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Towards Racial Reconciliation: An Oral History Inquiry Examining Race And Reconciliation In The Context Of Mercer University's Beloved Community

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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, TOWARDS RACIAL RECONCILIATION: AN ORAL HISTORY INQUIRY EXAMINING RACE AND RECONCILIATION IN THE CONTEXT OF MERCER UNIVERSITY'S BELOVED COMMUNITY, by JOY REBECCA KENYON, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University.

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Towards Racial Reconciliation: An Oral History Inquiry Examining Race and Reconciliation in
the Context of Mercer University's *Beloved Community*.

Under the Direction of Dr. R. Lakes

ABSTRACT

Informed by archival data and oral history interviews, this dissertation explored stories of the lived experiences of the stakeholders of Mercer University's *Beloved Community*. The goal was to gain insight into how higher educational institutions (HEIs) engaged community partners to address long-term racial injury through the process of racial reconciliation. This study included the insights of 18 participants in a racial reconciliation project named the *Beloved Community*; which began in 2005 and was sponsored by Mercer University, a private higher educational institution; formerly affiliated with the Georgia Baptist Convention. An aim of the project was to sustain a frank discourse within a safe, public forum, that would address the present and past injuries of racial segregation at the local church level and include the injured in problem solving. Mercer is one of few formerly segregated southern universities engaged in such an endeavor. The research questions were: 1) What do Mercer University's *Beloved Community* stakeholders perceive as the primary goals of higher educational institutions in addressing racial reconciliation? 2) What are Mercer University's *Beloved Community* stakeholders' perceptions and lived experiences of racial reconciliation, through this project? 3) What patterns and contradictions are there in the stakeholders' stories about their perceptions and lived experiences of racial reconciliation? The findings validate the research of Androff (2012) that reconciliation is a slow process, occurring at multiple levels, and provides insights into such an endeavor at a local level. Further, this study found that enactment of the project is influenced by social identity,

collective memory, and intergroup interaction. A culture of social reconciliation, in the form of building interpersonal relationships and creating forums for racial dialogue, was the dominant form of reconciliation found within Mercer's *Beloved Community*. This study is significant in examining the role of HEIs who include community partners to extend sustained scholarship, learning, and civic engagement.

Key Words: Community engagement scholarship, Higher educational institutions, Racial reconciliation, Wicked problems, Beloved community.

Towards Racial Reconciliation: An Oral History Inquiry

Examining Race and Reconciliation in the Context of

Mercer University's *Beloved Community*

by

Joy Rebecca Kenyon

A Dissertation

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Degree of

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in

Social Foundations

in

Educational Policy Studies Department

in

the College of Education and Human Development

Georgia State University

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2017

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2017

DEDICATION

Hebrews 10:35

This dissertation is dedicated to the beloved community throughout the ages.

Cast not away your confidence it has great recompense of reward!

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I first give praise and honor to Father God, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, The Comforter, and my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for life, love, joy, faith and peace. Thank you for reminding me: hope maketh not ashamed and never to cast away my confidence.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of higher educational institutions (HEIs) increasingly extends beyond the traditional goals of teaching and research (Boyer, 1996; Neave, 2006; Munck, McQuillan, & Ozarowska, 2012). Progressively, their purpose is understood to incorporate a crucial third mission (Jongbloed, Enders & Salerno, 2008), also known as community engagement, which aims to tackle seemingly intractable or “wicked problems” (Ramaley, 2016). In a rapidly changing world, internationally, HEIs continue to transition through a calculus of iterative responses to address complex, social, economic and environmental challenges (Nungu, Gounko & Kariwo, 2014). Innovative collaborations that foster new forms of HEI community engagement inspire a rethink about the fundamental nature of the academy’s role in society.

This dissertation explores how HEIs are shaping the capability of diverse communities to work together to broach *wickedly* complex problems, and how simultaneously, they are themselves thereby being transformed. Informed by archival data and oral history interviews, this study explores accounts of the lived experiences and perceptions of 18 participants connected to Mercer University’s racial reconciliation project, the *Beloved Community*.

A private higher educational institution, based in Macon, Georgia, Mercer University was founded in 1833 and is a former affiliate of the Georgia Baptist Convention (GBC). This study explores the importance of three nuanced *Rs* as it examines the project’s mission to confront the complexities of *race, religion, and reconciliation*. Mercer’s *Beloved Community* seeks to engage Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s vision of a fully inclusive United States democracy (Dunaway, 2016). Members of the *Beloved Community* thus join the ranks of those who espouse the credence of faith in

the pursuit of social justice (Thurman, 1949; King, 1957; Campbell, 2005; Wallis, 2016). This dissertation is the first research study of its kind for the population. The study addresses the paucity of literature that investigates *wicked* problem-solving and the phenomenon of racial reconciliation, through the prism of HEIs' civic engagement.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Defining the *Beloved Community*

In a speech, entitled *Birth of a New Nation*, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, “The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the *beloved community*. The aftermath of nonviolence is *redemption*. The aftermath of nonviolence is *reconciliation*” (King, 1957). In so doing, he established a connection between faith and community-based activism as a solution to tackle systemic racialized violence. The religious overtones of Dr. King’s speech naturally aligned with a frequent observation regarding the most racially segregated hour in US society. He recognized the pathos of Sunday mornings, when churchgoers gathered, primarily assembled along racial lines. As a Baptist minister, King contended that segregation in the pews revealed a dreadful peculiarity of the US Christian family: dysfunctional, undemocratic, and arguably, even atheistic.

He contended:

Unfortunately, most of the major denominations still practice segregation in the local churches, hospitals, schools and *other church institutions*. It is appalling that the *most segregated hour* of Christian America is eleven o’clock on Sunday morning, the same hour when many are standing to sing, “In Christ, there is no East or West.” Equally appalling is the fact that the most segregated school of the week is the Sunday school.

(Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as cited in Washington, 1991, p. 15)

At heart, King's observations, bolstered by his non-violent campaign, brought into question the realization of the American Creed, and more precisely, what it meant to belong. That is to enjoy with equanimity the unequivocal rights and responsibilities of democracy, as a fully-fledged citizen. *The Declaration of Independence* had after all championed the credos of one nation, united under the same God. As a nation, America was birthed upon the premise of self-evident truths, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" (National Archives, n.d., para.1). King was instrumental in awakening the nation's conscience to the nightmare realities of racial injustice.

Dr. King, as did his contemporaries in the struggle for civil rights, experienced repeated arrest, public vilification, imprisonment, death threats, and intensified scrutiny from federal government agencies. Perhaps most heart-wrenching was the lack of support from fellow clergy. As revealed in his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, he contended that "shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will" (King, 1963a, para.19). Somehow, Dr. King sustained hope. As well as a faith related to an emerging sense of his life's purpose, he also found sustenance in the beloved community, which was his vision of all-inclusively redemptive social relationships. Indeed, Marsh (2005, p.50) suggests that the need for the beloved community intensified, directly as a result of a reckoning with the "deep wounds wrought" in American society.

In a 1956 recording of a message entitled *Paul's Letter to American Christians*, King urged:

Segregation is a blatant denial of the unity which we all have in Christ. It substitutes an "I-it" relationship for the "I-thou" relationship. The segregator relegates the segregated to

the status of a thing rather than elevate him to the status of a person. The underlying philosophy of Christianity is diametrically opposed to the underlying philosophy of segregation, and all the dialectics of the logicians cannot make them lie down together.

(King, 1956a, para.16; King, 1956b, audio file)

Throughout his 39 years of life, King addressed the deep wounds and injustices of racial segregation, and his dream of the beloved community expanded to a broader universalism, which he believed was central to the gospel. King clearly considered that the desegregated church possessed the wherewithal to stand against racial justice, and become part of the solution to heal attendant hurts.

In the succeeding years since Dr. King's speeches, a modicum of progress has occurred, evident in civil rights legislative gains, such as, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In more recent times, the two-term election of President Barack Obama, the nation's first president to identify as an African American, has even caused some speculation about the US finally becoming a post-racial society (Frank & McPhail, 2005).

However, King's remarks regarding America's most segregated hour sadly remain a truism today. Racial polarization amongst US churchgoers still thrives. Research conducted for the 2012 National Congregations Study (NCS), shows that eight-in-ten American churchgoers still attend services at a place where a single racial or ethnic group comprise at least 80% of the congregation. The statistic of 20% of church attendees who worship in congregations where no single racial or ethnic group dominates has only slightly risen, from 15% in 1998, and 17% in 2007 (Chaves & Eagle, 2015).

More than 50 years ago, as Sam Oni—who became Mercer University's first residential Black student—all too soon discovered, the racial divide in churches was unrelenting.

Challenges to the *Beloved Community*

In the fall of 1963, with the admittance of Sam Oni, who was born in Ghana of Nigerian parentage, Mercer University became one of the earliest Georgia Baptist Convention affiliated higher educational institutions to become racially desegregated. (With the admittance of Patricia Tillman nee Smith, and another Ghanaian, Ed Reynolds, Wake Forest University was the first major private university in the south to desegregate just a year earlier). As well as the culture shock, and personal adjustments needed to continue his education, Sam Oni also had to reckon with a host nation gripped in deep social and political unrest. He was soon to realize that one of the greatest challenges he faced was neither on campus or in the wider culture, but rather at local area churches (Holmes & Bryan, 1969; Campbell, 2005; Oni, 2009). Oni disrupted the religious status quo, because as a young, Black male, non-violent activism simply meant showing up at a segregated church. Ideologically as Dr. King described in his *I have a Dream* speech, Sam's efforts symbolized an attempt to collect on a promissory note that banked on US democracy, dismally returned due to "insufficient funds" (King, 1963b). Given the news, that reached his home in Ghana about the turbulent times in the US during the post-World War II civil rights period, as well as the warnings he had heard from a foreign missionary Harris Mobley, Sam was hardly naïve in his attempt to desegregate either the university or local churches. In an interview reported in the Macon/Bibb County *Telegraph*, he reminisced, "I felt it was a mission the good Lord had for me, and I had to carry it out" (Oni, as quoted in Castillo, 2011, para.12).

Although two local area churches, Tattnall Square Baptist and Vineville Baptist each in their own way shunned him, they were far from atypical for the era—especially given their history. Both churches were part of the Southern Baptist Convention, a group that split from the general assembly in 1845 "when northerners contested the appointment of slaveholders to missionary positions" which

spurred their slavocracy southern counterparts to break away (Harvey, 1997, p.6). Indeed, along with many other church denominations in Georgia, and other southern states, churches were often jingoistically pitted as the last bastions of hope for segregationists (Manis, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Keane, 2008).

From the start of his relatively peaceable days at Mercer, Sam found that something was seriously awry on the church scene. Although he succeeded in matriculating into Mercer, officers at the nearby Tattnall Square Baptist Church, advised their minister to deliver him a very direct message. Within days of his arrival, Sam and his first-year roommate, Donald Baxter, were visited by a “distinguished looking gentleman” who knocked on their dorm door (Oni, 2011). Their first-time visitor, the minister of Tattnall Square Baptist Church had come on a surreptitious mission to politely inform them that Black people were not welcome to worship with the all-White congregation. He further made it clear that any attempt to do so would result in arrest (Baxter, 2011). Although shocked by this visit, Sam and Don had already agreed, based on previous recommendations, that (although it was further away) they would attend Sunday worship services at Vineville Baptist Church. Now the two students, as well as negotiating the newness of their circumstances, found themselves reassuring an elder and ordained minister that desegregation would in fact not impinge on the carefully procured sanctity of his church.

In a 2011 Founder’s Day speech at Mercer University, Oni and Baxter were to meet again nearly 50 years later to share their recollections. Sam mentioned that Benjamin E. Mays, then president of Morehouse College, had already met with him a few days before he arrived at Mercer to let him know that he was welcome to attend Morehouse. Established in 1867 as a private, all-male, liberal arts historically African American college, the institution had successfully graduated many prestigious alumni, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (class of 1948) and noted theologian Howard

Thurman (class of 1923). It was also based in Atlanta, Georgia, which was steadily becoming known as the city too busy to hate (Young, 1974, audio file). Despite a troubled record of racial violence and discrimination, at the time, Atlanta was also gaining a reputation as a racially progressive southern city. This was partly due to the existence of racial justice organizations such as the Committee on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). However, Sam felt compelled to go to Mercer which was in Macon, some 90 miles south of Atlanta. In a 2014 speech, Oni recalled explaining to Dr. Mays—given some of the rigors of his post-colonial missionary schooling in Ghana—by now he was well acquainted with “paying the price” for his faith and education (Oni, 2014a, video file). Don Baxter, for his part, was left shaken and “badly hurt” by their encounter with the Tattnall Square Baptist Church minister, to the extent that this double standard shattered his initial vocation to himself become a minister. He ultimately decided not to pursue this goal, and instead trained to become a physician (Baxter, 2011, video file). The reception was not much better at Vineville Baptist Church who admitted Sam after a series of several tense rounds of voting. Despite a seeming breakthrough, he soon discovered that continued membership was untenable, as “you could cut the atmosphere with a knife,” which assuredly, “did not contribute to a worshipful state,” and so he left Vineville soon afterward (2014a, video file).

Tattnall Square Baptist and Vineville Baptist, like many other US churches at the time, funded and supported missionaries to African and Asian countries for decades, yet championed racial segregation at home (Willis, 2005). In fact, the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC), was an overseas endeavor of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) founded in 1850, just five years after the Convention broke away on the issue of slave-owning missionaries, operated on the West African coast—known as the slave coast of Gold coast. Thomas Jefferson Bowen, the first Southern Baptist

missionary sent to Nigeria, was in fact from the state of Georgia; he was sent to, amongst others the Yoruba, which the same ethnic group as Sam Oni's ancestry. In over one and a half centuries of existence, the NBC's work has flourished. Today the church operates several hospitals and schools across the country and in 2002, opened Bowen University, in honor of its namesake (Nigerian Baptist Convention, n.d.). This was therefore a bizarre state of affairs that Sam Oni's admittance brought to light.

The Inception of the *Beloved Community*

Dr. John Marson Dunaway, Professor Emeritus of French and Interdisciplinary Studies was not to know when he joined Mercer University in 1972, that 33 years later he would be called upon to initiate the *Beloved Community* racial project. In an account shared on the university's website, Dr. Dunaway explained that in the summer of 2003 he went on a transformative mission trip to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) which formed the basis of Mercer's *Beloved Community* (Mercer University, 2016). This experience was life changing, not least because for the first time in his nearly 60 years of life, as a southern, White male, albeit from a traditionally privileged caste, in this paradigm Dunaway was now part of the racialized minority. Moved by the genuine warmth of fellowship that he enjoyed on this trip to Africa, Dunaway remembered the experience with affection, and even conceivably, as a homecoming. During the visit, he spoke at the DRC's Université Libre des Pays des Grands Lacs on the topic *Do You Have a Dream for Tomorrow?* Unsuspectingly, as a precursor to the *Building the Beloved Community* annual symposia, his talk intertwined biblical stories and Dr. King's dream of racial unity.

Returning to Macon from the mission trip, after another transformative personal experience Dunaway, felt further compelled to act:

I had a vivid dream myself, in which I saw myself at Mercer with a group of scholars (both African-American and White) whom I had gathered to address the same topic... *Building the Beloved Community*. I was profoundly moved, and from that day I set to work organizing an annual *Building the Beloved Community* symposium on the Mercer campus. (Dunaway, 2016)

Shortly afterward, he connected with a fellow Maconite, Dr. Lonzy Edward, who was a prominent African-American attorney, and the senior pastor of Mt. Moriah Baptist Church—an historically African-American church located in Macon, established in 1886. Dr. Dunaway recalled responding to a local newspaper article, placed by Rev. Dr. Lonzy Edwards who wrote, “encouraging local religious leaders to come together to talk about overcoming the racial segregation of local churches” (Dunaway, 2016). Edwards, who would soon become Dunaway’s close friend and mentor, had effectively thrown down a gauntlet. A planning committee evolved, and with funding from Mercer University and local clergy, a series of racial dialogues began. The discussions tackled the various challenges of congregational separation, denominationalism, and social inequities. Camaraderie, friendships, and collaborations emerged, bolstered by the consistency of a structured, annual symposia entitled *Building the Beloved Community*. Usually over the course of two days, the gathering has continued each February since 2005. It consists of guest keynote speakers, panel discussions, and talks, housed on the university’s campus, where shared meals, including an evening banquet, are offered, free and open to the public. Today, the *Beloved Community* consists of stakeholders striving to make sense of racial reconciliation and formulate achievable goals to address the racial injury of church and community.

The Goals of the *Beloved Community*

The *Beloved Community* falls under the auspices of Mercer University's *community engagement* mission. The project specifically seeks to "foster closer collaboration among all congregations of worship" (Mercer University, 2016) and thereby redress the racial divide amongst congregants in the local community of Macon/Bibb County. One of its stated goals is to "help the church demonstrate unity through collaboration across denominational and racial boundaries, based on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s concept of the *beloved community*" (Mercer University, 2015a). At the time of this study, Mercer's *Beloved Community* had expanded to include clergy from the Jewish and Islamic faiths. Dr. Dunaway specified that central to this task:

The church should demonstrate unity as we collaborate across *denominational* and *racial boundaries*, and we promote such activities as: sister church relationships; pulpit exchanges; community-wide unity services; partnerships in community development and service; formation of small action groups on specific appropriate issues. (Dunaway, 2016)

This multi-faceted approach has its roots in building strong interpersonal connections and relationships built on trust. The importance of the annual *Building the Beloved Community Symposium* highlights the role of HEIs' activism in creating safe spaces for public discourse on such contentious issues as race and reconciliation.

Engaging the *Beloved Community*

Judith Ramaley makes a case for the importance of community engagement as a strategy for linking scholarship and practice:

Engagement can tap resources that would otherwise not be available to our institutions and our communities because they represent tacit knowledge and expertise accumulated by individuals or small groups of residents within the community. Engaged work draws upon many perspectives to frame questions, explore options, and develop and then apply solutions to challenges, both in the local community and beyond. (Ramaley, 2014, p.9)

This understanding is based on the Boyer (1990) model of scholarship in which discovery, interpretation, and application of knowledge are democratized through an interdisciplinary relationship between the academy, and the external stakeholders. The resulting diverse partnerships provide a variety of perspectives, experiences, and capabilities upon which to tackle *wickedly* complex problems. Ostensibly, this calls for a representation of HEIs as grounded knowledge centers, or what Munck, McQuillan and Ozarowska (2012) refer to as “socially embedded institutions,” “anchored in a community” which prioritizes a firm commitment on their part to the “social transformation and the pursuit of knowledge for the benefit of the community” (p. 26).

Dr. King’s observation associating the most segregated hour in US society with church attendance also included a variety of secular entities as *church institutions*. King understood there to be interconnections between the church and fields as diverse as business, law enforcement, health and education in the wider society. He noted that with a few exceptions, such as Baptist minister Reverend Earl Stallings’ example in Alabama and the Catholic church’s desegregation of Spring Hill, the church was an “arch defender of the status quo” (King, 1963a, para.32). However, his concerns were hardly limited to Sunday’s segregated hour, it was the rest of the week that he was also concerned about. As one listens to the tenor of his speeches, it is clear that Dr. King was not absorbed with church desegregation alone, but rather in disrupting its

fostering of an ideological credence for White supremacy. The racialization of *sacred* spaces and images, spanned the *material* quality of all aspects of life, authenticating social, economic and physical harm. King (1963a, para.4) contended that “we are caught in an unescapable network of mutuality.” His concern was with the *sin of segregation* which “distorts the soul and damages the personality” (King, 1963a, para.13). Analysis of the implications of Dr. King’s oft quoted reflection offers a more nuanced appraisal of the connection between churches and other social institutions, theorizing a hindrance to the hope of unity, and thereby subversion of the conception of a beloved community.

It is against this backdrop that a richer conceptual understanding of HEIs’ third mission of community engagement may be viewed. Specifically, in the case of Mercer University’s *Beloved Community*, Dr. King’s beloved community provides a window through which to broaden the scope of authentic engagement.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Racial separatism persists as a phenomenon in US society. Dr. King’s appraisal of the most segregated hour occurring on a Sunday morning still rings true. Mercer University’s *Beloved Community* project seeks to address this challenge. The efficacy of racial reconciliation as a solution to the problem of lingering congregational segregation is unclear for three main reasons. First, because of indeterminate social practices, second, because of contested understandings, contradictions and gaps in the literature and third, due to a paucity of research on HEI community engagement in the field of congregational racial reconciliation. As a result, the role of HEIs, such as Mercer University, in forming community partnerships to solve *wicked problems*, such as continuing racial segregation in local churches, needs to be further examined.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine Mercer University's engagement, as a higher educational institution, in seeking solutions to the *wicked problem* of congregational racial separatism. This goal was attempted through the analysis of archival documents and primary source oral history interviews that explored the participants lived experiences and perceptions of race and reconciliation in the context of Mercer University's *Beloved Community*.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This dissertation examines HEIs' community engagement and their ability to address wicked problems as interpreted through the storied lives of participants in Mercer's *Beloved Community*. Oral history interviews were used to collect the data and provide an opportunity for the participants' voices to be added to the historical record. The overriding questions relate to the research goal, which is an examination of HEI civic engagement in addressing a final taboo of racialization in the pews. This study contextualizes racial reconciliation and examines the social factors which shape its definition, desirability, and attainment.

The guiding questions to support the research are:

1. What do Mercer University's *Beloved Community* stakeholders perceive as the primary goals of higher educational institutions in addressing racial reconciliation?
2. What are Mercer University's *Beloved Community* stakeholders' perceptions and lived experiences of race and reconciliation through this project?
3. What patterns and contradictions are there in the stakeholders' stories about their perceptions and lived experiences of racial reconciliation?

To better understand the academy's changing role in US society, a tacit goal of this study is to explore the contested literature, interpret archival and oral history research data and examine social practices. This study thereby contributes to emergent research in the field of *wicked problem solving* and HEI community engagement. The investigation of the stories told by 18 participants involved as stakeholders, enabled a greater understanding of the scope and limitations of higher educational institutions' community engagement at the current time in US history.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Previous studies in the field of HEI engagement on matters of race have primarily focused on race based policies surrounding access to higher education and evaluations of campus racial climate (Park, Denson & Bowman, 2012; Nussbaum & Chang, 2013; Cokley, Obaseki, Moran-Jackson, Jones & Vohra-Gupta, 2016). There is an identifiable gap in the literature that specifically examines the phenomenon of congregational racial reconciliation initiatives of formerly segregated universities (Park, personal communication, August 5, 2015). Consequently, an intention of this dissertation is to better understand, through the oral history narratives of 18 stakeholders, how HEIs engage in the process of racial reconciliation with community partners to address long-standing racial injuries. The significance of history and collective memory is not lost. Unless the antecedents of social ills faced today are addressed, we are doomed to repeat them.

This dissertation is the first qualitative research study that involves the collection and analysis of primary source data for Mercer University's *Beloved Community* and adds to the historical record by offering transcripts and recorded oral history interviews to a public repository.

Personal Justification

On a personal level, this dissertation was informed by my experiences as a Black immigrant to the US. Like Sam Oni, I have a post-colonial British heritage, with the “self-division” that Fanon (2008, p.8) describes. Namely, there is a dislocation of language, time, culture, history, and space. Although not exclusively, yet poignantly, in the immigrant there exists super-hero and *shero* power, identity-altering hybridity.

I am the youngest of five siblings, born to Jamaican parents who immigrated to England during the late 1950s. The city of Birmingham, which is near the geographical center of the country, was also at the heart of the Industrial Revolution. As the UK’s second largest city, recovering from heavy bombing during World War II, with its thriving car industry, canals, and history of innovation, the region attracted my parents and other overseas workers who brokered the start of a revolution of an entirely different, but similarly transformative kind.

My parents were part of the *Windrush generation*, a popular term used to represent the influx of Caribbean immigrants welcomed by the United Kingdom government to rebuild the country after World War II. The phrase, derived from the converted battleship, *Empire Windrush*, which began taking West Indians and other immigrants to England on June 22, 1948, is apt, given their subsequent combative encounters. This phase of UK immigration symbolized the beginning of contemporary multiracial and multicultural Britain, redefining what it meant to be British. The arrival of Afro-Caribbean immigrants to the UK played a significant role in reshaping the country’s social life and national identity (Phillips & Phillips, 1998; British Library, n.d.). Their tenure marked a knowledge revolution for all concerned, not least for the general populace, but also for the immigrants, many of whom had only intended to remain in the UK for a few years (Phillips, 2011).

My parents, Stanley Benjamin Kenyon and Ethlyn Elizabeth, journeyed in the late 1950s from Jamaica to England, the *Motherland*, one small island to another. Precariously perched, they sojourned, suspended on a tightrope of hope. As they tottered between abject failure and indefatigable hope, like others they audaciously built a family, community, and ultimately, a legacy in the UK. Their immigrant experiences must have been fraught with recodifications of their social identity within a litany of lived experiences and choices.

My father and I were in the hospital at the same time: I, because I was born with jaundice, and he, because his kidneys were failing. The family meandered from one floor of the hospital to the other—to visit the newborn and the dying. Both fighters, we made it home, but then he died just a few months later, the ultimate act of *irreconciliation*.

I never knew him; as I grew up, so began my work as an unofficial oral historian, trying to piece together the fragments of the past to discover Stanley Benjamin Kenyon. Who was the handsome, short, stocky-looking gentleman in those black and white photographs? What could be determined about *this* particular immigrant, who had left behind, in the ebb and flow of his short, 47 years of life, a 35-year-old widow and five children each under 16 years of age? What clues were to be found in the artifacts: late Victorian house, Steinway upright piano, blue-gray wing-tipped automobile, mosaic pieces of half-remembered stories, thick, blue medical books—remnants of his dream to be a physician? I knew that my father valued faith and education, and hoped that these aspects of his interior, private life, kept him going in his pressured public existence. As time went on, somehow, we survived. My mother, known for her wit and beauty, survived him by 23 years. Then, one gray November day, she too, was gone. I marvel, as her prodigal daughter, who is now so much older than she was then, at her fortitude, and given all the odds, how she still kept tottering onward, daring to keep our family, and herself, together.

Immigrants, quite simply, could not have made it without supporting one another back then, and so it is understandable that a sense of community and civic engagement was a crucial aspect of my formative years. In the British West Midlands of the 1970s and '80s, during a trusting, near foolhardy time, front doors were locked at night and ceremoniously unbolted to greet the morning. They were delicately closed or left ajar during the day inviting in the new day, with all its possibilities. Growing up also meant growing out of the confinements and nominal borders of home. Faith and education were seen as passports to unbounded success, self-actualization, and efficacy.

Being part of the second generation of Black immigrants, my siblings and I continued the tightrope walk begun by our parents, making our boisterous way through their promised land. Joining other children of Color, we populated the British educational establishment, schools, and eventually universities and colleges, a ragtag brigade of unwitting de-segregationists. As a 12-year-old, my older sisters took it upon themselves to pry me loose from my naiveté and ignorance about race, class, and gender. Personal self-agency and community activism were the order of the day. Community engagement came in the form of providing free academic home tutoring to local children, engagement in educational summer camps, volunteering with prison and after-care services, and other grassroots political action. There was always an eye to what was happening across the African diaspora: Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko, Angela Davies and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), African decolonization. This, along with the swirl of my British acculturation, was the milieu of my childhood against the backdrop of a home strewn with books, a potpourri of hymns, nature walks, BBC Radio 4, reggae sound systems, avid reading, Sunday school and playing with immigrant neighbors, who largely came from the Caribbean, India, Pakistan and Ireland. In the

flaring social unrest, increasing unemployment and racial tensions of the 1970s and 1980s (Phillips & Phillips, 1998), my contemporaries and I were learning, firsthand, how to fight to make our voices and spaces known in the world.

Sixty years on Black Britons as a whole, although undoubtedly a major cultural influence in UK society, still remain an under-researched population, imperceptible to the researchers' gaze. A 2015 report by the Runnymede Trust found that 92.4 % of all UK university professors are White, while just 0.49 % are Black. Despite the significant impacts of a sixty-year history of social migration, the UK's first Black Studies university course is due to open at Birmingham City University in England in the fall semester of 2017. Progress is slow, as noted by Andrews (2016), one of the UK's scant supply of Black academics.

With all this in mind, it is understandable that Sam Oni's story of his experiences in the desegregation of Mercer captured my interest, because of his immigrant acculturation, colonial past, his religious convictions, and the fact that he lived to tell his story. Yet the concept of racial reconciliation was alien to me as a child, and perhaps still remains so today. Black and White racial reconciliation meant little to the Afro-Caribbean community in Handsworth, Birmingham, where I grew up. It was not that we were opposed to unity with the dwindling population of our White neighbors who had resisted inner city flight in the 1970s. We simply saw racial integration, or even talking to Whites about race and racism, as unnecessarily onerous. Racial reconciliation was unheard of, and, by any measure, irrelevant to our ideals of self-agency, as modeled by immigrant parents whose post-colonial knowledge base was arguably rooted in a pragmatic positivism.

My parents' generation of West Indians migrated from 28 small islands in the Caribbean Sea. Our parents' homeland of Jamaica, at approximately 4,244 square miles geographically, is

figuratively, a mere drop in the ocean compared to all but 48 of America's states. Nonetheless, they were undeterred. Jamaicans particularly had a saying "*wi lickle but wi tallawah*" meaning that we are seemingly little and powerless, but we are nonetheless blessed with resourcefulness, vision, and grit, not to be diminished or constrained by the boundaries of an idyllic, but small island. Having dutifully looked to the ant, as *The Bible* instructed (Proverbs 6:6-8), and no doubt buoyed by the folk-lore tales of *Bre Anansi*, the original spider man, they made England their home. Holding down two, three, or even four jobs, meant that they had little patience or time for any solutions that lay outside of themselves or their spheres of influence. Exploring the effects of racial injury would have been anathema when the solutions were so clear for them: stop complaining, be twice as good, work hard and study even harder, be kind, have faith, and measure for measure by degrees, find *your* space, *your* voice, occupy the land.

A greater need for racial unity would come later for my generation as we ventured into careers and higher education, where proximity increased the likelihood of friendships with those of another race. Even now I do not think that my education, on or off university campuses, ever equipped me with the language, skills or knowledge to engage in racial dialogue with the expectation that it would help to heal the wounds of racial injustice. What I do know now, from my parents' bold, industrious *ant-full* lives, is that injury counts and it needs to be addressed. Perhaps it was the one boundary they could not overcome. Somehow, it needs to be spoken of, redressed, and shaken from the souls of our amazing, imperfect lives.

This study, then, is in part a story within a story. Lands of promise invariably have treasure and terror, Goliaths that can break you in two and whales that can swallow you up, if you let them. Stumbling block or stepping-stone, the simplest and most startling message conveyed to me as a child was that it was *my* choice. Somehow, after leaving Georgia, vowing

never to return, Sam Oni, Mercer's premier Black student, not only survived, he revoked his self-imposed exile, and chose to return to his alma mater to contribute his voice and his story in the building of the *Beloved Community*. I was compelled to learn more.

Social Justification

There has been immense worldwide attention given to racial reconciliation in recent times, most notably in the aftermath of the post-apartheid South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings of 1995-2003. However, Emerson and Smith's study reveals a discernible reluctance amongst the White evangelical church to address racial inequities (Emerson & Smith, 2000). In what Alexander (2010), and others, refer to as *the age of color blindness*, there is nonetheless an escalation of racialized injury, such as hate-crimes, mass incarceration, and police killings of those who are unarmed, which disproportionately affects African Americans. This marks the importance of a unified church that is able to mitigate such wrongs. The inclusion of faith-based leaders and groups as part of much needed interdisciplinary conversations that seek solutions to such wicked problems of racial injury seems all the more pressing.

In 2012, the murder of unarmed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin and the subsequent acquittal of his murderer spurred national outrage. The incident prompted President Obama to articulate to the electorate for the first time in office in a very personal way the experiences of many African Americans. The president's statement included the following comments:

You know, when Trayvon Martin was first shot I said that this could have been my son. Another way of saying that is Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago. And when you think about why, in the African American community at least, there's a lot of pain around what happened here, I think it is important to recognize that

the African American community is looking at this issue through a set of experiences and a history that doesn't go away. (Obama, 2013, para.5)

His assailant had been a volunteer neighborhood watchman, who had, shockingly for many, succeeded in his claim that the unarmed African American teen posed a serious threat. The hooded sweatshirt (hoodie) Martin wore soon became a symbol of protest against stereotypical racial profiling and a call for social justice. Most significantly Trayvon's death influenced the formation of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Its organizers define the movement as a "chapter-based national organization working for the validity of Black life...[and] to (re)build the Black liberation...movement" (Black Lives Matter, n.d.). Over the intervening years these activists have become increasingly seen as forming the vanguard of organized protests; most notably in organized peaceful protests regarding the murders of Black men, women, and children—often at the hands of White police officers subsequently acquitted.

