. A poeticizing activity: Giving voice (pp. 48–50)

From these eight characteristics, a researcher who uses this methodology finds themselves in a different point of beginning and a different ending (a misnomer because phenomenology in the interpretive realm never ends). What emerges from giving attention to these characteristics and their interplay is a most dangerous assignment—being open to a lived experience as it presents itself to the consciousness of another in all the diverse essences while retaining the humanity of it all, then delivering it in linguistically-attuned poetics. The types of methods used speak to the challenge of interweaving the eight characteristics into phenomenological research. Each method described in the following section provides openness, creates space for attentiveness and attunement to the phenomenon.

The methods were interviews as unstructured or semi-structured events, lived experience descriptions which offer groundings of poetics, and introductory surveys which allowed for interacting with the phenomenon of a Black spirituality in leadership formation in retrospect, acted as foundational introductory insights, and as a central recruiting method for the research. The lived experience description (LED), as adapted by van Manen (2014), opened up aspects of the phenomenon that might have remained obscured or closed off otherwise because they were the lived expression from a participant's own voice, hand, or memorabilia relayed to me in slow, deep, descriptions. The interviews also provided an additional perspective by reflecting and responding to how the participants live out the 'in-ness' of hermeneutical phenomenology in the intentionalities of their lives leading into their educational leadership experiences (Seidman, 2013).

To co-create a true representation of what the participants wished to share in this research, we co-constructed the final lived experience descriptions from the survey responses, interviews, and original draft LEDs. This phenomenon required weeks of engagement and communal interactions from taking "physically-distanced" long walks together to discuss concerns or share additional reflections to texting back and forth about a particular phrase or narrative moment. It is important to note that these moments of the ongoing phenomenon were occurring during a global health crisis (COVID-19). At multiple moments, we returned to "the things themselves" to reflect upon the phenomenon and our interpretations of our lived experiences (Heidegger, 1988).

The essences of phenomenological research begin with being open to the questioning of a particular phenomenon quite prior to when a researcher arrives at their ideas of methods like introductory surveys, interview questions, and LED's though. The activities begin with

developing thoughts and ideas on how best to engage with the phenomena to be studied as suggested by van Manen (2014, p. 56). This process of opening up to as many perspectives as possible allows for a deepening of relationships with the activities themselves, rather than simply taking the cookie cutter methods at face value. This deepening helps to define the question or questions that arise as the focus of the research. Inquiry and research for this study required a period of deep reflection and writing which evolved, partially, into the segments of my lived experience description narrative.

The questions that arose then aided in the elaboration of interview questions or ideas on approaching the phenomenon through the lived experience description (poetry, short narrative, song, etc.). Once I settled on unstructured and semi-structured interviews, introductory surveys for recruitment and gathering basic background data, and lived experience descriptions as the methods of investigation, I reviewed each and creatively nuanced them toward their best relationship with the phenomenon. With the participants chosen through snowball sampling (Creswell, 2009; Esterberg, 2002; Glesne, 2006), the selected prospective participants were emailed preliminary questions that set the background for our experience together. These questions were derived from the primary and secondary research questions.

Though I knew one of the perspective participants prior, we had not discussed their Black spirituality in-depth previously, and the participant was merely one of a list of possible participants who I hoped would respond to the introductory survey. This eventual participant was one of the people to provide lists of prospective participants for the snowball sampling. I also had interviewed one of the other eventual participants previously, but did not know them

beyond that brief encounter at two professional conferences. This participant also shared names of prospective participants with me.

For the snowball sampling, I emailed the introductory survey to 25 Black faculty and staff at public PWIs (See sample of brief introductory survey protocol in appendices). As noted previously, I chose to focus on public predominantly White institutions because I wanted to keep the research focused on the phenomenon as it had emerged from my own experiences. I also wanted to focus on public PWIs because a review of literature had presented information that disclosed possible differences between public and private PWIs in the realm of engagement with Black faculty and staff. Public PWIs are also the dominant sector of higher education in the United States (NCES, 2013). The introductory survey yielded twelve requests for follow-up and possible participation. Four of the twelve potential participants agreed to the full research inquiry process.

Because this research is so deeply intertwined with my own experiences, I chose to include my own participation as well while respecting the phenomenology precept of "bracketing" of experiences (Vagle, 2014, p. 38). Bracketing is a "phenomenological reduction" that ask the researcher to bracket past knowledge of a phenomenon and be present to the current concrete experience (Vagle, 2014, p. 67). However, this bracketing does not require removing all past knowledge. It asks that researchers not let past knowledge circumvent the presentation of the phenomenon in the lived experience (Vagle, 2014).

As bracketing is not a requirement, but instead a tool that may be used in phenomenology, I chose to use the tool as a way of defining the parameters of our experiences rather than as a tool to exclude previous encounters. Bracketing of experiences in this research protects the authentic lived experiences from becoming overly Christological or

diminished to generic experiences of every human. Though participants would reflect experiences with the Black church and Black religion, my bracketing work provided an avenue for us to situate those experiences as tangential yet historically relevant to our lived experiences.

I also chose to use Dahlberg's (2006) concept of "bridling" of our previous experiences as methodological tool in this phenomenological research because this stance allowed for the research to move beyond the brackets when manifestations emerged (Vagle, 2014, p. 63). "Bridling" is the phenomenological technique of allowing "pre-understandings" to be restrained, but still allow for openness to the whole of a lived experience. It also is forward-looking and asks that researchers slow down and not rush to understand a phenomenon too quickly so that they do not attempt "to make definite what is indefinite" (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2003, p. 36). This act of bridling actually offered freedoms to the participants to slow down in their reflections and for me, as researcher, to remain engaged with our communal phenomenon that emerged in the co-creation of the LEDs without rushing to definite determinations of outcomes.

However, bridling was not used to control the expression and gathering of data, which would have been counter to the concept of harvesting that was previously noted as essential to reliability and validity for the study. Also, because the work of phenomenology is so intentional, the research required a depth of engagement with each participant's lived experiences rather than a litany of data points or responses. Therefore, even my choice to not expand the research beyond five total participants held validity as an act of bridling in the phenomenon of the research process. .

During the period of deep reflection in preparation for this research, I developed a brief study that focused on the general experiences of Black faculty and staff at PWIs. Questions regarding how the participants in the brief study saw their positionality at the PWI were the basis for some of the reflective questions for this research. The LED method was also practiced in the brief earlier study as a reflective and practical method of gathering experiences representative of how these tactics might function on a larger scale. As noted previously, the introductory surveys were used before the interviews to garner participants and gather information on their possible encounters with a Black spirituality.

Those who responded to the introductory surveys and who volunteered to participate further were then provided information on the interviews and requests for LED's. The interviews with the four participants who agreed to the inquiry process were conducted over a 2-month period as many of the participants have very active professional lives. They were given the request for the lived experience description during this same time period. The interviews occurred entirely over the Google Meet and Zoom online meeting platforms for two participants due to COVID-19. The other participants and I either met in their offices or in outside locations.

In one case, the participant and I took a very long walk across their campus, and I conducted part of the gathering of their lived experience description while staying the COVID required six feet apart. We both agreed that this part of the experience may have been yet another manifestation of a Black spirituality as we used our creativity and inclusion of movement as elements of expression. This information is shared in support of an ongoing awareness of phenomenological method. Once the data was initially collected, each

participant was contacted to review their narratives, answers, and to check any emotional tones that I experienced in our engagements in order to clarify or correct understanding.

This process required approximately two months of follow-up interactions, but was essential to ensuring that the lived experience were being reflected responsibly and authentically. The interviews and lived experience descriptions deeply inform the research and phenomenological understandings beyond the introductory surveys and thus provided a type of triangulation of data (Glesne, 2006). Triangulation is one of the methods for substantiating validity and reliability in research, though phenomenology focuses on validity and reliability emerging from research remaining centered in "the things themselves" that are made manifest (Husserl as cited in Vagle, 2014, p. 11)

The data, once gathered, was viewed through van Manen's Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis that uses a "whole-part-whole" design (Vagle, 2014, pp. 96–98). By looking at the sum, taking it apart, and putting it back together, the research becomes a phenomenological act unto itself filled with intentionalities. The "whole-part-whole" design is demonstrated through the use of a 'Research Findings' chapter, which consists of the compiled co-constructed narratives from introductory surveys, interviews, intertwined with the original draft lived experience descriptions within the interviews from each participant and from my own lived experience narrative that were incorporated into the data overall.

The data was then taken apart in the 'Discussion' chapter as I deconstructed the data and made space for the phenomenon to emerge from the narratives and engage with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Then, in the "Conclusions and Implications chapter", I put the parts back together, but only after conceptually gathering and unpacking the data teleologically to expose their underlying depths of purpose. The end result was a text that

reads and has an orality more attuned to a novel or set of brief short stories. The goal of the research was to truly provide a poetics that relinquishes to the counter-narrative and anti-essentialism needs of Black faculty and staff in higher education at public predominantly White Institutions so their lived experiences as educational leaders can be seen, felt, and heard.

Design Rationale

The hermeneutical phenomenological approach was chosen because it is open, malleable, and responsive (Vagle, 2014, p. 58). For me to respectfully "turn to the things themselves" (encounters with a Black spirituality manifest in leadership formation) and not the prevailing hegemony (Black spirituality essentialized), I needed a methodological approach that had this stance. This approach also reflected and engaged the ever-shifting nature of the lifeworld as experienced through an interpretive 'in-ness' that also shifted and changed through our lived encounters—especially when viewed through a lens of manifestations of a Black spirituality.

Other approaches did not offer this action and interaction-oriented type of research design. They had the potential to offer a responsive avenue such as with a positivist stance, but causal or correlational data is not what I was seeking. Other approaches may even use the stories and experiences of participants such as with narrative or case study in autoethnography. But these approaches do not open up the understandings of the experience of life as it is in the motion of being intentionally lived as phenomenology does.

Phenomenology is active and has a dynamism that manifests in intentionalities (interconnectedness) that other approaches either find too messy or simply are not the point of their 'hard' science research. My questions were about the lived experience in all its

messiness and misunderstandings that both draws us deeply into yet also infuriate and disillusion Black folk's educational leadership at PWIs. Hermeneutical phenomenology helped me to answer the research question of "How do their encounters with a Black spirituality manifest in leadership formation and resilience for Black faculty and staff in higher education at PWIs?" by allowing the research participants to bring me into their experiences of phenomenon as lived, not as conceptually packaged (Vagle, 2014). In bringing me and readers of the research to the manifestation of a Black spirituality in leadership formation, this approach exposed and unveiled the actual day-to-day and moment-to-moment lived experience rather than representing it for Black faculty and staff at public PWIs.

This approach also allowed me to reflect upon and examine the things I assumed I knew from my own experiences and those of others in relation to a Black spirituality and educational leadership. This precept is extremely important when interweaving CRT and phenomenology because to combat the White hegemonic narrative, we must confront what we think we know about Black spirituality and Black people to engage with their truth in their lived experience (Dantley, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, Vagle, 2014). CRT takes the poetics and the attuned openness of phenomenology and offers discourses on counter-narrative that return voice to those who dare not speak in the White hallowed halls of academia.

The poetic narratives of "How I got over," a song crossing generations of Black lives from Mahalia Jackson to The Roots, reflect the moment of a person's life that triumphs with spiritual assistance as they live and tell it, not as some dominant culture says it is to be told. "I had to cry in the midnight hour coming over. But you know my soul looks back and

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wonders how I got over." (C. Ward, 1951). From The Roots, "How I got over where the people come apart. Don't nobody care about cha, only thing you got is God" (2009). The inherent racism that has dominated for hundreds of years as an external narrative of "understanding" or "knowing" how a Black spirituality becomes elementally experienced by Blacks requires a phenomenological intermingling with CRT to respect where the authentic knowledge is embodied and lives.

In this intimate and abiding way phenomenology is connected to my theoretical base in CRT's tenets of anti-essentialism, Whiteness as property, and combating the dangerous dominant hegemony through counter-narrative (Crenshaw, et al., 1996; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Vagle, 2014). The requirement that narratives be reflected as the participants lived them, and not as I, even as a Black researcher, might represent them, speaks to the issues that emerge from CRT in discussions of essentialism. Whiteness as property from CRT presents the critique that being White comes with added value, content, and favor in this world.

This added flavor and value means that the lives, narratives, and even the transformative pieces of the lives of Black folks, like Black spirituality manifest in leadership formation, do not have equity with White Americans. In phenomenology, all experiences are taken as that which is "made manifest for us" and as such belongs to the person (or people) that experience the intentionality of the encounter in direct resistance to this White hegemonic stance (Vagle, 2014, p. 21). The intentionality can be heard and felt in the research findings and in the powerful refrains of the discussions of the intersections between theory, conceptual framework and a Black spirituality. These elemental expressions are manifested and delivered in the narratives and lived experience descriptions that follow in

Chapter 5 and the essential reprise of voices in the reflective narratives shared in Chapter 6 as reinforcement of their value and prophetic call to action. *Let the caged bird begin to sing.*

Chapter 5: Research Findings

This chapter consists of two sections that report and narrate the research findings. In the first section, I report my Lived Experience Description (LED), which as noted in the Methodology chapter, is similar in structure and ethos to an autoethnography to address the research question. The LED process is used because it is reflective of the phenomenology through which Black Spirituality is being interpreted (Vagle, 2014). The second section consists of the research findings from the lived experience narratives divined from the study participants' answers to both the online introductory survey and one-on-one interview questions, and shared lived experience descriptions. Each of the sections are structured to reflect the manifestation of a Black spirituality in the personal lives, the manifestation in their professional lives, and as manifest in the institutional lives of the participants.

As a reflection of the lived experiences of the participants, my goal was to present the data as recounted to me in response to the questions from the surveys and one-on-one interviews with LEDs in culmination. The aim was to have the reader become enlivened in the lived experiences without the interspersing of my biases or redactions. Some of the narratives that will be shared are quite painful. The object of this sharing and inquiry is not to cause the reader harm, but to remain true to the phenomenon in the experiences. But, as some narratives may prove overwhelming to read, they should be understood as critical lived experiences that intimately relate to the presence of a Black spirituality's elements of survival, resistance, and resilience as the Black faculty and staff participants were formed as educational leaders.

For each participant, I shared the recounting of their responses and asked for any edits or clarifications. Their input was thoroughly integrated into the data. I also shared segments

of my lived experiences with Black spirituality with the participants to encourage a deep level of disclosure and also to represent my positionality in the research. The use of the extended narratives of the Lived Experience Descriptions (LEDs) with quotations are meant to present the data as unfiltered or distilled to ascribe to the phenomenology of a Black spirituality as lived and breathed by each participant. I italicize these narrative responses to delineate their intimacy toward the topic and toward the readers.

The expansion of the presentation of the narratives was also vital to my claims of validity and reliability in the research. But beyond supporting the adherence to sound qualitative research practices, this method of presentation served to respect and honor the voices of the Black folks who came forward to share their sometimes difficult and painful experiences in life and in higher education. As I present my lived experience description, it is with some of this pain and difficulty in its wake, but the disclosures and the imparting of how Black spirituality affected me through these experiences offer powerful possible implications for change as will be explicated in the discussion and conclusions chapters.

Though I begin with my participation through the use of lived experience descriptions, the section that follows this narrative represents elements of the diaspora of the Black experiences and the experiences with (and without) a Black spirituality. The narrative inquiries emerge without constraining the overall phenomenological narrative and its interpretation. I begin with a brief detailing of the participants' background and then follow with their shared lived experiences brought forth from questions from their survey responses and our one-on-one interviews which flowed into lived experience descriptions. The poetics and rhythms of our conversations and their expressive reflections speak to issues in the realm

of critical race theory (CRT) and agency as they impart wisdom from the presence or absence of the manifestation of a Black spirituality in their lives.

My Lived Experience Description: The Caged Bird Sings

"*A free bird leaps on the back of the wind and floats downstream till the current ends And dips his wing in the orange sun rays and dares to claim the sky. But a bird that stalks down his narrow cage can seldom see through his bars of rage his wings are clipped and his feet are tied so he opens his throat to sing. The caged bird sings with a fearful trill of things unknown but longed for still and his tune is heard on the distant hill for the caged bird sings of freedom…*" (Maya Angelou, 1983)

Spirituality As Personal

My mother and father had prayed for me to be born. Literally, my mother would recount to me in my older years; they prayed each day for me to be born. Not because I was to be their first, they had their hands full before me with my sisters; they prayed for me because they had lost my unborn sibling only nine months earlier. Throughout the gestation, my little body had struggles and downward turns, but my spirit was resilient and resolute that I would emerge from this birthing battle victorious. To add fear and frustration into the air, I was trying to emerge two months early. When framed in modern technology's view, two months is not always that difficult. But I was underweight and came from my mother's womb in a ball—no head, feet, or butt first. This little four and three-quarters pound fella decided to push out in a hunched sphere that definitely was painful and frightful for my mother.

And, since my parents were of mixed races, their plans for my birth already had to combat prejudice and disruption. So, it was tough for my mother to only be allowed to hold

me for a few moments before being whisked away. Mama said she prayed so hard that she thought her eyes were never going to come open again. For better or worse, our relationship has seen multiple moments in our lives when she was prone to this "prayer stance" again and again. Dr. H. said I cried even before he spanked my bottom and then I just settled into my tiny circular space and slept.

My dad (Pop) always told me that I was the child that they never thought would survive, but always dreamed that God specifically created me as a survivor to show others what is possible with God's help and with a devoted heart. Of course, he was also the man who called me what I grew to understand as a cruel name once I began reading. Though my birthright name is as junior to his own, he (after input from his not so gentile White work colleagues) called me Moto; yes, as in Quasimodo. For years, this man who I cherish to this day called me a name that was so harmful and hurtful, which he thought of as endearing. With my hunched back and crooked legs, my parents put me in braces tightened with metal bolts into my back and knees. But who was I to complain because these medical instruments and the procedures that went with them were very expensive, and they chose to invest in me rather than buying that first house or new cars. Pop would say that his boy was a gift from God beyond what they thought possible, and he had to help, protect, and support me because there was something great God had planned for me.

This plan was no small matter for our immediate family. It was broadcast across the families of my aunts and uncles to my cousins all down the line. From my birth, my grandmothers each "anointed me" with their daily prayers for me to grow strong and to bring amazingly good things into the world. Why this call was implanted upon me became clearer when I grew older and found out that both my grandfathers had died in a few days of my

birth—another reason my dad would cite for me emerging from the womb early. He'd say I was making sure to capture their spirits before they were completely gone.

Thank goodness I was not quite aware of this pressure or its implications at such a young age. But, before I could speak, the label of 'doctor' was placed upon my head. In a family with hundreds of close relatives (aunts, uncles, and cousins), I was to be the child who would change and heal the world. My father's mother, Miss Irene (called that because she was widowed) would say that God had put something in me that nothing could take away. At times, as I sat with her on her long wooden porch that would creak and sway in a strong breeze, she would grab my face and kiss me and say, "You will help us do better." I still feel the warmth of her embrace of my chin and the sweetness of the snuff on her lips; I can feel the love of God that coursed through her to me.

From my birth, there began this charge that I was born to keep, and my parents worked diligently to keep me "prayed up" so that I would continue the journey and the call. But just like my difficult birth and early days, my life in youth and college were fraught with fear, anxiety, promise and failure, challenges and triumphs, and painful disregard from people around me who test my resilience with their abhorrent labeling and derogatory acts. Yes, the people who interspersed harm and chaos in my life were both White and Black, but it was the White individuals who would contribute the most stress upon my resilience and the Black folks who would contribute most to me reaffirming my resilience.

As I came into this world, I screamed to be allowed to live and thrive; I continue to scream to that which is beyond the detractors and deniers, beyond me and my fear of losing myself, to that which is working for our good. This primal scream speaks to my fear of losing agency in my life and career and to rituals and beliefs that sustain my resiliency. The scream

is also the proclaiming of ownership of my narrative, unconstrained, as CRT demands from the caged bird.

Earliest Memories of Black Spirituality

Not being able to run or play as most other children could because of my leg and back braces, I devoted a large portion of my time sitting at the knee of my grandmothers and consuming books, including the Bible. After I was born and steady enough to be handed off, my mother had taken a job with the local poultry company for my parents to have a chance at building a house for their growing family. At my grandmothers' knees and rocking in chairs beside them, I learned the gift of storytelling and narrative—sharing that reached back into our ancestors in all their mixed-race glory. They spoke of how the spirits of our mothers and fathers still walk with us and through God's grace guide us through wondrous and difficult times. With a mixture of African and Celtic stories, they proclaimed notions of passionate couplings that withstood White denigration, harsh detractors who told my great-grandfather that his work had no value then stole his competencies for their own gain, and lives cut short by walking away from the guiding spirit. They brought out such sweet poetry, and enlivened my love for verse whether written or sung.

These ladies were not trying to teach from fear primarily; they were sharing life lessons to try to spare me harm and to let me know that the world in which "White makes right" keeps "Brown way down," and a life for me stood teetering on this morality. For Miss Irene and Miss Frances, struggling in the White world was what life on this earth brought them, but the God of their spirituality would not leave them in that state. If it was not for them to change how this world would treat those who were other than White, then God had a plan for their children or their children's children to make a stand for the acknowledgement

of promised equality and equity for all humans. Their "freedom and fairness" talks, as I came to call them, were sensibly stated mini-sermons that directly tied education to equity in our lives and God's role in fulfilling this promise.

My grandmothers did not rely on Bible stories or quotes from the Scripture, even though they both read the texts every day. Their tales of moral and ethical behavior came from a mix of ancestral narratives, biblical ideologies, and their own brand of 'homespun' Black wisdom that distilled lessons from how the White world had treated them and the people they loved. Their Black spirituality contained all these elements—along with some wonderful singing and what I called "low humming" and prayers. I remember distinctly warm summer days picking green beans in Miss Irene's garden filled with the beautifully, melodic sounds of her crisp, yet rattling voice as she sang words to spirituals that I could never quite discern (she made up some of her lyrics I found in my later college years) and took a moment every few stanzas to stand up and clap a bit. At three and four years old, I would sway and rock along with those melodic tones and even hours in that garden did not feel long enough to share in this spirit and her love of God.

I, as a very young child, was told again and again that what people would say to me about my braces, the color of my skin, the way that I spoke, and the fact that even as a child I had a "heart too big for my britches," as Miss Irene would say, would put me in harm's way. These ladies did not tell me this to try to keep me from venturing into the world, but instead, they shared these possible obstacles and aggressions with me so that I could begin to see where God steps in for us. They shared that sometimes God will intervene directly, but in the most powerful way, God sustains us, encourages us, comforts us, and gives us the strength to combat the offenses of life in this world. I carry this Black wisdom and spirit to this day.

Black Spirituality in Community and Culture

The Black wisdom and spirit that I acquired as a very young child grew beyond the mini-sermons and sharing of souls from my grandmothers to extend into the community and culture around me. As a child, I loved both words and music with all my heart. The songs of the Black church still inspire me when I am in the midst of struggles. Our community was centered in our churches back then. Much of the support my father received when he, a Black man in an overwhelmingly White county, decided to open his own gas stations and garages came from the Black churches in the area. My Pop also received support from many White citizens because of his warm and welcoming nature, but the bulk of his customers in the beginning were Black folks.

It was not a surprise to him when I expressed a deep desire to sing in the youth choir and join other activities in our church because he would hear my grandmothers and I singing as he would plow the fields around their gardens. He also shared later in my life that he would spot me trying to read the Bible at around two years of age. I remember thinking that this book had some stories in it that had something to do with how people were acting around me. So, I wanted to find out what all the discussions were about. The church was a natural space for me to continue this exploration and to have a chance to sing.

The Black community in our county was dynamic in that it was not all churchgoing and God-loving folks. The community also had some wonderfully, troublesome members who did their job to teach me that life has more than one flavor. The moments in church were always seen in concert with the vibes of the community. The vibes included some of the most beautiful and transformative music that I would hear in my entire life. Sitting in our neighbors' homes and in their front yards, the words and tunes from Marvin Gaye, Nina

Simone, Al Green, WAR, and the Fifth Dimension co-mingled with the biblical and slavery-inspired songs from the Black church to inspire some finger-popping and loud singing. But they also stirred something in me.

When I first heard "Trouble Man" (1972) by Marvin Gaye, I was quite young, but I heard a pain and also a strength in that power-laden music that spoke both of oppressive forces and also the impassioned scream of the spirit of a Black man. Though I was way too young to see the movie, my mother and father loved Marvin Gaye, so I was allowed to listen to his music—on 8-track—while I helped fold laundry or rolled in the grass as my Pop changed the oil in the tractor. Marvin Gaye was not sharing his narrative through church spirituals or gospels, but he was sharing a Black narrative that was, and remains, quite spiritual and definitely speaks a gospel to the oppressed.

My attachment to the songs of the church like "How I Got Over" share in the intimate spaces of my childhood memories with "Trouble Man" as I remember this feeling of connectedness growing in me as a child. Because of that "heart too big for my britches" that my grandmother remarked about many times, songs like these would make me cry while also filling me with wonder as to why some people would treat others so badly as to inspire the pain and resolution in the lyrics. As I looked around my community, it was clear to me that something beyond us would have to intervene if we were to survive and thrive in a world that seemed to disregard and defame those of us who were not White. Community meant (and still means) the world to me, and even at a young age, I felt the call to do something to bring a little healing and happiness to them. Whether it was singing in the choir or popping and snapping fingers, and dancing in the neighbors' yards, the drive to share in the uplifting of

those around me were moments when I felt powerful; power not in a controlling way, but instead, power that created opportunities to make the world a little better.

Black Spirituality in My Youth

This power in my early agency was part of how Black spirituality was developing in my youth. I saw the workings of Black spirituality in the slow changes in our community as people began to step up to improve the education of marginalized people in our county. From the strength of centering the influence of the Black church in their work, my uncle, Clyde, was elected to the county Board of Education and was able to grow his timber business, my Pop served in community organizations as well as finally opening his own businesses in the mid-seventies, and my uncle Romy also opened a gas station in the center of our town.

My Pop was even asked to join the Lion's Club, but he chose to stay on the sidelines and support them. The main gas station was a primary spot for Lion's Club fundraisers with everything from broom sales to car washes and holiday fruit sales. Pop said it was more important to show a shared caring for others than to sit in meetings. Our Lion's Club worked to assist people who were losing their sight or who were blind as well as those with other disabilities—something that resonates with me now as I lose my sight and experience such great love in the midst of my struggle.

It would be disingenuous of me if I portrayed my youth and the changes in the life of my family and community as simply a story couched in the joys of Black spirituality and God's grace. When I was about five, almost six, my father was actually working two jobs— one at a gas station for what proved to be a group a wonderful White men who honored and respected my father's work ethic and his good humor and another at a grain mill where he was constantly berated, paid less than a third of the wages of his White coworkers, and

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always had to be at their beck and call. My Pop was a man who mostly just tried to work hard and provide for his family while being honest and with a good sense of humor. But I could always see the pain in his eyes when he came home from working at the mill. I could hear him talking, in low tones so that we children could not hear, to my mom about the way that his supervisor and others treated him at the mill.

One evening, I walked my little braced-up body into the kitchen and climbed onto his lap. He was trying to eat, but took the time to huddle me into one side of him. He looked really sad. Then he dropped his head and began to pray. He peeked out of the corner of his left eye at me, and I bowed my little head as well. I could hear his words even though he was not making a sound, and I started to cry. Pop said his "amen" and smiled at me. He said, "It is gonna get better. Real soon. It is gonna get better." He gave me some of his potatoes and a chuck of stew beef, and I ran off to watch Batman. The next day, Pop woke early and said he was headed to town. I, of course, wanted to go along. There was nothing better than riding around with my Pop and visiting town. He knew almost everyone it seemed, and they were so nice to him—and me. Even the old White ladies we would see in the grocery store would either want to shake his hand or give him a hug—even though my grandmother, Miss Irene said to look out for them. On this day, we went to the service station where he worked part-time. Pop sat me in the main office and gave me free pick of whatever ice cream I wanted from the cooler—another bonus of riding with my Pop. He went into the back room and I distinctly remember hearing laughter and men talking. He was back there for quite a while, but came out smiling and laughing. He took my hand, and we went into the grease pit area of the station. Pop approached one of the men sitting at the controls for the lift and they shook

hands. The man, Raymond, leaned into my Pop and gave him a manly hug and patted my Pop's back.

We left the service station, and Pop said we had to make a trip a little further and did I want to go home. I was set with my second ice cream sandwich and my father. So, we headed south to the grain mill. When we arrived, Pop asked me to stay in the truck and behave (I had a tendency to play with the gear shift and start the truck). He went inside the mill and was gone for about 20 minutes. As he came out, he was wiping his forehead and his eyes a little. His gait was thundering as he marched down the lot toward me. I made sure to sit up straight and tried to smile. As he grabbed the handle to the truck door, I heard a loud voice from up the hill shout, "You better not come back here, boy!" My Pop just turned and stared. The man, who I recognized as my father's supervisor, shouted, "You won't get a job as long as anybody asks me. You think you can do better than I treat ya? Uppity Nigger!" I had never actually heard anyone use that word—and especially not toward my father, a man whose soul was as gentle and gracious as there could be.

The man hulked down the hill toward my father with his fists balled up. My Pop just said, "Stay away from me. I got my son in the truck." The man stopped and spit on the ground in front of my dad. He said, "Well, look at your father, boy. Lazy as they come." I just stared forward gripping the empty ice cream wrapper. "Get on out of here then!" the man yelled, his White face grown red and his voice trembling. Pop opened the truck door and slammed it shut. I jumped in my seat, but remained as still as possible. Though he didn't swear, Pop screamed and pounded the dash of the truck. We spun around in the lot and took off toward the highway. Halfway to the road, Pop stopped and looked back. He rubbed my shoulder and said, "It is better already. Don't let anyone ever treat you like you don't matter.

Sometimes God just uses them to wake you up so you get the heck away from them." He chuckled a little as I smiled and said, "OK." He gave me a choice—haircut or home. I pointed east toward the barbershop, and we headed off to have our haircuts and to share the good news that my father was no longer working at the mill. I still remember the words of Mr. Curtis as Pop told him the story. Mr. Curtis said, "Thank you, Lord." And my Pop said, "Yes, thank you, Lord."

My father's actions back then echo deeply with me as I think of the concept of my life as a "caged bird" and the oppressions the world places upon us that incite our outcries and wailings. One of the most painful times of my youth that still requires the strength and resilience of Black spirituality to combat stems from the abuse I endured at a young age. Though my parents were amazing, loving, and caring people, they were busy with the needs of our large family. Work, raising the large brood of children, church, and also taking care of their mothers who were widowed left little time to give particular attention to me. In no way do I blame or hold my parents responsible for the abuse that others placed upon me. But what my parents had on their plates and how they dealt with it is essential to properly relaying this narrative.

When I was seven, my first abuser took advantage of my youth and my compassionate heart to pull me into intimate abuse that lasted almost five years. This White man found ways to convince my grandmother that he and I should go off into the woods or into the fields around her house where I suffered abuses over and over. He would talk of hunting lessons or checking on crops—lies that now sound so easy to see through. In the beginning, I did not quite understand even what was happening. All I knew was that this man seemed sad and if I let him hold me, he would feel better. I even placed him in my prayers

because, to me, he was just lost and could not find anyone around him who cared enough to help him. In the midst of the abuse, I would sometimes just drift off into conversation with God as to why this man chose me and what I had done to put myself into the place. At night, in my room, I would ask God to help me to end this pain. The lamentations were unanswered and it became more difficult to sing praises or to believe that there was some wondrous, ultimate "call" that I was meant to do in this world. I tried to bring this pain out to my grandmothers, whom I thought had, in their Black wisdom and that of our ancestors, answers to that which had taken me seemingly out of connection with God. But from both of them, I was told to not speak of it, and it would end. I began to question everything about my agency in life and how the power of "Whiteness" was again harming me.

My memories of these ill times of life remain quite vivid even to this day. When I see people from the community or my family, I often wonder if my silence did more harm than just to me. These thoughts come to mind partially because of my other abusers from the community who worked for my father. In their intimate abuse, I found that it was not just one White man in my family's lives, but these agents of assault were across the spectrum of our community—both Black and White. My response was to try to go to church more, to pray more, and to sadly gain a huge amount of weight. If God was not going to intervene, I felt that I had to find some way to deter these men from me. For almost four years, I gained pound after pound until I was over 300 pounds at age 14. The outcome of this weight gain may have been a deterrent to the abusers eventually, but it took until the age of 16, when I went off to college, before it finally ended.

It remains in my mind how these men would tout how smart they thought I was and how kind I was to my father, but then subject me to abusive situations over and over again.

My father trusted these men, and many of them were hard-working, yet broken, souls. They drank too much, had multiple children out of wedlock, and went to jail on numerous occasions. But when asked, my Pop was always there for them. The agony of each abuse was coupled with the guilt of knowing that my words, my voice if screamed, could ruin a life. So I remained caged and only sang of how things will become better—for us all.

Black Spirituality in My College Years

The better did begin to happen in college, though I still, and continue to, feel the repercussions of the assaults. My trust in others, along with my weight, was greatly reduced each day. And sadly, my spirituality also lessened to a depth that left me without voice, without connection to community, and without any feeling of agency toward life or a call. I wandered through college, in and out of incongruent relationships and without a plan for my future. I could not bring myself to attend church when I came home from college on breaks. It became too difficult to listen to my parents as they tried to share their Black wisdom carried on from our elders. My daily prayers ceased, and I slipped into a space void of anything except lament that focused inward.

One day in the middle of campus, I was sitting outside the music building, and I heard the most awe-inspiring horns and the tenor of the sweetest male voice. As I peered inside the half-open door of the choral room, I saw this vision of hope and grace standing in front of a small ensemble. He continued to cast forth this riveting tune that sparked both admiration and wonder in me. "How could someone express themselves so deeply and personally in a world that cared so little for its beings?"

My worldview had shifted so far from grace and strength that I no longer saw any inroads into a relationship with God or Black spirituality. As I struggled in my beginning

courses in college, my parents had sought reflection and support from our community. Instead, they received negativity and shaming, which they then passed on to me. The world was questioning my call to vocation. So why would I not follow suit? Being at a predominantly White institution, "Whiteness" and the role of White hegemony were prevalent factors in how I was treated, advised, instructed, and counseled. And without support from home nor the centering of my roots in Black spirituality, I drifted further and further away from myself and my God. Suffering in the midst of an "imposter syndrome" which told me that I did not belong at this premiere institution anyway, I accepted failure as my lot and my path.

But as I stood at the doorway, something erupted at my core. This power began to surge within me. It felt so late as I was almost at the point of graduation, but it also felt so rightly timed. Cast out by my community because of what they took as my failure to "save them" or bring honor to them, and pushed aside by my family as they hated who I had become, there finally appeared the rays of hope and resilience that my grandmothers had spoken of in my youth. "But what if I am wrong," I thought. What if this moment is just another turn toward pain and more lamentations? I sat outside the music building for about 2 hours not really sure what I was waiting for or what I was going to do, when a crackly voice said, "You know it is better inside."

This chance meeting was to change my life in more ways than are appropriate or called for in this lived experience description. But this young man helped me find myself again from that day forward. Greg was the kind of man who my father would call 'salt of the earth', but with a little vinegar. He understood my trust issues, but shared every day what he found in God that I had walked away from in my grief and pain. Even as a White middle-

class male, he made it his mission to help me 'stop blocking my blessing' as my grandmother, Miss Frances might call my actions. Greg did not see himself 'saving me' and I did not see him in that manner either. We agreed that God was that which would help me fix my life and find my path and call again because it all comes from God. He and I shared the understanding that the concept of God was bigger than some biblical character or distant overload, or some being who acted like a genie granting wishes. For us, God was the earth, the sun, the people around us, the flow of energy in our spirits that sustains us, and the love that continues to surge toward expression even while confronting a world that sometimes seeks to constrain and contain its force.

The path with my parents was difficult as we had to navigate my expanded sexuality, my changes in career goals (no medical school), and the new found, growing depth of devotion to God's work on earth. But Greg and the new 'family' that was given to me made the journey less lonely and more survivable. As I climbed back upon my perch within my bridled cage, I sang a new song that saw the importance of facilitating changes for other Black folks that followed in my path in education. It was a song that honored my ancestors, but also claimed my place as a non-conforming spirit at the table. It was a song that said to my White colleagues and friends, "My place and call in life come from something far beyond you with more power and strength than all of us. So, either get on board or get out of the way." College had grown my mind, people like Greg had grown my trust and faith, and my Black spirituality in its connection with God had grown my resolve in the call to vocation in education and to combatting those who would oppress me and others who only ask for our rightful place at the table.

Spirituality As Professional

The college years prepared my spiritually for my professional career somewhat. The closeness to God and to the lessons from my ancestors, as reflective of African spirituality customs, would prove extremely efficacious within my workplaces in higher education as I not only used their insights and wisdom, but also their ethos of resiliency and combative, critical love in my work with students. Black spirituality changed for me through my career though, and as it has, I also changed as a professional. The narratives that follow explore events and interactions that were of essential value in this transformation—for better or worse.

In Early Professional Career Outside Academe

To better understand the manifestation of Black spirituality in my professional career in Academe, it is important to visualize my career outside the walls of the predominantly White higher education institutions that I continue to work in since my early post-bachelor's degree days. As I graduated from undergrad, my spirituality and my devotion to the higher power was in the midst of a major transformation. But the career prospects brought some of the questioning of call to vocation back to the surface. For the first few years, my career was in entertainment, working in theme parks, outdoor dramas, children's theatre, and other venues.

My belief, at the time, was that the place of Black spirituality would be diminished due to my career path shifts, but the work in entertainment proved to be essentially anchored both in my spirituality and in my call to vocation in education. While I performing as an actor in children's theatre, the opportunity to share ideas of community, integrity, and the sharing of folktales as moral plays provided me the setting to relay messages of equity, hope,

and ancient wisdoms with the children (and their teachers) in our audiences. In a job where I began by thinking of it simply as a way to sing and entertain, I found this amazing connection to God and to spirituality that had not occurred to me before.

The work in entertainment also allowed me renewed connections to the Black community. In rural areas of North and South Carolina, I interacted with Black and Brown children who had not seen a Black person as the main character in the shows that came through their schools. The community essence empowered by Black spirituality supported me as I stood as an example for the young children of color. Because the characters were not written as non-White, there was not the idea of a Black person portraying a Black character. Instead, my portrayal opened up the idea that Black people can perform as any person their talents allow—and they can lead a cast that is otherwise completely White.

Because the spaces where we performed were rural at times, we did encounter some prejudice—me in particular. We were returning from a performance at a friendly little elementary school in western North Carolina, when we stopped at a local diner in their downtown. It was the kind of diner that I had been used to frequenting when I worked for my father in my teen years. Never in my mind did I think that I would encounter such a level of outright hatred and racism. The troupe entered the diner and immediately all eyes were on me. We sat down at the large center table and our road manager went to the bathroom. As she walked back toward the table, the waitress pulled her aside, the waitress told the road manager, in a not so quiet voice, that we could not eat there. She told our road manager that the kitchen was closed—even as food was coming to the window to be served. A busboy walked out with water glasses for us, and she sent him back into the kitchen.

A White gentleman got up from his table and stood beside me. He told us that we would not like the food here and should go "over to the other side of town" if we wanted lunch. He hacked up something in his throat and continued to stand behind me. The road manager came over and sat down. I did not know what to do. So, I just bowed my head and began to pray. At first, it was quiet, then I asked God to forgive those who hate me because God made me who I am. The man walked back to the waitress and they both stood cross-armed at the food window. I looked at the road manager and asked that we leave. She agreed, and we stood to leave. As we walked out, I said aloud. "This should not happen. I hope those kids we entertained this morning don't grow up like this." I could not help but cry as I sat in the passenger seat of our van. I was not crying for the pain that those ignorant people had put me through; I was crying because in my heart I knew that many of those children from that morning would be subjected to this ignorance and hate. Whether they were White children growing up in racist households, or Black children being oppressed by this hegemonic hatred, they were all going to suffer. This moment in my life made me even more assured that my call to vocation in education and to transformation of community with combative and grace-filled spirituality was in dire need.

In Professional Career Inside Academe: The Early Years

The lessons from my professional career before entering into academe taught me essential coping and resiliency strategies that emerged from the manifestations of my Black spirituality and its effects on my agency as a Black man that carried forth into work in the PWIs. When I first acquired a position in higher education, it was simply to be able to stop working for my dad at the family car shop because I had again lost part of my direction and drive while working in the entertainment industry. But the moment I entered into that campus

office and helped the first group of students, I knew I had found where I belonged and where my calling was to re-emerge.

