Racial Differences and Lived Experiences: Civil Rights Experiences and a Private, Religious, Predominantly White Institution

Anthony Brandon Bates
Brigham Young University

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Racial Differences and Lived Experiences: Civil Rights Experiences and a Private, Religious, Predominantly White Institution

Anthony Brandon Bates

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

Racial Differences and Lived Experiences: Civil Rights Experiences and a Private, Religious, Predominantly White Institution

Anthony Brandon Bates
Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations, BYU
Doctor of Education

Purpose: This article explores the expressed thoughts and feelings of 24 research participants who processed and articulated their lived experiences. They each attended the same private, religious, historically, and predominantly White institution and participated in a three-credit course that covered the history of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and ’60s, which culminated in an experience in Georgia and Alabama (Civil Rights experience).

Methods: In this phenomenological study, the research participants all participated in a semi-structured interview with the same bank of questions. The questions were designed to examine their lived experiences, within the context of participating in the Civil Rights experience and attending the private, religious, historically and predominantly White institution. A phenomenological narrative inquiry employed a specific content analysis approach in conjunction with a constant comparative method to conduct open, axial, and selective coding.

Findings: Research participants discussed their reactions to and perceptions of experiences with racial differences, and researchers identified themes that provided perspective on the broader category of racial differences: white spaces, assimilation, stereotypes, microaggressions, and racism.

Implications: High-impact programming, such as the Civil Rights experience, may encourage the implementation of measures to foster institutional cultural humility, such as initiating important dialogue and accountability measures between the institution and the students. Racial Battle Fatigue can help both students and institutional personnel identify and interpret racialized experiences. A high-impact “critical experience” may also provide students with the knowledge, experiences, and vocabulary to reckon with racial realities and process their private, religious, predominantly white institution experience.

Keywords: higher education, black students, predominately white institution, race, religion
DEDICATION

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

I now feel like I know why the caged bird sings…

Accumulated experiences over a lifetime; deep personal reflections; personal, family, and professional sacrifices; unfathomable joys; exquisite sorrows; profound pain; effusive laughter; unbreakable bonds of friendship; a deep and abiding love; and an unshakable faith in Jesus Christ have culminated in this singular effort to give voice to underrepresented students over the years who have fundamentally and comprehensively impacted how I view and interact with the world around me. It is in that spirit that I dedicate this labor of love to students who carry the weight of the double burden, yearn to hope, reluctantly and unceasingly educate, and suffer from a sickness that can only be cured by respect, inclusion, equity, and love.

In particular, I want to dedicate this to B., M., and D. (and others who have had, are, or may be having similar experiences) for the lessons you taught me, and I apologize that I was not ready to learn them at the time they were being taught.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am forever indebted to the One who was “despised and rejected,” “a man of sorrows … and acquainted with grief,” who bore “our griefs and carried our sorrows,” who was “stricken, smitten … and afflicted.” He who “was wounded for our transgressions … bruised for our iniquities … and with [whose] stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53: 3-5). I never anticipated my educational and professional journey drawing me so close to Him.

My best friend and eternal companion has worked with God to make far more of me than I could’ve ever made of myself. You shouldered so much in unheralded ways and did so in spaces where it was difficult for the spotlight to reach. This accomplishment is every bit yours as it is mine. I love you.

My children: you have sacrificed time, experiences, and memories to support my education and you were the inspiration for the late nights, long days, and early hours.

I was blessed with four sets of parents. None of this was possible without your love, sacrifice, tenacity, guidance, support, and influence.

I have felt the presence and strength of my enslaved ancestors. Your toil, suffering, exhaustion, trauma, and resolve provided the motivation I needed during moments of weakness.

My sisters and brothers: I hope this work reflects your protection, encouragement, belief, and faith.

My partners in “good trouble:” You have borne my burdens, mourned with me, comforted me, and stood as witnesses. And we have laughed really hard and had incredible food.

My committee and student research team: your friendship, work ethic, commitment to excellence, and passion were invaluable. More than anything, you were dedicated mentors and colleagues in a common cause.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TITLE PAGE</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESCRIPTION OF DISSERTATION STRUCTURE AND CONTENT</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Themes</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Spaces</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Assimilate or Not to Assimilate</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microaggressions</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1  Race and Gender of the Selected Sample .................................................................9
Table 2  Average Mentions Per Interview of Lived Experiences With Racial Differences ......12
Table B1 Race and Gender of the Selected Sample ..............................................................96
Table B2 Average Mentions Per Interview of Lived Experiences With Racial Differences .....108
## LIST OF FIGURES

| Figure A1 | NIFA Land-Grant Colleges and Universities ..........................................................61 |
| Figure A2 | Psychosocial Processes Mediating Between Conditions of Justice and Well-Being States ........................................................................................................75 |
| Figure A3 | An Ecological Model of Justice and Well-Being ..........................................................76 |
| Figure A4 | Percent of Black Students in Majority Minority Schools .................................................82 |
| Figure B1 | Dates, Transcript Assignments, and Assigned Research Pair ........................................105 |
| Figure B2 | Online Tool Used to Process and Count the Instances of Words and Phrases ......107 |
| Figure B3 | Sub-Themes of Racial Differences ..............................................................................110 |
DESCRIPTION OF DISSERTATION STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

Racial Differences and Lived Experiences: Civil Rights Experiences and a Private, Religious, Predominantly White Institution is written in a hybrid format. The primary focus is to have a manuscript that is deemed publication-ready by the dissertation committee. The hybrid format consists of traditional dissertation requirements yet has fewer chapters and includes essential supporting documentation in the appendices. Appendix A is an extended literature review. Appendix B is an extended discussion of the methodology to demonstrate the dissertation satisfies Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements and has met standard academic research criteria. IRB approval is provided in Appendix C. Reference lists are provided at the conclusion of the main body of the dissertation, Appendix A, and Appendix B.

This dissertation has been prepared with intention to submit it to the Journal of Diversity in Higher Education (JDHE). JDHE focuses on issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in post-secondary educational contexts. The journal encourages research that engages with issues related to individuals from underrepresented and underserved communities, with a particular emphasis on barriers and challenges, access and achievement, and engagement in post-secondary environments. The journal accepts manuscripts that are between 20-35 double-spaced pages in length, which excludes references, tables, and figures.
Introduction

White students have historically and currently make up a large majority of the students in U.S. universities. In 2020, 54% of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions were White: 20% were Hispanic, 13% were Black, and 8% were Asian (Pew Research Center, 2022). The extent of the disparities is clearer upon a closer inspection on the types of post-secondary institutions. A 2020 report by Taylor et al. revealed that White undergraduates made up 50.5% of students enrolled in traditional nonprofit public or private four-year institutions. This was in comparison to enrollment rates for underrepresented students in less-connected, less-prestigious public two-year institutions: 60.1% for American Indian or Alaska Native, 56.9% for Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 55.4% for Hispanic, and 44% for Black. An additional 16% of Black students were enrolled in for-profit institutions (Taylor et al., 2020).

The definition of a predominantly White institution (PWI) is one where more than half of the students enrolled are White. Bourke (2016) described PWIs as not being defined solely by the proportion of White students, but also by the “embedded institutional practices that are based in whiteness” (p. 19). Years of policy, practice, and tradition have culminated in the current, common manifestation of the PWI (Adams & Tucker, 2022; Bowles & DeCosta, 1971; Harper et al., 2009; Komives, 1996).

The university where this research took place is both a PWI and a private religious institution. Research demonstrates a greater racial disparity in private religious institutions. For example, the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities utilized the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System to examine demographic trends for students, faculty, and

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1 Subsequent mentions of the institution will be condensed to PR-PWI (private, religious, predominantly White institution).
administrators at its institutions. They compared data from 2007-08 and 2017-18 (*Diversity within the CCCU, 2020*). Although there were some gains in achieving a more diverse demographic composition, the gains still fell well short of numbers for traditional schools. They reported 60.09% White students, which represented a negative 9.28% difference over the last 10 years; Black student percentage was 11.05%, a positive 1.32% increase. For populations of note, the percentage of Hispanic/Latino students doubled to 10.62%, while the overall percentage of American Indian or Alaska Native students decreased by .012%. At the institution where this research took place, approximately 1% of the population self-identifies as Black, while 81% identify as White (Brigham Young University, 2023). There may be other students who have some degree of African ancestry amongst the 4.5% who indicated two or more races.

To create community and support for students of color—primarily those of African descent—while fulfilling ambitious goals relating to learning opportunities outside the classroom, this PR-PWI organized a three-credit course and experience that centers around the U.S. Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and ‘60s. The Civil Rights experience (CRE) culminates in traveling to Georgia and Alabama to visit educational institutions, experience historically significant sites, and meet people who participated in the U.S. Civil Rights movement during the 1950’s and 1960’s. This course is offered once each year and has been going for about 10 years. Since the program’s inception, 117 students have participated in the CRE, with 20 faculty and administrators who have provided support before, during, and after the experience.

This phenomenological narrative study explored the following research question: How do research participants who attended a private, religious, predominately White institution and participated in a Civil Rights Experience talk about their lived experiences? The purpose of this
study is to understand how participants who all experienced a unique phenomenon of two seemingly juxtaposed experiences—a learning opportunity focused on a seminal Black experience and attendance at a private, religious, predominantly White institution—might articulate personally meaningful lessons, experiences, relationships, knowledge, etc., before, during, and after their time at the PR-PWI. Racial Battle Fatigue provided a theoretical context through which to examine the experiences of student of color—primarily Black—at a PR-PWI (Smith et al., 2016). The “critical experience,” viewed through Prilleltensky’s (2012) Wellness as Fairness theoretical framework, facilitated the examination of their thoughts and recollections through the lens of their CRE experience. University faculty and administrators can use this data to reflect on the circumstances and experiences of their own students and examine whether there are mechanisms in place to both solicit authentic, undiluted feedback from their own former, current, and prospective students and then take action to improve the structures of their cultural, physical, and procedural environments.

Literature Review

Researchers outlined two important concepts when trying to understand the experiences of students of color on a college campus. Hurtado et al. (1999) defined campus racial climate as attitudes, perceptions, and expectations about issues of diversity and race. Another important concept is the racial culture of campus, which is defined as the “collective patterns of tacit values, beliefs, assumptions, and norms that evolve from an institution’s history” (p. 32) that are manifest in nearly every aspect of the campus experience (Museus et al., 2012). Because the manifestation of both the culture and climate of PWIs are rooted in Eurocentric values, they can have a deleterious impact on students from underrepresented populations. For instance, students of color are more likely to hail from a collectivist culture and so if the prevailing culture on
campus espouses more individualistic values, students of color may be at a disadvantage in their efforts to navigate campus and find connections or resources (Museus & Griffin, 2019).

Museus and his colleagues (2012) outlined how these two concepts provide insight into university experiences for students of color. A campus racial climate that is hostile can diminish the potential for positive interactions on campus, in terms of both quality and frequency. There are also external forces, such as federal and local policies, that—for better or worse—signal to members of the campus community how they should interact with particular populations. Without the proper level of protection or appraisal, students of color can be made to feel less welcome and less safe. For example, the unspoken message to students of color is that they are not necessarily there for their individual value, but as a statistic that will help with compliance of policies that force desegregation. Curriculum design and delivery that emphasizes Eurocentric contributions and philosophies and excludes scholarly contributions, experiences, and perspectives of communities of color may communicate a hierarchy in the valuation of a particular campus group’s collective experience.

Research titled “Exposing whiteness in higher education” revealed little-to-no reflection on the role of unearned privilege and systemic matters that factor into educational and professional outcomes (Cabrera, 2014). One respondent said, “I would attribute [success] primarily to a matter of will power, work ethic, just personal drive. There may be a certain amount of discrimination involved in that, but once again, I would say that amount is fairly limited” (Cabrera, 2014, p. 44). Another stated, “you need to work hard for yourself … and you shouldn’t just get a free ride because you’re a minority” (Cabrera, 2014, p. 45). The following respondent insinuated that skin color paved the way for an employee to be less qualified for a position: “Someone has darker skin than me … that is a positive quality of them while my white
skin is a neutral quality of me. And so, they’re not as good skills plus black skin is greater than my superior skills and white skin” (Cabrera, 2014, p. 45). This individual asserted an automatic inferiority of their Black peers, with no evidence other than their skin color. Cabrera’s research reveals that navigating a college education does not solely mean isolation and confusion; it means the possibility of navigating veiled anger or resentment for perceived violations of meritocratic, colorblind, political, or other ideologies.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Dr. William Smith et al. (2016) over the years have compiled experiences and data that describe environments and impacts of PWIs on Black students. Their research describes an environment that is “extremely stressful, exhausting, and diminishing” that also generates “feelings of loss, ambiguity, strain, frustration and injustice” (p. 1192). The impact of these conditions has a cumulative negative impact because they have to expend energy on high alert, analyzing and assessing stressors and the appropriate responses.

Dr. Smith’s research has been honed into a theory of racial battle fatigue that particularly relates to Black students at PWIs (Smith et al., 2016). The theory describes the “psychosocial-psychological impact of racial micro and macroaggressions” (p. 1192) on Black students and other students of color (Smith et al., 2016). Consistent exposure to environments of this nature can produce negative health outcomes, both for individuals and collective groups. He asserts, “Pain is shared among … the larger racial group” because it can be transmitted via “collective group memories, racial socialization, and coping processes” (Smith et al., 2016, p. 1192). He asserts that the racial climate of a college campus can persist for years without deliberate interventions. This theory provides language to articulate the impact of racial differences more effectively on lived experiences, in particular for Black students.
In 2012, Isaac Prilleltensky introduced a research framework centered around the concepts of wellness and fairness. Prilleltensky’s model provided some foundational thought for this study, given the centrality of student well-being and justice as important tenets of the CRE. Within this framework, well-being is defined as “a positive state of affairs, brought about by the simultaneous and balanced satisfaction of diverse objective and subjective needs of individuals, relationships, organizations, and communities” (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 2). Prilleltensky postulated that too much of the well-being language and literature focuses on self-actualization, positive thinking, etc. Instead, well-being should be determined by considering its relationship with fairness (i.e., justice). Justice is defined as “each person receiv[ing] what is due…in a fair and equitable manner” (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 6). W.E.B. Du Bois (1935) succinctly summarized and effectively illustrated the plausible consequences that result when fairness does not prevail in an educational setting:

There is no magic, either in mixed schools or in segregated schools. A mixed school with poor and unsympathetic teachers with hostile public opinion, and not teaching of truth concerning black folk is bad. A segregated school with ignorant placeholders, inadequate equipment, poor salaries, and wretched housing, is equally bad. (p. 335)

This quote highlights the danger of a focus on well-being without considerations for fairness. A school that physically brings diverse students together without genuine intention mentally and emotionally alienates students. A school or system that keeps students emotionally, mentally, and physically apart shields them from the opportunities and rights they could have if given the chance to learn as their better-funded, advantaged counterparts.

Prilleltensky (2012) discussed the role of a critical experience in determining one’s wellness and sense of condition of fairness. The CRE fits into the definition of a critical
experience and can be used as a lens through which to gain perspective on students’ lived experiences. He describes critical experiences as events “that leave a strong impression, that question your assumptions about what is just and good, and that rattle your cage” (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 16). He articulates some sentiments that provide context for research participants’ unwitting descriptions when they share the impacts of their own critical experiences. Prilleltensky describes this as “cage rattling” by “feeling the pain of your people” and “revelations that something is profoundly wrong with your … work or community life” (p. 16). As a result of these revelations, the status quo of yesterday is no longer acceptable today (Prilleltensky, 2012).

Methods

While Racial Battle Fatigue and Wellness as Fairness were the primary theoretical frameworks through which to make meaning of the participants’ interviews, phenomenological narrative inquiry was used as the research methodology. This means the researcher identified a common experience or phenomenon—in this case, all participants had both the CRE experience and attendance at the same PR-PWI in common. The intent of the phenomenological approach was not to construct a model or build new theory, rather the research aim was to understand the lived experiences of the research participants. Prior to data collection, written informed consent was secured pursuant to receiving IRB approval. The data were collected from “persons who have experienced the phenomenon” and then “a composite description of the essence of the experience for all the individuals” was developed (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 252).