The nature of such incidents spurred Carol Anderson to further research this phenomenon, as is explored in her book *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of our Racial Divide*. In a chapter that explores US Reconstruction, Anderson noted that enslaved people were the main contributors to the US's tremendous wealth, to the extent that in 1860 as much as 80% of the nation's gross national product was tied to slavery. Many American colleges and universities were also built with the use of slave labor and there is emergent research regarding the extent to which enslaved people were instrumental in the construction and maintenance of HEIs (Wilder, 2013). Author of *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*, Craig Steven Wilder, professor of history at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, expounded on the idea of universities being held answerable to their

stakeholders and the wider community for their role in slavery. In a recent interview, Wilder stated:

My sense is that these universities first owe themselves, their students and alumni, and their other constituencies the truth about their historical ties to slavery and the slave trade. This means taking institutional responsibility for the work of researching and making public the ways in which they both benefited from and participated in the slave economies. (Wilder, as cited in Love, 2016, para.11)

As Wilder demonstrated, many of the nation's leading HEIs— such as Williams College, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Rutgers, UNC, and so on—being reliant on the slave trade, became the conduit for the racist ideologies that ensured institutional sustainability. This reckoning with the past has resulted in public apologies and the removal of artifacts and other material elements tying institutions to their slave-profiteering past, but for others it has led them to argue for a reparations paradigm to address past wrongs:

The colleges and universities of America are emerging as a battleground in the fight for racial justice, and the struggle to reclaim history and come to terms with a legacy of oppression. All of America's institutions were complicit in the enslavement of Africans, and certainly higher education was no exception. Within these halls of learning, leaders were cultivated, society was conditioned and indoctrinated with certain values, and slavery was upheld. Universities exploited Black people and profited from their bondage. (Love, 2016, para.1).

Yet, after two and a half centuries of labor, African American's received no compensation and, if anything, after Reconstruction the age of lynching intensified (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017).

As it relates to attacks on houses of worship, there are several projects which specifically document race-based hate crimes perpetrated against African American churches throughout the history of the United States. For example, *Mapping Violence against African American Churches* (MVAAC) provides a map chronicling the geographic location of Black churches that have been attacked. The website *Collective Punishment* documents “mob violence, riots and pogroms” against African American communities from 1824 to 1974. One such terror attack included an incident on November 24, 1865, at a Richmond church which is reported on the website to have begun as an “attack on a baptism ceremony” (Collective Punishment, n.d., data file). However, these incidents are far from being a matter of distant historical record. Congressional hearings were held in 1996 at the end of a two-year period when arson attacks against African American houses of worship spiked across the southeast.

On June 17, 2015, the slaying of nine African American congregants, at *The Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church* in Charleston, South Carolina, engendered widespread condemnation. Writing about the incident, Friedersdorf (2015, para.2) stated:

The attack on the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church and its congregation also stoked memories of an additional burden borne by blacks: the hate crimes and terrorist attacks that have targeted their places of worship for generations, each incident signaling virulent animus toward the entire black community.

The protests, debates, vigils, memorials and unity services that have rippled across the nation at each instance point to what civil rights lawyer Bryan Stevenson, in his work with the Equal Justice Initiative, says is the reality that racism has never left us, it has merely evolved (Stevenson, 2014). Crucially, this has caused individuals and church organizations to more readily investigate the paradigm of racial reconciliation and even discuss the more contentious

ideologue of reparations. These movements provide a personal, interpersonal and organizational vehicle to reexamine perceptions and responsibilities related to racial justice in a way that is *race-critical* rather than an *ipso facto color blindness*, presumed *post-racial or race-neutrality*.

The role of racial reconciliation and other social justice work that seeks to dismantle racial injustice and alleviate injury has been made all the more urgent in light of ongoing and intensified racial angst. The 2016 annual report by The Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education recently states that there were a record 16,720 complaints filed with the *Office for Civil Rights*. This represented a 61% increase from 2015. The largest number of the complaints concerned sexual harassment, and most of these involved alleged violations of Title IX provisions relating to equal opportunities for women in athletics programs. However, there were also 2,439 complaints pertained to issues of race, making up approximately 15% of all complaints. Of these, 198 involved complaints related to racial harassment at colleges and universities. Based on these figures the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (JBHE) reports that “the number of racial harassment complaints relating to postsecondary institutions more than doubled during the eight years of the Obama administration” (JBHE, 2017a, para.3). Neither church congregations nor college campuses are exempt. These impacts weigh in favor of research which addresses a way forward from the burdens and harms done and the role of two key power houses that have always shaped the ideologies of US society: the church, and educational institutions.

Philosophical Justification

Another aspect of justification for this study lies in what some have termed the *democratization of knowledge*, which is also broadly an aspect of feminist and womanist ideologies (Arnot & Dillabough, 1999; Williams, 1993). This term is shaped by the notion that to democratize means to make accessible to everyone. A democracy of knowledge, therefore, deepens and broadens knowledge so that it is available to all citizens in a given society and, beyond, to the world at large. The understanding is that those in education have a critical role to play as “knowledge workers,” to make data, information, knowledge, and by that corollary, wisdom, freely available for the benefit of all humans (Johnson, 2012).

Indeed, it is on the issue of education that critical race theorists such as Tate (1997) and Solórzano and Yosso (2002) argue that the failure for the US to live up to its democratic creed is at its most virulent. More specifically, Howard Zinn argued that historically, higher education has been an ongoing “contested site,” or “battleground” in the “constant struggle” for democratic rights (Zinn, 2001, p.130). Zinn, and others, contend that higher education has retained its position at the fore of a racial stratification that is deeply rooted in the 18th century European social constructs of dominance and imperialism. Formal education in the West, simply put, is construed to privilege a Eurocentric worldview.

For all their shortcomings, HEIs remain sites where the most pressing social, political, economic and environmental problems facing local communities, and the world in general, can be contested, critically examined and explored (Nungu, Gounko, & Kariwo, 2014). More critically, HEIs provide not only the opportunity for a meeting of minds but also a place where consensus may be put to the test. HEIs also provide physical living spaces for a diverse community. In this sense, they offer the opportunity for proximity, connection and interaction,

via communal living across racial and other social strata divisions, both within the student body and extended to external local or global communities. Proximity may potentially have an impact on social literacy, understanding, and relationship building. Stevenson (2014, p.17) for example, contends as a civil rights attorney, that *proximity* to his death row clients taught him a critical lesson, namely that “each of us is more than the worst things we’ve ever done.” Proximity, if compassion results, humanizes.

Rather than viewing economically blighted locales as a liability, advocates for HEI civic engagement critically contest the stereotype of an ivory tower elitism borne by higher education, and more readily see opportunity. Through calls and actions for a more socially responsive academy there emerges renewed global emphasis on HEI partnerships with a diverse collection of external stakeholders to more readily address wicked problems (Neave, 2006). The goals of Mercer’s *Beloved Community* racial unity project raise awareness related to how institutions of higher education might participate with diverse stakeholders in engaged work that extends teaching and scholarship for the betterment of society.

DEFINING KEY TERMS

The following summary of key terms, although not exhaustive, addresses ideas that form the basis of this study’s conceptual framework.

Wicked Problems

Wicked problems are distinctive because traditional processes cannot resolve them. According to Rittel and Webber (1973), in a seminal article in *Policy Sciences* magazine, wicked problems cannot be succinctly defined, they continue to change even as we study them. The choice of an appropriate response or solution is never clear cut, every problem is entwined with other issues and may often be a symptom of a larger, more complex challenge. Classic examples

of wicked problems are identified by Camillus (2008, para.3), writing in a Harvard Business Review article as “environmental degradation, terrorism, and poverty.”

Fitzgerald, Bruns, Sonka, Furco, and Swanson (2016, p.245) recognize that “societal problems affect universities and the students, alumni, faculty, and staff who are a part of both the university and community systems.” Thus, they argue, efforts to address complex societal challenges require new approaches regarding the exchange of knowledge and co-creation of solutions. In effect, to help solve wicked problems, as Judith Ramaley (2014) has noted in the context of HEI engagement “workable responses and solutions to today’s problems require new ways of learning, new ways of working together, and new definitions and measures of progress and success” (p. 9). Fitzgerald *et al.* (2016) contend that engagement scholarship is a “cultural and social imperative for higher education in the 21st century...the traditional approach to community engagement is not sufficient. For these issues to be addressed, society must leverage all of its existing and future knowledge to find effective solutions” (p.251).

Wicked problems require “collaboration, a sharing of exposure to risk, an opportunity for benefit, and a willingness to learn as the problem changes,” they raise “contested questions coupled with unclear and often disputed solutions” (Ramaley, 2014, p.12). By this standard, it is argued here that racism and specifically as it relates to this study, congregational segregation, may be deemed a *wicked problem*. Further, Linda Silka wrote about wicked problems in relation to scientific methods which were variously described as “citizen science, community-based participatory research, science democratization and participatory action research” Silka (2016, para.7). She championed the need for “stakeholder-engaged solutions,” and “focused interdisciplinary work” given the finite resources available to help solve wicked problems (para.9). It is evident, in addressing the complexity of ongoing societal challenges, such as

systemic racial injustice, that the interdisciplinary thinking and collaboration available through higher education/community partnerships needs to be explored.

Race and Racism

According to Emerson & Smith (2001, p.66) a racialized society is one in which “separation and socioeconomic inequality are the norm, our definitions of personal identity and our choices of intimate associations reveal racial distinctiveness,” and where “we are never unaware of the race of a person with whom we interact.” Thus, a racialized society is one where race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships.

Racialized separatism in churches, even if it has understandable historical antecedents such as those related to preferences in styles of worship, at a time when greater collaboration is needed to solve the *wicked problem* of racism is in itself is undeniably a *wicked problem*. These types of problems synthesize and self-perpetuate through-out history even as each iterative solution marshals in more confounding and lurking variables in the form of complicating attendant problems. Understanding the social origins of racism can provide encouragement for the work of those engaged in racial reconciliation because if racism is produced by ideological social constructs, it can also be reduced or eliminated thereby.

Race or the belief in differences between races is the fallacious prerequisite for racism. Although race is deeply contested as a social construct, what has become clearer is that race is not a biological reality, but instead an acutely nuanced construction that society produces and alters at will (Delgado & Stefancic, 2010, p.7).

For this dissertation racism is thought to express itself in three basic ways:

First, racism is an act of *violence*, a vicious act of imposition upon people's lives and their life chances based upon the social construction of race (Fanon, 2008). Racism, conceived here as an act of physical, economic, psychological violence, is evident where there is a subscription to the notion of race itself and is predicated upon exertion of power and oppression. Power is understood in this context as "the capacity to exert force on or over something or someone" and oppression is regarded as "the exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel, or unjust manner" (Hoyt, 2012, p.225).

Second, racism expresses itself as *ideology* or justification of the imposition of race upon life experiences. Du Bois recognized this ideological aspect of racism, calling it "race fiction" (Shamoon, 1995, p.44). It is an ideology that ranges from biological, religious and cultural thinking which creates systems and structures of socio-economic and life chance disadvantages. Bonilla-Silva (2006) defined racial ideology as "racially based frameworks used by actors to explain and justify (dominant race) or challenge (subordinate race or races) the racial status quo" (p.9). He contends that although all races have the potential to develop these frameworks those of the majoritarian race "tend to become the master framework upon which all racial actors ground (for or against) their ideological positions" (p.9). On the matter of language, which is of course, the conduit for racial ideology, this study includes terms such as Black, White, and people of Color to refer to various racial groups. It is appreciated that classifications used to describe race, and the concept of race itself, are fluid social constructs rather than biologically determined (Omi & Winant, 1994).

Third, racism expresses itself as a taken for granted, *institutional arrangement* for structures and processes that promote and perpetuate the imposition and ideology (Sundquist, 1996). In a 1968 television interview, writer James Baldwin, in his exposé of the realities of

racism in US society, stated “I don’t know what most White people in this country feel. I can only conclude what they feel from the state of their institutions” (Baldwin, 1968, video file).

The educational system, media, courts, legislative bodies, and economic structures from local businesses to global organizations all contribute to the promotion and perpetuation of systemic racism. In his classic *Savage Inequalities: Children in America’s Schools* Jonathan Kozol specifically explored institutional and systemic racism in the education system. He highlighted some of the dire consequences for life opportunities, health and even the mortality rates for children of Color and poor children in public sector education in a dozen schools in cities around the country. Evidence of consistent and virulent deprivation led Kozol to question and search for “some way to understand why a society as rich and, frequently, as generous as ours would leave these children in their penury and squalor for so long—with so little public indignation” and to further challenge “why is it that we can’t at least pour vast amounts of money, ingenuity, and talent into public education for these children” (Kozol, 1991, p.49). It is worth noting that Kozol’s analysis also included the desperate conditions facing White Appalachian children, and thus affirms that class also factors into savage disparities. The condition of organizational systems and structures are clearly imbued with historical legacies, rituals, and patterns of sanctions that directly impact the life opportunities of the traditionally marginalized.

In summary, based on these three criteria specifically related to racism as an act of violence, ideological, and institutionalized, the question remains whether churchgoers of different races, electing rather than being mandated to worship separately, although undeniably racialized, is in fact racist. Although definitions of race and racism are written about extensively and are deeply convoluted and contested social constructs, this does not lessen their significance

in US society. These terms provide a building block to enter the field of knowledge required to conduct this qualitative study.

Racial Dialogue

Discourse is widely used in social activism and politics, (Hatch, 2008; Frank & McPhail, 2005). It may be argued that it is easier for more people to engage in the co-construction of knowledge through conversations rather than through documentation and written communication. These conversations form narrations of stories which ultimately have the power to shape and construct social identities. They are especially potent when they are repeatedly told to us beginning as impressionable children. It is natural for a child to accept the milieu in which he or she lives. Like our socio-economic and political worlds, stories are defined by how they are told, who tells them and how they are interpreted. Stories are thus related to power.

Indeed, throughout history rhetorical devices, euphemisms or sanitized phrases have contributed to the dehumanization of *others* (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). If the reprobate behavior is called something less thought provoking, then social actors can view their roles as moral or harmless. For example, Tsang (2002) argues that characterizing the Holocaust as *the final solution to the Jewish problem* allowed many Nazis to routinize their actions by focusing on solving the “problem,” taking the scrutiny off the “moral implications of their actions” (p.30). In the Civil Rights Era euphemisms such as the “negro problem,” “race relations,” “American dilemma,” and “Baptist dilemma,” and even “race” itself sanitized the reality of systemic *racial violence*.

Speaking about her own language acquisition and acculturation as an early storyteller, Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie memorably cautioned in a talk, *The Danger of a Single Story*:

Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person. The Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti writes that if you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story and to start with, “secondly”. Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story. (Adichie, 2009, video file)

It is worth noting here something of the history of the hierarchical nature of knowledge acquisition. The language of English academia evolved as a privileged discourse in the 17th century as a conduit for a new scientific world view, which gradually became connected with colonialism via the linchpins of modernity—capitalism, and industrialization. Although racial dialogue may be considered an important aspect of the process of reconciliation (Lederach, 1997; Hatch, 2008), like all language, it needs to be deconstructed. Racial reconciliation dialogue it is not exempt from the influence of a racialized ideology which privileges the dominant, even for those genuinely committed to social change.

Desegregation and Integration

In conducting preliminary research for this dissertation, it was noticeable that the words integration and desegregation are often used interchangeably on university websites as they commemorated their 50th anniversary of desegregation. However, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was clear in marking a distinction:

The word *segregation* represents a system that is prohibitive; it denies the Negro equal access to schools, parks, restaurants, libraries and the like. *Desegregation* is eliminative and negative, for it simply removes these legal and social prohibitions. Integration is

creative and is, therefore, more profound and far-reaching than desegregation. *Integration* is the positive acceptance of desegregation and the welcomed participation of Negroes in the total range of human activities. (Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as cited in Washington, 1991, p. 117, 118)

In his definition, although desegregation ensured essential legislative reforms, it was static, and simply a means to an end, not the end-goal in itself. Integration was the ultimate goal. Crucially, beyond compliance with the *letter* of the law, it is clear that Dr. King was concerned about enactments of the *spirit* of the law or a heart-felt commitment to the democratic ideals of a fully integrated US society.

Racial Reconciliation

The simplest problem of racial reconciliation is that no one agrees on how to *define* or do it (Young, 2010; Frank & McPhail, 2005); or even whether it is *achievable* (Stanley, 2014). The *desirability* of racial reconciliation is also contested in the literature. For instance, activists, scholars, and writers such as Cone (2011), Harvey (2014), Stevenson (2014) and Coates (2015), advocate for a reparations paradigm. While the confusion about racial reconciliation remains largely unresolved, the term has steadily gained in popular usage and importance (Hatch, 2008).

As it relates to this study, Androff (2010) offers a useful examination of racial reconciliation in the context of community-based restorative justice. Seventeen participants engaged in promoting racial reconciliation in Greensborough, North Carolina were interviewed. It was proposed that *cognitive-affective* reconciliation is an important facet of racial reconciliation. This referred to “a change in people’s thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs” as well as, “changes in emotions, feelings or gut reactions” (Androff, 2010, p. 276). The internal work of

cognitive-affective reconciliation seems to be the most nuanced and the challenging aspect of the phenomenon. It would also appear to be the element most keenly related to ongoing church segregation because, as Dr. King and other activists understood, the legal battle for civil rights could only go so far. In the context of Mercer's desegregation, the awareness that racial reconciliation is, to some measure, an inside job, was something that Sam Oni was compelled to test first-hand.

Mercer University's *Beloved Community* is amongst the group of HEIs that have initiated projects that dare to wrestle with race and the role of the religion in the mediation of social justice. In that sense, Dr. John Dunaway, *Beloved Community* members, and those other visionaries who participate in this work across the country, take the risk of personal introspection which is much needed to embrace the *ministry* of reconciliation (Boesak & DeYoung, 2012; Wallis, 2016). Certainly, there are signs that churches, ministers and community groups are increasingly showing interest in educative, racial discourse programs which promote a rethink of race, reparations and reconciliation. Through programs like the ones offered by Salter McNeil and Associates, Congregations Organizing for Racial Reconciliation, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention and Dr. Catherine Meeks, Chair of the Episcopal Church's Beloved Community Commission for Dismantling Racism, in the archdiocese of Atlanta, to name just a few, this is an emergent field of exploration within an engaged scholarship in partnership with a wide variety of faith-based communities.

Critical Race Theology

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is also a growing field, and as Gloria Ladson-Billings, William Tate and other scholars have shown in the field of education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Hiraldo, 2010) there is room for a wealth

of expansion. It is thus not beyond the scope of a CRT framework to further analyze and critique educational policy applied to the academy and social justice aspects of racial reconciliation through a theological lens. In this vein, Geoffrey Shoonmaker (2012) suggests that “in order to continue to progress toward racial reconciliation, CRT may have to expand its purview beyond the legal theory and sociology into the realm of theology” (p.128). Additionally, with specific reference to the African American Christian tradition, Cornel West (as cited in Hedges, 2013, para.3) states:

The black prophetic tradition has been the leaven in the American democratic loaf... What has kept American democracy from going fascist or authoritarian or autocratic has been the legacy of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Martin King and Fannie Lou Hamer. This is not because Black people have a monopoly on truth, goodness or beauty. It is because the Black freedom movement puts pressure on the American empire in the name of integrity, decency, honesty, and virtue.

Indeed, it is clear that Dr. King’s critiques of the church, the political system, and the socio-economic world did not paint a narrow Black versus White binary. For example, in his speech entitled *A Knock at Midnight*, he was pointed in his critique of the laxity he felt existed in Black church leadership (King, 1964a). Instead, he consistently warned that exchanging White supremacy for Black supremacy was a doomed proposition, particularly if one believed, as he did, and the Constitution held, that all were created equal in the eyes of God (King, 1963c). Influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and the people of India, whose non-violent insurgence brought about the end of the British Raj; in his focus on the beloved community, King believed the solution was to take actions which provoked the nation’s moral conscience. His imperative, universal in its appeal, was quite simply to measure human evolutionary progress not merely by

the technological advances of the 1960s, which included advanced nuclear weaponry, but by a commitment to conflict resolution. He stated in his 1964 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech:

Sooner or later all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace, and thereby transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. If this is to be achieved, man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love. (King, 1964c, video file)

Several commentators also address the subject of racial reconciliation with the belief that defeating the prevalence of racism and the dominant hegemony will require spiritual transcendence (Perkins, 1993; Young, 2010). Marsh (2005) is unequivocal in stating that “the beloved community may then finally be described as a gift of the kingdom of God” (p.207). However, this reliance on religious imperatives, *prima facie*, runs counter to CRT, for which religious conviction is not a prerequisite for social justice activism. Moreover, African American Christian thinkers have disagreed on a wide variety of topics, including the moral status of nonviolence and the Black power movement, the desirability of racial integration, and racial reconciliation as a goal. For example, Cone (1997) in contrast to King’s commitment to non-violence, rejects this approach as a project of domination to subordinate the marginalized.

Yet, in what he described as “the first comprehensive account of the marginalization of the African American Christian tradition” Paradise (2014, p.117) posits that CRT has for too long ignored the influence and importance of the Black Church. He argues: “If we take seriously the value of grounding critical scholarship in the perspectives of Black people, then the need for a greater and more cohesive engagement with African American religious sensibilities is obvious” (p.125). It is clear that the Black Christian tradition is diverse and hardly a monolithic

form, but rather represents a wealth of orientations on a range of matters of critical importance not only to the Black community—however this might be defined—but also to the broader US society. CRT’s framework may thus conceivably be expanded to include African American theological perspectives as we address the burdens of racial injury, reconciliation and the lessons to be learned.

Beloved Community Stakeholders

Georges Haddad, Director of the United Nations Division of Higher Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), is quoted by Neave (2000, p.29) in recognizing that the word *university* has its origin in both legal Latin, *univeritas*, which means “community,” and in classical Latin “*universus*” meaning “totality”. This is an apt reminder since a university’s community is a vast assortment of subgroups that, to some extent, need to align both internally and externally. These subgroups are often referred to as *stakeholders*, which is a term adopted from organizational theory (Jongbloed, Enders, & Salerno, 2008). Internal stakeholders include students, faculty, administration and management, while for external stakeholders the list includes research communities, alumni and government agencies. Freedman (1984) offers a core definition of stakeholders who are referred to as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm’s objectives” (p.16). Stakeholders are members of a group that broadly share common interests, although their goals may be steadily emergent and available for renegotiation. In this study engaging the HEI with community partners is assumed to be a commonly held desire.

The five stakeholder groups identified were: administrators connected to the mission of community engagement, faculty who serve on the *Beloved Community* committee or who have supported the annual symposia with their attendance, student leaders who have served on the

committee, local pastors who wish to engage in the project, and finally, alumni who also supported the project with their attendance. These groups were selected because their contributions were recognized as being influential to the sustainability of the project.

Assumptions and Limitations

I have drawn upon elements of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to articulate that racism in the United States is a synonym for a deep-seated system of systemic inequity. CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of women and men of Color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination. Five propositions form the basis for the conceptual framework of this dissertation.

First, to better understand US society, history and all phenomena that pertain to its governance and operation, one must include an appraisal of race. This particularly relates to the way participants in the study express their perceptions and experiences regarding racial difference as it pertains to religion, education and their personal upbringing.

The second assumption is that racism is pervasive and damaging not only to the historically marginalized, but also to those who materially benefit from it (Baldwin, 1963a; Wise, 2008; Wallis, 2016). The consequence of being in the dominant group in an unjust, hierarchical system of societal racism and privilege paradoxically has negative ramifications (Spanierman, Todd, & Anderson, 2009). Personal accounts by White writers reveal that no one is left unscathed (Holmes & Bryan, 1969; Smith, & Gladney, 1994).

The third assumption is that human beings have a collective ability to co-construct knowledge to reveal and seeks ways to contest stereotyped racialized identities which present themselves as accepted societal norms (Delgado, 1989). This requires further analysis to explore

the nuances of stories, and story-telling in order to facilitate counter-narratives as well as unabashedly sharing and scrutinizing one's own personal stories (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

The fourth assumption is that out of the academic disciplines of the historically marginalized comes transformation, not only of one oneself, and other marginalized peoples, but also transformation of the mainstream. For example, it is undeniable that the demand by radical students for African Studies in the late 1960s and early 1970s transformed the way history is taught in US universities to this day (Raboteau, 2004).

The fifth assumption is based on the conception of “*sustainable reconciliation*” (Lederach, 1997). There are multiple levels of racial reconciliation (Androff, 2012) that can be tied to social justice, and it is thus desirable for the better democratic good of society. Despite the pitfalls, there is an assumption that reconciliation is in some meaningful way attainable and may be sustained by retaining strengthening the local community as well as the HEI's cultural identity.

There are three assumptions that are based upon my personal subjectivities, namely that racial reconciliation is *definable, desirable and attainable*. Broadly, there is a presumption that the endeavors of the *Beloved Community* will yield fruit and that the culture of racial dialogue will stimulate the building of relationships, which promote better understandings and ultimately create the nucleus for social changes. As John Perkins' model for community development, discussed later in the review of literature, presents, there is an assumption that racial reconciliation in turn helps to build community development.

The limitations of this study are largely connected to the presumed accuracy of the aforementioned assumptions. The subjectivism of my perspective, ipso facto, colors the lens through which the interpretations are reached.

Overview of the Study

This dissertation is an oral history analysis comprised of interviews with selected participants involved in the University of Mercer's *Beloved Community* racial reconciliation project. The 18 participants, identified as stakeholders in this study, came from a cross-section of those helping the university to fulfil its mission of community engagement.

Participant selection was based using purposive sampling. Selection was based upon members who had experience of being active participants of Mercer's *Beloved Community* (for example as an event planner, panel discussion member or speaker). The participants, thus, came from the population of those who were able to speak, from first-hand experience, about Mercer University's community engagement mission and, where applicable, experiences of their linchpin, *Building the Beloved Community* annual symposia within its first ten years from 2005 to 2014. A list of keynote speakers is listed in the appendix (Appendix G). This decade of community engagement included participation in social celebration, which, in 2013, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the desegregation of Mercer. The oral history interview data was analyzed using axial coding and thematic analysis (Saldana, 2013). Findings were reported, followed by a discussion in relation to the review of literature, followed by a reflection on the implications for further research.

Chapter 1 Summary

In this introductory chapter, I have outlined the background of the problem, shared the purpose and significance of the study, outlined key terms, and explained three tiers of rationalization for the study, which included how my interest in community engagement and the democratization of knowledge emerged from my own immigrant background. The research questions seek to probe the boundaries of HEIs' engagement in solving complex, wicked

problems. An outline of key terms and the theoretical framework were provided. A more detailed exploration of the theoretical framework will be completed in the review of literature. The next chapter draws on the existing body of research literature to explore where this dissertation fits into better understanding HEIs' community engagement in addressing wicked problems related to racial injury, religion and reconciliation.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature Introduction

The review of the literature for this dissertation helps to contextualize the social and historical backdrop of HEI community engagement and the work of racial reconciliation. It covers both the historical and current picture of race, religion, the role of higher education civic partnership and the frameworks for racial reconciliation and community building.

The Problem with Race and Religion

In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois engaged the questions of race with his often-quoted proposition that the problem of the 20th century was, quintessentially, the problem of the color-line (Shamoon, 1995). The stated goal was to confront the difficulty of racial inequity, not solely as a national or personal inquiry but rather as a worldview (Sundquist, 1996, p. 47). This social construction of race is understood as a system without borders. In Du Bois' framework, social progress requires a personal analysis of the social forces that influence our past, present and future age. Du Bois believed that understanding in order to dismantle the role of race was an inescapable task, in which everyone must engage for progress to be made as a human race (Du Bois; 1903/2007).

As it stands today, it is clear that the undoubted legislative progress, made over a century since Du Bois' statement, has still not quelled the reality of racial injustice in the United States. The phenomenon of racial inequity sidesteps civil rights legislative successes, which has led some advocates to contend that racialization persists because its dismantling will require a recognition of the "spiritual connection or psychic legacy that is not easily shaken" (Hatch, 2008, p.8).

Writing specifically about Christian colleges and universities, some researchers have revealed that the racial inclusion picture is no rosier than it is in non-religious institutions. For example, Kim, Anderson, Hall & Willingham (2010) corroborate Michael Emerson and Christian Smith's landmark study chronicling conservative Christian evangelicals' view of race. They reported that many of the two thousand respondents in their study were "sheltered, unexposed to racial diversity," and believed this racial isolation was "a problem in the past" and that, "a residue [of racism] may remain today because original sin remains, but the race problem is not severe" (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 81). Some 89% of the White evangelicals surveyed claimed that getting to know people of other races was "very important" as a solution to end racism, but only 38% believed that racially desegregated neighborhoods were a very important solution. This discovery led the authors to conclude that White, conservative, protestants are "more individualistic and less structural in their explanations of Black-White inequality than other Whites" (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p.96). Their conclusion suggests that there is still much work which needs to be done for those who seek to find common ground with church groups, particularly White congregations. The idea of historical systemic racial injury, White privilege and color blind racism may well need to be broached even before the conception of reconciliation as a solution can even be addressed (McNeil, 2008; Meeks, personal communication, June 9, 2017).

The next few sections include an exploration of the historical backdrop to expose more of the roots of congregational segregation. It has been necessary to be selective. A detailed linear timeline of events falls outside of the scope of this dissertation, which creates a series of vignettes. These portrayals contribute to a mosaic approach, which is useful to capture rich qualitative descriptions to represent the complexity of the phenomenon. Acknowledging the

historical backdrop began with consideration of the earliest African American's experiences to better understand the influence of religion on our present era of racialization.

The Paradox of the Slaves' Religion

Extensive slave narrative accounts reveal that enslaved Africans were somehow able to construct their identities as children of God, beyond the base hypocrisy of the slave owner's religiosity, and hold fast to the formulation of a reformed Christian message reconstructed as one of love and liberation for all who were oppressed. In his 1978 classic, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South*, the renowned historian, Albert Jordy Raboteau, explored the paradoxical survival of the Christian faith adopted by the earliest disenfranchised African Americans. In the face of evangelical evidence negated by physical and psychological damage, an abiding faith survived. Racism as *violence*, in all its machinations, was unquestionably directed towards the enslaved. But, by the start of the Civil War, Raboteau notes that Christianity had "pervaded the slave community" in a way that was life affirming (Raboteau, 2004, p.212).

Ferguson (1996) points out that little scrutiny is given to the "striking paradox in the portrayal of slave-narrative violence—namely, its frequent association with Christianity" (p. 297). The justification for evil conduct seemed to worsen, in fact, as a function of the slave owners' religious proclivity. Their religious ideology, myths, language and the de facto governance of the home, church and other institutions seemed thoroughly infused with hierarchical systems of male dominance and White privilege sanctioned by racial subjugation. Redolent of the enforcement of loyalty through terror, described in the functioning of *The Ministry of Love* in Orwell's dystopian novel *1984*, civil-religion belied its name and instead buttressed division, hatred, and violence.

In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, Douglass concluded “of all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, *religious* slaveholders are the *worst*. I have ever found them the *meanest* and *basest*, the most *cruel* and *cowardly*, of all others” (Douglass, 1845/1968, p.87). In her account of slavery, Harriet Jacobs made a similar discovery. In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, she wrote “I supposed that religion had a purifying effect on the character of men, but the worst persecutions I endured from him [the slave owner] were after he was a communicant” (Jacobs, 1861/1987, p.74).

Rather than be deterred by the religious malevolence of their captors, and abandon Christianity, many slaves were frequently moved instead to make the faith their own (Williams, 1993). The African American church tradition stands on the shoulders of those brave souls who held their own religious meetings “out of disgust for the vitiated familiar Gospel of their masters’ preachers” (Raboteau, 2004, p.213). The resiliency of their faith and determination to gather for communal worship thrived through the constant menace of systemic violence. Their assembly survived slavery, Jim Crow laws, lynching and all other forms of domestic terror. Understanding this as the root of the modern day Black prophetic tradition aids our understanding of the desire to retain Afro-centric cultural practices, such as styles of worship, which was a recurrent theme arising from participants’ interviews in this dissertation. One would understandably loath to discard African-American traditions given these hard-won gains and the august history. In light of a history of enslavement and subjugation, such delineation represents the understandable desire for the preservation of long-standing, hard fought traditions (Cone, 2000; Raboteau, 2004). Particularly in expressions and styles of worship, preaching and service, separation may well have provided a much-needed oasis for the marginalized who, per Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poem, *We Wear the Mask*, are slated to assimilate in other contexts.