Though the first professional jobs in higher education were based in office work, those jobs showed me how essential that work is to allowing the university to do the job of education. Without people to track records, direct student inquiries, manage the financial aid process, and keep departments supplied with necessary items the university would not function well and cause undue hardship on everyone outside the office sphere. In this office space, I felt the call of grace as I dealt with White administrators and professors who thought less of me for my position, my race, and my sexuality. But it was on me to offer them grace to work to maintain community in the support of our students. The voice of the call to vocation echoes at every level of the institution.

On one particularly difficult day, I remember being called to confront a professor as she discussed a Black student with her colleague. This professor was, without knowing the background of the student, calling her disrespectful and lazy. She happened to say that it is what you have when the college takes in students from historically Black colleges. I was enraged, but as a fresh new member of the department and the only person of color in the office, the scream against these aggressions was muffled for a while. A few days later, this professor was speaking to my supervisor about another Black student, and she noted that this Black student was "such a good example" unlike other students. She then proceeded to list off a number of Black students from the past few years.

My Black spirituality that calls for me to champion equity and righteous discontent would not allow me to remain silent. I came out of my office and stepped into the doorway of my supervisor's office. In the voice of my community and from my ancestors had asked for

an explanation of why this professor would speak of Black students this way. She scrambled to say that I was not supposed to be listening. My supervisor said we could talk about it later, but I could not stop myself. I remember trembling and thinking I would lose my job after I said what had to be said. But the spirit inside me reminded me that this is part of the call and part of my promise to my community through the spirituality manifest in my life. "Would you want someone to critique you without knowing all the things going on in your life?" I asked. "How can you think one Black student better than others when they are as diverse as you think they are alike?"

The female White professor thought about what I said and apologized. But it was not an apology that I was interested in hearing. It was the promise to try to change attitude and practices. Apologies fall hollow to those of us who have suffered these aggression for most of our lives. Our Black spirituality requires us to seek change and to remain combative within the fight until change comes. In my confrontation with this professor, I still offer compassion because in some ways I did understand that part of her thoughts and language came from frustration with students' progress, but insults and aggression are not the way to inspire success in student—especially students of color. This interaction made the White professor uncomfortable, as my supervisor noted again and again as they were close friends. But I would continue to remind her that it is in the discomfort that we find the injurious language that has to be repaired and healed.

The other outcome of this racist moment in my young career was that it did inspire me to strive to become a better mentor and guide for the Black students that came through my office. If would work to enlighten these students to obstacles that would be placed in their paths as Black professionals and on ways to not only survive, but ultimately to thrive in

the midst of it all. The truths of Black wisdom and the critical love that I learned as a part of my growth in Black spirituality were transformative elements of the success of many of the Black students I served. For decades after, it is amazing to see these students when they would visit campus and have them recall to the White faculty and staff around us that I was the reason they felt that they could be successful at this university. In the midst of this predominantly White institution (PWI), they found this Black man, singing his truth and sharing in the promise that education can hold for everyone, but especially students of color. Though I was young also, I knew that there had to be someone who would step up to promote change and deeper honoring of the Black students who, in many ways, took major chances in joining the community of this White space.

In Professional Career Inside Academe: Mid-Career

As I continue my efforts in higher education, I have had the opportunity to at both public and private PWIs. The struggles of Black and Brown students at each type of institution have varied a bit. But the primary moments when I have felt the manifestation of Black spirituality in my professional life has been in the public PWIs. Critical dialogues on race and equity have grown on these campuses, but also the levels of hate speech and micro-assaults and aggressions have also grown. While moving into faculty and mid-level administrative positions, I found that my soul is tested even more now that the conversations have opened. "Woke" faculty and staff tend to pronounce that the work to confront racism and inequity is proudly ongoing in our institution without asking what Black students, faculty, and staff need. Others who are still living in their own neoliberalism make statements that the university has done enough and should not be expending much needed funding on diversity and inclusion efforts.

These education professionals who believe that the work is done deeply disturb my spirit as I struggle to understand why this ignorance persist in the midst of intellectuals. Not too long ago, I was in a diversity and inclusion training session with some White, and few Black, colleagues. The work in the room felt strangled by people trying to make the point that they were accepting of everyone—which is not the point at all. One older White administrator/senior faculty stated that she did not see color. When my small group of those who identified as Black brought up the issues with this kind of rhetoric, she became indignant and sulked for the remainder of the session—whispering behind me once I sat down as she continued to plead her case to the back of my head. As the session ended, she stood talking to her colleague and reassured him that the Black professor that she works with said that being color blind is a good thing.

Once again, my spirit would not let me be still. I politely asked her to tell me who this professor was so that I could discuss this understanding. She said that it was "OK" and she just wanted to share that some Black people are not bothered by White people saying they do not see color. She ended by saying, "He also does not have a problem with White people using the term "boy" in regard to Black men. I quickly reminded her that Black people are of a diaspora, and not all Black people think alike, but it is important to hear the offensive nature of word for what they are to people across that Black diaspora. Her colleague may come from a background that did not find issues with terms that other Black people find negative connotation in, but that does not make it "OK" to use these terms.

I finished quickly by simply sharing a piece of my pain. I said, "When you say you do not see color, it means to me that you do not see me. Because in this White world my Blackness matters." I knew I had upset her, but I was hurting as well, and had to quickly

leave the room. I barely made it to the bathroom before I burst out crying and shaking. How in this university setting, after 3 hours of committed work on diversity and inclusion, could someone continue to think the way this woman did and say the things she said? As I thought once again of leaving the predominantly White institution, and education, for more lucrative careers, I realized that my tears were exactly why I could not leave. This pain was keeping me in the fight and the spirit was guiding me forward with resolve—even though I knew it would affect my career, which it did at that institution.

Spirituality As Institutional

Black spirituality manifest itself in my career as I have noted, but it goes beyond my work in educational offices and classrooms with my colleagues and students. This spirituality sits at the center of how I engage with my institution of higher education as well. One of the core elements of Black spirituality is the role of community as an earthly sacred space constructed and maintained by the love and care of God. This community provides shelter, nurturing, guidance, strength, a space for critical love conversations and disagreements, and an equitable environment for all its members.

With Students at the Heart

As a sacred space, higher education communities are ordained to foster both comfortable and uncomfortable arenas for students, staff, and faculty to perform their duties to the collective for the community to safely evolve and thrive. Protection for community members should involve threats from without and within. Recently, I saw what happens when a university does not seek to protect community members from internal dangers and acts of oppression. Once again, CRT's tenets surrounding neoliberal thoughts that institutions

can ignore certain concerns of students, staff and faculty of color because they have been solved or are being solved came into stark view.

The sacred space was tainted by some professors and senior administrators misunderstanding how to relate to concerns of community members. With this tainting, distrust soon followed. My grandmother used to talk about this in terms of her family. Her father would pronounce that he had solved some issue in the family, usually by an edict that some behavior that was causing problems would start or stop. But as Miss Irene would note, he sometimes did not get to the root of the problem, and in a few months it would come up again—many times twice as bad as before. Her father was not listening to the family members that were at the heart of the concern. He just wanted it fixed. Miss Irene always said that her father never gave God a chance to speak to him, and so much of her father's work failed because of this arrogance, though she would never have told him this. It was not that I wanted to tell the institution to stop and pray, but more that I wanted them to pause and reflect and listen. "Be still and listen. I am here" is a great quote from Scripture and also from life lessons.

With the Predominantly White Institution in the Mind and Soul

What troubles continue to invade our institutional community are continually situated in spaces where either one side or multiple sides in a conflict or who are addressing a concern, are not listening and do not take the time to reflect apart and together on solutions. In my career in predominantly White institutions of higher education, I find far too many people ready to work on a problem and find solutions before they actually hear from the community's heart of its concerns. In the work to heal, the institution is so afraid of the open wound, but it needs to breathe to properly heal. Black spirituality taught me that the offerings

of the community cannot heal a problem until they are offered correctly. What the peoples of African who held to their spirituality believed and held true still has importance in our work in education today if we are to heal our communities and provide all the necessities for its members.

Another lesson of Black spirituality that would serve institutions such as the ones I have served for the past 20 years is that of honoring and respect for those who bring different talents to the community. Black faculty and staff are a poignant example of those who bring a difference that deserves respect and honor. Beyond adding diversity in color and ethnic culture, Black faculty and staff bring influential methods of intellectual inquiry that provide a deeper naturalistic understanding of the thinking and learning of a broad cross section of students. The call to vocation runs through the lives of many Black faculty and staff to the point of their devotion to student support and interaction that has been pivotal in retention and recruitment of marginalized student populations. This devotion also pushes us to serve as mentors and guides to both students of color and White students who needs someone to see past their grades and into their potential.

But Black faculty and staff struggle to gain regard and honors for their work in these areas. Instead our scholarship is touted as less than intellectual and our vernacular too pedestrian for scholarly worth and value. So, those who want to advance may opt to lose themselves to the White hegemonic and abandon their colleagues and their students. In Black spirituality, from African heritage to Black intellectualism, our diverse talents are a sacred part of who we are as a people and have been given to us to share for the betterment of our communities. When denied, the caged bird continues to sing, yet go misheard.

"The caged bird sings with a fearful trill and things unknown but longed for still and his tune is heard on the distant hill for the caged bird sings of freedom." (From *The Caged Bird*, Maya Angelou, 1983)

Personal Narratives Through Lived Experience Descriptions

Dr. Rhonda: First Listen, Then Act Right

Spirituality As Personal

Dr. Rhonda is a scholar, educator, and administrator at a predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the southern United States. Though her current university is private, she has worked for public PWIs in her 28 years in higher education. Dr. Rhonda does not have children of her own, but has a substantial list of nieces, nephews, former and current students, who look to her as their "mother" figure and their guide in life. I previously worked for Dr. Rhonda while I was pursuing a graduate degree, and have now known her for over 10 years. She was instrumental in my process for continuing my education, and she serves as a model for how I wish to engage with and encourage my students—especially students of color. She sits stately in her leather office chair as we converse for the interview; a Black woman in her early fifties who admittedly likes to let people think she is only recently crossed the age marker into her forties. Behind and to the side of her desk filled with files and papers, are three sets of pictures of Dr. Rhonda's family. Small pictures of her nieces and nephews and others of her brother, mother and an older photo of her father who passed away about a decade ago. Surrounded by family, Dr. Rhonda's responses in reflection on Black spirituality feel even more personal and emerge as intrinsic to her life in the office and as a thread throughout her life. *My spirituality is truly rooted in my family. Though our*

relationship with churches has shifted a few times, we were always tied to one or another of them around the city. My mother made certain of that.

The personal side of Dr. Rhonda's Black spirituality can also be seen in the African art displayed around the office space as well. She describes the pieces as "sacred" to her daily routine. *When I come into the office, I see the mask given to me as a gift when I was in Ethiopia and the talisman I was drawn to and bought in Egypt. Since my work is tied to art as a discipline and as a vocation for educating others, these make a daily statement to me that hits at my spirit.* She laughs. *In a good way! The lighting in the room always hits the mask early in the morning and moves up its face as the day goes on. It is like the mask is coming alive as it accompanies me in my routine. On rainy days, it really does look sad. I know that sounds crazy and not intellectual, but I just think of it as not only giving me feelings, but also having feelings.*

Interjecting after Dr. Rhonda began speaking about the items she feels are spiritual around her office, I asked, "What are your spiritual practices?" *Well, I do attend church most weeks and also pray every day at least once or twice.* I wondered aloud whether she had any other practices that she thought of as spiritual. *My time sitting in my office, when I just sit and look at this art and listen to my gospel music in the background is very spiritual for me. It reminds me that all the stress of the day is just temporary. I also feel the presence of God when I look at these African art pieces. They aren't crosses or other Christian symbols, but they are symbols of faith and hope, and I like that feeling. You can tell from the Kenta cloth that is a part of my wraps that you've seen me wear that I love my African heritage and respect what it means for Black folks all over the world, but especially in America where we are distress every day.*

Dr. Rhonda became quiet for a bit and sat in reflection. Her phone rang (as it did throughout our interview), and it brought her back to commenting. *Some days, I just have to take a walk or go over to the campus museum to find some place of solace—especially when I have had a difficult meeting or a class just goes off the rails. You would think that teaching about art or helping students to come into their own artistically would be uplifting, but sometimes it just leaves me hurting. She laughs. From bending over backwards to appease so many people. So, yes, walking the campus and just looking at the trees is sometimes spiritual. I think that may go back to African worship of parts of nature. But I know you asked me not to push too much analysis into our talk.* I had asked each Black faculty and staff member to try to think of Black spirituality in their own context rather than as a subject matter for us to critically analyze in an effort to maintain a strong level of personal engagement.

She continues, *But I think my spirituality is rooted in my intellectual understanding as well as those practices that I talked about before. I do think about it when I pray and when I walk across campus to stir up my resiliency or fortitude after a combative situation. I wonder why (to myself) whether God hears me when the day is just too much, and I wonder why, as I smart, Black woman, I can't just solve this concern on my own. Of course, at any time, I also feel like God is always listening to what my heart is saying and will respond by and by. But the wait can be so difficult. So, it definitely means I pray and hope, and I keep listening for a response. Sometimes it is just a call from my mom or my brother that changes everything. Or I get an email from you or one of my other colleagues—just what I needed.*

We drift off track and discuss what good friends mean in higher education and in life, but I bring it back to Black spirituality by asking if this idea of community has anything to do with Dr. Rhonda's concept of Black spirituality. *Well now, you know that Black spirituality is*

all about family and community and how we support each other through trials and tribulations—even when we cause them. She laughs and I do as well. Black spirituality, to me, means that I have a God who is my protector, my guide, my healer, my friend, and my source of hope. He calls on me to be like him in this world and gives us our ancestors to help us remember and know how to "act right"—as I always put it.

I ask what she means by "act right" when it comes to Black spirituality because it can be defined through all kinds of lenses. *I will tell you that it does not mean always doing what other people tell you to do. It means showing up for your friends when they need you. It means taking charge when you need to stand up to colleagues or your college. It means sacrifices, but also rewards. And Black spirituality holds all these things in my mind. My call to do what I do is part of me just simply making sure I "act right" in the eyes of God—and of course, my mom. HA!* It is this idea of doing and presenting what is right that will come up again and again as we continue our interview, along with the value of Black spirituality when someone lives in this manner.

My questioning then leads to Dr. Rhonda sharing a story about when her Black spirituality directed her to "act right" even though she wanted to act in a very wrong way. *When I was first beginning to teach at a college in Atlanta, I was confronted by a White colleague who questioned my pedagogy or teaching style with my students. He told me that if I was too easy on the students that they would not learn. He related to me that the department chair had observed my classes and was not happy with my performance. This professor shared that they both thought I was too animated and focused on joking with the students. "Art takes serious study," he growled at me. He said the chair was not going to say*

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anything for now, but that I should not expect to have my contract renewed. "Perhaps you

should teach at one of those great Black colleges around town?" Professor N noted.

I mean, I was furious! I slammed the door to the classroom in his face. Then jerked it

open and headed to the department chair's office. I was ready for a fight and nothing was

going to stop me. Now I remember, it was so funny. On my way to his office, as my blood was

just boiling and steam must have been coming out of my ears, I realized I had to stop in the

women's restroom—and it was urgent. Ha! I scooted into the restroom and as I took that

break, I took a breath. Not to smell the room, but my body just needed to breathe. This cool

feeling came over me, and I look in the mirror and saw someone I didn't know. My hair was

out of whack and my eyes were already brimming with early tears. I took a couple deep

inhales and something inside me and outside me at the same time said "Listen. Stop and

Listen."

At this pivotal moment in my life, the flashes of how I came to this place washed

through my brain. My mom and dad watching me graduate. My church doing a carwash to

help pay for my study abroad. My friends staying up late to read my dissertation and grill

me. All of it was there with this voice. I was seeing these images, but also listening to them.

That spirit of my God was showing me something that I needed to remember. I pulled out my

phone and called my mom. She didn't pick up, but I heard her voice and thought about all the

times that she had warned me about "flying off the handle" rather than "acting right," and I

stopped. I went back to my office and sat down and wrote a detailed account of what

happened between me and Professor N along with a brief summary of my ideas about

teaching and why I do what I do the way I do it. That afternoon I asked my students to tell me

any concerns they had about our class. It was the usual about homework and readings, but

when I asked about their level of enjoyment, they responded that our class was the highlight

of their day. "You really talk to us. Nobody tries to talk to us. They may think they are

teaching, but all I hear is numbers, dates, and names." One student, I remember distinctly

said, "Other professors in this department teach like they are dead. We know you are alive

and loving what you do." And that is when I finally cried—when I realized that my God was

sending voices to help me listen and combat the ones I mistakenly had opened my mind and

heart to before. Those tears were great, such a powerful positive release, I tell you. Ha! I

think they were my God rewarding me for "acting right." If I had lost it and stormed into the

chair's office before this healing, my tears would have hurt more than healed me. My

spirituality let me put it all in the right places. Of course, we were both crying during the

interview at this point and took a pause.

Earliest Memories of Black Spirituality. Discussing the narrative about "acting

right" lead me to question Dr. Rhonda about how this way of thinking and how it meshed

with her understanding of Black Spirituality came to be. She had noted before that her family

were avid church-goers and that she had what she considered strong spiritual practices that

were reflective of part of African culture, but I wanted to delve into the origins of these ideas

and practices. *As a young girl, I remember how much my mother put into our church*

attendance. She would always make sure that my sisters and brothers and I were dressed to

the nines. She, of course, had the nicest dresses and the most stylish Sunday hats with the

white gloves. She remains the classic "Black church lady" that people think of on Sunday

morning.

We were properly dressed, but my mom would also strongly instruct us on the proper

behaviors for church attendance as well. We were not part of a "yelling and shouting" type

of church. So, she would sternly share her expectations for us to sing when it was time, sit and stand properly, and shake hands with all the church elders. This was the beginnings of her teaching us to "act right" toward other people and toward God. I, so wanted to sing in the choir as a child, but was placed in the church orchestra instead. My parents believed that the orchestra allowed me to practice my instrument in addition to my time with the wondrous French horn practice at home and school. I stayed with the orchestra (and the French horn) for about 6 years until I just could not stand it anymore. I know it is bad, but I asked God to tell my mother that he did not want me to play that horn anymore. But to no avail. I didn't want to displease God, so I kept practicing and playing.

I wondered when things changed and why. *In tenth grade, I remember like it was yesterday, I was picked to be in the school play—a musical "The Wiz" and I was ecstatic! I wasn't playing Dorothy, but instead got to play Evillene—the Wicked Witch of the West. The director of the play said that my voice was good, but if I wanted to improve I had to stop playing the French horn for a while. My prayers had been answered. It may have taken a few years, but I was free—and I was playing an amazing role. I ran around our big house singing to anyone and everything that might listen. I began devoting lots of my time to working on the play and my role, which lead to my grades slipping. When report cards came out, I told my parents that they would improve. But they insisted that I leave the play. I know it makes no sense, but I called my mother a name that I will never speak again and wished them both gone from my life. My father heard me shouting and gripped me by my shoulders and said, "Now is that the way God would want you to act to us?"*

I was speechless. I knew better. If God was great enough to have given me this gift of the play and freeing me from that horn, why was I being so ungrateful when I was the one

who messed up? I ran to my room and cried for about 2 hours. My mother knocked at my door and offered a food tray. I said "I am so sorry. I am so sorry." She frowned at me and then turned to the door. She then made the quote stick with me. "Act right. That is all we ask, baby. Me, your father… God. That's all I ask. You know what is right." I said, "Love you, mom." She said, "You better!" and laughed. Even today I sometimes wonder why people can't just listen to God and "act right" and maybe the world would not be so messed up.

Black Spirituality in Community and Culture. As we finished discussing family and church influences, I wanted to know if there were any community or social organizations that have influenced Dr. Rhonda's Black spirituality at any stage of her life. As the family, especially her mom, had been of such deep influence, it would be intriguing to see if that was bolstered or negated or transformed by community group involvement. *Apart from doing things with church or at school, I really did not get involved in our community when I was growing up. We lived in a very upper-middle to upper-class section of the city, and most of our neighbors were White families who did their own thing.*

I did begin to participate in social organizations, because of my mother, when I got older and continue with some of them now. It might be a part of my spirituality because it does lead me to work for the good of the Black community where I live now. I work with change organizations who are trying to raise the safety and living standards of our neighborhood. I also am a member of an organization for professional Black women that is a national organization. Much of our work is to support schools in Black neighborhoods and to enrich the cultural lives of Black kids in our cities. These groups are outside my church work, but still feel like church work in a way—at least as it feels like maybe a kind of "charge" that God has placed on my life and heart. You know what I mean? I nodded in agreement and

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noted that Dr. Rhonda definitely became very animated when talking about working with these organizations and her current community.

Black Spirituality in My Youth. Dr. Rhonda continued, *When I was younger, I was so focused on doing well in school and on trying to enter into singing in that church choir that it feels like I skipped over some of the opportunities that may have come my way. If I think about my spirituality when I was young, I think that it was mainly centered in my church attendance and my role in the church orchestra for so many years. I didn't really feel like I had some kind of "come to Jesus" moment like other folks may talk about. I just always felt like God was watching and just expecting me to do what was right—for me, for my family, and for the people who I came in contact with.* I ask about the Bible that sits in the corner of her desk. *Oh, I have had that a long time, but I received that Bible when I graduated from high school. So, yes, I guess it has been with me a few years.* She laughs. *Let's see…I am 40 now.* Laughs again. *No, I really have had it a long time. Sometimes, I remember this now, sometimes, I used to just hold it when I was having a tough time. Not really reading the words, except for the Psalms, but just holding onto it like it was my lifeline some days.* Laughs again.

When my grandfather died when I first entered college, I definitely remember sitting up in my college dorm room and holding this Bible. She picks it up and looks at it. The cover is frayed on the front cover edge, but still quite smooth and leathery across the face and back. Dr. Rhonda holds the Bible for a few moments, then places it back in the corner of her desk. *He was a quiet man, but very artistic. I think I acquired some of my love of art from him. He was not a churchgoing kind of man, but he was always so polite, helpful, and good to people—even when they were not so nice to him.* I ask if her grandfather had any influence on

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her spirituality in some way. *I guess Grandfather Isaac was more an influence on my love of African culture and art. My grandmother, my mom's mom, was more of the church side of life. But neither really shared much about faith and those kinds of things—except to always thank God and say grace at meals. But maybe he did give me some love and admiration for the spirituality of African nations now that I think about it. The art was, lots of times, tied to some religious or spiritual ritual in an African society. Yes, I guess so.*

Black Spirituality in My College Years. Since we were talking about her holding the Bible during that difficult time in college, I asked if there were any other moments either inside or outside the classroom in college that affected her Black spirituality. *My life in my wonderful sorority was definitely something that supported and lead me to emphasize my spirituality—especially the Blackness of it—in college. Our songs, our community work, and the revelation that we were placed on this earth to be leaders, not slaves was so amazing to me. Yes, I knew these things before, but they didn't feel real until my sorority days. I pledged my sophomore year and have been active ever since. We are part of the "Divine Nine" as you know*. I did know this and asked how she thought participation changed her perspective. *I don't know that change is the right way to put it. It really opened my eyes to the deeper ties between the Black church, our spiritual call, and our place in supporting and redefining our community.*

My sisters and I would do community service work in difficult Black neighborhoods around the city, but we came in as supporters, not as if we had all the answers. I think I learned that God is a part of that way of thinking. 'We are just vessels,' I think someone said once. 'What comes from us is best if it comes through heaven'. Dr. Rhonda laughs. *I think I just went in a little too much.* I assured her that I was good with how she was expressing

herself. She continued, *I think that as I took courses in art, especially those that focused on Africa and the Caribbean that I started to also think more about my role in sharing the important stories tied to this work and its people. I had professors who loved their work and definitely guided me to move on past the bachelor's level to obtain my doctorate. They made me want to be one of them. When they spoke of the power of ancestors and related it to our legacies in college at that point, I was struck by how much I began to think of this as my path and my goal.* I interject to ask, trying not to lead, if this would be what we might describe as a "call" and she agreed. *Yes, this was part of me finding and listening to my call back then.*

Spirituality As Professional

In Early Professional Career Outside Academe. Dr. Rhonda responded that she went directly into working in higher education from her college days. So, her professional life and career have always been centered in academe. She did work in college offices and in dining services, but it was still all on a college campus. She noted that nothing really spiritual happened during these jobs. But once in academia, Dr. Rhonda shared many instances of her spiritual growth and the need to hold onto the elements of Black spirituality that she had come to know in her past such as resilience, community support, her call to her vocation, and the strength and direction from her God through "warrior" spirituality as she called it when noting the her ties to African culture.

In Professional Career Inside Academe: The Early Years. When I asked about how Dr. Rhonda viewed her Black spirituality in the context of her work in higher education in her early career, she reflected back to the narrative around Professor N and their clash. *I will say that, especially when I was younger, I didn't realize how much I could accomplish from doing more to stay connected to my spirituality. I was so busy trying to have something*

published and finishing my dissertation that I just remember only really "going to the well"
as my grandmother would call it, when things would feel out of control, like with Professor
N. It (her spirituality) *was simply part of my life, but not that center that it is now.*

I asked if she had any influences from Black faculty or staff that made any
impressions upon her regarding Black spirituality at that time. *No, not really. We were all*
kind of in our own little corners or silos. I think there may have been 50 Black faculty and
staff out of over a thousand faculty and staff at the university at that time. And many of us
who were Black felt like our positions were not always respected or appreciated. So, they
could be gone at any moment. I mean, I knew I was not a "diversity hire" as people call
Black people acquiring jobs at predominantly White institutions sometimes. But, it did feel
like no one supported us coming together in community and no one made an effort to
understand how many of us had different ideas and expectations about university success as
a concept.

I really did not delve into a deeper understanding of my spirituality until things
settled down for me in my career—about 10 years in. Dr. Rhonda thought about it again and
sat back for a moment. *It really was about 10 years before I was comfortable in my position*
and in my own academic skin. Those were some tough years. I think I almost quit like five or
six times. I asked what made her not quit. *It was that voice that kept telling me that I was at*
that university for a reason—my students. I could not move away from that voice in my head
and in my heart. My question then turned to colleagues and her engagement with them. Dr.
Rhonda noted that apart from her issues with Professor N and once or twice with her chair,
she did not have many negative moments with her academic colleagues. *But I didn't have a*
major amount of positive moments with them either. Most of the White faculty just simply

shared pleasantries and whispered behind my back after I would make suggestions at departmental meetings. The only other Black faculty in our department went his own way and did rarely spoke to me. But he and the next Black faculty hired only were there for about 2 years each. I think I tried to connect with them both through discussions on our shared concerns, but we just could not develop any kind of community. Community is one of my big things with my spirituality. I tried. At least, I feel like I did.

In Professional Career Inside Academe: Mid-Career. Dr. Rhonda went on to begin to discuss her Black spirituality in the middle of her career; where she stands right now. *I know I changed when I passed that 10-year mark. Not only did I feel freer, I felt more authentic in my work. From the administrative duties to my pedagogy in my classroom, I was more of who I should be. It wasn't just the time passing, I think I was starting to find that I couldn't keep doing my work and not listen to all that this voice inside me was telling me I needed to do. And that was difficult.* I asked why she felt it was difficult. *Well, because I started answering people when they were whispering behind my back. I started pushing my students to engage with their authentic selves. I deeply began to see my call as one that was not to be put on the sidelines. But, I wasn't scared because I was so tired of doing it for everybody else except me and my students.* "Doing what?" I asked. *Everything. Teaching, working on projects. Writing. Even my relationships across our campus were shaped by serving the institution or my department and not my goals.*

Now, I bring my God-given self to meetings. I bring my spirit, full force, into my classrooms. I speak with the voice of a strong Black woman who is answering her call for her community and for those who sacrificed so much who came before us. I noted that this kind of stance can cause some tensions in a career. *You know I have had those tensions and some*

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battles in this past 10 to 12 years, but now I feel prepared for them. I am not alone in my

fight or in my compassion for issues that come up in my career. God is with me. My

grandparents and their grandparents are with me. The Black community on campus and

around the city are with me when I need them.

Spirituality As Institutional

With Students in the Heart. I remark that Dr. Rhonda has said quite a bit about her

focus on supporting her students and helping them succeed. I ask, if her Black spirituality has

any place in this work or in other areas of her predominantly White institution. *My students*

are my life and the work of my life. They give me strength that I would not have otherwise for

sure. So, I know that I have to give them strength and support as well. I love to hear from my

former students when they recommend other Black students come to our university because

of the relationship they had with me or other Black faculty or staff here.

Sometimes, I think the university forgets what power there is in letting Black folks

create community. For me and some other Black faculty, we are driven to help our Black

students and other students of color feel like they have a home here—even if it is just in our

offices. I remember that feeling when I came to my university that was mostly White back

years ago. It still feels the same. You come in and either you may feel like you have to be

phony and act "White," or you may feel like you just do not belong and spend way too much

time trying to prove yourself worthy to be at this school. I had a student, big guy and Black.

People thought he was an athlete. He wasn't. He was also a criminal justice major—also a

space where some assumed guys who looked like him were athletes. Jonas was actually

planning to attend law school, which he did after graduating from the university. But his time

here was tough. Faculty, Black and white, treated him badly at times. I devoted many an

afternoon to sharing my office with him so that he could study in a "safe space" and feel

supported. It was incredible that my chair actually came to me and asked why this student,

who was not in our department was in my office so much. Thank the Lord I was further into

my career and had God's gift of patience. I explained the need the student had for a

"homey" space to study and learn. The chair still made a point of bringing it up a few

times—along with commenting on how much other students of color were in my office so

much. But I knew that this was all part of my role in these students' lives and the outside

person could not be allowed to "own" our space, no matter what their title or position.

I asked if this way of relating to students might be helpful for predominantly White

institutions. *If they actually believe in it, then yes. But too many times, these schools just give*

the idea of a safe space and a "homey" feeling so much lip service. They don't think deeply

enough about the concepts and just look at them as so much window dressing that isn't

substantiated by quantitative data. They point to money and funding being the major reason

why students leave our university. They forget that funding is only a part of some of their

decisions. I know students who have struggled with funding, but had found the resources if

they were happy and felt welcome at the university. Didn't you or someone I know say that

money issues are simply a part of the breakdown of a relationship? I concede that it was me

when I talk about couples who are having partnering issues. Dr. Rhonda continues.

Happiness and satisfaction, along with feeling respected are all essential in a relationship. It

may not sound like these are part of a spirituality, but for Black folks, they are some of our

cornerstones that God brings to us and our fellowship.

With the Predominantly White Institution in the Mind and Soul. We continue to

discuss how predominantly White institutions affect Dr. Rhonda's viewpoints on Black

spirituality. *Well, first, not every Black person or person or color on a campus is either religious or ascribes to a Black or other spirituality. That point is really important, I think. But for me, I see what believing in my call and having it supported, and honoring community and its power and attraction as parts of the central essence of my Black spirituality. Having this connection allows me to "speak to the powers that be" and "honor the contributions of all" without trying to confine them to some power structure or worse, to essentializing them as this "Black mystic" that some universities do in their attempts at diversity and inclusion.*

I find it so frustrating to have to continually explain how Black people think and why they think as they do. If institutions respected their faculty, staff, and students of color, they would actually do the work to discover the depths of our souls and the conflicts that their controlling actions cause. More Black people would want to come to our university to work, to study, to live, and to love. But not when our spirits are ensnared and then caged up for display. For those of us who thrive within the support and strength of our Black spirituality, it is disheartening to find ourselves again and again sharing our narratives only to have them distorted to fit into prescribed programming and action plans of our White institutions. It's like my mother told me, "Listen" and not just with your ears. When we speak, we speak from our souls which means those who are engaging with us must listen with theirs. But first, it takes learning through the lens of Black spirituality where the truth of our souls actually lives.

I ask if she believes that there are actions related to her conception of Black spirituality that PWIs can take, beyond authentically listening, that would be helpful to share. *OK, one last idea that I believe is integral to my Black spirituality is the calling upon ancestral knowledge for guidance and support.* I ask how this might relate. *If the*

predominantly White university would take the time to engage with former Black faculty and staff from their institutions, or their older Black alumni, they would find a wealth of knowledge that could direct them in ways that would help better serve the Black campus members now. My story goes like this. When I first came to my current university, there were only about 15% of our faculty and staff of color here. But, if you look at the legacy of the campus, there had been hundreds of Black folks working here for years. And they each have tremendous knowledge that could be shared with the institution.

One former senior faculty member in particular gave me some amazing advice on my career here and also on ways that I could support my Black students when they struggled in courses with professors who taught without respecting cultural diversity. Professor Ames shared with me that teaching is a craft and an art that can be wisely amplified by infusing our African ways of interpersonal relationship development. "Everyone in a village has something to share and can learn from others" he would say. Professor Ames was not alone in his knowledge and points of inspiration. We had lots of other retired faculty and staff who had wisdom on everything from how to facilitate things through administration to how to find a place to live in a neighborhood that was diverse and welcoming to Black people.

I reflect that some many times the wisdom from those who came before us is ignored or discounted. *All of these 'rays of wisdom' as I call them, are spaces where a PWI could utilize the information, properly shared, to bolster the positive experiences of Black faculty, staff, and students. But the ancestors (former employees and/or alumni) need to be the ones that are centered in the sharing. They keep the heart and soul in the work and wisdom. The university shouldn't just put out a list of "diversity-friendly" neighborhoods or groups for Black faculty and staff to align themselves with as they can. The sharing should come from*

those who have lived the history of the space and be given authentically from a source whose wisdom is respected and honored. In African and Black spirituality, old wisdom has power from God and carries that power forward when it is shared.

Dr. Harrison: Hosanna

Spirituality As Personal

Dr. Harrison is a Black administrator at a predominantly White institution of higher education in the southern portion of the United States. He has been in higher education for over 30 years and has held both faculty and staff positions at both PWIs and a Historically Black University, but has been working with his current PWI for about 6 years. Our interview portion of engagement occurred through the Zoom web conferencing application as we are in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Harrison also completed the online survey that I distributed as well. Answers from the survey are interspersed in his responses from the interview as they relate to the questions.

I have known of Dr. Harrison for over 20 years off and on while working and furthering our educations at the same institution. He is a colleague that I greatly respect for his tenacity, empathy, wisdom, and authenticity. He is a music lover and a talented piano player in his own right. Dr. Harrison notes that though he has no children of his own, he feels deeply connected to the students he encounters in his work and to his large family that consists of numerous siblings and their children. He grew up in a large city in the south and attended elementary and high schools that were a reflection of his neighborhood. The loss of his father at a young age was one of the defining moments of his youth according to Dr. Harrison as was the almost intangible draw of church and school to his mind and spirit.

One of the most important ideas that Dr. Harrison wanted me to acquire from our conversation and from the knowledge that he shared with me was that he felt deeply that my research could have an impact on the practices of administrators, faculty, staff, and students at PWIs if they took the time to understand what was being shared. We also agreed that not every Black faculty and staff person at a predominantly White institution (or anywhere) would express a connection to Black spirituality. But for those who do, it is something that motivates, transforms, and inundates their lived experiences.

We begin by discussing whether or not Dr. Harrison considers himself to be spiritual. *Yes, I would definitely say that I am spiritual. I am also very religious in my practices and my worship. But I see my spirituality, my Black spirituality, as an extension of my faith into action. Black spirituality in one word would be "hope" as far as I am concerned. It is the true underlying messages of Negro spirituals and definitely came across with slaves with African spirituality. I ask what he thinks links Black spirituality in the United States to African spirituality. I think it is the whole way that African spirituality creates the standards for a supportive community; the way they respect and honor their elders; and the drive each has toward justice for its people as promised and ordained by God.*

He continues. *It is why so many Black folks go to their minister or pastor for counseling and not to a therapist; because in their role in partnership with God, these pastors seem much more connected to solutions to troubles than an outsider. These ministers connect to the plight of the Black people and to God's promise. African spiritual leaders did it on the continent and Black pastors are seen as having that same type connection. They bring a balance with hope at its center.*

In response to my question about how he understands the term "Black spirituality", Dr. Harrison shared the following: *Black spirituality is hope and it is grace. It is the communal assurance that in the end things will work out for good; they will be better in the end. The church can be a big part of one's spirituality, but it really goes beyond those walls and out into the world. You think of this when we talk about the Black spirituals that were sung in the church, but also sung in the fields and in the jails. Some of them even ended up being changed to juke joint tunes that were definitely not in a 'holy' place.* He laughs.

Black spirituality is the essence of the souls of Black folks. It guides our feet, and it cleans our minds of the tarnishing that comes from living in a racist society. Black spirituality comes with that warranty from God that it will never fail. We may stumble and stray from what our promise is, but the core of Black spirituality says that it will come back together and be right again—whether it is at the personal, family, community, nation, or world level. That doesn't mean we sit back. No, God has work for us to do and expects us to be about it. When you have work to do, you can't rest. It's not restful. You are charged up and ready for the fight. We try to work for change with love, but know that God has our back if we need to battle some evil. You know what I mean for sure. I nodded in agreement and laughed.

Every day in my job, it feels like a test to answer my call. Sometimes I just don't feel like I am ready for the fight, but my spirit won't let me back away from it all. At times, I have to… What do we call it? 'Reframe' the issue so that I can better manage what is being placed upon my head. And there are times when I just am filled with such righteous discontent that I shut down and sit away with God for a bit to pull myself together for some of my meetings. Not every conclusion is perfect, but I trust that all things are working for my good. God gives

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me that time to think and work through those issues. He gives me agency to be his protected child who is not owned by anyone in this world. Knowing this line of thought may move us into a more in-depth conversation, I share that we will talk more about career and institutional struggles in later questions.

Earliest Memories of Black Spirituality. We start with Dr. Harrison's early childhood and I ask about any influences that may have had a part in shaping his Black spirituality. *Well now, even though I grew up in a large city, I lived in a very close knit neighborhood. Black folks looked out for each other. We shared in our joys and our struggles. With a family that included 10 children, we were still all well taken care of—even after our father died. It was tough though when he passed. But my mother made sure we had all the things we needed. She made sure we were dressed well, clean, and our shoes shined when we left the house. If we were going to the store or to church, we still had to be neat and clean. She also made sure we showed good manners and were respectful to our elders.*

I learned early on that good manners was the way to go. We had this wonderful older lady in our neighborhood who made the best sloppy joes and cupcakes. And if we would act right, as we say, and go to church, she had them for us. It was definitely that 'carrot' that made me want to go to church even more. But I loved church so much—and school. Learning was amazing, and I learned so much at both places. In church, beyond learning, I loved the music, the movement, and the piano playing. The powerful preaching and teaching was just joy all around. But I am not going to lie. Those sloppy joes and cupcakes made it all that much joyful. Laughs.

We attended a CME (Christian Methodist Episcopal) church and then a non-denominational church later on when I was young. I completely fell in love with the spirit,

but also the music that the church brought into my life. Choir singing and playing the piano still are central parts of my life and they connect me to God in ways that are far beyond the structures of the church. It is awesome the way that a beautiful gospel song can rock you out of a tough day or help you remember God is still present in the midst of struggles. Black spirituality brings that to me—whether in my car or in a pew. That joy of reassurance. I laugh and agree with a nod.

Black Spirituality in Community and Culture. As I reflect upon the roles of community and Black culture on Dr. Harrison's Black spirituality, we discuss the facets of his childhood neighborhood. *The church was at the center of most all of our activities, unless it was school related. I came up during a time when social unrest was still going on, but my family was mainly still doing our work through the church. You know. You do the choir and usher board and vacation bible school. As I said before, our community was tight knit and very 'Black' so you always are caught up in the culture of it all. People walked a certain way and talked a certain way. My mother did not like us using slang. So, she would push us to speak proper English. Of course, that can get you beat up in the wrong place as well.*

The one thing I can say about the community was that no one ever had to deny being Black. They didn't have to apologize. I remember that when I got to college. I met other Black students who were always trying to apologize for where they were from. It was like we had to be ashamed so that the White people around us could feel better about where they were from or something. Still doesn't make sense to me. One space that we, Black students, could feel like we were still in community was when we were singing together. Black spirituality showed up and showed out when we would gather. Again, it wasn't usually in a church. Sometimes, it was just in someone's dorm room or out on the quad. Whenever it was

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and wherever it was, that soul stirring feeling would be of such comfort for us. It felt like home and family and God's love were all right there on that windy, snowy mountain top with us. I do think that a lot of us brought those parts of Black spirituality with us from our communities and from our cultures. I point out that having community is so essential for students of color at PWIs and having a connection to their culture is also an essential element of having an authentic campus identity.