The study of narrative “is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Narrative inquiry has three primary foci: temporality (referring to relationships with time, i.e., reflections on past, present, and future), sociality (referring to
relationships with internal processes, outward actions, and external events), and place (referring
to the relationships with the physical space, i.e., where events occurred; Clandinin & Caine,
2008). There are various forms of narrative analysis. This research took an approach where
categories were extracted from the collection of narratives (interviews), as opposed to a scenario
where each individual story is taken as a whole and remains largely intact (Merriam & Tisdell,
2016). Numeric content analysis (NCA) was used to understand the relative frequency and
prevalence of categories of data, while a team-based approach was used to extract the essential
themes from the collection of narratives, through a mix of thematic analysis--that was an
extension of NCA--and the use of a constant comparative method. Simply put, in constant
comparative method, the researchers compare one segment of data to another, trying to discover
patterns and understand relationships (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Participants

The sampling frame for the study was constructed from administrative records of all
participants from 2012 to 2019 who had completed the full course and trip experience. Ninety-
one potential research participants had completed the full course/trip experience at the
commencement of data collection. Seventy-two responded to the invitation to interview. The
final sample was stratified to account for the range of participant experiences by selecting three
students at random from each of the eight years, from 2012 through 2019, for a total of 24
students. Table 1 provides a profile of the 24 research participants by race and gender.
Table 1

Race and Gender of the Selected Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Non-Black/White</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
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</table>

This group was a representative subset of the racial and gender composition, as well as range of CRE experiences, of all prior participants. Different Black racial and ethnic identities—such as from African, Latin American, or Caribbean nations, African American, biracial, or multinational—were represented amongst the participants. The range of socioeconomic circumstances, lived experiences in the U.S., and situations and circumstances at home varied greatly. The participants’ stages of life at the time of interview were also greatly varied in terms of their status as students, their educational pursuits, career paths, family circumstances, religiosity, etc. Furthermore, the CRE has evolved over the years. Although the central purposes have been mostly consistent, the experiences of participants have varied greatly. Some of the guest lecturers featured prominently on the trip are or were octogenarians or nonagenarians and so students’ experiences can vary greatly from year to year when the people they interact with—who lived this history—die, become incapacitated, or change from one year to the next. The focus and relative importance of certain sites have changed over time. Significant new monuments and institutions have been constructed, while others that were prominently featured were temporarily or permanently closed, or completely torn down. It was therefore important that the research participation selection process took into consideration the different iterations of the experience over the years.
**Procedure**

Intentional efforts were made to assemble a research team that could successfully navigate academic and practical research concerns. A safe interview environment was important so participants would be more inclined to share interview responses that reflected their actual, nuanced, and authentic experiences, rather than acquiesce to the temptation of appealing to the interviewer. Several studies have shown that the race of the interviewer can affect the racial relevancy of the research subject’s responses (Gubrium et al., 2012). Research has shown a similar phenomenon around gender, with females demonstrating a higher propensity to be more honest and vulnerable with female interviewers (Kane & Macaulay, 1993). The research team—made up of the lead researcher and four research assistants—consisted of four females and one male. The racial composition was one full Black, two biracial Black and White, one biracial White and a quarter Black, and one full White student. The lead researcher was also a lead administrator for the CRE experience. Of the remaining members of the research team, one was a CRE alum and a graduate student, two were undergraduate students who had completed the CRE coursework but not the travel experience, and one undergraduate who had not participated in the CRE. One of the primary rationales for composition of the research team was to ensure forthright and honest responses by assigning interviewers whom the participants would “trust with their truth” (Marks, 2015, p. 500).

The full course/trip experience entails a deeply immersive look at the Civil Rights movement. At the heart of many of the discussions that take place are issues related to race and gender, conversations around which can sometimes be sensitive. Therefore, the researchers strove to make racial-, gender-, and experience-equivalent pairings in the interviews. Given the lead researcher’s history with both the program and each student who was interviewed, the
possibility for “role confusion”—which “exists when the researcher perceives or responds to
events or analyzes data from a perspective other than researcher” (Asselin, 2003, p.102)—
impacted the assignment of both the research assistants and the lead researcher to interviewees
(McConnell-Henry et al., 2010). The interview questions were influenced by the Prilleltensky
(2012) model and its emphasis on well-being, justice, and the role of a critical experience in
one’s life. During the interviews, participants reflections went far beyond their CRE experiences
and their attendance at the PR-PWI.

Once the interviews were completed, open, axial, and selective coding procedures were
carried out using a combination of manual and digital resources, as well as a qualitative research
methodology. Coding (open and axial) and the constant comparative method were used in an
iterative process to analyze the data. Beginning with open coding, “One important point with
open coding is that it focuses on [identifying] what is being said rather than what the text means”
(Allsop et al., 2022, p. 144). The team ensured that each interview was open coded by a two-
person coding partnership utilizing numeric content analysis (NCA), which was used to
understand the relative frequency and prevalence of categories of data. NCA afforded the
research team a basis upon which they could compare their results. To further establish the
trustworthiness of the research, the pairing of research assistants regularly rotated from interview
to interview in the coding process. In addition to the two-person coding partnerships, the lead
researcher open-coded all the interviews in the sample. This approach reinforced the tenets
behind narrative inquiry, where “each story told and lived is situated and understood within
larger cultural, social, and institutional narratives” and the “emphasis on relational engagement
between researcher and research participants” (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 542). The primary
researcher not only knew each interviewee but had also been a part of each year’s experience;
therefore, by having the primary researcher code all of the interviews in addition to the two-person team, it would provide some nuance, clarity, and, most importantly, depth.

In addition to the specific codes and their quantity, throughout this process, the research team was engaging with the constant comparative method, which is the process of taking data from codes to categories to themes. This cycle of coding and constant comparative method with two to three interviews at a time until all 24 interviews were discussed was the process by which the initial categories emerged. Researchers identified the broader category of racial differences, as they related to their lived experiences, which was coded 315 times and mentioned in some degree by all 24 research participants. Table 2 contains information about the average mentions of the research topic, broken down by race and gender.

### Table 2

*Average Mentions per Interview of Lived Experiences With Racial Differences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Non-Black/White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next step of this process is referred to as “selective” or “focused” coding (Saldaña, 2016, pp. 239-240). This stage of coding identified the most significant codes and engaged the researchers in the process of deciding which grouping of codes “makes the most analytic sense (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138) The analytical method used can be described in a couple of different
ways. Marks (2015) refers to it as “caching rocks and gems” (p. 502). He states that NCA is a necessary step towards identifying the core themes of the research, but it is not sufficient. The researchers must return to the interview excerpts that were compiled to create the emergent themes. Marks’ method was substantiated and expanded to incorporate digital qualitative analysis software—specifically NVivo (which was also used for this research)—in a “deep dive method” (Allsop et al., 2022, p. 144). Because the interview transcripts were uploaded, highlighted, and coded in NVivo, this allowed for “analyzing coded work more deeply” (Allsop et al., p. 144), by conducting open coding on collections of axial codes that had already been highlighted and grouped (Allsop et al., 2022).

The “deep dive method” suggested consensus around four to six themes (Allsop et al., 2022, p. 144). They offered two suggestions for how this could be accomplished. The first was the “combination, or the merging of two closely related open codes under a single code” (Allsop et al., 2022, p. 150). Second, they suggested—to quote Marks—elimination, which is removing “concepts that may seem important at first, but are not supported across interviews” (Marks, 2015, p. 496).

**Findings**

At the end of the coding (open, axial, and selective) processes and the constant comparative method, researchers produced the following themes related to the broader theme of racial differences that emerged as the dominant narrative of their collective lived experiences both by attending a PWI and the CRE experience: White spaces, assimilation, stereotypes, microaggressions, and racism. For the themes of White spaces, stereotypes, and racism to be established as such, each was mentioned by no less than 62.5% of the participants. The themes of
assimilation and microaggressions are uniquely racialized experiences and were mentioned by no fewer than 50% of the Black participants.

As described above, the backgrounds, cultures, ethnicities, lived experiences, perspectives, and races of the participants varied. Before addressing the specific themes, it is important to address both the complexity and intersectionality of students’ experiences. Although many of the findings addressed the “Black/White” dynamic, focusing strictly on this would be an over-simplification of racialized incidents and interactions. The following examples highlight the range of experiences that people from all races had confronting and processing differences: access to education, socioeconomics, religion, acculturation, geo-political forces, and intra-racial relations.

Although the experiences are different and should not be compared with their Black counterparts, White students voiced experiences that challenged the dichotomous way discussions around race are portrayed: conservative versus liberal, White versus Black, racist versus anti-racist, etc. Participant 19 admitted that they had “very minimal exposure to race problems and race issues” and that they were “unaware of their privilege as a White person.” They offered some important introspection: “I didn't consider how a non-White person would feel … all of the moments that were … easier for me [and] probably really difficult for someone who is Black, Hispanic, Asian, a person of color.” This White participant highlighted many of the ways White individuals are insulated from the racial realities of people of color.

Two White participants recalled experiences from their childhood when they remembered being aware of discomfort in connection with race. Participant 2 discussed his brother’s best friend growing up, who was Black. This friend wore a durag when he was invited to church. The participant could simultaneously sense the judgement from others, as well as his own discomfort
with the same. Participant 16 recalled thinking “Black boys are really cute” around the age of eight. She was watching a movie with many Black actors and, in the presence of her father, expressed her thoughts about marrying someone Black. Her father indicated that she could be attracted to whomever, but she was counseled against considering a relationship in the future with a Black person because of the cultural differences: “I remember being, like, I don’t know if I agree with you.” Both participants cited a discomfort and some incongruence with their internal dialogue and the external messaging they received.

Participant 22 addressed the complexity of managing complacency, acknowledging privilege, and assuming responsibility to do his part: “… As a White male, it's so much easier to just turn off the switch and not engage at all because I don't confront race relations, as frequently.” The participant brought up an uneasy reality for Black/White relations: “It is hard to develop full empathy with people of color because often White people can opt out.”

Participants also expressed some surprising experiences. First, one example offered a clear reminder that unfortunate incidents regarding race affect many people of color. Participant 12 discussed frequent interaction with law enforcement that stemmed from the simple reality that they were a non-White youth, out driving late at night. Each of these interactions seemed to come to a common conclusion. “I seemed to get off the hook once I really started talking. And they kind of figured out that I was fluent in English and educated.” This participant revealed that they were not able to shake the ramifications of the stereotype until the stereotype could demonstrably be proven wrong.

Secondly, several instances showed that the racial pain Black students have endured is not solely from White individuals. This should not be misconstrued to overstate the role interracial discord plays in the unfortunate situations in which Black individuals often find
themselves at PWIs. But it should serve to illustrate the complexity of these matters, and effectively demonstrate the intersectionality of individuals’ identities. Participant 21, who is biracial, said, “I would try and hang out with people of color and they would be like, oh, you’re so whitewashed.” Participant 5 added by discussing the challenge of being “light-skinned.” “[Y]ou're not really like black. [Y]ou go through everything that you can say that’s bad about being Black in America, but still people will cut you out just because you’re a little bit light-skinned.”

Participant 7 offered an insightful, yet mentally exhausting description of trying to navigate being Black, coming from another country, and having English as a second language. They excelled academically and got the impression that their peers thought they were better than their African American peers. They discussed both the pain and rejection they felt from peers that looked like them. “Cause sometimes the worst things I got told about myself … was from those people. Sometimes them calling me … the … booty scratcher … whatever in [Southern U.S.] and being told that I drink dirty water and all that stuff.” She surmised that this interracial discord is a symptom of the larger societal problem with racism. Participant 7 used imagery of Black communities pointing guns at each other as a way to illustrate that not only do negative images and stereotypes pit Whites against Blacks, but they also create distrust, misunderstanding, and animosity between Black people with different ethnic backgrounds.

The Black experience in the United States is not a monolith, nor is the Black/White dynamic. The experiences provided demonstrate that perceptions, ideas, and confrontations with racial differences are more layered, complex, and challenging than the current societal discourse on these matters. Despite the complexities, it was evident from the interviews that the dynamics of racial differences—particularly Black and White—weighed heavily on participants’ minds.
Their comments and reflections primarily centered around five themes related to their lived experiences with racial differences: white spaces, assimilation, stereotypes, microaggressions, and racism.

**Five Themes**

**White Spaces**

Four of the five White participants discussed something related to White spaces. They revealed how they—and by extension many others—remained oblivious to the plight of Black people in the U.S. Participant 10, who was White, revealed why, at a PR-PWI, the opportunity to step outside of their hometown reality can be challenging. “[W]e have mostly a circle of White friends, racial issues don't come up that often.” Participant 16, expounded on these ideas: “I think being White and having most of the people around me be White, that felt almost like the norm … and then anything outside of that felt like a deviation from the norm.” Homogeneity, comfort, and familiarity posed challenges for Whites to gain proximity to non-Whites.

An entirely different experience played out for Black individuals—12 of the 16 who made some reference to navigating the White spaces like the ones described above. Participant 11 pointed out that their church, school, and friend group were all majority White. Sticking out racially was not the only difficult part. Participant 20 pointed out the challenge in school of not seeing adequate coverage of Black individuals or their collective history.

For Black individuals who are confronted with the reality of navigating White spaces, the development and implementation of coping mechanisms can be a life-altering endeavor. For example, the following insight demonstrates a loss of sense of self because to belong they felt they had to learn to think and act like a White person: “I am, for sure … a Black person trying to
survive in White spaces” (Participant 3). Navigating White spaces and understanding the vernacular was described as an important survival skill for one trying to navigate a PWI.

For those who are not familiar with this reality, a PWI can be quite jarring, “I was so taken aback by just the overwhelming Whiteness of the campus” (Participant 7). Participant 8 shared a similar experience which further illustrated this phenomenon:

It just dawned on me that I was one of the only few people that look like me on campus. I find it hard to explain the experience because I was kind of walking around like everybody else, and sometimes you forget … you kind of just lose yourself in your daily routines … but then just dawned on me instantly while walking out of the library that I really did not fit in.

In addition to the loneliness and isolation depicted above, participants expressed that the PR-PWI is a White space that is oblivious to their needs and is a significant source of stress.

**To Assimilate or Not to Assimilate**

A large body of literature exists around acclimation theory. The most common interpretation is Milton Gordon’s framework, an important component of which was the “sense of peoplehood” that is based on the society as dictated by those in power (Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 831). This quest for “peoplehood” was echoed in sentiments expressed by 10 of the 16 Black participants. Navigating White spaces presents Black individuals with serious dilemmas that impact social, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being if they feel like they must assimilate to survive White spaces. Participant 11 explained that this can be taken one step further when one begins to assume inferiority in the face of what they see as normalcy: “I came to the idea that culture, that perspective on life, the way people looked was ideal, and because of that…” [I
was] a little bit self-conscious at times.” This assumption of normalcy is a manifestation of assimilation and can result in a negative self-perception.

Black female participants demonstrated that American beauty standards vividly illustrate assimilation’s dangers. They discussed their attempts to mitigate the isolation and distance they already feel from those standards. Participant 10’s sentiments clearly illustrated this concept:

You want to be accepted by those around you and … I think you internalize that as physical. … And you assume … for me to be accepted I need to be quote-unquote “more White.” You know, I need to have straighter hair, I need to look as much as I can like everyone else and therefore, I will be accepted. And possibly people won’t keep singling me out.

This quote provides an example of what Black women might need to face as they contemplate where they will be and who they will be interacting with each day.

Participant 7, who was a Black female, expressed the frustrations associated with purchasing make-up in an economic sector catered to White people. She was discouraged from purchasing a particular kind of makeup because it was not cruelty-free, yet it was the only product available that matched her skin tone. “You are so privileged! You guys have your whole pick in the store to go through brands. … I have this one thing.” She elaborated on her feelings further. “I think it was also because the beauty burden was so tied to my race. … It was not something I wanted these White girls to be talking about whether I should be using this makeup brand … when it wasn't cruelty-free.” She discussed further her attempts to access a portion of the privilege enjoyed by others, but felt very limited in her ability to do so. She concluded with the following: “And you want to tell me about cruelty-free? Do you not see how this whole thing is cruel? … Yeah, that really bothered me” (Participant 7).
Dealing with others’ perceptions factored prominently into discussions on assimilation. There were a variety of experiences. For example, Participant 24 said, “I was perceived as more culturally White than anything else. This bothered me growing up because I never saw myself as being White.” For some, dealing with others’ perceptions resulted in difficult realizations, like the reality of being tokenized. Participant 14 expressed, “I just felt like the token Black person for all of my White friends. … I talked like them, I acted like them because I grew up in that environment and culture. … [I]t was … easy to be [the] acceptable Black person for them.” This experience communicates a common confusion amongst participants regarding external pressure for Black individuals to fill certain predetermined roles established by others.

Other Black participants expressed that navigating these spaces took a more deleterious toll on their self-esteem and the relationship with their racial identity. Participant 7 said, “…When I look back, I know that I did not think of non-Whites as Americans.” These “othered” sentiments began to be applied to oneself for some. Participant 6 shared recollections of often being told they were White, despite being Black. “I spoke clearly and cleanly and I acted and spoke White and so that was … how I identified as a White person, if you will, with Black features.” This example illustrated the powerful influence of assimilation. It is reinforced by social and verbal cues, sending the message that “Blackness” presents a disadvantage and “Whiteness” is advantageous. Participant 7 was aware that she did not have the perceived advantages of “Whiteness.” “[I] remember, at a young age telling my mother that I wanted to be White. … I have my grandma who is fair-skinned, and my cousin who was fair-skinned, and I was always envious of them” (Participant 7).

The participants revealed that assimilation is simultaneously an expectation from White individuals for Black individuals to assume certain roles and a wrestle for Black individuals to
decide if they are going to conform to those expectations. The wrestle can manifest itself in the form of attempts to cope, to the modification of appearance, to an examination of the role of culture, to a consideration of more permanent ways to get proximate to Whiteness.

**Stereotypes**

Stereotypical assumptions were often shared about the research participants’ athletic ability and participation, living conditions, food preferences, and country of origin. This represents a consummate experience for many Black students at the PR-PWI, as was demonstrated by the fact that 15 of the participants referenced some variation of stereotypes or ignorance (11 of whom were Black).

Some students were able recall and clearly see instances of ignorance. “I didn't know at the time, I didn't think anything was wrong with … she's my best Black friend” (Participant 21). Another said, “…[K]ind of being, like, the safe Black person for the White people around me? Because I was not like the Black people that they had stereotyped in their head” (Participant 7). In some instances, the CRE facilitated a reflection and reexamination of life before the university, as illustrated by this example from Participant 7, not originally from the U.S. “The thing that made me special was not just because I was a smart kid. … It was … because … I was smart and Black, and a girl.” She went on to tell about a time when a middle school teacher did not believe she had written something because it was too good. She concluded the statement by saying, “They don't see you. They see a Black kid who broke stereotypes.” Examples provided by participants illustrated that Black individuals couldn’t just be a best friend, safe person, or smart kid; they had to be a Black best friend, a safe Black person, and a smart Black kid.

A Black participant brought up a topic that many Black students on campuses are all too familiar with regarding the stereotypical idea that Black students must all be great athletes. “And
then they thought I can play every sport out there …” (Participant 9). These remarks are a summation of the many times the athlete stereotype surfaces, both anecdotally and in the interviews, which was mentioned in approximately one-third of all the interviews. While Participant 8, who was Black, was in another capacity outside of the university context and they were asked about resuming their athletic career upon their return to the university. “I fit the role of … student of African descent who had to be here because of obvious physical abilities and not intellect” (Participant 8).