There is an understandable concern if racial reconciliation is merely reduced to assimilation or an effective *Europeanization* of the traditions and preferences of African American congregations. This history explains the reason why the most segregated hour in the United States is on a Sunday, by all accounts it has always been thus, and with probable cause.

An African Dilemma

The majority of the Black Africans who were brought as slaves to the US from sub-Saharan West Africa preserved indigenous beliefs through the oral tradition of storytelling, which continued after they were introduced to Christianity. Africans used this cultural respect for the oration of history, music and the spoken word to reframe their religious experiences and identities. Thus, Raboteau (2004) contends that slaves did not *become* Christians; instead, they *redeemed* Christianity by exposing its inherent contradictions within a *slavocracy* that denied their full humanity.

Rev. Raphael G. Warnock, the senior pastor of Dr. King's former pastorate, Ebenezer Baptist Church, concurs:

In testimony and independence institutional praxis, Black Christians of the 18th and 19th centuries, challenged the heresy of the premise that slavery and Christian faith were compatible—This refashioning, indeed *redemption* of a faith introduced to them by the missionary effort of a Christian *slavocracy* and the forging of their own perspectives with the *invisible institutions* – clandestine spaces of worship carved out within the hush harbors – may be regarded as the first moment in a long trajectory of critical turning points prior to the emergence of Black theology. (Warnick, 2014, p.23)

Theologian Howard Thurman summed up this perspective, “By some amazing but vastly creative spiritual insight the slave undertook the redemption of a religion that the master had

profaned in his midst” (Thurman, 1975, p.36). Annie Bell Williams-Cheatham’s 1995, audio file, oral history account corroborates the significance of Black religious life in the face of oppression. At the time of the recording, she was 84 years old. As an African American woman, born the daughter of sharecroppers in South Carolina, Williams-Cheatham’s perceptions of slavery were handed down to her through an oral tradition of slave narratives. It was through singing, story-telling and nurturing personal relationships that the family honored rich traditions. This provides an insight into ways in which African Americans were able to deconstruct myths, redefine their social identities, and reaffirm their faith and humanity, through the extraordinarily cruel eras of slavery and Jim Crow.

Citadels of Segregation

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) grew across the US in the decades after World War II and expanded its mission program to Africa and Asia as European colonialism collapsed. Using sources from SBC Foreign Mission Board and literature produced by mission board agencies, Willis (2005) argues that many Southern Baptists not only supported racial segregation, they also maintained that it was biblically sanctioned. Most White Southern Baptist congregations simply complied with or actively supported segregation (King, 1963a; Willis, 1996; Newman, 1999).

In several examples, Southern Baptist minister and theologian Samuel Southard highlighted the inherent contradictions found at the intersection of race and international missions work. He recounts the disparate experiences of field workers, whose return from the overseas missions disquieted the carefully constructed social order of White privilege, in the story of Arkansas missionary Josephine Scaggs. A highlight of the 1961 SBC was Foreign Mission

Night, and although Scaggs was celebrated for her missionary work in Nigeria, she encountered unmasked duplicity first-hand on her return:

Miss Scaggs described invitations she had received from women's missionary organizations in the South to speak in their cities on the conversion of heathen people. In reply, Miss Scaggs offered to bring a native concert to make the presentation more personal. The Southern women demurred. They honored the African in their hearts, but not in their homes. (Southard, 1962, p. 216)

Southard (1962) provides the example of a Nigerian seminarian who was required to continue his education with another denomination because the Southern Baptist Seminary (SBS) was segregated in 1949 and intended to remain that way. Fortunately, the vast majority of White Southern Baptist seminarians protested. Southard credits the positive vote of over 90% of the students as the principal reasons for the move to desegregate the SBS in 1950. As seen in the whole-scale desegregation of other HEIs in the 1960s however, the real costs of desegregation, and the dichotomy between this and true integration, remained.

In examining primary source data from the Civil Rights Era, historian Paul Harvey explored the intersection between race, racism, and religion. He examined evidence that showed that prominent Southern Baptist ministers were often active members of the racist Citizen Councils. Harvey writes that: "In Birmingham, a White minister boasted that other denominations were envious because Southern Baptists had stoutly held the line against undemocratic and subversive influences" (Harvey, 2005, p.238). Subversion was often equated with a communist threat (Woods, 2004). There are numerous accounts in the literature of attempts to coerce "progressive" ministers by having them "silenced or shipped to another church by segregationists" (Southard, 1962, p.208).

Willis (2005) provides evidence to show that Southern Baptist missionary leaders and staff in the SBC's Home Mission Board, Foreign Missions Board and Women's Missionary consistently urged the rejection of racism in the post-World War II era. The progressives' message emphasized a Christian basis for the unity of humanity and the biblical mandate to convert all people. However, progressives relied upon a conception of racial injustice perceived as a problem of personal prejudice; one that individual White Christians were duty bound to conquer. Thus, the conception of Whiteness itself or the structuralized system of White supremacy was unexplored. While Willis acknowledges the determination of progressives in furthering their message in the postwar era, he also reiterates that progressives often failed to appreciate the vicissitudes of systemic racism.

Deep-seated racism in church ranks remained overt and steadfast in the face of ostensive legislative advances in the secular realm. In the landmark U.S Supreme court case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), the Court ruled that state laws establishing separate public schools for Black and White students were unconstitutional, and overturned the *separate but equal* doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). In the latter case, as long as public facilities were equal, state and local governments could require that social services, housing, health care, education, employment and transportation could be racially segregated thus continuing the state of affairs throughout the former Confederacy. Some of the most ardent protests against desegregation came from church ranks. Harvey (2005) asserts, "Church people defended their *citadels of segregation* in church and society in spite of strong pronouncements from governing authorities urging support of *Brown*" (p.241). The common belief was that segregation was "timeless, natural and right" (Keane, 2008, p. 3). Such vainglorious claims were rooted in mythologized intellectual and moral certitude.

To maintain racial segregation, those at the helm of educational and religious institutions had to be complicit. Clergy and scholars alike stood as vanguards in churches and on campuses throughout the land, in *citadels of segregation* determined to maintain the hegemonic stronghold.

Post-Civil War Access to Higher Education

Before the Civil War, higher education for African-American students was, for the most part, unobtainable. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in the late 19th century and early 20th century illiteracy was very common. However, in the years following the Civil War, with the 13th Amendment's abolition of slavery and reconstruction in the South in 1865, things began to change slowly. In 1870, 20% of the entire U.S adult population was illiterate, and 80% of the Black population was illiterate. By 1900 the situation had improved somewhat, but 44% of African Americans still remained illiterate (NCES, n.d.).

In 1862, Senator Justin Morrill headed a movement to improve access to public higher education focusing on applied sciences, agriculture, and engineering. The Morrill Land-Grant Act of that year gave federal land to the states in order to establish colleges and universities with an aim to educate farmers, scientists, and teachers. Few institutions were open to African Americans, especially in the South. Nearly 30 years later, with the second Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1890, the stipulation was made that states using federal land-grant funds should either make their schools open to all races or allocate money for segregated Black colleges. Consequently, 16 exclusively Black institutions received 1890 land-grant funds. Most of these predominantly Black public schools were founded between 1870 and 1910 (Bell, 2004). The determination and inventiveness of many African Americans themselves helped, along with the backing of organizations such as the American Missionary Association (AMA) and the Freedmen's Bureau, which established Black private colleges and universities in earlier years.

For example, African Americans in southern churches ran their own schools preparing students for vocational training or advanced professional studies. This created a demand for higher education, particularly for institutions that prepared African Americans to teach in schools, as an investment and readiness for the opportunities hoped for in the next generation (Butchart, 2002).

Between 1861 and 1870, the AMA founded seven African American colleges and thirteen teaching schools. Many of these institutions, along with the private historical Black colleges and universities founded later by the AMA, the Freedmen's Bureau, and Black churches, became the mainstay of Black higher education, representing the only way for most African Americans to overcome the color bar in order to access higher education (Harvey, 2005).

Desegregation of Southern Colleges and Universities

The first Southern Baptist associated higher educational institution to desegregate was Wake Forest University. Trustees there affiliated with the North Carolina Baptist Convention and voted on April 27, 1962, to open its doors to students of all races. Ed Reynolds, the student selected, was like Sam Oni, a Ghanaian recruited by Baptist missionary Harris Mobley. At Stetson University, an institution of the Florida Baptist Convention, President J. Ollie Edmunds chose a transfer student, Cornelius Hunter, to desegregate the institution in the fall of 1962. Describing the desegregation of Jesuit affiliated Spring Hill College in Alabama, Padgett (2001) notes "before and after court-ordered enrollments, African American students faced chicanery from university officials and harassment from groups of Whites who opposed their right to be on campus" (p.168). Oni's and Reynolds' candidacies were calculated to be more palatable to old guard segregationists, still their applications heralded much rancor and heated debate (Campbell, 2005).

Tollison (2005) argues that desegregation of southern, predominantly White denominationally affiliated colleges and universities “forced the White churchgoing people of the South to confront changes introduced by the civil rights movement” (p.2). In Melissa Kean’s account of the desegregation of Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt, the presidents and trustees of private southern universities cherished their paternalistic identity as White southern gentlemen who felt that they knew best the “deliberate speed” advocated in the *Brown* decision, with which to bring about peaceful desegregation. The belief held was that southern universities had an obligation to uphold their “southern character” and to “lead the region in its drive to catch up economically with the rest of the country” (Keane, 2008, p.2).

After World War II, the continued barring of African Americans from institutions of higher education became progressively untenable to a growing number of Americans. Padgett (2001) argues that the powerful media images documenting “lonely, valiant struggles to gain an equal opportunity at higher education,” during the peaceful protest of African Americans demanding social justice, galvanized support because it “pricked many White consciences and left images in America’s public consciousness” (p.168). Additionally, Keane (2008) argues that in the early 1950s the threat of Soviet Communist expansionism into Africa and Asia caused a “glaring flaw” in the conception of American institutions as more “democratic, efficient and virtuous than their Soviet counterparts” (p.3).

Although there were undoubted gains in the movement to desegregate HEIs in the 1960s, steady progress had also been made in previous decades as the pressure for reform gathered momentum. For example, as early as 1936, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began a legal campaign to induce the desegregation of southern colleges and universities (Tollison, 1998). W.E.B. Du Bois served as the NAACP Director of

Special Research from 1944 to 1948. During this period, he was active in placing the grievances of African Americans before the United Nations (Lewis, 2000). Earlier, Du Bois had organized a series of pan-African congresses around the world, in the years 1919, 1921, 1923, and 1927. The delegations were comprised of intellectuals from Africa, the West Indies, and the United States. Though resolutions which condemned colonialism and called for the alleviation of the oppression of black Africans were passed, little concrete change was evident. After decades of litigation and piecemeal progress in Georgia, the NAACP finally earned a groundbreaking victory for African Americans in January of 1961, when U.S. District Court judge William Bootle (who happened to be a Mercer alumnus) ordered the admission of Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter to the University of Georgia (UGA). Following suit other Georgian public and private colleges also desegregated their institutions in the early 1960s.

Manis (2002) stated that not only did segregationist, southern Whites think they should remain as overlords, but they also believed that the Civil Rights Movement was a communist conspiracy to destabilize America. He contends that many Southern Baptists of the post-World War II era shared in opposing Communism abroad and Catholicism at home. They saw the US as a *Christian democracy* fulfilling its responsibility “as the guardian of freedom” (Manis, 2002, p.67). Historian Joy Williamson-Lott (2013) agrees that in the South “fervent anticommunism and racism were inextricable” (p.883). Jeff Woods (2004) uses the terms “Black struggle” and “Red scare” to describe the turbulent times of segregation and anti-communism in the South from 1948 to 1968. A central point of Woods’ analysis is a phenomenon that he called “southern nationalism,” characterized as the desire to safeguard the “southern way of life,” which at the time, was a barely veiled allusion to segregation and White supremacy.

Additionally, the Soviet Union launched a spacecraft into space—the unmanned satellite *Sputnik I* in October of 1957 that created a national moral panic (Woods, 2004). Such a show of technological prowess could only help the USSR in its efforts to achieve closer economic and political relations with nations in Africa and Asia. Adding to the anti-communist fervor, was the Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954, which was followed by the Eisenhower administration’s decision to send federal troops to desegregate Central High School in Little Rock Arkansas. The South now felt their way of life threatened by federal intervention.

An example of this was found in the inflammatory rhetoric of Georgia’s governor Eugene Talmadge, who served from 1940 to 1942. Talmadge responded to reports that a dean at the University of Georgia (UGA) had advocated bringing Black and White students together in the classroom. Talmadge, an alumnus of UGA, attacked the university, and threatened that he would unceremoniously dismiss any “foreign professors trying to destroy the sacred traditions of the South” (Heale, 1998, p. 223). It was clear that “foreign” was used as a euphemism for both communists and faculty who were not segregationist sympathizers, and the phrase “sacred traditions” equated to racial division and propping up White supremacy (Heale, 1998).

During the post-*Brown* years in the South, reaction to advances in civic equality increasingly took the form of a racism enshrouded in the rhetoric of virtuous civic duty (Manis, 2004). Response to the *Brown* decision was the rallying point for many Southern segregationists to consolidate their associations. Pressure mounted on upper-class White segregationists from a number of quarters to match the respectability and moral rhetoric of Black civil rights leaders. For example, King, Abernathy, and Lewis, as ordained ministers, drew upon Christian values

and the oratory of what Cornel West (1993) refers to as *the prophetic voice* of African-American tradition, one that challenged all Americans to live up to its Creed.

As the Civil Rights Movement evolved in the South in the 1950s, various independent Klan groups bombed activists' homes and African-American churches, and harassed and killed Blacks and White sympathizers. In an oral history interview conducted in 1974, Congressman Andrew Young considered Georgia to be the "lynching capital of the South." Young claimed civil rights activists in the state, by necessity, had to organize politically because voting was "a matter of life or death" and the "Klan was at every doorstep and there every Saturday night at Stone Mountain" (Young, 1974, oral history recording). It is sometimes hard to comprehend the normalcy of the Klan's presence in many Southern towns and cities.

As the Civil Rights Movement became more publicized, particularly through the televised images of brutalized non-violent protesters, elitist White Council members endorsed economic threat as a more effective strategy than overt violence to exert power. Panic about the end of traditional institutions and segregated systems intensified. In the new era of television and international media, White Citizens' Councils (WCCs) formed in response to the pressure to be viewed as distinct from the blatant barbarism of the Ku Klux Klan, in direct response to the mounting Civil Rights Movement. For example, southern states witnessed growth in the number of WCC members in the earliest months of the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955. This corroborates the oral history account of Andrew Young, an early civil rights pioneer, pastor, confidante of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and later politician, and the contention that the WCC greatly feared the "awakening of the Black Community" (Young, 1974) whose economic power and ability to organize could no longer be denied.

In the accounts of Newman (2001) and Willis (1996), it is clear that the debate about race relation increased within the Baptist Church and opposing views sharpened throughout the 1960s around the issue of desegregation.

The Desegregation of Mercer University

In the fall of 1963, Sam Jerry Oni, a Ghanaian national of Nigerian parentage, became the first Black, full-time, residential student to attend Mercer University. Georgia Baptists founded Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, in 1833. The university was named after Jesse Mercer, the first chair of the Mercer Board of Trustees. With Oni's admission, the institution became one of a growing number of private institutions across the South that elected to desegregate without a court order. The NAACP's lawyers had produced a steady stream of successful challenges to segregation in public higher education (Keane, 2008). Newman (2005) noted that even those Baptists willing to endorse the *Brown* decision acquiesced, not without contention, only to it being the law of the land. By the end of the decade, many Whites moved to the suburbs and opted for private schools, rather than be compelled to comply with court-ordered busing to achieve the desegregation of urbanized school districts (Newman, 2005, p.110, 121). This migration was certainly the case in the history of Macon's public education system (Honaker, 2017).

By the late 1950s, financial penalties were a real threat to both public and private southern institutions. Schulman makes the case that "federal aid became a still more powerful argument for moderation on the race issue" (Schulman, 1991, p.197). Colleges that delayed undertaking similar reforms soon discovered other pressures could be brought to bear on their decision-making. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (1964), for example, required that only institutions with open admissions policies be eligible for federal grants. Colleges and universities

delayed integration at their financial peril. This undoubtedly had an impact on Mercer's decision to desegregate. An article in the University's student newspaper, the *Mercer Cluster*, dated November 16th, 1962, included an appeal from Rufus Harris, the president of Mercer. Harris stated that his reasons for desegregation were three-fold: there was a legal duty following the Supreme Court ruling in the *Brown* case; he felt it was also "a matter of conscience," regarding the "un-Christian act of drawing the color-line" and he warned about the "dangerous accrediting matters" ("Loans approved", 1962, p.1). In a related article, Harris sought to secure a much-needed \$1,850,000 low-interest government loan to improve and expand campus facilities. This was needed in order for the university to remain a marketable attractive option to prospective students and remain fiscally solvent. Desegregation was considered the only way at the time to secure critical funds at the preferential terms offered by the federal government. Walter Moore, who called for an action of the 1962 Georgia Baptist Convention's executive body approving Mercer's quest for collaboration to form a committee "studying the possibility of admitting negroes to Mercer," was the chairman of Mercer's trustee committee at the time, and also the pastor of Vineville Baptist Church ("Federal loans okay", 1962, p.1).

A Baptist Dilemma

The "Southern Baptist dilemma," a phrase coined by Willis (2005), describes the contradictory evangelical message of overseas missions and the reality of racially segregated congregations on US soil. Home churches whose members raised funds and resources in support of overseas missionaries' often cloaked racism in the rhetoric of the civic jingoism adopted by so-called Christian organizations such as the White Citizen's Councils. US missionaries were culpable in promulgating White supremacist ideologies (Campbell, 2005, p.69).

Despite President Harris' entreaty and the *Brown* decision, members of Mercer's Board of Trustees considered Oni's application unwelcome and thought it presented what Willis (1996) termed a *Baptist dilemma*. How could university officials accept students from foreign missionary fields while sustaining a policy of segregation toward its Black citizenry at home? Although many in the Georgia Baptist Convention vociferously endorsed that duality, a growing number grew uneasy and recognized the *Baptist dilemma's* inherent hypocrisy of holding fast to the status quo of racism at home, and yet preaching the brotherhood of man in their evangelistic efforts on overseas mission fields.

Civil Religion, Moral Rationalization and Roles

To understand the contradictions of the *Baptist dilemma's* Manis (2002) posited that an ideology other than mere Christianity was at play. He theorized that the politics of a phenomenon he termed a *civil religion* powerfully upheld the culture and mechanism of a racist social order. He defined *civil religion* as "that cluster of mytho-cultural meanings (or symbols) by which Americans represent and communicate the significance and purpose of their national experience" (p.2). The argument which develops from this premise is that to some extent *civil religion* legitimized the segregationist doctrine. In the debacle over civil rights, segregationist churchgoers infused religiosity into their protest placards as countless online images attest. It is challenging to grasp the impacts and complexities of this fractured consciousness. Hope is found in the realization that wicked problems are not other-worldly; for all their complexity they are created and thus deconstructed by humans.

Psychologists and behavioral science researchers assist in theorizing these anomalies. For decades, they have explored the idea that rather than originating from a few wicked people, evil arises from a combination of situational (Zimbardo, 1995) and psychological factors present in

the majority of individuals. Psychologist JoAnn Tsang defines this phenomenon as *moral rationalization*. She identifies “the cognitive process that individuals use to convince themselves that their behavior does not violate their moral standards” (Tsang, 2002, p.26). Blumenthal (1999) found that a focus on *roles* is an important contributor to immoral behavior. If a given role includes aggressive or unethical behavior, individuals may engage in that behavior without realizing it violates their moral principles. Everyday people who are given roles of oppressive power over others will begin to exhibit pathologically aggressive behavior against the powerless (Staub, 2000; Zimbardo, 1995), as demonstrated in the Stanford prison experiment. Researchers randomly assigned male college students to be either prisoners or guards in a mock prison. Even though everyone was aware that this was an experiment, the “guards” became progressively aggressive toward the “prisoners” as the study continued, so much so that the experiment had to be terminated within a few days, ahead of schedule, due to the increased brutality.

In summary, some theorists argue that there are a number of stages leading to the decision to rationalize evil. To begin with, the individual internalizes society’s moral standards. When the moral significance of their behavior becomes salient, individuals are faced with conflict and moral rationalization, which essentially is the ability to delegitimize the social identity of others. In this way, individuals and social groups may be able to convince themselves that an unethical choice serves the common good (Keane, 2008).

A Message from the Mission Field

Writing specifically about the Mercer desegregation campaign, Campbell (2005) recounts missionary Harris Mobley’s criticism of the racism inherent in the church. Mobley, a Mercer alumni and a Baptist missionary to Ghana, had been instrumental in convincing Sam Oni to apply to Mercer. On a visit to Mercer in a speech given in Willingham Chapel to the student

body, just a few months before Oni was admitted, Mobley roundly criticized the hypocrisy of White supremacy that he found alive and well at home in US churches. He did not hold back on his ire, stating: “Neither the NAACP nor the Kennedy administration is responsible for the moral aspects of the race problem, we are...Christian compassion and segregation will not mix; they are like oil and water” (Campbell, 2005, p.69).

Mobley lambasted the privileged status of White missionaries who, redolent of their colonial predecessors, enjoyed the accouterments of material privilege: “Look at our houses. Where do you find a missionary? Perched pretentiously on some imposing hilltop, isolated from the African community, in colonial fashion...our methods have reflected our theology, and the image has emerged unchristian” (Mobley, as cited in Campbell, 2005, p.70). It was at this meeting that Mobley acknowledged true Christian values and racial reconciliation conflicted with the objectives of an overseas Baptist mission and the taken-for-granted racial disparity in the US. Mobley’s foreign-service career was now effectively ended.

Segregationists in the church felt betrayed by ministers who expressed sympathy for desegregation and obeying the rule of law. Harvey (2005) cites numerous incidents in the archival data from the records of Baptist, Methodist, and other denominations that “overflows with protests and cries of anger emanating from the grassroots” (p.239). They fought on into the 1960s but suffered another dilemma in their proclamation to be defenders of law and order when in fact the laws were changing in support of desegregation. The troubling reality for rabid segregationists was that although they might argue that racial segregation was a God-given imperative, the sociopolitical landscape was changing with or without them.

Faith-Shattering Experiences

In a 2011 Founder's Day speech, Sam Oni, Mercer University's first Black residential student recounted several shocking instances that caused him repeatedly to marvel "Is *this* America?" News of the strategic attack of a prominent African American church on September 15, 1963 was one such event. A bomb, placed by four Klansmen at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, was set to detonate during the Sunday morning worship service. In her book entitled *While the World Watched*, Carolyn McKinstry provides a first-person account of this horrific incident. The explosion took the lives of four girls: Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson and Addie-Mae Collins, each of whom was aged 14 years old; and Denise McNair who was just 11 years old. McKinstry was probably the last person to see the four girls alive, as she left the bathroom they were in just moments before the fatal explosion.

Another tragic incident that happened within a few months of Sam's arrival was the assassination of President John. F. Kennedy. This occurred on November 22nd of 1963, just a few months after the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. A few months earlier on 28th August, more than 200,000 demonstrators took part in the march in the nation's capital. The widely-publicized gathering was successful in increasing the pressure on the Kennedy administration to initiate an unprecedented federal civil rights bill in Congress. During this event, Martin Luther King delivered his memorable *I Have a Dream* speech before an audience of the thousands who had gathered, as well as millions around the world who watched via television. In an open letter to his family in Ghana, published in the student newspaper the *Mercer Cluster*, and preserved in the digital archives, Oni described quite simply being "knocked cold" by the news of Kennedy's assassination (Oni, 1964, para.6). The youthful hope for a better future that Kennedy had embodied was exemplified in his inaugural speech "And so, my fellow Americans: Ask not what your country can do for you—

ask what you can do for your country” (Kennedy, 1961, audio file). This call for engaged citizenship was clearly under serious threat and change was going to be hard won.

Another incident, that Oni mentioned during his speech, occurred in the summer following his arrival at Mercer. In June of 1964, the abduction and murder of three young civil rights workers: James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, who had spent the summer trying to get African American Mississippians to register to vote, caused widespread condemnation. Since Mississippi’s authorities refused to prosecute the assailants in the state court, the federal government were left to charge 18 men with conspiracy to violate civil rights.

The year 1963 had indeed been one of intensified tragedies. Only months before Oni’s arrival, civil rights activist Medgar Evers had been assassinated outside his home in Mississippi by a White Citizen’s Council member. Each of these pivotal incidents stirred national and international outrage and galvanized the Civil Rights Movement. Oni explained that these events were amongst several that “jolted me to my foundation” (Oni, 2011). They would have also come on the wings of a time buoyed by some moments of optimism. Internationally, the process of liberation from centuries-old European colonization in Africa and Asia continued when on December 12th of 1963 Kenya joined the ranks of other African nations that gained their independence.

A common theme for these events is the unrelenting, violent assault on the youth of the nation, and their strivings, idealism, and faith in the possibilities of a genuinely democratic nation, united in honoring the civil liberties of all citizens.

According to Hatch (2008), the word injury signifies “a wrong done and harm suffered” (p.17). On a personal note, the particular series of wrongs Mr. Oni endured in his attempted desegregation of local church congregations constituted what he later described as “faith shattering” experiences. Sam Oni did not require an armed escort to join the student body at Mercer, unlike others who

desegregated southern universities. Fellow pioneer Black students such as James Meredith who faced violence at the University of Mississippi, Vivian Malone and James Hood at the University of Alabama, or Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter at the University of Georgia, experienced firsthand the visceral violence of racial prejudice. However, Oni, like so many others at the forefront of US desegregation, exposed the *wicked problem* of perpetual racial injury often occurring in the most unlikely-seeming places.

In the summer of 1966, while attending a summer program at Berkeley, Sam Oni learned that Tattnall Square Baptist Church, on Mercer's campus, had fired the minister, Rev. Holmes. This was the church who, a few years earlier in his freshman year, had dispatched their minister to greet him and his college roommate Don Baxter with the news that he was not welcome to attend. As the new incumbent, Rev. Holmes angered the deacons and the church's old guard segregationists, who were increasingly displeased by his rhetoric on racial inclusion, which aligned with Mercer's perceived waywardness. As expressed in his book, *Ashes for Breakfast: A Diary of Racism in an American Church*, which provides an autobiographical account of events, tensions continued to mount on this and a number of other leadership issues. The crescendo resulted in his dismissal for steadfastly preaching a series of conscience-pricking sermons which robustly advocated racial unity and church desegregation.

Inspired by the increasingly effective non-violent protests such as the bus boycotts, lunch counter sit-ins and church knee-ins, that provoked confrontation, Oni decided to act. He turned down the offer of support from fellow students at Mercer and Berkeley and on September 25, 1966, Oni alone showed up for the Sunday morning service at Tattnall Square Baptist church. Perhaps inspired by Alabama's Governor George Wallace, who had pledged "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever!" and physically tried to blockade the enrolment of

African American students Vivian Malone and James A. Hood at the University of Alabama, the church's deacons physically resisted. Oni was met at the door by two deacons who, after an exchange of words, bodily wrestled him away from the church and into a waiting police car. Although the police let him go after a reprimand, Oni was prepared to be arrested and knew this would likely be the result. His brave, non-violent action had achieved its primary goal, which was to draw international attention to Holmes' plight and the true state of affairs in the final citadel of segregation—the American church. Following his dismissal, Holmes was rehired as an assistant to a Mercer University administrator, a position he had held before he became pastor at Tattnell Square Baptist Church.

In 1967, Oni graduated from Mercer with a degree in sociology, and he vowed never to return to the south, and more specifically to Georgia. He attended graduate school at the University of California at Berkeley to study journalism, where he received his Master's degree. Oni was invited back to Mercer University in 1994 for the thirtieth anniversary of desegregation. Mr. Oni now makes his home in the state of Georgia, and he has made some degree of reconciliation with the South and with Mercer. He is a regular attendee and participant at the annual *Building the Beloved Community Symposium*.

It is in understanding these aspects of US history, and the complex symbiosis of religion, education, and ideology that we can appreciate more precisely the assertion that racial inequity is reasonably defined as a *wicked problem* (Ramaley, 2016) and thereby recognize the importance of the *Beloved Community's* engagement. HEIs' civic engagement in addressing complex social, environmental, and economic challenges (locally and internationally) may rightly be deemed both an opportunity and responsibility (Nungu, Gounko, & Kariwo, 2014; McIlrath, Lyons & Munck, 2012).

Christian Evangelicals and Color-Blind Racism

Sociologists Emerson and Smith (2000) chronicled conservative Christian evangelicals' views of race in their book, *Divided by Faith*, and define evangelicals as Christians who, "true to their name, believe in the importance of sharing their faith, or evangelizing" (p.3). Using data from 2,000 randomly selected telephone survey respondents and 200 face-to-face interviews from 23 states across the country, the researchers asked White evangelicals to explain the Black-White socioeconomic gap. Participants were also questioned about their proposed solutions to the problem of racism. The researchers found that a significantly higher percentage of evangelical Whites believed that individual motivation and self-efficacy alone explained the socioeconomic gap between Blacks and Whites (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 173, 175).

Tranby and Hartmann (2008) propose that evangelicals' ideas about race are not based on theological belief alone, but are also dependent on commonly held racialized ideologies, such as blaming victims of systemic racism for their disadvantaged status. There was thus a failure by many to acknowledge a troubled past re-inscribing a dominant narrative of privilege and race-neutrality. The researchers concluded that "conformity to American identity in the eyes of White Conservative Protestants is explicitly racial" (p. 354). People in other racial groups that do not achieve the same success, as Whites remain outsiders. In the eyes of the White Conservative Protestants the researchers studied, such people are "excluded from the American identity and ideals" (p. 347). This is consistent with the "color blind" approach explored by Bonilla-Silva (2006), wherein Whites express the desire for a *post-racial* society in which skin color, and by extension racial discrimination, can be ignored. Bonilla-Silva argues that the allure of color blindness enables Whites to ignore social inequity, mythologize lies and maintain their status of privilege ignorance "without fanfare, without naming those who it subjects and those who it

rewards” (p. 4). He debunks the concept of a post-racial society and provides an analysis of racism which resurfaces more subtly but with similar effects.

Christian Affiliated Universities and Campus Racial Climate

Hurtado, Carter and Kardia (1998) defined “campus racial climate” as the way students experience the campus environment in relation to (a) the history of racism at their institutions, (b) the quality of interactions between racial groups, (c) the amount of racial or ethnic representation in the curricula, and (d) the representation of different racial groups on campus.

Although Mercer University is formerly affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, it still maintains a commitment to “an educational environment that embraces the historic Baptist principles of intellectual and religious freedom, while affirming values that arise from a Judeo-Christian understanding of the world” (Mercer, 2017, para.1). Organizational structures exist not only at the macro level but also micro levels such as student sub-cultures which also play a critical role in influencing the campus climate for diversity. Student sub-cultures also have historical legacies, patterns of socialization that influence the status quo. As Park (2013, p.5) found in her research exploring students’ attitudes towards race-related affirmative action at a Christian affiliated HEI, “student sub-cultures play a key role in shaping campus climate.” This indicates that more research is needed. It is mistaken to suppose that the challenges regarding racialization dissolve in faith-based environments, they may in fact deepen.

A study by Lowe, Byron, Ferry, and Garcia (2013) revealed that students of Color are 69% more likely to report experiencing a negative campus racial climate than their White counterparts, even after controlling for class level, gender, major, and an amount of peer interaction.

Moreover, Kim, Hall, & Willingham (2010) discovered in their analysis of discriminatory experiences among 11 Asian/Asian-American female faculty from several Christian universities, that all but one of the women felt that they were being treated less favorably due to race and/or gender. Several themes related to campus racial climate in the context of Christian universities emerged from this study, which reflect a color-blind or race-neutral ideology, namely a lack of diversity, naiveté about race and the denial of difference. Similarly, Modica (2012) used students' online discussion forum postings to analyze ideas about race expressed by students in education classes at a small denominational Christian college. It was concluded that the White students in the study did not differ in their constructions of race or racism from other White students in non-religious settings.

The findings of these studies corroborate the Emerson and Smith report's conclusions made a decade earlier—that many White evangelicals admitted that they had thought little about the topic of race in general, they were “sheltered, unexposed to racial diversity, [and] insulated, in their own small world” (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 81). It was argued that racial isolation caused them to think that racism was “a problem in the past” and that, “a residue [of racism] may remain today because original sin remains, but the race problem is not severe” (p. 81).

