

Developing a BIPOC-Centered Equity Performance Coalition at an Arts College: An  
Autoethnography

by

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## ABSTRACT

Predominantly White arts colleges in the United States, like many other institutions around the country, need equitable leadership frameworks that center Black and Brown students. This project is a response to that demand. The purpose of this dissertation is to develop a BIPOC equity coalition in an Arts college at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). The choice to utilize an autoethnographic research design was based on the researcher's lifelong work in social justice and equity. Additionally, the choice to utilize Black-centered storytelling was due to the researcher's identity as a Black male who has a company devoted to social justice activism. The research questions for this dissertation are: 1) How does one develop a diverse equity coalition that is BIPOC-centered within a Predominantly White arts college? and 2) What leadership roles must be in place in order to develop a diverse equity coalition that is BIPOC-centered, within a Predominantly White arts college?

The data sources for this dissertation are meeting notes, Facebook call for action, letter of demand, and reflective journal process. The data from this year-long experience was analyzed to describe the steps needed to develop a BIPOC equity coalition. The steps included a call to action on social media, listening sessions, formation of the coalition, development of guiding principles, and action steps taken throughout the academic year. Additionally, data revealed that roles such as having a seat at the table with administrators, and having the power of a job and a title within the arts school influenced the success of the coalition's actions throughout the academic year. The first three

chapters of the dissertation present the theoretical frameworks supporting the equity coalition. Chapter 4 and 5 presents findings and answers to research question 1 and 2.

## DEDICATION

To the most beautiful, loving, and supportive person I know, my wife, Tiffani McGilvery; thank you a million times over. Without you by my side encouraging me and giving me space to write day and night, I could not have completed this study. I am here because of your support and encouragement pushing me to keep on going. For that, I am most appreciative and I love you dearly.

To my children, Améiah and Faraji, whom I love so much; I dedicate this to you. May you know that I am always thinking about ways to protect you both. In the future, I hope that you will be able to look back on this study and see just how much you are always on my mind, you two motivate me immeasurably. I love you with an everlasting love.

To my mother, Terry McGilvery, who taught me how to cherish and maintain, against all evidence: faith, hope, and love. If I had ten thousand tongues I still would not be able to thank you enough. You demonstrated to us, your children, what God can and will do to us, through us, and for us if we only believe. Love you dearly.

The Rev. Dr. Warren H. Stewart Sr., thank you for being committed to the prophetic preaching ministry of Jesus and justice. Thank you for being a pastor with a heart for those who are suffering. When I met you in the fall of 2016, I was a sufferer and I did not know if I would continue on believing in the power of the church. Through your sermons, the love you've shown to my family and I, and through your commitment to truth-telling, my spirit was reignited and my faith in God and the church grew much firmer than it was before.

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To the employees of the arts colleges in the Southwest, thank you for giving me a chance to learn and lead. Thank you for allowing space for me to grow and subsequently, room for error. Thank you for trusting me and providing me with opportunities to put to practice theories of equity and inclusion.

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## **CHAPTER 1: STORY OF MY LIFE**

Dear, Améiah and Faraji:

I read an article recently on Sportingnews.com that made me think of my deep and abiding love for you and the responsibility your mother and I have, as your parents, to make sure you are safe. The article was about a father who, with tears falling from his eyes, expressed the fear and anger that came over him after hearing that his son had been called the N-word by a White woman one night near the campus of the college his son was attending as a student athlete. The father being interviewed happened to former NFL player, Ryan Clark, and the incident that caused him so much fear was the safety of his son, Jordan Clark.