When I think back to my neighborhood, there was always a sense of respect for our elders, as I said before also. I will always wish that I could have had more 'elders' around me to show me the pitfalls and pathways through them when I got to college. But it was good to have them at home. Community at home taught me a valuable lesson that not all Black people get along either, which was a very important lesson when I got to college and even in grade school. But I also learned that there are people in the community to turn to when you do encounter trouble in your way. Evil can be anywhere. I know that comes from traditions in African culture for sure. Dr. Harrison laughs and gestures with his hand as if pushing away at something.

Black Spirituality in My Youth. Before we move too far ahead into college, I wanted to revisit Dr. Harrison's youth and discuss a bit more any other activities or encounters that may have been a part of the development of his spirituality and practices. *I think that Miss J, the lady who made those wonderful cupcakes and sloppy joes is actually one of the people that instilled a bit of what Black spirituality means to me. She exemplified the concept of community sharing, support, and care. She was 'God's light' in the lives of us kids. She also always had some little bit of wisdom to share while we ate the food she fixed for us. It was sometimes a story about someone who lived in our neighborhood who had done*

wrong, but God have intervened and saved them. Or it could be a story from a long time ago

that she just remembered and wanted to share. Whatever it was, we knew we needed to listen,

not just for the food, but because she was our elder who was telling us something valuable.

I ask if the passing of his father created any struggles in his spirituality. *I would be*

lying if I said it did not affect me. But I was young and did not really understand all that was

happening. But the sadness was definitely there in my heart. I do remember that it was still

the songs in the church that would lift me up. I could also see even now how they would lift

my mother up as well. In some ways, I guess it brought me closer to the music, but the

struggle was there—just not as much as it could have been. Probably I struggle more now

with losses because I see that we all have such great things to do in this life and time is

fleeting. I did realize, very young, that if I am successful at all or manage to endure, it is

because of my spirituality and God's presence in it.

As a Black child, knowing that I was God's child did affect my passion for school as

well. I wanted to do well for myself and my mother of course, but I also felt compelled to do a

great job for God. I figured if God gave me the chance to learn, it was like when I was given

the chance to sing or play the piano. Whatever I was doing was for the glory and honor of

God, which ultimately would be for my good as well. This charge has stayed with me all my

life and is rooted in Black spirituality in my mind.

Black Spirituality in My College Years. We moved forward to the college years,

and I returned to the question of whether there were any instances that influences Dr.

Harrison's expression or alignment with Black spirituality. *College was both wonderful and*

a test for my spirit. I always felt like I had to keep proving myself to everyone around me.

Some days it felt like there were white faculty and administrators that were rooting for me to

fail. But in the midst of it all, God and my spirituality were always present. I do remember one event in particular that tested my spirit, I was working on my graduate degree and was working in a placement that had some difficult people running the facility. The clients were good people who were just lost, but the people running the facility showed little care for the actual healing of those who came to them for help. Instead, they ordered programming and tests that ran up cost that were then charged to the state. It was not surprising to me that in later years, they were shut down for filing false claims and other violations. That must really have challenged your ethics, I noted.

But to want to help those in need and be constrained and blocked at every turn by the people that were supposed to be training me was more than I could bear some days. I remember talking to my mother and one of my sisters about the problems at the site and just wanting to quit. But wisdom prevailed, and I actually came to see why I may have been placed in this tough spot. God was preparing me for greater things and greater challenges that were to follow. I was ready when I later worked with the same type people. God had given me practice in how to confront evil and still keep integrity and grace in my work.

I ask about culture. *College also gave me the opportunity to be a part of transforming the culture of our university a bit. We (a group of Black students) started a singing group and association for Black students, and other cultural outlets for the growing population of students of color. It was an incredible time. What saddens me is that I see that the university really does not seem to have moved much further since that time which was over 20 years ago. But that presence of Black spirituality is still on the campus and is slowly being transmitted to a new generation. Once again, I think that looking to tenets of Black spirituality like community and honoring culture were effective years ago and can be quite*

effective today. They still allow Black folks to remain engaged with our God and with the promise of hope for our success and our healing in the midst of continued racial struggles and inequity. Any differences between the decades or similarities. *Our focus on social justice back then was tied in part to things like apartheid, which echoes some of the same themes that plague our world today.*

Spirituality As Professional

As we began to discuss Dr. Harrison's professional career, I noted that he had previously stated that he had a kind of "call" that he felt was central to his agency when he went into both his work in the church and into his education. My inquiry was now directed toward whether this call extended into his professional life. *Yes, I definitely have a call to a specific kind of work in my career. It comes from my belief that God has a purpose for us all. I also know, from personal experience, that if I don't follow this call that my work and my life go "off the rails" pretty quickly and in the wrong direction.*

I ask if this call is something he has seen in others and what it looks like. *I have seen the 'call' in many other Black folks that I have worked with in my career, and a few white folks as well. Some of the best teachers and administrators that I have had the privilege to work with have had a deep and abiding call. Not all of them have been what some would call 'religious', but they had completely given over their lives to serving the needs of our students and our university community to the betterment of all—not just for money or looks. They would face ugly criticism from colleagues for helping students navigate the roadblocks that many Black and poor White students encounter at a university larger than some of their towns. These folks would give up career advancement to stay where they were needed— because that we their 'call' and their battle to fight.*

My next inquiry follows from this idea as I sought to find out how Dr. Harrison believed this call affected faculty and staff when they were faced with a 'battle' on their campus. *People of God (or with God's spirit) are fighters, friend. They take on battles that others flee or just ignore. I completely feel that charge when I am confronted with campus and community issues that can affect our students or my colleagues. The Bible talks about people who are sent forth to proclaim to those who are doing evil that they will not stand. It's called a "fire" in their speech I think. I have seen this "fire" come through from Black faculty and staff at a White university when they see some shameful behavior happening. And, I also know that we have to be ready for evil to push back against us. But that 'call' and that 'fire' mean I and others don't have a choice if we are flowing the spirit. That's when I see Black spirituality being so powerful for good.*

In Early Professional Career Outside Academe. The interview moved into discussions of Dr. Harrison's career before coming into work in academia. Dr. Harrison referred back to his narrative about working in mental health services and the struggles that he found in that environment. *It really was a test for me. I was so convicted in my call to work honestly and authentically with the people who were suffering so much with mental health issues, and the system ended up being the problem for me. Every day when I would have sessions with my clients, I knew I was doing what they needed of me. But then I would see the wrong that the companies were doing to these folks and it hurt me. It is one of the reason I moved on into higher education. It was always my heart to be in education, and now that I think about even more, that was another point where God was moving me on to a place by showing me that I wasn't supposed to be in another situation.*

Hearing that he felt motivated by God to move on. I ask if this would be a change in how he saw his call. *No, I was still being called to serve my community and to follow my path through my spirituality—the community just changed. I was still trying to help mainly Black folks who were struggling in profound ways that are caused by systemic racism and privilege. But higher education was a way that I thought would connect me to people before they might become steered in the wrong direction. And I wasn't a fan of secondary education; that just is not my age group.*

In Professional Career Inside Academe: The Early Years. *When I first started in higher education, I thought that I could 'save the world' for about a minute. It didn't take long to realize that I had so little power at the upper levels of decision-making as a faculty member. I had a colleague who went through the master's program with me who spelled it out for me. He said, "If you want to make change in this institution, you have to move closer to the space where decisions are made. You can do amazing things in your classroom, but at the end of the day, it is those folks in upper administration who run the show." You know it hit me hard when he told me that, but it also woke me up.*

My questioning then went to what Dr. Harrison's career looked like through a lens of Black spirituality in his early years given this advice and insight from another Black faculty member. *Well, in the beginning, I was so happy in the classroom and with my students supervising them in their placements that I just couldn't bring myself to leave that role. And I will tell you that it did cause me some strife in my career because people wanted me to move up—either because they believed in my work or because they wanted to get rid of me.* We both laugh. *I just saw how important it was for my Black students to have representation in*

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the classroom and in their field experiences. I was also advising some Black student groups and knew that I just wouldn't have time if I left teaching and went into administration.

I noted that the classroom can be a real draw on the spirit because it provides such wonderful uplift from interacting with your students and even some of your colleagues. *Yes, I was pulled into that early position for quite a while, but God was pressing me to move onward with my call. So, some things happened in my personal life and in my career that pushed me from the faculty position at that university. A position opened up at another university that was a bit smaller where I could have some faculty duties as well as become a member of the upper administration. Spiritually speaking, that new university was going through its own battles, and the call definitely came with some fire. It gave me a chance to do more and to have more influence; that's important to me. You know I carry on that saying from my mother. "I can show you better than I can tell you." And this new role was going to give me that chance to begin 'showing' those folks in upper administration what students need from us.*

In Professional Career Inside Academe: Mid-Career. We move on to discussing Dr. Harrison's middle career lens through which he might see Black spirituality influencing his words, actions, and overall call to vocation in higher education. *At my university that I moved to next, I was in for a ride, my brother. God was with me every day when I went into work. I think that I listened to more gospel and spirituals during that first year than I had in my younger days. Music is always at the center of my peace. I needed so much peace back then.* He laughs. *I prayed and meditated for protection from the assaults that were coming at me every day, and those lamentations got heard. Thank you, God.*

My primary mistake was trusting in people who looked like they were my allies on the surface. You know. To my face. Then when I was not in a meeting or when I had to confront them with an issue involving them, they would be devilish and so evil. I had these White faculty members who thought they were so 'woke' that they already had the answers to what our Black and Indigenous students needed to be successful at our university. They would try to fix an issue by holding seminars and workshops before they even listened to what the concern actually was. When I would share that they were doing it wrong, I was even asked by upper administration to not confront them like that. Well, calling out evil, even when it is disguised as something good, is part of my spirituality and my culture. I can't in good conscious work that way—at least not for long.

I point out that there is a word that we used to remind ourselves of back in the day. Resilience. Dr. Harrison agrees. *It took a lot of resilience. Heck, it still does. Part of the issue is that when my spirit helps me to be resilient, the White folks in some powerful positions take it as a sign of rebellion. Just because I keep fighting for what is right is not showing rebellion against you're institution. It is showing you that something is still wrong, and I am going to stick with it until we make it better. It is so tough. I ask if the middle of a career makes it easier as I sound hopeful for my future. I wish I could say that I have been able to relax, but that is just not true. Resilience will be needed for you whole career. But know that the spirit keeps us in the midst of these struggles and supports this resiliency in the battles.* I share that my dad used to say "Never back down. Never surrender" when we would discuss the life issues that would confound me in my youth. Dr. Harrison responded. *Yes, that is it. That is it. He wasn't talking about rebelling against something. He was encouraging you to continue in*

the fight and to know that God is supporting you so stick with it. I agree, and we both laugh a little.

I have administrators now who just do not understand the way Black culture and the spirit move us to 'never surrender' to the evil in this world. We were promised better. We are promised greatness. Why would we surrender before the promise is fulfilled? When (predominantly) White institutions ask students of color to not resist or to only resist on the terms of the institution, they are telling them to ignore their culture, their spirits, and the sacred promise that I would say came along with the horrible bondage and pain of enslavement. When Black faculty or staff keep coming to the table to talk about concerns, it isn't to show rebellion many times, mainly I think we are showing that we are resilient in our fight for good. At this point in my career, I still feel like they are trying to control my essence of Blackness—to allow me to forget what is not just innately a part of me, but actually who I am.

Spirituality As Institutional

Stressors and pressures from our institutions may be one place where Black spirituality may challenge the agency and call of Black faculty and staff to "speak truth to power" at some PWIs. So, I followed up by asking how Dr. Harrison saw Black spirituality interacting with these institutions. *In general, I think that I would have to repeat that I am tested almost every day with the strength and call from the spirituality the flows through me. But that righteous discontent and resilience that I was talking about before keeps me at least at a simmer when concerns for equity come up on campus.*

It still amazing me that in 2020 we still have such terrible things happen to Black faculty, to Black students on our campuses. And our institutions let us down over and over

again because they confront issues with their conventional approaches that just do not work many times with the concerns of members of the campus who are not part of the "White" system of problem—solving. I ask what he means by the "White system." *Well, it is the way White administrators think about concerns raised by Black faculty, staff, and students. They strip the cultural and philosophical foundations of Blackness away from their analysis of a concern and the formulation of solutions, or they ignore them. Or worse, they utilize stereotypes and tropes in their understanding of a problem and then issue their sometimes well—intentioned solutions without truly seeing the lived experiences of these Black folks.*

I ask if Dr. Harrison feels any sense of defeat in his work in higher education institutions. *No, not defeat. I feel like we are still working to fulfill the promise that God has for us, and that work has to continue. It goes back to that idea of resilience that I talked about earlier and when I made that quote about "faith without works is nothing" in the eyes of God and in the answer to the call we are given. Institutions need to see that just working on an issue is not enough either. Sometimes that 'work' is not really 'work' at all; it is just piling programs, people, or empty policies onto an issue. The true 'work' of restoring hope and recognizing the value and essence of the Black lived experience on their campus is where that real work has to be done.*

With Students in the Heart. I move the conversation to students from this jumping off point. I ask if Dr. Harrison believes that Black spirituality could have any positive effects on the way that predominantly White institutions work on issues related to Black students on their campuses—especially with regard to the positionality of Black faculty and staff. *Why yes, I completely believe that the tenets of my Black spirituality could be useful in solving problems and supporting students on our campuses.* I ask what those tenets are again. *I'm*

talking about seeing resilience as a good thing when students don't stop their protesting against inequity. They should see this as a part of the students' call to acquire the best educational experience possible as they are responsible to their community, their families, their ancestors, and their God or spiritual selves.

Predominantly White institutions could also learn a lot from Black spirituality's tenet of righteous indignation when events and issues emerge that are causing deep stressors and debilitation for the campus community. And this tenet goes beyond the concerns of Black students to issues that affect all members of the campus such as the ongoing pressure and pain of systemic racism. The institution should be incensed that something like racism has been allowed to maintain a hold upon its campus and its equity for students. Something that damages one of us damages all of us inherently. That ties into the tenet of respecting and honoring the needs of community and the responsibilities of community membership. Being family can't be just a motto—especially when our students are truly part of this deep responsibility.

I ask what he can say about recent concerns from the Black students on his campus. I tell him I understand if there are restrictions. *I can tell you this, Cliff. When we see concerns from our Black students, we do begin to work on finding solutions. We haven't done as good a job in the past and that pressure has accumulated. Some of our issues of today come from not fully doing the work in the past. When I encounter concerns of Black students, it is not restful on my spirit, and if I can't find ways to motivate administrators to understand the concerns, it definitely brings about some shame.* I ask about this idea of shame. *This shame comes from feeling like I'm not coming up to the standard that God and my spirituality has set for me. But, since I stay in the fight, I stay courageous knowing that ultimately it will be*

alright. But there are things that happen that I just can't let go, which causes another level of struggle in my spirit.

I ask again about some specific instances. *I'll just speak in general if that is OK for now. In some of my university work at predominantly White institutions, Black students have raised concerns about how they feel ignored in campus programming, even though they do report having events and offices set up for them. They share that the offerings aren't culturally responsive to the diaspora of the needs of Black people. Black students shared that so much of what they encounter is stereotypical of what White people think Black people want in their lives instead of reflecting their lived experiences. White administrators agree to bring in some current rap or R&B group, but they don't think about all that goes into Black students' enjoyment or buy—in for such an event. I remember a recent concert where there were more White kids dancing and yelling to the rap group the university brought in then there were Black students in the crowd. A Black student said to me, "They brought in that rap group, but can't seem to find the resources to support getting a hairstylist for Black hair into town. So much effort for some show, and nothing for our day—to—day needs."*

I notice Dr. Harrison sounding anxious and share that he only needs to say what he wants to in this interview. *For me, that is an example of another moment where the institution just isn't listening to what the Black students are saying and looking into their lived experience. I does bother me that I feel like these types of concerns could be dealt with by the Black community itself and not something for the institution to tackle because they are so far off from understanding. I think that some Black students run to the institution for solutions mimicking their White counterparts instead of being strong and independent thinkers who trust in that spirit beyond them to help create solutions. It comes from a lack of*

life experience, but I still believe that there is promise in their uprisings and protests. I ask if it feels like some students are depending on going to "the main house" for the White man to fix their problem when the answer could be found in their own resources and ranks. *You could say that. I won't go that far. But you could say that.*

I shift to Black spirituality and the recruitment and retention of Black college students at PWIs. I ask if Dr. Harrison see any value or connections between Black spirituality and these ongoing concerns for PWIs. *Yes, I do think that with an understanding of the tenets of call and community that PWIs could enhance their reach and retention of Black students. Community in Black spirituality means that the college works to create and support a thriving Black community on its campus that is intrinsically a part of the greater community—there is symbiosis as the community thread runs through Black spirituality.*

PWIs can also manage their retention of Black students better through establishing in an authentic way what the actual 'call' is for their Black students and understanding and deconstructing the diversity of thought and relational needs of these varied calls to vocation and education. I'm sure some empirical researcher out there either has done or will do a study on Black college students at PWIs, and then tell us that money or financial concerns are the biggest factor is those students leaving the college. I just don't agree. From the students I speak to when they are considering leaving, it is because they don't feel connected to the community and they haven't found a connection to their 'call' for their future. Why stay some place where you either don't feel like you belong, or you don't feel like what you are doing is useful either now or for your future?

With the Predominantly White Institution in the Mind and Soul. We began to then discuss how this same type of understanding could potentially be useful in the

recruitment and retention of Black faculty and staff at predominantly White institutions. *I think that both supporting the development of authentic community that is intentionally situated as a necessary component of the whole campus community can be quite helpful. I see Black faculty and staff groups on campuses, but they feel limited. For staff, I would like to see the university intentionally support the Black staff community on campus by helping create a Black and persons of color committee as a part of our staff council or senate. I don't think that is a thing right now and it should be. The universities where I have worked have had Black or Latinx faculty and staff groups, but they are separate from the central campus organizations who remain at the ear of the administration. Not just a place at a table, but a position planning what happens at the table. Black spirituality calls for us to respect the members of our community to make sure that this happens.*

I ask about whether the 'call' that seems to be an inherent part of Black spirituality could also be useful in recruiting and retaining Black faculty and staff. *Oh, most definitely. We, as Black folks, are charged with this call, and if an institution makes the effort to celebrate and provide necessary support for us to maintain and grow within our call, then we are apt to stay with them. If Black faculty and staff don't feel supported in their call, they are not going to stay in that relationship. Some Black faculty find that their call involves mentoring and guiding young Black students on their campuses to help them in their college success. The problem at PWIs is that this really essential work is not respected as part of the notable duties of faculty when they are in line for tenure.*

Colleges want more research and writing rather than more of the genuine interpersonal support system creation that many of our Black students crave and really need to survive in a space where they don't feel connected otherwise. The work we do is not simply

talking to these students or sponsoring their club; it is helping them create plans for internships and research opportunities that are relevant to their lived experiences, attending their events, helping them learn how to confront and resolve issues with instructors, creating spaces to celebrate them within community, and modeling professional behavior and practices for them. All of this we do because it is a part of our call to vocation and our responsibility. Now I am not talking about all Black faculty or staff at a PWI. Just like not all Black folks are in tune with Black spirituality; not all Black members of the community wish to be active in these mentoring activities, which makes the work of those who do that much more essential.

I ask if universities that are predominantly White (and others) could find the tenets of Black spirituality helpful in other ways. *Yes, once again, I think that if they respect and recognize the role that Black spirituality can play in their decision—making processes, they could create a less hostile environment issue confrontation and problem—solving process.* I ask what he means. *I mean, when problems arise, and they will, if the university would take the time to understand the lived experience of the people involved and the inherent needs of those involved, better decisions might come from this process. When I think back to some of my lessons on African spirituality, I remember learning how decisions were made through community and through intersection with the spirit world. I'm not saying everyone should pray to find better decisions. But I see pray as very deep reflection within. Reflecting deeply as we enter into decision-making or when institutions are trying to manage an issue can be very useful in solution creation. This reflection should be both in solitary and in community just as with our spirituality.*

Mr. Calvin: I Am My Brother's Keeper

Spirituality As Personal

I always found myself connected to the word of God, even as a child. It gave me a sense of responsibility to be kind and to be as good as possible to everyone around me. These words are what resonate with me when I think of Mr. Calvin and all of our associations through the past 5 years. He is definitely a man who has his spirituality and his God at the center of his work, family, and personal lives. Mr. Calvin is in college administration at a predominantly White institution in the southern portion of the United States. He holds a bachelor's and a master's degree and has worked in higher education for almost 15 years.

Mr. Calvin is affiliated with national organizations that have allowed him to interact with PWI Black faculty and staff all over the country and their students. He takes his role in higher education seriously as he does his family and spiritual life. Mr. Calvin is committed to his work with marginalized populations—especially young Black men, who are at a high risk of falling prey to internal and external pressures of college life. He credits his background for helping him to remain connected to these young men. Growing up in rural Mississippi, Mr. Calvin knew he wanted to play sports, but he did not know of his other passions when he was young. He came to higher education from some very influential moments in his life that moved him in that direction.

Mr. Calvin noted that his spiritual practices are rooted in the Black church, but they expand out into his work and into how he continues to grow as a Black man of faith. He prays every day—sometimes three or four times, and he attends church with his family weekly. He is also involved in church activities that include working with the youth of his church in their programming and events. His son's participation is also a factor in his taking

on this mentoring role as Mr. Calvin wants to keep in connection with him while also serving

his church and his God. He also does Bible study, which began back in his childhood with

his grandmother, who he notes was a major influence on his life. Mr. Calvin shares that she

was one of the main factors in his spiritual life and also in him coming to his call in his work

in higher education.

Another thing that is in me is to try to share the goodness of God with other people. I

ask if that can become tough in a work environment. *Well, people know me, and I try to*

share by what I do and not really push "the Word" down their throats. That just turns people

off most times anyway. But I practice kindness and try to show some grace, which I hope

shows people that this is a part of working and living in God's purpose. This practice of

sharing though does give me a lift—especially when I connect with someone who also knows

and feels this spiritual strength like I do.

When I ask him what Black spirituality means to him, Mr. Calvin is quite animated in

his response. As he holds out his broad hands toward the screen, he begins sharing. *I think*

Black spirituality to me is about faith. It is about faith that things can change for the better.

It's about faith in a higher power that cares for us. I think it means that there is a purpose in

our prayers. I ask what that could mean for him. *Well, it means that when I am praying that*

what I am expressing to God is important to me and to others and that God hears what I am

saying or thinking. Of course, that also means that we have to be careful for what we pray

for. We just might receive something that we are not ready to handle just because we truly

felt we wanted it.

I inquire what else there might be in Black spirituality for him. *I always believed that*

my spirituality is a part of my vocation, my job, in this life. It is what helps me regulate my

goals and gives me strength. It allows me to please God and please myself. Sometimes it pushes me to move on from things and sometimes it holds me in the midst of my struggles until I can move on. That has happened to me when I am working. I'll be honest. I'll ask God why do I have to go through this, and then I understand, after a while, that it is because I am needed in the place or in that job at the time. It allows me to stay grounded in my purpose.

My spirituality didn't used to mean as much to me for a while when I was younger, but in college, I rededicated myself to God. Then as I grow older, I see that my spirituality has so much more to do with who I am to me and to others, and it definitely means that I can't separate myself from it. I wouldn't want to if I could. I ask Mr. Calvin why this is. *I can't change my race or how tall I am, and I can't change the other things that God has made me either. Being in faith is just like those things to me. They're a part of all that makes up me.*

Earliest Memories of Black Spirituality. When we discuss Mr. Calvin's spiritual practices, he brought up his grandmother. So, I asked about how she was a part of his early memories of Black spirituality. *My grandmother was amazing. She was a very devoted church—goer and was active in everything. She taught me what it was to be a Christian and to follow God. She is the grounding for how my faith began. She made sure we got to church and that, even though we were poor, poor that we dressed as well as we could. I know that she loved God very much and spent a good amount of each day in Bible study just reading it over and over.*

That is my earliest memory of seeing her reading the Bible and praying. Maybe it was because we were in the middle of so many struggles in our family, but she was always in some way connecting to God. I can't even separate anything in those early years from that

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memory. Her faith showed at dinner, at the store, at my football games, and of course at

church and with the other ladies from the church who would come over to our house. She

was not a meek woman, but she kept herself prayed up as we say. She was always on guard

against the troubles that would happen—especially in our poor neighborhood in Mississippi.

Black Spirituality in Community and Culture. I note that Mr. Calvin mentioned

the ladies from the church and wondered if their group or other community organizations or

activities shaped any parts of his spirituality or his practices. *Yes, the ladies of the church*

definitely were a part of my spiritual practices. They were all substitute mothers and

grandmothers for all of us kids when ours were not around. They made sure we weren't

hungry, but they also made sure we said grace and that we followed the commandments.

Some of them encouraged us to sing along with them when they would drop some gospel or

spiritual song while we hung out on their porch or in their backyard. You were never far

from some spiritual influence when they were around. It was part of how our neighborhood

and the Black community worked for us.

We also had ministers and other church leaders who I saw as leaders in our

community, and they showed me what it was to be a leader in the Black community in a very

positive way. Back then, it was mostly men who were in those positions, but we also had

some women who would go from church to church and spread their voices to us all. You just

got to know them by their praise. He laughs and I laugh having known this type of praise

practice from evangelical church ladies in my past as well. *Miss B and Miss Nancy always*

had a testimony at the end of the services they attended. I can hear them now, man. I still

think they talked to each other and made sure that they didn't show up at the same church on

the same Sunday. "Giving honor to God" and the pastor was how they started over and over. It was funny, but also felt real. You know. I shook my head in agreement.

These ladies and the pastors of the community taught me not to be ashamed of my spirituality or any testimony that I wanted to share from my heart. It is part of the reason I wanted to support you in this research work you are doing. There were other men around the area who also would preach at different places. They would also show up on Sunday at my grandmother to be fed. She wasn't going to turn them away. So, I heard a lot of Bible stories and other stories when I was young that shaped my relationship with God.

Black Spirituality in My Youth. I take this opportunity to ask about Black spirituality in Mr. Calvin's youth as he had been reflecting upon the community influences during that time in his life. *Well, like I said, my grandmother was a really powerful influence on me throughout my life, but especially as I was growing up. I also had football coaches and other athletics folks who were deeply spiritual in my eyes. My coaches would have us pray before and after games and when any of us came into their offices when problems with school.*

I do think playing sports really did keep me at least a bit tied to my spirituality—not always for the right reason when I think about it now. Like when I would pray to win a game rather than praying for God to help me do the best that I could do to support my team and maybe win in the end. But that is part of being young. But it did at least start me praying and thinking about what God meant to me and what I needed from God. I wish I had thought more about what God needed and needs from me. I note that we all have those concerns with our spiritual side and even with the people we care for in our lives. Mr. Calvin responds that he learned to try to move away from only using God to make "Genie wishes" to acquire what

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he wanted. I ask him to explain what he thinks of "Genie wishes" as I had the same type of transition in my life I thought. *"Genie wishes" are those prays that kids, and some grown folks, make to God to get things in their lives. Kids pray to get a new bike, to get money, or to have that girl like them instead of praying to be a better person who is more connected to God and truer to his word.*

When I think of how I thought of God in my youth, I made a lot of "Genie wishes" that were so misdirected. High school changed things a little for me when I joined the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA). The FCA gave me a better grounding in what it meant to be a Christian and to serve those around me. Our service projects and our community at the high school was really close knit even though we were all from really different areas around the town. I think I learned that God sees all of us as part of what can make this world better, and it doesn't matter if I am rich or poor, Black or white or brown. I ask if the FCA caused any issues with his spiritual practices or beliefs as well. *No, I have heard from people that they thought their experience was too intense or that they felt controlled, but not me. It really helped me stay grounded and connected to my spiritual me.*

The stuff that I was taught at home and at church pretty much went along with what I was a part of with the FCA. So, between that and my community and the coaches that were also supportive, they all helped me stay in my lane and not stray into trouble. I didn't slip into drugs or alcohol or any of that stuff. I just didn't see what good it was. I wasn't out telling other people not to do it, but it just wasn't for me with what I was practicing. That continued on past high school and even to today.

Black Spirituality in My College Years. College is a transition time for most all students, and I wondered if that time in Mr. Calvin's life changed his Black spirituality or

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altered his perceptions of what his practices should be. *I think I said it before, but I got baptized again in college. I actually become more devoted to my spirituality during my sophomore year. I think at that point it was all becoming clearer to me and I was also beginning to see that there may be something that I was called to do in my life—that God had a real plan for me. I stayed involved with football and that was tough because in college you slip into some bad situations. Your peers and other folks are offering you all kinds of stuff that is not good for you, and you are pressured to do what the others are doing. I felt that what I would be around the other student-athletes who were doing well on the field. I saw how women were paying attention to them, and how they were treated so well with other things also. And I wanted that. But my spirit told me it was not for me.*

Challenges from the Devil, or from God, were all around me. And I almost folded, man. But I had great influences with some coaches and then the support within the Fellowship for Christian Athletes to help sustain me. Plus, I had family at home that was depending on me to keep success in my school work on my mind. They all helped me keep things in perspective and to make it through the troubling times. I really needed them to stay with me while I tried to figure out my call because I was focused on playing professional football and not paying enough attention to college except to survive to graduation.

I ask if Mr. Calvin had any professors or courses that were of influence in his spirituality also. *No, I didn't have any courses that were that big an influence. I mean I took the Old Testament course to fulfill a requirement in my undergrad, but not really any other courses like that. I still think that because I was a student-athlete that the professors didn't think they needed to spend too much time with me. But I didn't try to connect to them either. That is something that I make sure my students do now. I know the value for many reasons—*

especially for Black men in college. Hey, maybe that is another lesson God was teaching me back then that I brought forward now? I agree it might be. We laugh.

Spirituality As Professional

I take this opportunity in our interview conversation to move into our discussion of Mr. Calvin's professional life and the role that his Black spirituality has played in it from his perspective. *I will just begin by saying that I would not be here if it had not been for my spirituality and my God. I would have fallen by the wayside and lost my way completely without the love, compassionate corrections, drive, and hope that comes with my spirituality. The work I do every day lets me know that God is present in it, and I try to show the people around me that my work is from my charge from God.*

Some days it is so difficult to keep this in focus, but between my reading, prayers, and the uplifting that I get from when I work with my students, I know it is all worth it in the end. My goal is to be a blessing to other people and go where God sends me. I will tell you that in my professional life that hasn't been easy when it came to some career choices. But the choices have worked out for me and the people I work with at the universities. Sometimes you just have to take that "leap of faith" and take the time to value what is happening for what it is doing for you. You have to really see the effects from the beginning to the conclusions. You can't just remain stuck on the tough times in the beginning. I see people becoming bitter instead of getting better when they don't do this. God wants me to get better.

In Early Professional Career Outside Academe. Mr. Calvin had many jobs outside academia that centered on athletics from the amateur to the professional levels. Some of his "best lessons" in life and spirituality were coupled with his growth in the sports industry. Mr. Calvin relates multiple stories he feels were deeply motivational in his career and for his

soul. From his time working as an intern for the NCAA in Indianapolis after graduation into his career paths in higher education, he has found that his spirituality has moved closer and closer to the center of his work and his ethics. What seems consistent in his narrative is the overarching drive to promote a culture of support at a very personal level to the students that he encounters.

The manifestations of Black spirituality in Mr. Calvin's youth emerge as the arbiters of his interactions with the colleagues and college students who have made a marked impact upon his career as well as his life. What may be seen in these lived experience descriptions is the manner in which Mr. Calvin's spirituality evolved through some powerful moments of distress and challenge. What I reflect in this recounting of our interview is from a man who has a passionate love of his God that will be presented in its truth as was relayed to me in deep honesty and trust.

We began with a discussion of how or if his Black spirituality was as manifest in his beginning career outside academia as he has reflected in his narrative from his college days. *Well, after I didn't make it into a professional football career, though I have a cousin who did, I went on into a graduate degree program where I did work hard to maintain my spiritual call and conviction. My community had changed, and some of the disappointment of not making a professional football career had just gnawed at my heart and spirit. I was not respecting myself or my future wife sometimes during that tough period of my life.* I ask what changed.

I had some really good people who helped me see that I was not understanding the guidance God was trying to give me. I was resisting because I only wanted what was on my mind for my personal satisfaction. They helped me get through to the other side, and I ended

up with a great internship with the NCAA in Indianapolis afterward. I met some folks who helped me see even more deeply how God can work in your life. Remember that I'm from Mississippi, and I was then in Indianapolis where it is cold, cold, cold. Well, I was not prepared. I didn't have a real winter coat and was walking around freezing. One of the guys who was in charge of my internship pulled me in and asked where my coat was.

I told him I didn't have anything but my jacket that was not much more than a windbreaker. We laugh. *It was so cold, man. You've been there for meetings. You know.* I nodded in agreement and laughed again. *This great man told me something that sticks with me today. He said, "Never be ashamed to ask for help. That is what other people are here for. We care for our brothers so that they can carry on and care for future generations. We are our brother's keeper." I know I had heard this idea before, but when he said it, he meant it. The next day he pulls me into his office again and presented me with a new winter coat. I cried man. I am not ashamed to say it. I balled like a baby. And this big old Black man just hugged me. He knew it was tough for me being in a big city and all the way up north from where I went to school and was raised. That coat was like God's love was made manifest right there in that moment. I can still see me standing in the snow outside our offices and looking up and thanking God for bringing this coat and someone who genuinely cared about me into my life.*

That guy kept with me all through my internship and worked with me to find ways to advance my career in college athletics. He guided me away from distractions that were affecting my marriage. I mean, I was a young guy and in a big city, and there was just so much coming at me every day. It was overwhelming to me, but this man was honest with me about what he saw in me and what I could make of my life if I stayed on a good path. For him

and for me, that was following God's word and staying away from drugs, alcohol, and other things that were sent by the Devil to derail me or sometimes, I think, by God to show me how lost my life could be so that I could understand better what was really for me and what was against me.

In Professional Career Inside Academe: The Early Years. When Mr. Calvin made the career move into working at universities, he stayed in the area of college athletics with a focus on supporting students in their academic success. One of the most difficult roles in college athletics, academic support and services for student-athletes comes with a myriad of issues to manage including instilling integrity, honor, and rallying intrinsic motivation in the population and holding coaches and other athletics personnel responsible for ethical behavior as well. As both Mr. Calvin and I had worked in this field, I knew his struggles somewhat and could identify with how deeply he cares for his student-athletes' success.

We continued to discuss his career as it moved into his first university position at a university in the southeastern portion of the United States. It is important to note that Mr. Calvin has worked for a few universities in his career so far, and they all are in the southeast just to maintain a frame of reference. *While I was in Florida, I had a really rough time with my first jobs. The jobs were at some high-profile colleges that didn't support their student-athletes like I would have chosen to do if I was in charge. I had so many young, Black men who only could see the bright lights of a professional career in sports and not in their schoolwork. So many really talented young men who only saw one way out of where they came from or into what they wanted (or thought they wanted) in their futures.*

I felt like I didn't voice my opinion enough during that first part of my career, even though I could always see what was wrong with how we were operating with our students. I

ask when he thought that might have changed. *I must have been around the time I was still in Florida at a prestigious university, and I had this player who headed in a very wrong direction with his life—just destructive. We had a program that was called "Bright Minds", and I tackled a lot of the academic and personal issues of our students in that program. I was able to get this player involved in the program and help him see how much his actions were being affected by peer pressure. As a Black man, I felt tied to this kid and to his mistakes. I felt that I had to try to be his guide like so many had been for me.*

I knew that part of the issue for this student was that he lacked a community that would support him away from who he was as a star athlete on a big time college team. So, we worked to create strong community for him and other young Black kids in athletics like him to give them better grounding and positive influences in their lives. This all may sound like some standard way of encouraging students through programming, but it was more than that. We were all people of faith and so when we set out to support these students, it was backed by our faith that god had called us to this place to help these kids be successful and not back down—even when our work confronted university plans that would have disadvantaged these students. I think that is when I really began to understand how far God and the spirit were going to take me in this battle in higher ed.

I ask if everyone in his athletics department was onboard with thinking about student support in this manner. *No. He laughs. Definitely not. We had some folks who would even walk away from me when I tried to talk about a student concern if I begin to point out that the student was lost. Of course, I wasn't even talking about their spiritual life, though that might have been part of their issues. But some folks just didn't like that I wore my call on my sleeve and my faith. It wasn't like I was praying in the hallways. But they would see me*

praying with players who asked me to share with them, and I would be reported. But that thing inside me told me to be patient and be still so that God could work through me. My spirituality gave me the strength to have those uncomfortable conversations that had to happen—with my colleagues and with my students. Sometimes you gotta call them out! He laughs and nods at the camera. I nod in agreement.

I ask him to go on with an example if he has one. *OK, I had the student at the college in Florida, and he was not doing well in his course work. I had called him into my office, and he came in with this gruff attitude that I didn't have anything to tell him because he was about to leave school once he was drafted. I told him I just wanted to hear his plan. He spouted off the basic of his plan and couldn't tell me specifics. So, I saw a road in for us to talk. I asked about money because that is always something that is at the front of their minds. He gave me some numbers, and I asked what he would do with it. He talked about things for his family and his girlfriend along with some nice items for himself. It all sounded very nice. But then I asked what happens if he is hurt, if he doesn't make the draft, if his life changes in some major way, if his money does not go as far as he thinks. He couldn't tell me. That's when I was able to share how his business classes could benefit him—from knowing what bad accounting looks like to being able to fairly market his image.*

We talked for about 3 hours, and I still felt like it was not sinking in, but we ended with me telling him that I was there for him and to contact me soon. I asked what happened to this student. *It was about 5 weeks later, he came into my office just off the street without any warning and sat down. I congratulated him on getting drafted. He shook his head and nodded a little. "Mr. Calvin, I'm going to be a dad in four months, and I don't know what to do." I sat down across from him and bowed my head for a minute—really just thinking. He*

said, "My mom is so disappointed in me, and the guys on the team mostly just laugh and call me stupid for being trapped." We talked for a while about the situation and his concerns about football, the baby, the baby's mama, and his mother. I asked about any community support he might have. His friends had pretty much deserted him after he didn't draft very high with a large paycheck.

I asked him if he wanted to talk to a counselor. He said that he didn't want to talk to outside people. So, I offered to be there for him as long as he needed me. I shared a couple ideas of how to manage his issues and some people away from campus who would be good for him to talk to during this time of transitions. We met for many weeks after that first meeting, and we worked through some difficult questions and found some solid solutions and made plans. I talked to his mom a couple times with him over the phone, and I think that helped her. He and I are still connecting when he can. After the run of his football career, I was able to return to college and obtain his degree. I ask about what drives all this extra effort and devotion. *My spirit is what compelled me to go that far with that student. I couldn't have stayed through all his struggles without my spirituality calling me to this work—especially when I had colleagues who would question why I was still trying to help this kid after he had left our college. They just didn't understand my reasoning and my call.*

In Professional Career Inside Academe: Mid-Career. I was drawn to this idea of resistance to the naysaying of his colleagues and wanted to know if that has continued in his present career and position. *Things have changed for me since I have advanced in my career to this point. My position now has a little more authority than I had back then.* I interject that he has a lot more authority as a director. *You know the titles still don't allow you what you'd think. But, yes, I have been able to create a team that is more grounded in some ideas from*

my spiritual background. Now, I'm not hiring people based on their faith or their testimony.

But I do pay attention to how they treat people and how other people say they have treated

them. I ask questions about how they handle the responsibilities of supporting students and

why they think the career in academic support for student-athletes is so important in

students' lives—especially minority students.

I ask them about being a guide for students and if they can understand how

community makes a difference in students' perceptions of everything they go through.

Lacking community can make a student feel out of place on the field, in the classroom, in

their dorm, or even in their own skin. It's the folks that understand the importance of

community and of mentorship with heart that make for a strong team to support our student-

athletes. Without these values and understandings, we can't do our jobs—at least not well.

We want to provide that space for our students that my spirit makes for me. I still have a

ways to go since I think I just got to the beginning of the middle of my career, but I know

what leads and guides me, and I try to be patient and ensure that every day I keep my

students' best interest at the heart of my work.

Spirituality As Institutional

Mr. Calvin and I have been discussing our concerns about how institutions support

and affirm the lived experiences of the Black students and other students of color at their

universities at many of the conferences and meetings we attended together. We had talked

about the systemic organizational issues that can hamper the academic and personal success

of these students. So, I wanted to probe his thoughts on whether or not Black spirituality

tenets of community, respect for present and ancestral contributions, and the call to vocation

might prove useful in combatting these aggressions against our Black and other students of color.