Racial Reconciliation Projects of Christian Universities in the Southern US

Data from the US Department of Education indicates that in 2012 there were 791 reported hate crimes on college and university campuses in the United States. In 2012, of the 791 reported hate crimes, 355, or 44.8%, were categorized as being motivated by race (Roberts, Zhang, Morgan & Musu-Gillette, 2015). Statistics of this nature have become alarmingly common. Earlier research examining race-based educational policy studies in higher education has often explored accessibility for traditionally marginalized groups (Cokley, Obaseki, Moran-

Jackson, Jones & Vohra-Gupta, 2016); the socialization of students of Color (Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011); the negotiation of racialized identities (Modica, 2012); and campus racial climate (Kim, Hall, & Willingham, 2010; Park, Denson & Bowman, 2012; Ecklund, 2013), for both students and professors of Color (Orelus, 2013). Some studies have focused on the challenges of racial diversity in the context of Christian colleges (Nussbaum & Chang, 2013; Park, 2013).

Perusing the websites of several US universities and colleges with Southern Baptist denomination affiliated roots, at the time of writing, it is clear that, if they had reached this milestone, the celebration of their fiftieth year of desegregation was marked by a variety of social events. In some cases (Wake Forest University in North Carolina, Furman University in South Carolina and Baylor University in Texas) extensive online information is provided about the memorials, and on-going work on *race relations*. There are also invitations to “share your story” by completing online data forms. However, the topic of desegregation is only nominally mentioned in others universities with Southern Baptist roots. For example, Samford University, in Alabama, which will reach the landmark in 2019, (like Stetson University in Florida which was founded in 1883) devoted just a few lines to “integration” on a streamlined historical timeline. At Oklahoma Baptist University, founded in 1907, no mention is made of desegregation. (In fairness, there may be a number of reasons for this and further investigation is needed to analyze the variety of representations of desegregation in institutional memory.)

Mercer University seemed to be uniquely active in engagement and cultivating an on-going partnership with local church communities and in defining this as the work of racial reconciliation in work of the *Beloved Community* project. The most popularized

commemoratives, where they existed were, like Mercer, symposia, lectures, and panel discussions including feted pioneer Black alumni, banquets, concerts and art exhibitions.

This search also revealed that Sam Oni was not the only Ghanaian introduced to by missionary Harris Mobley to desegregate a Southern Baptist-affiliated university. A year earlier, in the fall of 1962, Ed Reynolds became the first black full-time undergraduate to enroll at Wake Forest University. Fifty years later, Dr. Reynolds returned to campus to mark the anniversary of the desegregation of Wake Forest as part of *Faces of Courage: Celebrating 50 Years of Integration*, a yearlong series of events designed to “encourage discussion, bring people together and honor those who helped the school become the first major private university in the South to integrate” (Walker, 2012, para.2).

Similar to secular counterparts, Mercer and other Christian higher education institutions have a diversity mission. According to Smith (2009), racial differences must be courted and embraced if Christian colleges and universities are to be successful in a more pluralistic and interconnected world. He argues that Christian higher education must respond and build its institutional capacity around this diversity imperative. Advocating for the development of *multicultural competency* McNeil and Pozzi (2007) further contend that an unsophisticated theology of *tolerance* is inadequate for sustained and real institutional action. Mercer’s intention to develop the racial reconciliation program may be framed as an attempt to create a space for candid discourse on race, racism and its impact on the local (religious) community, which like most others in the US, is divided along racial lines.

A Culture of Engagement

It is a common contention that 21st century institutions of higher education have a distinctive opportunity to prepare students for citizenship so that society can flourish. Judith Ramaley proposes that institutions of higher education are uniquely placed to “build extensive collaborative partnerships and reflect both academic interests and the characteristics of local communities to generate knowledge that addresses societal challenges” (Ramaley, 2014, p.15). By this conception, the overarching goal is to cultivate in students the skills and educative experiences critical to becoming active members of a progressively racially diverse nation and globalized society (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Chang, Wit, Jones & Hakuta, 2003).

Leaders of higher education institutions, and their associations, often make claims that position racial diversity and inclusion as objectives of their interdisciplinary themes. As early as the 1940s the Truman Commission on Higher Education held that:

Equal opportunity for all persons, to the maximum of their individual abilities and without regard to economic status, race, creed, color, sex, national origin, or ancestry is a major goal of American democracy. Only an informed, thoughtful, tolerant people can develop and maintain a free society.

United States President’s Commission on Higher Education (1947)

It may seem as though the nature and scope of higher education have been fashioned by the same anvil of economic and political concerns of the previous decades of the 20th century. It is clear, however, that the same concerns and dilemmas related to the *employability* of graduates have underpinned their development into the 21st century. In this fiscally inspired, technological vein the American Association of Universities (AAU) statement on diversity asserts:

We are committed to diversity. It is fundamental to the very concept of education. The question is not whether or not a diverse student body is important—the consensus among higher education, military, and business leaders has long been that it is—but rather how universities can enable all of their students to flourish in their studies, in their careers, and as thoughtful citizens and visionary leaders. Our institutions have a responsibility to lead the way in retaining and preparing all students. (AAU, 2016, para.5)

Moreover, in a report from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2013, p.17), the Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences issued a challenge to all who seek to educate an “adaptable and creative workforce” and a “broader public who exercise civil political discourse, founded on an appreciation of the ways our differences and commonalities have shaped our rich history.” These statements on diversity are open to the criticism of championing a neoliberal agenda (Giroux, 2004). Even if taken at face value, research suggests such diversity statements all too often contrast the lived experiences and the racial climate on US college campuses (Hurtado, Carter & Kardia, 1998; Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Park, Denson, & Bowman, 2012; Lowe, Byron, Ferry & Garcia, 2013).

Theological Framework for Racial Reconciliation

The theological framework for racial reconciliation requires an examination of the scriptural basis, the role of the church and other institutions and the image of Jesus.

Biblical references about Christian unity often form the bedrock for those in faith-based communities who believe that racial reconciliation is *definable*, *desirable* and *attainable*. Several scholars agree that the scriptures provide a basis for moving Christian higher education, in particular, toward greater racial inclusivity (Braxton, 2002; Ash & Schreiner, 2016).

An investigation by Tolmie (2014) examined research studies, published from 2000 to 2010, and related to Paul's letter to the Galatians, reveals that this scripture received the most mention from theological scholars. In the specific passage the apostle Paul's proclamation, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, NIV) is a much-referenced source in the literature. Ash and Schreiner (2016, p.53) make the key argument that this scripture was also an essential aspect of the "abolitionists' fuel in the debate over American slavery." They further advise that:

Just as well-intentioned Jewish Christians in Galatia believed that preaching circumcision as the path to Christ was right; well-intentioned educators on predominantly White-Anglo Christian campuses often believe they are right in preaching conformity to the prevailing spiritual practices of the White evangelical majority as the path to Christian unity, not fully recognizing the sociocultural and ethnic influences on these practices. As a result, their pleas for Christian unity can be experienced by persons of Color as oppressive demands for conformity to the ideology of the majoritarian culture. Well-intentioned as Christian college educators may be, requiring assimilation for the sake of unity may actually be in opposition to the Gospel of Christ. (Ash & Schreiner, 2016, p.54)

In relating this passage to higher education, Ash and Schreiner thus caution against devolution to an assimilationist mind-set which ultimately privileges the status quo.

In the advent of social media campaigns, it is clear that Black students' affinity groups and alliances have chosen not to remain silent and instead insist on a re-fashioning of institutions

of higher education. For instance, in recent times the actions of students at the flagship educational institution of the Seven-Day Adventist Church, Andrews University, who issued a set of demands to the administration to address systemic racism suggests that the matter of religious *assimilation for the sake of unity* is unsustainable (“It is time AU”, 2017, video file).

The scriptural affirmation for the celebration of racial and ethnic diversity, rather than a supposed color-blind pedagogy is explored in the work of several writers. Exegeting the text Ukwuegbu (2008) makes a claim for an authentic African theology based on Paul’s distinction between Jew and Greek as outlined in Galatians 3:28:

The Pauline vision of *neither Jew nor Greek* can prove a veritable scriptural *cum* theological guide for African theologians in their attempt to chisel out (even amidst conflict and controversy with a dominant culture or dominant view of being a church) a self-understanding of the Church for their own people that is truly Christian, while at the same time respecting the peculiarities and particularities of their ethnic and cultural specificities (p.316).

This verse illustrates the importance of unity and diversity among different ethnic identities. Likewise, Alio Cissé Niang, a Senegalese convert from Islam to Christianity, “trained in Biblical interpretation in the West” (Niang, 2009, p.3) pondered how the Pauline epistle to the churches in Galatia might be appropriated in the context of colonial, post-colonial and neo-colonial Senegalese Diola communities. He interpreted Galatians 2:11-14 and 3:26-29 through the experiences of colonialism as experienced by the Diola people in Senegal, West Africa. In this regard, the Apostle Paul was believed to act as a “countercolonialist *par excellence*” by liberating colonized people (Niang, 2009, p.7).

In another example, John Mansford Prior, a US missionary to Indonesian since the 1970s, pleaded for a contextual social reading of Galatians, which allows for a radical multi-ethnic and multi-religious context (Prior, 2010, p.71-90). He explored the way in which Galatians 3:27-28 might be interpreted in Christian communities in Indonesian cities with high proportions of minorities. He contends that the inclination to interpret these verses for Christian unity in an overly westernized way has caused churches around the globe to miss the opportunity to reveal the power, beauty, and relevance of their creed. Prior asserts that an ostensible otherworldly mysticism, which often still manages to privilege some more than others, has only served to render the churches affected, irrelevant and ineffectual.

However, there are dissenting opinions. For example, Miller (2002) argues that this scripture primarily addresses the ethereal issue of inheritance of Abraham's promise for the faithful and no worldly constructs have any bearing. This, however, does not mean that the social differences between believers are invalidated. Miller contends, "such distinctions far from being abrogated are actually reinforced" (Miller, 2002, p.9). One solution to this dilemma is to re-envision Christian higher education as a place where "the rich diversity of the body of Christ is not only valued and celebrated, but intentionally sought" (Ash & Schreiner, 2016, p.53).

Other biblical references supporting racial reconciliation include the encouragement to love one's neighbor as oneself (Luke 10:27; Mark 12:31) and Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan in response to the question concerning who is one's neighbor (Luke 10:29 - 37). In this we find Jesus' prayer that those who believe in Him would be one (John 17:20-23), and the description of a vision of "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9, NIV). Cone argues that centralizing the Black experience is the most effective way to expose the

historical hypocrisies of Christianity. He contends that employing “the Black experience as a source is like using the Christian tradition to interpret itself” (Cone, 2000, p. 746). This is not to engage in a lionization of any particular group, nor yet to create a reverse and equally debilitating binary of Blacks supremacy (King, 1963c). Instead, Cone stresses the need for Christians of every race to avoid the allure of the myth of color blindness to address ongoing racial injury and racial injustice in US society. Race neutrality is thus merely another place to hide sugar, acting as a saccharine sweet placebo in place of the, sometimes bitter, work of community building. Acknowledging racial injury is the real graft of grace and perhaps a necessary first step.

In an oral history interview, recorded in 1973, Georgia Senator John Lewis spoke at length about the importance of the Christian values in the struggle for racial equity. An ordained minister, Lewis defined the Civil Rights Movement as an “extension of the church” and shared his conviction that “the church, as an institution, as an organized effort, is a source of great power, great strength” (Lewis, 1973, audio file). He argues that even in an urbanized context the role of the church is critical to social justice work.

Warnock (2014) affirms this belief in the critical role of the church in bringing about social justice. He acknowledged that Dr. King forever reaffirmed the critical role of the clergy in social justice activism. Hinting at a perceptible tendency to focus on *individualism*, via tropes related to a personal relationship with a personal Savior, Warnock warns against a modern day overemphasize on “the pietistic dimension” of “self-understanding while minimizing the work of liberation” (p. 48). In this theological framework, self-identity and the role of the church as a uniting force for social change are inextricably linked. The emphasis on discrimination being a result of individual preference, foibles or even sin negates the existence of systemic inequity and

as is argued by Bonilla-Silva (2006), such a claim requires “ignoring the multiple institutional and state-sponsored practices behind segregation and being unconcerned about these practices’ negative consequences for minorities” (p. 28). Park (2013, p.170) further argues that because American individualism is predicated on personal agency, human relationships are conceived to be a matter of personal choice, thus, “the decision to befriend someone of another race due to preferences rarely considers organizational structures, demographics” and other systemic factors that affect our ability to “meet and befriend one another.”

As well as the scriptural and institutional aspects of this puzzle, new understandings of an equitable society are being debated that cause some to question all forms of hierarchy and the lure of what is conceived to be a nationalistic *Americanized Jesus* (Kelley, 2002). Hart (2016) writes “the Jesus we follow sometimes bears more resemblance to Uncle Sam or ourselves, in thought and reasoning than the crucified Messiah in Christian scripture” (p.59). Hart reminds us that this was recognized by theologian Howard Thurman decades before, who ascribed the image of Jesus as a suffering servant, able to identify with the oppressed and more specifically with the African-American story of racial subjugation. Described by Du Bois in his 1903 classic, *The Souls of Black Folks* as a “dark and pierced Jew” (Du Bois, 1903/2007, p.227), Jesus became recognized as being from an oppressed minority living in an occupied state, and thus, amongst the “disinherited” of the earth (Thurman, 1975).

Historian, Dr. Paul Harvey is another writer who has written extensively on the history of race and religion in America. He explores the Civil War as a climactic moment, and its aftermath as a turning point, not only in American national history but also in a lesser-known battle, to bring Jesus into the racialized ideological struggles of the mid-19th century (Blum & Harvey, 2012).

According to the Critical Religion Association (CRA) rather than view religion with “suspicion,” “blame,” “discredit,” or “incredulity” it may, instead, be considered from a positive critical standpoint. This means that “we engage in our work with a view to showing how open to re-interpretation or re-conceptualization the term ‘religion’ is today in our intellectual, social, and cultural spheres” (Critical Religion Association, 2017, para.3). This openness to innovation represents what Lederach (2005) termed a *moral imagination*.

In the next section, some of the ideas about the characteristics of racial reconciliation offered by two grassroots activists who have decades of experience related to faith-based work, at international and on a local level, proved useful in this analysis. It was important to examine the work of activists who approach wicked problems associated with racial difference. As I discovered later when conducting the oral interviews, selecting keynote speakers who were able to address racial reconciliation knowledgeably from a faith-based perspective was an important aspect of planning for their annual *Beloved Community* symposia.

John Paul Lederach’s Framework for Reconciliation

John Paul Lederach defines reconciliation as both a perspective and a social phenomenon that seeks to create an encounter where people can focus on their relationship and share their perceptions, feelings, and experiences with one another, with the goal of creating new perceptions and a shared experience (Lederach 1997, p.30). Lederach’s framework of reconciliation outlined in *Building Peace, Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, focuses on the development of reconciliation through seven key concepts: truth, mercy, justice, peace, relationships, encounter, and innovation. Although not confined to racial injury alone, Lederach is a leading advocate of grassroots peace processes balancing scholarship with

interacting with local people in situations of conflict all over the world as a peacemaker.

Relationship, encounter and innovation are the underlying assumptions of this approach:

Relationship

Relationship is considered the basis of both the conflict and the long-term solution in the reconciliation process. This means that reconciliation is not pursued by separating different conflicting parties from each other and minimizing their affiliations, but rather by building relationships. Relationship building requires patience and a commitment to remain engaged long-term because it is understood that community necessarily includes difference, risk, and discomfort rather than homogeneity, ease and predictability.

Encounter

According to Lederach (1997) reconciliation represents a place of encounter where concerns about both the past, present and the future can meet. Therefore, reconciliation allows space to express grief and anger about experiences of loss and to acknowledge these feelings on both sides. As an aspect of reconciliation, encounter signifies a meaningful interaction between people in conflict in order to deal with the legacy of painful events. Encounter thus relates to the idea of proximity (Stevenson, 2014) and relocation (Perkins, 2007).

Innovation

Lederach (1997) argues that innovation has its grounding in “socio-psychological and spiritual dimensions that have traditionally been seen as ... irrelevant” (Lederach, 1997, p.29). The willingness to try innovative, untried solutions within an inter-disciplinary community of problem solvers compliments the conclusion reached by Amy Edmondson, who wrote about solving wicked problems a Harvard Business Review article:

Pointing out that the work ahead is experimental creates an expectation that risk taking, both interpersonal and technical, is essential. When people understand this context, they are more likely to approach their collaborators with open-minded curiosity and feel less concerned about committing social blunders or exposing their ignorance. (Edmondson, 2016)

Acknowledgment

For meaningful interaction to take place, Lederach contends that the warring parties must first acknowledge the injustices of the past. Acknowledgment “validates experiences,” and represents “the first step toward restoration of the person and the relationship” (Lederach, 1997, p.26). Recognition of prior injustices is not enough in Lederach’s view. The dialogue must produce innovation, meaning planning for future initiatives to build constructive relationships (Nagai-Rothe, 2015). Lederach (2005) argues that the commitment to live out the *ministry of reconciliation* will take a work of grace or transcendental depth which intrinsically stirs the *moral imagination* of warring sides to connect with one another in the face of grievances.

As an international peace worker, Lederach offers a theory that provides a useful overarching framework for reconciliation. This approach offers some valuable tools and skills employed internationally, for examining reconciliation. It is now expedient to consider where racial reconciliation in urbanized US settings that are comparable to the *Beloved Community*’s locale in Macon, Georgia, appears to be working well.

John Perkins' Model of Community Development

John Perkins, who is widely recognized as a leading voice in the evangelical Christian racial reconciliation movement, has worked for over 50 years in building urban communities (Young, 2010; Marsh & Perkins, 2009). Perkins has developed, what he terms the “three R’s of community development” which lie at the heart of his strategy for urban renewal (Perkins, 1993). He was also the 2006 keynote speaker at the *Beloved Community*’s symposium.

Relocation

The first R stands for *relocation*. Perkins’ strategy begins with the redistribution of skilled people. It is argued that social justice cannot be achieved long distance, but rather needs to be populated in areas of greatest need. He proposes:

Our best attempts to reach people from the outside will patronize them. Our best attempts will psychologically and socially damage them. We must live among them. Their needs must be our needs. (Perkins, 2007, p. 90)

Committed members of corporate church communities must relocate to communities of need to in order to face common needs, build friendships and serve together. Perkins maintains that for some, it may mean moving there from “the outside in, to uplift the people who are there” (Perkins, 1993, p.36). For others, as in his case, it means returning to one’s hometown. After his conversion to Christianity Perkins rescinded his vow never to return to Alabama. It was a vow made when he left the state as a teenager, after his brother was murdered in a race-based hate attack. He returned, feeling compelled to be a force for change. In this way those who have been marginalized by society are not avoided because of the perceived cultural inferiority, which drives racialization (Young, 2010).

Reconciliation

The second R is for *reconciliation*. Humanity's reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ is clearly at the heart of the Christian faith. However, as theologians (Cone, 2000; Warnock, 2014; Perkins, 2007) argue reconciliation must occur between human beings and this must happen across racial, cultural and economic boundaries (Perkins, 2007, p. 51). Perkins suggests that building communities without first deconstructing the context of systemic racialization and intra-racial class differences has weakened rather than empowered urban communities. The most marginalized have been left in concentrated areas while those with the educational and economic means have moved to more affluent suburbs. He comments that because of the Fair Housing Act of 1968, more Black Americans also obtained better employment and education opportunities in the 1960s resulting in "Black flight." This refers to a migration of upwardly mobile African Americans from urban centers to the suburbs. Perkins suggests that this migration of middle-class Blacks living in more affluent communities whilst often working in the inner cities helped to re-inscribe divisions, this time emphasized by class (Perkins, 1993, p.9). It is maintained that for reconciliation to occur, the complicity from all stakeholders and the injuries this causes must first be acknowledged and addressed in order for strong and sustainable communities to be built.

Redistribution

The third R is for *redistribution*. Perkins claims that because Christ calls followers to share with the needy that this means sharing not only materially, but also intangibles goods, such as time, skills and energy. The belief is that this needs to be done in ways that break down cycles of poverty and employ resources "in ways that produce development rather than dependency" (Perkins, 2007, p. 179). His pragmatic economic initiatives include forming community church

based cooperatives, mutual saving and loan associations and credit unions. The objective of this redistribution is not “absolute equality,” but rather “equitable distribution of resources” (Perkins, 2007, p. 56). He emphasizes the connection between the three Rs: *relocation*, *reconciliation*, and *redistribution* in his organization the Christian Community Development Association and concludes that the most critical resource we have to redistribute is ourselves. Redistribution most directly relates to a reparations approach to addressing racial injury, which Coates (2015) and others, argues must take precedent.

In analyzing Perkin’s popularity with White evangelicals, Young (2010) argues that two key ideas drive his crossover racial appeal. First, he is a conservative evangelical himself and second, he has managed to emphasize the gospel in such a way as to disarm guilt. Young (2010) posits that this is achieved because racism can be understood objectively and assessed in terms of the interplay between real people and the constructs and therefore work of building community has the potential of going forward.

For many people, especially since the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of 1995-2003, the term is linked to *truth* and *forgiveness*, even if those also both remain hard to define (Gibson, 2004). The mismatch of terminology persists in the academic literature.

Critiques of Racial Reconciliation

Lederach (1997) argues “reconciliation represents a space, a place or location of encounter, where parties to a conflict meet” (p.30). In this place of encounter, the traumas of the past and the hopes for the future must be formulated and brought together.

However, the complexity of socio-political contexts and the hegemonic prevalence of a

White supremacist worldview have caused some theorists to call into question the *attainability* of racial reconciliation (Wilson, 2004) and its *desirability* (Stanley, 2014).

Some argue, that the crux of the paradox of Sunday's being the most segregated hour in US society does not lie so much with people of different races congregating together separately for worship, the issue lies with what happens during the rest of the week (McNeil, 2008; Boesak & DeYoung, 2012). Those who hold this view may well express concern that the call for congregational racial harmony is, in fact, a covert form of assimilation and devolves to conformity to the status quo which already marginalizes and privileges certain racialized groups. Stanley (2014, p.46) warns against the possibility of racial reconciliation acting as "the benign mask worn by compulsory assimilation". The idea of assimilation is connected to what Bonilla-Silva (2006) termed *color blindness racism*, which also surreptitiously panders to existing racialized norms and reaffirms biases within the status quo.

The rhetoric of color blindness is argued to privilege and standardize tropes and mythologies of White, Protestant, masculine, middle-class social identity as the desired norm. Bonilla-Silva refers to the narrative of a *minimization frame* socially constructed to parse minorities as hypersensitive and too race conscious whenever the matter of race is raised. The rationale is that society would be more harmonious, just and prosperous if people would learn to get along better by just being more color blind. The practice of minimization allows the dominant privileged group to refute the racial inequality claimed by minorities and further negates the social identity of any group that is different from the desired norm. Instead, the minimization discourse paradoxically qualifies the dominant group to proffer an identification as the oppressed against whom minority groups like to play the race card.

In the rhetoric of faith-based reconciliation, humans at their God-ordained best are members of an authentic (beloved) community. Separations along racial lines therefore, fall short of and even violate this ideal. A critique of the reconciliation paradigm is that Whiteness as a social identity exists as a manifestation of normalized privilege and structuralized injustice. This causes critics to argue that a racial reconciliation ideology only focusses on disunity and a closing of divisions. However, this fails to address the causal, structural conditions, that make the respective social identities, and thus hierarchical racial divisions even exist.

Harvey (2011) posits that if understandings of racism are seen “primarily as a problem of separateness” reconciliation as the solution is “incomplete” (p.60). She argues that the reality of racial separateness is “evidence that our differences embody legacies of unjust material structures, and painful violent histories that remain un-redressed” (p.61). Harvey joins the ranks of those who advance a reparations-based approach which discards the desirability of racial reconciliation if it is simply limited to more racially diverse congregations and little else. Harvey (2014, p.73) argues that reparations begin with *repentance*, defined as the “unequivocally rigorous and costly process of taking responsibility for changing one’s ways and finding concrete, effective methods to demonstrate the sincerity of that repentance, by *repairing the actual harm done to the greatest extent possible*.” This concept of *repair* for unjust benefit and the on-going injuries of racism includes an unequivocal and specifically targeted apology for harms done, as well as a pledged commitment to engage in actions of restorative justice in order not to repeat them.

Meanwhile, Wilson (2004) critiques reconciliation from a theoretical view of interest-convergence. The proposition is that the interests of Blacks in achieving racial equality have historically only been accommodated when they have converged with the interests of Whites.

Wilson contends that if reconciliation is to have a hope of success in US politics, rhetoric that advances Whites' interests must be directed towards stakeholders.

As well as the ideological challenges of racial reconciliation and misgivings with the social practices, critiques of HEI community engagement also center on their purpose and effectiveness in addressing wicked problems. For example, in an online article, Stanley Fish, an academic dean at University of Illinois, contends that the “main objection to moral and civic education in our colleges and universities is not that it is a bad idea (which it surely is), but that it’s an unworkable idea . . . democratic values and academic values are not the same and . . . the confusion of the two can easily damage the quality of education” Fish (2003). In his estimation, this is borne out in the evidence that graduates are more motivated by self-interest, regardless of moral and civic educational imperatives. Such critiques of civic engagement highlight the obstacles and challenges of defining the purpose and the effectiveness of higher educational establishments that must be overcome, or at least minimized. In order to institute authentic racial reconciliation efforts these criticisms cannot be overlooked. Problems of racial injustice and disenfranchisement remain stark and urgent, but conciliatory responses continue, largely as a work in progress (Harvey, 2011).

Hatch (2008) posits that while racial reconciliation initiatives cannot fully redress racism they represent an interesting and significant rhetorical effort to overcome the legacy of racial injustice. He cautions that no single initiative could possibly achieve racial reconciliation in the fullest sense and should not be judged by that standard. Similarly, Sharon Stanley (2014) argues that from the vantage of our “still-segregated present,” “racial solidarity” should be understood as “a process moving us on an uncertain, obstacle-laden path out of a segregated society”

(Stanley, 2014, p.61). She offers three useful distinctions for the complex forms of what she conceives as *racial solidarity*: cultural, social and political.

Cultural solidarity stems from a rudimentary “celebration” of the cultural contribution of different racial groups to “cultural traditions” such as literature, art, music, fashion, and cuisine. Social solidarity recognizes interpersonal bonds between groups as “intrinsically valuable” and worthy of cultivation for their own sake. Political racial solidarity is based on the view that “shared political needs or interests” are more effectively attained through “group action” across racial lines (Stanley, 2014, p.48). Stanley, citing Valls (2010), agrees that racial solidarity is only validated when “it results from uncoerced individual choices under just conditions” (Valls, 2010, p.475). Stanley’s resulting “pessimism” stems from the recognition that “we are a long way indeed from affording people such uncoerced choices, and our political present does not seem very propitious for moving us in this direction” (Stanley, 2014, p.62).

Chapter 2 Summary

Frank and McPhail (2005) suggest that reconciliation requires “the creation of a new common history and not simply the rehearsal of an old mythology” (p.583). It is clear from the literature review that the past needs to be examined through eyes, ears, and minds that are more willing to be attuned to seeing, hearing and learning counter-stories. More than 50 years after the legal desegregation of higher educational institutions, amidst the bicentennial celebrations and advertising campaigns designed to show a narrative effectively lauding how far HEIs have come, the dream of racial reconciliation has yet to be realized. Definitions remain contested and epitomize the inherent complexity of wicked problems. Hatch (2003) advises that reconciliation deserves further study for us to better understand the underpinning complex elements of its potential and challenges.

As HEI and faith-based racial reconciliation community engagement projects emerge, it is important to understand that at whatever level of solidarity a project operates, the work of racial reconciliation is slow and complex (Androff, 2016). It is also relational, as Perkins (2007) and Lederach (2001) posit—proximity and racial dialogue are important aspects of social justice and community building. Dialogue is shown to be an important precursor to political actions. Whether it be reparations, public apologies, or other political solidarity as explored by several commentators, active engagement as a result of proximity needs to be mediated to address systemic and interpersonal racism (Harvey, 2011; Stanley, 2014; Stevenson, 2014).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology: Introduction

This dissertation is the first qualitative research study of its kind to investigate the lived experiences and perceptions of racial reconciliation for Mercer's *Beloved Community*. An exploratory, qualitative design was used to solicit 18 in-depth, open-ended oral history interviews. This allowed for a detailed investigation of the participants' perspectives on race and reconciliation. An oral history methodology also provided an opportunity for them to share, at length, stories about their personal life histories and lived experiences as it pertained to negotiating racialized identities. Fifteen participants gave consent for their recorded interviews to be archived in the Mercer University Tarver Library repository, and made available to the public as primary source data for further reference.

This study is intended to contribute primary source data to the historical record and aid in the effort to democratize knowledge, which means making the raw data, information, knowledge and wisdom that can be gleaned thereby, readily available for the benefit of all (Thompson, 2000; Johnson, 2012; Shopes, 2015).

Conceptual Framework

This section details the research methods used in this study, including specifics about participants' selection and the role of the researcher. In addition, this chapter explains the procedures for data collection and analysis and explores anticipated ethical issues like trustworthiness, credibility, and confidentiality in the research design.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explain that qualitative research has evolved epistemologically to accommodate multiple ways of understanding human behavior, and *gives voice* to the participants in the research process. This includes the voices of historically

marginalized others, who are often disregarded by the academy's long-standing positivist research tradition (Guthrie, 1998; Woodley & Lockard, 2016). The notion of *giving* anyone else *a voice*, is problematic, especially from a feminist, womanist or critical race perspective, because the implication is that the researcher has the power to do so. This conceivably assumes a socially constructed position of objectivity or neutrality which inherently privileges the researcher's *voice* as the one able to empower others.

Many researchers using an oral history methodology do so in an attempt to *democratize knowledge* which essentially means to privilege narrators whose voices may not be traditionally heard or legitimized in hitherto historical accounts of the past. A tenet of oral history research is the desire to gain a deeper understanding of the "struggle over power, subjectivity and knowledge" found in life stories (Goodley, Lawthom, Clough & Moore, 2004, p.101). It is understood that each of these elements features in most human interactions and potentially exerts influence on individuals, groups, and organizations. This struggle is an ongoing aspect of reflexivity as a researcher (Etherington, 2004). Oral history is a complex and multi-vocal genre in which multiple perspectives, ideologies, and narratives create a mosaic of understandings that build our knowledge of past events (Plummer, 1983). Stories of individual lives add texture to socio-historical events such as racial reconciliation and also allows the participant's voice to be sustained, as a matter of historical record, beyond the scope of a research frame. It is hoped that the beauty and authenticity of the participants' voices are thus unfettered, un-bottled from the time capsule of this researcher's interests, research questions and those of the academy.

Many social justice researchers, with theoretical groundings in womanist, feminist and critical race traditions have critiqued research practices which privilege White male majoritarian narratives (Cone, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Williams, 2013). Instead, they favor a

reflexive turn in social science research, which prompts inquiries into “systemic practices of inequality and oppression even within the research methods themselves” (Woodley & Lockard, 2016, p.321). Additionally, Coffey (1999) argues that fieldwork is a “social setting, inhabited by embodied, emotional, physical selves...that helps to shape, challenge, reproduce, maintain, reconstruct and represent” the self and the selves of others (p.8). In sharing her experiences as an ethnographer and the need to “manage and produce an acceptable body to the field site,” for example, Coffey (1999, p. 65) also emphasizes the body as both a site of “description and analysis” (p.75) in fieldwork.

Oral History Research

Oral historian Linda Shopes proposes that the research “ground itself firmly in the narratives themselves and [that we] work outward from there to explicate their meaning” (Shopes, 2015, p. 301). By that token, the goal is to tread a delicate balance of interpretive inquiry that avoids overpowering the stories with pre-existing conceptual categorization. Shopes expounds in her encouragement to oral historians to “see our work as part of a project to reorient the dominant narrative, to restore a measure of public respect for narrators beyond the realm of the archive and seminar room and perhaps as a strike against injustice and towards a measure for change” (p. 306).

Since 1968 the Oral History Association (OHA) has published a series of statements aimed at outlining principles and obligations for all those who use this research methodology. Oral history interviews seek an in-depth account of personal experience and reflections, with sufficient time allowed for the narrators to give their story the fullness they desire. Oral history thus, has a special value not merely concerning the *process* of work itself but, as Thompson (2000, p.91) asserts “with the *social relationships* and *culture* which follow from it.” This

methodology gave the opportunity for the recorded interviews and verbatim transcripts in this study to be archived at Mercer University's Jack Tarver Library and made available for the historical public record. In so doing, it was also an effort to *democratize* knowledge and shift the focus of the history itself and thereby "give back to the people who made and experienced [that] history through their own words, a central place" (Thompson, 2000, p.3). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) argue that our interpretation of these lived and told stories "fill our world with meaning" and through the process of interrelation we "enlist one another's assistance in building lives and communities" (p. 35). It is through these stories that we make sense of ourselves, of the world, and of our relationship to others (Denzin, 1989; Van Manen, 1997). Thus, the narratives that make up the participants' stories give an insight into how they make sense of their lives, and are linked more broadly to historical events and social constructs of identity (Somers & Gibson, 1994; Thompson, 2000). It was hoped that this approach would facilitate further exploration of the interconnectedness between stakeholders in the study and their relationships to institutions such as Mercer and faith-based organizations.