These athletic stereotypes can even extend into specific roles within sports. Participant 10, who was White, commented: “I remember one time, my mom said something about … trying to give an explanation for why there weren't very many Black quarterbacks that played both in college and in the NFL, like they were better suited to other positions.” This statement highlights an unspoken reality for many Black individuals, where attribution is immediately given to their possibility to excel athletically, but not intellectually. Singling out the quarterback position is particularly poignant, where they are commonly accepted to be the player with the highest IQ on the field.

The participants reported that ignorance can exacerbate stereotypes. Participant 21 (Black) said, “I wasn't expecting the level of ignorance that is at [PR- PWI].” Participant 15 shared an account from the first gathering they had with their new congregation upon arriving to college. The participant was asked where they were from. The person apparently did not recognize the name of the U.S. state and proceeded to ask questions as if it were a foreign country. This included inquiring about access to utilities and whether the participant cooked indoors or outdoors. The experience was topped off with a question that plays off a myriad of problematic racist tropes: “Oh, so do you guys really … eat fried chicken and drink Kool Aid
and eat watermelon, like I see on the movies?’” (Participant 15). Participant 15’s example represents a painful illustration of the power of stereotypes, and how that power is amplified when White individuals simultaneously won’t listen and feel entitled to narrate another’s story.

**Microaggressions**

Microaggressions are “subtle statements and behaviors that unconsciously communicate denigrating messages to people of color” (Nadal, 2011, p. 470). They are the more passive-aggressive, subtle indications that racial distinctions do exist and govern relationships. Half (eight) of the Black participants specifically mentioned microaggressions.

Sometimes the microaggressions were nonverbal. A Black participant shared the following: “Somebody would walk [to the other side of] the street when I was walking” (Participant 11). The participant went on to explain that they worked very late and would come to campus very early. The unusual hours, the few people on the streets, and the fact that the participant was Black resulted in strangers attempts to avoid them. Sometimes the microaggressions were verbal and in public settings. Participant 6 talked about being in the class of a well-known professor that had only eight students, of whom two were Latino students. “[W]e were always the examples; [He] would always use us, and stereotypically … for basketball. … Why are you doing this right now, like come on?” (Participant 6). Participant 20 was Black and shared that the microaggressions were more pervasive feelings that were hard to detect. They said that while they did not experience outright racism, they experienced a lot of prejudice that came in the form of passive aggressive behavior. “[T]here was this either behind your back, or you could just sense this attitude of, ‘I'm just being nice because I'm supposed to be.’ …” (Participant 20). The three examples serve to illustrate that microaggressions can be communicated and received many different ways, according to situation and circumstance.
Unfortunately, students also described more overt experiences that blurred the line between microaggression and racism:

I had a few people tell me … the reason I got in [to the university] was because I was Black, because you know, the ACT score was super high, the GPA was super high, so I was doing a sport or I was an affirmative action admit. (Participant 6)

Participants reported that instances where intentions were unclear and communication was indirect or nonexistent created an unsettling situation that left them feeling unwelcome and out of place. This suspicion was confirmed by more blatant microaggressions. Participants demonstrated that even though the hurt from microaggressions were often unintentional, it hurt nonetheless. Even though individuals seldom hold ill will, the majority community can take on a hostile, adversarial personality that results in Black discomfort and distrust.

**Racism**

The concept of racism, as it manifests today, is rooted in the institution of slavery, where those in power had to justify ownership and mistreatment over another human who looked different. The system necessitated that one group become inferior to another. The intentional or unintentional modern manifestations of racism are when efforts are made to maintain a position of superiority along racial lines (Equal Justice Initiative, 2018). The participants revealed that, unfortunately, racism still factors into their own experienced human interactions: 11 of the 16 Black participants and four of the five White participants made specific references to racism and other related terms. Some of the Black participants had these memories at an early age. Participant 6 recalls getting into an argument with another student in second grade. That same student called him the N-word in fifth grade. “[His] parents who were also shouting multiple things at me in front of the principal, and then also in front of my mom, who then, graciously,
didn’t reach across the table to try and choke them out” (Participant 8). The racist words expressed by the child were likely substantiated by the harsh treatment from the parents in the young mind of Participant 6.

Two participants shared very similar experiences, but the context for each added some layers of mental and emotional harm, one being from a peer and the other coming from an authority figure. Participant 3 was at a function where a peer was saying overtly racist things, such as pointing out that people would not be able to see her at night. Participant 8 was returning from a youth trip and a youth leader asked them to smile because it was dark and they would be able to be seen that way. Both expressed feelings of vulnerability and some degree of helplessness. Participant 3 lamented, “I remember being so uncomfortable and at that time, I didn't know how to stand up for myself.” Participant 8 described the conclusion to his ordeal, as well as an insinuation that this was not an isolated incident: “[E]veryone laughed, brushed it aside. It was always weird, awkward.” Both comments illustrate the pain of being in a vulnerable, unsafe place where one might expect safety and protection.

Navigating relationships with strangers or authority figures is challenging enough in adolescence without having racial undertones. Doing so with peers brings on a keen sense of discomfort and rejection. One participant shared a comment heard frequently by biracial people or Blacks who do not conform to stereotypes: “I remember my friends would call me an Oreo [Black on the outside, White on the inside] or a zebra [mixed race]” (Participant 21). Other participants expressed frustrations with more comprehensively painful experiences:

My upbringing, … people were extremely ignorant. They had no interactions with people of color. And so they would say really awful things, and so I put up with a lot in high
school, a lot of name calling, and just microaggressions, and really awful things that people would say or do. (Participant 13)

Participant 6 expressed similar experiences in a comparable environment. “I did this sports camp [at a PR-PWI] one summer, and things went horrible, they were absolutely horrible. I remember I was mocked, again called racist names, so I thought I would never go to [that university]” (Participant 6).

For those who had unfortunate pre-PR-PWI experiences, those same experiences followed them to the university classrooms. “That was like a big part of my experience when I first got up to [PR-PWI] … where people would say things that are very racist and hurtful” (Participant 20). “Very demeaning, racial things in religion classes, … [u]sing the N word in classes, [and] students defending slavery in [a] class next to one of my very good friends” (Participant 8).

Participant experiences seemed to reveal an interesting correlation between Halloween and racialized incidents, as illustrated by two Black participants: “I remember one semester, there were some students who thought it was funny to dress up as Klansmen for Halloween” (Participant 4). Participant 6 recounted Halloween parties where individuals would proudly approach them, dressed in blackface and “terrible braids.” They summarize this experience with the following observation: “I was always super frustrated and it always seems to be the wealthiest of the kids who made the worst decisions and tend to wear the most racist costumes at Halloween” (Participant 6).

There are other sobering examples where the impact of racially motivated thoughts, words, and deeds likely had and will have an impact for a very long time. Participant 13 discussed Black friends from all over the country who are excited for the experience to be around
so many religious people “then they realize how many [religious people] are racist. … I think that's a slap in the face for them.” Another recounted an experience of one of their relatives who was attending a PR-PWI years ago. “[H]e wasn't even Black, but they called him like the N-word, and would like chase him … in a truck, throwing rocks at him” (Participant 21).

The racism manifested in the dating scene from the interviews was frequent and glaring. Here are some of the examples, each offered by a different Black participant: “One of the issues I definitely had was with dating, you know? Not always a contender for female students that went to [PR-PWI] … yeah, so I would say that dating was probably the most negative of my experiences” (Participant 24). Also, the following:

Dating was really hard for me at [PR-PWI]. … I went on a lot of dates and I had a lot of fun with people, but I had many boys tell me, “oh, we have a lot of fun together but I just can't take you home to my parents. … [I]f they knew I was dating a Black girl, they would be not super happy about that.” (Participant 21)

Participant 6 was asked who he would date, concluding that his only option was the other Black female they could recall. This same participant was told things such as, “you’re a great person but not right for my daughter” (which was the most common). There were others. “[Y]ou’re really nice, but, like, I'm not interested.” “I think my parents would be really mad if like I brought someone black home.” And “I’m pretty sure my grandma's racist; it would be interesting if you met her” (Participant 6). He also recounts a serious relationship where it ultimately ended with the family informing him that he was not the right type for that family. As many participants shared, this was not their first experience with racially motivated interactions. But many alluded to the fact that interactions like this were so jarring because so many
proclaimed adherence to Christian beliefs, yet communicated hurtful, racist sentiments that demonstrated some cognitive dissonance with their professed beliefs.

As if it were almost scripted, a White participant shared an experience that pulls back the curtain to substantiate what most of the Black students assumed:

[O]ne of my roommates … knew that I was doing this class, and they were kind of whispering in the front room. … And I heard them say, “Would you ever date a Black guy?” and my other roommate was like “no, like never.” … My first roommate that asked the question was like “good, I think I'd be afraid for you if you did.” … [I]t like makes me mad to think about—I remember sitting in my room, doing my … homework [for the CRE] and just bawling because … my roommates, I liked them, [but they] think these things still. … [I] have friends who are Black, friends who were talking about their pain. (Participant 16)

For the White participants in the CRE, as the previous example illustrates, it gave them both knowledge and a vocabulary to not only address overt racism, but to also identify tacit or hidden racism that has a cumulative impact over time. But more importantly, it brought them proximate to Black pain.

One White participant provided an example of introspection and reckoning with past action. The participant lived in a community with a high immigrant population, and they got caught up in the team making discriminatory remarks towards another member of the team from one of these immigrant backgrounds. The target of the joke tried to laugh it off and joined in somewhat. “And so it felt like it was okay. Looking back, yeah, it wasn't okay. So I mean yeah, I guess I have engaged in some of that in my life” (Participant 2). This reflection simultaneously
provides an example of the dangers of both ignorance and conformity, as well as the redemptive qualities of self-awareness and admission of fault.

**Discussion**

Participants discussed their lived experiences, which for many, could be summarized by the racial differences that brought their racial realities into stark contrast with the experiences of most of their PR-PWI peers. The participants varied in terms of demographic factors, backgrounds, and cultures, yet their lived experiences, reflected upon within the context of attendance at a PR-PWI and participation in a CRE, evoked shared experiences and strikingly similar themes, namely: White spaces, assimilation, stereotypes, microaggressions, and racism.

**White Spaces**

At a very basic level, White space is defined as the “overwhelming presence of white people” and the “absence of black people” (Anderson, 2015, p. 13). But the historical and societal ramifications go far beyond being simply outnumbered. Black people are often stigmatized by Whites and others “by associating them with the putative danger, crime, and poverty of the iconic ghetto” (Anderson, 2015, p. 13). This unfortunately puts Black people at a disadvantage because they have more to prove to others to reciprocate trust in a relationship. The interviews are illustrative of the fact this lack of trust is a significant obstacle for Black students to obtain proximity in White spaces. White students revealed the unintentional barriers that can exist between them and another student’s experience, which consequently limited their ability to understand and feel Black students’ silent suffering.

**Assimilation**

Black participants discussed the challenges with gaining acceptance in a society that does not readily acknowledge the impediments and barriers to gaining that acceptance. Worse still, the
majority culture seemed rather unyielding in the standards it set for the in and out groups. These environments damaged Black students’ self-confidence, demanded unrealistic conformity, and fomented confusion and resentment. Some participants demonstrated a deleterious misappropriation of White culture when they adopted and internalized self-loathing narratives.

In order to be tolerated in White spaces, participants described conscious or subconscious maneuverings, or what was referred to as the “dance” where Blacks are required to show that certain stereotypes do not apply to them and in a certain sense, they have to perform to be accepted (Anderson, 2015, p. 13). The “dance,” or assimilation, is a form of internalized racial oppression (IRO). Researchers defined IRO as the process by which individuals—African Americans in particular—“internalize and accept the dominant White culture’s oppressive actions and beliefs toward Black people” (Bailey et al., 2011, p. 481). Like experiences and sentiments recounted by participants, assimilation is a type of IRO, which results in psychological distress for both African American men and women due to unhealthy internalization of externally defined images of race and gender (Parks et al., 1996; Wester et al., 2006).

**Stereotypes**

Since the tumultuous summer of 2020, a common anecdotal sentiment amongst Black people is, “I’m surprised how many times I’m not surprised.” This applies to the stereotypes that participants reported in their interviews that revolved around citizenship, food, athletics, and intellectual capacity. As the participants highlighted, this stereotyping can exacerbate feelings of isolation and detachment. They seemed to be people to fill a role, rather than being regarded as a whole, complex, unique individual. Black participants were “best Black friends,” exceptional Black students because of their intellect, student athletes and not just students, a foreigner with a
completely different way of living, or a Black person that falls in line with the racist tropes of loving fried chicken, Kool-Aid, and watermelon.

The history of racial stereotypes and their impact on students of color—Black students in particular—is well-documented. Shaun Harper (2015) provided an extensive history of research literature that substantiates the experiences of the participants and illustrates how students of color are impacted by stereotypes illustrative of the “how many times I’m not surprised” perspective, one such example came from the 1991 edition of a book titled *How College Affects Students*. The authors wrote over 30 years ago that the academic, social, and psychological reality for most non-White students at PWIs is vastly different from the realities of their White peers (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Harper adds context by pointing out that this is in large part because they cannot shake racialized stereotypes concerning preferences, capabilities, and expected behaviors. This point is powerful because Harper adds depth to research from 30 years ago that has been cited nearly 20,000 times. Furthermore, Pascarella and Terezini’s 1991 work summarized the previous 20 years before its publication. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Dealing with stereotyping can be exhausting to students who must constantly dispel inaccurate racial stereotypes, and work harder to prove themselves. This is a key component of racial battle fatigue, which has been documented by other researchers (Smith et al., 2007).

**Microaggressions**

The collection of accounts in the interviews communicate a painful and not-so-subtle message that one does not belong. Black individuals are reminded of another inherited falsehood tied to the history of racism in this country: that Black people are inherently criminal. Although
subconscious, incidences of people crossing the street upon the approach of a Black person is not isolated, the brief interaction sends a clear and distinct message: a Black person is a threat.

Repeated stereotypical assertions can also be perceived as microaggressions. This can happen from a single individual, for example when the professor continued to typecast Participant 6 and his Latino classmates as the athletes. It communicates a monolithic image of people of color, that their value add is one-dimensional, and that their reality cannot exist in other contexts.

The campus itself can also take on a hostile persona when, although repeated comments are not coming from one person, microaggressions are being perpetrated by the campus community. A summarizing sentiment was captured by Participant 20 who expressed being able to sense the hostility and discomfort through nonverbal cues and things both unsaid and said in hushed tones. Sometimes the collective persona comes through verbally, when individual members of the campus community repeat and affirm the same assumption that as a Black student, they were admitted to meet a diversity quota and not because of their intellect, accomplishments, or ability to contribute.

The experiences of participants with microaggressions is also supported by an extensive body of research. One article looked at the relationship between racial microaggressions and self-esteem for 225 college undergraduates. Their summary of the literature brought to light the damage inflicted when a campus community goes a step beyond making stereotypical mistakes and takes a more hostile position communicated via microaggressions. The campus community might consistently communicate inferiority, criminality, or othering (Nadal et al., 2014). This consistent messaging results in sentiments echoed by the participants, where they are left feeling
unsafe, invisible, or socially rejected (Franklin et al., 2006; Garcia et al., 2011; Yeung & Martin, 2003).

**Racism**

The participants shared several racist experiences prior to attending the PR-PWI. Thus, the racial climate at the PR-PWI was surprising for some and not for others. The overall sentiment was that it was still jarring for so many to see individuals coming into an institution under the guise of wanting an education in a faith-based environment, but then acting in a manner that was contrary to the core values of both the sponsoring religion and the institution.

A troubling element of the data was the lack of knowledge and level of ignorance at an institution for higher learning. Given the demographics for many PR-PWI, it is not out of the realm of possibility to think that many students did not receive an education that would help them contextualize the damage of their words or actions. If this is the case, it is a condemnation of a broader educational system that is not sensitizing its citizens to these issues. It would be even more disconcerting if university students had received an education on these matters, yet still chose to use racial slurs and advocated for oppressive and cruel systems that propagated racism to the highest degree (e.g., wore KKK costumes).

Participants revealed one of the heaviest burdens they had to carry was when incidents would occur, they were often left to process painful, humiliating experiences with very little support. The dating scenarios highlighted are fraught with both pain and confusion, particularly after repeated experiences. The spoken racism is hard, but as the experience shared by Participant 16 revealed—the proverbial salt in the wound is the supposition and concern for what people might be thinking or what might be said when no one is around.
Commentary from Dr. Willie James Jennings (2020) provides a succinct and powerful summary of many of the experiences and sentiments expressed by the participants that corroborates the assertion that the situation at this PR-PWI being studied is not unique. He relates the following:

I said that students of color carry a double burden in their schools. In one arm they carry the weight of racial harm, of aggressions small and large, and in their other arm they carry the fatigue of their friends…They attend their classes…hoping to learn just like the other students learn, only to hear all too often an ignorance laced in the knowledge of their professors, an ignorance of them and the racial world they all shared. And then they return to the private spaces of dorm rooms and meal halls and study rooms and places off campus, only to find they have a new job—teaching and explaining, debating and exposing the racial truths that they are only beginning to deeply understand themselves. … [They] carry a labor totally unfair and cruelly taxing. This is why … so many students of color by the time they are seniors are sick of their schools and sick in their schools.

(pp. 121-122)

Dr. Jennings’ (2020) words pose an important question. What proverbial medicine should be prescribed to relieve the pain, sorrow, and frustration borne by Black students at a PR-PWI, resulting from prevailing university conditions where White space, assimilation, stereotypes, microaggressions, and racism do not appear to be anomalies for the students in study?

Limitations

The primary researcher for this study was a biracial (African American and White), cisgender, Christian male with 15+ years of higher education administrative experience. He has
worked extensively with students of color and other underrepresented populations for the duration of his career. The researcher was also one of the founding administrators of the CRE.