The responses from Mr. Calvin are drawn from his experiences as a student of color and as a Black professional staff member at a predominantly White institution. My desire with this line of questioning was to explore his experiences for what he decided to reflect to me and to identify the experiences he valued and his reasoning. Our time centered on his narratives because he expressed that what he has found with PWIs is that the voices of Black folks continuously are either silenced or "modified" by their respective institutions. We began with the heart of his work, which is his students and their struggles and successes.

With Students in the Heart. I asked if Mr. Calvin believes Black spirituality has a fundamental place in higher education's recruitment and retention practices for Black college students. We positioned the question as it relates to his work in academia as someone who provides advice and counsel to Black students and engages with them on a regular basis. *You know our colleges miss out so much with these kids. They spend so much time and money creating programs that don't meet the actual needs of our students. Yes, they can keep them busy, but busy does not mean they are happy. I wish we did more work to support and maintain community for our Black students. Having lots of organizations like athletics, campus clubs, and Greek life are all good pieces of the puzzle, but what I think Black spirituality would suggest is that White universities work to create a central safe space where Black students can come together from these smaller units to form a larger community in solidarity.*

I know that scares some White administrators. I have seen it in their practices. The way they support the pieces (sometimes) and, he pauses, then they back away from promoting

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ideas that would bring these varied segments together. The work that Black folks do together is a blessing for everyone if they are supported in a communal way. I think that really challenges the devils in higher education though. What happens if we let all or even some of these smaller groups come together? What if they gain some kind of power and ask us to do things that we don't understand how to do? Fear is real. I feel that. But it should not stop us from making space for a unified Black community on our campuses. Students need this. Black staff and our teachers need this.

He stops to consider this for a moment. *I'd say that is the most pressing concern for my students now, and it really has become even more prevalent in the midst of all the racial injustices and out right killing of Black people by law enforcement that has gone on for this past decade or so. I am just calling on the college to be more of a blessing in our students' lives than an obstacle.* I ask if he has an instance that might be an example. *Well, back a few years ago, I had a group of student-athletes who were struggling in a certain professor's course. The students claimed that because they were Black and because they identified as student-athletes that the professor treated them badly. They said he was abrupt with them and wouldn't answer their questions. He would ignore them when they raised their hand in class, and if he did call on them, he would make fun of their answers. The other Black students in the class just sat in silence when this was happening. I believe a part of this issue is that those Black students did not feel the level of community with our Black student-athletes that they all needed to combat this racism.*

The harm that professor was doing to those Black student-athletes was also harming the other Black students in the class, but by not providing a communal space where they could break down social and personal barriers, these Black folks had a hard time coming

together. I note that this kind of thing happens in the Black community as well. *We are a diverse people with different opinions about a lot of issues in this world. As I said earlier, I understand that there are Black folks who don't follow God or have a spirituality, but we still need to be as united as possible as a community to confront this racism and privilege that holds us back. My students are sharp and they saw what was happening. It was a very uncomfortable conversation when they tried to get the other Black students in the class to join them in complaining. It's how this control happens so easily. The system works to pit us against each other so nothing changes. After a couple dinners and conversations together though, the other Black students (and a few White students) did join in on a letter to the department chair, the dean of the college, and the president of the university to air their grievances and share their united pain, man. It was great!* He laughs. *But that took so much work because our campus didn't have this capacity on its own. My work in all this was to listen, support my students when they thought of giving up, and mentoring them through the process so that they kept their efforts professional and respectful for all involved.*

This insight led to us discussing if this work was a manifestation of Black spirituality in his life or the lives of his students. *Totally, it was. Without the spirit, I would not have been able to be a mentor and guide for these students. I would have been afraid to voice my support out of concern for my job, and the community would not have been created in such a positive way. I used wisdom from my mentors, my grandmother, and other very important people from my past in what I told these students and what I showed them by example. I helped them stay grounded when they would come into my office just screaming mad at this guy. You gotta see past his evil and find a way to make things better. That is what I would tell them over and over while giving them the tools to hopefully have the issues improve.* I share

that I have seen this type of internalized racism on my former campus as well. I note that some White faculty try to disguise their treatment of Black student-athletes as being about them feeling that these students have been given a "pass" in life, and therefore are not going to make an effort in their classes.

Mr. Calvin responded that he sees this as well. *I have conversations with faculty, and the first thing out of their mouth is that they are not being racist, which you and I both know is the language of people who don't know the racist things they do. I had to stand firm against some really powerful faculty members*. Mr. Calvin reflects for a minute. *It was so hurtful to see that they just could not see where their prejudices were intersecting. It's like they thought that making the statement of non-racism was going to mean that I was not going to look for it anymore in their language and actions. I don't ask for a pass for any of my students; that is not what God would want me or my staff to do. But I will fight for equity in how our students are treated.*

With the Predominantly White Institution in the Mind and Soul. We continue discussing equity for a bit longer, and Mr. Calvin notes that it is not the same as equality. *I learned that from one of your presentations at a conference, and it makes sense now. Equality is what some White folks tell us we have in some areas of our world, but they don't see that when Black folks start out 10 or 20 steps behind, coming up equal does not balance with all the struggles to progress or mean that we stay there. I see this in our colleges when we have to deal with problems of racism in our practices. White universities have worked for years to make things appear to be equal for all students. And many of them have done a good job as a start. But, they don't have the "Black mind," as I call it, to see how equality misses*

the mark on helping mitigate the issues of the negative lived experiences of our Black folks

on their campuses.

The idea of the "Black mind" intrigues me so I ask Mr. Calvin to tell me more. *Well, the "Black mind" has passion. It searches for truth in the midst of lies told to us and on us. It wants to find ways to not just cope with the traumas of their lives on campus, but in the end find some justice and peace as well. I can tell many of my Black students are just tired of all the mess they encounter. And the universities are not opening safe spaces for these students to unload their minds' ideas in a constructive way. Meetings turn into crying and shouting matches with little real work being done.* I then ask if he thinks Black spirituality could find a place in this work. *Yes, I do. Well, I think it could. But I see such misunderstandings going on between groups. Now I am not putting all these troubles on the White institutions either. Black spirituality is about community, and that community needs to include all God's people when we want to solve issues that affect us all.*

As a Black staff member and a leader of sorts among my Black students, I feel like part of my call is not being fulfilled when I don't help prepare these students for meetings and discussions with White administrators or faculty. I need to be there to share the wisdom that has come to me from those before me. I need to reflect what community should mean and do in my own work life. And I definitely think that I need to remember to respect the call of my students even when it may bump up against the way I would do things. Remembering how my call was changed and grew from the influences of strong Black people in my life could help me be better for these students. I ask him to think about whether these ideals might be helpful for the predominantly White institutions overall.

One of the hardest things about being spiritual is not thinking that everyone should be at my level or someone else's level. I can't say that my college or any college should come to see their work as God's work or a call if they aren't OK with committing that way. But I can say that it is a shame because looking at a mission statement as a call could change the way that colleges embrace the work behind the statements. It's not about checking boxes or making lists. Those things have their place, but they take us away from the work and the people we serve. They also don't give enough responsibility to our students to be a part of the work. I have read a lot of mission and vision statements, and they talk so much about the promises of the college and little about what our students will do on their part. Yes, we can produce "global leaders", but what does that mean for the responsibility of the student? God holds us all responsible. We are responsible for and to each other. Colleges should remember that.

I circle back to the idea of predominantly White institutions intellectually and financially supporting the mentoring efforts of Black faculty and staff with Black students, and perhaps other students of color. *I think it is a great idea. Now, not every Black staff or faculty person can or should be mentoring students. Some people overall just don't have that capacity. I think having a grounding in spirituality can help with this. It helps me focus on giving students the guidance, direction, mental tenacity, community affiliation, and just a level of continuous encouragement and support that they really need at a predominantly White university.*

But colleges and universities have to respect and find true value in this kind of mentoring and personal connecting for their Black students, or the efforts will not work. I do what I can with the time and energy that I have, but there are limits. I feel like if I was

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financially supported and given the acknowledgement for my work, I would be able to feel like I could invest more, but it isn't just about money. Money helps though because it shows other folks that a program or initiative is valued. Words go only so far. Once again, I have to say that not every Black person on campus can be a good mentor. There is some natural call in it, but maybe part of the process is that people who are interested would also take some added training. That could show commitment to a program and to the students. The call to do this kind of work is so important though. We have to want to stand up and step up for these young folks for real. For my part, my God won't let me fake it. My spirit always pushes me to be real, even when it makes my job tough.

Dr. Malcolm: Larger, Freer, More Loving

"If the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving. If God cannot do this, then it is time to get rid of Him." (James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time, 1964)

Spirituality As Personal

Dr. Malcolm brought the above quote to our interview in response to my question about whether or not he thought of himself as spiritual and if he believed in God. With this quote from James Baldwin and the possibilities for conversation that emerge from Dr. Malcolm's selection, our time together began with a flourish. Dr. Malcolm is in his early thirties and still considers himself still a young professional in the world of academia. He identifies as LGBTQ+ and is earnest about how this identity has shaped his relationship to spirituality and its manifestations. Dr. Malcolm is a faculty member at a predominantly White institution in the southeast area of the United States. He is tenure-track, but has not made tenure yet. Dr. Malcolm has been at his current university for about 6 years.

He began his narrative by emphatically stating that he is not a "God person" who only sees spirituality coming from a singular being that is distant from him. As we travel through the interview and reflect back upon his answers from my survey, there is a profound shift in Dr. Malcolm's Black spirituality identity, but not so much in what he presents as aspects of it he continues to use. He notes that in his youth he was completely consumed by church and by worship. He loved the choir robes, the fiery ministers, and the reading in Sunday school. Dr. Malcolm notes that he was reading at age 2, and Sunday school lessons and literature were his first exposures as his family couldn't afford to buy books and he was too young to attend school with his siblings.

He begins. *My spirituality was intrinsically tied to the visuals and the auditory senses all around me in church. As a child, they stimulated me deeply. I felt this draw and attraction to God through all that the church offered me that I couldn't obtain from other places. When I sat in Sunday school reading with other children that were 4 or 5 years older than me, it felt transcendent. When I read about Moses and saw these colorful pages so well illustrated, I would be transported back to those times. My mother would patiently answer my questions about what did all of this look like and why these people had to go through what they did. My dad would really take out time for me to understand also. Sometimes after church, he and I would sit in our den, and he would go through lesson from the sermon with me. I still think he believes I will be a minister someday, even though he knows I don't worship anymore.* When I hear this, I had to hold back from commenting as I too went through something like this when I was younger and am now a minister as part of my life.

Dr. Malcolm continues. *When I think about my current spiritual practices, they have little to do with that child who was so devote in his worship, Bible lessons, and church*

attendance. Now, I see my spiritualty as being more about me and my connection to the world around me. I see nature as a part of my spirituality and the way the world reverberates around me in response to my being as the spiritual that grounds and directs. I don't pray. You might call it meditation, this practice I do. But it is not prayer. I am not connected to something that is beyond me. I'm agnostic. I'm not saying that this God does not exist; I'm saying that it does not exist for me anymore.

My response is to ask if he then believes that anything like Black spirituality exists in this world. *Yes, don't misunderstand. I believe in spirituality and maybe Black spirituality even more so. Black spirituality to me means the connectedness of the Black community in ways beyond the structures of the White created Christian church that infuses itself into the practices of Black people in their worship. I see Black spirituality as being tied to nature and its power to move us, convert our understanding of each other, and help us learn how to function in cooperative ways that enable people to work together for the betterment of this world.* I ask if Black spirituality holds any level of responsibility for him then. *Yes, so much. My spirituality directs me to stand up for those who cannot stand for themselves. I see this so much with young Black LGBTQ+ students at the university. It calls me to be an example for them and to try to beak barriers for and with them.*

So often, I see the Black church and White institutions working in concert to detract from these young people. They find it OK to somehow stop protecting, honoring, and serving the youth who dare to come out as who they naturally are. I know I was put here to take the place of the people who would rather stick to their misguided ideologies than be of comfort and guidance to young people who need them so desperately. I'll be honest. I blame the Black church, writ large, for following in the steps of their White religious masters and

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forsaking their own. Think back to that Baldwin quote if you will. He laughs. *Maybe if Black people looked at their spirituality like some African spirituality we could or would be more supportive and more secure in who we are as a community.*

I ask if he would say more about his thoughts in African spirituality. *OK, so not every African spiritual practice is helpful to disenfranchised Black youth or Black people in general, but some elements are I think. Like the connectedness of community that I discussed before. I also see that orientation toward nature and the symbiosis with humanity. And of course, that respect of old wisdom and the call to lead others to be happy and successful in their lives are essential. Old wisdom has to be seen in context though. I see that as being one of the problems of the Black church today. They read the wisdom, but want to keep it in its old context. White institutions want to do that with programming and policies that affect Black students as well. These higher education institutions will tell us that they have programs that have proven to be effective in supporting Black students, but no one seems to want to reflect upon whether the context has changed for our current students.*

I put up with a lot of difficult situations when I was in college, and some of these issues still exist on our campuses. But the context for students is different. We had some police violence against Black people back 20 or so years ago, but I don't believe it was at this intensity. And I'll be honest, we had a different capacity back then. Maybe it was a deeper connection to our Black spirituality or greater warnings from our parents after they had suffered through the trials of the civil rights era, but we were more resilient. That's another element of Black spirituality that I don't think I mentioned before. Resiliency. My spirituality gave me such strength in my resilience when pressed with issues of race and sexuality on my college campus when I was in undergrad.

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Earliest Memories of Black Spirituality. Since we were discussing the ways the Black spirituality supported him in his younger years, I used this moment to shift to us reflecting upon the origins of Dr. Malcolm's spirituality. *OK, as I said before, I am not religious or a "God person" anymore. But when I was really young, the church and my conception of God gave me so much. There I was as a child envisioning God as this White man with a long beard and robes, sitting on a high cloudy throne, and causing thunder and lightning when he was upset by something on earth. I also saw him as this being that knew my every thought and saw me and everyone else all day, every day. I often wondered why he would want to watch me or other people because I thought my life was so boring.* We laugh. *But overall, my Baptist church and our minister made me believe that God loved me and wanted me to be happy—as long as I did what he wanted me to do.*

And I can't stress enough how much I loved being in church. It was this mysterious place to me. Yes, God was everywhere, but he especially was in that church building. I treated it like his house too. I would wipe my shoes before going inside and always dress well. Of course my mom and dad had a lot to do with how I was dressed, but they liked that I wasn't fidgety. I was happy to be dressed up for God in his house. He was my guy back then. We both laugh and Dr. Malcolm waves his hand in the air to emphasize his point. *From the moment my parents let me, I was up in the youth choir just singing and praising my heart out. I would become upset if I had to miss Sunday school even if I was sleepy for the first 10 minutes or so.*

I ask if he ever felt other stressors that were trying to keep him from church. *It was a battle with the devil sometimes because I loved (and still love) cartoons. And Sunday morning had some of my favorites. The choice was quite the test as I got older. But church*

almost always won out. I do remember feigning sickness a few times so I could stay home, but eh guilt of missing time in God's house with him was too much for it to happen much more than that. I loved the community that came out of this affiliation with God and the love that people shared while there. Of course when I was older and found that many of those people were faking it, it was devastating for me. It is still one of the reasons I walked away from church and God-based spirituality. If people were not being true to God and to each other, then how in the world could I trust them to be true to me or express truth in how they treated me and my life? It was a deeply personal lesson I learned as in the early stages of my spiritual development that continued to detract from my spirituality and its uses today.

Black Spirituality in Community and Culture. After we take a break for a few moments, Dr. Malcolm and I turn to a discussion of how and if Black spirituality had any presence or influence from his community or culture. *The community in which I grew up was and is a tightly knit group of people. They are all quite different in income, where they live, and where their children go to school. Just because they are Black does not mean they all have the same experiences specifically. But most of us went to church and socialized together based upon our churches. Revivals and other mixtures of our churches were the sites and events that allowed those of us from one side of the county to meet other Black kids from the other side.*

I share that my curiosity is engaged by this idea of a mixtures of churches in a community. Dr. Malcolm continues to explain. *Revivals were an exciting time for me. For one, I was able to see other ministers bring their powerful voices to our pulpit and the choirs bring such amazing, glorious celebratory singing as well. It was like God had brought over some new family to his house, and we were having a party. I have to share one really funny*

story though. I was at one of our revival when I was about 12 years old, and the worst and

best things happened to me. For years, I was one of the main singers in our youth choir and

reveled in giving praise and of course getting attention. The attention wasn't wonderful

because it came from people; it was wonderful because if they we complimenting me. it

meant God must be pleased as well. And God's approval was all that mattered really.

I ask what happened on this revival evening. *Well, at this revival, I was suddenly cut*

off from this wonderful connection to God. Puberty kicked in, and I my voice picked that

night and that moment to change. Nothing I could do would make it better. I croaked for

about half a song until the choir directors singled for my cousin to take over. I was ashamed

and embarrassed—not for my voice breaking up in front of the congregation, but because I

had missed up in God's house. It was all I could do not to cry.

Dr. Malcolm apologized for straying from our topic. I assure him it might all be

connected. He finishes the story by sharing that a girl he met at this revival would later

become his wife for an all too brief time. As we were thinking about leadership and his

education, we continued the conversation revolving around the moments connected to his

Black spirituality when he was younger, I ask if Dr. Malcolm will share any narratives from

that time in his life if he has some.

Black Spirituality in My Youth. *I would say that the church remained the center of*

my Black spirituality in my younger days. And again, it was not like what my White friends

talked about when they talked about church or their spiritual lives. In my youth, we had such

strong Black leaders in our church and community that shared their wisdom with us and

treated us all like we were their children. These older gentlemen were from all kinds of

backgrounds just like the Black community in our county was as well. If we were on a church

trip and needed money, they had us covered. If we ran into racist, like we did on a trip to a major amusement park in our state, these Black men, and some of our Black women, would stand up for us and protect us.

He thinks for another moment. *In my case, and that of some of my cousins, we had a couple Black men who were teachers and principals in school systems away from our county in larger cities. When they would visit, they would give us valuable insights on how to study for tests, how to write a better essay, and how to handle receiving good grades but still being ignored by teachers. It was so transformative for these men who stepped up to help us to bring their care through their connection to their faith and to their God. They didn't want anything from us except our success and our continued determination.*

The influence of these Black men led me to ask if these men, or others, were visible in other moments in Dr. Malcolm's younger life. *One event, well, a lifetime event, that included some of these gentlemen intersecting with my life is our camp meeting that happens every year on land that my family purchased over 80 years ago. It is a huge Black spiritual event held on about 10 acres in the countryside in western North Carolina. A camp meeting is like an extended revival that is centered on generations of families coming together at a set location. The key word in all this is "camp" because that is what people do. They camp at the site in little "huts" that are passed down from generation to generation. There is a central arbor that used to be a bunch of benches around a center improvised pulpit area. Now, we have a large shelter space that is open on three sides with rows of pews with a pulpit area and choir area up front.*

The camp meeting area also includes a section that I used to love where people would set up corndog, ice cream, hamburger, hotdog, snow cone, and cotton candy stands as well

as a photo booth and some small rides for the really little kids. It was like a small carnival next to a small church. We laugh together at that idea. *But for me it was magical in some ways. You know, having these ideas all come together. We had services three times a day, plus a short mini-service early in the morning. It was at sunrise. Beautiful, but I was so tired. We would sing late into the nights before. So, sometimes, we would only have about 4 hours sleep between that time and the sunrise service. But it was such dynamic and transcendent community and an expression of our Black culture with elements from African tribal customs wrapped in our westernized practices.*

He continued. *The elders of the camp meeting would make rounds to each "hut" to share some wisdom, to pray, to sing a little, and to offer support for those who may have lost a loved one in the year in between the meetings. These women and men had years of knowledge about our ancestors and their lives, the difficult times during the efforts of the civil rights era, and the ongoing racism that they would try to explain. In all of it, these mentors and sages would also inspire us to learn and challenge the world who thought less of us because in the elders' words. "We are promised greater and better than what we see in our lives today. God keeps his promises." Each year, we came back to renew this promise between God and his people under an arbor, on the benches in front of huts, and through the shared wisdom from those who came before us.* We both take a breath at this very personal reflection from Dr. Malcolm and pause for a bit.

Black Spirituality in My College Years. Dr. Malcolm has been discussing the manifestations of Black spirituality and its tenets in his youth, but he disclosed earlier that he had shifted away from the identity as "God-person" and of a spirituality centered more in the Black church. To continue our journey toward understanding any intersections between

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educational leadership and Black spirituality, I wanted to investigate when this shift occurred so I asked him to discuss his college years since that seemed to be the logical next time period. *Well, it wasn't during my college life that I found my spirituality within me and left the God-centered church world. I may have had some glimpses of my personal spirituality then, but it was later. In college, I was still very much involved with the church and with seeing my spirituality as just centering on my doing what would sustain my relationship with God.*

My college years were busy with doing what I thought God wanted from me as a future leader. I achieved great grades in undergraduate and graduate school. I was in the Gospel Choir and very active in the Baptist Student Union—both of which bolstered my connection to worship and to servant leadership at that point. I graduated and was married toward the end of my undergraduate program, and I thought I was happy. I thought what I was doing was making God happy. But things always kept just not quite feeling right to me. I ask what didn't feel right. *I majored in a subject that would allow me a high paying job instead of majoring in English, which is what I love. I loved my future wife as well, still do, so I majored in business to make that salary to be the man she needed me to be—that God needed me to be I thought. I didn't have a mentor to help me understand what I wanted. I didn't have community that supported me when I disagreed with their opinions.*

I wonder aloud to Dr. Malcolm about his campus leadership positions and other involvements' influences. *You know, though I was active in the Baptist Student Union, some of the members were quite upset that I supported the equality of rights for LGBTQ+ people and that the words in the Bible were subject to interpretation and contextualization. There were people in the Choir that didn't like the fact that I called them out for being evil to other*

people in our group by talking behind their backs or playing passive-aggressive games with them in rehearsal. These acts of hate and discrimination turned me off to some of my connection to Black spirituality and God in general, but I was still pretty steady. I was lost, but still going somewhere in God's plan, I thought.

I could have used some better guidance in college. It took me years to move out of my business career, out of my marriage, and out into my true identity—who I am. Those years were difficult. College had separated me from my family because I was at school or in an internship or working a summer job. Ideologically, I was also separated from the groups that I had on my campus and in my life because it was becoming clearer to me that I wasn't like them in some very important ways. I could have used some insights from people with the wisdom of my ancestors and the love of community without the preconceived structures that the White institution was offering me. Black spirituality was leaving me from a philosophical angle, but it was still calling me to be what was really being asked of me—to be authentically me. I found that when I listened to my real call and embraced my role as a warrior for my future students.

I ask Dr. Malcom to ponder if there was anyone in his college life that might have had an impact on his spirituality in either a positive or negative manner since he had said he wanted a mentor during that time. *I didn't have a mentor, per se, who affected my spirituality or leadership as we have talked about it. I did have a faculty member, a White man actually, who did provide me with some important guidance when I was in my undergraduate work. He was actually not in my college, but was a professor in another department. He worked with me to help me prepare for graduate school. He said he saw promise in my essays and research. He also questioned why I was a business major. And, yes, maybe if I think of Dr. S*

outside of religiously based spirituality, he would have been a good mentor who shared

wisdom with me from his years of experience in higher education. He did think that is where

I belonged. I guess he was tight. Hadn't thought of him fitting in like that. But, yes, he was

there for me. He also brought in some of his Black colleagues to talk to me, but none of them

had time to commit to helping me. I think, now that I am in higher ed, that it was because

they would always be pressed with efforts to maintain their status in the programs with

writing and research projects. So, yes, I will go back and instead say that I did have some

influences, but they were not grounded in spirituality—Black or otherwise.

Spirituality As Professional

With the insights into his college years to put us in context, we continued the

interview to discuss Dr. Malcolm's career after college. I ask him to reflect upon his spiritual

life and leadership roles after college and before his entry in working professionally in

academia. *As I told you earlier, I went into a business career after I graduated with my*

undergraduate degree. I was able to acquire a position with a very prestigious international

corporation with headquarters in Atlanta. Because I was there, I was also able to add an

MBA to my resume during that time. My work with the corporation was not very fulfilling,

but they did pay for me to obtain the MBA and that was appreciated. I ask why the job was

not fulfilling to try to elevate to some spiritual and leadership dynamics. *Well, I would say it*

was not fulfilling because I was not following my passions or what I would say is my call in

life at that point.

My job was running three or four project teams for various product lines that were

part of the corporation's portfolio. Yes, I was using my business management and

organizational management skills, but I wasn't given the time or space to really connect with

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the people on the teams that I might have been able to assist with their professional growth.

Even back then, I knew that something inside me was pushing me to be that mentor for others

and a community builder for other minority employees at our offices. But the system kept me

busy with other duties, and I was also not feeling like I had much power to do anything about

it back then. For so long, I lived with the idea that God would make a way if there was

something I was meant to do. But it wasn't happening. I didn't have community to support

me either. And my new wife was caught up in being in the "big city" and hanging out with

new friends that she was not there as a partner for me. I had everything I thought I wanted,

but I felt like no one had me.

In Early Professional Career Outside Academe. We sit for a bit as I sense this

reflection was difficult for Dr. Malcolm. He takes a deep breath and continues. *The whole*

processes of this huge "very White" corporation were not supportive of my goals of finding a

sustaining and growth position in my life. So many times when we would meet as a larger

team, I would be pointed out as a "fine example" of their work to promote the success of

minority employees. Others in the corporation pointed how many more Black and other non-

whites were then working there to say that affirmative action had balanced everything out at

that point. So, we didn't need to focus on equity or parity in hiring or promotion anymore.

This kind of expression of opinion really tore at my faith that community, no matter in what

forms, would come together for the betterment of all those who came into their collective.

After listening to all these work environment stressors, I ask what changed for him. *I*

remember the day I figured out that I was meant to be somewhere else though just like it was

yesterday. I was in one of my final courses for the MBA, and the professor at Georgia Tech

had assigned four teams of students to present a lesson that demonstrated and explained the

entire process of product creation to launch. No one on my team wanted to take the reins on giving the primary portion of the lesson. So, I took it on and produced the lecture and activity for the project. I had worked so hard on this project and had guided my teammates to their highest potential as well, which I thought of as just part of what I do every day in my job. But I also felt like this time was different.

The morning of the presentation, I turned to God and laid out my laments about all that was happening in my life. I asked for direction and peace. After the other teams had presented, it was our turn. We presented our lesson and completed our activity, and we received our polite applause like all the other teams. But then something else happened. The professor of the course made us stay at the front of the lecture hall and began pelting us with questions. No other team had been asked any follow-up questions except to clarify who did what on the team. But we received questions about our intent, our vision, our process, and how we would do things differently if we were to do it again.

So, I'm thinking we did a terrible job, and this professor is trying to tear us apart. But I answered pretty much all of the questions and supported my teammates when they struggled to answer. After the class dismissed, Professor K stops me and pulls me aside. He says that he was quite impressed by how I handled that lesson and really embracing the teaching. He asked me if I had ever thought of being a college professor. I shared that one of my former professor from undergrad had suggested that path for me, but the pay and all the work to arrive there was a real obstacle in my mind. He said the usual profound professor statement. "It is not about the money when you do what you love and for the right reasons." You may think I am kidding, but I still remember that moment. I was so nervous when he first stopped me because I was thinking I had screwed up. But he was trying to wake me up to my

potential. I felt like, spiritually, I was both encouraged and challenged by someone who could have been an elder in my community speaking wisdom to me.

I remark that the moment must have felt amazing and overwhelming. Dr. Malcolm nods and continues. *I remember thinking that and feeling like I was moving into an amazing new phase of my life when I finally left the job with the corporation. But painfully, I also felt like I was moving away from being in that relationship with God that had been such a major part of my life. I stopped praying. I stopped going to church, and I stopped trying to find a community to support me. I started going on long hikes and sitting in my backyard for hours just listening to the nature around me. I would go camping by myself for days and reflect on me. When I started my graduate program in Rhetoric and Composition and Creative Writing, I was in a different space, and it was my space to honor and control. The road through graduate this time was very rough, but I made a way.*

In Professional Career Inside Academe: The Early Years. Since Dr. Malcolm had shared that his connection to God and to spirituality had come to some kind of end, I thought we might have hit an impasse. I thought our portion of the interview in which we would discuss where Black spirituality fit into his early career and to his understanding of what it might manifest for students and his institution would not have substance. I was quite wrong. When I asked about his early career and Black spirituality, he was quite adamant that Black spirituality was present and deeply manifest in his life at that time. *Let's get one thing straight. Though I hate that phrase. Black spirituality for me is not completely grounded in my or anyone else's ideas about a God figure. Black spirituality, in proper context, expands to encompass what it means to be held closely and in authentic relation to your community. It manifests in the guiding and mentoring that Black people do for our younger generations as*

we pass on our wisdom and that of our ancestors. Ancestors don't have to be from hundreds of years ago either. I consider my grandparents and even my parents as a part of my ancestry. They taught me so much that were of value beyond what I was learning in church. They way my dad took the time to teach me about Bible lessons was even more important to me than the lessons.

I ask then what and/or how he believes Black spirituality was made manifest in his early teaching career. *OK, here is a perfect example. I was in my second year of teaching and was doing well as far as teaching and advising my students for their success. But my research was lacking because I was still dealing with the fallout of my marriage ending, my change in thinking about God, and trying to date in a town the size of my old hometown in the valleys of North Carolina. So many of my colleagues didn't respect my struggles. They only saw that I didn't have a load of citations on my vita.*

When my review came up, the department chair set our meeting, and we met in his office. He started by explaining how tenure works and how continuing contracts work. I thought, OK, I'm done here. He paused, leaned over and picked up a stack of papers on the floor by his desk. Not a huge stack, but at least 40 or 50 pages. He said that these were student and faculty notes about me that he had received in the past 2 years. My head was spinning. OK, I am gone for sure is what I thought. He handed them to me, and said just look at them. The words were wonderful. Page after page of little and long notes talking about the impact I had made on a student, on a project for the department, or from some alumni who wanted him to know what a difference it was having me as a professor.

I couldn't help it. I started crying. Then my chair started crying. He stood up and came over and hugged me. He told me not to worry so much about all the research work.

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That it would come naturally from my work with my students. He reminded me that the most powerful work is honest and authentic. You can't just research a subject and produce solid work if you don't have passion for it was a point he would remind me of over and again. He also told me that I needed to be more of a fighter when it came to my colleagues talking about my work. He said, "If you don't press them to respect your work, then many of them just won't. Speak truth to them and they can't deny it." That wisdom rings so true. It is part of the wisdom that I share with my students now. When I left that job to move on to be here in the mountains, I took so much of what he told me and showed me. I was beginning to see how some of the elements from Black spirituality really were manifesting in my life even without me seeing a connection with a God.

Speaking in reference to his colleagues, I wanted to discuss how Black spirituality may have affected Dr. Malcolm's engagement with the people who he worked with in his early years. *When I was a "God-person" back in my youth and in college, I built up a deep level of trust in people because I trusted that God would protect me from those who would try to do me harm. I felt that I could trust in the processes of life that everything would turn out alright in the end with God's plan. I trusted that my community would have my back, and I trusted the wisdom of all my mentors and ancestors that was shared with me. Building trust is a primary outcome of all the elements, and I was so deep in love with being a part of the spirit from God that my trust encompassed a lot of people and things.*

In my early career, that trust was whittled away to almost nothing. Between the back stabbing and lies that happened with colleagues that I had trusted, and the way my old community walked away from me when I came out as bisexual, the trust just fell apart for me. With my spirituality in my early career, I began to see that I could trust in other things

though. I could trust in nature and in the rare goodness of a few souls. I shared this level of trust with my students, and it allowed me to be very authentic with them. Helping them see the assets they have along with working to improve on their challenges connects with students in ways they don't seem to share across the board in college from what I have learned.

As we sit for a minute in silence, I am drawn to ask how this links to his spirituality. *I see that as a key part of my current Black spirituality. I am called to serve these students as a "very young elder" who has wisdom and hope to share with them. That is one thing that I was afraid I would lose when I walked away from the church and from a connection with a God. It is one of the best parts of what Black spirituality brings to Black people and has for years, even back to our time in Africa and into the diaspora. Hope is one of the other ties I still find between the manifestations of Black spirituality in my past and what happens in my life now.*

Spirituality As Institutional

As we discuss the idea of "hope" and what Dr. Malcolm sees it doing in his life, I ask how he believes the part of Black spirituality might function or manifest in the lives of college students. *Well, for my students, hope is what keeps many of them pursuing their degrees at a predominantly White university. They are bombarded by such oppressive situations that cause them to question their value, question their right to be in the university community, and their potential to succeed if and when they graduate. Our universities and their faculty and staff have a lot to do with how these students either advance or exit the college.*

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With Students in the Heart. With the students in mind, I ask Dr. Malcolm to ponder whether any of the other elements or outcomes of Black spirituality could manifest positive impacts upon our Black college students. *Yes, I think that some elements, like using our positions as mentors or "elders" to help manifest hope and resilience in our Black students could have a powerfully positive effect on their persistence and ultimate success through college and into their professional careers. Most Black college students want to connect with their faculty and staff as well as the greater campus as far as I have seen in my career. Offering informed wisdom that supports real hope and reasons for resilience is definitely worth our attention and efforts. But we need to concerted effort by the whole, or majority, of the campus community.*

It amazes me that institutions also continue to not understand that students are people, and people, mostly, need community in the lives as well. We have talked about earlier when we talked about my time in church and in my camp meeting community when it comes to Black spirituality. That level of community needs to be espoused on our campuses with that level of trust that come with it. I ask if predominantly White institutions are equipped to offer this level of community for Black students. I'm not sure. I haven't seen it at the institutions where I have worked so far. I see programming and a go to meeting, but they miss the point because most of them aren't in response to what students are actually saying. Institutions are only hearing what fits into their way of solving problems. Much of what I hear Black students say in my classroom and when we are together in my office doesn't fit into the agenda items of the meetings I attend.

My understanding of Black spirituality also includes the charge for me as a member of the community in support of Black college students, and other students as well, to work

diligently to guide them into the call as I was guided into mine. Hopefully, our work will make their journey a less rocky road than mine has been. He laughs. I laugh and nod. *Whether or not one of my Black students believes in a God or in some spiritual being beyond them, having a call to their vocation is of major importance. It helps ground them in their courses, and can keep them from wandering around, misdirected into numerous majors, which can add to their time in college, and for some, their student loans expenses.*

I wonder if he see a way through all these concerns. *I believe that the lack of guidance toward a student's call is one of the great failings of our universities. Career services do a great job with students in general, but many of my Black students need a different approach. By supporting Black faculty and staff in their efforts to position themselves as mentors for our Black students and perhaps other students of color, institutions could possibly fill this gap and help these students complete connections between their academics, personal values and needs, with their call into vocation. It's just so difficult to try to do this kind of work when, as a professor or as an administrator, I don't see or feel the support of my institution in an authentic way.*

With the Predominantly White Institution in the Mind and Soul. The idea of what institutions can do for our students brings us into conversation about what place, if any, Black spirituality could have in their practices in relation to supporting and serving Black faculty, staff, and students. *If we are talking about students, I think I have shared what I think Black spirituality, as its elements are applied, can be useful especially for predominantly White institutions to better serve Black students. The elements of nurturing self-created and autonomous community within the larger community is valuable. It is similar to the way Black people in church would work to support youth choir or other youth groups in the midst*

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of the larger operations of the church community. Their work was nurturing. Some might say that White churches and people do this as well. OK, then maybe there is something to it beyond labeling it "Black spirituality" as a guidepost. But the essence of how Black people work within their spirituality to nurture resilience and hope against odds that are not usually seen as prevalent in the majority world.

We talk about general ideas that are grounded in Dr. Malcolm's previous suggestions and ideas regarding supporting Black students. We move to PWIs, and he continues with other thoughts. *Institutions could also step up to provide the backing for Black faculty and staff to fill in the much needed mentoring and guidance space for Black students as they navigate their college careers toward graduation. But not even just to help them ascend to graduation, but to help them survive in what can feel like and be a hostile environment for them. It's not just about the classes or the majors for these students; it is about how they have to act in class to be respected, and how they are received when they walk across campus at night. When a young, Black man is shunned and whispered about with suspicion when he is simply walking back to his dorm from the library at night, and he needs someone to talk to about the emotions and disrespect that he feels, he needs someone who looks like him inside and outside.* I nod in agreement.

One of the things I miss about my spirituality from my youth is that feeling that there was always someone in my corner that would listen to me. At many of the PWIs where I went to college or worked, the White administrator especially would not listen. Now, they heard what we were saying as Black students with their ears, but not with their hearts and minds. It is always a defensive stance that they take, and in response we have no choice but to become defensive as well instinctively. If I could bring the essence of that consensual listening and

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responding to my university, I would in an instant. That call and response that I remember from my time in the choir and at those late nights at camp meeting is what is missing. You have to listen to the call in order to correctly respond.

I share that this line of reflection could be so powerful. Dr. Malcolm sits for a moment and then responds. *We lose so much when we stop listening to each other. I hope that people will listen to what I and the other people you spoke to have to say.* I note that this work is a beginning at least. We laugh. He continues with a final insight. *If I could feel like I had a voice when I go to these campus meetings that would be amazing. It feels like my voice just becomes swallowed up by the noise of people spouting policy or interjecting their own agenda, and that Black and White people. I think my students and some staff that I have talked to feel the same way.*

They sit at the town halls and workshops, and when they raise an objection, they are met with either ignorance of their concern or what I like to call "administrative sleight of hand" that serves to conflate a real concern with an administrative interest. I may not believe in a God anymore, but I see evil, and this kind of approach to engaging with Black faculty, staff and students is just evil—well intentioned or not. We can do better to combat this type of evil in how we work together in community as an institution by respecting the call that brought these Black people to a sometimes foreign environment and facilitating spaces where their needs can be truly heard. It will also take some of us on the faculty and staff members standing up for each other and our students like our spiritual mothers and fathers did to show our readiness to fight in the battle and that there is hope in the end.

These lived experiences shared in the research findings provide powerful narratives that require a sincere and critical hermeneutical discussion and reflection upon their themes.

Chapter 6: Discussions

In this chapter, I use the phenomenological research findings from the lived experience description narratives couched in the interviews and surveys from the research participants to disclose and interrogate the themes that were made manifest in this inquiry. The prophetic voices from the lived experience descriptions, in their separate ranges and tones, are now presented in a choral manner as they sound and resound with both harmonies and discordant tones in the data. This distinctive manner of (re)presentation of the data is essential to remaining attuned to the elements of Black spirituality that call for communal gathering and expression. The data is reported in sections in the frameworks of spirituality as personal, spirituality as professional, and spirituality as institutional.

As noted, the data from the findings is repeated (a reprise) throughout this discussion chapter because the phenomenon of manifestations of a Black spirituality and the elemental experiences for the participants and for me called for repetition to answer part of our prophetic call and to remain authentically engaged with our voices while also opening up hermeneutical processes for deeper examination. The refrain of these LEDs is meant to draw the reader back into relation with the elemental experiences of a Black spirituality. To best provide navigation of this chapter, I revisit the purpose of the study and the research question as they ground the discussions of the themes and sub-themes from the phenomenological narrative inquiry.

As the themes are manifest, I provide comparatives between participant responses as well as reflecting upon their points of agreement. The data from my lived experience description is used as a tool to inform in the data set and also to extend the narrative inquiry. The chapter concludes with an analysis and summary of the data findings as revealed. At its

heart and spirit, this chapter centers on how the "caged bird" continues to sing even under the duress faced in a public predominantly White institution in higher education.

Review of Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this research was to investigate and explore if and how Black spirituality entered into the lives of Black faculty and staff in ways that affected their agency as educational leaders, and if manifest, how this phenomenon might be seen through a critical race theory lens to provide reformational insights for the policies and practices of public predominantly White college and university institutions (PWIs). My research was guided by the question: *How do their encounters with a Black spirituality manifest in leadership formation and resilience for Black faculty and staff in higher education at public PWIs?*

Spirituality As Personal

The Role of the Black Church

The Black Church as exemplified by characteristics of containing some of the aesthetics of Black culture (distinctive music, community relations, and leaders), performative aspects of services, and personal expressions of faith were a part of each of the research participants' lives in their youth. The Black Church was also a large part of my life in my youth as well. What our encounters with this powerful entity reflect are emotional, social, physical, and mental markers that left a range of residual effects in our future relationships with the Black Church, with our chosen spiritual connections, with our communities, and even with our families.