Because of the importance of context and identity in shaping the content of a narrative, it is usually the practice in oral histories for narrators to be identified by name. However, there may be some exceptional circumstances when anonymity is appropriate, and this was clarified and negotiated in advance with each participant as part of the informed consent process for this study.

Procedures

Description of the Site

a) Racial Division in Bibb County Public Schools:

It is in the public-school sector that one can see another stark example of the lingering racial segregation that exists at the site of this study. After I had presented my prospectus design to a group of colleagues, one attendee asked if I knew about “how bad *White flight*” was in Macon’s public schools. This corroborated the accounts I had heard from several participants. I decided to investigate this further and include my findings in this study because I think the disparities paint a succinct picture of the work that race does in this social context.

According to the state of Georgia government data for 2016, the proportion of White students attending Bibb County public schools has continued to drop significantly over the last 20 years (Blankenship & Ragusea, 2017). At the same time, the population of Black students in the area’s public schools has increased. According to the enrollment data, Bibb County showed a total enrollment of 23,988, with 17,354 (or 72.3%) of the students identified as Black and 4,483 (18.7%) as White. Of the 4,483 White students enrolled in Bibb County public schools in the fall of 2016, more than 1,000 or 22% of them were at one school, the Academy for Classical Education (ACE), a charter school located in north Macon. Other key statistics from the Georgia Department of Education’s enrollment data shows there were 15 schools, or more than 40% of schools in the county listed as nearly all Black. This stands in contrast to 1996 when about 28% of the schools were nearly all African American.

These metrics suggest that race remains a definitive predictor of educational opportunity and outcomes in Bibb County, which contains Macon Georgia, the site where this study is conducted. This has an impact on the participants in the study, their families and where they

choose to educate their children. If the community is so sharply divided on this issue of where it educates the young, in order for the *Beloved Community* to stand any chance of relevancy or sustainability for generations to come, this chasm must be addressed.

b) Mercer University's National Rankings

Since its inception in 1833, Mercer University has enjoyed great success measured by markers such as increased expansion of course offerings, enrolment and a rise in its national ranking, land acquisition, endowments and academic status. The university has more than 8,300 students enrolled, at the time of writing; 12 schools and colleges with major campuses in Macon, Atlanta and Savannah; two teaching hospitals; an engineering research center, a performing arts center and a NCAA Division I athletic program. For almost 20 years, *U.S. News and World Report* has ranked Mercer among the leading universities in the South. *The Princeton Review* repeatedly ranks it in the top 10% of all colleges and universities in North America. The university has been named a “College with a Conscience” by *The Princeton Review* and *College Compact* and has been named to the *President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll* for distinguished community service. Mercer has also earned a Community Engagement classification by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, (Mercer University, 2016b). Mercer University ranks 135th for *National Universities* in the 2017 edition of *US News and World Report Best Colleges*. It is ranked 24th for *Best Value Schools* and 67th in High School Counselors' rankings. Its annual full-time undergraduate tuition and fees are \$35,130 (2016 to 2017) with an endowment of \$251,100,622 for 2015.

In terms of the number of African American students currently enrolled at Mercer, the trend of an increasingly racially diverse student body has continued over the past 20 years. According to the most current data available from the university's online enrolment profile

(Mercer, n.d.), for the fall of 2015, of the 8,603 students enrolled approximately 48% were White and 30% were Black. This represented a rise in the number of Black students from 25% of the student body in 2005 with Whites constituting 62% of the total 7,154 enrolled. In 1995, there were 6,719 students in total enrolled, 71% were White and only 16% were Black.

Regarding campus racial climate, some incidents have occurred at Mercer which have raised concerns within the community. According to a 2016 Georgia Public Broadcasting report, racist graffiti was found written on doors in Sherwood Hall, a sophomore students' residence. The university's president was reported in a local press report as stating that the graffiti was a "shameful and ignorant conduct" and that despite gains in racial reconciliation "much work remains to be done" (Blankenship, 2016). In the fall of 2012, an anonymous flyer surfaced on the campus that there were no Whites-only student organizations and demanded recognition and November and December should be designated "White History" months. The story gained local and national media coverage (NBC, 2012; Kingkade, 2012) and the university's leadership roundly condemned the actions and investigations were launched. Each of these incidents received calls for concerted unity across the university's community. Sadly, these are not isolated incidents at one US campus, there are myriad race-related aggressions at HEI campuses and schools throughout the country. The *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (JBHE) provides an excellent critical synopsis on many of the incidents related to this phenomenon (JBHE, 2017b). This is not to mention the myriad micro-aggressions which are part of the everyday reality for marginalized others. Despite the undoubted legislative progress made over a century since Du Bois' statement, the color fault line still persists beyond being the principal problem of the past century.

Participant Selection Criteria

Eighteen participants with experience of the Mercer University *Beloved Community* racial reconciliation project are included in this study. *Snowball sampling* was used, and occurs when participants recommend other potential interviewees to the researcher. Although this is a standard practice of qualitative research—because it provides an opportunity to reach potentially inaccessible groups, as well as afford insight into the structure of social networks—some of the leads were unsuited for this study. For example, despite several attempts, some participants did not return communication, or once contacted, perhaps did not feel qualified, or amenable, to being interviewed. There were also those who were willing to participate but, from what could be learned from a preliminary conversation, were unable to speak with firsthand experience about the HEI's community engagement or the *Beloved Community*.

The participants for this study was narrowed to 18 selected upon their ability to provide quality accounts of their engagement in the *Beloved Community* program from 2005 to 2014. Of particular interest were those who have participated in panel discussions, given prepared speeches or in other ways entered into public discourse on the subject of HEI community engagement. The participants were able to speak about their positive and negative as it relates to racial reconciliation.

Potential interviewees were formed from members of the *Beloved Community* project, including individuals who sat on its organizing committee. As can be seen in Appendix E the sample of 18 participants represents five groups identified as key stakeholders, with some overlap in the categorization.

Defining Stakeholder Categories

The five stakeholder groups are:

1. **Mercer University Administration (AD):** This stakeholder category refers to participants who held administrative positions which included responsibility for community engagement, and more precisely the commitment to involve students in service learning opportunities. Five participants were identified as ADs. While some of them may not have been directly involved with the *Beloved Community*, this group represented, through their office, the institutional response to community engagement which includes the project's innovation on racial reconciliation.

2. **Mercer University Professors (PR):** This constitutes Mercer university professors who have specifically engaged in the *Beloved Community* project to some capacity. The scope of their engagement varied from those closely engaged as a committee member to being an occasional attendee at one or more of the annual symposia events. There were five participants who represented this category, three of which also were ADs.

3. **Alumni (AL):** Seven graduates of Mercer University were included in the study. Their dates of graduation ranged from 1967 to 2016. This group included two pioneer Black Mercer alumni, one of whom was a regular participant at the annual symposia.

4. **Student Leaders (SL):** Three former Mercer University student leaders who had served on the planning committee of the *Beloved Community* were included, their ages ranged from early 20s to mid-30s.

5. **Pastors (P):** Seven local pastors agreed to participate. Five are male and two are female. Three pastors are Black and four are White. Their level of engagement included regular attendance at the annual symposia, and founding membership on the planning committee.

There were 12 men (M) in the study and six women (F), seven participants identified as Black (B), 10 identified as White (W) and one identified as Asian (A). All participants had some college education and six have Ph.Ds. Of the 18 interviewed 15 consented to their interviews being preserved for oral history archives (OHA) deposited at the university library. Two black alumni were at Mercer University since the earliest days of desegregation in the early 1960s. Both were male, one of them also served as a professor with over 20 years' tenure at the university.

Table 1: Participants by race and gender

	Male	Female	Total
Black/Asian	5	3	8
White	7	3	10
Total	12	6	18

The administration group was disproportionately White and male, one was Black and there were two women. There were seven pastors (P) interviewed in this study. The seven members of the pastoral subgroup were predominately White, male, and middle-aged. Only two of the seven were female, and of the female pastors one was Black and the other White. Two of the male pastors were Black and the other three were White.

Table 2: Participants by stakeholder classification

1. University Administration (AD)	5
2. University Professors (PR)	5
3. Local Pastors (P)	7
4. Student Leaders (SL)	3
5. Alumni (AL)	7

a former student leader, he is an Asian alumnus in his mid-twenties. **Ken** is a local pastor, he is White and in his 60s. **Levi** is a White male student leader in his early 20s. **Mathias** is Black male alumni in his early 70s who graduated from Mercer in the 1960s. **Noreen** is recently retired Mercer professor, she is a in her 60s. **Peter** is a local pastor who has worked on the committee of the *Beloved Community* since its inception, he is Black and in his late 60s. **Quintus** is a White professor in his early 40s and actively engaged on the planning committee. **Rachel** is a Black local pastor in her 50s. **Stanley** is a White pastor in his 60s. **Toni** is an African American in her 30s and she is an alumnus of Mercer and former student leader. More detailed descriptions and memos may be found in Appendix E.

Methods of Data Collection

The common criterion was that they are members of the wider population of stakeholders who engage in this program which falls under the auspices of Mercer University's community engagement mission. These were typically wonderfully dedicated men and women who had actively committed themselves to community engagement and civil service for many years.

Sixteen of the participants were recruited largely by purposive snowball sampling. This means that as one participant after another was recruited they referred others who were considered influential and who could speak knowledgeably about the *Beloved Community*. Often the same names would be mentioned and so it became clear who the most active members considered to be important voices. Two participants (Noreen and Harvey) were recruited through my own research efforts as I investigated the topic of racial reconciliation in the local context. Both participants had experience as Black professors at Mercer.

The initial selection consisted of what I identified to be eight core stakeholders. This group consisted of the most active *Beloved Community* committee members who knew first-hand

about forming the group and what it took to plan and facilitate the annual symposia. The nucleus consisted of the founder and director, the celebrated pioneer Black alumni, key local pastors and some of the note-worthy faculty who were involved. At the time of my prospectus defense the doctoral committee probed for a more three-dimensional analysis of what organizations such as the *Beloved Community* meant to institutions of higher education themselves and urged that I modify my focus from analyzing community impacts to exploring the impact on the HEI itself. As a result, I included more Mercer University personnel and student leaders who could share more from an institutional perspective about community engagement. William Underwood, the president of Mercer University kindly extended his initial permission letter—which had enabled staff and faculty participation—to include student leaders, as my committee had advised. In this way, I was very grateful to recruit 10 more participants for the study, in addition to the eight that I initially had in mind. Several of this additional cohort were senior administrative personnel with responsibility for community engagement. The group also included several additional professors and three student leaders.

Each participant was first contacted via email with an attached flyer and consent form describing the research project and then contacted within a week later to secure a formal interview date. After securing informed consent, interviews were conducted following an interview protocol (Appendix F). After each interview the interviewee was typically mailed an envelope which contained a personalized, written thank-you card, and a reference copy of their signed consent. This was scheduled to arrive via the standard US post within three days of interviews.

This purposive sampling method enabled me to identify 18 participants associated with Mercer University's community engagement efforts in the context of the *Beloved Community*.

Fourteen people were interviewed in person from June through July of 2016, and four participants were interviewed via telephone with interview dates ranging from June through to September. At the time of the interviews the ages of participants ranged from 20s through 70s. Telephone interviews with four participants were a last resort and came about, in large measure, due to scheduling issues related to their summer travel plans. Of the 18 participants included the mean average age was approximately 51 years, the median age was 57 years, and the modal age group was the 60s. Specifically, three participants were in the 20s, two were in their 30s, three were in their 40s, two were in their 50s, five were in their 60s, and three were in their 70s.

I conducted a preliminary telephone conversation once the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved informed consent form (Appendix A) and the recruitment flyer (Appendix B) were emailed to the participants which helped to more fully assess whether the potential interviewee felt that they could contribute to the research questions. I soon realized that written communication should be backed up with oral communication. Inherent bias may have been present because those who recommended participants may be more inclined to refer other participants with similar views to their own or who were already affiliates.

Of the fourteen interviews conducted in person, eight were located in Macon, GA, in either the participant's, home, office or church facilities. Three interviews were conducted in a meeting room at the university's Tarver Library. One was conducted in a public library closer to the participant's home in the south of Georgia. One was conducted at the participant's home in Atlanta, Georgia and another interview—at the participant's request—was conducted at a local church building in Atlanta. The travel time to Macon was typically two hours one way. Once the interviews were conducted I would return to my vehicle and turn on my digital tape recorder to capture my initial reflections on the interview, venue and any other initial peripheral thoughts in

order to maintain an audit trail while my ideas were still fresh. As Creswell (2013) advises, memos are essential tools that help researchers in their interpretive analysis.

The mean average time for the duration of interviews was 61 minutes and a total of 1104 minutes, (18 hours and 24 minutes) was recorded, with 850 minutes (14 hours and 10 minutes) of these granted, by the consent of participants, to be archived for the oral historical record.

Interviews were recorded using a digital microphone recorder which made it easier to store compressed mp3 files. Once transcribed, the initial coding was completed through the Max-QDA qualitative analysis software program.

Methods of Data Interpretation and Analysis

Defining Codes

Saldana (2013) defines a code as “most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p.3). He warns that coding is not a precise science; it is primarily an interpretive act. To codify is to “arrange things in a systematic order, to make something part of a system or classification, to categorize” (p.8). Coding is thus a method that enables organization and grouping into categories with similar characteristics.

The data was analyzed using multiple coding methods, thematic analysis, and inductive and deductive content analysis. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and I also forwarded an mp3 audio file with the transcribed interviews for those who affirmed that they would like a personal copy. Participants expressed satisfaction with the interview process, based on their communication with me in person, via telephone or email. The transcripts were read many times over and the recordings were

played several times. A three-stage coding process of open, axial, and selective coding was used.

Open/Initial Coding

Saldana (2013, p.17) advises “preliminary jottings” as a start as the data is collected and formatted, and advises researchers not to wait until all the data is collected to begin initial coding. Following this advice, I stored all the transcripts in a large file and made detailed notes. My field notes, analytical memos (and where available, archival documents such as newspaper clippings) were stored on dozens of electronic files and also on the mp3 audio recordings that I made after each interview when I returned to my car.

Conceptually, I thought that it would be useful to assign initial codes particularly influenced by the work of John Paul Lederach. As mentioned in the literature review, Lederach lists seven ingredients of reconciliation: peace, justice, truth, mercy, relationship, encounter and innovation. He has practiced peace-making strategies in a number of countries that include Israel, Nicaragua, Haiti, Somalia, Northern Ireland, and the Philippines. Lederach understood reconciliation to be “dynamic, adaptive processes aimed at building and healing” (Lederach, 2001, p. 842) and “a process of change and redefinition of relationships” (p. 847). I thought that his model suited what I had initially observed in work of the *Beloved Community*. This is because their focus was upon building new and better social relationships and upon racial dialogue. According to Lederach relationships are both the root cause and the long-term solution of conflict.

However, when it came to actually coding the data, I found that the structure explored by Androff (2012) which focused on the definition, attainability and desirability of racial

reconciliation was a better fit. This is because the terms used by Lederach (peace, justice, truth, mercy, relationship, encounter and innovation) all seemed interconnected, which leads to ambiguity in trying to decipher how to code parts of the narratives. I was able to progress by taking an *inductive approach* to coding, identifying the main themes from the data, as opposed to assigning pre-existing categories. This approach was also consistent with an oral-history approach to qualitative research, as advocated by Shopes (2015) who cautions against the imposition of “presumed theoretical ideas,” that are “expressed in turgid and obfuscating language” (p. 301).

Axial Coding

Axial coding extends the analytic work from initial coding. This method “relates categories to subcategories [and] specifies the properties and dimensions of a category” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60). Grouping similarly coded data reduces the number of initial codes while sorting and re-labeling them into conceptual categories. According to Saldana (2013, p.162) emergent themes are the focus of the analytical memos at this stage of coding. Diagrams of the phenomena at work are also encouraged during this phase and I found it extremely useful to clarify patterns by creating simple charts and tables contained in the findings. It was an inductive, messy, and interactive process which involved engaging with the data by reading the transcripts at the same time, listening to audio recordings of the interviews multiple times, and annotating paper copies as I did so. The more exposure and practice I acquired with this level of scrutiny resulted in more confidence with recognition of the patterns that emerged, often with a scaffold provided by the theories found in the review of literature.

Selective/Theoretical Coding

In selective coding, sometimes referred to as theoretical coding (Saldana, 2013, p.163) all categories and subcategories now become “systematically linked” into a central/core category. A core category is one “that appears to have the greatest explanatory relevance” for the phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.104). I took each of the research questions in turn and used these to help me determine which comments most appropriately addressed the study’s statement of purpose. However, a lot of the questions that I asked to open the interviews did not directly address the research questions. Instead, these queries were intended as ice-breakers and thus they were more related to the participants’ personal backgrounds and biographical information. This was intended to put them at ease; it also helped to reveal more about their personalities, thus adding to the richness of the oral history interviews.

Related to the first research question, I wanted to know what they considered the role of HEIs in addressing racial reconciliation with community partners. This included exploring the pitfalls, and their understanding of what was working well and what needed revision. For the second question, I targeted the specific aspects of the narratives concerned with their perceptions and lived experiences of HEI engagement through the project. I found it useful to bracket the data in this way so that I was achieving the goals I had set in my statement of purpose. This helped me to decide on the core categories and revise my axial coding as needed.

Once each of the interviews was transcribed verbatim I listened to and reread the transcriptions, marking the passages that I thought were significant in relation to the research questions. I conducted this process of initial coding over the course of several months to familiarize myself with what participants thought about the involvement of HEIs and the work of racial reconciliation. The initial coding was unstructured and relied on my gut reaction to what I

read. This resulted in hundreds of sub codes. There were 687 assigned sub-category codes and 130 memos in this process, as a result of initial open coding analysis of the 18 interviews describing the social constructions of racial reconciliation in the *Beloved Community*. The MaxQDA qualitative data handling software program proved a useful way to handle all the data as I formulated my initial codes. Once I began the next phase of coding—thematic coding occurring in the final month of my coding schedule, things became more refined. The themes that emerged related to each of the three research questions. When I began thematic coding, I used color coding and found it helpful to use a consistent color code of yellow highlighting for question one, red for question two, and blue for question three. Using these distinctive colors for each of the research questions made it easier to return to the work and pick up the pieces again for each new data analysis and coding session. I transferred quotes from the transcripts into a summative spreadsheet, using MaxQDA. This was further streamlined as I went through the transcripts by hand.

Random Sampling Codes

I found it worthwhile to apply some of Androff's methodology in assigning codes derived from his study of the victims of racial violence who participated in the *Greensboro Truth and Racial Reconciliation Commission*. Participants in this study were randomly labeled using letters of the alphabet to protect their confidentiality (Androff, 2012, p.83). Using a Microsoft Excel (MSE) spreadsheet I first typed in the names of the 18 participants, alphabetized by their last names. The random number generator feature of the MSE spreadsheet program [=Rand ()] was used to assign random numbers to each name. The numbers allotted were then rearranged in ascending order, which resorted the alphabetical order. Thereafter I assigned the randomly sorted participants using a letter from A to T. I excluded the letters O and I, because I felt that

this aided clarity, since these letters could be potentially mistaken as numbers in my handwritten notes. At the suggestion of my committee's methodologist, Dr. Jodi Kaufmann, I chose pseudonyms for each of the participants, which helped to make the research more personalized, also keeping to the fore that rather than abstract statistical units of measure, real human beings were involved. For the purposes of reporting, the randomly assigned letter ascribed to each persona was then expanded to a full name beginning with that letter. The participants were thus renamed: Abraham, Ben, Carmen, Davina, Elizabeth, Felix, Graham, Harvey, Jun, Ken, Levi, Mathias, Noreen, Peter, Quintus, Rachel, Stanley and Toni.

Issues of Quality

Verification

Verification is at the heart of historical inquiry: dates, names and accounts of events all have to be checked, which would improve the final document. Discrepancies come in two forms, internal and external. Internal discrepancies arose as a result of the existence of conflicts within the interview data itself. Examples of this occurred when participants were asked about their experiences of racial reconciliation through the project. Discrepancies came in the varying conceptions regarding their explanations related to the definition, attainability, desirability of racial reconciliation. There were times when, within the process of the interview, participants gave answers which, if taken *prima facie*, were ambiguous or contradictory. However, as well as extant rhetorical devices, perhaps such discrepancies revealed the formulation of developing ideas and thoughts, which for most of us is a non-linear, complex and iterative process. External discrepancies may exist if there are conflicts with the historical data gathered from other sources. This only occurred in one known instance in this process, it was related to the timing of an historical event, which happened decades ago, that the participant recalled happening a few

months before it was widely reported to have occurred. In that instance, the discrepancy was referred back to the participant to provide the opportunity to address the matter in further communication, in this case a follow-up email.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the ability to demonstrate that the data represents the participants' responses with my own subjectivities or viewpoints bracketed. I demonstrated confirmability by describing how the conclusions and interpretations were established, and making the interview data available to my doctoral committee advisor, Dr. Richard Lakes, as the chief research investigator. This served to corroborate that the findings were derived directly from the data. As a means of establishing confirmability, I also triangulated different sources using interview, archival data, my research memos and journal notes.

In addition to the oral history interviews I also reviewed secondary source literature and data from primary sources to provide the historical context for Mercer's desegregation era. These sources bolstered my understanding of the historical context. For instance, I used primary source data in the form of video recordings of Sam Oni's keynote speech at the *Beloved Community* annual symposium in 2014. I also viewed the Civil Rights Digital Library (1966) and WSB-TV news film clips of comments by Sam Oni and Dr. Thomas Holmes following the decision of Tattnell Square Baptist Church to remain segregated, in order to triangulate the accounts in the study. I researched archival data in the form of local press articles from the *Mercer Cluster* and also the Macon/Bibb County *Telegraph*, I also read original documents such as the minutes of Mercer University Board of Trustee meetings from the desegregation period, that are housed in the archival library at Mercer University in Macon.

These measures helped to bolster validity about the research findings and the processes by which they had been determined.

Member-Checking

Describing one's appraisal and verifying the research findings with the research participants is a useful strategy to enhance validity (Creswell, 2013). I engaged in member checking by making the transcripts and recordings available to all the participants. In an effort to ensure credibility and confirmability I also circled back to ask participants if I had correctly transcribed their interviews. The transcripts and audio recordings were sent to those who wished to receive them and were available for all participants to review. If participants made factual errors or wished to retract or add to the initial interview, I planned to follow up with a second interview or ask for clarification via email or telephone. As it happened, there were no revisions made by the participants. There was therefore no need for the anticipated follow up interview that I had requested and had been approved by my initial IRB submission.

On an occasional basis, in the initial months after the interviews, I also exchanged personal one-on-one communication (usually via email, on average, one or two times a month) with seven of the participants (Mathias, Graham, Toni, Levi, Noreen, Harvey and Davina). This evolved naturally; we each enjoyed sharing articles, tidbits or interesting stories. Although communication waned over time, I still hear from a few of the participants from time to time. During the months that have passed since collecting the data, I have also received intermittent updates related to the ongoing work of the *Beloved Community*. At the end of the analysis, as the dissertation reached its final draft stages, I emailed a copy of the participants to check if they felt that the representation was accurate and received positive feedback.

My researcher-generated documentation (memos, field notes and coding) was organized in such a way as to create an audit trail available for scrutiny. The audit trail provided reviewable insights into my decisions and experiences throughout the research process, extending from interview transcripts, data analysis, notes and drafts to the final report.

Representation

Storytelling requires an act of trust between the researcher and participants as they engage in the language of narrative interpretation which needs to be cultivated over time. Brushwood-Rose and Granger (2013) argue that “every story is contradictory, partial and untold, and that these contradictions, refusals and silences are central to understanding the place of narrative in negotiating our relations with others and the world” (p. 217). On this point, they are in agreement with Pitt (2003) that no narrative holds, or even invites, a singular interpretation and they are “suspicious” of unproblematized personal narratives offered as “an explanatory device for understanding experience.” Engaging in a genuine dialogue is a necessary condition for parties to reconcile their relationships. I found this to be true as it related to the intense emotions (such as anger, frustration, anxiety and catharsis) which may be invoked by racial dialogue. It was also important, as a researcher, to be part of the conversation and, as Creswell (2013, p.48) advocates, “de-emphasize a power relationship” by being open and, where possible collaborative.

There is an assumption that misrepresentation can be minimized if researchers are cognizant of their theoretical approach to the research and consider ways in which their personal and professional characteristics or intersubjectivity may affect the interpretations of the data and representations of participants’ voices. With this in mind I gave consideration to disseminating and archiving the work. If other researchers, students, or interested parties are to make use of the

interviews, it was important that the study be accessible in a public repository. The electronic files of the audio recordings and transcripts of the oral history interviews, of those 15 participants who gave informed consent, will be made available to Mercer University's Tarver Library. The audio recordings and transcripts of those who did not give consent will be destroyed, per the IRB approved consent form (Appendix A) within one calendar year of the interview.

Rigor

As with any methodology, rigor is essential at all stages in an oral history qualitative study (Stake, 2010). For this particular dissertation, rigor was evident in regular communication with my advisor and the rest of my dissertation committee by the weighing of their feedback in my deliberations. Discussions occurred at each stage in the process of selecting the appropriate methodology and methods, clarifying the research goals, determining the use of multiple methods for triangulation, maintenance of meticulous records, and addressing issues of quality and ethics. In addition, it was useful to invite independent analysis by approximately 30 fellow doctoral candidates, work colleagues and students to discuss the research design, findings and limitations over the course of a year from the spring of 2016 until the dissertation defense date.

The preliminary research consisted of a literature review to identify and research existing secondary and primary historical records. I visited Mercer University's special collections and library archives in the spring of 2014 and, using a digital camera, began the process of collating a historical file related to the events surrounding desegregation. The Jack Tarver Library is located in down-town Macon and houses a variety of collections and exhibits specific to Mercer University.

Limitations

Researcher Subjectivity

Purposive samples can be highly prone to researcher subjectivity. I am mindful that some predilections existed because of my own faith-based hopes, which were influenced by womanist theologians such as Delores Williams.

There were also predispositions tempered by my experiences as an immigrant. I understood from my parents and my own life experiences, that although acknowledgment of hurt was not to be ignored, courage, grit and faith also mattered. My parents perhaps first learnt, and then expected, to be marginalized. Eventually they seemed to welcome it as merely more wind beneath one's sails. As well as my immigrant background, I was aware of the participants' reactions to me specifically as a Black person from the UK. Interviewees were very affable, and may well have been influenced by factors, such as, a Black British racialized identity, gender, and a religious connection, and so on. I equally could have been influenced by their persona.

There is also a power dynamic which comes into play as a researcher, and I felt uncomfortable with any notion that the participants were "subjects" or were being scrutinized personally. An attempt was made to *democratize* knowledge gleaned from the interviews so that this was regarded as a co-construction and authentic partnership, as far as possible. Although I am sure that my British accent had some impact on the participants' perceptions of me, I didn't sense that anyone was holding back or trying to paint anything other than an honest picture of their perceptions and lived experiences. The process of conducting interpretive qualitative research is part of one's own co-constructed story with participants and it is a heroic endeavor which nurtures trust and authenticity. Radical self-care grew in importance as I learned, in a more personalized way, that the stories we tell matter, albeit messily contestable, they are ours to

tell. Rather than deny or minimize the effects of these subjectivities it is wise instead to be mindful of influences which customarily color human encounters and, where possible, weigh these impacts throughout the analysis.

The practice of reflexivity, where the researcher seeks to be open about how they think their subjectivities intersect with the participants and the interpretation of the research, as a strategy to minimize power relationships, is influenced by feminist and womanist ideologies. However, the process of explicitly situating the researcher as a self-aware co-creator of knowledge is fraught with challenge. The belief that it is important to untangle how our biographies, values, and perceptions impinge on research implies that reflectiveness will invariably improve research. Unwittingly, this strategy may have the undesired consequence of further privileging the researcher's voice over the participants, and thus re-inscribe the power dynamic between the researcher and the researched. It can only be hoped that being mindful of these pitfalls will make for a more reasoned analysis.

Selection Criteria

Another limitation of this study is with regard to the selection criteria. The subjectivity and non-probability based nature of purposive sampling means that it was difficult to achieve a representative sample of the population. Participants were recruited through purposive snowball sampling; I found particularly towards the end of the recruitment cycle in late July and August 2016, that the names being referred as potential interviewees tended to be people of the same stakeholder code categories as the person who referred them. Therefore, I found myself interviewing several White male pastors. Although it would be wrong to think that everyone with similar classifications behave and think as a monolithic group, including more women of Color and clergy from other faith groups who were recently involved in the *Beloved Community* would

have diversified the selection. I included only two Black women and three White women. There were seven men in the study, three were Black and four were White. Ultimately, this may be a topic for future researchers. For this study, participant selection was based on the ability to speak about HEI community engagement as members of the five core stakeholder groups identified within the allotted time frame.

Issue of Ethics

Research ethics are associated with obtaining ethics approval from Internal Research Ethics Boards (IREBs) and evaluating the researchers' adherence to principles of autonomy, confidentiality, respect, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice (Mauthner & Birch, 2002).

Often woven deeply by "fidelity to relationships" (Noddings, 1986), the ethical considerations in narrative inquiries are commonly considered to be responsibilities negotiated by participants and narrative inquirers at all phases of the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is understood that lived and told stories give an insight into the storytellers' identity, who they are, whom they are becoming, and the stories that sustain them. This understanding shapes the necessity of negotiating research texts that respectfully represent lived experiences and the stories used to convey them. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality take on added importance as the complexity of lives are made visible in research texts.

Confidentiality

Rules for the ethical reporting of human research data prevents researchers from revealing confidential, personally identifiable information concerning research participants (American Psychological Association, 2005). Simply put, researchers are duty-bound to *prevent* the reader from identifying their source of information. In respect of these conventions, all the participants in this study were given a randomly assigned sampling code. The institution is named, and

permission was sought from the University's president (see Appendix C). Each participant completed the official consent form (Appendix A) and 15 of the 18 participants agreed to donate their oral history audio-recorded interviews and the transcripts to the university's library.

I also used pseudonyms to protect the identity of all the research participants; I was especially sensitive to respecting the wishes of the three participants who do not wish to have their data included as part of the oral history audio collection.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the conventional research criteria of trustworthiness, such as reliability and validity, are unsuited to the maxims and practices of qualitative research or naturalistic inquiry. Other measures of trustworthiness are more appropriate as they concern an implicitly interpretive approach. The most significant, as it relates to this study is that of credibility. This can be established using the procedure of member checking, whereby tentative results are shown by researchers to their research participants to assess the degree of correspondence and to incorporate members' perspectives into the study's findings. Member checking was used as an integral part of the research design for this study. Participants were also informed, as a follow-up to their interviews, that a verbatim transcript and the mp3 file on the audio recording was available should they wish to obtain a copy. Member checking also came after the analysis, as a few people were sent selected sections of the study which related to them specifically, typically to check minor facts. This helped to clarify specific details—usually of a biographical nature.

Challenges

Denzin (1989) suggests that both the researcher and interviewee are active participants in developing the story told in research interviews. Qualitative research can thus produce what Thomas terms “exemplary knowledge”. This is “a fluid understanding that explicitly or tacitly recognizes the complexity and frailty of the generalizations we can make about human interrelationships” (Thomas, 2010, p. 577). This presents a pitfall because of the scope for *misinterpretation*, and *bracketing* each interviewer’s subjectivities is challenging. Oral history research methodology does not shy away from this idea of co-constructed narrative. Indeed, as Pollock (2005) states:

The performance of oral history is itself a transformational process. At the very least, it translates subjectively remembered events into embodied memory acts, moving memory into remembering. That passage not only risks but endows the emerging history/narratives with change (p. 2).

Rather than only supplying “external evidence” of a participant’s social life, the oral history interview is considered to be a “social relation, which can generate a variety of emotional responses” (Roper, 2003, p.21).

Non-probability sampling procedures might also limit the findings of the study because no claim is made to seeking a statistically representative sample. Similarly, by using audio-recorded interviews as the primary data collection method, it was hard to record reactions such as changes in intonation, pregnant pauses, hand gestures and facial expressions.