There are numerous ways that this research effort could have been constructed. One preferred approach by the lead researcher would have been to conduct semi-structured pre- and post-interviews. The pre-interview would have taken place prior to the first day of instruction, so as to gather perspectives and opinions prior to engaging in any part of the CRE experience. The post-interview would revisit many of the same themes they addressed in their pre-interview, but in the light of how these same themes were impacted by the CRE experience. Although there are some perceived limitations and missed opportunities with not having engaged in a pre-/post-longitudinal study, there are also some benefits. This study was able to benefit from months and years of reflection, life experiences, and the possibility of being able to process the experience they had more fully.

The research was phenomenological, but different approaches could have been—or in the future could be—taken to examine different aspects of the student, CRE, or campus experience. For example, an ethnography could embed a researcher to explore the society and culture that is formed and exists within the CRE course, on the actual CRE excursion, or within the immediate and/or larger community of research participants who have been a part of a CRE experience. Grounded theory research could be conducted through structured interviews and/or a mixed methodological approach to see if data collected from students’ CRE experiences can build on existing theory, such as racial battle fatigue or wellness as fairness. This research focused on students’ lived experiences, which is not like a case study that examines a “unit around which there are boundaries” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 38). To better understand the CRE program or community, a case study on a particular CRE group or on the CRE program would be a viable
research option. For this purpose, a phenomenological approach was deemed best to facilitate a way that research participants’ collective experiences—not a program, theory, or culture—could be effectively communicated.

**Implications**

Research participants shared experiences that spanned from early childhood to relatively recent occurrences. They offered poignant insights and perspectives on the impacts and ramifications of White spaces, assimilation, stereotypes, microaggressions, and racism. Despite this, many of their responses articulated sentiments consistent with research and theories that depict life and experiences for people of color on university campuses. The emergence of these themes warrants a discussion of both comprehension of the harm caused and mitigation of the same. These conclusions prompted an exploration of “critical experiences,” cultural humility within institutions, and the internal cultural and systemic structures to mitigate students at PR-PWI being negatively impacted.

Long-standing, systemic issues that impact students of color will not be resolved in an instant. What is to be done until the proposed solutions can catch up with the pervasive problems? Interventions must be put in place to recognize and triage individual student distress and pain while they navigate a system that was not necessarily designed for them.

Improving educational systems and those that have comparable societal functions is also important and doing so involves coming to terms with the fact that aspects of them were not built for everyone’s success. Harvard law professor, Derrick D. Bell (1991), has argued that “Racial equality is, in fact, not a realistic goal” (p. 363). Harper et al. (2009) expounded on this concept:

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2 Due to the nature of the CRE—its historical content and propensity to attract students of African descent—much of the analysis and research cited will focus primarily on the Black university student experience.
“Racism is real and unlikely to be eradicated despite incremental changes” (p. 404). They suggest that “race and racism are persistent and dynamic fixtures in American culture” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 404). However, the term “unlikely” is not the same as “impossible.” With this distinction in mind, they assert that accepting this racial reality allows educators to focus on “strategies and approaches that will more comprehensively address racial inequities in higher education” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 404).

In addition to accepting racial realities, Smith and colleagues (2016) recommend that educators ask themselves, “Do I (or my organization) have the cultural humility?”—which according to Haynes-Mendez and Engelsmeier (2020) entails (a) “challenging the power imbalance between the student and [educator],” (b) “participating in community partnerships on behalf of students being served,” and (c) “commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique”—to respond to whatever students might say? To demonstrate cultural humility by engaging in self-evaluation and self-critique, an individual or organization must take accountability for its role in negative student experiences. An institution, particularly a PWI that espouses Christian teachings and values, demonstrates supreme cultural humility by (a) making sure that students of color are seen, heard, and valued, (b) ongoing self-evaluation and self-critique, and (c) committing to collaborative, effective, and responsive action. It is not sufficient to solely establish an environment that allows students of color to express themselves, but that also has frameworks and theories at the ready to understand individual and group experiences with the intention to act.

Herein potentially lies the most consequential implication for this research. Many of the thoughts, feelings, and experiences expressed by research participants can be found in much of the literature on the experiences of students of color at PWIs. In the CRE, the students become keenly aware of the modern manifestations and evolutions of suppression, racism, injustice, and
racial violence. This is why students in the experience can have such a visceral response to instances of discrimination, microaggressions, ignorance, and racism. They see them as echoes and reverberations from the past. Therefore, the following participant’s experience offers a glimpse into a window of opportunity if an institution wants to lean into cultural humility:

When I heard … news about this Black kid in Florida being shot by a person that lived in this neighborhood … who felt threatened by this boy's Blackness. … [A] week after the [Civil Rights] trip … you’re sitting there and realizing this Black boy—I didn't use these words back then—was lynched. (Participant 3)

After spending time down South and having a raw and deeply personal experience grappling with the United States’ history with race, the past suddenly became present as Participant 3 processed the killing of Trayvon Martin, which she was able to then contextualize as a lynching. Although participation in the CRE did not change the fundamental experience Participant 3 was having at the PR-PWI, the CRE provided knowledge, academic frameworks, examples, experiences, and, maybe above all else, for this research purpose, a contextualization and vocabulary to articulate their own racialized experiences.

Although the CRE experiences these research participants discussed may not be replicable or accessible everywhere, there are some important elements of both the program in which they participated and theoretical frameworks that could help reduce tensions in the face of racial differences and create space for honest and healing dialogue. One could look to both Prilleltensky’s (2012) “critical experience” and high-impact practices for suggestions as to how to craft an experience in their own context that would represent a “significant investment of effort by students over an extended period of time” and would include “interactions with faculty and peers about substantive matters,” and “opportunities to discover relevance of learning
through real-world applications” (Kuh & O’Donnell, 2013, p.10). Prilleltensky found that these critical experiences often lead to a realization that something previously believed to be “normal” is wrong. He posits that this awareness has two components: An assessment of the conditions leading to the injustice and the resulting pain, along with the realization that both the situation and the attitudes of those involved can be changed (Prilleltensky, 2012).

If an institution not only embraced a “critical experience” for the benefit of students of color, but also for the emotional, mental, social, and—in some cases—spiritual health of its collective student body, it could yield some important benefits. Such a program could assist with underrepresented students being seen, heard, and valued. What if a study or program evaluation were intentionally infused into a critical experience, wherein a concentrated group of students could provide timely and relevant insights regarding their university experience within the relative safety of a program couched in their own cultural, ethnic, or racial context? This would demonstrate to students an institutional willingness (a) to challenge the power imbalance between the student and the educator and (b) to engage in ongoing self-evaluation and self-critique. Finally, the creation of the experience and a demonstrated institutional commitment to its growth and maintenance would demonstrate responsive action. A commitment to the pre- and post-dialogue would demonstrate a collaborative spirit. Finally, responding to student concerns and implementing feedback in a regular and routine cycle could demonstrate its efficacy over time.

This research highlights another important consideration for “critical experiences,” and is a recommendation to prioritize for future research. For Black participants, at some point in their lives, would they have to reckon with the racial realities of White spaces, assimilation, stereotypes, microaggressions, or racism? If so, does the CRE provide the optimal conditions for
this reckoning? It provides some unique benefits that are not easily replicable in such a condensed, organized, and intentional framework. The CRE can provide historical context, experiential learning, a vernacular to express one’s lived experience, and a support network. For White students, it can provide many of the same things, particularly proximity to another’s lived experience and understanding of how to create a support network for others. More importantly though, it raises the question of how or where White students might have a comparable opportunity if something akin to the CRE is not even encouraged, much less provided.

The final expression of cultural humility that will be mentioned here is the institution’s willingness to examine policies, procedures, and environmental factors that may be contributing to the racial battle fatigue. Too often, the burden of resolving a racially hostile situation is shifted to the students who are most affected by the hostile climate. This cannot be the case, as evidenced by the thoughts, feelings, and experiences that coalesced into the painful themes expressed by the participants. An important first step is to accept the racial realities experienced by the institution’s students; the strong likelihood that they are dealing with a hostile environment that has not been designed nor customized to foster their emotional, mental, spiritual, social, and—even in some cases—physical health and overall well-being. It is important to emphasize that racial realism is not suggesting a fatalistic subjugation to racism, but rather an acknowledgement with the intention of formulating a realistic game plan. With implementation of some form of institutionally backed “critical experience,” the institution could not claim ignorance to the racial realities of its students and the climate that precipitates potentially harmful conditions.

Smith and his associates (2016) provided important guidance for the PR-PWI where this research took place, and other institutions that are exploring more ways to be responsive to their
racial realities. Theirs is a fitting response to these participants’ experiences by describing what it would look like for an institution to both accept racial realism and demonstrate cultural humility. “Black [students] should not be seen as a group that must cope no matter what, under any conditions, through all circumstances. [They] are not meant to just survive the college experience but thrive through it” (Smith et al., 2016, pp. 1202). These researchers assert that the responsibility to develop transformative solutions for systemic issues lies with the institutions.

They also assert that a racial plurality or token representation of Black people will not assuage participants’ concerns with the campus climate. Because of the amount time spanned by the research and the repetition of themes in the participants’ experiences demonstrated that “dismantling racism requires a critique of the structural inner workings of higher education institutions” (Smith et al., 2016, pp. 1203). The concluding thought, as informed by Smith’s research, is that although changing individual hearts and minds is important, it will not be transformative if the individual change does not result in a collective impetus towards challenging and changing the social order of power, both institutionally and culturally. Allowing students to participate in the process by organizing and investing in critical experiences may be just the mechanism to inform the necessary institutional and cultural changes.

Conclusion

The PR-PWI where this research took place has generally recognized that students of color are (a) subject to a decreased sense of well-being and conditions of fairness and (b) opinions, experiences, and situations impacted by racial differences can play a prominent role in negative outcomes. Procedural efforts, organizational changes, and adjustments to physical space have been implemented as the initial stages of longer-term, more comprehensive effort. It is hoped that these research findings and implications will provide a research-based, structured
exploration of students' experiences that highlight the enduring, consistent, and thematic nature of students of colors’ lived experiences impacted by racial differences. In turn, highlighting the students’ experiences in this way will inform the institution’s ongoing efforts. It is also hoped that the research will be instructive for other colleges and universities striving to navigate the impact of racial differences on students' lived experiences.

This research provides insight into the thoughts and emotions of Black students and possibly other students of color during instances like these. The participants' responses were painful, poignant, and revealing with regards to their life prior to college, their actual university experience, and future implications. The research question asked how research participants who participated in a Civil Rights experience and attended a private, religious, predominantly White institution processed and articulated their lived experiences. The participants discussed how racial differences impacted their lived experiences. Five prominent themes emerged from the overall conversation of racial differences: White spaces, assimilation, stereotypes, microaggressions, and racism. Two quotes offer important summary statements for the overall results. “The subtle, cumulative mini-assault is the substance of today’s racism” (Pierce, 1974, p. 516) and “[i]f raced and gendered microaggressions … are not confronted, non-Black students and college employees will likely continue to inflict harm…” (Smith et al., 2016, p. 1202). The consideration of “critical experiences,” cultural humility within institutions, and the internal cultural and systemic examinations of the same were offered as ways to mitigate racial battle fatigue and confront the racial realities of a private, religious, predominantly White institution.
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APPENDIX A

Extended Literature Review

The extended literature review is organized into two main sections. The first provides a contextual understanding of the history of Black people in education. A discussion of Black history and race relations in the U.S. provides an important foundation for the subsequent discussion on the interplay between Black race and education. Concerns about race and education have resulted in important policy developments that will be discussed. Finally, the literature review will discuss additional complexities introduced by the confluence of race, education, and religion.

The second section outlines theories and frameworks that explicate the Black experience in higher education as it relates to previous, existing, and emerging trends in higher education policy and procedure related to race. Wellness and fairness will expound on student well-being as it relates to the satisfaction of their needs. Racial battle fatigue provides a framework to recognize challenges of Black students in higher education and how those challenges might be manifest in the lives of Black students. Racial realism provides a lens by which practitioners can examine the state of education for students of color and inoculate themselves from generalized, overly optimistic approaches to addressing the challenges and complexities of race in higher education. Cultural humility outlines how institutions can comprehend student well-being and develop effective responses to their needs.

History of Race, Blacks, and Education

In 1939, the United States kept a wary eye eastward as war raged in Europe. To avoid foreign entanglements amid recovery from the Great Depression, the Neutrality Act of 1939 modified provisions of the first two neutrality acts (The Office of the Historian, n.d.). That same
year, the U.S. revisited the tragedies of the Civil War in a romanticized way with the release of *Gone with the Wind*. Before neutrality was reaffirmed and the Antebellum South was revisited in film, a song of protest performed earlier that year painted a much different picture of the plantation era, its reverberations, and modern-day manifestations (Amoako, 2019; Meeropol, 1939):

Southern trees bear a strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

Billie Holiday’s performance of “Strange Fruit” demonstrated a power to elicit strong reactions; a powerful antiracist anthem that inspires the courage to confront past wrongs, or a brutal history that urges recoil from this country’s history of domestic terrorism and racial violence. “Strange Fruit” called out the unspoken national tension and one-sided complacency with the status quo.

The prevailing systemic response in the U.S. educational system to the country’s racial history is to recoil—minimize the brutality, longevity, and modern ramifications of the institution of slavery, and its putrid blossoms of racism, terror, suppression, and violence (Shuster et al., 2018; Stewart, 2019). The prevailing narrative is to briefly cover slavery, the heroism of President Abraham Lincoln, and the impacts of the lauded Emancipation Proclamation. The story continues with Black Americans suddenly feeling like they are being treated unfairly in the 1950s and that resolution is tied up in a nice, neat bow with the Montgomery Bus Boycott, *Brown v. Board*, “I Have a Dream,” and Dr. King’s assassination which prompted a supposed full reconciliation with this country’s racist past. For example, the
Southern Poverty Law Center conducted research in 2017. They scoured 12 popular U.S. history texts and surveyed 1,700 social-studies teachers and 1,000 high school seniors to understand the teaching and learning of slavery (Shuster et al., 2018; Stewart, 2019). They found that more than a third of students thought the Emancipation Proclamation ended slavery. Nearly 60% of teachers did not believe the text adequately covered the topic. An expert panel comprised of diverse training and experience evaluated how the books depicted slavery using a 30-point rubric and on average, the books received a failing grade of 46%; 46% was the average!

**Black History and Race Relations in the U.S.**

Natives of Africa first began interacting with Whites on what is now the mainland United States in 1619 when the first group arrived in Jamestown, Virginia. At that time, there was not a clear delineation between their status as indentured servants or slaves. Power differential and acceptable proximity had its early start in the 1641 Massachusetts colony decision to legalize slavery (Carson, 2003). The first major opportunity for the budding nation to establish equality came when the founding fathers wrote, “We hold these Truths to be self-evident, 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” (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2020). Unfortunately, though, they skirted the issue of slavery.

The Three-Fifths compromise of 1787 further distanced slaves from the hope of claiming any rights or guarantees (U.S. Const. art 1, §2). Three-fifths of a person gave just enough consideration to factor their population into the representation equation, but not enough validation to recognize their existence as individuals. The dehumanization and monetization of slaves in the United States was exacerbated by the invention of the cotton gin. The ability to separate cotton more quickly increased the demand for more cotton, which fueled the financial
motives for increasing labor at the lowest possible cost: slaves. Although some political lines over time began to be drawn that delineated free states and slave states, the crux of the argument was acceptance of the institution of slavery and not necessarily the incorporation of Blacks as members of society. This is evidenced by the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 that encouraged government officials to return runaway slaves (Library of Congress, n.d.).

The 1857 decision of Dred Scott v. Sandford firmly planted a barrier between Whites and Blacks and cemented a power differential that strongly favored Whites. In summary, it stated that U.S. territories could not prohibit slavery and that all Blacks—including free Blacks—did not have constitutional rights (Carson, 2003). The Civil War offered a glimmer of hope for Blacks; the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th and 14th Amendments came about as a result. Though these government actions were significant in theory, the actual change brought about was mostly cosmetic. High-level appointments of Blacks in government or business were scarce and there was not large-scale housing integration. Employing a construction metaphor, Blacks were essentially told where the building supplies were and that they would be welcome to seek them out, but they were not given the financial resources to purchase the materials nor the necessary tools to make something of the materials.

Even though the attempts were relatively feeble, the specter of Black access and equality gave rise to domestic terrorist groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan. Not only did Blacks have to deal with physical intimidation, but they also had to deal with segregation and systemic oppression, often manifested as Jim Crow laws in the South. White segregationists’ and supremacists’ concerns were substantiated by the passage of the 15th Amendment, which guaranteed voting rights to all adult male citizens. The rights could not be “denied or abridged … on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude” (Carson, 2003, p. 28). The 15th
Amendment seemed to provide another glimmer of hope for Blacks, but over the next few decades, the North and South waged a legal and legislative war over how readily Blacks would be integrated into mainstream White society. *Plessy v. Ferguson* was a significant ruling that seemed to contradict the passage of the 15th Amendment. It established the doctrine of “separate but equal” (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896).

Many Blacks left the South at the end of Reconstruction, traveling both west and north. Those who stayed faced severe consequences for challenging the status quo, with little to no protection. “The Ku Klux Klan, White Citizen’s Councils, and the groups, which were formed as private efforts to keep Blacks in their place, established close ties to and did the dirty work for local law enforcement officials” (Carson, 2003, p. 55). During this period, lynching became one of the most common ways to maintain and enforce Jim Crow segregation. The Tuskegee Institute reported 886 lynchings in the U.S. from 1900 through 1909; 791 of those victims were Blacks (Carson, 2003).