To say that being involved in the Black Church in our youths had an effect on us is to simplify what can be a life-altering time of engagement with the spiritual. Dr. Rhonda made

note of how her church interactions began as something typically heard from narratives of some Black people who have attended various Black churches. Dr. Rhonda recalled:

> As a young girl, I remember how much my mother put into our church attendance. She would always make sure that my sisters and brothers and I were dressed to the nines. She, of course, had the nicest dresses and the most stylish Sunday hats with the white gloves. She remains the classic "Black church lady" that people think of on Sunday morning.
>
> We were properly dressed, but my mom would also strongly instruct us on the proper behaviors for church attendance as well. We were not part of a "yelling and shouting" type of church. So, she would sternly share her expectations for us to sing when it was time, sit and stand properly, and shake hands with all the church elders. This was the beginnings of her teaching us to "act right" toward other people and toward God.

As she grew older and connected at a deeper level with her spirituality, her ontological stance toward the Black Church evolved. She emotionally noted a time when her church held a carwash to support her efforts to study abroad and the feeling of belonging to community in a larger sense then began to mean to her.

> My church doing a carwash to help pay for my study abroad.
>
> I don't know that change is the right way to put it. It really opened my eyes to the deeper ties between the Black church, our spiritual call, and our place in supporting and redefining our community.

Dr. Rhonda felt it important to also reflect that her experiences were also enhanced by engagement with aspects of African spirituality as expressed in African art and music as they

related to the Black community and spiritual culture. Her office artwork and the music she played in the background were definitely representative of this connectedness that remains in her life.

Dr. Harrison was quite adamant that his experiences with the Black Church in his early life, and his memories disclosed in sections of his lived experience shared in our interview time represent the ideas expressed by Dr. Rhonda as well. He spoke of how his mother made sure that he and his large amount of siblings were properly dressed, according to her rules, from pressed clothes to shiny shoes. In both these participants' narratives, their positionality to the church required them to show respect and reverence to an entity partially because of the influence of a parent. It is in this context that Dr. Harrison's relationship to the Black Church deepened when he tragically lost his father in his youth. He stated

> *I would be lying if I said it did not affect me. But I was young and did not really understand all that was happening. But the sadness was definitely there in my heart. I do remember that it was still the songs in the church that would lift me up. I could also see even now how they would lift my mother up as well. In some ways, I guess it brought me closer to the music, but the struggle was there—just not as much as it could have been. Probably I struggle more now with losses because I see that we all have such great things to do in this life and time is fleeting. I did realize, very young, that if I am successful at all or manage to endure, it is because of my spirituality and God's presence in it.*

Dr. Harrison noted that as his understanding of the church emerged into a new level of maturity and relationship that he saw the call and requirements of engaging in this relationship as requiring responsibility to call out evil. In this framing, evil represents the

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willful, pernicious, strategic degradation of Black people to exert power, influence, and control over them and without regard for harm. I found this insight intriguing as we discussed the call of Black faculty and staff at predominantly White Institutions that may present hostile environments.

> *The Bible talks about people who are sent forth to proclaim to those who are doing evil that they will not stand. It's called a "fire" in their speech I think. I have seen this "fire" come through from Black faculty and staff at a White university when they see some shameful behavior happening. And, I also know that we have to be ready for evil to push back against us.*

This "fire" of which Dr. Harrison spoke reminded me of the 'combative spirituality' that Michael Dantley and Cornel West have presented as a strategic methodology in confronting, deconstructing, and positively engaging with critical racial issues on PWI campuses that Black faculty and staff might use.

Though Dr. Malcolm shared in his narratives that his Black Church experiences of his youth were similar to Dr. Rhonda and Dr. Harrison, his reflections shifted greatly as he grew older and moved away from the church. His youthful narratives represented an intimate connection to his God and to the Black Church that reflected a relationship that was closer than family. He expressed his feelings of love and devotion to both his God and the work that he, in his relationship with God, was required to fulfill. This idea of a 'requirement' that affected the personal and performative lives of each of the participants I have discussed so far highlights a thread that will run through this research and into implications for its future uses and research.

This rejection transformed the highly connected relationship of his youth into one that denies affiliation with the practices of the Black Church today but also still reflected some of the tenets of call and community that are aspects of the church's ethos.

In college, I was still very much involved with the church and with seeing my spirituality as just centering on my doing what would sustain my relationship with God.

So often, I see the Black church and White institutions working in concert to detract from these young people. They find it OK to somehow stop protecting, honoring, and serving the youth who dare to come out as who they naturally are. I know I was put here to take the place of the people who would rather stick to their misguided ideologies than be of comfort and guidance to young people who need them so desperately. I'll be honest. I blame the Black church, writ large, for following in the steps of their White religious masters and forsaking their own. Think back to that Baldwin quote if you will. He laughs. Maybe if Black people looked at their spirituality like some African spirituality we would be more supportive and more secure in who we are as a community.

Dr. Malcolm would go on to respond to my inquiry about what might be some of his continuing concerns about the Black Church. We discuss what might also remain as useful to academia, to church-goers, or just individual people today:

Old wisdom has to be seen in context though. I see that as being one of the problems of the Black church today. They read the wisdom, but want to keep it in its old context. White institutions want to do that with programming and policies that affect Black students as well.

My conversation with and review of the survey of Mr. Calvin proved to be in line with the other participants, but one could tell that his level of devotion came from a core that had only grown more engaged with the Black Church rather than a movement toward a more separated existence like Dr. Malcolm. Even the church relationships of Dr. Rhonda and Dr. Harrison did not speak a narrative as intricately woven as Mr. Calvin's. Part of this interweaving comes from his present-day family involvement with his church. Being involved with his son's youth programs and other family events and activities allows Mr. Calvin to retain a level of connection that is not a part of the other participant's lives.

Mr. Calvin noted that his spiritual practices are rooted in the Black church, but they expand out into his work and into how he continues to grow as a Black man of faith. He prays every day—sometimes three or four times, and he attends church with his family weekly. He also does Bible study, which began back in his childhood with his grandmother, who he notes was a major influence on his life. Mr. Calvin shares that she was one of the main factors in his spiritual life and also in him coming to his call in his work in higher education.

Mr. Calvin responded to my question about his church and faith dynamic in college as I wanted to know if he had any times of 'losing faith' or church struggles:

> *I rededicated myself in my sophomore year in college, and it was so transformative for me to reestablish my purpose and solidify my connection to God. I struggled with peer pressure, but not in ways that took me away from my church. I also always had my family back home that kept me anchored to the church. I always felt and still feel like I owed it to them to stay with the God who brought me this far.*

In all of these shared lived experiences and narratives, I found elements of my youth in the Black Church and what would become my expressions of Black spirituality. The formative moments of our combined youthful narratives display a relationship to a God as centered in not only the church, but also in our lives as we are called into relationship to be responsible, respectful, and devoted to an entity whose scriptural promises that we heard from our grandparents and parents was to do the same. Most of participants, including me, noted the music and singing of the Black Church as another draw for us. This draw is yet another element of the dynamic relational interactions of the church and its people—especially the youth who find formative information in the lyrics and performance of the spiritual, gospels, and contemporary music.

One of the most intriguing phenomena in this study was the revealing of the ways in which we all became more deeply connected to church attendance. The markers of engagement range from a type of 'ordered' relationship where parents or grandparents told us how to dress, act, or perform to more intimate relationships that go beyond the bounds of hierarchy into a sort of partnership. When we further discuss how we define and understand our call, this difference in intimacy may unfold into other relational realms.

The Influence of Family in All Its Forms

For all of the research participants and for me, the role and influence of family and peers in the evolution or transformation of our Black spirituality created both comfort and moments of chaos in our lives. For me, as I remark in my lived experience narratives, that role and influence began before my birth as my mother and father had prayed for me to be born. Literally, my mother would recount to me in my older years; they prayed each day for me to be born. Not because I was to be their first, they had their hands full before me with

my sisters; they prayed for me because they had lost my unborn sibling only nine months earlier.

From my birth, my grandmothers each "anointed me" with their daily prayers for me to grow strong and to bring amazingly good things into the world. Why this call was implanted upon me became clearer when I grew older and found out that both my grandfathers had died within a few days of my birth—another reason my dad would cite for me emerging from the womb early. He'd say I was making sure to capture their spirits before they were completely gone.

My father's mother, Miss Irene (called that because she was widowed) would say that God had put something in me that nothing could take away. "You will help us do better." When one hears this day after day, and stated with such devoted exuberance, it becomes ingrained like breathing. Even when I felt lost from the Black Church, I felt this spiritual connectedness to what my family had espoused as the place for me to inhabit in this world and its inherent responsibilities.

Mr. Calvin recounts feeling these responsibilities, and also the support in his spiritual life, from his family. He also reflected, as we spoke, of how his grandmother and other family members saw it as their spiritual role in life to provide this support—even when they did not like his decisions.

My grandmother was amazing. She was a very devoted church-goer and was active in everything. She taught me what it was to be a Christian and to follow God. She is the grounding for how my faith began.

He also shared the narrative of the family reaching out to him when he was in college and feeling the peer pressures of drinking and drugs that helped him sustain the life he wanted to live instead of falling prey to those influences.

Though the struggles in my life continued through some abusive and difficult times in my youth with my family, I shared with Mr. Calvin how they were also my connection to the things that had helped form my spirituality and essence so I could not completely separate from them when I had peers who advised that course of action for what they thought was healing. Mr. Calvin shared that he still uses that form of familial connectedness to support his student-athletes and colleagues. I agreed that those exemplars of spiritual connection still apply in my life and work today.

Mr. Calvin's narrative reflected his grandmother as being highly centered upon reading the Bible and relaying those stories. I responded that my grandmothers did not rely on Bible stories or quotes from the Scripture, even though they both read the texts every day. Their tales of moral and ethical behavior came from a mix of ancestral narratives, biblical ideologies, and their own brand of 'homespun' Black wisdom that distilled lessons from how the White world had treated them and the people they loved. Their Black spirituality contained all these elements—along with some wonderful singing and what I called "low humming" and prayers. We listened to the impassioned scream of the spirit of a Black man from movies like "Trouble Man" and learned of other ways to confront the evils of the world. I reflected to Mr. Calvin that though I was way too young to see the movie, my mother and father loved Marvin Gaye, He agreed with me that Mr. Gaye was an amazing talent lost too soon. We both agreed that Marvin Gaye was not sharing his narrative through church

spirituals or gospels, but he was sharing a Black narrative that was, and remains, quite spiritual and definitely speaks a gospel to the oppressed.

Dr. Harrison's narrative aligned in ways with the dialectic that happened between Mr. Calvin and I as his family played a central role in his relationship with spirituality and the positionality of family in our lives. He notes:

> *With a family that included 10 children, we were still all well taken care of—even after our father died. It was tough though when he passed. But my mother made sure we had all the things we needed. She made sure we were dressed well, clean, and our shoes shined when we left the house. If we were going to the store or to church, we still had to be neat and clean. She also made sure we showed good manners and were respectful to our elders.*

His family, and his mother in particular facilitated a connectedness to his God that began in youth, enjoined to the joys of making glorious praise with music in the church choir, and it followed with him into his career. He continued:

> *As a Black child, knowing that I was God's child did affect my passion for school as well. I wanted to do well for myself and my mother of course.*

Dr. Harrison reflected about this connection in sustaining his career and call:

> *I remember talking to my mother and one of my sisters about the problems at the site and just wanting to quit. But wisdom prevailed, and I actually came to see why I may have been placed in this tough spot. God was preparing me for greater things and greater challenges that were to follow.*

Dr. Malcolm responded favorably when sharing his narrative of his relationship to spirituality as directed or supported by his family. For him, his father and mother provided grounding and points of dialogic reflection to his questions. He shared:

> *When I read about Moses and saw these colorful pages so well illustrated, I would be transported back to those times. My mother would patiently answer my questions about what did all of this look like and why these people had to go through what they did. My dad would really take out time for me to understand also. Sometimes after church, he and I would sit in our den, and he would go through lessons from the sermon with me.*

> He continued, *I consider my grandparents and even my parents as a part of my ancestry. They taught me so much that were of value beyond what I was learning in church. They way my dad took the time to teach me about Bible lessons was even more important to me than the lessons.*

This parental and familial devotion to clarifying and sustaining their children's connections to spirituality was again a thread that ran throughout the interview and survey data. Dr. Rhonda furthers this line of discussion and evaluation in her shared lived experience narrative statements.

She reflected upon her relationship to the church with intricate ties to her family as well. Their relational interactions remain centered on the church, but ran across a spectrum of ideological and practical words of wisdom as she reported in our interview time together. Dr. Rhonda noted:

My spirituality is truly rooted in my family. Though our relationship with churches has shifted a few times, we were always tied to one or another of them around the city. My mother made certain of that.

She continued:

As a young girl, I remember how much my mother put into our church attendance. She would always make sure that my sisters and brothers and I were dressed to the nines. She, of course, had the nicest dresses and the most stylish Sunday hats with the white gloves. She remains the classic "Black church lady" that people think of on Sunday morning.

Her father took a different approach when Dr. Rhonda had thrown a tantrum after begin told she would have to quit the musical role that she had earned at school. She shared:

My father heard me shouting and gripped me by my shoulders and said, "Now is that the way God would want you to act to us?"

This idea of there being a proper way to act and be in relation to God resonated with me and reflected some of the responses from Dr. Harrison and Dr. Malcolm. It is quite informative when Dr. Rhonda responded with the following statements from her mother:

"Act right. That is all we ask, baby. Me, your father… God. That's all I ask. You know what is right." I said, "Love you, mom." She said, "You better!" and laughed. Even today I sometimes wonder why people can't just listen to God and "act right" and maybe the world would not be so messed up.

In speaking about other influences that family used, I shared the work of Black R&B and the Motown music in my spiritual formation. Dr. Rhonda discussed her grandfather, who she noted was not really a religious man, but as she spoke came to realize that his sense and

association to African art had indeed been influential in her spiritual development and current relationship to Black spirituality. But she also reflected a different sense from other family. She shared:

> *My grandmother, my mom's mom, was more of the church side of life. But neither really shared much about faith and those kinds of things—except to always thank God and say grace at meals. But maybe he did give me some love and admiration for the spirituality of African nations now that I think about it. The art was, lots of times, tied to some religious or spiritual ritual in an African society. Yes, I guess so.*

All the lived experience narratives in the data displayed parental and/or familial influences into the lived experiences we reported. However, neither the participants nor I presented many instances when our peers in our youth contributed greatly to our spirituality or our connectedness to its tenets. This finding was intriguing to me as I see the amount of literature that describes the influences on Black students' spiritual lives in college. It may be that we, in this research, thought of this peer relationship as having more of a center in our reflections on community influences. We will see how the words manifest in that direction in the upcoming sections.

Community and the Role of Black Spirituality Beyond the Church

Community for each of us in this research study has evolved in ways that reflect our chosen career paths as well as the changes in who we may consider family in our lives. For Dr. Harrison, the idea of community has deep roots in his Black neighborhood from his youth. He stated:

> *I lived in a very close knit neighborhood. Black folks looked out for each other. We shared in our joys and our struggles. Our community was tight knit and very*

'Black' so you always become caught up in the culture of it all. People walked a

certain way and talked a certain way.

The one thing I can say about the community was that no one ever had to deny

being Black. They didn't have to apologize. I remember that when I got to college. I

met other Black students who were always trying to apologize for where they were

from. It was like we had to be ashamed so that the White people around us could

feel better about where they were from or something. Still doesn't make sense to

me.

It is in the space of community connection to spirituality that Dr. Harrison related some of

his peer experiences.

One space that we, Black students, could feel like we were still in community was

when we were singing together. Black spirituality showed up and showed out when

we would gather. Again, it wasn't usually in a church. Sometimes, it was just in

someone's dorm room or out on the quad. Whenever it was and wherever it was,

that soul stirring feeling would be of such comfort for us. It felt like home and

family and God's love were all right there on that windy, snowy mountain top with

us.

In our dialogue surrounding how this community experience might have positive influence in

the realm of PWI academia today, he responded:

Once again, I think that looking to tenets of Black spirituality like community and

honoring culture were effective years ago and can be quite effective today. They

still allow Black folks to remain engaged with our spirituality and with the promise

of hope for our success and our healing in the midst of continued racial struggles

and inequity.

He noted from his past lived experiences on how community might be transformative that he feels Black faculty and staff must hear and take the call to action:

Spiritually speaking, that new university was going through its own battles, and the call definitely came with some fire. It gave me a chance to do more and to have more influence; that's important to me. You know I carry on that saying from my mother. "I can show you better than I can tell you."

In all of his responses, Dr. Harrison presented a strong case for why community, though created strongly in the Black Church, can be just as effective, if not more, outside this arena in other segments of Black life. I shared the power that community has had in my life in somber ways as when I was rejected because of failing one class in high school. We also shared, on the surface, about the physical abuse I sustained in my youth as well, and how the community sat in silence to protect my abuser and themselves. Dr. Harrison shared in the struggles of loving a community that fails to love us at times, but still needs us to be a part of their lives as we need them (in one form or another).

I shared that issues of color were at play in my struggles and remain a point of detriment even today. I noted that as I looked around my community, it was clear to me that something beyond us would have to intervene if we were to survive and thrive in a world that seemed to disregard and defame those of us who were not White. Community meant (and still means) the world to me, and even at a young age, I felt the call to do something to bring a little healing and happiness to them.

It was essential to me to discuss this with Dr. Malcolm as well as I knew he had similar issues arise in his lived experiences. He began with earnest reflections from his youth and camp meetings, which provided a rich oral history from which his future experiences were shaped and better understood. He responded on early community influence:

> *The elders of the camp meeting would make rounds to each "hut" to share some wisdom, to pray, to sing a little, and to offer support for those who may have lost a loved one in the year in between the meetings. These women and men had years of knowledge about our ancestors and their lives, the difficult times during the efforts of the civil rights era, and the ongoing racism that they would try to explain. In all of it, these mentors and sages would also inspire us to learn and challenge the world who thought less of us because in the elders' words. "We are promised greater and better than what we see in our lives today. God keeps his promises." Each year, we came back to renew this promise between God and his people under an arbor, on the benches in front of huts, and through the shared wisdom from those who came before us.*

He continued to share about his college experience in centering the manifestations of spirituality in community:

> *Though I was active in the Baptist Student Union, some of the members were quite upset that I supported the equality of rights for LGBTQ+ people and that the words in the Bible were subject to interpretation and contextualization. There were people in the Choir that didn't like the fact that I called them out for being evil to other people in our group by talking behind their backs or playing passive-aggressive games with them in rehearsal. These acts of hate and discrimination worked to*

negate some of my connection to Black spirituality and God in general, but I was

still pretty steady. I was lost, but still going somewhere in God's plan, I thought.

We discussed other influences in college since this seemed to be a transformational time in his overall lived experiences as it was for me and others. He shared with me that a White professor, who he did not consider a mentor or guide was actually highly influential in exactly those ways.

I didn't have a mentor, per se, who affected my spirituality as we have talked about

it. I did have a faculty member, a White man actually, who did provide me with

some important guidance when I was in my undergraduate work. He was actually

not in my college, but was a professor in another department. He worked with me

to help me prepare for graduate school. He said he saw promise in my essays and

research. He also questioned why I was a business major. And, yes, maybe if I

think of Dr. S outside of religiously based spirituality, he would have been a good

mentor who shared wisdom with me from his years of experience in higher

education. He did think that is where I belonged. I guess he was tight. Hadn't

thought of him fitting in like that. But, yes, he was there for me.

Dr. Malcolm had not thought of this professor as a mentor in the beginning of our dialogue because we were discussing Black spirituality. He shared that this may have been part of the issue, but that our process allowed him to reflect more deeply to connect to this valuable person of influence.

Finding that deeper point of reflection to find spiritual influences from his personal life was not an issue for Mr. Calvin. He noted:

Yes, the ladies of the church definitely were a part of my spiritual practices. They were all substitute mothers and grandmothers for all of us kids when ours were not around. They made sure we weren't hungry, but they also made sure we said grace and that we followed the commandments. Some of them encouraged us to sing along with them when they would drop some gospel or spiritual song while we hung out on their porch or in their backyard. You were never far from some spiritual influence when they were around. It was part of how our neighborhood and the Black community worked for us.

I also had football coaches and other athletics folks who were deeply spiritual in my eyes. My coaches would have us pray before and after games and when any of us came into their offices when problems with school.

I do think playing sports really did keep me at least a bit tied to my spirituality—not always for the right reason when I think about it now. Like when I would pray to win a game rather than praying for God to help me do the best that I could do to support my team and maybe win in the end. But that is part of being young. But it did at least start me praying and thinking about what God meant to me and what I needed spiritually.

Mr. Calvin also noted that he found strong community influences outside the church through his involvement with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, a high school and college religious and service organization with a very substantial membership across the country. He stated this involvement had shifted his prayer and devotion practices.

A shift in his spiritual practices that proved vital to Mr. Calvin from his reflections is the alteration of his prayer from "genie wishes" to meditations from his heart on things that

possess deeper value to him and others. This represents a true evolution in relational practices toward community as well. He noted:

> *"Genie wishes" are those prayers that kids, and some grown folks, make to God to acquire things in their lives. Kids pray to get a new bike, to get money, or to have that girl like them instead of praying to be a better person who is more connected to God and truer to his word.*

We both shared in our interview time together how limiting this type of understanding is for spiritual people, and how it can be exploited by others such as PWIs to distract Black students from their deeper needs by granting "genie wishes" that only serve to alienate these students from others on campuses. It is one of the ways that a Black spirituality or religious practices can be corrupted and coopted to serve as weapons of exoticism.

Dr. Rhonda and I had a dialogue about her community outside of the Black church and family that included the enriching time with her Black sorority. As a member of the 'Divine Nine,' Dr. Rhonda stated that the organization's authentic and engaging history of intention and activism have been quite influential in how her spirituality has manifest in the work that she does in academia and in her personal life. The community service, the sisterhood, and the sense of the overall call to action that are major aspects of the sorority remain essential to Dr. Rhonda's spiritual stance in academia. We discussed how involvement in organizations such as the National Panhellenic Council can serve as community foundations for the support and advancement of inclusive environments on public PWI campus. She noted how her membership allowed her to present fronts of resistance to the feelings of 'imposter syndrome' that assail many Black college students as well as Black faculty and staff at PWIs. Imposter syndrome for some Black students at PWIs

exists when they are engulfed in feelings and environmental pressures that erroneously situate them as not belonging at an institution because they are either not qualified or underqualified (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Call to Vocation

Dr. Harrison and Mr. Calvin both discussed how the call to vocation was apparent in their lives from their youth onward. Though they did not know what their career path might be, they knew it was intimately connected to the work their faith called them to do for others. Dr. Malcolm reflected in our dialogues that

Black spirituality in proper context, expands to encompass what it means to be held closely and in authentic relation to your community. It manifests in the guiding and mentoring that Black people do for our younger generations as we pass on our wisdom and that of our ancestors. Ancestors don't have to be from 100s of years ago either. I consider my grandparents and even my parents as a part of my ancestry. They taught me so much that were of value beyond what I was learning in church. The way my dad took the time to teach me about Bible lessons was even more important to me than the lessons.

In the lived experience description from my early career, I recounted working in children's theatre and realizing the evil that the people raising these children can impress upon the world. As I relayed in the recounting of what I told our road manager when confronted with extreme racism in a small town diner, "This should not happen. I hope those kids we entertained this morning don't grow up like this." As I noted, I could not help but cry as I sat in the passenger seat of our van. I was not crying for the pain that those ignorant people had put me through; I was crying because in my heart I knew that many of those

children from that morning would be subjected to this ignorance and hate. Whether they were White children growing up in racist households, or Black children being oppressed by this hegemonic hatred, they were all going to suffer. This moment in my life made me even more assured that my call to vocation in education and to transformation of community with combative and grace-filled spirituality was in dire need.

Dr. Rhonda and I discussed how her call to vocation grew stronger with every issue that confounds her predominantly White institution related to the treatment of and acknowledgement of the gifts of Black students and other students of color. She noted that it had been difficult when she struggled in college for a bit, but had support to return to her call to serve the community and share the ancestral wisdom she was gaining each day. Dr. Malcolm remarked that his struggles took a while to filter out and to regain a center away from his God and the church. He stated about life after acknowledging his LGBTQ+ life that seeing and feeling his call left him:

> *And without support from home nor the centering of my roots in Black spirituality, I drifted further and further away from myself and my God. Suffering in the midst of an "imposter syndrome" which told me that I did not belong at this premier institution anyway, I accepted failure as my lot and my path.*

I shared with the participants that college had grown my mind, people in community, had grown my trust and faith, and my Black spirituality in Black art, culture, and music had grown my resolve in the call to vocation in education and to combatting those who would oppress me and others who only ask for our rightful, authentic, and respected place at the table. But for us all, it was the challenges brought by our professional careers and the concurrent evolution of our lived experiences that created multiple revelations of the

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manifestation of the elements of Black spirituality in our lives. The call to vocation, the need and relevance of a spiritually centered narrative, and the ardor to confront issues at our PWIs in combative, yet compassionate ways emerged in our critical engagement with academia.

<div align="center">**Spirituality As Professional**</div>

Challenges in the Spirit: Persistence and Resilience

In all of our professional careers, we encountered (and continue to encounter), issues that challenges our spirituality's elements that provide persistence and resilience. Emerging from the familial or community stabilities that supported and reassured us in times of strife, each participant relayed a substantial connection to their Black spirituality in withstanding the presence of challenges in their professional career at PWIs. Dr. Harrison noted that during his early career working in a mental health facility that he was under great duress from White colleagues who were ignoring mandated guidelines and thus serving their clients poorly. When, out of the spirit, he confronted them, his whole career was put into question and possible jeopardy. He recounted:

> *I remember talking to my mother and one of my sisters about the problems at the site and just wanting to quit. But wisdom prevailed, and I actually came to see why I may have been placed in this tough spot. God was preparing me for greater things and greater challenges that were to follow.*

Dr. Harrison went on to discuss how he would use the songs and words from his Black church experience to hold him steady as he drove into work each day, but also that these were as an added element to the spirituality that flowed from the connections to his family and extended family in community that offered their wisdom to his circumstance as lived at that time,

In the interview responses from Dr. Malcolm, he spoke of the struggles and challenges he faced professionally when he found he lacked trust in his colleagues and his institution. He responded:

In my early career, that trust was whittled away to almost nothing. Between the back stabbing and lies that happened with colleagues that I had trusted, I was lost.

Dr. Malcolm strongly reflected to me that it was the words of his parents from his youth and from a mentor he did not even realized he had that made the difference in his overcoming these issues. The turning to wisdom, even if the words are not considered by some to be 'ancient' or 'ancestral' in the anthropological sense, which is another central element of Black spirituality, allowed Dr. Malcolm to sustain his presence at his university among White colleagues who showed little or no respect for his work. Similar to Dr. Harrison, he also shared that songs and words lifted him up during these times, but the songs he noted were more closely related to my own experience of gaining strength from Motown artists and Black poets instead of strictly relying on biblical scriptures.

In my interviews with both Dr. Malcolm and Dr. Harrison, I shared that my dad used to say "Never back down. Never surrender" when we would discuss the life issues that would confound me in my youth. Dr. Harrison responded. *Yes, that is it. That is it. He wasn't talking about rebelling against something. He was encouraging you to continue in the fight and to know that God is supporting you, so stick with it.* The confidence that leads to persistence has familial spiritual roots that bounds us in professional security each day.

Mr. Calvin recalled that he relied on a communal wisdom that was shared with him in his past by family and mentors as he was confronted with the racism that hides in plain sight

in predominantly White Institutions and beyond. He shared a time when he was called upon to defend his students against faculty micro-aggressions:

> *I have conversations with faculty, and the first thing out of their mouth is that they are not being racist, which you and I both know is the language of people who don't know the racist things they do. I had to stand firm against some really powerful faculty members. It was so hurtful to see that they just could not see where their prejudices were intersecting. It's like they thought that making the statement of non-racism was going to mean that I was not going to look for it anymore in their language and actions. I don't ask for a pass for any of my students; that is not what God would want me or my staff to do. But I will fight for equity in how our students are treated.*

His reflections were rooted more in his strong ties to biblical scripture than other participants, but also contained linkages to the powerful moments in his life when others, including a mentor who was White, taught him the value of supporting those in community who are facing egregious challenges.

Dr. Rhonda shared multiple challenging moments in her professional career, including a most powerfully spiritual event that happened during her early career in teaching that involved her being derided by a White colleague who questioned her work in the classroom. She recalled that it was through the wisdom of her mother, which came to her in a voice before she could even call her on the phone that allowed her to persist and remain resilient in the face of targeted negativity. With her, and the others, spirituality in some form, had provided a supportive shield of sorts that guarded them and helped retain the strength to overcome adversity and professional challenges.

Call to Vocation

The challenges in our collective professional lives led me to ponder how the call to vocation, if each of the participants and I had one, was stalled, transformed, or erased as we performed in academia. Mr. Calvin, whose passion for his call runs deep from the lived experiences he shared during our time together, presented a heartfelt reminder of his commitment as he spoke of assisting one of his students who encountered multiple life and school challenges. Mr. Calvin stated:

> *My spirit is what compelled me to go that far with that student. I couldn't have stayed through all his struggles without my spirituality calling me to this work— especially when I had colleagues who would question why I was still trying to help this kid after he had left our college. They just didn't understand my reasoning and my call.*

> *I used wisdom from my mentors, my grandmother, and other very important people from my past in what I told these students and what I showed them by example.*

He continued to take his reflection deeper:

> *I always believed that my spirituality is a part of my vocation, my job, in this life. It is what helps me regulate my goals and gives me strength. It allows me to please God and please myself. Sometimes it pushes me to move on from things and sometimes it holds me in the midst of my struggles until I can move on. That has happened to me when I am working. I'll be honest. I'll ask God why do I have to go through this, and then I understand, after a while, that it is because I am needed in the place or in that job at the time. It allows me to stay grounded in my purpose.*

Dr. Rhonda reflected that she received her call to vocation early on in her life from a combination of influences that were from her family's connections to African spirituality and art and their drive for education, the Black church, and from her community of sorority sisters. She recounted to me especially in relations to the connection to African spirituality and art:

> *When I come into the office, I see the mask given to me as a gift when I was in Ethiopia and the talisman I was drawn to and bought in Egypt. Since my work is tied to art as a discipline and as a vocation for educating others, these make a daily statement to me that hits at my spirit.*
>
> *The words of my mother to "act right" keep me entangled with the charge to educate others in the right way with all my heart and spirit so the wisdom is not lost.*

Her outlook represented that merging of worlds that are reflective of some of the other participants' ontological stances toward the intersections of the work, the call, and the spirit.

I remain truly grateful for the interjection of Dr. Harrison into our discussion of call to vocation to remind me that not every Black faculty and staff member on a campus or in the field of education has the same connections or attachments to call or spirituality. He responded to my inquiry surrounding the requirement of a call to vocation:

> *Now I am not talking about all Black faculty or staff at a PWI. Just like not all Black folks are in tune with Black spirituality; not all Black members of the community wish to be active in these mentoring activities, which makes the work of those who do that much more essential.*

At my university that I moved to next, I was in for a ride, my brother. God was with me every day when I went into work. I think that I listened to more gospel and spirituals during that first year than I had in my younger days. Music is always at the center of my peace. I needed so much peace back then. I prayed and meditated for protection from the assaults that were coming at me every day, and those lamentations got heard. Thank you, God.

Dr. Harrison's opening up about the vulnerability of his call was also enlightening and heartening as I shared that I, too, have days when I feel my call is strong, but being sorely tested.

Though Dr. Malcolm consistently responded that his sense of spirituality was not rooted as others in a 'Black church' mentality, he insisted that his connection to a call to vocation was held just as strongly in his personal spirituality. He shared regarding the call in his early career:

Even back then, I knew that something inside me was pushing me to be that mentor for others and a community builder for other minority employees at our offices. But the system kept me busy with other duties, and I was also not feeling like I had much power to do anything about it back then. For so long, I lived with the idea that God would make a way if there was something I was meant to do. But it wasn't happening. I didn't have community to support me either

He reflected on the difference in his point of view that is rooted in how he valued the contributions of his family to his spiritual direction, which allowed him to extend his ideas surrounding his call to vocation.

I consider my grandparents and even my parents as a part of my ancestry. They taught me so much that were of value beyond what I was learning in church. The way my dad took the time to teach me about Bible lessons was even more important to me than the lessons.

My understanding of Black spirituality also includes the charge for me as a member of the community in support of Black college students, and other students as well, to work diligently to guide them into the call as I was guided into mine. Hopefully, our work will make their journey a less rocky road than mine has been.

For each of the participants, the call to vocation, which can be a foundational element and manifestation of Black spirituality, grew into and remains a central feature in their work in higher education. It is a primary point of connection for all of us and meters our persistence and levels of resilience in academia. But as Mr. Calvin and Dr. Harrison responded in their reflection, it is not a solo journey. Family, community, and mentors are a part of the growth into the call and its sustaining energy. For some, mentoring was a defining contributor to their resilience and continues to be.

Mentoring

The challenges of my early career were many, and those who aided in my growth toward being the strong, Black professional that I strive to be engaged with my spirit to uplift me even in the most horrific moments. The racist event at the local diner during my performance career was a catalyst for me to reflect more deeply upon what it means to answer a call and suffer in its midst. The other outcome of this racist moment in my young career was that it did inspire me to strive to become a better mentor and guide for the Black students that came through my office. I would work to enlighten these students to obstacles

that would be placed in their paths as Black professionals and on ways to not only survive, but ultimately to thrive in the midst of it all. The truths of Black wisdom and the critical love that I learned as a part of my growth in my Black spirituality were transformative elements of the success of many of the Black students I served.

When I shared my narrative of these events with Dr. Rhonda, as I did with all the participants to nurture the level of trust and safety in the research study, she responded with agreement, but also a keen observation. She reflected:

> *Some Black faculty discover that their call involves mentoring and guiding young*
> *Black students on their campuses to help them in their college success. The problem*
> *at PWIs is that this really essential work is not respected as part of the notable*
> *duties of faculty when they are in line for tenure.*

The time, effort, and devotion that this mentoring requires was a concern that all of the participants noted in our sessions, and points to some deeper issues that Black faculty and staff encounter at their PWIs. We will delve into some of these issues further in this discussion section.

In the dialogue with Dr. Harrison, he also made a significant statement regarding how PWIs value and view the mentoring and nurturing work that some Black faculty and staff do as a part of their call to vocation—even without compensation at times. He stated:

> *The work we do is not simply talking to these students or sponsoring their club; it is*
> *helping them create plans for internships and research opportunities that are*
> *relevant to their lived experiences, attending their events, helping them learn how to*
> *confront and resolve issues with instructors, creating spaces to celebrate them*
> *within community, and modeling professional behaviors and practices for them.*

The work that Mr. Calvin does with his student-athletes aligned directly with the observations and reflections of Dr. Harrison. He noted in regard to his students:

> *My work in all this was to listen, support my students when they thought of giving up, and mentoring them through the process so that they kept their efforts professional and respectful for all involved.*
>
> *I used wisdom from my mentors, my grandmother, and other very important people from my past in what I told these students and what I showed them by example. But colleges and universities have to respect and find true value in this kind of mentoring and personal connecting for their Black students, or the efforts will not work.*

The concept of mentoring plays a key role in practices of community in Black spirituality as they strive to support and sustain the lives of their membership. For Dr. Rhonda, Dr. Harrison, and Mr. Calvin, mentoring was most influential during their college years, but for others, like me and Dr. Malcolm, the mentoring in our youth played a pivotal role in how we view mentoring in our academic practices today.

As Dr. Malcolm responded in his reflections on his time at the family camp meetings of his youth, he noted the significance of the presence of elders who were cast as mentors for the youth at these meetings. He also shared the experience of having a mentor in college, even when he had not thought of this faculty member as one before our reflective time together.

He went on to include where he finds mentoring manifest in his past and present roles:

> *Even back then, I knew that something inside me was pushing me to be that mentor for others and a community builder for other minority employees at our offices. But*

the system kept me busy with other duties, and I was also not feeling like I had much

power to do anything about it back then.

With the students in mind, I asked Dr. Malcolm to ponder whether any of the other elements or outcomes of a Black spirituality could manifest positive impacts upon our Black college students.

> *Yes, I think that some elements, like using our positions as mentors or*
> *"elders" to help manifest hope and resilience in our Black students could*
> *have a powerfully positive effect on their persistence and ultimate success*
> *through college and into their professional careers.*

Restriction of the Call to Vocation

The call to vocation plays a central role in the professional lives of all of the participants and in my life as well from what has been discussed thus far. The spiritual drive to provide, mental, emotional, professional, and intellectual support for our Black students and other students of color at public predominantly White institutions requires us to continually reaffirm our commitment. But the promotion policies, priorities, and unwritten rules of PWIs can create hostile environments in which the call to vocation, as express through a manifestation of a Black spirituality, faces negative attitudes, willful ignorance, and restrictions on career advancement and fulfilling a call. The distractions inherent in how White academia is structured denies that worth and value of a call to vocation past what allows for fulfillment of their hegemonically constructed requirements for faculty and staff. Dr. Rhonda stated in reflection on her early career that she indeed encountered these types of restrictions to expressing her call to vocation to the fulfillment of the call of her spirit. She recalls:

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I was so busy trying to have something published and finishing my dissertation that I just remember only really "going to the well" as my grandmother would call it, when things would become out of control, like with Professor N. [Her spirituality] was simply part of my life, but not that center that it is now.

Dr. Harrison reflected that he experienced some struggles with restrictions at one of his earlier institutions, but he expressed that he found ways to confront the restrictions. He stated:

Spiritually speaking, that new university was going through its own battles, and the call definitely came with some fire. It gave me a chance to do more and to have more influence; that's important to me. You know I carry on that saying from my mother. "I can show you better than I can tell you."

The strength that Dr. Harrison expressed in his reflection runs through all of the responses from the research participants, but each had their own level of experiencing restrictions that shaped how the spirit intersecting with their conflicts.

For Mr. Calvin, sometimes it meant he needed to move on to another job, and that was the sentiment of both Dr. Rhonda and Dr. Harrison as well. But Mr. Calvin also noted that at times his spirituality would not let him leave because of his call. He responded to my inquiry with his notable resiliency message:

I always believed that my spirituality is a part of my vocation, my job, in this life. It is what helps me regulate my goals and gives me strength. It allows me to please God and please myself. Sometimes it pushes me to move on from things and sometimes it holds me in the midst of my struggles until I can move on.

It helps me focus on giving students the guidance, direction, mental tenacity,

community affiliation, and just a level of continuous encouragement and support that

they really need at a predominantly White university.

But colleges and universities have to respect and find true value in this kind of

mentoring and personal connecting for their Black students, or the efforts will not

work. I do what I can with the time and energy that I have, but there are limits.

Combative Spirituality

Mr. Calvin's sentiments act as a kind of 'calling out and calling in' to the leadership at public PWIs to be on notice that Black faculty and staff can visualize the restrictions that they face and are at work to create solutions that foster greater resilience and support for their Black colleagues. As Cornel West remarked in his dialogue with Christa Buschendorf (2014) on the "prophetic fire" of Black people and their spirituality, this "combative spirituality" is about confronting issues of racism and other prejudices in the power and understanding of the spirit (p. 27). It requires those living in the spirit of Black spirituality to speak with truth and wisdom from their lived experiences to the White political, social, economic, and educational structures that constrain the advancement and even basic survival of Black people and other people of color. Combative spirituality requires a kind of critical analysis of issues facing Black people couched in Black spiritual love for each other as a community.

Again, in discussing this concern with Dr. Harrison, he shared a reflection from an experience at a PWI he had moved to after issues with his previous institution only to find that the new one also had issues. He noted:

Spiritually speaking, that new university was going through its own battles, and the

call definitely came with some fire. It gave me a chance to do more and to have more

influence; that's important to me. You know I carry on that saying from my mother.

"I can show you better than I can tell you."

Every day in my job, it feels like a test to answer my call. Sometimes I just don't feel like I am ready for the fight, but my spirit won't let me back away from it all. At times, I have to... What do we call it? 'Reframe' the issue so that I can better manage what is being placed upon my head. And there are times when I just become filled with such righteous discontent that I shut down and sit away with God for a bit to pull myself together for some of my meetings.