Another challenge is that once in the digital domain, there is potential for decontextualized use and even misuse of a recorded interview.

Chapter 3 Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined my research design for this study. The 18 participants selected consists of five stakeholder groups: local pastors, student leaders, faculty, alumni, and administrators. A description of the site was also offered as well as an exploration of some of the contentious issues surrounding campus racial climate. I explored various facets of interpretive inquiry and an oral history research design such as trust, reliability, member checking, and validation, all of which affect the cogency of the analysis. An oral history research methodology enabled the use of more personalized accounts, contextualized by local and institutional history. This approach was taken in order to increase understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of HEI community engagement on the matter of racial reconciliation, which continues more on than 50 years after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision of a beloved community.

CHAPTER 4

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Research Question 1

What do Mercer University's *Beloved Community* stakeholders perceive as the primary goals of higher educational institutions in addressing racial reconciliation?

Introduction

The first research question focused on what participants perceived as the role of higher educational institutions in the context of racial reconciliation. The participants' reflections on this issue are important because their perceptions are likely to influence the outcomes of the *Beloved Community's* efforts and how they measure success.

As illustrated in Figure 1, three themes emerged, namely that the HEI's primary goals were centered on *partnership*, *student leadership*, and *social justice*.

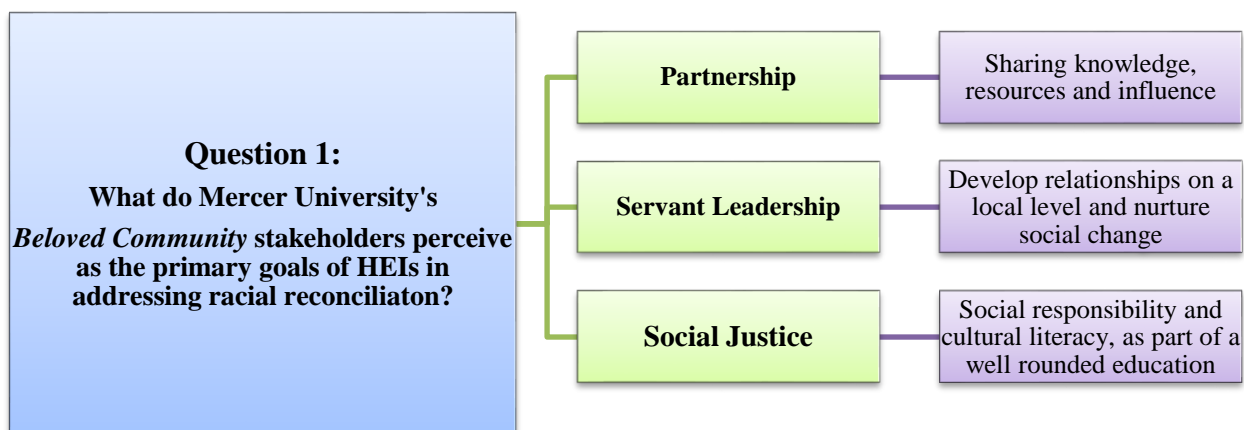


Figure 2: Themes related to the goals of HEI community engagement

Partnership

Partnership emerged as a theme and was defined by comments related to perceptions that the HEI would best engage by *sharing knowledge, resources, and influence*. Participants expressed the belief that the university's goal was most valuable as a power broker that helped to marshal resources. For example, Graham, Harvey and Jun expressed the view that HEIs provided a safe space in which to facilitate communal racial dialogues. For both Carmen and Elizabeth, as educational institutions, HEIs served as influential partners in sharing knowledge. In their roles as administrators each also expressed sensitivity to how HEIs were able to garner a deeper level of understanding of the needs of the neighboring community and, given their inherent *proximity*, respond sustainably over time.

Levi, Harvey, Ben, Felix, and Mathias felt that urban HEIs brought added scholastic gravitas which could be used to bring attention to local issues garner social activism and change. Peter believed that the university was the best-situated stakeholder to attract speakers for the annual symposia.

Graham and Davina also commented on the ability of the HEI to recruit an impressive cadre of the keynote speakers, whom they noted have so far each contributed to a religious lens through which to view race and reconciliation. Appendix G includes the list of keynote speakers for the annual symposium from 2005 to 2017. For all but two of these thirteen years the keynotes speakers have been ordained, male, church ministers or Christian academics. Members of the planning group have debated whether to include speakers who have a non-faith based perspective on racial divisions. Davina spoke about the relevance of two in particular. She referenced Ta-Nehisi Coates and Tim Wise in particular and stated "The conversation always comes around to, "Well, are these people talking about race from a religious lens?" Because,

that is the focus of the *Beloved Community*” (Taped Interview, July 1, 2016, lines 543-544). Decisions about whether to have a more diverse range of speakers typify struggles the group faced with more clearly identifying the *Beloved Community*. There are suggestions however, as expressed by participants such as Felix, Ken, Graham and Davina that increased emphasis is being placed on partnering with non-Christian clergy. Some also discussed breaking away from a Black/White binary and reaching out to the Latino and Asian communities going forward. The inclusion of other faith groups is something that some members of the group said that they would like to see happen as part of the group’s development.

Rachel, Harvey and Peter mentioned being “inspired” by past keynote speakers, some of whom are renowned African American Christian ministers and civil rights activists. Graham, a professor and key organizer, for example, cited John Perkins and Fred Shuttlesworth as being influential in shaping his thinking on reconciliation. He shared personal anecdotes about the connections that he and his family had developed with the some of the notable speakers. His recollection of “warm experiences” conveyed his desire to forge authentic interpersonal relationships at all levels of engagement.

On the issue of keynote speakers, Harvey’s case was particularly insightful. As an African American alumnus, who graduated in the mid-1960s. He recalled that he had remained focused and tried to retain a singleness of purpose—to graduate. He was not a residential student, as a Maconite, he instead continued to attend his local, predominantly Black church. He recalled, “I stuck to being a student,” “I didn’t do a lot of protesting and stuff like that,” “I just stuck with what I was here for—trying to get my degree” (Taped Interview, June 9, lines 513-521). For Harvey, these more recent racial dialogues, spurred on by the university’s racial reconciliation project contemporized long overdue conversations about race and religion. Although he was a

part of the institution's history of desegregation the *Beloved Community* made him more able to recognize and add context to Sam Oni's story. When asked what his most positive experience of the *Beloved Community* was he responded, "I heard Sam speak before, but when I went to the symposium that he spoke at, I thought it was great" (Taped Interview, June 9, lines 542-544). As a result of hearing Oni at a symposium, Harvey, a professor at Mercer, assigned Will Campbell's book *The Stem of Jesse*, which chronicles Mercer's desegregation, as required reading for a course he taught on the culture of the university. As a result, in addition to Sam Oni, he and another professor invited Betty Jean Walker and Benny Stevens, two other Black pioneer alumni, back to the university to be interviewed by their students. Harvey stated:

I thought, "Well, wouldn't it be great to have some people meet with my students who were featured in *The Stem of Jesse*?" And, that's when I came up with the idea of inviting Mr. Oni, Mr. Stevens, and Ms. Walker; the early pioneers, to come and meet with my students, so they could actually have an exchange, and here are the real live people that they have been reading about. Here they are right in front of them, and it was such a tremendous experience—especially Sam! I can't believe that this university hasn't used him as a resource more than they have. (Taped Interview, June 9, lines 337-343)

In Harvey's case the partnership within the *Beloved Community* directly impacted his experience of cognitive affective reconciliation, in that he and his students were able to be part of candid conversations about race and engage with firsthand accounts of desegregation. This ability to engage in racial dialogue in a safe space was reminiscent of the *Beloved Community* symposia. Harvey, perhaps like no other professor, as a contemporary of Oni, was able to enrich his classroom instruction and facilitate the increased exposure of Mercer's students to this aspect of their university's history. It also had the potential to acculturate the students in a curriculum

based, but more personal way to participatory HEI engagement about the critical issue of race. The university's ability to recruit Sam Oni as a keynote speaker also marked an epiphany for Harvey, whose desegregation story was markedly different.

Harvey was one of six African American students to enroll at Mercer in the fall of 1965. His positive recollections corroborated the experiences of Betty Walker and Benny Stevens. Harvey recalled that everyone, particularly Dean Joe Hendricks was "very accommodating" (Taped Interview, June 9, line 101) and shared positive anecdotes of cordial exchanges with fellow students. However, I found it a rather surprising that Harvey seemed to have been largely oblivious to Sam Oni's treatment. Particularly as it related to Sam's efforts to desegregate Tattnell Square church in 1966. As Sam had hoped, his non-violent protest attracted a lot of media coverage and wide-spread out cry over the firing of the pro-desegregation minister Rev. Holmes (Holmes & Bryan, 1969; May, 1971; Campbell, 2005; Manis, 2004). I wondered if the accommodations Harvey seemed to have experienced were because, as an African American raised in the south during the era of Jim Crow and segregation, he was already well aware of the seemingly invisible, yet ever present racial boundary lines of the broader culture. Harvey mentioned, for instance, that it had not dawned on him to attend a White church as a Mercer student. He recalled:

When I got here, he [Sam] was a junior and I was a freshman. Even when I was here, I wasn't aware of some of the things he went through. I learned that afterwards, but even when I was here, the things that happened in the residence hall and stuff, I wasn't aware. I wasn't even aware that much about what happened at...church. I heard those stories later. (Taped Interview, June 9, lines 149-153)

Although experiences of racial dialogue with others of a different race have credence, it was clear in this case that because of the *Beloved Community* Harvey was able to more fully recognize the nuances of racial identities within his own race.

As a contemporary of Sam Oni's, Harvey had not experienced the racialized tensions in local, segregated churches. As an African American, born and raised in Macon, Harvey confessed that he has always wanted to attend Mercer, although he could have attended elsewhere. As a local he had strong community ties and in some ways, although an outsider like Oni, he was also part of a supportive wider Black community to which he also felt accountable. There may well have been subtle pressure, given the socio-political turmoil at the time, to be the model minority, as was conceivably the case of many other pioneer African American students who stepped into hard won desegregated space in US institutions of higher education. The overwhelming message from his interview was that Harvey was compelled to focus on his education.

As a long-standing resident, Harvey's knowledge of local community politics and the social divisions that persists in area churches is extensive:

Even today, that's the thing, the churches are segregated. There are few Blacks that will go to some of the predominantly White churches, but there are no Whites that come to the Black. I still go to an all-Black church. I still attend an all-Black church, and I say all-Black, there might be a White person come, every now and then, but that's the reality. So, it never occurred to me back then to even have a desire to go to any [other] church...I went to the one for Black people. (Taped Interview, June 9, lines 271-278)

Thus, in Harvey's case it appears that the *Beloved Community* increased his level of awareness about what it may have felt like to be fully immersed in US southern culture as a

foreigner in the mid-1960s, and experience the “faith-shattering” consequences of church sanctioned ostracism that Mr. Oni endured.

Partnership - Summary

The key element that emerged from the theme of partnership is the expectation that the university uses its status to attract keynote speakers who can speak about race and reconciliation as Christian leaders. This restricts the list of those who are selected as symposia keynote speakers. It also intimates a tension with the work of more precisely defining who the *Beloved Community* is and whether there is a difference between the more universal (lower case) beloved community, which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. seems to have envisioned.

Servant Leadership

A second strong theme that emerged in answer to question one was the belief that the goal of a university was to take responsibility in cultivating *servant leaders* through addressing local problems, curating unique local knowledge, and nurturing *engaged learners*. For several participants, the university, especially given its moral standing over a racially divided church community and current privileged status in a city was a valuable ally and leader. Noreen, a former professor at Mercer, was unequivocal on the overall matter of HEIs’ engagement:

I think that most universities could play a bigger role. I think universities ought to be not only just places where we are helping people to get an education, but that people should be learning about social responsibility and social justice in the community that the university sits in. And I think too many universities tend to be happy to be isolated and just create their own little world and then you just live in that little world. (Taped Interview, June 6, lines 551-555)

Mercer's perceived status of influence was all the more visible by the stark contrast to its neighbor the Beall's Hill community. This juxtaposition was a recursive theme in the conversations, particularly with Carmen, Noreen, and Elizabeth. All three thought that Beall Hill's proximity elevated Mercer's social standing, responsibility and opportunity to affect change. Jun, Levi, Elizabeth and Davina mentioned that as freshmen they had been warned by other students about not venturing too far into the local community, which was deemed crime ridden.

Carmen revealed plenty of sensitivity in her acknowledgment that there existed a fine balance in the necessity to share success stories about the university's community partnerships and this perhaps being perceived as rank marketeering. As a result, she stated that some community outreach endeavors were better publicized than others, because "to put all of that information out into the public, inherently sounds self-congratulatory and self-promoting, and so, to be able to do the work is more important than trumpeting the work. Ultimately, you have to find a good balance" (Taped Interview, June 9, lines 218-220).

The term *servant leader* was mentioned by Noreen in reference to expectations of HEI community engagement in this context. This is explored well in the literature by Patterson and Dierendonck (2010) among others. In Noreen's definition, the concept was clearly rooted in a Christological ideal of leadership. It is the determination to work in tandem with those in need, stripped of power, prestige and privilege, in a subservience that espouses the belief that "to whom much is given much is required" (St. Luke's gospel, chapter 12, verse 28).

Noreen was able to draw on her experiences as a professor at Mercer in the 1970s and as a resident who had remained there for 40 years. In her interview, she communicated her

frustrations and articulated this common sentiment about Mercer's proximity to the Beall's Hill neighborhood.

Mercer was sitting right where one of the worst housing projects that existed in Macon, the oldest and worst that needed to be torn down and redone; sat there and Mercer just had nothing to do with it. It was like, "if only it would go away" you know. Well, it's not going to go away. (Taped Interview, June 6, lines 556-559)

Noreen recognized that Mercer was not atypical in being close to some of the harshest socio-economic contrasts between the "haves" and "have nots" that US inner cities contain:

I think the same is true for the Atlanta University Center. It is right in the neighborhood where there's a whole lot of stuff could be done. I think it is true for Georgia Tech; you know, that area beyond it could use some help. I don't know what, if anything, that they [can] do. But, how universities have great resources, in terms of students, in terms of all the people to be volunteers and stuff; but they also have great resources, so if they decide to partner with somebody, they can help access funds, and offer some leadership in getting that work done. And I think that is absolutely a role that universities ought to play. I think they should be heavily focused upon servant leadership. (Taped Interview, June 6, lines 560-567)

I recorded my own recollections in my memo notes experiencing some of what Noreen was referring to, most notably as a first-time visitor, in the eclectic architecture.

Carmen gave numerous examples of US and overseas service learning projects which reflected a genuine desire to be "intentional and successful in creating a curriculum that shows students how meaningful it is to become responsible citizens and to look toward solving problems and taking on real world change" (Taped Interview, June 9, lines 269-271). She also

pointed out a phenomenon within HEIs where many institutions “take on the noble principle that Spring Break ought not just be going to Daytona Beach, that we need to provide alternatives” (lines 231-233). She noted that the service projects available to college students are rarely in their hometowns. Unlike Mercer students, “most universities from the South are going up to the Midwest, northern Midwest, or to the Northeast. It’s like they were just exchanging regions and I think being able to travel to a different part of the country is one of the incentives that gets students to sign on for the Spring Breaks” (lines 234 -237). As an administrator, Carmen admits to struggling with the “delicate balance” (line 242) in weighing the pros and cons of cultivating service learning in the local and more far-flung contexts.

I have to admit that one of the things that I wrestle with is, would it be better to take all of the money that you’ve invested on the travel, give it to a really, high-quality non-profit that’s going to make a difference with that, but then you haven’t opened all those eyes, and those students who have that kind of experience can go on to become inspired and to become agents of change wherever they go. (Taped Interview, June 9, lines 243-247)

In their accounts as community engagement administrators, Carmen and Elizabeth were able to give a perspective of the macro level of student community engagement. (I use the term macro level to refer to engagement which potentially may also involve outreach beyond the locale and includes larger sections of the student body, so this may for example include overseas mission trips or tutoring students in the local public schools.)

When asked broadly, about his general perception of HEIs community engagement Levi, a student leader initially stated:

It means, making the university look good. I would say Mercer goes about it the right way, even if there’s a perception that we don’t. How our office is very dedicated to

understanding the problem; coming when invited, not overstepping its bounds. But even then, I question why universities have community engagement offices. Students pay for an education. They don't pay to be forced to do volunteer hours, but now we are; and that should be a choice of the student, not a requirement. (Taped Interview, June 14, lines 231-236)

Levi was emphatic in recognizing some of the problems surrounding the perceived potential neo-liberal politics of HEI engagement and he was ardent in advocating for engagement on a voluntary basis:

There's just a difference between students electing to do it of their own volition, as opposed to saying, "Ok, now you *have* to do it, and now, we're going to add on *additional* admin to oversee that; and we're going to also use money—received from the state and federal government—to pay for those new positions that we created, that you are also *paying* to do community services hours for." It's a big, large, harder problem; they're all competitive and that's why they do it. I understand that. (Taped Interview, June 14, lines 251-258)

While Toni and Levi, as student leaders, emphasized the importance of voluntary action it was clear from their interviews that some of the other stakeholders were not so keen on leaving this so open-ended. Harvey, Mathias and Noreen in particular more readily advocated for curriculum based social activism. The view was expressed that this would be ideal in order to address the urgent needs of local distressed communities in a way that would ensure continuity and sustainability, as well as fulfill what they felt was a moral opportunity and obligation in providing *authentic service opportunities*.

Toni, an active member of the planning committee and civil rights lawyer, initially became engaged with the *Beloved Community* as a student at Mercer. She voluntarily attended the annual symposia during that time and participated with other student groups in campus activities, which focused on sharing her Christian faith. She also mentioned the importance of things not feeling forced and students being recruited voluntarily. Jun, like Levi was a student leader and had also risen in the ranks of student governance. Jun reasoned that his experiences as a first-generation immigrant influenced his level of engagement. Enthusiasm for his new adoptive country explained why he felt that he always tried to “stay engaged” with extracurricular activities and community work since his time as a high school student.

Elizabeth, an administrator, felt that the *Beloved Community* was not highly profiled enough in the student body and so it was losing out in student appeal mainly because of the publishing and timing of events and also the impression that it was an organization solely for Christians in the community. She mentioned that she welcomed more education and training about how was wary of causing offence. The topic of mentoring came up and she explained that she would appreciate a mentor to work with her around this subject, but as someone who was not particularly religious she questioned whether she would be welcome to be part of the *Beloved Community*. As we discussed this further, I shared that the *Beloved Community* did not only include Christians and indeed there is an Imam and Rabbi who are part of the group. She suggested a *Beloved Community* specifically for Mercerians. Although no data was available at the time of writing, it was clear from anecdotal evidence, and from what she could see, that Mercer students did not yet attend or participate in the *Beloved Community* as much as was possible.

Mathias, who is an alumnus, contended that the *Beloved Community* had not done enough to engage students as much as other Mercer service opportunities. However, Mathias was conciliatory in seeing this as more a function of a complex problem “the challenge is such that you don’t even know where to address, the challenges and the university establishment, institution, it is not exactly set up to engage in social engineering” (Taped Interview, June 2, lines 1019-1021).

In contrast, Harvey who was engaged in various community service projects, as a private citizen, expressed frustration that specific colleges were not more strongly aligned with local needs: “I mean, the College of Education is right here, and so I don’t see any reason why we and Mercer; and particularly, the College of Education can’t become more active” (Taped Interview, June 9, lines 406-407). This may be a question of perspective or present itself as an actual opportunity to be more engaged, but it seems that even amongst those who advocate for student engagement, there are conflicting views about what form this should take. For some it is incumbent on universities to focus on service learning as a civic duty to meet local needs and to prepare 21st century citizens. Others conveyed apprehension and the need to avoid *show-casing* to win coveted prestige and recognition and accolades in an increasingly competitively ranked HEI market. Levi expressed concern about effectively indenturing students into service *opportunities* that may get the job done but lacked authentic *engagement*.

Noreen perceived that there was difficulty with the word *leadership* in the context of service education:

I think leadership sometimes has a really bad rap because there’s been a lot of bad leadership, and I think that’s what’s given leadership a bad name. But, the notion of servant leader, is a leader who is willing to serve; a leader who is not trying to be the

person who stands here and hands back all of the instructions to all of the peons to go do all the serving. But a leader like Jesus who's willing to wash somebody's feet; who's willing to go walk in; go to jail with somebody. (Taped Interview, June 15, lines 683-689)

Although this conception of servant leadership may appear overly ambitious to the student leaders, they all seemed to agree that being part of the *Beloved Community* provided a rich opportunity for authentic relationships and dialogue on issues that were of growing and paramount importance for their local community and preparation as fully engaged citizens.

Servant Leadership – Summary

Student involvement is a contested theme. What is clear is that, in this context there is scope for the planners in the *Beloved Community* to explore more ways to engage with and involve the broader student body. The easiest way would be through the curriculum but volunteerism was preferred especially by two student leaders in the study. Many of the participants seemed to like the idea that the *Beloved Community* facilitated opportunities to air and discuss their ideas related to race in a safe space and inter-generationally. Although there was dissent regarding whether student engagement should be part of the curriculum or solicited on a voluntary basis, it is clear that projects which give students an opportunity for *authentic local community engagement* were welcomed by all participants.

Social Justice

As explored in the review of literature, indeterminate definitions and expectations surrounding the language of reconciliation can frustrate goal attainment. Several participants typified the *Beloved Community* service on a local level as an important role of universities but they wrestled with the nebulous definitions, scope and expectations. Limiting the definitions may

ironically help to clarify goals and lead to more attainable expectations and goals. The challenges of lasting local engagement being hampered by using a transient student population appeared several times during the interviews. Another issue was an awareness of the highly competitive HEI service learning market where global outreach to help the needy was deemed more forward thinking and certainly more of a pull for students. Neither of these limitations was lost on the participants in the study, especially those who served as faculty and administrators. Both Carmen and Elizabeth expressed the mindfulness of dealing with a transient labor force in terms of what students could offer beyond their four-year college experiences.

As explored in the review of the literature the John Perkins' model of racial reconciliation involves closer proximity and relocation, which requires volunteers to live in the communities in which they serve. Carmen understood the importance of being credible and a credible and consistent presence in the community:

I won't say live in the community, but you have to invest enough in the community to have trustworthiness, you know, otherwise you are going to have a purely utilitarian; quite frankly, in my mind, exploited and abusive relationship with the community. So, if you are not going to go and stay in, and go through the tough times that you've talked about, not just about the results, "Look what we did," and no self-congratulation. I mean, if you are not about the genuine work, then don't do it, then you are injuring people and that is not fair. (Taped Interview, June 2, lines 627-633)

Carmen felt very protective of the university's good name and the effectiveness of remaining present and connected to make a lasting change.

As a grassroots community project the opportunity for deliberate democratic action was believed to a strength of the *Beloved Community*. For instance, Graham mentioned that a prayer

vigil, impromptu unity church service, or meeting could be called within a relatively short period of time. However, Mathias, Ken and Quintus were cautious about the ability of the *Beloved Community* to address systemic racism. Each recognized a slow, but necessary commitment to steady progress. The culture of reflectivity afforded learning institutions was believed to be beneficial in the work of racial reconciliation. Quintus felt that the culture of scholarship associated with HEIs facilitated a culture of reflectivity which was complimentary to the work of the *Beloved Community*. He expressed the need for patience:

I don't teach engineering and the *Beloved Community Symposium* doesn't offer a quick mechanized approach to fix the problem with this society, but the university, at least in theory, has committed this idea that there's a lot of *knowledge* out there that will have real value to the people's lives and to our communities. It's not something that can be quickly or easily applied, there's not many places that have *tolerance* for that kind of *delay*, and so, you know, I think we're allowed to sit and ask questions and think about the *messy process*, and no one saying, "Well where are the immediate results? If we don't have the immediate results, we're shutting it down." (Taped Interview, August 4, lines 217-228)

This reminder was corroborated in the literature, that reconciliation is a slow, multi-layered process. There has to be patience with delay, setbacks, and even resistance, to accomplish goals.

In terms of limitations several participants felt that guest speakers needed to be selected who were supportive of a theological perspective on racial reconciliation because this was seen as unifying and ecumenical especially given the already different denominational views of Christianity represented in the *Beloved Community*. Quintus was not supportive of the idea of

rushing for consensus nor of the avoidance of conversations and speakers who were not seen as unifiers. He felt that, by default, community meant struggle and disparity and this provided an opportunity to trouble long held views and taken for granted assumptions. Non-faith speakers might thus add something to the dialogue.

By contrast, Abraham and Carmen specifically viewed the *Beloved Community* as a Christian organization, able to reach out to the wider community more effectively on a united front. Quintus expressed concern about what he saw as the potentially exploitative knowledge acquisition by HEIs. He felt that, in the name of community engagement, that could be viewed as mining information and data for some of the most vulnerable populations:

There's all these different social do-gooder trips that we do; and this idea that somehow maybe college students can swoop in on a problem that local people have been dealing with for a long time, and with their little experience, but a lot of privilege step in and fix the problem, and you know, I think there's a lot that we're concerned that we not do that, that not be what it's about. I was even talking to a colleague recently. I was really concerned that the universities could get into the problem of a kind of *intellectual colonialism* where students go and interact with communities that are having problems, whether it's race relations or poverty, or violence, and say that they're helping the communities, but the students who learn a lot about the problems and get exposed to things that they wouldn't get exposed to before, and the people doing the educating are those communities in trouble, but they're not being compensated for their expertise; in the same way that you might have European countries swooping in and gobbling up natural resources of a country and not compensating them for it. The same thing could

happen intellectually with universities, so I think it's something that we definitely should be thinking about. (Taped Interview, August 4, lines 233-246)

Quintus focused on power dynamics and argued that "almost all human relationships" are "embedded in systems of power" and that an important part of social justice work, beginning with oneself, is to "recognize situations of power" and to strive to mitigate them (lines 261-266). He believed that this was achieved by being aware of power in interpersonal relationships. He argued that addressing essential questions such as "how power is distributed in this relationship?" and "analyzing" how can it be "mitigated" as opposed to eliminated (line 265-269). This would require a set of sophisticated processes and skills and assumes that the persons who are best served are willing to yield power.

Rachel, a local African American pastor, agreed that a unique set of perhaps not often used or honed skills, needed to be developed in the work of racial reconciliation. She contended that the work of social justice came secondary to building relationships. Rachel shared that one needs to be:

Reasonably knowledgeable about human nature and about history, you don't have to be a scholar. You don't have to be a historian, but you need a reasonable working knowledge of some of the things that we've been through, and some of the things that have shaped our thinking and culture on both sides. So, I think that's probably the heart of it. (Taped Interview, June 13, lines 609-613)

For pastors Abraham, Peter, Rachel and Ben in the study, racial reconciliation seemed to take the form of building personal social relationships rather than an overt concern for social justice work.

Social Justice – Summary

For the social justice aspect of racial reconciliation participants understood social responsibility and advocacy work in local matters as a key aspect of HEI engagement. The participants who focused on social justice tended to be ones who were already engaged in this work through ventures not associated directly with the *Beloved Community*.

It would be interesting to return to this topic and try to determine how many participants had engaged in social justice causes because of their engagement in the *Beloved Community*. For participants who mentioned the social justice elements of racial reconciliation, this was most often referred to in terms of *ought* statements, related to the scope of what the university was capable of, its future scope and suggestions for goal development. Social justice activism and collaboration between members of the *Beloved Community* did not appear to be the major manifestation of racial reconciliation. Abraham felt that until church leaders united, there would be little long term effectiveness in social activism.

Working together on social justice issues was an exciting prospect for some of the younger participants, such as student leaders, Toni and Levi, and local pastor Davina, but for others like Mathias, who was in his 70s, the prospect of HEIs knowing where to start to effect social change was viewed with some skepticism.

Summary for Question 1

In summary, social justice activism was not regarded as the main priority at this stage of the *Beloved Community*'s growth and identification. Expanding and nurturing cross-racial interpersonal relationships were shown to play a much more significant role.

Three themes emerged, in answer to question one, regarding what participants understood as the role of universities: partnering to share resources, promoting active engagement/servant

leadership and social justice. What emerged were disparate and sometimes conflicting views about what racial reconciliation meant. There are varying views when it came to defining the *Beloved Community* and clarifying the phenomenon of racial reconciliation.

Research Question 2

What are Mercer University's *Beloved Community* stakeholders' perceptions and lived experiences of racial reconciliation through this project?

Introduction

The findings in this section include the stakeholders' perceptions of reconciliation as essentially a multi-variate macro and micro level process, which requires a commitment to sustainability in terms of long-term personal relationship formations (micro) and social justice and community building innovations (macro). They expressed their views on the *Beloved Community's* efforts to address local needs and the pitfalls and successes of the project.

As seen in Figure 3, there are three themes that emerged related to overarching perspectives on reconciliation: definition, desirability and attainability.

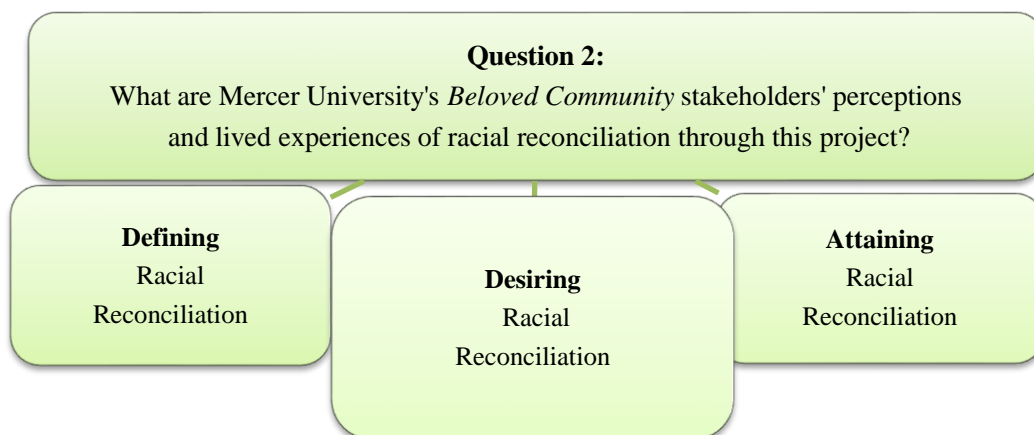


Figure 3: Participants' perspectives on racial reconciliation

The participants' descriptions in these three areas provided insights into what racial reconciliation meant to them in the context of Macon's local setting.

Defining Racial Reconciliation

For many participants defining racial reconciliation required development of a conciliatory language, social practices, interpersonal relationships, social justice activism and reformative behaviors.

As echoed in the literature defining racial reconciliation proved to be a challenging aspect of this study. Once the data was coded from the data verbatim transcripts and streamlining it to the five categories above, it was necessary to collapse the "*multi-layered*" and "*Christological*" themes so that three categories remained, namely social, behavioral and social justice reconciliation. This was done for three reasons. First, the "multi-layered" code was used as a placeholder when I was not sure about how to code particular passages of the transcript. This may have meant that the participant's comments were inconclusive, or because in a few instances, there was a list of ideas, which came at once, which meant that their response was indeterminate.

From my memos, it may also have been because the participant may have mentioned something in passing, but chose to focus on another form of reconciliation.

Second, the "Christological" code seemed redundant when speaking with pastors and others whose engagement was understandably motivated by a deep commitment to living out their faith. This was the same for a code that I had called "Legacy" where a few participants (most notably Peter) made significant reference to striving to realize Dr. King's legacy.

The third reason is that for both the "multi-layered" and "Christological" codes I felt that the language tended to be esoteric and therefore rather vague. For example, in his interview Ben,

a local pastor, mentioned that he would give me he described as the “biblical” answer first and then shared his more personal views about racial reconciliation. He personally felt that racial reconciliation was elusive and acknowledgment of hurt was often overlooked.