The Great Migration (as it is sometimes referred to) is discussed as one of the largest movements of people within the United States—an estimated six million Black people. It began in the early 1910s and spanned several decades, with two noticeable spikes that coincided with the two world wars. The pursuit of economic and educational opportunities is often cited as the driver. The truth of other factors that are not often cited in history books are very uncomfortable. If oppressive Jim Crow laws were not enough of a push factor, the Equal Justice Initiative signals an even greater push factor:

…[T]error lynching played a key role in the forced migration of millions of Black Americans out of the South. Thousands … fled … out of fear of being lynched. Parents and spouses sent away loved ones who suddenly found themselves at risk of being
lynched for a minor social transgression; they characterized these frantic, desperate escapes as surviving near lynchings. (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017)

This era put the U.S. on proverbial trial because now dealing with proximity to Blacks and their potential influence on the societal fabric was not contained to the Southern U.S. Many fled to large northern cities and almost exclusively congregated into Black neighborhoods. This was in large part because Whites wouldn’t allow Blacks to rent or buy homes in their sections of the cities. Significant violence broke out in Chicago, Washington, Illinois, and other western states (Carson, 2003).

In the context of the chaos and desperation that had followed the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression, there was at least an acknowledgment of how conditions were affecting the Black community. The U.S. Armed Forces during war time demonstrated the most progress in terms of access and steps towards integration. After Pearl Harbor, the nation had to bring all resources to bear, including more readily incorporating Blacks into the war effort, both at home and abroad. More than 370,000 African Americans served in the military, with 42,000 of them in combat units (Carson, 2003). Further advances toward integration and influence continued when Franklin D. Roosevelt announced that African Americans would have equal opportunities in the military, but that the units would not be integrated. Black soldiers made up about 9% of the U.S. Army, while the Tuskegee Airmen, an all-Black squadron of fighter pilots gained notoriety for destroying or damaging more than 400 enemy planes without losing their own (Carson, 2003).

At the conclusion of the war, the ‘Double V’ was not only effective at highlighting the credible assertions of Black returning servicemen, but perhaps more potent, was the highlighting of U.S. hypocrisy:
They called for both victory abroad against fascism and victory at home against racial injustice. Meanwhile, millions of white Americans, sobered by war and the Jewish Holocaust in Europe, became more sensitive to racism. They were more aware that racism could kill, that “polite” antisemitism or the occasional “dawy” joke were germs that could grow more monstrously into genocide. (Carson, 2003, p. 82)

The moral mettle upon which the U.S. fought a battle overseas would then be tested at home.

World War II had been a heroic moment for the U.S. on the world stage; fighting the aggressive ambitions of Japan that resulted in the Pearl Harbor bombing on the western front and fighting the terror and brutality of the remaining two Axis powers on the eastern front. African American soldiers got exposure to opportunity, leadership, camaraderie, and trust through their military service. Furthermore, they got exposure to other cultures where racial tensions were not as prevalent. This engendered an impatience and intolerance for the segregation and the power dynamics they now recognized upon returning home. One important step towards increased influence and proximity came in 1954, when President Eisenhower signed Executive Order 9981, which ended segregation in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Then, not many years after the war, with the advent and increased usage of various media outlets—particularly television—images of terror and oppression from the U.S. were broadcast to foreign allies and enemies alike. It seemed no small coincidence that this confluence of factors resulted in a heightened urgency to resolve race issues that had reached a boiling point after more than 300 years of indefensible race relations in the U.S.

Like the returned veterans, Black athletes were also gaining attention and challenging the nation’s narrative. Although Jesse Owens and Joe Louis’ performances were significant,
particularly because their individual victories came at the expense of Hitler’s Nazi Germany, they did not quite compare to Jackie Robinson becoming the first Black player to enter Major League Baseball. The nation had to question assumptions as they watched a composed, upstanding Black excelling at “America’s pastime” under the racially charged insults and hostility directed at him game after game.

Having achieved some victories, both abroad and at home, the generation of Black leaders heading into the 1950s had a great resolve and collective energy. Perhaps this generation had a more expansive, collective perspective on proximity and power dynamics than the generations that had come before them. In context of the time in which it happened, *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* was a very hopeful moment that appeared to be an important victory for the nation as a whole. Perhaps increased access to educational opportunities would pave the way to greater participation in U.S. society and greater acceptance overall.

**Black Race and Education in the U.S.**

The initial indicators were that this battle for Black education would be hard-fought and prolonged. Autherine Lucy was forced out of the University of Alabama after exhaustive efforts to be admitted as the first African American. President Eisenhower federalized the Arkansas National Guard so that the Little Rock Nine could attend Little Rock Central High. James Meredith was blocked from entrance into Ole Miss by Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett. Ruby Bridges was protected by U.S. Deputy Marshalls as she went to school as not only the first African American, but due to protests from White families, the only child in the school. These are just the most visible accounts, and each of them were emblematic of the dozens, perhaps hundreds, of more large-scale protests and efforts to thwart school integration.
The years following *Brown v. Board* were contentious, uncomfortable, and often violent. Very visible advocates for Civil Rights were assassinated during this time: Medgar Evers (1963), John F. Kennedy (1963), Sam Cooke (1964), Malcom X (1965), Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1968), and Bobby Kennedy (1968). Instances of riot and civil unrest were frequent, most of them racially motivated. In March of 1956, 101 of the 128 congressmen in the South signed “The Southern Manifesto,” which denounced the *Brown v. Board* decision. Many Southern communities followed the lead of their political leaders (Equal Justice Initiative, 2014).

Resistance to desegregation, even violent opposition, was common throughout the country. In August 1967, more than 13 years after the *Brown* decision, a report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights observed that “violence against Negroes continues to be a deterrent to school desegregation” (Equal Justice Initiative, 2014).

Observations of the overall sentiment and occurrences are telling when they are placed within the context of population statistics. During the ‘50s, ‘60s, and ‘70s, approximately 20.5% of the population in the South was Black; so, 1 out of every 5 people was Black (Gibson & Jung, 2002). It was reported in the publication that during the same span of time in other regions, the Northeast and Midwest averaged out to about 7 out of every 100, and the West region averaged to about 4 out of every 100. These statistics serve to highlight the significance of instances of racial unrest and violence during this time. It was more pronounced in the South because the concentration of Blacks was higher. This meant that norms of inequity, discrimination, and segregation like Jim Crow laws were more entrenched and pronounced. But similarly, in other regions of the country it even further highlighted the resistance to proximity and the potential of comprising or relegating power or position. Notable riots and instances of civil unrest during this period took place in regions outside of the South, particularly the Watts Riots, the Long Hot
Summer of 1967, and the violence that broke out in the wake of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s death (Roper Center, 2017; Taylor, 2018; The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, n.d.). Set against the backdrop of this brief history, it provides important context for the evolution of the relationship between higher education and race.

**Black Education and U.S. Policy**

Alexander Lucius Twilight is thought to be one of the first African Americans awarded a higher education degree when he completed his studies at Middlebury College in Vermont in 1823 (Harper et al., 2009). After additional graduates from both Amherst and Bowdoin Colleges, the 1820s signified a new era of possibilities for Blacks, even while slavery ravaged Blacks’ hopes, opportunities, and sense of community (Harper et al., 2009). In the 1830s, Oberlin College became the first to openly admit African Americans, and the original efforts of what would eventually become Cheyney State Training School and Wilberforce University ultimately resulted in the schools becoming two of the first known historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU; Harper et al., 2009).

The 1860s saw an important milestone when Mary Jane Patterson became the first African American female college graduate in 1862 (Harper et al., 2009). Unfortunately though, Ms. Patterson was one of only 28 who had received a bachelor’s degree of the nation’s approximately 4 million freed enslaved people (Harper et al., 2009). After the Civil War, there were many well-intentioned people who wanted to support Black education. Although many of these institutions were named “normal,” “college,” or “university,” many of them were nothing more than elementary or secondary schools with literacy as the primary focus (Harper et al., 2009).
These institutions did have an important impact on the educational landscape for Blacks, but the depth and breadth of the impact was slow to develop. Post-1860s, many of these institutions were created hastily with little financial backing, and by 1900 many of the operations had ceased (Harper et al., 2009). Additionally, even a noble cause like education did not grant immunity from the threats and intimidation to Blacks, who were already experiencing racism and hostility on so many other fronts. Education for Blacks was particularly problematic because it challenged White supremacy and violated important norms of a society that had slavery and racism interwoven into its culture.

The larger concern for the education of Blacks manifested itself in the overt ways used to inhibit progress in other aspects of former enslaved peoples’ lives. Opposition efforts were also manifest in more subtle ways. For example, White founders and financial supporters were reluctant to grant Blacks control of the institutions and this practice prevailed until the 1930s and 1940s (Harper et al., 2009). Significant consequences from this were two-fold: (a) the curriculum “focused on white, European, Westernized cultures and values” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 394) and (b) agriculture, mechanics, and industry were the primary foci, or in other words, the education provided continued to relegate them to manual laborers and, on the whole, did not provide them with the academic education that might offer upward mobility and opportunities not previously afforded Blacks.

Public HBCUs appeared to be a goodwill gesture by government that demonstrated an interest in the education of former enslaved people. Additional examination reveals that although better than nothing, public HBCUs revealed ulterior motives. HBCUs reinforced segregation and offered a curriculum primarily focused on agriculture and trades, which perpetuated the belief that Blacks were intellectually inferior to Whites. While in contrast to private institutions, in that
they granted educational leadership opportunities to Blacks, this was due in large part to the fact that they were underfunded and under-resourced and were not enticing to White educational leaders (Harper et al., 2009). Public HBCUs also provided a societal benefit to Whites because they presented an alternative to Blacks enrolling in predominantly White institutions (PWIs). This had a far-reaching impact. For example, although Blacks had been allowed to enroll in PWIs by 1940, 90% of degree holders were educated at HBCUs (Harper et al., 2009).

Furthermore, on the eve the desegregation ruling in 1954, Blacks accounted for less than 1% of first-year students at PWIs (Harper et al., 2009).

The effects of the Morrill Act of 1890 had both positive and negative impacts on the state of educational affairs for Blacks. It stated that educational funds should be annually distributed on a “just and equitable” basis to Blacks in 17 states (Bowles & DeCosta, 1971; Brazzell, 1996). Although the legislation resulted in important increases in the number of Black graduates overall, the “just and equitable” condition in the legislation did not play out as stated. A stated reason for the creation of public HBCUs was “to get millions of dollars in federal funds for the development of White land-grant universities, to limit Black education to vocational training, and to prevent Blacks from attending white land-grant colleges” (Roebuck & Murty, 1993, as cited in Harper et al., 2009, p. 395).

Even a cursory glance of a map highlighting the universities created as a result of the legislation provides a striking visual representation of Roebuck and Murty’s (1993) assessment (Figure A1).
In 1862, 57 universities were created that included notable institutions such as Cornell, Ohio State, Clemson, University of California, Texas A&M, and Purdue, just to name a few. Nineteen were created in 1890, many of which were HBCUs. The most notable was Tuskegee, but it also included institutions such as Langston, Lincoln, and Tennessee State. The last wave of 36 institutions, mostly colleges, were established in 1994. These colleges were located on or near Native American reservations with the intent to provide educational opportunities to Native American populations in states like New Mexico, Montana, and the Dakotas (National Institute of Food and Agriculture, n.d.).
Totaling the number of colleges from the respective years, examining the chronology of their development, and assessing the current state of their support and national reputation is extremely telling. The allocation of funds from grants were prioritized to benefit Whites and are now some of the most recognizable (and predominantly White) institutions in the United States. The unequal distribution of funds did allow for the creation of HBCUs that persist today, but in general, they are historically underfunded and under-resourced and have not grown in size or reputation like their earlier counterparts. The last wave tried to make up for mostly overlooked Indigenous populations by providing them with relatively small local colleges. Not only is the inequality in the original disbursement clear, but the ongoing support clearly favors the schools that were priorities from the outset.

*Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 was heralded as a landmark in education because it struck down the notion of “separate but equal” and mandated desegregation of schools. The primary battleground at the outset was the nation’s elementary and secondary schools. Effects of the legislation took much longer to impact post-secondary schools, with noticeable gains beginning after the passage of both the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965. For example, Kelley and Lewis (2000) reported that Black enrollments went from 27% in 1972 to 34% in 1976.

Not unlike previous instances in history when it appeared as if public sentiment and efforts to support Blacks in their recovery from the nation’s past were sincere, opposition efforts materialized to thwart the educational process for Blacks. A series of legislative actions over the next 30 years negatively impacted Blacks’ opportunities to attain post-secondary education. First, in an apparent attempt to counteract efforts that appeared disproportionately favorable to Blacks, a call to equalize educational opportunities resulted in HBCUs having their distinct
purpose and identity being called into question. They received increasing pressure to
desegregate, which necessitated that in order to survive, that they seek to attract a more diverse
student body in an attempt to qualify for more funding. Enrollments decreased from 18.4% in
1976, to 17.2% in 1990, to 10.9% in 2004 (Harper et al., 2009).

Historically, funding for HBCUs has always been low. Sekora (1968) reported that even
after the “separate but equal” doctrine prescribed in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, PWIs that originated
with the 1862 batch of the Morrill grants received 26 times more funding than their HBCU
counterparts. Similarly, Bowles and DeCosta (1971) revealed that around the same time, per-
pupil spending for Blacks has been about one-fourth the rate for Whites. This trend has
continued over time. Forbes looked at Black land-grant institutions and compared their per-pupil
funding to historically White land-grant counterparts since 1987. They found that despite
significant efforts to improve educational access in the United States, when adjusted for
inflation, Black land-grant institutions have been underfunded by over $12.8 billion since this
time (Adams & Tucker, 2022).

**Race, Education, and Christianity**

Dr. Willie James Jennings (2020) who is an associate professor of systematic theology
and Africana studies at Yale University Divinity School provides a succinct and powerful
description of what it is like for underrepresented groups to navigate a PR-PWI:

The most urgent question[s] about … institutional life within theological education…are
about how we should rethink the work of building so that we can move away from the
cultivation of an institutional persona that is soul killing and death dealing. How do we
form institutional life such that everyone may feel at home in the work of building,
sustaining, or supporting an institution without suffering in a tormented gender
performance bound up in racial and cultural assimilation? At present, a healthy institutional life not rooted in white masculinist self-sufficiency is a difficult reality to imagine, let along execute. (p. 18)

The intersection of race, religion, and education in PWIs is a relatively recent topic of research. Longman reported in 2017 that the cumulative percentage of non-White students across the 180+ Council of Christian Colleges and University (CCCU) schools was 28%. This number was up from 19% in 2004. They saw a 0.03% decrease for Indigenous students, but the rest had increases, with Latino/a students having the highest increase at 3.58% (Longman, 2017). In a study that looked at the campus climate as a predictor of spiritual development at Christian colleges, they found that a sense of belonging was the most important predictor of spirituality for students of color. Conversely, students of color reported a significantly lower sense of belonging than their White peers (Paredes-Collins, 2014).

A study was conducted at a CCCU school that provided insight into why students of color might feel a decreased sense of belonging (Russell, 2021). The researcher interviewed White students at the Christian school to try and understand their attitudes about race. Although students expressed interest in understanding recent episodes of racial injustice, they expressed a reluctance to engage in conversation with others. While all the participants denied being racist and asserted the illegitimacy of colorblindness, some conversations still involved racist ideals, denial of the effects of White privilege, and colorblind ideologies. Collectively students did not understand White supremacy and its systemic manifestations. Lastly, they communicated a refusal to sacrifice. This came in the form of unwillingness to surrender systemic advantages they had, expressing unfairness about people of color having too many advantages, and an inability to identify how their own actions sustain racism (Russell, 2021). Lack of meaningful
discussion, understanding of individual situations and circumstances, and inability to assess the impact of long-term societal and historical forces is going to leave White students with superficial conversations, stereotyped conclusions and responses to what they see, and without the hindsight or foresight to make any meaningful progress for their peers of color.

While it is important to examine how the intersection of race, education, and Christianity impacts White students’ abilities to both identify the problems and enact solutions, a more urgent call to action should be elicited from impact of such environments on students of color. Dr. Jennings (2020) provides just such an insight into their perspective:

I remember those weary minds. I was speaking at a Christian college in the aftermath of a few racial incidents on campus that were evidence of the resurgence of white supremacy’s confidence. The students of color were feeling the stress of it all. I looked in their eyes and I saw the truth I know too well, having gone to a college just like theirs—very Christian and painfully white—and I spoke a truth that all needed to hear. I said that students of color carry a double burden in their schools. In one arm they carry the weight of racial harm, of aggressions small and large, and in their other arm they carry the fatigue of their friends. Eyes opened wide as I spoke. They attend their classes, I said, hoping to learn just like the other students learn, only to hear all too often an ignorance laced in the knowledge of their professors, an ignorance of them and the racial world they all shared. And then they return to the private spaces of dorm rooms and meal halls and study rooms and places off campus, only to find they have a new job—teaching and explaining, debating, and exposing the racial truths that they are only beginning to deeply understand themselves. Their friendships with white students and some assimilated students of color carry a labor totally unfair and cruelly taxing. This is why, I said, so
many students of color by the time they are seniors are sick of their schools and sick in their schools. The joy of not knowing was taken from them in the work of having to know, and the joy of their friendships died in the heat of an exhaustion that they feel but cannot explain. At that moment, many students of color stood up and cheered; other sat crying—water in a thirsty land. (pp. 121-122)

The logos of Longman’s (2017) research, coupled with the pathos of Jennings personal experiences and insider assessment can provide a potential rallying cry for action.