Dr. Harrison's spiritual practices sometimes required him to move away into a private space to strategically work through his plans for addressing issues that bring forth the need for a combative spiritual stance. However, Mr. Calvin shared that this segment of Black spirituality is a part of his practice, but is tempered by compassion that is sometimes directly in the face of combatants.

He stated:

Another thing that is in me is to try to share the goodness of God with other people... people know me, and I try to share by what I do and not really push "the Word" down their throats. That just turns people off most times anyway. But I practice kindness and try to show some grace, which I hope shows people that this is a part of working and living in God's purpose. This practice of sharing though does give me a lift—especially when I connect with someone who also knows and feels this spiritual strength like I do.

Dr. Rhonda shared that her combative spirituality stance has grown and matured over the past several years, and she feels more mentally and spiritually prepared for challenges now.

When we discussed her sense of how she manages the combative elements of her Black spirituality, she is quite confident and proud of her work. She stated:

> *You know I have had those tensions and some battles in this past 10 to 12 years, but now I feel prepared for them. I am not alone in my fight or in my compassion for issues that come up in my career. God is with me. My grandparents and their grandparents are with me. The Black community on campus and around the city are with me when I need them. But I think my spirituality is rooted in my intellectual understanding as well as those practices that I talked about before. I do think about it when I pray and when I walk across campus to stir up my resiliency or fortitude after a combative situation.*

Though Dr. Malcolm did not speak directly to combative spirituality as a practice, his personal stance on confronting institutions that denigrate marginalized students, faculty, and staff and his personal drive to combat the misinformation and ignorance surrounding the lives of the LGBTQ+ community on college campuses are intimately aligned with the elements of combative spirituality. They are contained in the sentiments and actions of the other participants. This stance supersedes a religious or institutional system of belief to instead encompass the passions and compassion of Black educational leaders at PWIs.

His responses are better contained in the section focused on spirituality as institutional as they directly confront PWI actions that require Black faculty and staff to take an informed, active, intelligent, forceful, and compassionate stance in opposition to the hegemonic rhetoric that sustains discriminatory and exclusionary program, policies, and practices on public PWI campuses. In his work, Dr. Malcolm says and does what so many of

the other participants reflected; he simply does it in his own way and within his own identity and agency.

Spirituality As Institutional

Combative Spirituality

For me, I learned about one of the issues that lies at the heart of the need for a combative spirituality stance in strategically addressing oppressive issues on the campuses of predominantly White institutions early in my career. The issue that I found central to the struggle to find truly valuable solutions to the concerns of Black staff, faculty, and students is that White institutional leaders rush to proclaim a problem solved before they actually discover the roots of an issue. This action taints the dialogue on an issue, and as I noted in my lived experience description, once tainted, distrust soon follows.

My reflection on this issue came through my grandmother as she would share stories about this in terms of her family. Her father would pronounce that he had solved some issue in the family, usually by an edict that some behavior that was causing problems would start or stop. But as Miss Irene would note, he sometimes did not get to the root of the problem, and in a few months it would come up again—many times twice as bad as before. Her father was not listening to the family members, and that distrust became a family legacy that continues to linger for us. It remains a part of my awareness and cultural sensitivity in the PWI workplace as well. As previously noted, I am similar to others in this research in that my Black spirituality manifests in my reliance on and honoring of the dynamic forms of wisdom that ancestors passed down to me through familial and community ties.

Mr. Calvin was one of the participants who shared this point of view regarding the manifestations and influence of wisdom from our Elders as a much valued weapon in combatting inequity and racial concerns at PWIs. He noted:

> *I used wisdom from my mentors, my grandmother, and other very important people from my past in what I told these students and what I showed them by example. Without the spirit, I would not have been able to be a mentor and guide for these students. I would have been afraid to voice my support out of concern for my job, and the community would not have been created in such a positive way*

He continues to discuss this combative spirituality in the context of his professional discourse with some White colleagues and remarked:

> *I have conversations with faculty, and the first thing out of their mouth is that they are not being racist, which you and I both know is the language of people who don't know the racist things they do. I had to stand firm against some really powerful faculty members. It was so hurtful to see that they just could not see where their prejudices were intersecting.*
>
> *We were all people of faith and so when we set out to support these students, it was backed by our faith that god had called us to this place to help these kids be successful and not back down—even when our work confronted university plans that would have disadvantaged these students. I think that is when I really began to understand how far God and the spirit were going to take me in this battle in higher ed.*

Dr. Malcolm was adamant that Black faculty and staff acknowledge the need for a combative element in our Black spirituality ethos to confront and provide spaces for community discourse over racial issues and obstacles on PWI campuses. He stated:

> It will also take some of us on the faculty and staff members standing up for each other and our students like our spiritual mothers and fathers did to show our readiness to fight in the battle and that there is hope in the end.
>
> We can do better to combat this type of evil in how we work together in community as an institution by respecting the call that brought these Black people to a sometimes foreign environment and facilitating spaces where their needs can be truly heard (speaking about combative spirituality confronting the evil of willful ignorance and obstruction).

Dr. Malcolm visualized his efforts as once again a matter that centers his racial and sexual identities rather than a church-based ideology, but remains connected to the Black spirituality elements that place requirements of duty to community and legacies of hope upon Black faculty and staff. His combative stance aligns with the phenomenological elemental experiences that the other participants and I articulated as sovereign to our Black Spirituality. Dr. Malcolm agreed that our Black spirituality requires us to seek change and to remain combative in the fight until change comes.

In our dialogue during the interview session, I relayed the narrative of the confrontation I had with the professor who used racist tropes and deficit thinking to defend her analysis of my students' work even though her neoliberal attitudes proclaimed her beyond this type of combative deconstruction of her motives and alliances. In my confrontation with this professor, I still offered compassion because in some ways I did

understand that part of her thoughts and language came from frustration with students' progress, but insults and aggression were not the way to inspire success in students—especially students of color. This interaction made the White professor uncomfortable, as my supervisor noted again and again as they were close friends. But I would continue to remind her that it is in the discomfort that we find the injurious language that has to be repaired and healed.

Dr. Rhonda also spoke of the power and influence of her ancestral familial and community wisdom that flowed through her Black spirituality as a resource and instrument to support her efforts to bring forth change in her PWI environment. She reflected in our interview session and in her survey responses a deep connection between her ability to combat the biases and disrespect either she or her students receive in their lives at the university and the tools of wisdom and confidence in doing what is right that came from her Black cultural roots that sustained and inspired her in policy and programming battles. She noted:

> *You know I have had those tensions and some battles in this past 10 to 12 years, but now I feel prepared for them. I am not alone in my fight or in my compassion for issues that come up in my career. God is with me. My grandparents and their grandparents are with me. The Black community on campus and around the city are with me when I need them*

From the events that ensnared Dr. Rhonda into a spiritually combative situation with her White former colleague to the issues that emerge while she is supporting her Black and other students of color on her predominantly White campus, she expresses that she is affirmed in her need and right to confront the oppressive structures.

However, in speaking to Dr. Harrison, I heard the voice of someone who felt that Black faculty and staff must be cautious in their approach using combative spirituality at the institutional level. He further explained though that his stance was not a passive one, but one that used our gifts of familial and community wisdom in the midst of our call to action. Dr. Harrison responded:

> *That doesn't mean we sit back. No, God has work for us to do and expects us to be about it. When you have work to do, you can't rest. It's not restful. You are charged up and ready for the fight. We try to work for change with love, but know that God has our back if we need to battle some evil.*
>
> *People of God (or with God's spirit) are fighters, friend. They take on battles that others flee or just ignore. I completely feel that charge when I am confronted with campus and community issues that can affect our students or my colleagues. The Bible talks about people who are sent forth to proclaim to those who are doing evil that they will not stand. It's called a "fire" in their speech I think. I have seen this "fire" come through from Black faculty and staff at a White university when they see some shameful behavior happening. And, I also know that we have to be ready for evil to push back against us. But that 'call' and that 'fire' mean I and others don't have a choice if we are following the spirit. That's when I see Black spirituality being so powerful for good.*

In understanding the Black spirituality's manifestation in the context of confronting racial, social justice, or environmental concerns of Black students, staff, and faculty at PWIs, the responses of the participants clearly support a combative spirituality stance. But the added wisdom of Dr. Harrison deserves a space in the strategic thinking of those called to these

great challenges. The 'fire' concept that he presents can be seen through multiple lenses as an invitation for warmth and sharing, as a rage that erupts in destruction leading to spaces for reconstruction, or as a blaze that lights up the darkness of hegemonic thinking.

Listen

When stoked by the call to vocation and as the elements of Black spirituality manifest into combative spirituality and other strategies for confounding and confronting the sometimes oppressive environments on public PWI campuses, the work of Black faculty, staff, and students to bring resolution and healing can be so quickly forestalled. The culprit, time and again, is the institution's lack of truly listening to their cries of pain and suffering caused by living in culturally toxic academic and social worlds. Each of the participants in this study echoed these thoughts and the call for change.

As Dr. Rhonda stated so eloquently in reflecting upon her lived experiences working in predominantly White institutions:

It is disheartening to find ourselves again and again sharing our narratives only to have them distorted to fit into prescribed programming and action plans of our White institutions. It's like my mother told me, "Listen" and not just with your ears. When we speak, we speak from our souls which means those who are engaging with us must listen with theirs. But first, it takes learning through the lens of Black spirituality where the truth of our souls actually lives.

In this reflection, Dr. Rhonda's response is nestled in her growth and life in the elemental expressions of her Black spirituality. It is a calling out to PWIs, but also a calling into dialogue with the experiences and authentic words of Black people.

As Dr. Rhonda's reflection on the power and force of listening stemmed from her childhood roots in her family's interpretation of their Black spirituality, so did Dr. Harrison's. He shared that his experiences in the university could benefit from the words of his mother that came from her spirituality and the call to confront this lack of listening in its fullest ways that go beyond simply hearing the words, but also 'hearing' the actions of a people. He shared regarding his interaction with the "cupcake lady" as she shared stories with him and other children after church:

Or it could be a story from a long time ago that she just remembered and wanted to share. Whatever it was, we knew we needed to listen, not just for the food, but because she was our elder who was telling us something valuable.

He adds how this awareness carried forth into his university work sharing:

I had these White faculty members who thought they were so 'woke' that they already had the answers to what our Black and Indigenous students needed to be successful at our university. They would try to fix an issue by holding seminars and workshops before they even listened to what the concern actually was.

In this statement, Dr. Harrison provides clear avenues for PWIs to self-examine their practices surrounding the creation of programming and committees that they deem appropriate to address the concerns and issues of the marginalized members of their campus community.

Mr. Calvin does not stop with the call to PWIs to listen, he also calls upon Black students, staff, and faculty to listen in community to each other as well as a part of the recognition that the experiences of Black people are diverse even when bounded by some belief system or concern. When he speaks of how Black students at his university were able

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to come together to seek resolution to an issue with a faculty member, he shares part of their narrative of community called to action, which is a principal manifestation of Black spirituality. Mr. Calvin stated:

> *After a couple dinners and conversations together though, the other Black students (and a few White students) did join in on a letter to the department chair, the dean of the college, and the president of the university to air their grievances and share their united pain, man. It was great! But that took so much work because our campus didn't have this capacity on its own. My work in all this was to listen, support my students when they thought of giving up, and mentoring them through the process so that they kept their efforts professional and respectful for all involved.*

For Mr. Calvin, his Black students' struggles were made more evident in the midst of their university not having the previously created capacity to provide a safe and welcoming space for them to voice their concerns over faculty they perceived as having the power in this classroom relationship.

This idea of having a space or positionality at the PWI that offers the safety to speak and the trust to be heard flows into the responses of Dr. Malcolm as well. He especially longed for his administration to listen to the Black students and the Black faculty and staff who seek each day to support their survival and success in this predominantly White environment. Dr. Malcolm recounted:

> *One of the things I miss about my spirituality from my youth is that feeling that there was always someone in my corner that would listen to me. At many of the PWIs where I went to college or worked, the White administrator especially would not listen. Now, they heard what we were saying as Black students with their ears, but not with their*

hearts and minds. It is always a defensive stance that they take, and in response we

have no choice but to become defensive as well, instinctively. If I could bring the

essence of that consensual listening and responding to my university, I would in an

instant. That call and response that I remember from my time in the choir and at

those late nights at camp meeting is what is missing. You have to listen to the call in

order to correctly respond.

He continued in his entreaty, which, as he noted, is not grounded in a Black spirituality from his viewpoint, but still resonates with the manifestation of its agency. He reflected deeply:

We lose so much when we stop listening to each other. I hope that people will listen to

what I and the other people you spoke to have to say. If I could feel like I had a voice

when I go to these campus meetings that would be amazing. It feels like my voice just

becomes swallowed up by the noise of people spouting policy or interjecting their

own agenda, and that is Black and White people. I think my students and some staff

that I have talked to feel the same way.

They sit at the town halls and workshops, and when they raise an objection, they are

met with either ignorance of their concern or what I like to call "administrative

sleight of hand" that serves to conflate a real concern with an administrative interest.

I may not believe in a God anymore, but I see evil, and this kind of approach to

engaging with Black faculty, staff and students is just evil—well intentioned or not.

In thinking critically about the words and insights of my participants, I relayed to them that it was evident to me that listening has a central role in creating safe spaces for Black faculty and staff and students to voice their concerns and that modeling this type of behavior as a Black community has power as well (Tatum, 1997). This deep listening is one

of the first steps in combatting what we have labeled as 'evil' in the practices of public PWIs as they exhibit willful ignorance that can result in dangerous, neglectful, and disorienting environments for Black faculty, staff, and students of color. But I also noted that from my childhood manifestations from community based in Black spirituality, I could understand why some PWIs struggled to actualize this practice. From the internalized traumas of my youth I shared:

> *It became too difficult to listen to my parents as they tried to share their Black wisdom carried on from our elders. My daily prayers ceased, and I slipped into a space void of anything except lament that focused inward.*

As my research continued to respond and react to the lived experiences of the participants, clarity in the power of listening came into fine focus. The caged bird was singing, but those around him were not listening to the song, only rejoicing in their efforts that allowed him to sing at all. Meanwhile, the struggles and concerns that were erupting from the continued expressions of narratives of oppression and resistance went unheeded. Within a deep reflection, I noted:

> *In my career in predominantly White institutions of higher education, I find far too many people ready to work on a problem and find solutions before they actually hear from the community's heart of its concerns. In the work to heal, the institution is so afraid of the open wound, but it needs to breathe to properly heal. Black spirituality taught me that the offerings of the community cannot heal a problem until they are offered correctly. What the peoples of African who held to their spirituality believed and held true still has importance in our work in education today, if we are to heal our communities and provide all the necessities for its members.*

Institutionally Restricted Voice and Presence

In deconstruction of the dialogue that can be facilitated by authentic listening from the power structures of the predominantly White institution in their engagement with Black faculty and staff, the reality of the silencing of Black voices emerges as a vital factor in actualizing this dialogue. The voices and presence of Black faculty and staff, as noted from some of the participants in this study are cradled in the manifestations of their Black spirituality. As Mr. Calvin noted:

> *I can't change my race or how tall I am, and I can't change the other things that God has made me either. Being in faith is just like those things to me. They're a part of all that makes up me. Without the spirit, I would not have been able to be a mentor and guide for these students. I would have been afraid to voice my support out of concern for my job, and the community would not have been created in such a positive way.*

This fear of reprisal and restriction is a factor in my forestalling of ideas and insights that I could share with my university as well. Even in a space where White members of the PWI believe that uncovering racist behaviors and micro-aggressions are not, or should not, be faced with systemic suppression, the reality is that this practice is so fully engrained in the workings of the organization that the repression of voices continues. The primary reason that I, and other Black faculty and staff persist in our work for equity at PWIs is not for ourselves, but for our students.

As I noted in my lived experience description of Black spirituality in my professional and institutional life:

> *This devotion also pushes us to serve as mentors and guides to both students of color and White students who need someone to see past their grades and into their*

potential. But Black faculty and staff struggle to gain regard and honors for their

work in these areas. Instead our scholarship is touted as less than intellectual and

our vernacular too pedestrian for scholarly worth and value. So, those who want to

advance may opt to lose themselves to the White hegemonic and abandon their

colleagues and their students. In Black spirituality, from African heritage to Black

intellectualism, our diverse talents are a sacred part of who we are as a people and

have been given to us to share for the betterment of our communities

Dr. Harrison, in his interview, spoke in support of this understanding of the power and positionality issues that Black faculty and staff must face at PWIs:

If Black faculty and staff don't feel supported in their call, they are not going to stay

in that relationship. Some Black faculty find that their call involves mentoring and

guiding young Black students on their campuses to help them in their college success.

The problem at PWIs is that this really essential work is not respected as part of the

notable duties of faculty when they are in line for tenure.

Dr. Harrison goes on to share a bit of the types of obstacles PWIs seem to intentionally misunderstand to bring the silence of Black faculty and staff:

Colleges want more research and writing rather than more of the genuine

interpersonal support system creation that many of our Black students crave and

really need to survive in a space where they don't feel connected otherwise. The work

we do is not simply talking to these students or sponsoring their club; it is helping

them create plans for internships and research opportunities that are relevant to their

lived experiences, attending their events, helping them learn how to confront and

resolve issues with instructors, creating spaces to celebrate them within community,

and modeling professional behavior and practices for them. All of this we do because
it is a part of our call to vocation and our responsibility.

When Dr. Malcolm and I discussed how he believed Black spirituality created the awareness of the restriction of voice and the call that confront and confound this limiting structural dynamic, he expressed a deep engagement with the ideas beyond his self-avowed lack of linkage to Black spirituality overall. He stated:

My understanding of Black spirituality also includes the charge for me as a member
of the community in support of Black college students, and other students as well, to
work diligently to guide them into the call as I was guided into mine. Hopefully, our
work will make their journey a less rocky road than mine has been.

This silencing of voices also emerged in Dr. Rhonda's detailing of her lived experience with the White faculty member who tried to alter her teaching pedagogy and her expressiveness in her classes at the beginning of her career. As she noted, it was her moment standing in that university bathroom with tears in her eyes that made her know that she was not alone, and her voice remained valuable to her students and her university.

Lamentations and Compassionate Spirituality

The final theme that emerged from the study that manifest for discussion is the act of lamentations or plaintive requests for relief from oppression and the use of compassionate spirituality to ease the pain of racism in our institutions. The entreaties from lamentations, as manifestations of a Black spirituality, allow Black faculty and staff to maintain hope in the midst of systemic racial struggles. Compassionate spirituality, as manifest from Black spirituality, allows Black faculty and staff to sustain a level of engagement with their call to vocation that both convicts the oppressors and offers understanding for their ignorance.

As I reflected in my lived experience description, though I find a charge toward combative spirituality that Cornel West espouses, I also find my heart and spirit yields to compassion. Our Black spirituality requires us to seek change and to remain combative in the fight until change comes. In my confrontation with this professor, I still offered compassion because in some ways I did understand that part of her thoughts and language came from frustration.

Dr. Harrison and I shared in these reflections upon this difficult requirement that is encompassed in our Black spirituality. He responded:

> *Yes, once again, I think that if they respect and recognize the role that Black spirituality can play in their decision-making processes, they could create a less hostile environment issue confrontation and problem-solving process. I mean, when problems arise, and they will, if the university would take the time to understand the lived experience of the people involved and the inherent needs of those involved, better decisions might come from this process. When I think back to some of my lessons on African spirituality, I remember learning how decisions were made through community and through intersection with the spirit world. I'm not saying everyone should pray to find better decisions. But I see prayer as very deep reflection within. Reflecting deeply as we enter into decision-making or when institutions are trying to manage an issue can be very useful in solution creation. This reflection should be both in solitary and in community just as with our spirituality*

Mr. Calvin, as he deconstructed the ideas of lamentations and compassion, brought the conversation into the realm of his students as was his usual thought pattern. His response was based upon his lamentations about lack of support for true community offered in the

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PWI spaces. His entreaty was for PWI administrations to hear these concerns and render authentic assistance. Mr. Calvin shared:

Lacking community can make a student feel out of place on the field, in the classroom, in their dorm, or even in their own skin. It's the folks that understand the importance of community and of mentorship with heart that make for a strong team to support our student-athletes. Without these values and understandings, we can't do our jobs—at least not well. We want to provide that space for our students that my spirit makes for me.

As Dr. Rhonda and I spoke of the levels of compassion she has had to use while working at PWIs, she noted that her approach changed as she has grown in the system. In the beginning, she would be less apt to confront members of the university who would make passive-aggressive statements which they thought the Black faculty were not bright enough to understand and micro-assaults against her or other Black faculty and staff. She also connected to the idea of lamentations or entreaties as she remembered bringing her concerns to the department chair in her early career. In her reflection, one can also see the struggle she endured as she was repeatedly told to "understand" the thinking of White faculty who were being cruel to her. She again reflects that "caged bird" that sings, but is still not truly heard and laments what is lost in the silencing.

Dr. Malcolm and I discussed how he thought leaders at predominantly White institutions could better serve Black faculty, staff, and students. He shared that it is in these ideas and insights that one can see the lamentations of a person with a call to a vocation, who couches his words in an aura of compassionate spirituality. Dr. Malcolm noted:

Yes, I think that some elements, like using our positions as mentors or "elders" to help manifest hope and resilience in our Black students could have a powerfully positive effect on their persistence and ultimate success through college and into their professional careers. Most Black college students want to connect with their faculty and staff as well as the greater campus as far as I have seen in my career. Offering informed wisdom that supports real hope and reasons for resilience is definitely worth our attention and efforts. But we need a concerted effort by the whole, or majority, of the campus community. It's just so difficult to try to do this kind of work when, as a professor or as an administrator, I don't see or feel the support of my institution in an authentic way.

Summary of Discussions

The following section provides a summary of the discussions from themes emerging from the manifestations of a Black spirituality in the personal, professional, and institutional lives of the participants in this research study. The final reprise and refrain represents the communal voice of the participants after having explored their harmonies and discords in the discussions previous to this summary. The summary also makes explicit the points of non-alignment that occurred in the study's participants responses as well. The discussions are the catalyst for the conclusions and implications that follow, and should be taken as exemplars of the totality of the grander lived experiences shared by me and the other study participants.

Spirituality as Personal

The Black Church

What our encounters with this powerful entity reflect are emotional, social, physical, and mental markers that left a range of residual effects in our future relationships with the

Black Church, with our chosen spiritual connections, with our communities, and even with our families. To say that being involved in the Black Church in our youths had an effect on us is to simplify what can be a life-altering time of engagement with the spiritual. The Black Church provided community for participants like myself and Dr. Rhonda as she noted a time when her church held a carwash to support her efforts to study abroad and the feeling of belonging to community in a larger sense, and with how the church influenced and supported my father's business and our lives during difficult times.

For Mr. Calvin and Dr. Malcolm, the connection to the Black Church was a more intimate relationship in its influences on manifestations of Black spirituality in their youth that continued for Mr. Calvin into his career and adult life. For Dr. Malcolm it became a source of rejection, fear, and distrust as he emerged into his sexuality and lived experiences as a gay man. But the influence of the Black Church could still be found in the ways in which he spoke of combatting "evil" in the workplace and in the actions of people who would try to subjugate his Black students on his campus.

The Influences of Family in All Its Forms

For all of the research participants and for me, the role and influence of family and peers in the evolution or transformation of our Black spirituality created both comfort and moments of chaos in our lives. For me, as I remarked in my lived experience narratives, that role and influence before my birth as my mother and father had prayed for me to be born. From my recounting of my grandmother's pronouncing of my call to me daily from my youth onward as she would say that God had put something in me that nothing could take away in her proclamation that "You will help us do better" to Mr. Calvin and Dr. Harrison's

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family directives that led to their call, it is clear that the Black family, in all its forms, had tremendous influence on the manifestation of Black spirituality in our lives.

Mr. Calvin's narrative reflected his grandmother as being highly centered upon reading the Bible and relaying those stories. I responded that my grandmothers did not rely on Bible stories or quotes from the Scripture, even though they both read the texts every day. Their tales of moral and ethical behavior came from a mix of ancestral narratives, biblical ideologies, and their own brand of 'homespun' Black wisdom that distilled lessons from how the White world had treated them and the people they loved. Dr. Malcolm stated, as I and Dr. Harrison had reflected, that Black musical offerings from outside the church, offered from family and community gatherings, were a feature in his formation, and caused revolutions of thought and call, in his lived experience as well.

As Dr. Rhonda recalled how her mother and father situated her role in life to "act right" as they had espoused for her in church and then in her future career, one can see beyond a parental instruction to a call to action that carries forth with her even today.

Community and the Role of Black Spirituality Beyond the Black Church

For Dr. Malcolm, his community at camp meetings, similar to mine, had a major influence on his Black spirituality as the call to vocation and action that comes with it. Each participant reflected a sense of family as relative and as community that extended their relationships with Black spirituality outside the bounds of the Black Church and into their everyday lived experiences. This positionality shift and emergence would prove integral in the realm of how they each encountered manifestations of Black spirituality's elements in their professional and institutional lived experiences.

Mr. Calvin also noted that he found strong community influences outside the church through his involvement with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, a high school and college religious and service organization with a very substantial membership across the country. His reflection that membership in this organization allowed him to move past "genie prayers" to a more mature engagement with the spiritual denotes a depth that continued to evolve in his responses in the study.

Dr. Harrison's responses that were rooted in how supportive the community was after his father passed away provided a view into how he would later seek out his community in times of strife in his professional and institutional life as well. He noted that the positionality that is symbiotic in his view both provides sustaining elements manifesting from Black spirituality and also imparts a requirement that he remain defiant in his call to vocation.

Call to Vocation

The Call to Vocation that may be made manifest by engagement with one's Black spirituality can instill a drive into Black faculty and staff who are enmeshed in it, but it also can be part of the fear and caution that some Black people are taught in their youth. The voice may pronounce that a Black person is called to do something powerful in the world, as reflected in my standing up to my abuser, when Dr. Malcolm stood firm against those who would try to restrict his life, and with Dr. Rhonda and her wish to be in that play years ago, but it comes with the sounds of deniers and those who speak ill to control our fates. Though it begins as small moments in our youth, it grows in voice and tambour as we enter our professional careers and environments—especially in the face of oppressive ideologies and practices at PWIs.

The nurturing and emergence of this call to vocation has its origin narrative firmly set in the realm of the youth of the participants' lived experience descriptions and in mine as well. But the struggle to retain that call is also quite vivid in the recollections of the research participants. Dr. Rhonda noted that it had been very difficult when she struggled in college for a bit with feeling of 'imposter syndrome', of not feeling as if she belonged in the college environment and was even fooling herself and others, but had support to return to her call to serve the community and share the ancestral wisdom she was gaining each day. Dr. Malcolm's call to vocation stands away from Black spirituality in his mind, but still began in his youth. He remarked that his struggles with the Black Church took a while to filter out and then it took a while to regain a center away from his ideas of a God and the church.

He stated that he felt he lost his call after acknowledging his LGBTQ+ life because of all the people who told him that he no longer had a relationship with the spirit that manifest his call. This ebb and flow for all of those in this study is an authentic element of Black spirituality that speaks to the struggles even the goodness of manifestations can bring with them, which again, was expanded in our responses as we plumed the depths of our relationships to Black spirituality and listened to our 'caged birds' sing.

Spirituality As Professional

The manifestations of Black spirituality in the personal lived experiences of the participants and for me created a strong sense of connection to a call to vocation, to a sense of community support and responsibility, to the "words" of our elders, and to the Black church—taken in perspective. The research study sought to delve into how the phenomenon of these manifestations carried forth into the professional experiences of the Black faculty and staff as the live in the environment of predominantly White institutions of higher

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education. The participants shared moments of courage, moments of conflict, and moments of pain from their lived experiences that shine a brilliant light and raise a distressed voice in the shadows of the hegemonically supported attitudes of colleagues in the educational system.

Challenges in the Spirit: Persistence and Resilience

As I reported in the earlier section on a Black spirituality in the professional lives of the Black faculty and staff from the research study, we encountered (and continue to encounter), issues that challenges our spirituality's elements that provide persistence and resilience. Emerging from the familial or community stabilities that supported and reassured us in times of strife, each participant relayed a substantial connection to their Black spirituality in withstanding the presence of challenges in their professional career at PWIs. Though Dr. Malcolm strongly pronounced his rejection of the idea of Black spirituality because of its ties to the Black church and a community from his past that rejected him, he did share instances from his early career when the elements of persistence and resilience that are key characteristics of a life lived in Black spirituality were essential to his survival in the workplace.

Mr. Calvin, Dr. Harrison, and Dr. Rhonda all spoke of their deep need for resilience and persistence in the face of racist behaviors that were being explained away by supervisors and by their colleagues, which left them feeling as if they had not redress—except in their connection to their spiritual soul that provided a shield and a hope for change. These recollections aligned with my own narratives during my career in higher education that allowed me to persist in my work and remain resilient when routinely slighted or condescended to in meetings. Though persistence and resilience can be found in other belief

systems or mantras, it is in a Black spirituality that these elements provide a shift in positionality that affects agency, the Black person's standing in a PWI as a professional may be transformed by manifestation of these elements.

Call to Vocation

In alignment with the ethos of the manifestations of persistence and resilience is the interweaving of the element of the call to vocation into the fabric of the lived experiences of Black faculty and staff at PWIs. Though each of participants in this research study reflected a strong call to vocation and the depth of its connection to their Black spirituality (except for Dr. Malcolm), Mr. Calvin's narrative surrounding his work with a student who others had shunned or discounted, bespoke the truth of a call to vocation. This narrative contains a strength in directive that exemplifies the inflective essence of the phenomenon of Black spirituality as manifest as a call to vocation.

When the participants recount their lived experiences in the professional world of higher education at a public PWI, the element of the call to vocation stands front and center in why they then must persist and be resilient. We all asked ourselves, even in the midst of our own professional struggles and discord with colleagues, who would give voice to the concerns and issues of our students and our Black community members if we do not. We also are pressed to remember that we represent our 'home' communities who also depend on us to carry forth the call, as Dr. Rhonda so profoundly stated, to make our colleagues "act right" and do what is right.

Our call to vocation, as the participants relayed also calls us to voice our insights and demonstrate them in ways that show how others can accomplish these actions in authentic ways. As Dr. Harrison supremely reflected from his mother's saying, "I can show you better

than I can tell you" which is a powerful statement when one realizes that part of this reflection is grounded in the pain of knowing the others may not be listening to the voices of Black folks anyway. But people pay attention to actions to a greater extent. But not every Black voice is straining to be heard. One essential note from this theme was made by Dr. Harrison who deftly reminded me that not all Black faculty and staff have a call to vocation and not all Black faculty and staff align their lived experiences with Black spirituality.

Mentoring

Mentoring is an action that has been demonstrated in the lived experiences of all of the participants in one way or another. Mr. Calvin reflected that his mentoring came from the ladies in his church, his grandmother, his coaches in school, and from a man in his internship that truly altered his vision of how his professional life would be lived. From the moment with the jacket in the midst of the snow of Indianapolis winter, this mentor offered a manifestation of Black spirituality that began centuries ago with the elders of villages on the African continent.

The time, effort, and devotion that this mentoring requires was a concern that all of the participants noted in our sessions, and points to some deeper issues that Black faculty and staff encounter at their PWIs, as reflected in the shared narratives of the participants. Dr. Rhonda and Dr. Harrison both noted that one of their concerns with some of their White colleagues was the lack of respect and acknowledgement their continued investment in the lives of Black students and other Black colleagues received. Both these participants and I stated that we were not presenting this concern because we simply felt slighted, but as an indictment of the system for promotions and salary that finds its distasteful roots in this

disregard. This issue also represents a discounting of the struggles of our Black students in the PWIs and thus a discounting of their lives and futures.

The elements of mentoring that Black spirituality exudes were also not presented as an intangible that is bounded beyond Black faculty and staff sharing with their White colleagues. In fact, the summation of their responses bespeaks a people resolute in their commitment to gather these colleagues into the workings of this mentoring to produce an environment reflective of the roots of this mentoring in the African village with the hope that this shift in positionality will be transformative for the institution and their particular campus areas.

Restriction of Call to Vocation

The focus upon professional structures to evaluate performance, attitude, engagement, and work ethics was seen by the participants as being wholly restrictive to the elements of the call to vocation that necessitate Black faculty and staff enacting the depth of their responsibility to the Black campus community in the varied ways calling them. The spiritual drive to provide, mental, emotional, professional, and intellectual support for our Black students and other students of color at predominantly White institutions requires us to continually reaffirm our commitment. But the promotion policies, priorities, and unwritten rules of PWIs can create hostile environments in which the call to vocation, as expressed through a manifestation of Black spirituality, faces negative attitudes, willful ignorance, and restrictions on career advancement and fulfilling a call.

The effects of these restrictions varied for the participants from confronting the colleagues and supervisors who presented the restrictions to leaving their position. Mr. Calvin stated that sometimes it meant he needed to move on to another job, and that was the

sentiment of both Dr. Rhonda and Dr. Harrison as well. But Mr. Calvin also notes that at times his spirituality would not let him leave because of his call, and he relied on the elements of resilience and persistence to allow him to sustain his call. Though Dr. Malcolm does not align with Black spirituality as a practice, he too felt the brunt of the restrictions on his call, but for him it also enveloped his students who identify as LGBTQ+ on his campus. His struggles represented a restriction to his identity as well as his agency in the call to vocation, which will be explored in the Conclusions chapter of this study presentation.

Combative Spirituality

As Cornel West (West & Buschendorf, 2014) remarked in his work on the "prophetic fire" of Black people and their spirituality, this "combative spirituality" is about confronting issues of racism and other prejudices in the power and understanding of the spirit (p. 27). It requires those living in the spirit of Black spirituality to speak with truth and wisdom from their lived experiences to the White political, social, economic, and educational structures that constrain the advancement and even basic survival of Black people and other people of color. Dr. Rhonda shared that in her combative stance she does not feel alone in the fight and is sustained in her efforts for transformation of practices of PWIs that inflict harm upon Black students and other students of color.

Mr. Calvin positioned himself as one who both uses a "calling in and a calling out" in his engagement with obstacles and issues at his PWI when seeking positive transformation for the support of his Black colleagues and students. He does not see this combative stance as reflective of an 'angry Black man', but instead of a Black man who is charged to call out evil where it presents itself and to engage and expel these forces for the good of all. Dr. Harrison spoke of the "righteous discontent" that at times fueled his combative spirituality to the point

where he would seek temporary solace in a space of meditation and prayers before combatting the negative forces in his departments or programs.

It is important to remember that although Dr. Malcolm did not speak directly to combative spirituality as a practice, his personal stance on confronting institutions that denigrate marginalized students, faculty, and staff and his personal drive to combat the misinformation and ignorance surrounding the lives of the LGBTQ+ community on college campuses are intimately aligned with the elements of combative spirituality contained in the sentiments and actions of the other participants relayed earlier. Combative spirituality centers on the work to remain true to the call to vocation while confronting the negative works of others in ways that show both a fierce and forgiving heart as shared in the narratives of the participants.

Spirituality As Institutional

Within the narratives shared that exemplified Black spirituality's manifestations as institutional agents of transformation were four themes: combative spirituality, the authentic act of listening, a strong sense and presence of institutional restrictions on the participants voice and authentic presence, and the lamentations and compassionate spirituality that emerged from the ongoing struggles for that voice and for equity in the institutions. These themes contribute to the answering of the research question and also set the stage for the conclusions and implications, which engage the phenomenon of the call of Black spirituality into this study.

Combative Spirituality

As reflected in the Spirituality as Professional section of this study, combative spirituality requires those whose Black spirituality manifests for them in their career to

actively contest oppressive and denigrating systems and programs in the structures of the predominantly White institutions of higher education. Though the call to combative stances may center for some Black faculty and staff in the departments or between colleagues, the hegemonic power of the institution as a whole must also be confronted because, as some of the participants noted, the larger institutional environment has a primary role in the continuation and propagation of the oppressive systemic attitudes and actions at the collegial and departmental levels.

In this section, the participants spoke of the looming issue of their PWIs rushing to proclaim a problem as resolved without reviewing with those involved to discern whether the solutions are actually working. This rush to end a "fight" required Black faculty and staff in their manifestation of Black spirituality to resist these euphoric moments and disturb and disrupt the self-congratulatory proclamations that only seem to afford authentic solutions. The participants also noted that the wisdom of their elders, a continued reference to elements of African spirituality, and the confidence in the wisdom of their God were also part of the combative spirituality that bolstered their exercises of voice and ardor in their institutions.

With the wisdom of their elders also came the knowledge of the duty to community that each of the participants revealed as a part of the manifestation of Black spirituality in the institutional setting. This duty was part of their call, but also an essential element of their identity, which gave them agency to remain devoted to the causes under their concern. As Dr. Harrison reflected though, this combatting couched in Black spirituality may also require that Black faculty and staff enjoin themselves to a mantra of sharing love along with the 'fire' of their prophetic call. In order to find the way to "act right" as Dr. Rhonda would note, Black

faculty and staff at PWIs must turn to the things that are inside them; they must continue to turn to the manifestations within their lived experiences.

Listen

In the midst of all the narratives' pronouncements of the roles of call to vocation and the duties of community, the participants all took substantial time to share what concerned them most about the actions of their PWIs. Their reflections were not centered upon their personal needs or the singular vision of overturning an oppressive system; their reflections brought stark focus to one word "listen." Each participant shared narratives that offered insights into how powerless they felt, even with the manifestations of their Black spirituality that provided a deep, abiding strength, to move their institutions to truly listen to them.

Listening, in an authentic manner, from the upper administration to their White colleagues and students, was a primary point of struggle and of distress for the participants. They pointed to the meetings and sessions where each of their voicing of concerns was either blatantly ignored or conflated with other cultural and social misunderstandings that tend to become the issue rather than the actual issue. Dr. Harrison responded, in a profound manner, to this charge against our PWIs when he noted that the practice of these institutions giving spaces for the presentation of concerns and issues by Black faculty, staff, and students only allow for their disclosure under the terms of the hegemonic system to which the oppressed are bringing their claims in the first place.

Without authentic listening, the participants feared that their call to vocation was being forestalled and even denigrated. Dr. Rhonda's responses grounded in her growth as a professor and administrator displayed how much her call was continually under attack even as she rose in rank and 'power' at her institution. In the end, the words of Dr. Harrison's

mother still ring true when these institutions choose not to listen authentically—[Ok, then] "I can show you better than I can tell you" and thus the combative stance shifts to the performative actions that will be explored in the Implications chapter of this study.

Institutionally Restricted Voice and Presence

In deconstruction of the dialogue that can be facilitated by authentic listening from the power structures of the predominantly White institution in their engagement with Black faculty and staff, the reality of the silencing of Black voices emerges as a vital factor in actualizing this dialogue. Though these institutions may present themselves as supporting spaces for Black faculty and staff to be seen, these spaces are monitored and managed by the hegemonic structures of the larger institution, and therefore do not present spaces for the presence of Black bodies and minds to flourish authentically according to the participants in this study. The voices and presence of Black faculty and staff, as noted from some of the participants in this study are cradled in the manifestations of their Black spirituality.

A plaintive sense of loss is palpable in the narratives of the Black faculty and staff who participated in this research when they present their encounters with the restrictive conditions at their PWIs. Mr. Calvin, Dr. Rhonda, and Dr. Malcolm—who spoke from outside the engagement with Black spirituality, recounted that their call to community support and call to vocation were constantly combatting silencing from the institutions. Though they each stated that their institutions provided spaces in meetings and in programming for dialogues centering on the concerns of the Black community on campus, their narratives presented occasion after occasion where the structural composition of the meetings occluded the messages they were trying to share. Anger was a response to these

slights, but they also displayed a sadness for the loss of opportunity to be present authentically in their own spirits.

Dr. Rhonda and Dr. Harrison noted the strategic manner in which Black faculty and staff are represented at these meetings as well. Voices of Black faculty and staff that were either those the institution 'controlled' or those who would strike a point of discord in the ranks of their fellow Black faculty and staff were the primary agents in these meetings and programs. The community of Black members of the campus were positioned on the sidelines as Mr. Calvin relayed in his reflections on his encounters at PWIs. The conceptualization of the 'caged bird' continued to evolve as the participants revelations of their positionalities emerged. And the pain, which was a part of many of the revelations led them both to become more vocal in their proclamations and also to deconstruct their oppressors' ignorance and resistance to share with them another element of Black spirituality, which is compassion.