Table 3: Defining racial reconciliation

Major Categories in Defining the Attainment of Racial Reconciliation	Examples of Responses: Defining Racial Reconciliation
Social/Relational	Openness to discourses on race and racism, cross-cultural, interpersonal, communication skills, connection of students with local community, new understandings and friendships, banquet, heightened awareness of personal and societal subjectivities, dispositions, empowers collaboration, paired clergy network, expanded social engagement, mentor, event planning and participation, cross-racial mentoring, cross-generational connection, persuasive, charismatic leadership, seeks inclusive community building, appreciating church traditions.
Behavioral	Acts of conciliation: confession, repentance, truth telling, vigils, prayer, unity services, acknowledgment of White, middle-class, male over-privilege, mix of democratic and authoritarian practices that coexist in organizational systems such as churches and other social agencies, addresses injury.
Social Justice	Reparations, mitigating cultural power dynamics, local perception of Mercer University’s status, acknowledgment of historical segregation and injury, Black Lives Matter, working closely with local police, non-violent protest, <i>Beloved Community</i> , sense of bigger picture, mission beyond one’s lifetime, Mercer University’s racial past, historical story of race relations in Macon/Bibb County, historical antecedents of US racism, White flight in public schools, desegregation of Mercer and other southern HEIs, neo-colonial missionary efforts, Mayoral support.
Multi-Layered	Racialized attitudes of evangelicals, extending the <i>Beloved Community</i> to include inter-faith reconciliation, geo-economic disparities, service learning performativity of HEIs, seek to include other faith groups and races, influenced by politics of general election.
Christological	Pastoral responsibility, emphasis on unity services, reconciliation to God first. Genesis 1:27: “God created man in his own image...”, reconciliation is not something to achieve but to receive, spiritually transformative, overcoming conflicting worship styles, decoding rhetorical language and linguistic devices, cross-denominational.

Abraham and Mathias were particularly adept at posing rhetorical questions and I loved the inspirational oratory, lyricism and vocal tenor when listening to some of the ministers I interviewed. I admired the skill with which some of them drew me in with their rhetorical questions. However, being raised in a Pentecostal church tradition, I also recognized that one needed to have a keen ear to hear subtleties of meaning and read between the lines. I remember reading over the transcripts of a certain participant and initially feeling that there was little that I

could actually use, as nothing, on the face of it, seemed to be about lived experiences. It was only when I re-read the transcript several times and paid closer attention to the rhetorical questions that the interviewee had posed to me that I realized I had been given a map and the speaker was saying a tremendous amount. I was thus reminded that value is found not only in the said, but also in the unsaid, and not only in the answers we seek to interpret, but also in the questions we are asked, and in how we choose to answer.

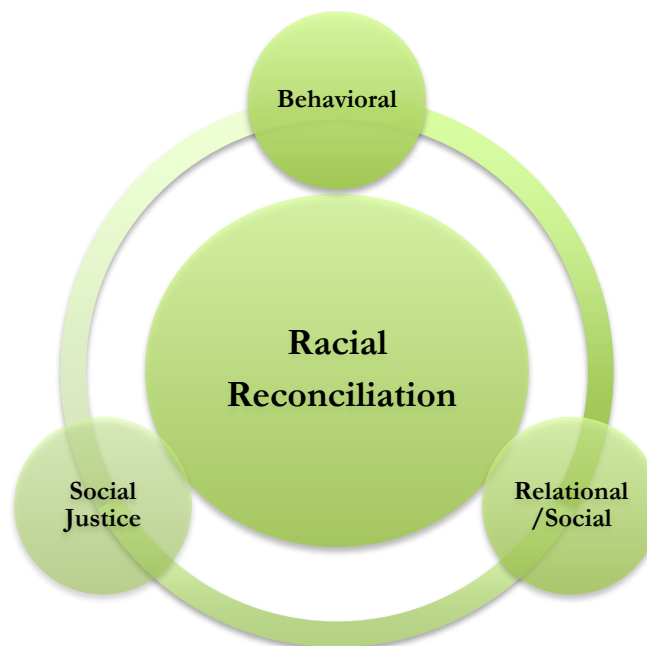


Figure 4: Racial reconciliation themes

Figure 4 shows the three categories that were finally used to represent participants' perceptions of the multiple levels of racial reconciliation.

Racial Reconciliation is Relational/Social

The social aspects of racial reconciliation were prevalent in the *Beloved Community* project. Increased cooperation and mutual tolerance through intergroup engagement and dialogue is based upon the social contact hypothesis of intergroup relations, which maintains that the more

people interact, the more likely they are to tolerate and accept each other (Androff, 2012, p. 78).

With varying degrees of emphasis, all 18 participants referred to the importance of forming inter-relational bonds as a healthy indicator of racial reconciliation.

As mentioned in addressing the first question, it became clear that a common understanding among participants was that racial reconciliation is relational, which is to say that some form of interpersonal connection is considered to be necessary.

Davina explored how her racialized identity as a young White female potentially affected her social relationships:

The work of racial reconciliation: The work of getting to know one another beyond race. Once again, not to be *color blind*, but to get to know the person, as well as, why their race makes them who they are, or how and why their life experience shaped them; growing to be in whatever the most genuine relationship we can be, acknowledging my privilege, setting aside my privilege, using my privilege to make sure that things become more equal, but then, having a sense of deep humility and gratitude for the space that we're in and how far we've come. (Taped Interview, June 22, lines 779-799)

Rachel also posited that “everything is based on relationships” (Taped Interview, June 13, line 360). Yet she cautioned that Eros or romantic love that resulted in interracial marriage amongst Black and White Christians was still taboo. In her experience, there was still work to be done because “we've come to the place where we can sit in church together you know we are open to that extent but, let us not get married” (lines 381-382).

Peter equated forging personal inter-racial relationships as part of Dr. King's dream of racial reconciliation:

The *Beloved Community* challenged me to go and actually start living that dream. So, with that in mind, I was challenged to reach out toward, not just people that look like me, but some of my White brothers or sisters. I formed a relationship with one of the White pastors that was also part of the *Beloved Community Initiative*. (Taped Interview June, 8, lines 136-140)

This resulted in a “paired clergy” relationship, which lasted a year until the White pastor moved. Peter seemed more definitive about being “fortunate to pair” and “interact together” (he mentioned lunches and inter-fellowship) which resulted in a “better understanding.” This suggested filial love was the most readily accepted kind based also on Rachel’s comments and still held taboos surrounding interracial marriages. Ben believed that “you can’t legislate morality, but the truth is that is you can bring people into close proximity with each other and to share in life together more. That is the only way that real change happens” (Taped Interview, August, 21, lines 319-322).

Mentoring relationships

Graham spoke warmly of his personal relationship with a local pastor of another race, who he considered to be a mentor. The relationship had come about because of he tried to understand the work, in a way that provided a safe space for risk taking:

We would have lunch or breakfast together occasionally, and he pretty quickly became my mentor, because I’d never read King, I’d never read Douglass, Du Bois—any of these writers. So, he kind of gave me a list of things that I needed to read, and encouraged me. (Taped Interview, June 30, 2016, lines 166-169)

Levi, who is White student leader, also spoke of having an African American male mentor and how he benefited from that relationship, prior to attending college. He said that his

mentor broke down racial stereotypes, but this also provoked him to question why his mentor seemed so exceptional.

Carmen related a story of her experiences on a mission trip to South Africa. Learning traditional dances and songs of the indigenous community was an enjoyable experience. She believed joint religious acts such as praying and singing together aided human connection. Carmen said, coyly, that although it might sound sentimental, this was transformative for all involved and provided a chance to interact “on a human-to-human level with mutual respect, and willingness to open up to one another” (Taped Interview, July 1, lines 105-106).

Racial Reconciliation is Behavioral

As Androff (2010) found in his study, some attribute racial reconciliation to an act of conciliation. Ben, a local White pastor was one of a few people interviewed who expressed this view. He contended that:

From a Christian perspective, from our tradition, you can't have reconciliation without some sort of *confession*, hearing of *testimonies*, some sort of confession and *repentance*.

I think there's a process. It's not just kind of deciding one day that we're not going to do certain things or we're not going to think certain things. Even if that were possible, that's not how it works. I think it is a process of hearing each other's testimonies, of hearing each other's stories, of creating space for people to speak honestly, you know, and not necessarily to be protected from opposing views, but you know to be heard and for it to be at times painful. (Taped Interview, June 15, lines 94-100)

Ben believed that the performance of conciliatory acts or gestures was a key part of facing a “broken situation,” “generational pain and “...unspeakable cruelty and violence” (lines 101-102). He further stated:

I think that [racial] reconciliation requires a kind of honest *reckoning of the past* and not a silencing of the past, but really of a *reckoning with the past*, and I think we have to be, to that we have to be historical people. We have to realize that our lives didn't really start the day we were born, that we are part of stories and narratives and communities that we inherit so much, and we can't own the good in that without also owning the bad. I'm speaking I guess more from a perspective, from a White perspective. (Taped Interview, June 15, lines 101-108)

In like manner, Quintus, a professor actively engaged on the *Beloved Community* committee, interpreted racial reconciliation as a “messy process” that involves “truth-telling” that the “pains,” “hurt,” and “sins” of the past have to be “examined and dealt with in a way that people in groups are open to, both on one hand, *self-examination, self-criticism, repentance* and also *forgiveness*—reaching out to the other.” (Taped Interview, July 1, lines 102-105)

Attaining Racial Reconciliation

In terms of attaining racial reconciliation, two participants made a point of deconstructing the “*re*” of racial “*reconciliation*.” Quintus, again argued that rather than there being a “golden day when White southerners and Black southerners were reconciled, it's trying to see how relationships can be as they were intended by God at Creation” (Taped Interview, July 1, lines 111-114). Graham concurred and expressed the view that some people are right to maintain that reconciliation is not the “proper term” because it is a misnomer to regard this as unifying people whose socially constructed identification and engagement, within a racialized society, were never created with equality in mind. Referring to 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 and the idea of the Church being given a “*ministry of reconciliation*.” Graham referenced to the Apostle Paul:

I think it's scriptural because in 2 Corinthians, Paul talks about the ministry of reconciliation and he says, "We have been given this ministry of reconciliation, and that first of all, we are to be reconciled with God." That was Christ's work to reconcile us with God; and you know, I came into this work with a very firm conviction that racial reconciliation can never take place as it should without the church taking leadership; and so once we are truly reconciled with God, then we realize that people of every race are our sisters and brothers; and that there's no room for judgment according to race, no room for White privilege, no room for injustice in our country, based on racial differences, and we're learning now maybe to expand our focus to include all races. You know, the Asian people in this country; Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans; you can go on and on, and they've all been oppressed by the White majority. And, unfortunately most of us Whites don't understand how deep and real White privilege is. I didn't understand it myself until I started teaching race here a few years ago. (Taped Interview, June 30, lines 243-255)

Some interviewees felt that apart from clergy networks all the stakeholders needed to be given more opportunities to engage throughout the year to continue racial dialogues and the work of racial reconciliation beyond the annual symposia.

With regard to the achievability of racial reconciliation, Rachel, argued "for Christians it is achievable" which she said made her "very hopeful," "excited," and "encouraged." However, she admitted that she, like others "struggled outside the bubble of just Christians" (Taped Interview, June 13, lines 346-347). Outside what she also described as a "religious bubble" the "political rhetoric and so much going on" caused Rachel to wonder if "will people ever really be

able to come together?” (lines 348- 349). Abe, a Black pastor, also understood that it was achievable chiefly for Christian “believers.”

Ben, a local White pastor, and Toni, a former student leader, believed that racial reconciliation was more elusive and they were not sure whether it was attainable. Ben stated that it was hard to begin to have “a vision” of what racial reconciliation “feels like,” from relative spaces of comfort for Black and White congregants, because he argued that we are so far removed from the work and with so few good examples. Ben was not satisfied with the idea of racially diverse churches being the epitome of racial reconciliation in a Christian context. Neither was he enamored with an emphasis on debunking the archetypal “most segregated hour in America” being remedied when “we all just combine and have multiracial, multicultural churches. I think if we focus so much on that one hour, it’s often times at the expense of the rest of our lives together which ultimately for me is more meaningful.” (Taped Interview, August 21, lines 115-116)

Some participants expressed concerns and critiqued the capacity of the United States to achieve true racial unity. Toni admitted to inner conflicts of opinion about whether racial reconciliation is attainable:

I feel like, it is achievable when you have people who are of equal playing field with each other. And sometimes you have to choose to be on equal playing field with each other. You can’t just expect that it’ll happen. For example, there might be a church with more resources than another and they have to figure out how do we treat each other as equal partners, where I’m not just helping this other church, but we’re actually deciding that we’re equal in this. And I think *it is a humbling kind of thing*, and I will say that

happens, not even just between White and Black churches or people, but it's between; it can be Black-to-Black. (Timed Interview, June 10, lines 380-287)

Toni was also wary that, even on a perfunctory level of continuing important conversations about race, the impetus for racial reconciliation for her had seemed to wane. She emphasized the importance of her student experiences of living with White students and being part of a home church and community based on the John Perkins model of relocation. Toni had discussed the idea of relocation with her husband and moving their young family to an underserved community, perhaps with a White family as well, so that they could be much more part of the community. She felt that when the quality of schools, policing and environmental factors, such as the quality of water, sanitation and greening the inner city affected one personally it was so much easier to be part of an authentic community with the sole agenda of seeing the community thrive. This conception of the *Beloved Community* presents perhaps the most inspiring vision of integration possible. It sketches a model for racial reconciliation based on “unescapable network of mutuality” King (1963a, para.4). It is refreshing that Toni and other participants at least are able to paint a picture of this worthy and radical form of community existence.

Desiring Racial Reconciliation

The efforts which members of Mercer University's *Beloved Community* are taking to form a coalition occur at a time when the United States is struggling with increased racial tensions. The interviews were conducted in the summer and early fall of 2016, deemed by some political and social commentators as a particular *annus horribilis* (or terrible year): the ending presidency of the country's first African-American, highly publicized police shootings, and acquittals, as well as deadly attacks on police officers, and the vitriol of a bitterly fought general

election campaign. The scapegoat rhetoric against immigrants, Mexicans and Muslim Americans amidst cries to “Make America great again!” in a highly racialized general election would not have been far from the minds of participants.

Several participants expressed misapprehension about the premise that racial reconciliation was a *desirable* goal. The most nuanced roadblock was also the one that is most problematic according to Felix. He mentioned that *Building the Beloved Community Symposium* and other work related to reconciliation in faith-based communities can often, unwittingly, become cathartic in relieving racial tension, but do little more than assuage personal angst and lack sufficient follow-through with social justice actions. His response, like many other participants shows an optimism and desire for more to be done within the *Beloved Community* to garner dialogue which leads to measurable outcomes for the many social justice issues facing local communities of Color. Felix, a local pastor, also has family members working in the public education system. He movingly shared from his personal experiences:

We feel very good about having all of these meetings and talking and things like that, and my fear [is] always—you know, whether it is church, as I have been a pastor for so long—or whether it is working with the *Beloved Community*—is that in our talking about what we ought to do, some parts become *catharsis* for actually doing what we ought to do and so I think that’s the roadblock that I think I put my finger on. It is not ill-intentioned, it is just that sometimes, you know, we pat ourselves on the back when we’re done and say, “Well, that was great!” because we all felt inspired, and that’s a good thing. It is great to feel those things, but we really have to follow-up with something concrete.

(Taped Interview, August 29, lines 320-331)

Felix's observation, related to how the virtue of being engaged in reconciliatory acts, in and of themselves carries a certain allure, serves as a useful reminder that within organizational structures activities can become routinized in such a way as to impede genuine restorative justice. This was reminiscent of critiques leveled at the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission—because of the emphasis placed on public confession, reconciliation and forgiveness, amnesty was granted to the guilty. Critics argued that amounted to mere virtue signaling, which ultimately obfuscated the necessity for public outrage, prosecutions and punitive justice (Gibson, 2004).

In his reflections about expanding the networks of the *Beloved Community* Levi also felt that there was a danger of unwitting insularity and encouraged deliberation about innovative approaches to reach a greater section of the student body:

We need to recognize that we, as a group, can only reach out so far into our own networks. And, once we've tapped those out, then it's either time for us to kind of take a step back and find someone else from a different network. (Taped Interview, June 14, lines 145-148)

Levi acknowledged that the *Beloved Community* was one of the “best organizations” that he had joined, while he was as a student at Mercer, and he was thankful for the opportunity to speak with other students, faculty, and community leaders about such an important matter as race and reconciliation. He also felt that the group had made him more aware of local politics. His suggestion about developing networks came from a sincere desire to see the project succeed.

Mathias, a long-standing committee member, called for more community activism in terms of addressing social justice matters:

Otherwise our symposia at the *Beloved Community* becomes incestuous, in the sense that it will be the same group of people, like-minded people, interacting with one another and feeling good about. (Taped Interview, June 2, lines 968-971)

In light of the systemic and deeply embedded racism and state violence that plagues traditionally marginalized communities several participants expressed concern about *assimilation* to perceived White norms as a by-word for racial reconciliation. Toni stated, “The history is so challenging because, you know, I wonder sometimes, like, why is it that over the history of the world, so many White people were conquering people. They conquered people of various races. Why?” (Taped Interview, June 9, line 430-432).

Toni, a civil rights lawyer gave deep, well thought-through answers in the interview, it was a privilege to speak to her.

She showed sensitivity and a steadfast commitment to civil rights activism. As the interview neared its end Toni expressed a shift in her perceptions about the relevancy of racial reconciliation:

We’re going to have to actively partner with people of other races in order to get the work done and to promote reconciliation. And I guess that has become less of a priority [for me] maybe due to some cynicism. But, I don’t know; you know, it’s really, [*Toni hesitated for several seconds, pensively*] I wish I could explain it better, but I guess, overall this is something that is just not as high of a priority right now. For good or for bad, I don’t know, but it’s just not a priority. I think I would like it to be a priority, but my sense of it being as worthwhile is kind of waning. (Taped Interview, June 9, line 673-678)

This decrease of interest in seeking racial reconciliation as a solution to persistent societal race-based ills may possibly arise from Toni's advocacy as an attorney. Toni, who had been a student leader, then went on to explain some more about meeting primarily to form discourse and social friendship communities such as the *Beloved Community*:

It's not seeming as necessary to get the work done. And when I say the work, it's the things that we're passionate about. When you are in college, you are kind of like, in this *forced* environment. (Taped Interview, June 9, line 707-711)

For Toni, a social justice approach was most relevant, no doubt influenced by her work as civil rights attorney. As a legal counsel, she knew firsthand that racism as a structured and systemic form of violence needed to be dismantled on a macro level, as well as through interpersonal relationships. This view echoed Levi's call for voluntary participation in service projects and other allusions that the time was ripe to extend their project into sustained community activism.

Summary for Question 2

The findings reveal a typology of reconciliation that includes social/relational, behavioral, and social justice focused racial reconciliation. The most dominant form of racial reconciliation was social/relational. Relationship building was a commonly expressed goal. There were tensions related to *defining, attaining and desiring* racial reconciliation.

Research Question 3

What patterns and contradictions are there in the stakeholders' stories about their perceptions and lived experiences of racial reconciliation?

Introduction

In this section, with the goal of better understanding participants' perceptions of the goals of HEIs in addressing racial reconciliation, it was useful to analyze the issues on which the participants agreed and those on which they differed. There was consensus and contradiction surrounding the three themes of defining, attaining and desiring racial reconciliation.

Patterns and Contradictions in the Study

The patterns and contradictions centered first on contested definitions. Of particular relevance to the research question was the tension in the participants' disparate takes on the socially-constructed characteristics of the *Beloved Community* and *racial reconciliation*. Such differences in defining the *Beloved Community* and racial reconciliation are unsurprising as this uncertainty is echoed in the literature.

Through their interpersonal relationships, the stakeholders in the *Beloved Community* continue to work through the shifting conceptions of defining *who* they are as a group, *what* they seek to achieve and *how* they plan to go about realizing a united vision. Mercer's input is valuable in the personnel, acumen and resources it brings to this challenge. However, this clearly causes a power imbalance in their relationship with other stakeholders which needs to be acknowledged and if possible mitigated. Many other HEIs, particularly in urban settings, and advocates for localized HEI engagement recognize that despite the difficulties of this power dynamics, to do nothing is hardly a sustainable or moral response. Community partnerships are troubled with challenge, risk and ambiguities and—as with all wicked problem solving—fraught

with complexity. Perhaps the startling discovery then is that the formation of a beloved community is in itself a wicked problem, neither poison or cure.

Apart from contentions in defining key terms, the second set of trends pertinent to the engagement of HEIs arose in assessing the *attainability* of racial reconciliation. A variety of opinions were expressed about the key challenges and roadblocks to the efforts of the *Beloved Community* in stimulating a truly racially reconciled society.

Diverse opinions were expressed amongst participants regarding the identity of *Beloved Community* members: who is part of the *Beloved Community*? A third of the participants strongly believed that although the work of the *Beloved Community* could, and even should, necessitate connections and service to the general local populace, the *Beloved Community* was ultimately a church-led group. This is because they expressed strong views that racial reconciliation was principally a Christian charge. By contrast, eight respondents made comments that could reasonably be interpreted as acquiescence to the option that the *Beloved Community* was meant to be a multi-faith based group. These participants expressed views that racial reconciliation necessitated ecumenical inclusion and for some this also included inter-faith collaboration.

Within the past year, the group had welcomed leaders from two major religious group, although neither were available to be interviewed at the time of data collection. Most participants expressed views that indicated openness to viewing the *Beloved Community* as inclusive of a wider non-religious audience and not exclusively for Christian clergy. But Abraham, in particular, felt strongly that the *Beloved Community* was a Christian concept, specifically clergy-led and made the distinction that although the community could collaborate with and help to benefit others in the work of social justice projects, a Christian community in agreement needed to be at the nucleus.

Similar to the work of Marsh (2005), participants Abraham, Rachel, Mathias and Peter made a case that the church was uniquely placed to be shining exemplars, actively engaged including the voices of other the broader community, but in service to it and leading it.

There were several participants who also felt that the *Beloved Community* still had some way to go to be more inviting to the mainstream student body. Toni mentioned seeing only a small number of regular student attendees at symposia and having a sense that some professors had required their attendance or offered extra credit. Elizabeth felt that the *Beloved Community* was overtly a Christian organization, and as such, she was unsure whether as a not particularly religious person, she would be welcomed or fit in.

I found it interesting that based on his personal experiences Abe, an African American minister, took, what seemed to my mind, a somewhat genteel approach to the idea of racism in church ranks. Abe understood racialized separation to be a result of “cultural preferences” and distinguished this from flagrant, (worldly) prejudice based on the racism still prevalent in wider US society:

Often times we congregate around what we’re familiar with, but in many cases, that could be erroneously viewed as racism, when in fact it’s just what I’m comfortable with. I’m comfortable in this circle, and so that’s why I said, I think there’s a difference between *racism in the church* versus *racism in America*. Now, I’m not talking about that which is on the fringe. There are probably churches in America that are outright racist that says that, “A Black man or woman cannot come in this church.” To me, that’s not church; that’s not *the* church of Jesus Christ. That is just a group of people coming together, playing church. But, when you speak of the *true church*, those who truly believe in Jesus Christ; I don’t know; at least I have not been exposed to a church or a

pastor who says, “I can’t worship with you because you are Black.” (Taped Interview, June 7, 2016, lines 331-340)

Stanley, a White pastor and active committee member, also expressed concern, “we just have to be careful...be sure that they’re focused on unity and not things that divide us” (Taped Interview, July 1, 2016, lines 252-253). Jun in contrast, reflected that recognition of the inherent struggle and variation is a price paid for being more inclusion communities.

When asked about their experiences and perceptions of racial reconciliation the *Beloved Community* participants replicated the lack of consensus found in the literature on narrowing down a specific definition. This clearly has an impact on goal setting, and assessing the successes of the *Beloved Community*. Nine participants made statements which revealed that they strongly associated racial reconciliation as being defined by building strong relationships with members of another race within the group. One participant placed particular emphasis on behavioral racial reconciliation exhibited in acts such as public apology and confession. Six participants associated the phenomenon as strongly linked to social justice and seeking to unite to change societal ills such as education reform in public schools. Although many participants made reference to faith-based definitions, two participants made comments which referenced a belief that having a Christian faith was an essential element of racial reconciliation and were unequivocal in their emphasis that above all reconciliation was only possible in a faith-based ministry. Three participants acknowledged their uncertainty about defining racial reconciliation, and in each case, their reticence at offering solutions was attributed to a lack of real world examples.

Three participants made comments about racial reconciliation needing to extend beyond a Black/White binary and expressed a desire to explore racial reconciliation with other racialized groups such as Asians and Hispanics.

Participants also differed in their perceptions of what the hindrances were to successful racial reconciliation. Some focused on the logistics of organizing the *Beloved Community* as what was conceived of as part of an already busy community engagement and service mission. Participants, notably those who were alumni and professors, felt that more needed to be done to integrate the project into the university's curriculum.

Several participants such as Graham and Jun expressed a wish for more collaboration to continue beyond the annual symposia. For example, Toni states:

I think that a lot of people are honest about their feelings regarding race, and they did express that to some extent in some symposia, but it was kind of a guarded expression; I believe. I don't know how far it goes beyond the symposium where we talk about how we need to be reconciled with each other, and how we need to show the love of Christ by being united between races. I'm not sure if that conversation and that intentionality continues beyond the symposium. (Taped Interview, June 9, 2016, lines 241-247)

Other participants such as Mathias, Noreen, Felix, Graham, Quintus and Rachel shared similar sentiments.

Summary for Question 3

Participants differed in their conception of the definition, desirability and achievability of racial reconciliation. They also differed in the definition of who was in the *Beloved Community*. There was common ground in the understanding that whatever one's approach, strong social relationships helped to foster reconciliation. Clarifying what *strong social relationships* mean in

this context, requires further investigation. Many participants were also united in the belief that the time was ripe to follow-through with social activism and conciliatory actions.

Chapter 4 Summary

As other researchers found (Lederach, 2001; Marsh & Perkins, 2008; Androff, 2012), the participants in this study corroborate the supposition that racial reconciliation involves, to a significant degree, interpersonal contact. When people talk about racial reconciliation they mean a reduction in racial animosity and a greater interest and effort to interact with each other across racial lines. This may mean better communication, agreeing together to tackle social justice ills, but it is the spirit of togetherness that is considered most impactful.

Even for those who critiqued the initiative, and expressed frustration about more not being done beyond the annual symposia, all noted its value as a perhaps imperfect, but nonetheless important, and long overdue process.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

In a speech entitled *The American Dream*, speaking about racial injustice Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. keenly observed, “if the problem is to be solved ultimately, hearts must be changed and religion and education must play a great role” (King, 1963c, video file). Indeed, writer and Civil Rights activist James Baldwin contended analyses of religious, educational and other social institutions policies provides conclusive evidence of a state’s attitudes towards race (Baldwin, 1968). As this dissertation has examined, Mercer University’s *Beloved Community* raises awareness related to how HEIs might, in line with their third mission, participate with diverse stakeholders in engaged projects that extend teaching and scholarship for the benefit of society. The project ventures into the historically nuanced, and entwined ideologies of higher education, race, and religion in order to explore the meaning of racial reconciliation in the local context.

The underlying question which concludes this inquiry and the closing discussion points is a revisit on the initial question of significance. As addressed in the first chapter, a case was made for its personal, philosophical and sociological justifications. It is further argued that partnership between the HEI and the faith-based community is significant, for a number of reasons.

First, ideologically, this study supports the understanding that religious institutions and higher educational organizations are powerful change agents in shaping societal structures, norms and beliefs. More specifically, when it comes to solving wicked problems, it is can be surmised that both religion and education wield influence and authoritative weight pertaining to social identification and what stakeholders consider desirable, attainable and knowable.

Participants differed in their views regarding definitions, attainability and desirability of racial reconciliation. Further research needs to be conducted to better understand the connections between knowledge acquisition, engaged scholarship and how partnership relationships impact communities and the HEIs.

Second, sociologically, this study supports the idea that higher educational establishments, in partnership with faith-based communities, provide a unique opportunity for encounters between people from a wide spectrum of backgrounds in a way that can facilitate the transdisciplinary approaches to problem-solving. Proximity, social encounter, and dialogue are important elements of racial reconciliation. Institutions of higher learning and faith-based communities both serve an important role in engaged scholarship that enables civic engagement in addressing racial injury.

Third, on an institutional level, the story of Sam Oni's early experiences of racial segregation in local churches is part of the collective institutional memory of Mercer University. Collective memory refers to how a group recalls the past. To understand an organization's collective memories is to grasp something essential about their identity and outlook. Of course, organizations of themselves do not hold memories; it is the people in the organization who retain the memories, but often amongst those people, there are common themes.

Sam Oni's story distinguishes Mercer's history of desegregation and links it with a history of engaged scholarship. Although Mr. Oni recollected that his "faith shattering" encounters came primarily as a result of the racialized experiences he encountered off campus, this had implications for Mercer. The HEIs leaders had succeeded in desegregating the first Southern Baptist higher educational institution in the country in a history that at the time stretched back 130 years without violence or government interventions. However, it was at local

area churches of Tattnall Square and Vineville Baptist churches that racial separatism was most dishearteningly still virulent. These experiences came as a direct result of Sam Oni's residency at Mercer and connected the church community with campus in a way that caused racial injury and harm, not only to Sam Oni, but also to his room-mate Don Baxter and other supporters of desegregation. Although Mercer students had agitated for desegregation for some years before, as explored by a Mercer English professor Andrew Silver in his play *Combustible Burn*, things came to a head with Sam Oni's admittance.

Silver is quoted in a *Mercer Cluster* article:

According to Silver, the moment when Mercer began to embrace desegregation and equality was really the moment when the school came into its own as a place of acceptance for all. "To me," he said "the play serves as a reminder of the work we have to do yet...it is a call to action, to resist the status quo, to resist mindless materialism, to embrace justice, to fight injustice wherever you see it...and to serve others, even if it puts you at risk." It's tough, Silver admitted, but he believes that's what being a Mercer Bear is all about. (Smith, 2014, para.7)

The institution is replete with the names of many brave men and women on the faculty and in the student body who took the risks Silver describes and stood up against racial injustice on and off campus. Joe Henricks, a Dean at the time of the institution's desegregation, was one such man. In remembering Joe Henricks the university website describes him as:

An instrumental figure at Mercer during the Civil Rights Movement, as he helped bring the first black student, Sam Oni, to campus in 1963. With the enduring belief that Mercer is a family rather than just an institution, Dr. Hendricks worked relentlessly to make diversity an asset for the University community. He also helped start Mercer's Upward

Bound program, one of the first in the nation. For his efforts, a group of alumni, faculty and staff created the Joe Hendricks Minority Endowed Scholarship Fund in his honor to help minority undergraduate students afford a Mercer education. (Mercer, 2015b, para.3)

This study thus supports the idea that authentic HEI engagement with community partners in solving societal problems requires recognition that the challenges in society are an integral part of the HEI community. Stakeholders are also a part of the wider society which has an influence on social identity, collective memory, and intergroup interaction.

Comparison to Literature in the Field

Androff's identification of *cognitive affective* reconciliation, because it refers to changes in attitude and points of view (Androff, 2010, p.277) initially seemed germane to the work of reconciliation. However, few participants in this study directly described their experiences of reconciliation through the *Beloved Community* project as transformative, or as shifting their beliefs (for example) from a place of intolerance to one of tolerance. This may be because the participants are already predisposed to conciliation and willing to give serious thought to how race operates in society. There was generally little talk of the experiences of engagement overtly causing empathy as Androff (2010) claims is a characteristic of cognitive affective reconciliation. The notable exception was Harvey who expressed that hearing Sam Oni's first-hand account meant for the first time that he could grasp more strongly Oni's experiences as a fellow Black student at Mercer during the time of segregation. One reason that cognitive affective reconciliation may not be strongly associated with the *Beloved Community* could be because, Androff's study focused on telling and listening to painful stories related to an incident of racial violence. The *Beloved Community* is not a truth and reconciliation commission charged with making space for frank disclosures as was the case in the Greensborough study (Androff,

2012). Behavioral reconciliation focusses on acts of contrition and seemed to be more based on a desire to explore this more by a few participants as a result of their own readings and research on the topic.

A few participants mentioned the behavioral form of reconciliation, which related to gestures such as public confession or apology and acts of contrition such as reparations. Several agreed that facing past and present injuries and engagement in acts of conciliation were needed for racial reconciliation to occur, but the focus was largely on building personal relationships and on tangible acts of service. Behavioral reconciliation for the few participants who mentioned it seemed to be more hypothetical and based on their readings or conversations rather than upon personal lived experiences of racial reconciliation experienced at this stage of the project. The three participants (Quintus, Graham, and Ben) who mentioned this level of reconciliation were all White male pastors or administrators. It is conceivable that the *Beloved Community* will move in this direction, but Graham recognized that this is fraught with challenges. He discussed, for instance, the idea of reparations, and felt that what this meant in their context was something that could be further discussed. Like most of the participants, his emphasis was on social reconciliation and creating the opportunities for a culture of engagement that was rooted in interpersonal relationships with the hope that this would develop with consensus on social justice issues.

Lederach's conception of reconciliation is another useful comparison for this study's findings because it is based on a premise that advocates for reconciliation through grassroots peace processes which include *relationship, encounter, innovation and acknowledgment*. As already discussed, participants appear to associate the *Beloved Community* project with *encounter* and *relationship* building, both of which are central tenets of Lederach's model.