**Admissions and Affirmative Action**

There are two reoccurring themes in the calls for more diversity in university admissions. A common theme in the calls for more diverse student bodies is because they enhance the overall educational experience. Given the documented challenges for people of color at PWIs, it begs the question: Who is receiving the enhanced educational experience? Upon further scrutiny, these attempts could be viewed as veiled benefits for White students who may have had very little interaction with people who are different from them. Said benefits were outlined in research that was used in the 2003 Supreme Court case, *Grutter v. Bollinger*, that argued the legality of using race as part of a holistic admission review. They included “cross-racial understanding that challenges and erodes racial stereotypes,” “more dynamic classroom discussions,” and “better preparation for participating in a diverse workforce” (Yosso et al., 2004, p. 8). Although the benefits outlined helped preserve race considerations as a part of admissions, they suggest that students of color are accepted to better prepare their White counterparts for a global economy. Little is said about the benefits that students of color could derive from being admitted.

Similarly, sometimes students of color are valued for their capacity to remedy past wrongs and serve in their communities. Diversity admissions have been touted as remedial
efforts to the communities long impacted by racial disparities. Universities could then supply
disadvantaged communities with university-educated citizens who could assist in remedying the
social ills. They could return and serve as leaders, role models, representatives, and change
agents (Yosso et al., 2004, p. 8). This suggests that they are given temporary access to privileges
of the majority population but were never intended to stay. For example, are admits who are
descendants of wealthy, influential alums ever evaluated for their effort to give back to their
local community and uplift it?

Examining the history of affirmative action rhetoric, policies, and challenges is
particularly important to understand how society had evolved from racist brutality to reticent
acceptance of interracial associations. Much of this struggle has been manifest in education and
schools have become the primary point of conflict. The beginnings of affirmative action are
often traced back to Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal which insured employment opportunities,
regardless of “race, color, or creed” (Hsu, 2018, p. 50). The term first appeared in the National
Labor Relations Act of 1935, which provided a way for workers to unionize without reprisal.
“Employers who were found to have discriminated against an employee were required to rehire
him, or to make amends, through 'affirmative action’” (Hsu, 2018, p. 50). The Secretary of the
Interior at the time even went so far as to ensure that the Public Works Administration employed
a fixed percentage of African Americans.

The war-fueled economy of the 1940s and 1950s saw top-down efforts to implement fair
employment practices and integrate institutions like schools and armed forces. The most
prominent was Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 that struck down separate but equal. March
1961 was the first time the government used affirmative action in relation to race. John F.
Kennedy signed Executive Order 10925, which attempted to achieve the goal of ending
discrimination. It required government contractors to “take affirmative action” to help realize the goal (Hsu, 2018). This commitment was strengthened when Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which outlawed discrimination based on color, national origin, race, religion, or sex.

The Civil Rights laws resulted in significant gains for women, which goes largely undocumented. For ethnic minorities, there were very few tangible gains. Meanwhile, White frustrations were festering and finally came to the surface in 1978. Allen Bakke asserted that if he would have been an ethnic minority, he would have been admitted to University of California, Davis’ medical school. Two important distinctions result from the case of *Regents of the University California v. Bakke* (1978). First, it was determined that UC-Davis’ admissions policy was unlawful because it included a quota for underrepresented minorities. On the other hand, affirmative action was upheld, which allowed for race to be considered a “plus” factor in the admissions process.

Unlike his colleagues, who largely supported affirmative action as a corrective to historical injustice, [Judge Lewis] Powell based his decision on the principle of “diversity.” This was not the original impulse of the civil-rights movement—the presence of African American at the lunch counter wasn’t about enriching the environment of Woolworth’s. Powell’s compromise changed the terms of affirmative action. (Hsu, 2018)

Slowly, momentum began to build toward repealing affirmative action. *United States v. Fordice* in 1992 ruled that schools in Mississippi should eliminate policies and practices that mirror a dual system of education while keeping the institutions racially identifiable. The year 1996 marked the beginning of a full-frontal assault on race-based admissions and financial aid policies. *Hopwood v. The University of Texas Law School* (1996) officially banned race as a
consideration in decisions regarding admissions and financial aid. The effects were immediate and significant. African Americans at University of Texas-Austin comprised 4.1% to 5.6% of the total student body between 1988 and 1996. By the Fall of 1997, African American made up 2.7% of the first-time freshmen (Harper et al., 2009). Similarly, California Institute of Technology enrolled no African American undergraduates during the 1999-2000 school year (Harper et al., 2009). By Fall of 2006, African Americans made up less than 3% of undergraduates at University of California-Berkley and UCLA (Harper et al., 2009).

A significant blow was dealt to the concept of affirmative action with the two University of Michigan Bollinger cases. *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003) was a narrow five to four U.S. Supreme Court decision that upheld the University of Michigan Law School’s admissions policies, which espoused the idea that having a diverse student population enhanced the educational experience and was of great value to the study of law. The six to three decision in the *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003) case was another matter. It ruled that undergraduate admissions policies were unlawful and that points towards admissions could not be awarded solely based on race. The ruling did allow for race to be considered a “plus” factor when considering individual applicants. These two rulings have had a significant impact on the educational landscape of admission and financial aid policies in higher education.

There are two individuals connected to the *Brown* case whose words were almost prophetic in describing the seemingly subtle shift from equity to diversity, and the lasting impacts on affirmative action. The first is Robert Carter who was heavily involved in developing *Brown’s* legal strategy:

>If I had to prepare for Brown today, instead of looking principally to the social scientists to demonstrate the adverse consequences of segregation, I would seek to recruit educators
to formulate a concrete definition of the meaning of equality in education, and I would seek to persuade the Court that equal education in its constitutional dimensions must, at the very least, conform to the contours of equal education as defined by the educators.

(Carter, 1980)

Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall said:

I fear that today we have come full circle. After the Civil War our Government started several “affirmative action” programs. This Court in the Civil Rights Cases and Plessy v. Ferguson destroyed the movement toward complete equality. For almost a century no action was taken, and this nonaction was with the tacit approval of the courts. Then we had Brown v. Board of Education and the Civil Rights Acts of Congress, followed by numerous affirmative-action programs. Now, we have this Court again stepping in, this time to stop affirmative-action programs of the type used by the University of California.

(Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, 1978, p. 402)

History paints Brown v. Board and other subsequent affirmative action triumphs as a victory for the United States. Why then, beginning in 1978, is there a steady opposition to seeming gains that had been so prolonged and hard fought? There was a concerted U.S. effort, compulsory or altruistic, to make amends for racially motivated practices, policies, legislation, and laws. The crux of the argument here is that there is a troubling correlation between affirmative action policies and the nature of the increased interactions between Whites and Black in the wake of desegregation efforts. Similar to the Black upheaval and social unrest during the same period of time, one could interpret the Bakke decision as the White political and legal unrest from a 24-year affirmative action effort to integrate, and even more significantly, the
resultant White trepidation if a group of people who had been oppressed for centuries might actually gain academic, economic, and political equality.

Resistance to efforts to fully accept students of color as an integral part of the educational fabric is well-documented. White Americans are more opposed to affirmative action, in comparison to the sentiments of Latino and African Americans (O'Brien et al., 2010, p. 896). The research group lead by Laurie O'Brien (2010) identified various documented reasons for White opposition to affirmative action. One is a merit-based objection, which states that meritocratic principles are violated when students are admitted who did not earn it or perform as well as White counterparts who earned it more. Another is based on integrated threat theory, which outline four types of threats that impact intergroup attitudes. Of the four, realistic group threat was the one in which a significant relationship was demonstrated with affirmative action. Realistic group threat expressed concerns about the economic or political threat to the in-group such as a quota-based system that takes jobs, scholarship, and college admissions slots from deserving Whites: “People often act on behalf of their perceived group interest. …Whites may oppose affirmative action not because they personally stand to be harmed by it, but because they perceive that affirmative action harms the in-group’s social position” (O’Brien et al., 2010, p. 896).

Group threat’s relationship to affirmative action was examined by the research team. Sixty White U.S. students, 37% female, were asked to read an article about the impact of an actual affirmative action policy at Washington State that directly took ethnicity into consideration for college admissions alongside SAT and GPA scores. The article stated that because of the policy, students with higher GPAs and SAT scores were passed over in favor of students with lower scores. The article discussed the 10-year impact of the policy on enrollments.
In the article, affirmative action was described as causing an increase in Black and Latino enrollment.

Participants in the study were randomly assigned one of three conditions regarding the Washington State affirmative action policy: (a) it caused decreases in White enrollment, or in other words it harmed Whites; (b) it caused increases in White enrollment and decreases in Asian enrollment, that is to say, it helped Whites; and (c) it had no impact on White enrollment and caused decreases in Asian enrollment, that is to say, it had no impact on Whites. Upon completion of reading the article, study participants were asked two types of questions: (a) does affirmative action harm “the self-esteem of those it is intended to help … by suggesting that certain people cannot make it on their own;” and (b) “affirmative action give some groups unfair advantages, and it is wrong to consider ethnicity when admitting college applicants” (O’Brien et al., 2010, p. 899). The questions were on a 7-point Likert scale, with the endpoints being strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The results were very telling. The second set of questions was designed to look at participants’ merit-based objections to the policy. This remained virtually unchanged, regardless of whether the perception was that affirmative action has helped, harmed, or had no impact on Whites. The average response was around a 5, which meant the group tended toward strongly agreeing that affirmative action policies gave some groups unfair advantages. The first set of questions looked at realistic group threat. When examining whether or not affirmative action had no impact or helped Whites, the response was fairly neutral regarding opposition to affirmative action policies. But when it was determined that affirmative action harmed Whites, the answers approximated those that were consistently opposed to merit-based implications for affirmative action. The conclusion to this study is particularly insightful:
Whites’ endorsement of this particular objection may rise and fall with their own group interests; the apparent concern of the participants for the intended beneficiaries of affirmative action may instead mask their own group interests. This objection to affirmative action is particularly insidious. By masquerading as concern for ethnic minorities, this objection makes attitudes that are hostile appear beneficial, and actions that harm look like help. (O’Brien et al., 2010, p. 901)

Juxtapose the extensive research with the recent admissions scandal where more than 50 people with wealth and prestige were accused of using a variety of means to get their children into some of the most elite schools in the nation. Athletics, disability status, cheating on tests, and a lot of money were the primary mechanism used by these parents in an elaborate scheme. An interesting exercise is to apply the counterarguments to affirmative action to this scenario. If colorblindness requires equality for all that is merit based; does merit principle apply to ultra-wealthy students? They did not get into elite private schools, fund rigorous test prep classes, and self-qualify for a diverse range of experiences that inform college essays. “The problem is that after all that, we often call these young people ‘smart,’ as if their abilities and knowledge were innate” (Fletcher, 2019).

On the flip side “…[S]tudents get a boost into the most elite schools because they are athletes … also allow[ing them] to get into top school with lower average test scores and grades than their classmates” (Fletcher, 2019). These instances of race-based admissions seem to not make the headlines. It also seems that rarely do people raise much concern about wealthy, mostly White, legacy admits. This is not so with affirmative action measures.

Quantitative research has been performed on the impact of schools that banned affirmative action measures. Research conducted by Peter Hinrichs (2012) demonstrated that in
the University of California system, the schools that were the bottom four at the time of the ban saw an increase in the number of students of color; from about 20% in 1998 when the ban went into effect to approximately 23% by the year 2003. The top four presented a much different picture. The enrollment for underrepresented minorities is just under 22% in 1992. The affirmative action ban went into effect in 1998 and the number dropped to about 12%, and then clawed to about 15% again in 2003 (Hinrichs, 2012).

**Research Theories and Frameworks**

**Wellness as Fairness**

Positive psychology has been a juggernaut in well-being literature since Martin Seligman became the face of the movement with *Positive Psychology: An Introduction* (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). It is defined as the “science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions” that will improve life and “prevent the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless” (p. 5). This approach has generated innumerable books, publications, studies, etc. Issac Prilleltensky (2014) suggests that the determination of well-being (or wellness) is too focused on cognition and perception, and that a concentration on justice (or fairness) will balance out the prevalence of individually determined factors. His definition of well-being is “a positive state of affairs, brought about by the simultaneous and balanced satisfaction of diverse objective and subjective needs of individuals, relationships, organizations, and communities” (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 2).

Prilleltensky’s (2012) *Psychosocial Processes Mediating Between Conditions of Justice and Well-Being States* is a continuum that is comprised of four states of justice. They are optimal and suboptimal conditions, and vulnerable and persisting conditions of injustice. The well-begin
continuum has four states as well: thriving, coping, confronting, and suffering (Prilleltensky, 2012).

**Figure A2**

*Psychosocial Processes Mediating Between Conditions of Justice and Well-Being States*

*Note.* Source: Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 11

This model provides some balance to positive psychology because some people’s circumstances are out of their control. In one sense, Prilleltensky (2012) postulates that positive experiences, traits, and institutions carry a certain degree of privilege. Prilleltensky also spells out types of both well-being (personal, interpersonal, organizational, and community) and justice (intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, and community) in *An Ecological Model of Justice and Well-Being.*
Figure A3

An Ecological Model of Justice and Well-Being

Note. Source: Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 11
Lastly, Wellness as Fairness discussed the ideas of distributive and procedural justice. Distributive justice refers to the “fair and equitable allocation of burdens and privileges, rights and responsibilities, and pains and gains in society” (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 6). Procedural justice is “fair, transparent, informative, respectful, and…participatory decision-making processes” (Prilleltensky, 2012, p. 7). Prilleltensky’s (2012) view of well-being aligns better with collectivistic cultures, which tend to be those of students of color. In his conclusion, Prilleltensky offers this insight, “I am saying that psychosocial determinants of health are not naturally distributed among people, but rather given to power dynamics, political disputes, and ethical considerations” (p.18).

**Racial Battle Fatigue**

Racial battle fatigue was introduced in 2007 as theoretical framework for psychological stress responses associated with being an African American male on a historically White campus (Smith et al., 2007). These stress responses can appear in several ways, from minor (frustration) to major (physical altercation). The stress responses come because of a cumulation of racial microaggressions. These can range from unfair treatment to personal threats or attacks, and everything in between. These factors create a university environment that feels unsettling and emotionally draining.

Racial battle fatigue was conceptualized and patterned after combat stress syndrome, where military personnel can have mental, emotional, or physiological effects when they are under constant duress (Helmus & Glenn, 2005). Students experiencing racial battle fatigue differ from military personnel in that their symptoms “are natural responses to living and working under mundane conditions of heightened distress especially when facing potential perils or dangers because of tough, violent conditions or the perception that one’s life, personal dignity, or
character is being threatened” (Smith et al., 2007, p. 555). The initial conceptualization of racial battle fatigue centered on the experiences of African American males, but the framework has since been expanded as a mechanism to understand the experiences of students of color more generally (Fasching-Varner et al., 2014, p. xvii).

**Racial Realism/Critical Race Theory**

Derek Bell (1976) was a Harvard law professor who examined one of the most celebrated rulings in U.S. history: *Brown v. Board of Education*. He made the following observations: (a) desegregation efforts at schools did not necessarily improve the education for Black and other students of color, and (b) *Brown* only functioned when there was interest convergence, or in other words, ground is only ceded to Blacks where there is mutual interest with Whites and Whites will benefit in the long run (Bell, 1976; Bell, 1980). This line of thinking laid the groundwork for Critical Legal Studies, which meant, because one cannot legislate hearts and minds, legal professionals cannot rely on the passage of laws for reliable social engineering. Effectively addressing social issues would necessitate examining systems and acknowledging the emotions, beliefs, and history that resulted in the formation of the system.

Later, Derek Bell would put forth another concept that would advance this discussion of Critical Legal Studies:

Rather than challenging the entire jurisprudential system, as the Realists did, blacks' focus must be much narrower—a challenge to the principle of racial equality. This new movement is appropriately called Racial Realism, and it is a legal and social mechanism on which blacks can rely to have their voice and outrage heard. (Bell, 1991, p. 364)

Around the same time, important ideas were coalescing in another legal mind. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1988) disrupted the concept of civil rights moving in a long, steady upward trajectory
towards some racial utopia. Instead, she proposed that (a) race is the central ideological underpinning of society, (b) equality is not the goal—because it is not achievable—rather the goal is to eradicate White supremacy and Black subordination, and (c) law and politics are intertwined and so Black identity and political unity are required to bring about systemic change (Crenshaw, 1988). From all these concepts was born Critical Race Theory (CRT). In summary, it is a rejection of the concept of colorblindness. CRT is an acknowledgement that despite civil rights reforms, there are stark racial disparities that have persisted. Structural racist hierarchies are enforced, even unintentionally amongst well-intentioned people (Fortin, 2021).

A very similar sentiment was voiced in the preceding century when Frederick Douglass (1849) stated:

I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence bequeathed by your father, not by me. (p. 42)

“African American participation in higher education cannot be taken for granted or assumed to be a privilege that has always existed” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 392). As a continuation of that thought, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) stated, “So complete is this exclusion that black students often come to the university in the role of intruders—who have been granted special permission to be there” (p. 60).

In keeping with Crenshaw’s analysis of racial inequities being systemic, an analysis of elementary and secondary education conditions is necessary to understand trends of college-age students. Work by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) provides an important theoretical and practical lens through which to view assertions of reverse discrimination, student
diversity, and the philosophical roots of strategy. Their work looks at how Critical Race Theory provides an analytical tool through which to better understand educational inequity in school. Ladson-Billings and Tate’s three central propositions are:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States.
2. U.S. society is based on property rights.
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequality. (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 48)

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) suggest with the first proposition that race, though subconsciously it seems to be a clear delineating factor, remains largely without theoretical foundations. Therefore, the deleterious impacts of race-based educational policy decisions go largely unnoticed because it can be “conflated with notions of ethnicity, class, and nation” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 49). Their second assertion with race as a significant factor in determining equity is that explanations for inequity based on class and gender do not appear powerful enough, in and of themselves, to explain difference in school experience and performance between groups (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In other words, research in the social sciences has not articulated the manifestations of race as a primary determinant of educational inequity in a manner that is clear and unmistakable; there is still room to consider other factors so that the nation does not have to confront the hard reality of race and educational inequity.