Lamentations and Compassionate Spirituality

Those who engage with the elements and manifestations of Black spirituality understand the need for continual lamentations to deconstruct the structural systems and programs that oppress Black faculty, staff, and students at predominantly White institutions. The act of lamentations or plaintive requests for relief from oppression and the use of compassionate spirituality to ease the pain of racism in our institutions is an essential manifestation of a Black spirituality. The entreaties from lamentations, as manifestations of Black spirituality, allow Black faculty and staff to maintain hope in the midst of systemic racial struggles. The participants also strongly acknowledged that compassionate spirituality, as manifest from Black spirituality, allows Black faculty and staff to sustain a level of

engagement with their call to vocation that both convicts the oppressors and offers

understanding for their ignorance. *The caged bird ends the refrain and petitions once again.*

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Implications

In this chapter, I interweave and connect the theoretical and conceptual frameworks from the literature review with the data from the research findings in a discussion and examination that illuminates the conclusions and implications of the findings. This chapter begins with a brief review of the tenets of critical race theory (CRT) and the concept of agency. A review of CRT is essential as its framework creates the backdrop for the hermeneutical exercise in the phenomenon of Black spirituality that connects with Agency. The task of interpretation by "turning to the things themselves" as Heidegger, as explicated in Vagle (2014), noted, requires situating ourselves in the proper stance to acknowledge the depth of experiences in the data. Without this acknowledgement, the conclusions and implications simply present the hegemonic rhetoric already populating our discourse.

The concept of agency relates to Black spirituality and to those who have a Black spirituality as a distinct historical, social, ethnic, racial, political, and critical part of their lives in two transformational ways. Agency can be said to be a tool that shapes and forms ways of liberation of thought, action, and self in freedom from outside forces. But agency may also be signified by ideas of constraint as to who a person "is" to use the term as Gertrude Stein did in her poem "Identity" as that which remains defined by those forces from outside (Nealon & Giroux, 2012, p. 255). In this bi-fold manner, agency can be said to place the person in a "double-bind" of sorts that both exists in a free state at the margins and one of concealment under the pressures of constraining forces declaimed but still in power (Spivak, 1993, p. 178).

CRT creates the foundation for examining agency and its implications for identity for Black faculty and staff at PWIs, but also for the institutions in which they work and live by

allowing the data to expose the ways in which it is both controlled and freed in its narratives and presentation. This control and freedom have direct ontological meaning-making in the concept of agency (Bellah et al., 1990; Harper, 2013). The tenets of CRT come with principles and assumptions that provide the framework for discussion and analysis using the theory. The theory passionately reflects upon anti-essentialism, the continual struggle with race and racism in America, Whiteness as property—and from this issue, material determinism, counter-narrative, and finally, interest convergence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Crenshaw et al., 1996).

Another central conceptualization that shapes these conclusions and implications is the understanding of the experiences and manifestations of Black spirituality. A Black spirituality is not simply or completely Black religion or a religious practice (J. Evans, 2012; Giles, 2010; Stewart, 1997; Wilmore, 1998). As noted previously, grouping and interweaving Black spiritual ideologies with religious ideologies is problematic as Black religion is a "diaspora of thought, expression, and experience" (Wilmore, 1998, p. 17). Whereas, a Black spirituality can exist in its own ontology as an ethos and reality apart from strict religious dictates—except for holding God as sovereign.

A Black spirituality consists of elements of African Creation Cosmology (a belief in one central God and a stewardship to the earth), Biblical hermeneutics (life-sustaining interpretations), acknowledgement of the binary consciousness of Black Americans, and an embrace of freedom (creative, intellectual, and spiritual) (Stewart, 1997, pp. 8–12). Each element of a Black spirituality adds to the connections that Blacks have with the Creator, who is not simply a being to be worshipped, but a force wholly involved in their lives. This Creator, Nature, Soul Force God provides refuge, inspiration in creativity and self-

expression, and strength to surmount obstacles in life (Wilmore, 1998; Palmer, 2000). As the data reveals, not every Black faculty and staff member may align with the elements of a Black spirituality, but the concepts that emerge from an analysis of their thematic relationships to the Black experience at public PWIs continues to connect in some forms.

The connections to future experiences were reflected in the participants' revelations from youth onward, but also disconnections. When I was a child and in my early youth, I did not experience that I had any type of agency in my life because of the major issues with my health from birth and the trauma of the abuses I suffered at the hands of the White men my family trusted even in the midst of the "safe" harbor of Black spirituality. Perhaps this lacking was because my faith or my spiritual understandings had not grown, but as the data disclosed, some of the other participants also struggled with this disconnect between their lived experiences and the manifestation of a Black spirituality in their lives. Others, from their youth, found agency through the manifestations of Black spirituality.

For me, and somewhat for Dr. Rhonda and Dr. Malcolm, agency was already interwoven with issues confronted through CRT even before we knew what it was to be essentialized or to have our voices silenced. Our positionality in youth resonates with the research of Shaun Harper (2015) in surveying Black males who had been interviewed by White institutional figures. The Black male students, responding to a fear of the institution, provided answers that were "guarded" and constrained (p. 21). Within this research study, we could use our growing agency to both respond without fear and to have control over the narrative. These realizations about agency, the role of CRT, and manifestations of a Black spirituality provided the backdrop for this research investigation into how we, as Black faculty and staff, persevere in oppressive institutions and relationships. They support the goal

of my research question, which was: "*How do encounters with a Black spirituality manifest in leadership formation and resilience for Black faculty and staff at predominantly White institu*tions?" Additional questions that unfolded from this central question were:

- *How do Black faculty and staff view their spirituality in its context with their roles on their campuses?*

- *What role does Black spirituality play in the experience of academia for Black faculty and staff?*

- *Do the origins or practices of their Black spirituality make a difference in the manifestations in their work in academia?*

- *What evidence exists in the performative aspects of the Black faculty and staff activities that implicate an interconnectedness to a Black spirituality?*

The research findings launch from a hermeneutical platform informed by a Black spirituality, which allows an exploration of the growth of agency and the continual constraints of issues in the lived experiences of Black faculty and staff that are confronted by an examination through a CRT lens. This exploratory inquiry required that I examine the lived experiences of Black faculty and staff in their personal lives before engagement with their professional lives in academia, their experiences while engaging with their colleagues at public predominantly White institutions, and their lived experiences while engaging with the PWI as an institutional entity.

Spirituality As Personal

In our youth, the participants and I each experienced manifestations of a Black spirituality and its influence in our lives in varied ways, but each did have a center in our lives in the Black church. The church provided a space for personal development as well as

deep connections to our communities. It was not simply a space of worship, though for some of us that was quite powerful. The Black church, in our lived experiences, offered spaces of comfort when we did not feel like we fit in, a space of consolation from losses, and a dynamic that supported our beginning inquiry into who we were as Black people and to whom we held allegiances (Our Creator, our families, and our community) (Stewart, 1997). But even as the church provided these spaces and alliances, it also created constraints and produced situations that placed us each in a "double-bind" in our youthful agency as we were both freed in spiritual and cultural expression and constrained by the mores and traditions of the institutions. The data shows that we were both "servant to and served by" the Black church and its ethos (Stewart, 1997, p. 27).

A hermeneutical analysis of the lived experience descriptions of the participants and I must begin with the social, political, and cultural forces that shaped our narratives. CRT facilitates this analysis. The conclusions emerge from the interplay between this foundational thematic analysis and the conceptual analysis centering on agency. In our personal lived experiences before moving into our professional and institutional selves, the framework of CRT's tenets was not a factor easily identified then that appears glaringly profound in our current examination.

In Foucault's power/knowledge dynamic of societal and intellectual structures, as noted by Vagle (2014), we all experienced some kind of absence or loss of power in our lived experiences in our youth whether it was Dr. Rhonda and the entreaty of her parents to always "act right" or Dr. Malcolm in his experience of being shunned, or my experiences with abuses. These experiences though are juxtaposed with Mr. Calvin and Dr. Harrison who each reported garnering a depth of power and knowledge from their youthful spiritual experiences.

Though Dr. Malcolm did state that he found an almost 'intimate' experience with Black spirituality and the church in his early youth, that connection was acutely damaged by the isolation and disempowerment he reported after disclosing his sexual identity.

In my lived experience, it was the silencing by my family, who were at my spiritual center, when I tried to exert agency to expose my abusers that broke that intrinsic connection that previously enjoined me to Black spirituality. What I did not see was the power of the essentialism and exoticism that these White men exerted upon my life that were at work in these painful experiences. As I shared the narrative in this research, it was almost palpable to my ears the cadre of readers voicing a level of misinterpreting this experience as common in their feedback that would follow (Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009). CRT denotes this type of hegemonic assertion as damaging to the identity and agency of Black people because it disallows the problematizing of these actions beyond the dominant moral interpretations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

The tenet of anti-essentialism responds to this equating of experiences to decry the misconceptions and offer ways to counter the narrative in performative ways (Taylor et al., 2016). As Dr. Rhonda noted, it was during the time with her Black sorority that she began to reclaim her agency after experiencing this essentializing in her youth. Dr. Harrison also noted his shift to confront the essentializing he was experiencing in his work at the mental health agency as a point where his family actually aided his recovery of agency. Hiraldo (2010) discusses this type of reclamation in their work examining cultural capital and its ability to deconstruct exoticism that seeks to control and subjugate. Dr. Rhonda used her cultural capital gained from membership in her sorority to regain agency and overcome essentialism

that positioned her simply as a Black student at a White university with only the potential given by the hegemonically controlled institution.

According to Crenshaw et al. (1996), CRT confronts the essentialism placed on Blacks by the dominant culture, which requires Black people to use a cultural hermeneutics to reclaim our authentic cultural elements and ethos. In my lived experience description, I provided insight into the ways that laying claim to soul and R&B music as a source of my Black spirituality, instead of a simplistic narrative of gospel or spiritual musical impressions, allowed me to dissect the essentialized me and expose deeper measures of interpretation. Dr. Malcolm also extended his identity beyond the essentialism even as he resisted the conceptualization of a Black spirituality as a phenomenon in his current life.

Dr. Rhonda reported that her confounding of essentialism in her college life came with support of her community, a distinct movement of the phenomenon of a Black spirituality, when she joined her Black sorority. Before this manifestation, she recalled being essentialized as the "average Black female college student" with a kind of mythical promise rather than the high potential that she possessed. DuBois (1903) points to this type of harm when he noted that essentialism produces a struggle in the lives of Black folks to reinterpret our lives. Stewart (1997) reflected that some of this reinterpretation does take place through the manifestations of the spirit in the Black church, but that this manifestation is not symbolic as visualized from White essentialized interpretations. This manifestation strikes through the illusion of the dominant society's interpretations to reflect a depth of lived experience, which first must reject dominant society's characterizations of Black life in an effort to claim experiences as common enough such that anyone can speak to what is "Black" in our world (Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009).

Dr. Harrison and Dr. Malcolm, each in their own lived experiences, deconstructed the idea of the Black church and how they performed in this entity in ways that could be interpreted to reflect a common experience until the manifestation of the Black church is brought into a hermeneutical and ontological review in their lifelong retrospection. Hiraldo (2010) responds to these shifts in the manifestations in the lives of Black people by extolling the value of questioning interpretations in life with Hegel's (trans. 1977) ideology that stated that if people wish to regain their agency in relation to outside conceptualizations of self that they must extract their subjectivity from this constraining model through using intellectual and emotional reinterpretations to position self as knowledge holder (p. 27).

This work of an anti-essentialism stance aligns directly with the issues of the CRT tenet of Whiteness as Property in that both represent ideologies that value White knowledge and the power of Whiteness over that of Black ideologies and the power of Blackness in cultural, social, and political realms (Tate, 1997). As Tate (1997) reflected in his writing, Whiteness is seen as valuable and Blackness is not only devalued, but if it is valued is seen as only so because it reflects some ideas or elements of the White society and culture.

As was apparent in the lived experience descriptions of Dr. Rhonda, Mr. Calvin, and I, when White teachers in our youth set the value of our education as lower than that of White students, they created barriers that required years of extra efforts for us to overcome (Watkins, 2001; Whiting, 2009; Woodson, 1933). Dr. Malcolm, in his poignant reflection of his lived experience with the high school math teacher, Mrs. R., directly illuminated how a manifestation of Black spirituality first helped him with his struggles with the issue of Whiteness as property and then set him adrift from the community support so intrinsic to his academic success. One can see that this tenet has the ability to cause harm in the lives of

Black people whether directly extracting opportunities or by becoming part of an obstruction between positive manifestations of Black spirituality and those who might benefit. Dr. Malcolm struggled with the dominant society's assertion that Blackness equates to being deficient when he felt he lost the support of the manifestation of a Black spirituality in the community and family support he formerly depended upon as Emdin (2012) notes as a frequent occurrence for Black youth.

This 'ownership' of what is considered valuable and positive in society by the White dominant entities of the United States leads to another tenet of CRT, which is material determinism. This tenet represents ideologies that pronounce that since White entities own the 'materials' in this life that are valuable that they then control and determine what is legitimate knowledge, legitimate power, what is valued and how, and societal positionality based upon these rubrics (Bernal & Villalpando, 2016; Giles, 2010; Yosso, 2005). But as previously noted, with the lived experiences of Blacks in the realm of their Black spirituality, Black people can find the cultural, social, political, and communal ties to a Creator God with boundless love for them and power for change that can combat these racist ideologies. In this powerful manifestation, the Creator God owns us all and all that we possess, so no one human can assert power through ownership of materials in this world.

But Watkins (2001) and Harper (2015) note that the White architects of Black education continue to seek power over the intellectual spaces and knowledge of Black people. Harper (2015) reflects that this practice is especially pernicious in the lives of Black male students at predominantly White colleges. Mr. Calvin presented this issue as he spoke of how he used his commitment to his call through its manifestation in Black spirituality to support and reaffirm the lives of his Black student-athletes and other Black students at his

PWI as their intellectual prowess and value were challenged by the larger White university community. Both he and I rejected that idea that only the words, programs, ideas, and projects of White members of academia have value, and asserted that universities could learn a tremendous amount of knowledge from Black students as they could have from him and me when we were in undergraduate work.

As Giles (2010) reflects, material determinism works to the social and intellectual determinant of all of society by allowing those who possess certain materials or knowledge to determine who has access to the knowledge, how the knowledge can be used, and whose narratives receive attention and acknowledgement as authentic. Charmaz (2016) states that this power over Black narratives is one of the deleterious issues that Blacks must confront. I responded to this tenet in my lived experience, as Dr. Rhonda did, that I use the ancestral knowledge of my elders to deconstruct the material determinism tenet in ways that position the power and influence of this knowledge as transformational to the valuation of material assets.

In the research, Mr. Calvin shared his experiences with striving to own his future and his narrative as a Black man and as a college student-athlete at a predominantly White institution in a narrative that aligns with the issues illuminated by the tenet of material determinism as the college created an environment in which they had control over his personal value and how others valued him. His response, as he reflected, was to remain steeped in his alliance with the manifestations of Black spirituality in his life. The PWI was also operating in the realm of the CRT tenet of interest convergence as well (Taylor et al., 2016). Mr. Calvin's PWI gave him space for a narrative that was shaped to primarily serve them. Dr. Harrison noted this issue in his collegiate life as well.

The issues surrounding interest convergence, as elucidated by Wilder (2013), prompts Black people to identify the ways in which the White dominant society creates narratives of equity in opportunity only when it serves their hegemonic purposes and uses elements of Black culture to deconstruct them. From the research, Mr. Calvin found this to be especially valid when interrogating how PWIs engage with Black student-athletes. Dr. Harrison shared the need for using manifestations of a Black spirituality when he was a college student as well in standing against these denigrating circumstances. I realized the trauma of not being empowered to confront these issues in the abuses of my youth as well as during my college years.

Because exposing the cruelties of my abusers was not acknowledged as beneficial to either the Black community, my family, or the abusers, I was forced to hide this overwhelming shame and pain. As with Dr. Malcolm's narrative on experiencing betrayal in the manifestations of his Black spirituality, I too, at that point, felt betrayed. As CRT aided me in the deconstruction of the negative events and reactions that left me feeling unsupported and devalued, I could engage more deeply in extracting the ways interest convergence and material determinism shaped my lived experiences and continues to do so. Through this examination, I was able to reaffirm my value as posited in manifestations of my Black spirituality.

Stewart (1997) and DeCuir and Dixson (2004) discussed how concerns over interest convergence drive Black people to question motivations by those who tell us that they want to assist us in our struggles. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) write that the idea of altruism is not at the heart of some instances of minoritized people receiving help. But Dantley (2008) reflects that elements of a Black spirituality can work in our lives to assist in distinguishing when

authentic altruism is present. It follows in the essence of the manifestation of authentic community, which is central to the core of manifestations of a Black spirituality.

But the struggle continues, as Bell noted back in his 1987 work "And We are not Saved" with his acknowledgement of the perniciousness of racism, unconscious bias and discrimination in the United States. Dantley (2008) responded with ideas from Cornel West's (1999) works that Black spirituality can hold keys to addressing these demonstrated evils. Race and racism continue to emerge as problematic systemic issues and produce a spectrum of harm-filled environments for Black faculty and staff at PWIs and Black people overall. In our youths, the participants and I felt the pressures of racism in our school classrooms, our counties and cities, and in our family dynamics.

As a child of a multi-racial couple and family, I knew firsthand the taunting and discrimination that the dominant culture could place upon the heads of small children. As Reynolds (2010) reported, some of the hatred grew out of negative stereotyping of Black people and also facilitated the stereotyping. Dr. Rhonda and Mr. Calvin both presented narratives that reflected this insidious power dynamic in their youth. Mr. Calvin reported in the findings that he sought release from these constraints in sports, which contained elements of community grounding in faith and spirituality for him. Dr. Rhonda shared that she found release in her sorority membership and from discovering a deeper connection to the narratives of African elders, which aligns with manifestations of a Black spirituality also.

Though Dr. Malcolm saw the tremendous issues of racism around him in his youth, he was not as quick to respond with ways in which Black spirituality might have helped him survive the sometimes threatening environments in which he lived and learned except as he later noted when he was first confronted with the negative experience with his math teacher.

In that instance of his youth, he was, as Delgado and Stefancic (2012) wrote, confronting racist micro-aggressions as a part of remembering his intrinsic value—a value upbraided by the manifestations of Black spirituality in family and community in his life. All of the participants and I, in the research, relayed that our experiences involved us each finding ourselves in a position of being excluded from the promises bestowed upon us by our experiences with Black spirituality in our youth as aligns with Fordham's writings in "Blacked Out" (1996).

A portion of the negative experience with racism and issues of race in our youth was made worse by White people who disregarded our lived experiences and told us that the harmful malfeasances that were inflicted upon us were not possible any longer because the United States had changed from its racist past (West, 1988). These people would tell us that the world is now "colorblind" and that this practice was the norm and best manner of addressing racial issues. As Tushnet (2016) wrote in his deconstructive work on schools and the law, "We've done enough" in the realm of creating an equal space for minority students, and so it follows that the call to action does not require an answer (p. 3). But as Dr. Harrison and I reflected in the findings from our lived experiences and those of our colleagues and students, the work was far from over in our youth and remains vital today.

Schofield, in his 1986 work, relayed that the idea of a colorblind world can be used as a power mechanism by the dominant society to disallow the narratives of minoritized people to deny transgressions, to alleviate their requirements of social responsibility, and to confer elements of equality onto inequitable situations. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) note that this type of issue, raised by critical race theorists, shows a disregard for the systemic presence of racist hegemony in our lived experiences. Dr. Malcolm shared this concern in his lived

experience in school and in college. I was greatly concerned when I included the narrative reflection of my Pop's experience with his former boss at the grain mill in my lived experience description because of possible pushback and discrediting from neoliberals who wish to deny this level of struggle and suffering.

But the manifestation of a Black spirituality in his life then and my life now would not allow me to hold back. My Pop's experience in my youth can still be found reflected in the professional and institutional lives of Black faculty and staff today. The words of denigration may have changed, but their power still exists. Because these neoliberal voices continue to detract from the presence of systemic racism in our world, the manifestation of the call to vocation, the call to action, and to hopeful resistance remains as a cogent response through Black spirituality. This neoliberalism view of the world evolving to a colorblind state neglects the strength that flows from minoritized groups being able to hold their distinctive identities and communities as is exemplified in manifestations of a Black spirituality.

Manifestations of a Black spirituality can inspire the use of counter-narratives, which are central to the findings of this research and another tenet of CRT. As Judith Butler (2010) presented in her work, bringing authentic voice to the struggles we experience in our lives offers the opportunity for performativity to navigate between our understandings of the dominant culture and the interpretations of selfhood, which can provide powerful positionality for Black people. Because, as Hiraldo (2010) shared, the voices of minoritized people are distinctive and vibrant, Black people can use the voice emerging from our connections to a Black spirituality to reaffirm our worth and purpose. When I shared the narrative of my Pop's experience with leaving his job at the mill and moving to the job at the service station, this sharing provided a counter-narrative to the dominant societal stereotype

of Blacks as "lazy" or of Black men as absent fathers. When viewed through a hermeneutical lens, my youth speaks a counter-narrative that emphasizes the wisdom of my elders (an African spiritual element included in Black spirituality) and exemplar of 'performativity' as relayed by Butler (2010).

Dr. Malcolm also shared this type of counter-narrative in the findings as we discussed our youth, and he responded with the narrative of his times at camp meetings. Though an overarching narrative in the United States for Black Americans has been presented with images of family reunions and gatherings, the deeper interpretations brought forth by Dr. Malcolm transformed the conversation about what these gatherings actually do for Black people, especially our youth. Spivak (1999) acknowledges this dynamic in her discussions of seeing "margin as center" (p. 12). In his counter-narrative, Dr. Malcolm may have been working to erase the margins or re-centering them, as a powerful action in response to a type of "double consciousness" that DuBois (1970) described in his works (p. 47).

Dr. Harrison's narrative surrounding the experiences of finding a relationship with the Black church through the after church food offerings of the neighborhood older lady were, on the surface, a remembrance of time that brought him joy and a connection to the church, but this narrative could also be seen as counter in some ways. His narrative may not be simply a bartering of goods for building relationships. It may have been a manifestation of how a Black spirituality brings people together in community that would not necessarily be enjoined. Interpretation allows us to reflect upon the idea that, as Dantley (2008) noted, this narrative can also reinforce our call to vocation, and reflect the different strategic ways in which the wisdom of elders and ancestral knowledge can be shared that permeate our future lives.

Spirituality As Professional

This permeation of knowledge and power dynamics do tend to flow into our professional lives as demonstrated in the research findings of this study. As reflected in the lived experience descriptions of all the participants, the tenets of CRT and the manifestations of a Black spirituality can align to deconstruct the ongoing issues of racial prejudice and racism in the lives of the participants, including me. In the tenet of anti-essentialism, the findings centered upon the themes of the Black church, community, combative spirituality, and mentoring, Dr. Harrison, Dr. Malcolm, and I each shared manifestations in our lived experiences where our Black spirituality essences provided direction, consolation, and strategies for besting the challenges of essentialism from the dominant societal structures such as our predominantly White universities.

These confrontations with the challenges of PWI institutional structures were, as DuBois noted many times in his writings, a struggle to reinterpret our lives to authentically disclose who we are rather than who we are told we are in our institutions (DuBois, 1903, 1970). Though Dr. Malcolm had begun his rejection of the cultural concept of 'Black spirituality', he remained connected to the manifestations that he valued in his life that supported his survival in a less than amiable campus ideological and intellectual environment. As was apparent in his stance when discussing how counter-narratives worked in his youth, Dr. Malcolm shared agreement in principle, but also extracted value beyond the stricture of the spiritual. His stance also allowed the reconceptualization of how Black people also essentialized minorities in our communities such as in depictions of LGBTQ+ individuals. As Mattis reflected, these types of internalized aggressions toward our own

community members can give added strength to the essentializing from the dominant society and has a lasting effect on how we see ourselves (Mattis, 2002, p. 28).

In the research, Dr. Rhonda agreed with me and other participants that the struggle that DuBois spoke of remains difficult in reinterpreting our lives as Black professionals in higher education. The essentializing of how Black educators teach, do research, perform administratively, or present our viewpoints in meetings requires a resistance that Delgado and Stefancic (2012) propose as a defining element of Black positive presence in environments where we are minoritized and our lived experiences subject to stereotyping. Cornel West (1999) presents the argument that this resistance to essentializing is paramount to retaining our voice and the uniqueness of the contributions entrenched in our Blackness.

In professional settings, the research findings encompassed in the shared narratives also brought forth the struggles with the CRT tenet of Whiteness as property in that each participant presented narratives denoting the disregard by White institutions for knowledge and transformative ideologies that imbue Blackness as a form of cultural and intellectual capital, as noted by Watkins (2001) and Crenshaw et al., (1996). As Solorzano and Yosso (2002) reflected, it is this possession (or claim to possession) of cultural capital by White hegemonic entities that can work to devalue Black education and positions Whiteness as the arbiter of cultural capital.

This offense toward the value of Black knowledge and intellectual credentials unless captured in Whiteness strikes at the heart of the manifestation of Black spirituality that proposes that the elder and ancestral knowledge, along with the ongoing growth of intellectual and cultural knowledge, of Blacks have tremendous value. That value, as proposed, is not simply for Black professionals, but for the entire PWI community, who can

benefit from the conceptualization of a call to vocation, presenting counter-narratives as a voice in combative stance against oppressive structures, and reconceptualization of what it means to live, work, and thrive in community. Mr. Calvin's narrative regarding his students is a primary example of this shift in ideology that confronting Whiteness as property could facilitate. This transformative stance is also apparent in the continual efforts of Dr. Rhonda's teaching and administrative career. Once again, Dr. Malcolm also shares in this stance while separating himself from Black spirituality, but maintaining its necessity in his identity as a Black faculty and staff member at a PWI.

The effects of institutions functioning in the epistemological framework of Whiteness as property directly aligns with their uses of material determinism as their operational strategy. Since the PWIs control the hiring, promotion, and in some cases the visibility of Black faculty and staff on their campuses, they can possess the ability to determine who is elevated in the organization based upon any hegemonic criteria that they wish to impose as they hold the power. These institutional environments also possess the power to control what elements of Blackness the faculty and staff might use in the education of students as well, which can be especially problematic for our education and support of students of color on our campuses as Mr. Calvin and Dr. Rhonda responded in the findings. As Wilder (2013) noted, this positionality affects that valuation of the gifts of Black faculty and staff to the community as well.

Further, when Wilder reflects on this conundrum, he also noted that this positionality of Blacks in PWI settings then become subject to the value that the institution places upon their membership in the PWI (2013, p. 12). If, as Dr. Harrison and I shared in our lived experiences, the institution does not find the our gifts intersect with the interests of the public

PWI, then Black faculty and staff can find themselves ostracized from the overall community and from prospects of promotion and leadership opportunities. Delgado and Stefancic (2012), as well as Crenshaw et al. (1996), and Matsuda (1995), all present this performative action by PWIs as affirming the CRT tenet of interest convergence.

Interest convergence appears in the findings in the context of Mr. Calvin receiving support for his student-athletes when it served the university, but encountering resistance when the students either left a team or were seen as not contributing to the elevating of the PWIs prestige. Dr. Rhonda relayed this concern when she spoke of how her use of African imagery and music into her courses was received differently once the department saw value in spotlighting her work. Yosso (2005) points to this issue in her discourse surrounding how institutions decide whose culture is to be valued and represented and why.

DeCuir and Dixson (2004) allude to the larger issue of interest convergence in their discussion of how interest convergence may occlude the false altruism of an institution. This occlusion positions Black faculty and staff to not trust their White colleagues and administrators in their professional lives. In the findings, I shared events that deeply affected my work performance and my choices in career paths because of this loss of trust that was directly influenced by interest convergence disguised as altruism. As reflected in my lived experience narrative and that of Dr. Malcolm, manifestations of Black spirituality such as centering my call to vocation and reassessing community were the powerful sustaining elements that allowed us to survive difficult moments of betrayal in our professional careers. This conviction from the roots of our lives went deeper than simply providing a release of anger; it provided a strength and space of renewal that cannot be encapsulated in a slogan or distraction as reflected in Dantley's (2005, 2008) writings.

Race and racism and neoliberalism play distinct roles in this interest convergence as critical race theorists discuss in their works. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) and Bell (2004) continually respond to White critics of CRT to explain how pernicious these elements of oppression are in the lived experiences of Black people in the United States. Ignoring or denying these pernicious actions restricts people from opening their minds to the issues of racial disparity that work beneath the surface of their performative existences. The micro-aggressions are especially prevalent at public PWIs where White members of the community may falsely believe that because of some advances made by Blacks in America that the issues of racism and oppression have been alleviated. Schofield (1986) noted that it is important to confront these colorblind mindsets to aid those in this state to reflect more deeply upon their views and perhaps come to some point of acknowledgement of racism's continued effects as Ayers (2005) noted as well.

Neoliberalism, or viewing a colorblind stance in interacting and knowing others as a best practice, denies the inequities of the lived experiences of Black faculty and staff in society and at their institutions. Differences are important, as Dantley (2008) and others reminded us, because they allow people to encounter the authentic lived experiences of others rather than relying on stereotypes and contrived caricatures of the other. One of the issues with the racism housed in neoliberalism is that it subordinates our Blackness as something that is inconsequential.

Dr. Harrison, Dr. Rhonda, and I all shared narratives that included instance of encountering neoliberalism that damaged our psyches and altered our connections to our professions. Once again, it was the conviction of the call to vocation and the wisdom of elders that manifest to aid our overcoming these obstacles and learning how to better explain

our positionality to those with the neoliberalism mindset. When I encountered the instructor who was discussing one of my students in a negative manner without acknowledging the hegemonic obstacles this student, and others like her, had encountered in their academic and personal lives leading to that point, it was the manifestation of the elements of honoring the knowledge of my elders and also honoring the combative spirituality of my call that allowed me to both work to compassionately transform the language and ideology of that colleague and also to remain steadfast in my conviction.

In that moment of compassionate spirituality, as Dantley (2008) might denote it, I shared a counter-narrative that had a lasting effect on that colleague and on my supervisor. Moments such as this one are where CRT comes into full view as a tool of institutional transformation (Harper & Harris, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Tate, 1997). It is a part of the "hopeful resistance" that is a primary element of the manifestations of Black spirituality as reflected in the lived experiences shared by Dr. Harrison and Mr. Calvin as well as from my professional life (West, 1999, p. 28). The voices of counter-narratives at predominantly White institutions in our offices, departments, and campus units allows distinctive voices to rise in the midst of essentialism as relayed in the work of Hiraldo (2010) and Paris (1995). These voices build from the professional level in these institutional areas to the larger institutional environment and carry with them manifestations of a Black spirituality from the findings expressed in this research—even when the narratives emerge from those, like Dr. Malcolm, who no longer identify as adherents to the corporal Black spirituality.

Spirituality As Institutional

At the professional level, manifestations offer inspirational, directional, and instructional elements to the lived experiences of Black faculty and staff at public

predominantly White institutions, and those elements press forward into the larger institutional environment. Within the hegemonic systems and practices of PWIs, the anti-racists efforts centering upon the tenets of CRT continue to find purpose and applicability (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). As such, anti-essentialism efforts remain a strategic response for Black faculty and staff at PWIs. At the institutional level, essentialism takes the form of selecting Black faculty and staff for only certain positions that align with how the institution sees them through their colored lens. It also appears quite dramatically in the promotion practices and use of solutions to campus issues brought by these Black members of the leadership community on campus.

Nealon and Giroux (2012) explain that these practices negate the power of acknowledging differences in the knowledge bases and tools of Black faculty and staff and other institutional figures. Crenshaw et al. (1996), when discussing essentialism, note that the action of essentializing minoritized groups allows institutions to retain power and influence on how these groups are viewed by those around them and also power over how the minoritized group sees themselves. Mr. Calvin shared this experience when discussing how he had been left out of certain highly influential campus committees that could have allowed him to produce greater transformational strategies for the institution. Dr. Rhoda and I echoed this frustration in our lived experiences.

Neoliberalism would tell us that the lack of selection to institutional committees and to selection to only certain opportunities for advancement are only because those Black faculty and staff must not be qualified for these selections. Neoliberalists insist the system is colorblind and that the days of racist or other phobic behavior in academia is over. The battles have been won as they would have Black people believe. However, all of the findings

in the research presented narrative lived evidence that racist practices, whether intentional or unintentional, still abound at our universities. As West (West & Buschendorf, 2014) and Dantley (2008) relayed in their works, the call to vocation requires that Black faculty and staff, who live in the grasp of the phenomenon of the manifestations of a Black spirituality, confront these misguided attitudes with grace but also with the confidence that these action are not right.

Dr. Rhonda so eloquently reflected this in her narrative as she remembered the words of her mother and father to "act right" and how she was called to enlist this performative stance from her institutions. She expressed how deeply affecting the neoliberalism voiced at her university had been in how she felt protected in her academic freedom and in her drive for promotions in ways that also connected to her life as a Black woman. These conflicting points of interaction with her institution are also reflective of how bell hooks (2000) explored the strain of the DuBoisian 'double consciousness" for Black women in academia.

As Dr. Harrison and I responded in the findings of the research, this refusal to view the authentic struggles of Black faculty and staff at PWIs by those who operate the power structures of the institution and those who follow the neoliberal mindset, along with those who are simply racist in their actions, depends upon the material determinism of the institution writ large as Giles (2010) explains in his writings. As the institution proclaims their ownership of the academic, social, and intellectual properties and ideologies of the campus environment, its actions also proclaim whose properties and ideologies are not of value or will not be recognized.

When Dr. Harrison recounted having to leave meetings because his ideas were being overtly silenced or ignored, hermeneutics of manifestations of a Black spirituality required

that he and others look deeper into these types of interactions to better understand what has happened. It is not simply a rejection of one person's ideas, but may be a strategic movement that isolates and denigrates Blackness on that campus. It is imperative that Dr. Harrison stand within this uneasy space, but also to know that the manifestation of his ancestors, his family, his community, and the cultural aesthetic of Blackness as a cultural power are with him bolstered by his Creator God. Even as Dr. Harrison and Mr. Calvin shared how these forces made such a difference in their lived experiences, the epistemology of hegemonic actions of PWI confers only so much listening to these confrontations and concerns.

Within these power dynamics stands the ongoing interest convergence that governs the strategies and actions of the institution (Bell, 2008; Taylor et al., 2016). Dr. Malcolm, in the findings, shared a powerful narrative that expressed the harm of rejection when his concerns for LGBTQ+ faculty, staff, and students were ignored by his institution during recent years even as the struggles of this marginalized group have become starkly visible. Dr. Rhonda's great efforts to remain connected to her students even though her institution wished to place her in different roles was also emblematic of this interest convergence at the institutional level.

The rejection of the mentoring that Mr. Calvin and I find so essential to the success of our students of color at PWIs represents the trauma that can be inflected by these practices into the lives of Black faculty, staff, and students in these campus environments. Again, the manifestations of a Black spirituality are not simply a space of comfort; these manifestations empower resistance, instill an intellect that is equipped to tactically address the critical questioning of outcomes and motivations, and elucidate the scope of the call to vocation for Black faculty and staff.

In these efforts for transformational strategies and in addressing the concerns and issues of implicit and explicit racism and biases at PWIs, Black faculty and staff, such as the participants, in this research can produce authentic reflections of the positive responses established in the manifestations of a Black spirituality. But the voices of the Black faculty and staff require PWIs to listen in authentic ways as well. Counter-narratives produce the reflections as DeCuir and Dixson (2004), and Hiraldo (2010) have stated, but the manifestations of a Black spirituality provide the strength and "prophetic call" to make these claims to authority and action as West (1999) has discussed in his works.

The predominantly White institutions that stand as the backdrop for all of the professional lives of the participants in this study are capable of providing spaces for Black faculty and staff to present their counter-narratives, but we each questioned deeply if they are capable of authentically listening to these voices. When shuttered in our campus areas or the imposed identities that material determinism by the institution has placed upon us, we each continue to give voice to our combative spiritual stance and sing of dreams and promise still restrained from fulfillment in semiotic sign and symbol (J. Evans, 2012). But with the voicing of our concerns and the presenting of possibly transformational ideologies, the findings reflect a questioning of our ontology, but not our teleology. In an exploration of agency from the hermeneutical examination of the findings perhaps the ontological questions may reveal themselves as we turn to them as Husserl and Heidegger (Vagle, 2014) once implored us to do.

Agency

As the research "turned to the things themselves" in hermeneutic interpretation, the concept of agency and its role in the manifestation of Black spirituality in the lived

experiences of Black faculty and staff at predominantly White institutions emerged as both a constructive and deconstructive exploratory resource (Vagle, 2014, p. 78). As Nealon and Giroux (2012) explained, Agency can be said to be a tool that shapes and forms ways of liberation of thought, action, and self in freedom from outside forces (p. 48). However, agency may also be signified by ideas of constraint as to who a person 'is' to use the term as Gertrude Stein (1935) did in her poem "Identity" as that which remains defined by outside forces (in Nealon & Giroux, 2012, p. 55).

In this way, agency, especially when expressed as a concept in the interpretations of manifestations of a Black spirituality, produces a "double bind" that offers both a free state at the margins of our existence and also a state in concealment under the constraints that a dominant entity may disclaim yet still hold in its power (Spivak, 1999, p. 78). In this research, my aim was to position agency as also the ability of Black folks to respond to internal and external forces and to make choices. Agency through the elemental experiences of a Black spirituality in the lived experiences of Black faculty and staff shape the ways in which adherents (and those who are tangentially connected) to respond and make choices in their educational leadership formations and practices.

Yet as Sue (2003) reflects, this agency within a "double bind" is not a simple two-way exchange, but is instead a multivalent discourse with varying points of interchange and disputation. In the manifestations of Black spirituality, agency can be liberative, obligatory, responsive, dismissive, and other actionable exchanges. As Hegel (trans. 1977) noted, the action of agency allows people to be the subject of constraint by the other and be enjoined to freedoms through actions of one's intellectual and emotional sanctuary of self (p.68). Bellah et al. (1990) presented ideas centering upon this type of social dynamics of agency that

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reflect a call to responsibility to both self and also to public (community) duty, which are intrinsically elements of a Black spirituality's manifestations in the lived experiences of Black faculty and staff. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) reflected that agency allows for the claiming of power in CRT, but also requires laying claim to responsibility.

Spivak (1999) noted that the freedom that comes to individuals through the auspices of agency that has placed them at the center of their margin of their identity also places them at the margin of others who may now make claims to part of the individual's identity. This action of agency is reflected in the dynamics of interrelatedness of Black faculty and staff and their communities and colleagues when enacted through manifestations of Black spirituality in their lives. It places them as servant to, and those who are to be served, in institutions. But it is essential to reframe agency at times to view the complexity of its multivalence by acknowledging the marginalization of such agency by institutions who question the inclusion of elements of "faith-based" ideologies. Dr. Malcolm shared his concerns surrounding this agency dynamic in his professional and institutional life as part of his reasoning for not acknowledging Black spirituality in his current lived experiences beyond engrained manifestations.

Davies and Gannon (2012) presented the conceptualization of constraint of agency also as represented in the manner in which institutions foster grand narratives of equality and neoliberalism that replaces individual realities. Parker (1998) describes this negative conception of agency as institutions failing to allow or resisting the ability of campus community members to be known as they are, not as they are defined by outside entities. Dr. Harrison and I reflected in the findings our struggles with this constriction of our institutional agency, and its effects on our students and Black colleagues. It bears repeating though that

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institutional constraints are not entirely or ostensibly centered in higher education, corporations, or other public organizations; constraints on agency can be seen even in the ways in which people may view Black spirituality as enjoined to the White dominant society's Christology.

One of the primary issues in conducting this research was my continual need to pushback upon those who would infer that this work had to be Christocentric rather than focused on the phenomenon of manifestations of a cultural, political, social, spiritual and ethical ideology that is a Black spirituality. As my margin of identity in this research study bumped against the margins of others, it became imperative that I acknowledge this challenge and curate my levels of obligation and responsibility to deny or affirm outside agency in my narrative inquiry. Though some participants remained centered on their agency emerging from their relationship with a higher power, this relationship is a complex one that also includes community, family, educational attainment, and elements of a Black spirituality not exclusive to adherence to Christian beliefs.

Agency in our lived experiences can be viewed throughout the time periods delineated in the research study as multivalent, multi-intersectional, and dynamic in influence. From our youth and in our personal lives, agency each participants encountered the concept of agency in ways that shaped our future leadership and also our connections and manifestations of Black spirituality. For me, in my youth, I had much less agency because of my disabilities from birth. For so long, I had no control over my narrative or how I was allowed to respond to the ways in which others centered the identity of my margin in their narratives they created for me.