Jordan, accompanied by two of his Arizona State University football teammates, who are also Black men, decided to go to Whataburger near the college campus one night to get something to eat. The three did not have a car and only the drive-through was open so as cars entered the drive-through the three students waved the cars down and asked the customers to place an order for them and they would pay for their own food. When they asked a White woman, she declined to help them and when she got to the window to pay for her food, she complained that the three students were harassing her. The manager apologized to the woman and gave her the food she had ordered free of charge. The lady then turned to the three college students and said, “thank you for the free food N—” and again, as she drove away, she shouted “Bye N—” (Haislop 2020). Children, as I clicked on the video at the end of the article, I could see the pain and fear the father was feeling

written very clearly across his face. While describing his emotions, Ryan Clark noted that the fear and anger he felt after learning about what happened to his son, Jordan, was because he had worked so hard to give his son the best life that he could and yet nothing could protect Jordan from experiencing racism. Ryan Clark described how he had raised Jordan with all the privileges money and fame could provide. Mr. Clark pointed to the fact that Jordan, “grew up in very affluent areas; he went to schools that were predominantly White because those were the schools that [he] felt could give [his son] the best opportunities to succeed . . .” Yet, despite all that he had done for his son, Mr. Clark found himself angry because he felt that he did not do enough to protect his son, or educate him on the need to protect his body at all cost. Mr. Clark was in part, angry at himself, feeling that despite all of the ways he provided for his son and protected him, it was not enough. In the Twitter video, which is attached to the article, with tears in his eyes and tremble in his voice, Mr. Clark states “I felt that I didn’t prepare [Jordan] for this situation enough; to know that as a Black man you can’t walk up to cars and you can’t wave down cars with White people in it because your life is not of value to all of them . . .” (GetUpESPN 6/19/2020, 3:11-3:23). Mr. Clark displays so much honesty in that moment as he discussed his emotions that one would have to try hard to force themselves into believing that racism does not exist in the US and that the consequences of that reality does not live in the psyche, the bones, and marrow of Black and Brown people, as well as White people across the nation. We are all marred by racism in some way in this nation but White people are the beneficiaries of it.

What resonates with me the most from that interview is Ryan Clark's words, "I felt that I didn't prepare [Jordan] for this situation enough." Those words sound awfully familiar to me because I have heard my mother utter the same sentiments each time I experienced racism. I remember the first time I heard my mother's voice tremble when I told her that my fifth grade Social Studies teacher, a White woman, told our class of all Black students that "Blacks need to go back to Africa" (Miller 1995). I remember the anger in her voice as she drove me back to the school to talk to the Principal about the situation and realizing the local news stations had already beat her to the punch; news cameras were all over the school campus reporting the story.

I remember hearing that same tremble again in my mother's voice the first time I called to tell her that I was arrested because the officer said that "I turned funny." I was a nineteen-year-old college student at that time and after that experience my mother begged me to attend a college closer to home—even though the university I was attending was only an hour away from her. Children, I now understand that what your grandmother was really pleading had less to do with the number of miles that separated us, but rather, it was her way of expressing her fear that I was too far outside of her grip of protection; my mother was afraid that she had not prepared me enough for moments of racism that come at the hands of law enforcement. She feared not knowing if I knew how to handle encounters with police in such a way that I would remain alive; her worry was that I would not know how to navigate the system of White supremacy well enough to ensure my survival. Needless to say, the same concerns my mother had are also the same sentiments many other Black and Brown parents, past and present, express concerning

their children as well. Just like Mr. Clark, no matter how much we do, when our children find themselves the target of racism, as parents our worry is that we have not prepared them enough. The consensus of the Black experience asks me to consider how I will prepare my own children for the world beyond my grip. What can I do or say to prepare each of you—not merely for the vicissitudes of life common to all humans, but the terrifying inequities caused by anti-blackness, racism, and the centuries-old systems of White supremacy? Children, your mother and I will do all we can to teach you how to live your best life despite all the odds against you. But in addition to that, I leave you with this dissertation, in the form of a letter, to help you understand how I have approached these concerns and worked to build a better future for you; that way, if your memories fade and your heart grows weary you have something to turn to so that you may be revived.