Where the model is not as robust, in this context, is with relation to innovation and acknowledgment. This is because like Androff's study, the *Beloved Community* model currently leans more towards improving interpersonal relationships and raising awareness with the hope that this will help members to be informed and positioned for participation on social justice issues. More work still needs to be done for the interpersonal relationship building efforts to extend to more congregants and the wider university community. The suggestion that a junior *Beloved Community* symposium, primarily organized by Mercer students, and that invites the parent group members to share their stories, become mentors, and continue the racial dialogue, may be worth consideration. If the Lederach model is to provide a framework, discussions need to continue regarding innovation, acknowledgment and project sustainability.

The other interconnected level of racial reconciliation identified by Lederach (2001) Marsh & Perkins, (2008) and Androff (2012) is social reconciliation, which refers to change in interpersonal relationships. Social reconciliation is where the *Beloved Community* is most active. The annual symposia and the relationships that are formed from this and other meetings offer participants an opportunity to build bonds. In this study, many of participants cited improved socialization across racial lines as a key component of racial reconciliation.

John Perkin's model of racial reconciliation is widely recognized as innovative in community building and social justice conception of racial reconciliation. As discussed in the review of literature the 3 Rs are *relocation, reconciliation and redistribution*. It is clear again that although there are some members who express a desire to see the work of the community extend to include social justice programs, at present, this largely falls outside of its current scope.

Conclusions

The research findings validate the research of Lederach, (2001), Perkins, (2007) and Androff (2012) in concluding that reconciliation is a slow process, occurring at multiple levels. Further, this study found that the process of racial reconciliation is influenced by social identity, collective memory, and intergroup interaction. The importance placed on racial dialogue and interpersonal relationships was the most prevalent aspect of reconciliation evident in participants' conceptions of the *Beloved Community*. The projects contribution to social reconciliation, in particular, may be a useful starting point for HEI engagement with ecumenical inter-racial and potentially inter-faith communities. Opening the door to provide safe spaces for racial dialogue with symposia is a noble ideal. To be sustainable engagement needs to be extended to include a broader cross-section of students, perhaps in mentoring relationships with *Beloved Community* members, or as Harvey did, by inviting speakers into the classroom. Faculty who commit to community development partnerships also need to be recognized and remunerated.

To overcome natural ambivalences about what constitutes the *Beloved Community*, racial reconciliation must include not only recognition and celebration of triumphs, but also recognize hardship and suffering. A generic text-book definition or prosaic understanding of racial injury will not suffice. Some participants were more drawn to a reparations framework, and activism directed at improving the state of public school education was mentioned several times.

This study is significant in examining the role of HEI engagement with community partners to extend scholarship, learning and civic engagement. The stakeholders' perceptions of reconciliation operate at a micro and macro level. Participants express the view that reconciliation requires a commitment to long-term personal relationship formations—which

includes engagement with student sub-cultures—(micro) and social justice and community building innovations (macro). This requires a reconceptualization of campus racial climate beyond superficially racially desegregated spaces, or even as race fixated amphitheaters cloistered from everyday practicalities. More poignantly for faith-based HEIs striving for grounded community partnerships, the challenges present themselves in the recognition and cultivation of the sacred in the difficult spaces between policy and practice.

The role HEIs might play in addressing racial reconciliation through community engagement partnerships gains credence at the institutional and community level, like any other project, based on discernable results. Even though the process is slow, progress in goal-setting is a reasonable expectation. Quick-fix panaceas related to race, even by venerable social institutions such as HEIs and churches even in shared partnership, might rightly be viewed with skepticism. The realization of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of the beloved community, on the topic of racial reconciliation, is all the more necessary and urgent. Progress in striving for authentic racial reconciliation is attendant with an acknowledgment of injury, suffering and the sacrifice of privilege which results if there is to be tangible repair. As daunting as this may seem, acknowledgement of injury may also open the door to educative encounters which do the interior cognitive affective work which eludes legislative reform.

Reflections

Differences Between Prospectus and Actual Research

I decided to include a section on the difference between the prospectus and the actual research in the hopes that it will help future doctoral candidates. In essence a lot is going to change, and one need not be too anxious about this. The initial IRB approved research design included allowance for two sixty-minute interviews with each participant. It turned out that the initial interview was more than sufficient to cover questions directed to the participants' personal experiences as it bears on their engagement in Mercer's *Beloved Community* racial reconciliation project. So, unlike my prospectus design I needed only one sixty-minute interview for each participant at most.

I was relieved to be able to successfully conduct over 20 hours of oral history audio recordings with participants and even relished the idea of completing the verbatim transcriptions. It had been a delight to finally get to meet the participants in person and spend time getting to know them a bit more as I heard their stories. It was important to always keep an eye to my audit trail and remain as reflective as possible. No doubt in classic zealous, rookie mode my first interviews sometimes felt meandering. It was helpful to use my tape recorder to debrief after each interview.

Again, I had envisioned at the time of my prospectus design that I would generate a considerate stock of handwritten notes, both during the interview and afterward. During the actual interviews, I found that I took fewer notes than I had initially planned. At times jotting down memos during interviews was actually quite a challenge for me, especially in the earlier interviews. This was partly due to nervousness (illegible and unintelligible for the most part), but also because I genuinely wished to focus on what the participant was saying and not distract

them, or myself, with notetaking. For my sensibilities at least, being too overly taken with writing notes would have potentially inhibited the ease of our conversations, which often involved participants recounting difficult emergent revelations and life histories related to race, especially when the tape recorder caught everything much less obtrusively. If I did jot down notes I tried to maintain eye-contact with the interviewee as much as possible. What I did find useful was having my interview outline questions at the ready and highlighting or circling things that I wanted to come back to in terms of follow-up questions. I found that the interview process was wonderfully organic. The oral history recordings research methodology was well suited to the subject matter and my interview style than more structured interviews would have been.

My interviews went according to my schedule and were conducted over approximately a three-month period. As a full-time educator, for the years that I have been in graduate school, summers have been priceless—providing a great opportunity to read, write, and eventually conduct research. There were some interviews that came at the end of my research interview cycle, and although I would have preferred face-to-face interviews they had to be conducted on the telephone. The number of participants also increased since my prospectus defense and so it was important to have some flexibility regarding the participants' summer schedules and the fact that, as some of them were educators themselves, summer was the long-awaited opportunity to get away for a well-deserved break.

Each of the interviews were conducted at a mutually convenient time and in a location of their choosing. There was only one exception to this when a participant asked to meet in a noisy café. I found it very important to try to get to all public locations at least an hour in advance to set up and make sure that there would be as little disturbances or interference with the sound quality as possible. This was immensely beneficial because in so doing I realized that due to

summer hours the café was closing at the time that the participant had asked to meet. I appreciated the early advice of mentors, others who had gone through the doctoral process who cautioned me that it was wise to secure the services of a competent professional transcriber. The primary reason this design was chosen was because it facilitated a desire to add to the historical archives. Thus, the recorded interviews of 15 participants, who gave their informed consent, will be made available to the public via the university library who will be the repository (letter of consent Appendix D).

I decided to donate the research interviews of those who had given consent for this to be added to the historical record at Mercer's Tarver Library rather than another repository such as a national or local repository or historical society. This is because I felt that the data would be more readily accessible to future scholars and members of the general public if they wished to build on this study or investigate similar topics. Although the audio recordings will be digitized I felt that having a local repository also served the local community best, and for those who do not live in Macon, Mercer University and other local attractions are well worth a visit, especially when the impressive magnolia trees are in bloom. The donation is also itself become a small part of institutional history and the archival material will be on a subject that was hopefully of direct relevance.

Stakeholders

As explored in the review of literature, Jongbloed, Enders, & Salerno (2008) argued that worldwide HEIs are being increasingly compelled to carefully reassess the part that they play in society. Furthermore, there is a growing need for them to reevaluate their relationships with a broad spectrum of stakeholders. I found that the matter of internal and external stakeholders was quite political, particularly within any organizations. To fulfill their changing social contract

Mercer University, along with other HEIs have to identify their stakeholders. In order to progress towards being more socially accountable institutions and to prevent mission fatigue, careful consideration needs to be made of the nature of stakeholder relationships in order to identify the appropriate degree of differentiated engagement. For Mercer University in general, and for its *Beloved Community* representatives specifically, thinking in terms of ongoing partnerships with key community stakeholders has significant implications for its governance and accountability measures. In order to further explore some of these concepts this dissertation proposes an aspirational oral history research agenda for addressing the emergent issues of governance, stakeholder management and higher education's community engagement.

HEIs are public institutions and their members are clearly also members of the wider society. Democratizing knowledge through authentic partnerships requires input from the many communities that work with the organization externally. However, the transdisciplinary skills required to address complex wicked problems fails without institutional support. Genuine community partnership struggles without institutional policies and practices that foster the scholarship of engagement. Clearly defined project evaluation criteria that are included as part of a system of rewards for university personnel also helps to build confidence in maintaining sustainable projects.

Thoughts on the Slaves' Religion

These accounts piqued my interest as I reviewed the literature of the history related to Black theology and the antecedents of slave narratives. I came across this text in my research and it arrested my interest. The faith of those who were brought to this nation in shackles and chains is the untold story of the making of America. This so humbled me—these men and women held on to their faith despite so much to the contrary, they held on to hope. As a Christian believer, I

felt that if the Lord can do so for them what more me or anyone else? I learned that there is a woeful lack of recognition that includes the accounts of earliest African Americans and the faith that sustained them. This is a critical aspect of US history and Raboteau contends, “to ignore the history of another people whose fate has been intimately bound up with your own is to forgo self-understanding” (Raboteau, 2004, p. 325). This study has left me desiring to learn more about the stories of America’s earliest Africans and I look forward to discovering more through the work of womanist theologians such as Delores Williams.

Intergenerational Mentoring

Intergenerational personalized mentoring was a wonderful way to dispel myths and increase understanding for several of the participants. Graham, Elizabeth, Davina and Levi spoke about their mentors, some of whom were of another race, and in each case, they felt that mentoring made a difference. As I reflect on how amazing the participants in this study are, their dedication is truly humbling. I recall that Davina, Toni, Elizabeth, Jun and Levi, whom each now serve their communities as inspiring, young professionals, each spoke about the authentic rapport with faculty that they each enjoyed as students at the university. In navigating the tough topic of race and racial injury Elizabeth, in particular, expressed an earnest desire for a mentor as a young professional. Further discussion about whether cross-generational mentoring with relation to *Beloved Community* members individually, or as a panel of elders, including local community partners, could perhaps help those who wish to be mentored navigate and work through matters relating to race and reconciliation. In this way, the *Beloved Community* would wonderfully expand its mission.

Engaging Community

One way to engage stakeholders in the community and build more intergenerational collaboration by fully engaging the student body may be to make more effective use of social media and build networks that are inclusive of community partners. The *Beloved Community* has already provided a wealth of resources in the video-recorded keynote speeches that Mercer University has made available on its website and other social media. As community engagement agendas unfold in other nations, the HEI community engagement movement has become increasingly globalized and the ability to engage increasingly diverse stakeholders will require all available technologies.

Implications

Knowledge is fundamental to the purpose of institutions of higher education. As HEIs articulate their commitment to broaching complex societal challenges, an appreciation that knowledge is also developed in the communities beyond their campuses invigorates innovative collaborations. In order to tackle wicked problems stakeholders must leverage knowledge, past, present and future which means a commitment to sustainability and building long term relationships, policies and structures. As well as social organizations HEIs are also economic centers that have a financial impact on the local communities and the states in which they operate. Mitigating the power dynamics at work will be challenging, but is necessary so that authentic partnership can occur. Shifting away from a traditional supply-driven, service delivery model of community partnership to one that is more demand-driven and focused on engagement brings with it attendant complexities.

Perhaps not dissimilar to the dilemmas explored in the review of literature, the irony is that sometimes the elements that contribute to solution may also have pre-imbedded beliefs,

mythologies and ways of being which simply re-inscribe the wicked problems they ostensibly seek to solve. Emerson and Smith (2001) began their ground-breaking study, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* by stating “this book is about how well-intentioned people, their values, and their institutions actually recreate racial divisions and inequalities they ostensibly oppose” (p.1). There are myths about higher education, community and citizenship that need to be explored. Institutionalizing community engagement means transforming the culture of higher education so that it welcomes the forms of scholarship that permit community engagement to thrive.

The preceding sections in this study reveal some of the complexity of how higher education engages with community partners to address wicked problems in US society. It is in this complex historical antecedence that an opportunity arises to provide students with an authentic service education. This study has implications for those who wish to understand more of the *agora* or *coming together* of community imbedded in the notion of higher education. The challenges and implications of racial reconciliation enacted at a local level have the opportunity to extend HEI engagement to bring together different factions of a community in a way that perhaps no other institutions can do, apart from religious organizations. This allows stakeholders to co-create new narratives based on their shared experiences.

Although some participants expressed frustration that after ten years of the *Beloved Community*'s existence most local churches were still largely segregated along racial lines and there still needed to be work done to engage on social justice matters, particularly with the burgeoning problems of the public-school system, all of the participants thought that it was worthwhile to meet. Although there is more scope to include the wider student body in events it

was clear that those student leaders involved benefitted from the intergenerational input of guest speakers and associations with other members of the *Beloved Community*.

Suggestions for Future Research

A contextualized appraisal of the *Beloved Community*'s contributions to racial reconciliation clarifies the need to supplement reconciliatory efforts with restorative justice. A wide variety of interventions will be required to provide students with opportunities to build and revitalize communities, particularly those which are in close proximity, as is the case at Mercer and other urban US institutions of higher education. Mercer University has an impressive history of social justice. The *Beloved Community* has enriched the work of engaged scholarship and racial reconciliation in Macon, but the work of social transformation cannot conclude there. More research is needed that guides funding, support, and resources in a sustainable commitment to engage with a wide variety of stakeholders as we explore the capabilities of HEIs to succeed at their third mission: community engagement. The creative vision and goodwill required for socially embedded HEIs to authentically engage with local community partners as we strive to solve wicked problems is exhilarating. For those audacious enough to pick up the gauntlet, the struggle is truly worthy of our divine lot and esteemed portion as we migrant these verdant and embattled, lands of promise.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: IRB Approved Informed Consent Form

**Georgia State University
Department of Educational Policy Studies (EPS)
Informed Consent**

Title: Mercer University's "*Beloved Community*" program
Principal Researcher: Dr. Richard D. Lakes, EPS Professor
Student Principal Researcher: Ms. Joy R. Kenyon, EPS student

I. Purpose:

You are invited to take part in a research study. The purpose of the study is to examine Mercer University's "*Beloved Community*" program. You are invited to be part of the study because you are able to share first-hand experience. A total of thirty people will be included in this study. Being part of the study will require 60 minutes of your time for the first interview. On another date, you may also be asked to give an extra 60 minutes for a follow-up interview, if it is needed. Interviews will be carried out from May through August 2016.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to take part, you will:

1. Only be in contact with Ms. Joy Kenyon (Student Principal Researcher) or Dr. Richard Lakes (Principal Researcher).
2. Be asked to suggest a date, time and place to have the interview(s).
3. Be interviewed by Joy Kenyon about your experiences of the *Beloved Community*.
4. Have the choice to have your interview(s) audiotaped.
5. Have the opportunity, if you wish, for the recording of your interview(s) to be given to the Mercer University library.

You can refuse to answer any question without explanation. You will not lose any benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Taking part in this study may not benefit you personally. We hope to gain information about how universities and colleges partner with their local communities. We are especially interested in how this works out around issues of race and justice.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in the research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions. You can stop the interview(s) at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

VI. Confidentiality:

By signing this form you allow the research study team to make your records available to the Georgia State University (GSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) and regulatory agencies as required by law. We will keep your records private, to the extent allowed by law. Dr. Richard Lakes (Principal Researcher), and Ms. Joy Kenyon (Student Principal Researcher) will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly. This includes GSU's IRB and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). If you wish we make the interview(s) public. Mercer University library will keep them. Anyone who chooses to can then have access to the interview(s).

If you do not wish to be personally named:

- 1) You will not be named personally. We will use a study code instead of your name in our records.
- 2) The study key that named you will be stored separately from your interview(s).
- 3) Your name and any other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results.
- 4) What we find out will be summarized and reported as a group.
- 5) The audio recording(s) of your interview(s) will be stored and kept private.
- 6) The audio recording(s) of your interview(s) will be destroyed within one calendar year from the time that you give the interview(s).
- 7) The study code that links your name to the interview(s) will also be destroyed.

If you give consent to be personally named:

- 1) You can decide to have your recorded interview(s) and a transcript of your interview(s) to be given to the Mercer University library.
- 2) The Mercer University library may store your interview(s) as a resource for future researchers, or anyone else who may be interested.

All the information you provide will be stored in a locked cabinet. For the study we will use password-firewall protected computers.

VII. Copy of Consent Form to Participant:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research please mark your choice with your initials and please sign below.

Please write your initials in the boxes which applies to you:

[.....] It is OK for you to be named in the thesis.

[.....] You do not want to be named in the thesis.

[.....] It is OK for your interview(s) to be audio-recorded.

[.....] You do not want your interview(s) to be audio-recorded.

[.....] It is OK to give your audio-recorded interview(s) to the Mercer University library.

[.....] You want your recorded interview(s) to be destroyed after the study is completed. This will be within one year from the time you are interviewed.

Please sign below to confirm that you have written your initials by your choices.

[X] _____
Participant's Signature Date

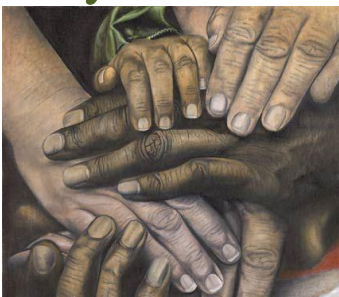
[X] Please Print Your Name: _____

Principal Researcher or Researcher Obtaining Consent Date

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY

Race & Reconciliation

in the context of
Mercer University's Beloved Community



We are conducting oral history research to better understand racial reconciliation

Participants will have experience of:

Engagement in Mercer's Annual Beloved Community Symposium by contributing to discussions, talks or other events & activities that support the work of racial reconciliation

Oral History Research: Share your experience and add to the historical record

Minimal Risk: You may speak confidentially or drop out at any time

Convenience: 50-60 minute initial audio-recorded interview, with a possible follow-up interview of 50-60 minutes at a time & location of your choice



Please contact:

Student Researcher: **Ms. Joy R. Kenyon** at 678 793 5725;

Email: kenyonjoy@hotmail.com

Principal Researcher: Dr. Richard D. Lakes at 404-413-8285; email: rlakes@gsu.edu
Georgia State University, Educational Policy Studies Department

Appendix C: Letter of Consent from Mercer University President

May 6, 2016

Joy Kenyon
2545 Kolb Manor Circle SW
Marietta, GA 30008

Dear Joy:

I am giving permission for you to interview Mercer faculty, staff and students for your research on Mercer University's *Beloved Community*. The University will be happy to accept a donation of the oral history recordings and transcripts associated with this project for our Tarver Library.

Good luck as you pursue your doctoral degree.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "William D. Underwood".

William D. Underwood
President

WDU/vs

Appendix D: Letter of oral history repository from Mercer University Library

April 13, 2016

University Research Services & Administration
Georgia State University
30 Courtland St. SE
Dahlberg Hall, Suite 217
Atlanta, GA 30303

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to express my support for Joy Kenyon's oral history project on Mercer University's Beloved Community symposium. We are happy to serve as the archival and online repository for the audio recordings and the transcripts that she would like to donate for future researchers.

Please let me know if you need any further information from me. I am delighted to help Ms. Kenyon with her project and to have this chance to document Mercer's history.

Sincerely,

Laura M. Botts
Associate Director for Special Collections

Appendix E: Descriptors of Participants and Abbreviated Memos

Abraham is a local pastor; he is an African American in his mid 50s.

He understands the *Beloved Community* as the “true church” and stressed the importance of it being the pastor’s role to “set the right vision” and unite to be more culturally aware about what is happening in Macon. He also referred to “a degree of church territorialism” and denominationalism which creates a roadblock in church unity. Abraham argued that racial reconciliation was faith-based, relational and achievable. He contended that as a whole “racism in the church is different from racism in America” and largely due to cultural preferences; and that “oftentimes we congregate around what we are familiar with” as distinct from other historically overt racism, such as physical barring and flagrant ostracism.

Ben is a local pastor; he is White in his late 40s.

He spoke of racial reconciliation as including, in part, performative acts of contrition such as public confession, repentance and an “honest reckoning with the past” to address the clear divide in Macon (paralleled in the South and in other parts of the country) where “class lines are pretty well divided along racial lines.” Ben also thought that this was most evident in Macon’s racially polarized public and private education systems. He argued that the racial divide in local congregations reveals the “long, painful and very sad history of supporting social and cultural atrocities” and as such “bears the wounds” of the national story. Despite this critical historical connection with the church and broader societal ills Ben still found it is harder in White congregations to make the case that the work of racial reconciliation has relevance in post-modernity. He welcomed that the

Beloved Community provided “a kind of space to address some of these things” and an opportunity to break through inherited “stereotypes, lies and myths” passed down through seeming *cultural preferences*. Ben believed that dialogue gave the whole community a chance to approach one another “as humans and as individuals, which you are going to do when you are sitting there and hearing each other’s stories.”

Carmen is a White administrator and professor in her early 60s.

She used words such as “real” and “extraordinary” to describe Mercer’s history of service and mission to serve locally and globally. She highlighted what she considered to be the positives of institutionalized community engagement. Carmen argued that the university has “an extraordinary history and that Sam Oni is part of that history.” She felt that “faculty cultivate a value system and way of thinking and being in the world” that is authentically shared with students, about real service experience “rather than platitudes that are on banners, websites or PR literature.” The *Beloved Community* was lauded for its vision and leadership, but seen as autonomous in its operation and funding.

Davina is a White alumna of Mercer in her early 30s.

Davina believed that the *Beloved Community* was an interfaith community. She discussed the importance of acknowledging White privilege and mentioned that symposium speakers were presently limited based on religious affiliations.

Elizabeth is a White alumna in her late 20s.

Elizabeth felt that the *Beloved Community* was not high profile enough in the student body and was losing out in vying for wider student appeal. She felt that this was mainly because of the timing of events and also the impression that it was an organization solely

for Christians in the community. She suggested a *Beloved Community* specifically for Mercerians.

Felix is a White administrator in his early 40s.

Felix understood racial reconciliation to be rooted in a call and gift from God. He argued that “charity of heart without justice is shallow” and that “genuine reconciliation has to lean towards social justice.” He mentioned that his wife was a public-school teacher and that White flight into the private schools and was a key indication of ongoing White privilege and indifference to the conditions of schooling in the Black community.

Graham is a White administrator and professor in his early 70s.

This participant was able to share in detail the history of the Mercerian *Beloved Community*. He expressed frustration that participation was skewed more to Black and envisioned a community, which would expand to include more White members as well as clergy from other religions.

Harvey is a Black professor/administrator and Mercerian (class of 1968) in his early 70s.

Harvey associated himself strongly with the local Black community of Macon/Bibb County, and provided insights into how he felt the Black community perceived Mercer. He shared stories of his upbringing in Macon and his attendance at Mercer. Although his experiences with Whites appeared to be far less antagonist than Sam Oni’s, he attributed this to residing off-campus as a student. Additionally, he had as a local resident with strong community ties, he no thought of attending Tattnell Square, Vineville Baptist or any other White churches. His account reveals that there may be instances when full integration or racial reconciliation may not be as desired by Blacks. The goal of

desegregation in higher education and access to a tertiary education at Mercer was perceived to be of more importance for Harvey.

Jun is a former student leader who served on the *Beloved Community* committee. He is an Asian male alumnus in his mid-20s.

Jun describes positive experiences during his college years at Mercer as a student leader in the *Beloved Community* and as Levi and Davina describe, he benefited from the close mentoring relationships he enjoyed with professors at the university. He conceived of racial reconciliation as being linked to educating college students and mentoring them to encourage discussions and engagement in social action.

Ken is a local White pastor in his 60s.

Ken shared the belief that racial reconciliation succeeds on the basis of building interpersonal relationships. He felt that historical racial injuries played an important role and had to be addressed in order for racial reconciliation to occur.

Levi is a White student leader who graduated from Mercer in the summer of 2016.

Levi felt that Mercer had “receptive,” “quality students” but that a more integrated and “interdisciplinary” approach was needed to “reach out” to them. He believed that, similar to most HEIs, getting students to the *Beloved Community*’s events was a challenge. Levi cautioned against niches and stated that the *Beloved Community* needs to extend itself more fully to the whole student body. He contended that although Mercer “goes about it the right way” with regard to community engagement. Service-based education was problematic and he questioned two aspects of it. First, mandating service hours and the role of community engagement offices. Second, students having to *pay* for service hours given they students were already paying tuition for their education. For Levi, racial

reconciliation needed to be more than bettering personal relationships and instead expand to include concrete social justice activism.

Mathias is Black alumni who graduated from Mercer in 1967.

Mathias' accounts of his experiences at Mercer stood in stark contrast to Harvey, an African American contemporary at Mercer. He felt that the *Beloved Community* had focused heavily on interpersonal relationships and there was a greater need to connect with social equity initiatives.

Noreen is recently retired Mercer professor; she is a Black female in her 60s.

Noreen thought that racial reconciliation was primarily relational but strongly argued that urban-based HEIs needed to be part of the solution for economic renewal and sharing of talents and resources.

Peter is a local pastor who has worked on the committee of the *Beloved Community* since its inception; he is a Black, male in his late 60s.

Peter also felt that *prima facie* racial reconciliation was relational. He felt that church traditions and the racialized political climate were roadblocks to reconciliation. He mentioned several times the need to hold fast to Dr. Martin Luther King's dream of full integration.

Quintus is a White, male professor in his early 40s, who is actively engaged on the planning committee.

Quintus believed that HEI engagement and community service work in general was fraught with nuanced balance of power dynamics, not least in the appropriation of knowledge acquisition.

Rachel is a Black, female, local pastor in her 50s. She has spoken at the annual symposia.

Although Rachel made reference to a relational framework for reconciliation she warned against assimilation and Black congregations feeling pressured to adopt a standardized *modus operandi* dictated by White church leaders.

Stanley is a White, male pastor in his 60s. He had devoted himself to years of service and was involved in a number of projects that sought to bring different factions of the Macon community together.

Toni is an African American alumna. She is in her 30s and is a former student leader who now serves on the *Beloved Community* committee.

Toni expressed deep reserve about racial reconciliation being attainable or even desirable. Her focus was on actions that lead to a fairer world.

Appendix E Continued: Summary of Code Categories and Demographics of Participants

	ID Name	Code Category	Gender	Race	Age	OHA	Interview Time in mins	Interview in Person
1	Abraham	P	M	B	50s	Y	49	Y
2	Benjamin	P	M	W	40s	Y	50	N
3	Carmen	AD,PR	F	W	60s	N	96	Y
4	Davina	P,AL	F	W	30s	N	90	Y
5	Elizabeth	AD,AL	F	W	20s	N	68	Y
6	Felix	AD	M	W	40s	Y	39	N
7	Graham	PR,AD	M	W	70s	Y	65	Y
8	Harvey	PR,AL, AD	M	B	70s	Y	78	Y
9	Jun	SL,AL	M	A	20s	Y	39	Y
10	Ken	P	M	W	60s	Y	76	Y
11	Levi	SL,AL	M	W	20s	Y	35	Y
12	Mathias	AL	M	B	70s	Y	93	Y
13	Noreen	PR	F	B	60s	Y	63	Y
14	Peter	P	M	B	60s	Y	67	Y
15	Quintus	PR	M	W	30s	Y	44	N
16	Rachel	P	F	B	50s	Y	62	Y
17	Stanley	P	M	W	60s	Y	39	N
18	Toni	SL,AL	F	B	30s	Y	51	Y
Total							1104	

Code Category Key:

P = Pastor, AD = Administrator, PR = Professor, AL = Alumni, SL = Student Leader
 F = Female, M = Male, W = White, B = Black, OHA = Oral History Archive (Donor)

ID Name:

Names beginning with letters A-T (excluding I and O) = Randomly Selected Pseudonyms
 Identity Code

Appendix F: Oral History Interview Questions

Questions for Participants in Mercer University's *Beloved Community* Initiative

Duration 45-60 minutes

Good morning/afternoon. Before we begin, I would like to confirm what you have agreed to on your consent form. Please would you confirm or correct what I read from the form?

The purpose of today's interview is to have you tell me about your personal educational experiences as part of the racial integration movement and to learn more about your experiences of being involved in Mercer University's *Beloved Community* initiative. Please tell me as much as possible about yourself in regards to these topics.

1. Tell me a little about yourself as far as your birth family and where you grew up.
2. Tell me about your own schooling and education
3. Tell me about any key person(s) and/or events in your upbringing that you think most influenced your ideas about race.
4. How did you become aware of racial differences?
5. Tell me a little about what your relationship was like with peoples of different races/ethnicities as you were growing up.
6. How and when did you become aware of Mercer University's *Beloved Community*?
7. What do you understand to be the purpose of the *Beloved Community*?
8. Do you think it is important for Mercer University and other HEIs to partner with the wider community?
9. If you think that HEI community engagement is important, can you explain why?
10. What are your past experience/expertise as it relates to racial reconciliation in the *Beloved Community*?

11. What has been your most positive experience being involved in the *Beloved Community*?
12. What has been your least positive experience?
13. Tell me a little about what your relationship is like with peoples of different races/ethnicities (as part of the *Beloved Community*.)
14. How do you see the *Beloved Community* being used to bring about racial reconciliation in the university and local community?
15. What have been some of the pitfalls and challenges?
16. What has worked well?
17. How urgent do you think this work is?
18. What recommendations can you make about developing the *Beloved Community*?
19. Do you have anything else to share?
20. What would you like to be remembered for? What would you hope your legacy to be?

Appendix F Continued: Guidelines for Follow-Up Interview

The purpose of today's interview is to follow-up on our first interview, clarify a few points and to ask you to describe in a bit more detail some of the items that you've previously mentioned.

1. Please share any additional positive experiences that you have had being part of the *Beloved Community*.
2. Tell me about the any experiences from your subsequent to your first interview that you experienced being part of the *Beloved Community* that you would like to include in this study.
3. Based on the first interview, were there any other questions that you wished that I had asked or issues you would like to highlight which help me to better understand your experiences as a member of the *Beloved Community*?

Thank-you for your time!

Appendix G: List of Beloved Community Keynote Speakers, (2005-2017)

Symposia speakers have included:

- 2017 The Rev. Jim Wallis, Editor in Chief Sojourner Magazine, author of *America's original sin: Racism, white privilege, and the bridge to a new America*, (2016).
- 2016 The Rev. C.T. Vivian, Legendary Civil Rights Organizer
- 2015 Dr. Michael O. Emerson, Cline Professor of Sociology and Co-Director of the Institute for Urban Research, Rice University
- 2014 Mr. Sam Oni (CLASS 1967), Mercer's First Black Student
The Hon. William C. Randall, Civil Court Judge and Chief Magistrate
- 2013 The Rev. Gail E. Bowman, J. D., Director, The Willis J. Weatherford, Jr. Campus Christian Center, and College Chaplain, Berea College (KY)
Mr. Michael J. Dunaway, Independent Filmmaker
and Film Editor for PasteMagazine.com
- 2012 Professor Bill J. Leonard, James & Marilyn Dunn Chair of Baptist Studies,
Former Dean, Wake Forest University School of Divinity
Professor Chester J. Fontenot, Jr., Baptist Professor of English,
Director, Africana Studies, Mercer University
- 2011 The Rev. Leroy Barber, President, Mission Year
Mr. Calvin Cole, Speakers Bureau, Macon Coalition to End Homelessness

- 2010 The Rev. Dr. Samuel Wells, Dean of Chapel, Duke University

 Professor Anthony Harris, Tift College of Education at Mercer University
- 2009 The Rev. Dr. Emmanuel L. McCall, Fellowship Baptist Church, East Point, GA

 Dr. Robert L. Lupton, FCS Urban Ministries
- 2008 The Rev. Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr., Former Pastor, Riverside Church, NYC

 The Rev. Mo Leverett, Rebirth International Urban Ministries
- 2007 Professor Richard L. Gray, Asbury Theological Seminary
- 2006 The Rev. Dr. John M. Perkins, J.M. Perkins Foundation for

 Reconciliation and Development Rev. Gail E. Bowman, J.D., Dillard University
- 2005 The Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth, Legendary Civil Rights Leader

 Professor Andrew M. Manis, Macon State College

 Professor Catherine Meeks, Wesleyan College