“We talk about the importance of the individual, individual rights, and civil rights while social benefits accrue largely to property owners” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 53). The second proposition is that U.S. society is based on property rights. For this discussion, it is
important to consider the differences between political systems and financial systems. For example, democracy is not synonymous with capitalism; regarding them as one in the same “masks the pernicious effects of capitalism on those who are relegated to its lowest ranks. Traditional civil rights approaches to solving inequality have depended on the ‘rightness’ of democracy while ignoring the structural inequality of capitalism” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 52). This assertion is most plainly manifest in the position that the fundamental purpose of government was to protect property, which is the main object of society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This fact becomes a very complex issue when one considers that enslaved people were property. Hence, the federal government, working in favor of property owners, had very little incentive to secure human rights for property that belonged to its citizens.

Concerns with property, and its accompanying entitlements, persist today. Unfortunately, the focus on property ownership and the ramifications pervades the educational system. Price-per-pupil and the quality of the curriculum varies greatly according to the socioeconomic status of the school district. Recurring discussions about property tax relief highlight the fact that communities with higher property values and tax assessments do not want their tax dollars going to an inferior school environment from which their own children will not benefit. In short, those with better property deserve better schools. The great tragedy is that these divisions often fall along racial lines and subtly maintain systems of privilege and oppression. “We must therefore contend that the problem facing White people [of coming] to grips with the demands made by Blacks and Whites while at the same time avoiding the possibility of institutional change and reorganization that might affect them” (Wellman, 1977, p. 42).

The third and final proposition is that where race and property intersect, an analytical tool is provided to better understand inequity in society and education. *Brown v. Board* fell short in
terms of achieving long-term gains for Blacks. Students are still very segregated. In 1995, Blacks represented 12% of the national population, they comprised the majority in 21 of the 22 largest urban school districts (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Not only does this problem persist, but according to data (see Figure A4 below) that looks at the percent of Black students in majority underrepresented schools, there are indications that the problem is worsening (Rosiek, 2019).

Figure A4

*Percent of Black Students in Majority Minority Schools*

In conclusion, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) offer a plain, yet powerful analysis of the next steps towards advancing educational equality for all:

> [T]he dialogue of the people of color has been silenced. … [W]ithout authentic voice of people of color … it is doubtful that we can say or know anything useful about education in their communities. … [W]e contend that the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system. (p. 58)
Cultural Humility

Patient-centeredness was a concept in the medical care industry that was introduced by Enid Balint in 1969. The assertion was that in caring for a patient, it was not sufficient to discover the illness; the doctor had to examine the whole person. This included everything the doctor could know and understand about the patient as a unique human being (Balint, 1969). Patient-centeredness dominated patient care conversations until the early 1990s. It was acknowledged for decades that cultural and linguistic barriers could prove to be significant impediments to providing effective healthcare (Saha et al., 2008). Cross-cultural approaches to healthcare involved acquiring some background knowledge of various ethnic and cultural groups to increase responsiveness to certain individuals without stereotyping, while simultaneously trying to develop some attitudes and skills that would be universally relevant to working with diverse populations (Saha et al., 2008).

Three developments expanded the scope and application of cross-cultural care and transformed it into a more mainstream ideology of cultural competence. First, this approach to healthcare was expanded from immigrant populations to essentially all ethnic and racial groups. Second, its prejudice, stereotyping, and social determinants of health were taken into consideration, in addition to culture. Lastly, this approach to healthcare expanded to include health systems and communities at-large (Saha et al., 2008).

Becoming a culturally competent educator has been defined as one who is skilled in the following areas: (a) awareness and acceptance of differences, (b) self-awareness, (c) awareness of the dynamics of difference (knowing what can go wrong and how to set it right, (d) knowledge of students’ culture, and (e) ability to adapt (Moule, 2012). Research began to examine the limits of cultural competence (Abrams & Moio, 2009). For example, both the
receipt and delivery of content can be hindered by a lack of preparation and receptivity, both on
the part of the educator and the student. It is also difficult to establish concrete learning
objectives. Lastly, and perhaps most salient, is the reality that as prevalence and knowledge
about cultural competency would expand and become more diffuse, “… increasingly vocal
activism about multiple forms of oppression [would] … downplay racism’s persistent legacy and
leave … [people] … unprepared to deal with the realities of racism, both systematically and
interpersonally” (Abrams & Moio, 2009).

Calls for a different approach to cultural competence began in 1998.

Cultural competence … is best defined not by a discrete endpoint, but as a commitment
and active engagement in a lifelong process that individuals enter into on an ongoing
basis with…communities, colleagues, and with themselves. … [P]erhaps better described
as cultural humility versus cultural competence. … It is a process that requires humility
as individuals continually engage in self-reflection and self-critique as lifelong learners
and reflective practitioners. (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998)

Haynes-Mendez and Engelsmeier (2020) provided examples of when cultural humility is
manifest. Educators develop relationships of accountability to the institutions, individuals, and
communities they serve. They establish values for engaging in interpersonal relationships. They
encourage advocacy and the promotion of justice. Finally, educational institutions and educators
“engage in an ongoing critical reflection and cultural learning process that does not ‘end’ with a
mastery of a specific set of cultural skills” (pp. 25-26). Rather the educators’ “goal is to continue
learning and reflecting about different cultures in a way that provides a continual feedback loop
of positive engagement and ongoing change” (p. 26).
Conclusion

One of the most celebrated Supreme Court decisions of the last 100 years was the 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* where it was ruled that separate but equal educational facilities for students from underrepresented racial groups was a violation of the Equal Protection clause of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. An educational case that will be the most consequential since that time began on October 31, 2022, with the opening arguments for *Students for Fair Admissions v. University of North Carolina* and *Students for Fair Admissions v. President & Fellows of Harvard College*. The arguments boil down to whether race can still be considered as one factor amongst many in admissions, or if it should be banned as a consideration for admissions altogether. Race matters in education. This research confirms that reality by adding to the ever-expanding library of literature that race has important implications for the persistence, well-being, sense of belonging, etc. for students of color. Students who participated in the CRE at a private, religious PWI described, explained, and demonstrated understanding for how racial differences related to their lived experiences. This research adds to the existing literature by providing long-term, qualitative perspectives situated within a unique context.
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APPENDIX B

Extended Methods

While Racial Battle Fatigue and Wellness as Fairness were the primary theoretical frameworks through which to make meaning of the participants’ interviews, phenomenological narrative inquiry was used to construct the research. This means the researcher identified a common experience or phenomenon—in this case, all participants had both the CRE experience and attendance at the same PR-PWI in common. The phenomenological approach was not to construct a model or build new theory, rather the research aim was to understand the lived experiences of the research participants. Data was collected from “persons who have experienced the phenomenon” and then “a composite description of the essence of the experience for all the individuals” was developed (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 252).

A phenomenological approach was deemed most appropriate because it “aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of [participants] everyday experiences” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9). Studies of this nature often examine “what it is like to be, to have, or to live” (Given, 2008, p. 787). This approach aligns well with the participants experiences: What it is like to have the CRE experience, and to live and navigate at a PR-PWI?

The study of narrative “is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). There are various forms of narrative analysis. This research took an approach where categories were extracted from the collection of narratives (interviews), as opposed to a scenario where each individual story is taken as a whole and remains largely intact (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This phenomenological narrative study explored the following research question: How do research participants who attended a private, religious, predominately White institution and participated in a Civil Rights Experience talk about their lived experiences?
Participants

The sampling frame for the study was constructed from administrative records of all participants from 2012 to 2019 who had completed the full course/trip experience. Ninety-one students who participated in the experience during this time comprised the target population for this study. They were originally admitted to CRE through an application, interview, and selection process, with the primary selection criteria being as follows:

1. Connection to, interest in, and/or understanding of African American history in the United States, particularly as it relates to the Civil Rights movement;
2. Interest in and potential for actively participating in community building and mentorship;
3. Commitment to the academic experience; and,
4. Commitment to generating, facilitating, and participating in dialogue about potentially sensitive matters in a forthright, thoughtful, courteous, and constructive manner.

Due primarily to trip constraints, only 12-14 students could be selected each year. In keeping with the first two stated selection criteria, students of African descent, faculty, and administrators have observed that this experience has demonstrated the ability to create community amongst underrepresented, marginalized students of African descent. This factor also plays a prominent role in the selection process. As a result, 68% of CRE participants self-report some degree of African ancestry, 22% are White, and 10% identify with another racial category. Self-reported gender indicates that 64% of participants have been female, while the remaining 36% self-report as males.
Of the students who identified as Black, some were biracial, full Black from the United States, full Black from a country on the African continent, or some hailed from other African diaspora countries. The range of socioeconomic circumstances varied greatly, as did the lived experiences in the U.S. Circumstances in the home also varied, including some who lived with a single-parent and some with both birth parents. Some participants were adopted, most often into White families. Some experienced parent divorce. The participants’ stages of life at the time of interview were also greatly varied in terms of their status as students, their educational pursuits, career paths, family circumstances, religiosity, etc.

Finally, researchers took into consideration the year participants participated when constructing the sample. CRE has evolved over the years. Although the central purposes have been mostly consistent, the experiences of participants have varied greatly. Some of the guest lecturers featured prominently on the trip are or were octogenarians or nonagenarians and so students’ experiences can vary greatly from year to year when the people they interact with—who lived this history—die, become incapacitated, or change from one year to the next. The focus and relative importance of certain sites have changed over time. Significant new monuments and institutions have been constructed, while others that were prominently featured were temporarily or permanently closed, or completely torn down. Although the core objectives, instruction, and structure of the experience have been relatively consistent over the years, the researchers considered the different iterations of the experience over the years.

Of the 91 students in the target population who were eligible to participate in the research, 72 responded to the request to participate in the study and were interviewed. The final sample was taken from this group (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because the research team took into consideration the variability of research participants’ experiences in CRE from year to year,
the final sample was stratified and random, where three participants from each of the eight years were randomly selected. This increased the probability that the experiences represented in 24 of the possible 72 interviews covered the range of possible CRE experiences offered each year. Table B1 provides a profile of the 24 research participants by race and gender.

Table B1
Race and Gender of the Selected Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Black/White</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was determined that three interviews for each year, for a total of 24 interviews; would minimize the number of research participants; likely produce race and gender ratios proportional to overall percentages, achieve saturation—that is, when the analytical coding procedures begin to produce “no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences … in the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 136)—all while maintaining the likelihood of covering the range of experiences that participants might have. The final stratified random sample was constructed using the following steps:

1. The accessible population was stratified by year of participation in the CRE (2012-2019).
a. The number of interviews conducted varied for each year: 3 of 4 from 2012, 6 of 10 from 2013, 8 of 10 from 2014, 12 of 12 from 2015, 8 of 12 from 2016, 8 of 13 from 2017, 14 of 16 from 2018, and 13 of 14 from 2019.

2. A random number generator was used to randomly select three participants from each of the eight years.

The final stratified random sample was comprised of approximately 58% female and 42% male students (the target population was 64% female and 36% male). Within this sample, approximately 67% of participants reported some degree of African ancestry, 21% White, and 13% who primarily identified as another race (in the target population, 68% self-reported some degree of African ancestry, 22% as White, and 10% who identified with another racial category). As such, the sample used for the study is highly representative of the target population.

**Procedure**

The primary researcher for this study is a biracial (African American and White), cisgender, Christian male with 15+ years of higher education administrative experience. He has worked extensively with students of color and other underrepresented populations for the duration of his career. The researcher was also one of the founding administrators of the CRE. The research team—made up of the lead researcher and four research assistants—consisted of four females and one male. The racial composition was one full Black, two biracial Black and White, one biracial White and a quarter Black, and one full White student. Of the remaining members of the research team, one was an alum of the seminar and a graduate student, two were undergraduate students who had completed the seminar coursework but not the travel experience, and one undergraduate who had not participated in CRE. The research assistants completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training program, reviewed
the literature associated with the research, and received instruction regarding interview and analysis protocols.

Intentional efforts were made to assemble a research team that could successfully navigate academic and practical research concerns. Biases, particular by the primary investigator, can manifest during various stages of the research. Loren Marks (2015) provided these insights: “Intentionally assembling a diverse group of team members can heighten our awareness of blind spots” (p. 498). This counsel not only applies to traditional indicators of diversity, but to experience and the level to which someone has been impacted by the research topic. A safe interview environment was important so participants would be more inclined to share interview responses that reflected their actual nuanced and authentic experiences, rather than acquiesce to the temptation of appealing to the interviewer. Several studies have shown that the race of the interviewer can affect the racial relevancy of the research subject’s responses (Gubrium et al., 2012). Research has shown a similar phenomenon around gender, with females demonstrating a higher propensity to be more honest and vulnerable with female interviewers (Kane & Macaulay, 1993). One of the primary rationales for composition of the research team was to ensure forthright and honest responses by assigning interviewers whom the participants would “trust with their truth” (Marks, 2015, p. 500).

Ninety-one potential research participants had completed the full course/trip experience at the commencement of data collection. Seventy-two responded to the invitation to interview. The full course/trip experience entails a deeply immersive look at the Civil Rights movement. At the heart of many of the discussions that take place are issues related to race and gender, conversations around which can sometimes be sensitive. Therefore, the researchers strove to make racial, gender, and experience equivalent pairings in the interviews. Given the lead
researcher’s history with both the program and each student who was interviewed, the possibility for “role confusion”—which “exists when the researcher perceives or responds to events or analyzes data from a perspective other than researcher” (Asselin, 2003, p.102)—impacted the assignment of both the research assistants and the lead researcher to interviewees (McConnell-Henry et al., 2010).

The interview questions were designed to have participants reflect on their lived experiences before, during, and after their PR-PWI experience, which also encompassed the CRE. The questions were influenced by the Prilleltensky (2012) model, and its emphasis on well-being, justice, and the role of a critical experience in one’s life. The questions included were:

1. Tell me about your cultural, ethnic, and racial identity?

2. These definitions do not have to be given formally during the interview. Nor should the definitions be prescribed for the research participants. This is purely a reference, should the participant ask for clarification.

   a. Culture:

      i. “highly variable systems of meanings” which are “learned” and “shared by a people or an identifiable segment of a population” (Betancourt & López, 1993; Rohner, 1984).

      1. In other words, how factors external to familial/social environment, as well as the internal conditions of familial/social upbringing combine to inform collective thoughts, opinions, and perspectives, and ways of life for a group of people.

   b. Ethnicity:
i. “Groups that are characterized in terms of a common nationality, culture, or language” and delineated from culture and characterized as a mechanism by which culture is transmitted (Betancourt & López, 1993).

1. In other words, a socially constructed, external definition for a group of people that can be defined by any combination of their language, religion, geographical region, or nationality.

c. Race:

i. “Generally defined in terms of physical characteristics, such as skin color, facial features, and hair type, which are common to [a]…geographically isolated population” (Betancourt & López, 1993).

1. In other words, a social construct that can be an individual or external definition based on shared physical and/or genetically transmitted traits and characteristics.

During the years growing up:

1. Talk to me about how race impacted your perspective and possibly the perspectives of those around you, perhaps:
   
a. How you saw others.

   b. How others saw you.

   c. How you saw yourself.

2. What period of time or age range prior to coming to BYU do you feel had the most profound and lasting impact on your personal development?
   
a. What sticks out to you about that time period?

   b. Where were you living?
3. Upon being accepted, what expectations did you have for BYU going into it?

4. Tell me about your BYU experience prior to the Civil Rights Seminar? (There is nothing specific I am looking for; whatever is most dominant or prevalent in your mind: Highs/lows, successes/challenges, thoughts, feelings, experiences, etc.)
   a. Civil Rights Seminar Experience.

5. Tell me about your Civil Rights Seminar experience, anything from the first application interview to the conclusion of the trip? (There is nothing specific I am looking for; whatever is most dominant or prevalent in your mind: Highs/lows, successes/challenges, thoughts, feelings, experiences).
   a. Views on BYU Experience Post Civil Rights Seminar.

6. How did the Civil Rights Seminar impact how you viewed your previous BYU expectations, experiences, thoughts, feelings, etc.?

7. How did the Civil Rights Seminar impact the rest of your time at BYU?
   a. BYU’s Ability to Provide Wellbeing and Fulfill Needs.

8. How would you describe your own personal sense of well-being while at BYU, both before and after the Civil Rights Seminar?

9. The previous question talks about how we feel emotionally, spiritually, physically, etc. We often don't think about what we need from a cultural environment or community, especially as it relates to college, because we think that what we need is an education, so we may not think of the social, emotional, or physical needs coming to college. How would you describe what you needed from your BYU experience
before the Civil Right Seminar? How, if at all, did what you need from your BYU experience change after the Civil Rights Seminar?

10. How would you describe BYU's ability to meet those needs before and after the Civil Rights Seminar?

11. How would you describe the long-term impact of the Civil Rights Seminar on you?

The semi-structured nature of the interview lent to a narrative inquiry, where substantive reflections took place that expanded beyond the CRE and into broader ruminations on the impact of their PR-PWI attendance. Narrative inquiry has three primary foci: temporality (referring to relationships with time, i.e. reflections on past, present, and future), sociality (referring to relationships with internal processes, outward actions, and external events), and place (referring to the relationships with the physical space, i.e. where events occurred; Clandinin & Caine, 2008).

The profound and complex nature of individuals’ experiences confirmed the practicality of phenomenological research as it was apparent very quickly that participants’ answers would not satisfy as a case study because their answers would extend far beyond the limitations of the CRE class or CRE experience and would delve into the childhood, adolescent, and adult experiences. Furthermore, trying to channel their experiences into analyzing them through a specific theoretical framework felt like it would be a missed opportunity to explore the depth and breadth of how these shared realities of those attending both the PR-PWI and the CRE had highlighted the racial realities of their lived experiences.