My refuge was found in part in the Black church, but more than that, it was the elder wisdom, poetry, music, and art of Black people who shared their own struggles and victories with me that provided transformational moments for me. In the music of Marvin Gaye, I discovered the agency I could own, even in my imperfections. In the poetry of Maya Angelou and the writings of James Baldwin, I discovered that my voice deserved a place of honor and respect no matter its frailties or fears. This counter-narrative of my youth was a phenomenological manifestation of my Black spirituality that, at the time, I could not define or authentically describe, but both freed me and also held me to an understanding of a purpose for my life beyond the struggles.

For Dr. Rhonda, she, like Dr. Malcolm and Dr. Harrison, found agency in her youth from singing in the church. Though Dr. Malcolm no longer ties his current agency to the church or one particular religion, both Dr. Harrison and Dr. Rhonda still hold fast to the belief that the Black church is a space where they can rekindle lost agency and find freedom from societal constraints that seek to diminish their agency as reflected in the work of Watkins (2001). Mr. Calvin, also responded in the interview and survey that he felt his church and religion were a major part of his maintaining agency in his youth and moving forward. But it is interesting to note that both he and Dr. Harrison also listed "hope" as a resource for their agency that allowed them to resist 'evil' in their worlds. This "hopeful resistance" is at the heart of Dantley's (2008) writings on spirituality and education (p. 8). Dr. Rhonda reminded me in our interview conversation that her agency emerging from manifestations of her Black spirituality also evolved in her youth from the African music and art that her family shared with her. What Dr. Rhonda reflected can be seen in direct confrontation to the material determinism of White Christian practices and is in correlation to

her present positionality in the construct of her teaching pedagogies. It also speaks to the counter-narratives she developed as a part of her membership in a Black sorority in college, which as Harper et al. (2009) noted, is a powerful affirmation of agency in the maturation of Black college students.

The agency of my youth, as reflected in my lived experience description, was meant to be marked by combative spirituality and resistance, but instead was marred by abuse and disempowerment for the most part until college. However, as I shared previously, these traumas, when navigated with the soul and spirit of Black cultural aesthetics, allowed me to speak to the oppression and also to find support in the sustaining manifestations, which is important to note as I move forward into my professional life. Mr. Calvin and I agreed that our Black spirituality could, at times, constrain us during this time of our lives as the caring for community and family sometimes lead us to have a "heart too big for our britches" to quote my grandmother Irene.

However, this concern, as we grew older, transformed into an agency relationship with social justice that continues to drive us to combative spirituality for the betterment of our communities as a part of our call to vocation. In an expression of concern for the Black youth of today, both Mr. Calvin and Dr. Harrison expressed that they were encountering more and more youth who did not view elements of Black spirituality as central to their agency. They instead were living in a world where Whiteness as property perceptions instructed them in the belief that only things that are valuable are those that White society deemed as such, which negates the promise of agency in Black spirituality (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

But the promise of agency can be stifled by those in the Black community as well as Dr. Malcolm shared in his lived experience description. For a young man who found his drive, ardor, and spirit in the church—even the love of his life—it was devastating to have the community that offered him these gifts take them away when he emerged into his own being as a LGBTQ+ individual. The anti-essentialism work that Dr. Malcolm performed echoes the similar identity agency issues that other participants reflected in their encounters with White hegemonic forces. As a subject to others' essentialized views of manhood and relationships, Dr. Malcolm found himself, not oppressed by racism, but by sexism and homophobia. To sustain his agency, he moved his marginalized identity to the center of his life and began to exclude the encroaching of the center/margin of the Black church in an act of material determinism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

For Dr. Rhonda and I, the act of material determinism was not available in a perceived manner in our early college years as shared in our narratives in the research. We both lived in identities ensconced in imposter syndrome and daily habits of code-switching while fighting to ignore oppressive narratives from the White majority campus environments at our PWIs. Our agency remained forestalled by signs and symbols around us that valued White knowledge, White social status, and White bodies more than ours giving Whiteness as property primacy in worth and power in ways formalized in the work of Nealon and Giroux's (2012) writings on agency and identity. As imposters, we did not belong and were required to align our speech, thinking, and actions to those of our PWIs in order to succeed academically and communally.

The research findings illustrate that it was primarily the manifestations of a Black spirituality that allowed us to not just survive, but to also thrive in the midst of the oppressive

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campus cultures. As West (West & Buschendorf, 2014), Dantley (2008), and others relayed in their works, answering the call to vocation and having a combative spirituality stance toward oppressive acts and semiotics can be transformative in elevating the agency of Black people. Dr. Rhonda, Dr. Harrison, and I all had this type of transformation in our college years. Mr. Calvin found his transformation by delving deeper into his religious practices—even having another baptism during his sophomore year of college to ward against the evils he felt pressing upon him from his peers and teammates. As noted previously, for him, agency is inextricably tied to his religious practices.

Mr. Calvin's agency in his youth continued to grow, as he shared that his faith grew in his professional life in academia. As Watkins (2001) noted, education is a place where agency and identity for Black people are challenged continuously because of both the material determinism and policies steeped in interest convergence in the PWIs where Black faculty and staff are employed. From the findings, it is clear that Dr. Harrison, Dr. Rhonda, and I experienced this conflict as well along with struggling through the neoliberalism of our colleagues that also detracted from our agency as they insisted upon defining our margins (Spivak, 1999).

The neoliberalism even questioned our need for agency as represented in both my encounter with my supervisor during my early career and the harsh incident between Dr. Rhonda and her department chair in her early teaching as well. The colorblind mindset disallowed the prospect of the need for agency to combat oppressive environmental issues and confront racist tones by pronouncing that the work to fix this issues had already been completed and the change accomplished even as the harm of hegemonic policies that

restricted professional growth and advancement were very much alive and functioning (Taylor et al., 2016).

As with the diminution of my agency when I encountered the racist during the work in children's theatre, the research findings identified segments of our professional lives when we, as Black faculty and staff, had to present strong counter-narratives to regain selfhood and agential power. Mr. Calvin spoke quite frankly and sincerely that he wished he had relied more on his call to vocation from his Black spirituality to aid in raising his voice in righteous discontent during his professional career. His responses represented a loss of agency that he continues to work to re-establish especially as he now understands that his combative stance toward oppressive forces can also be "a blessing to the oppressors" around him, which Gooden and Dantley (2012) also point to in their writing.

In the research findings, my narrative continued to fall under the shadow of the abusers from my youth and sadly this pall remains over my agency as a professional when encountering White hegemonic figures in academia. To be steadfast in my authentic self, my narrative requires me to share the honest misgivings and mistrust and pains of still having to serve those who mis-serve me that entangle and subvert my agency. Through the support and space to redefine my selfhood that are garnered from my community of friends, colleagues, and the spirit, my voice does produce counter-narrative to the subjugation, but in opposition to the neoliberalism's voice, these battles are not yet won. When Dr. Harrison shared in the findings how difficult it was to be in an institution that seemed to honor only Whiteness as rightness, the echoes of a voice silenced rang true to my narrative as well.

Our institutions struggle to honor the talents and gifts of many Black faculty and staff in ways that demonstrate acknowledgement of value and understanding of purpose. The

manifestation of the call to vocation that incites Black faculty and staff to enjoin themselves to students and colleagues of color in mentorship relationships (in homage to ancient African traditions of passing along knowledge, values, insights, wisdom, and strength of character) goes unheeded by institutions that do not find worth in actions, programs, or knowledge that is not theirs to own or from the culture of Whiteness. All of the participants relayed narratives that bolstered the idea of mentorship as a part of their call to vocation, and these narratives were not simply about following a call or supporting minoritized members of a community; they are entrenched in agency. By mentoring young Black minds and bodies, Black faculty and staff act as vital elements in the formation and solidification of agency for these students at PWIs (Hikes, 2005). The performative act, to bring forth the imagery of Judith Butler again, also shares in the development of agency for the mentor as well as they honor their talents in this craft in spite of sometimes being ignored by their institutions (1997).

This mentorship and bolstering of agency can also be instrumental in the recruitment of Black faculty and staff at PWIs as reflected in the research findings as well as being elemental to the retention of these Black institutional members (Ladson-Billings, 2005). The strengthening of agency also allows for resistance to flourish in a constraining environment because mentored people feel protected and empowered (Hall, 2006). Hopeful resistance, which as presented earlier, is a distinct manifestation of a Black spirituality that signals call to vocation, community responsibility, and agency to create and foster positive change all in its reach. But as Dr. Harrison, Dr. Rhonda, and I all shared, predominantly White institutions in higher education must not continue to view resistance as rebellion.

When PWIs view resistance as rebellion, one of their first actions is to restrain selfhood and seek to control agency. A more constructive response to resistance is to resolve to see it as service to the community, which then imparts additional agency and responsibility for right actions from all parties according to the reflections by many of the research participants. This wisdom from the research findings speaks to the further implications of manifestations of Black spirituality in the lived experiences of Black faculty and staff at public predominantly White institutions in higher education as they have unfolded from engagement and intertwining with tenets of CRT and agency.

Implications

With "critical love" as Dr. Harrison would state it, and with a sense of urgency couched in the lamentations expressed in the lived experience descriptions and discussion from this research, the implications for active transformational work at PWIs is our collective prophetic voices sharing our gifts. These implications are not presented as signifiers of rebellion, but instead of a compassionate spirituality that also invokes our critical voices and experiences to creatively gift our institutions with wisdom to redesign, redefine, and recognize spaces of communal improvement for not just Black faculty and staff, but for our entire institutional community. The songs of the caged bird are not simply for its own freedom, but also institutional freedom from enacting oppressive structures and systems that harm themselves as well.

In analytical terms, this research works through the integration of analysis of CRT and the conceptual theory of agency with the hermeneutics of phenomenology of a Black spirituality elucidate implications for the phenomenon itself, for educational theory, for predominantly White institutions, and especially their students, faculty, and staff. These

implications are presented with the hope that they be taken in hopeful resistance to the narratives and practices currently used to constrain the leadership potential and community engagement of Black faculty and staff at PWIs. In the end, these research outcomes simply bespeak a yearning for the dominant hegemony that operates in the power/knowledge dynamics in higher education to "act right" and authentically "listen" to the caged voices of the Black members of their communities.

Black Spirituality As Phenomenon

As Dantley (2008) described in his powerful writings and speeches in the past decade and a half, the phenomenon of Black spirituality can have a positive effect on intercultural relations, education policy formation, and practical educational pedagogies in the development of Black leaders in higher education as well as the P–12 systems because this phenomenon aids in the deconstruction of colonized thought and power dynamics. The influence of manifestations of a Black spirituality upon higher education could encompass shifts in how faculty and staff are hired, retained, how students are recruited, educated, and retained, and how staff find connections that bring them community and closer to their call that works to retain them as well.

Another implication for the phenomenon of a Black spirituality exists in its inherent requirements for adherents to use their prophetic call to vocation to pronounce "hopeful resistance" and formulate strategies of "combative spirituality" to bring voice authentically to upper level leadership at PWIs and to the overall higher education community. This implication places both the responsibility of sharing voice on the Black faculty and staff, and also the requirement and responsibility of authentically listening on the campus community.

It is this prophetic call that Cornel West (1999) proclaims as an essential power and energy of combative spirituality, which resides in Black spirituality.

The previously noted implications bring forth the overarching implication for Black spirituality in the context of its place in higher education leadership formation and in the social, political, intellectual, and ontological construction of the environment of the predominantly White institution—the call to vocation and community must be heard. Whether these manifestations of Black spirituality come from Black faculty and staff or through authentic listening and revelation by the dominant agency on campuses, manifestations of a Black spirituality lays claim from its roots in positive transformation for the empowerment and growth of communities and the ardor that offers resiliency in the calls to vocation it demands to its worth and positionality as margin as center (Spivak, 1999).

Black Spirituality As Educational Theory Contributor

The deconstruction of Foucault's power/knowledge dynamic by the counter-narratives and anti-essentialism of the manifestations of Black spirituality creates space for a reexamination of educational theory surrounding the operational concepts that are possible to bring into conversation with theoretical analyses such as social identity theory, post-modern theory, cultural identity theory, queer theory, structural functionalism, and constructivist theories (Nealon & Giroux, 2012). As Watkins (2001) reflected while echoing Emile Durkheim, education is a "social thing, but it is also a political thing" and in this classification, the elements of manifestations of a Black spirituality align with education, and thus allow engagement with theoretical frameworks that connect to education.

In particular, structural functionalism's tenets that examine social cohesion and conflict as an agent of change in organizations directly intersect with this research study's

findings and conclusions (Taylor et al., 2016). Placing the phenomenology of Black spirituality in conversation with CRT and the conceptual framework of agency was a beginning step in creating possible intersecting points with other theories which can continue the examination of manifestations of Black spirituality to discover additional systematic analysis that may prove transformative for higher education.

Black Spirituality As Combative Institutional Agency

Before beginning any suggestion of implications of Black spirituality in higher education institutions, it bears importance to share the assertions of Stewart (1999), Giles (2010), and J. Evans (2012) that Black spirituality is not simply or completely the Black church or Black religion or Christology as was relayed repeatedly in the research. Black spirituality can include African creation cosmology, biblical hermeneutics, acknowledgement of the dually consciousness of Black people in the United States, and the ardor of hopeful resistance. Each of these elemental forces within a Black spirituality bestows different manifestations in the lived experiences of Black people and allows for a reclamation of agency and voice. Therefore, an essential implication of manifestations of a Black spirituality in higher education institutions is its power to transform agency, not only for minoritized community members such as Black faculty and staff, but also the colleges and universities as well. Learning to listen authentically, as was emphatically presented in the research findings, would allow these higher education institutions to accomplish positive reforms without the specter of revolt continually hanging as a pall over their campuses (Watkins, 2001; Woodson, 1933). This listening is a prevalent narrative in the writing of Ladson-Billings (2006), Tate (1997), and Harper (2015).

Once again the implication for transformation of agency as a combative realignment is not meant to sow seeds of disengagement between minoritized campus members and the hegemonic entities that currently control their campuses; it is instead designed to facilitate a cooperative alliance between these disparate spaces to counter racist and other discriminatory issues on our campuses in a unified combative front. In this way, Black spirituality can operate in structural functionalism's theoretic ways to maintain the social cohesion of the institution, but also allow for conflict to formulate change and shift agency (Nealon & Giroux, 2012; Taylor et al., 2016).

By listening to the voices brought forth through manifestations of Black spirituality on our campuses, institutions may find better ways to embrace the agency of freedom that fosters creative, intellectual, and spiritual (as in communal) strengthening and expression in service to the betterment of the institutional mission and vision. In this shift in positionality, predominantly White institutions can begin to understand that silencing the narrative data for minoritized members of their campus communities is not in the best interest of the institution.

They begin to also understand that respecting quantitative data while belittling the qualitative data not only constrains the agency of some Black faculty, staff, and students, but also can lead to validity and reliability issues (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harper, 2013) as was noted by multiple participants in this research. Finding and using the intersections of the transformative elements of a Black spirituality with the vision institutions have for their community offers a greater possibility of having an institution where members who wish to serve well are also served well. As continually noted, this framing of intersectionality does not require a campus to align itself with some particular religious tradition or Christological

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belief system. Manifestations of elements of a Black spirituality expand and extend much

deeper and further than this essentialized ideology.

Implications for Black Student Recruitment, Support, and Retention

To be in service to the community is a central element of the manifestations of Black

spirituality and especially as it directs Black faculty and staff toward supporting Black

students at PWIs. This call to service carries with it the implication that these Black faculty

and staff can have a positive impact upon the lives of Black students at their institutions, but

it also has implications about who these campus leaders can be of transformative service to

White students and other students of color as well. It is this community responsibility that

Giles (2010) notes in his research that brings agency and influence to the lived experiences of

Black faculty and staff, and also provides the opportunity to create exemplary models of

engagement that non-Black faculty and staff may learn to use. Though "learning" a call to

vocation is not how the manifestation of the phenomenon works in most cases, the attributes

of this call can be shared as temporal points of transformation in engagement pedagogies

(Hayes, 2012).

For Black students, as relayed in the research, viewing visible signs and symbols of

caring and mentoring in the environments of higher education institutions can have

tremendous potential to raise their mental tenacity, to facilitate intellectual growth, to foster

community, and to present a campus that is inviting in an authentic way (Stipek, 2006). As

Pope (2006) noted regarding students and campus environments, "Community is more than

just where they learn and live" (p. 48). It includes the people, places, and events that shape

their lived experiences, as Harper (2013) shared in his examination of the elements of college

campuses that fostered success in Black male college students and as Hikes (2005) noted in

her analysis of the factors in the persistence and attainment rates of Black females at higher education institutions.

Using the depth of the concept of community in the phenomenon of Black spirituality on PWI campuses may create this type of authentic community and sustain and celebrate its true worth and value to Black students seeking admission, navigating the decisions surrounding whether to remain, and providing the support to thrive and strive toward degree completion. Multiple participants in this research, including myself, honored the work of mentoring and finding community in our engagement, persistence, and degree attainment in college; all of which were amplified by the efforts of faculty and staff (whether Black or White) who deeply manifest a call to vocation.

Implications for Black Faculty and Staff Recruitment, Support, and Retention

At the heart and soul of this research study, and to make a final connection to the research question, stands the implications for Black faculty and staff in their lived experiences as members of a community at a public predominantly White institution and that positionalities effects upon their leadership formation. Overarching areas that impact leadership formation are recruitment, support, and retention; if Black faculty and staff are not positively recruited, do not feel supported in their work, or are not being retained, their leadership formation can be deeply negatively affected. As with the issues surrounding recruiting, retaining, and supporting Black college students on our campuses, these issues also abound in the lived experiences of Black faculty and staff (Brown & Brown, 2012). One might infer that the two are inextricably intertwined because of a central issue that Watkins (2001) explicated in his writing on Black education—"the Negro question" as he brought forward a concern noted by DuBois decades earlier.

Ostensibly, Black faculty and staff enter into an institutional environment where they may be welcomed, but where they find it difficult to find place and community because of requirements of their call to vocation and their need for authentic community engagement. Their work, because of the call to vocation, requires that they do either more than what the dominant hegemony of the institution requires of them or perhaps actions and pedagogies that operate in direct conflict with the institutional ideology (either spoken or unspoken). Black spirituality's implications in the instance of conflicting goals and ideologies is to produce counter-narrative rooted in the Black faculty and staff's call to vocation and community responsibilities and to create spaces for anti-essentialism's agency in the face of the institution's material determinism.

Sadly, as disclosed by numerous authors such as Watkins (2001) and Harper (2015), some Black faculty and staff fall into a space of "accommodationism" where they accept their place in the institution and their subordinated relationship to the hegemony of the dominant organizational structures. The implication for those standing with the phenomenon of manifestations of a Black spirituality is to produce moments of "critical love," as Dr. Harrison had shared, to engage these Black faculty and staff to offer them support in claiming their freedom and agency.

Black spirituality's manifestations in these lived experiences offers the same impactful opportunities for mentorships and creative engagement to enhance community that are part of the implications for Black students also. Giles (2010) words of entreaty to Black leaders on higher education campuses rings authentic in this implication as he calls upon these leaders to infuse mentoring and teaching pedagogies in relation to other Black members of institutions where their agency and community have been diminished or never truly

acknowledged. It is the power and the authority of the manifestations of a Black spirituality, as conceived and actualized by Black faculty and staff at PWIs, that requires them to follow their prophetic calls to vocation by shepherding and supporting others in communal relation to create spaces for their voices to emerge in compassionate combative spirituality and transformative agency.

All these implications then converge upon deconstruction and redefinition of policies, programming, processes, and place that foster authentic practices in recruitment of Black faculty and staff who then may find communal connections that create environments in which they feel welcomed and heard, thus wishing to remain as a member of that community, Manifestations of the phenomenon of a Black spirituality, at its practical depth and center, requires that Black faculty and staff not only bring voice to the counter-narratives that must confront issues and problematic strategies of predominantly White institutions, but also that we operate in invitational ways to engage leadership at PWIs in ongoing transformative dialogues that require us to a mentorship level that reaches to the highest level of the PWI leadership.

As Dr. Harrison so profoundly stated in the research findings, "I can show you better than I can tell you." In the case of Black spirituality, we are called to both show and to tell of the struggles and issues that constrict the lived experiences of Black faculty and staff at PWIs; we do this with our voices in all their dynamics to shake those around us, to move them, to upbraid ideologies, to offer critical love and compassion, and to break the silence imposed upon us for conceptual transformations (Duncan, 2002). Though a list of recommendations or suggestions for progress by public PWIs may be a request of the White hegemonic institution, my response to this lamentation is to offer space to reenter the

implications set forth above, and engage with them to begin their journey of discovery. *And so the caged bird still sings.*

Future Considerations

The implications and conclusions of this research study illuminate a spectrum of ontological and teleological strategies that could prove to produce significant transformational ideologies and performative actions for predominantly White institutions in higher education and also bolster agency and positionality for Black faculty and staff's lived experiences in their campus environments. From evolutions in anti-racists ideologies and pedagogies at PWIs to engagement with diverse theories to deconstruction of institutional subservience by some Black faculty and staff, future considerations for the inclusion of elements of manifestations of Black spirituality at public PWIs should become a part of the dialectical interchanges that direct the mission, vision, and practices of these higher education institutions (Burley et al., 2010; Kaba, 2005).

The conceptualization of a Black spirituality as a constructive methodology calls to action responsible community members to support anti-racist ideologies and pedagogies at PWIs such that it becomes a critical responsibility achieved in combative spirituality. But the call is also to critical love as both the participants of the study and many of the cited authors agree. Anti-racist confrontation of institutional issues requires the acknowledgement of neoliberalism's toxic practices, confounding of structural entities that historically obstruct progress on racial and culturally responsive issues and concerns, and a hermeneutical redesign of what it means to be a responsible member of the campus community as reflective of principles of a Black spirituality.

Altering the ways in which PWIs and others interests with the narratives of minoritized members of the institutional community extend beyond the analysis through CRT achieved in this study to encompass relational contributions from other theoretical framing ideologies. The elements of the manifestations of a Black spirituality has multiple intersecting points with Black Feminist and Queer educational theories that should be explored as they also present opportunities for elevation and a greater depth of examination of factors effecting the lived experiences of minoritized groups at PWIs. In alignment with the lamentations and the counter-narratives associated with the phenomenology of Black spirituality, Queer and Black Feminist theories amplify the authentic voice and deconstruct systemic oppressive issues to support positive transformation of institutions for the betterment of the entire campus environment—and perhaps higher education writ large.

This ability of the manifestations of a Black spirituality to transform the agency of individuals and institutions in higher education through theoretical applications that inform policy and practices operates in a multivalent manner as do manifestations of a Black spirituality in their larger sense. But they also should be a part of inclusive excellence efforts with educational programs of study at higher education institutions also. One dynamic possibility for the implementation of thematic manifestations of Black spirituality into curricular elevation is in educational leadership and counseling programs. Both the inclusion of authentic representation of minoritized voice and narrative and the pedagogical work of mentoring as elder leadership and shepherding could become essential curricular professional tools developed during these type programs.

The difficult task of engaging in critical dialogues that educational leaders encounter could also benefit from allowing intersectionality with the anti-essentialism actions,

respecting of lamentations and combative spirituality's counter-narratives from Black spirituality and nurturing of "critical love" practices in support of dialogic inclusive practices. By entering into these professional and institutional conversations equipped with the inclusive practices required by the responsibilities and respect for community central to the manifestations of a Black spirituality, public PWIs may find a communal ground from which to better address in authentic ways the struggles of minoritized and majority members of a campus community.

Black spirituality's prophetic call to confront intra-racial micro-aggressions (community self-hate and derision) in professional environments can operate as agential in Black leadership against an epistemology of subservience and obligation with our own communities as well. The call to proclaim our worth and responsibilities to other Black faculty and staff remains a pivotal element in the transformation of PWI oppressive ideological and practical constraints on the institutional lived experiences of Black faculty and staff. As essential to the examination and re-conceptualization that must occur to positively shift the oppressive and disenfranchising environments at some PWIs is the requirement of manifestations of a Black spirituality to call all Black faculty and staff into communal unity. This call does not require that we all agree on all matters, but instead that we agree to work in community to create answers that are just, equitable, and respectful of the ongoing struggles of our people.

Conclusion

As I reflected at the beginning of this research, this work was never simply about completing a dissertation or research project. This work is rooted in my call to vocation, which requires me to continually and prophetically respond to the struggles of my Black

educational community. The influences that inform the phenomenon of a Black spirituality in my lived experiences engulf a wide spectrum of cultural, social, communal, and spiritual manifestations. My voice does not simply emerge from the Black church, as I began with the reflection on the songs and relationships with this entity in my youth; it gyrates, snaps, and leaps from the literature and ancient wisdoms of the powerful voices I encountered throughout my life as it did with the other participants in this study.

Through this research, narratives were shared to underline the authentic nature through which Black faculty and staff at public predominantly White institutions in higher education wish to perform in their lived experiences. These narratives unfolded from the phenomenology of manifestations in a Black spirituality even for participants such as Dr. Malcolm who did not align themselves with the precepts of the Black church or Black religion. As the interactive analysis with CRT and the concept of agency disclosed, manifestations of a Black spirituality do not require the strict alignment with Black religious practices, but are more informed by the cultural, social, political, spiritual and communal aspects that transmit from the elder wisdoms, community engagement and support, and emergent creative rhythms.

The ancestral wisdom, call to vocation, prophetic call to responsibilities toward community, and hopeful resistance each were explicated through the lived experience descriptions shared in the participants' narratives in ways that were always "seeking" and "demanding" a place in the dialogue at public PWIs. These voices carry a spirit of transformation that also offers authentic translations of the struggles of Black faculty and staff at PWIs into a palatable and plaintive lamentation on oppression and derision they encounter each day at their PWIs. The plaintive and palatable lamentation resurrects images

and voices from my youth with my grandmother, Irene, as we shared beautiful moments in her garden.

As I shared at the beginning of this sojourn, in my thoughts many days in the midst of my work with struggling students and distressed Black faculty and staff, the songs and wisdom still resonate. These echoes of knowledge from centuries past manifest within me especially during this time which has brought forth the long-known struggles with systemic racism that Blacks encounter in the United States and the global pandemic. I still feel this marvelous spirit in the lyrics my grandmother would sing because that is also what helps me persist. "I don't feel no ways tired. I've come to far from where I started from. Nobody told me that the road would be easy. I don't believe you brought me this far to leave me."

When my journey toward a doctorate is befouled by those with arrogance and spite, I hear those power-laden words, and my sojourn strengthens. As my research delves into how a Black spirituality manifests itself in the professional lives of Black faculty and staff at predominantly White institutions, I find resilience and resistance in the lyrics of my youthful gospel, negro spiritual, the words of Maya Angelou and James Baldwin, and the sweet pain of Marvin Gaye. I alter the words of my grandmother a bit to reflect where I have come to in this journey, " The manifestations of Black spirituality keep me going so that I can keep other Black folks going."

In this research, the authentic narratives of lives lived with some manifestations of the phenomenon of a Black spirituality deconstructed and reformulated the intellectual underpinnings of this phenomenon through the development and exploration of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks to begin the combative and compassionate task of strategically engaging in institutional transformation. The conclusions and the implications

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that proliferated from the examination of the thematic trends of the research findings lead to an array of actionable suggestions for predominantly White institutions in the positive engagement with the struggles and needs of their Black faculty and staff, and also for Black faculty and staff in their engagement in their own campus communities.

Using the power of the lived experience descriptions as auto-ethnographic portals into these struggles through a phenomenological lens exercised a level of agency that sometimes alludes the voice of Black faculty and staff at public PWIs. Finally, the phenomenon of the manifestations of a Black spirituality in the lived experiences of Black faculty and staff at PWIs in this research offered authentic hopeful resistance and resilience for voices caught and caged for so very long, and encourages the songs of resistance to continue. I encourage readers to journey into the playlist in the appendices again … and remember Angelou's poetics as well.

> *The caged bird sings with a fearful trill*
> *Of things unknown, but longed for still*
> *And his tune is heard on a distant hill*
> *For the caged bird sings of freedom*
> *—Maya Angelou (1983)*

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Appendix A

Participant Form

Information to Consider about this Research

Dissertation: WE SHALL RUN AND NOT BE WEARY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND COUNTER-NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE SUSTAINING ELEMENTS OF BLACK SPIRITUALITY IN THE ACADEMIC LIVES OF BLACK FACULTY AND STAFF AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS (Title changed)
Principal Investigator: Clifford Poole, MDIV, Ed.S, ABD
Department: Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership
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Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair: Dr. Louis Gallien, gallienlb@appstate.edu (Chair changed)

You are invited to participate in a research study about Black Spirituality's manifestation in educational leadership for Black Faculty and Staff at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs).

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to provide both an interview and complete a narrative questionnaire, or you may opt to only complete the survey questionnaire. You are also invited to submit a "Lived Experience Description", which draws upon your reflection of a time/moment when your spirituality was manifest in your life in higher education. The benefits of this research are that it may assist PWIs in exploring new ways to recruit, retain, and support Black faculty and staff. Shared narratives may also provide these institutions with a catalyst for systemic change in their work environments. The risk from participation are only those inherent in any disclosure situated in an intense arena such as Black Spirituality. Participants may experience strong emotions associated with their positionality in PWIs and within their connections to their spirituality.

Participants will not be compensated for their participation in the research.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions on the questionnaire or continue with the interview for any reason.

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact Clifford Poole and/or Dr. Louis Gallien for additional information.

The Appalachian State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has determined that this study is exempt from IRB oversight.

By continuing to the research procedures, I acknowledge that I am at least 18 years old, have read the above information, and agree to participate.

I agree to participate in the study.

_____   _____   _____

Signature   Date

Survey Protocol

Black_Spirituality_and_Higher_Ed

Thank you for completing this brief questionnaire on Black Spirituality and your role as a Black faculty or staff member at a predominantly White higher education institution. The questionnaire should only require about 25 to 35 minutes of your time. All responses are confidential. If you need assistance with the questionnaire, please email the principal investigator, Cliff Poole, pooleco@appstate.edu

Brief Description:

Whether our belief systems or perceptions of our interrelationship with the world around us provides us with some groundings in spiritual practices, or if we have developed sustaining practices of our own, Black Faculty and Staff at Predominantly White Institutions of Higher Education have persevered in the midst of micro and macro-aggressions from within academe. The goal of this survey is expanding further qualitative studies to begin to share the narratives of those of us who have experienced these aggressions and utilized our "Black Spirituality", as it manifest in our lives, to confront, combat, call in, challenge, and create new ways of being to sustain us, encourage us, and educate those who can benefit from our resilience.

* Required

1. Do you have spiritual practices? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes No

Maybe

2. Do you consider your practices to be rooted in your identifying as being Black?

Mark only one oval.

Yes No

Maybe

3. When did you first begin following any spiritual practices?

4. How spiritual was your family as you grew up? *

Mark only one oval.

Very Spiritual Generally Spiritual Only slightly Spiritual

Religious, but not Spiritual, but not Religious

5. Is there a specific spiritual figure from your childhood or young adulthood that you remember? Why do you think this spiritual figure is memorable to you?

6. Did this spiritual figure have any influence on your life, work, and choices?

Mark only one oval.

Yes No

Maybe

7. Have you ever felt like your Black spirituality was being held against you in your life? When and Why?

8. Would other people say that you are spiritual?

Mark only one oval.

Yes/ No

9. Explain why and how

10. Do you think that Black spirituality exists beyond church/religious services? How?

11. What do you believe is the most important thing about Your spirituality for you?

12. Please share why you believe this

13. Would you say the institution that employs you understands your spirituality? Why or Why not?

14. Did Black spirituality affect your educational choices? (Where you went to college or professional school) If so, in what ways?

15. Have you ever stopped to meditate/pray/center yourself in the middle of your work day? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes No

Maybe

15. What was the reaction of others in your work place if they saw you praying or doing some other spiritual reflection?

16. Do you refrain from any spiritual expressions in the workplace? If so, why? If not, why not?

17. Do you know your supervisor or department lead's feelings on your Black spirituality or spiritual expression in general? How would you describe their feelings or reactions?

18. Do your students in your classes (or the students you work with in your department) seem to make assumptions about your spirituality?

Mark only one oval.

Yes No

Maybe

19. Do you believe that a "combative spirituality" (a spirituality that confronts people who seek to do others harm in some way or that stands up for those who they see as being oppressed) is a useful stance in higher education? Why or Why not?

20. How would you describe your daily/weekly Black spiritual practices? What do you think sets them apart from the spiritual practices of non-Black colleagues?

21. Would you like to further the cause of supporting the transformation of educational leadership in higher ed and agree to a brief (one hour and a half) follow-up interview in late June/Early July? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes No

Maybe

Please provide your name and email address if you would like to participate further in this dissertation research. Thank you so much for your support!

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

General Interview Guide

Black Spirituality, Black faculty and staff, and Educational Leadership

General Research Question

How does the phenomenon of Black spirituality manifest as a part of Black faculty and staff's work environments at predominantly White institutions?

Interview Questions (Building a personal narrative)

1. What formative experiences shaped your spirituality?
2. What are your spiritual practices?
3. What does "Black spirituality" mean to you?
4. What are the social or community activities or organizations that are a part of your spiritual practices?
5. What educational activities have aided you in developing spirituality practices?
6. What personal life developments through your family and/or peers have been useful to you in the evolution of your Black spirituality?
7. How does your Black spirituality tie into your "call to vocation" in higher ed?
8. How do you view Black spirituality in the context of your work in higher education?
9. Tell me about a time that your spirituality helped you through a troubling or difficult situation at your university?
10. How does your spirituality affect your engagement with people you work with?
11. Do you believe Black spirituality has a fundamental place in higher education's recruitment and retention practices for Black faculty and staff?
12. What ways do you think Black spirituality can be an effective tool for transforming predominantly White higher education institutions?

Created by Clifford Poole (2017)

Appendix D

The Phenomenological Playlist from Manifestations of a Black Spirituality

This playlist was created and curated from and through the phenomenon of developing and defining this dissertation within the author's lived experiences with manifestations of a Black spirituality. Each chapter's sub-playlist contains seven songs that have manifested in powerful and transformative ways in the study's participants' lives within a Black spirituality. Just as Black spirituality is not monolithic, neither are the ways in which these songs can be heard and experienced. Listening in the order as presented is only one way of encountering the phenomenology through song, prophetic voice, lyric, culture, and call.

Within these songs are beautiful elements of a Black spirituality that shares tenets of critical race theory, agency, prophetic voice, call to vocation, and the wisdom of Black elders from decades and centuries past. Diversity of thought, reflection, expression, identity, and being are represented in these works of art. All videos and songs are property of their respective creators, publishers, or their designated distributors. My inclusion of these works of art in this playlist in no way should be construed as a claim to ownership of them.

Chapter 1: Introduction
GrandMa's Hands Bill Withers (1973) https://youtu.be/TdrChyGb574
I Don't Feel No Ways Tired Rev. James Cleveland (1978) https://youtu.be/_Cw75v2uqts
How I go over Mahalia Jackson (1955) https://youtu.be/l49N8U3d0Bw
Sacred Space India Arie (2020) https://youtu.be/hUg2KP8R4TM
Ain't No Stopping Us Now McFadden and Whitehead (1978)
https://youtu.be/ZEWkZb11pss
Welcome 2 America Prince (1958–2016) (2021) https://youtu.be/HJtxSdTL488
Songbird Fleetwood Mac (1977) https://youtu.be/wTi19MPOvDw

Chapter 2: Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks
Lean on me Bill Withers (1972) https://youtu.be/fOZ-MySzAac
Fight the Power Public Enemy (1989) https://youtu.be/mmo3HFa2vjg
The Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like That) Digable Planets (1993)
https://youtu.be/cM4kqL13jGM
Me, Myself, and I De La Soul (1989) https://youtu.be/P8-9mY-JACM
I'll Take You There The Staples Singers (1972) https://youtu.be/Qsl4A9hZEto
True Colors Cyndi Lauper (1986) https://youtu.be/LPn0KFlbqX8
Count On Me Whitney Houston and Cece Winans (1996) https://youtu.be/ae2iX6vZCoM

Chapter 3: The Literature Review
Sign 'O' the Times Prince (1987) https://youtu.be/eWmnc7oapaE
Tennessee Arrested Development (1993) https://youtu.be/6VCdJyOAQYM
America Prince & The Revolution (1985) https://youtu.be/Pq98n2j75XA
Rise Up Andra Day (2016) https://youtu.be/zlOfgLL_qi8

I Say a Little Prayer Aretha Franklin (1968) https://youtu.be/7Ifw8JhDBvs
I Look to You Whitney Houston (2009) https://youtu.be/5Pze_mdbOK8
Bang, Bang, Bang Tracy Chapman (1992) https://youtu.be/IrRA7WMI1ks

Chapter 4: Methodology
Mountains Prince & The Revolution (1986) https://youtu.be/_WmPeLOLDnA
Scenario Tribe Called Quest (1992) https://youtu.be/Q6TLWqn82J4
Sometimes It Snows in April Prince (1986) https://youtu.be/iBThX4o2_KI
Talk'n About a Revolution Tracy Chapman (1988) https://youtu.be/Xv8FBjo1Y8I
Strength, Courage, and Wisdom India Arie (2000) https://youtu.be/u6P4jI8t-0I
What's Going On Marvin Gaye (1972) https://youtu.be/H-kA3UtBj4M
Wake Up Everybody Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes (1975)
https://youtu.be/OOxoeGL3tTo

Chapter 5: Research Findings
Ain't Nobody (love me better) Chaka Khan (1983) https://youtu.be/Z3DT625kSyo
Thieves in the Temple Prince (1990) https://youtu.be/FyfF20APPrA
Unpretty TLC (1999) https://youtu.be/g2gy1Evb1Kg
Landslide Fleetwood Mac (1975) https://youtu.be/WM7-PYtXtJM
Family Reunion The O'Jays (1975) https://youtu.be/i6zsg2GbLqc
Live 4 Love Prince and the NPG(1991) https://youtu.be/SzGwYUESxf8
Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler) Marvin Gaye (1971)
https://youtu.be/57Ykv1D0qEE

Chapter 6: Discussion
Optimistic August Greene (feat. Brandy and Common) (2018) https://youtu.be/YE2lgI5nnQE
I'm Here Cynthia Erivo from "The Color Purple" (2016) https://youtu.be/E-Flmo07ddk
New Power Generation Prince and the NPG (1990) https://youtu.be/_Hd_EkQo9gg
Say Yes Michelle Williams (feat. Beyonce and Kelly Rowland) (2014)
https://youtu.be/2MZxf-lQD-o
U.N.I.T.Y Queen Latifah (1993) https://youtu.be/f8cHxydDb7o
We Are Family Sister Sledge (1976) https://youtu.be/uyGY2NfYpeE
Glory John Legend and Common (2014) https://youtu.be/HUZOKvYcx_o

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Implications
Lovely Day Bill Withers (1977) https://youtu.be/bEeaS6fuUoA
People Get Ready Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions (1971)
https://youtu.be/VOXmaSCt4ZE
Golden Jill Scott (2007) https://youtu.be/4QCXr79Rkcw
Reprise of Bang, Bang, Bang Tracy Chapman (1992) https://youtu.be/IrRA7WMI1ks
A Change is Going to Come Sam Cooke (1964) https://youtu.be/fPr3yvkHYsE
How I Got Over The Roots (2010) https://youtu.be/zI4D1QOLGuM
I Was Here Beyoncé (2011) https://youtu.be/i41qWJ6QjPI

Vita

Clifford Odell Poole, Jr. was born in the United States, to Odell and Velma Shuford Poole. He graduated from Alexander Central High School in North Carolina in May 1983. In the fall, he entered the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to study Biology, which in his final terms changed to multiple other majors and interests. In December 1987 he entered Appalachian State University and was awarded the Bachelor of Science in Political Science and Public Administration degree. Beginning in autumn 2007, he entered Emory University to complete a Master's in Divinity (specialization in pastoral counseling areas), which was awarded in May 2012. In the summer of 2013, he accepted a research assistantship in Adult and Developmental at Appalachian State University and began study toward an Educational Specialist degree. The Ed.S. was awarded in May 2014. In summer 2014, Dr. Poole commenced work toward his Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Appalachian State University.

Dr. Poole is a volunteer for international relief (especially in the Caribbean). He is also a member of Alpha Phi Omega and Alpha Psi Omega and numerous other national organizations. He continues to provide mentorship and academic support for marginalized student populations in the southeastern United States. He has over twenty years of experience in academic advising and student support services. He resides in Boone, N.C. and Atlanta,

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