The approach to analysis in this study was interpretive/constructivist. This paradigm relies on the assumption that reality is a social construct and that there really is “no single, observable reality” rather there are many (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 9). Because it is a
construct, people can only know what they experience personally. Twelve to 14 students from the same PR-PWI experienced the same planned CRE experience each year, and so as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) point out, “the experience a person had include[d] the way in which the experience [was] interpreted” (p. 9). The purpose of this study was to place equal value to each research participants individual experience and strive to build an understanding of students’ lived experience that gives the reader a credible glimpse into a reality without trying to objectify the result as an immutable, consummate experience for all research participants who participate.

Once the interviews were completed, the open, axial, and selective coding efforts were carried out using a combination of manual and digital resources, as well as a qualitative research methodology. Coding (open and axial) and the constant comparative method were used in an iterative process to analyze the data. Beginning with open coding, “one important point with open coding is that it focuses on [identifying] what is being said rather than what the text means” (Allsop et al., 2022, p. 144). Conventional qualitative content analysis is defined as the process of thoroughly reviewing each interview and highlighting or marking words or phrases that seem to capture important or relevant thoughts or concepts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The first four interviews were randomly selected for all five members of the research team to open code and conduct Numeric Content Analysis (NCA; i.e., a list of all the codes identified in each interview script, as well as the frequencies for each of the same). In “The Quad-Squad Approach to Qualitative Research,” Marks (2015) further describes NCA as “Open Coding Concepts” in each interview. Namely, what relevant words or phrases occurred and how many times they were mentioned in each interview (p. 496). This study implemented the recommended practice of noting the words or phrases on Post-It notes and then counting each occurrence of the same. These first four randomly selected interviews were read by every
member of the team in order to acclimate to the NCA analysis method and norm the work of the team. The team ensured that each subsequent interview was open coded by a two-person coding partnership utilizing NCA. NCA afforded the research team a basis upon which they could compare their results.

In addition to the two-person coding partnerships, the lead researcher open-coded all the interviews in the sample. This approach reinforced the tenets behind narrative inquiry, where “each story told and lived is situated and understood within larger cultural, social, and institutional narratives” and the “emphasis on relational engagement between researcher and research participants” (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 542). The lead researcher not only knew each interviewee but had also been a part of each year’s experience; therefore, by having the primary researcher code all the interviews in addition to the two-person team, it would provide some nuance, clarity, and, most importantly, depth. As research assistants were reading about experiences with a fresh set of eyes, and the lead researcher offered clarifying details or some background to interview details, it added layers of meaning and importance. This arrangement also served as a control of sorts because the lead researcher could offer clarifications and insights when participants discussed certain places they visited, people they met with, classroom topics, particular discussions, or the unique shared experiences of each group from year to year. This arrangement made for a rich and lively analysis. This approach is outlined in Figure B1.
The axial coding analysis occurred during what the research method prescribed as a meeting of sufficient length to account for quantity of data, the size of the research team, etc. Axial coding is the process of delineating between the dominant codes and the less important ones (Boeije, 2009). Therefore, axial coding provides for categories and subcategories and reveals how they are related (Charmaz, 2014). Because both the team and the process were new, the initial meeting was to discuss the four interviews together. This process helped establish some consistency in determining what types of words, phrases, concepts, and ideas would be
important to identify and discuss, as to how it would relate to the larger research picture, the
associated literature, and the emerging categories and subcategories.

This research team had a total of 24 interviews that ranged anywhere from 30 minutes to
2.5 hours. The team met nearly every week for approximately two hours for over three months.
The method stresses the importance of all members of the coding team being present to maintain
consistency. Video conferencing was utilized when a team member could not be there in person.
The following excerpt provides a description of the research team meetings:

During this meeting, each member of the coding team takes turns sharing (a) the names
of the codes they identified, (b) a brief definition/description of the codes, and (c) how
many instances of that code were present in the work they performed. … A scribe records
the codes (and associated counts) each team member shares on a whiteboard or projector.

(Allsop et al., 2022, p. 149)

Figure B2 is a sample of the instrument used to organize this effort.
In addition to the specific codes and their quantity, throughout this process, the research team was engaging with the constant comparative method, which is the process of taking data from codes to categories, to themes. Simply put, in constant comparative method, the researchers compare one segment of data to another, trying to discover patterns, and understand relationships (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This cycle of coding and constant comparative method with 2-3 interviews at a time until all 24 interviews were discussed was the process by which the initial categories emerged. Researchers identified the broader category of racial differences, as they related to their lived experiences, which was coded 315 times and mentioned in some degree by all 24 research participants. Table B2 contains information about the average mentions of the research topic, broken down by race and gender.
Table B2

Average Mentions per Interview of Lived Experiences With Racial Differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black/White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next step of this process is referred to as selective or focused coding (Saldaña, 2016, pp. 239-240). This stage of coding identifies the most significant codes and engages the researchers on the process of deciding which grouping of codes “makes the most analytic sense (Charmaz, 2014, p.138) The analytical method used can be described in a couple of different ways. Marks (2015) refers to it as “caching rocks and gems” (p. 502). He states that NCA is a necessary step towards identifying the core themes of the research, but it is not sufficient. The researchers must return to the interview excerpts that were compiled to create the emergent themes. Marks’ method was substantiated and expanded to incorporate digital qualitative analysis software—specifically NVivo (which was also used for this research)—in a “deep dive method.” Because the interview transcripts were uploaded, highlighted, and coded in NVivo, this allowed for “analyzing coded work more deeply” (Allsop et al., 2022, p. 144), by conducting open-coding on collections of axial codes that had already been highlighted and grouped. The selective coding process in NVivo initially produced eight themes: White spaces, assimilation, harsh realizations, tokenization and black exceptionalism, stereotypes and ignorance, microaggressions, racism, and breaking the racial façade. NVivo allows for the
grouping of excerpts from separate interviews into one “file” where they can all be viewed together. The “deep dive method” suggests consensus around four to six themes (Allsop et al., 2022). They offer two suggestions for how this can be accomplished. The first is the “combination, or the merging of two closely related open codes under a single code” (Allsop et al., 2022, p. 150). Second, they suggest—to quote Marks—elimination, which is removing, “concepts that may seem important at first, but are not supported across interviews” (Marks, 2015, p. 496).

The research team tabulated the number of times each theme was coded, and then calculated the average number of times each theme appeared across the interviews. These averages were then broken into five categories: female and male for gender; and Black, White, and Non-Black or White (Non-BW; is an alternative for “Other,” which did not feel appropriate in this context) for race (see Figure B3). It is important to note that there was a significant amount of overlap between themes, where one word or phrase could be “counted” more than once. For example, when paired with the sentence prior, a word or phrase could align with one theme. The same word or phrase could then be paired with the following sentence and then more firmly align with another theme. This allowed the team to not only see which themes were most dominant within the gender and race categories, but to look a little deeper to see if additional meaning could be extrapolated when placed in context with selected excerpts from other participants. This process was indicative of employing the constant comparative method to continue to extrapolate meaning from each new interview that was coded.
**Figure B3**

*Sub-Themes of Racial Differences*

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As illustrated in the images above, the initial interpretation of the combined data resulted in the grouping of five themes: body image, privilege, race, racism, and Whiteness. Each of the racial differences themes that were excerpts extrapolated from the interview were highlighted, sorted, and tabulated using NVivo, which is a qualitative data management and analysis software. Mentions of racial differences as they related to their lived experiences was coded 315 times and mentioned in some degree by all 24 research participants.

Final results emerged from a process of condensing and consolidating the data and eliminating redundancy, where specific phrases or words can be numerically counted as a part of a sentence or phrase but are part of the same thought or experience being shared. For example, rather than coding each time a participant says “diversity” in a sentence or paragraph, the code captures the entirety of the thought about diversity that is contained in a phrase, sentence, or paragraph.

At the end of the coding (open, axial, and selective) processes and the constant comparative method, researchers produced the following themes related to racial differences that emerged as dominant narrative of their collective lived experiences: White spaces, assimilation, stereotypes, microaggressions, and racism. For the themes of White spaces, stereotypes, and racism to be established as such, each was mentioned by no less than 62.5% of the participants. The themes of assimilation and microaggressions are uniquely racialized experiences and were mentioned by no fewer than 50% of the Black participants.

**Trustworthiness**

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to try and get at the essence of the lived experiences for research participants who had both attended the PR-PWI and participated in the CRE. Efforts to clearly understand the themes came about as the result of an extensive
process of crystallization. First off, 79% of possible research participants from the target population opted in. This meant a wealth of rich data, where the five members of the research team conducted 72 interviews that ranged in length of anywhere from 30 minutes to 2.5 hours. As a measure to establish the validity of the data, upon the completion of each interview, the assigned researcher transcribed the data and had three inputs they could rely on to generate an accurate transcription. Each interview was recorded into a transcription software that was a cellphone application, as well as the video file and transcription generated by a video conferencing software. Once transcribed, the transcript was sent to each interviewee for their review. They could then add, modify, or remove anything that they did not feel was an accurate representation of their thoughts and experiences. The interview data was organized by placing all the individual corresponding interview data files into a shared folder that was password protected to limit access to the research team. Interview data files were transcribed, member-checked, and assigned a number to preserve anonymity in the final study. Anonymized interviews were both stored in a separate file and imported into NVivo.

Not only were the themes derived from a variety of perspectives of those in the final research sample, multiple researchers facilitated a deeper level of crystallization. Each interview was coded by no less than three members of the research team: the lead researcher and two of the four research assistants. Furthermore, the pairing of research assistants regularly rotated from interview to interview in the coding process to limit the impacts of familiarity or stagnation on the coding and discussion process if the same sets of eyes were examining every interview. Finally, the entire research team met together for two hours nearly every week over the course of more than three months to discuss and distill the meanings and interpretations of the coded interview data in order to identify and solidify the themes.
Limitations

There are numerous ways that this research effort could have been constructed. One preferred approach by the lead researcher would have been to conduct semi-structured pre- and post-interviews. The pre-interview would have taken place prior to the first day of instruction, so as to gather perspectives and opinions prior to engaging in any part of the CRE experience. The post-interview would revisit many of the same themes they addressed in their pre-interview, but in the light of how these same themes were impacted by the CRE experience. The benefits of this format would have been to capture the richness of emotions and experiences that were very recent. This was not possible, as the CRE began in 2012 and the research for this study did not commence in earnest until 2020. This has already been identified as an important step in future program evaluation and possible research and has already been initiated. Although there are some perceived limitations and missed opportunities with not having engaged in a pre-/post-longitudinal study, there are also some benefits. This study was able to benefit from months and years of reflection, life experiences, and the possibility of being able to process the experience they had more fully. The ideal construction would have been to have pre- and post-interviews, and then to have another follow up interview one, three, or five years out in order to capture both the short-term and longitudinal perspective.

The research was phenomenological, but different approaches could have been—or in the future could be—taken to examine different aspects of the student, CRE, or campus experience. For example, an ethnography could embed a researcher to explore the society and culture that is formed and exists within the CRE course, on the actual CRE excursion, or within the immediate and/or larger community of research participants who have been a part of a CRE experience. Grounded theory research could be conducted through structured interviews and/or a mixed
methodological approach to see if data collected from students’ CRE experiences can build on existing theory, such as racial battle fatigue or wellness as fairness. This research focused on students’ lived experiences, which is not like a case study that examines a “unit around which there are boundaries” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 38). To better understand the CRE program or community, a case study on a particular CRE group or on the CRE program would be a viable research option. For this purpose, a phenomenological approach was deemed best to facilitate a way that research participants’ collective experiences—not a program, theory, or culture—could be effectively communicated.
References


[https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n275](https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n275)


https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452218403


https://doi.org/10.5172/conu.2009.34.1.002


APPENDIX C

Institutional Review Board Documentation

Memorandum

To: Donny Baum

Department: BYU - EDUC - Educational Leadership & Foundations

From: Sandee Aina, MPA, HRPP Associate Director Wayne Larsen, MAcc, IRB Administrator

Date: June 29, 2021

IRB#: IRB2020-355

Title: Does anecdote align with reality? A phenomenological exploration of students’ experiences with the BYU Family, Home, and Social Sciences African American Civil Rights Seminar

Brigham Young University’s IRB has reviewed the amendment submitted to change the sample size to 24. The IRB determined that the amendment does not increase risks to the research subject and the aims of the study remain as originally approved. The amendment has been approved. The revised consent statement and recruiting script have been approved and stamped for your files.
All conditions for the continued approval period remain in effect. Any modifications to
the approved protocol must be submitted, reviewed, and approved by the IRB before
modifications are incorporated in the study.
Memorandum

To: Donny Baum

Department: BYU - EDUC - Educational Leadership & Foundations

From: Sandee Aina, MPA, HRPP Manager Wayne Larsen, MAcc, IRB Administrator
Bob Ridge, PhD, IRB Chair

Date: September 11, 2020

IRB#: IRB2020-355

Title: Does anecdote align with reality? A phenomenological exploration of students' experiences with the BYU Family, Home, and Social Sciences African American Civil Rights Seminar

Brigham Young University’s IRB has approved the research study referenced in the subject heading as expedited level, categories 6 and 7.

The approval period is from 09/11/2020 to 09/10/2021. Please reference your assigned IRB identification number in any correspondence with the IRB. Continued approval is conditional upon your compliance with the following requirements:

1. A copy of the approved informed consent statement and associated recruiting documents (if applicable) can be accessed in iRIS. No other consent statement should be used. Each research subject must be provided with a copy or a way to access the consent statement.
2. Any modifications to the approved protocol must be submitted, reviewed, and approved by the IRB before modifications are incorporated in the study.

3. All recruiting tools must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to use.

4. In addition, serious adverse events must be reported to the IRB immediately, with a written report by the PI within 24 hours of the PI's becoming aware of the event. Serious adverse events are (1) death of a research participant; or (2) serious injury to a research participant.

5. All other non-serious unanticipated problems should be reported to the IRB within 2 weeks of the first awareness of the problem by the PI. Prompt reporting is important, as unanticipated problems often require some modification of study procedures, protocols, and/or informed consent processes. Such modifications require the review and approval of the IRB.

6. A few months before the expiration date, you will receive a prompt from iRIS to renew this protocol. There will be two reminders. Please complete the form in a timely manner to ensure that there is no lapse in the study approval. Please refer to the IRB website for more information.

7. Instructions to access approved documents, submit modifications, report complaints and adverse events can be found on the IRB website under iRIS guidance:

My name is __________. I am a research assistant for Anthony Bates, a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership and Foundations program at BYU. Thank you for your time and willingness to share your CRS experiences with me.

I plan to record this interview, and I will take notes to help me better remember and reflect on our discussion. I will use this interview information to try and better understand the individual and collective experiences of students who participated in CRS.

Your identity and answers will be kept confidential and will not be used in any other way. You are allowed to decline to answer any questions I ask, and you may end the interview whenever you wish.

Do you have any questions or concerns? If at any future point you have any questions or concerns, please contact the supervising professor, Dr. Donny Baum, at dbaum@byu.edu or 801-422-1709.

**Research information:**

- For the purpose of the research transcript, please state your name?

- For the purpose of the research, please state your gender?
Formative Experiences:

- Tell me about your cultural, ethnic, and racial identity?
  - These definitions do not have to be given formally during the interview. Nor should the definitions be prescribed for the research participants. This is purely a reference, should the participant ask for clarification.

- Culture:
  - Culture- form, content, and effects of the symbolic aspect of social life. (Bryan, S. 2011)
  - In my terms, how factors external to your familial/social environment, as well as the internal conditions of your familial/social upbringing combine to inform collective thoughts, opinions, and perspectives, and ways of life for a group of people.

- Ethnicity:
  - Ethnicity- a political construct that is generally used to distinguish between groups with a salient array of culturally acquired characteristics (language, religion, or nationality). (Bryan, S. 2011)
  - In my terms, a socially constructed, external definition for a group of people that can be defined by any combination of their language, religion, geographical region, or nationality.

- Race:
  - Race- a political construct generally referred to as, genetically transmitted characteristics popularly associated with different human groups (skin color, facial features, hair texture, body type, and so forth) (Bryan, S. 2011)
• In my terms, a social construct that can be an individual or external definition based on shared physical and/or genetically transmitted traits and characteristics

● During the years growing up:

○ Talk to me about how race impacted your perspective and possibly the perspectives of those around you, perhaps:

● How you saw others

● How others saw you

● How you saw yourself

● What period of time or age range prior to coming to BYU do you feel had the most profound and lasting impact on your personal development?

○ What sticks out to you about that time period?

○ Where were you living?
BYU Experience Prior to Civil Rights Seminar

-Upon being accepted, what expectations did you have for BYU going into it?

-Tell me about your BYU experience prior to the Civil Rights Seminar? (There is nothing specific I am looking for; whatever is most dominant or prevalent in your mind: Highs/lows, successes/challenges, thoughts, feelings, experiences, etc.)

Civil Rights Seminar Experience

-Tell me about your Civil Rights Seminar experience, anything from the first application interview to the conclusion of the trip? (There is nothing specific I am looking for; whatever is most dominant or prevalent in your mind: Highs/lows, successes/challenges, thoughts, feelings, experiences)

Views on BYU Experience Post Civil Rights Seminar

-How did the Civil Rights Seminar impact how you viewed your previous BYU expectations, experiences, thoughts, feelings, etc.?

-How did the Civil Rights Seminar impact the rest of your time at BYU?

BYU’s Ability to Provide Wellbeing and Fulfill Needs
-How would you describe your own personal sense of well-being while at BYU, both before and after the Civil Rights Seminar?

-The previous question talks about how we feel emotionally, spiritually, physically, etc. We often don't think about what we need from a cultural environment or community, especially as it relates to college, because we think that what we need is an education, so we may not think of the social, emotional, or physical needs coming to college. How would you describe what you needed from your BYU experience before the Civil Right Seminar? How, if at all, did what you need from your BYU experience change after the Civil Rights Seminar?

-How would you describe BYU's ability to meet those needs before and after the Civil Rights Seminar?

-How would you describe the long term impact of the Civil Rights Seminar on you?