In broader terms, my dissertation uses justice as a means to combat systems of White supremacy. I do this by calling on leaders to imagine the possibilities of an equity leadership model that employs the principles of Moral Fusion Coalition—which is a performative arm of Liberation Theology—in order to center Black and Brown communities. More specifically, by exploring the ways in which equity currently is and can be performed, I point to the need for a radical imagining that can reorient Predominantly White Institutions to center the most impacted populations. My primary research questions are:

- 1) How does one develop a diverse equity coalition that is BIPOC-centered within a Predominantly White arts college?

- 2) What leadership roles must be in place in order to develop a diverse equity coalition that is BIPOC-centered, within a Predominantly White arts college?

Améiah and Faraji, I write this letter to you in the midst of actualizing a Third Reconstruction. The Third Reconstruction is a phrase used by the Reverend Dr. William J. Barber II (whom I will say more about in the next chapter) to describe an era where justice, equality, and fairness are the lived-experiences of all people no matter skin color or status; an era where access is granted to all and no one is held back from achieving their aspirations based on hate, discrimination, or racism. When a growing number of diverse coalitions, made up of people from various backgrounds (racial and economic), come together in an intersectional movement on behalf of the dispossessed, they signal to us that a Reconstruction is underway. These broad and diverse moral movements are what the Rev. Barber refer to as Moral Fusion Coalitions.

Here, in the twenty-first century, a worldwide surge of moral fusion coalitions movements aimed at amplifying the voices and demands of disadvantaged people are taking place. The Rev. William Barber reminds us that “young Blacks, Whites, and Latinos are coming together all over this country. That’s a sign of the Third Reconstruction. You have Moral Mondays, Black Lives Matter, and the environmental movement: these are signs that we are seeing a Third Reconstruction” (Barber 2016). To add to the list of movements the Rev. Dr. Barber lists, our nation is also seeing protests on behalf of Black students on college campuses, and targeted hiring of Black and Brown employees in various fields of employment; all of which evidences a Third Reconstruction.

Children, I know you are asking yourselves the question: If we are in the midst of a Third Reconstruction, when were the first two Reconstructions and what role did moral fusion coalitions play in each of them? This is why the rev. Barber informs us of the importance of knowing history as moral leaders working to usher in the Third Reconstruction. In a sermon entitled “Our Third Reconstruction” the Rev. Barber stated:

We are in the midst of a Third Reconstruction in US America and if we fully grasp the power of the Moral Fusion intersectional movement building that produced the first two Reconstructions, we can bring this reconstruction into full existence. And, if we understand the deconstructive tactics that always begin when there is a move to a reawakening or a reconstruction, or a revival to help this nation move a little bit closer to being ‘a more perfect union’, we cannot be so much in despair but we can understand what we can do now (Barber 2016, 0.10-1:00).

Becoming a student on the history of the formation and successes of various moral fusion coalition movements and having knowledge of the revolts that brought an end to each Reconstruction, provided me with insights necessary in my own justice-centered movements as a student in an arts college in the Southwest. Moreover, by dividing our nation’s history into three Reconstructions the Rev. Barber demonstrates how the formation of diverse coalitions have led to equitable changes on a national level on behalf of those considered to be the least.

For example, the First Reconstruction took place in the shadows of slavery and the wreckage of the Civil War (1865-1877). During this period of history, using moral fusion as a framework, Black and White farmers joined hands in the South and within four years they: created Black and White coalitions and together they rewrote state constitutions, guaranteed public education. They also were able to pass the 13th

Amendment ending slavery and 14th Amendment which guarantees “equal protection under the law.” These coalitions also built the first public schools and made education a public right (Barber 2016).

After four years of progress, deconstruction began. Opposers formed the Redemption Movement to end the progress the coalitions had made. “Many former Confederates saw black citizenship and leadership working with white leadership as inherently illegitimate” (Barber 2016). They revolted against public schools as they didn’t want black and white children to be educated at the same level. The Ku Klux Klan was formed as a sign of White resistance. Fourteen years later, the progress of the moral fusion coalition had completely come undone.

Then there was the Second Reconstruction which occurred during the American Civil Rights Movement between 1954-1980. Some of the accomplishments of moral fusion led movements in that period include: In 1954, Thurgood Marshall, accompanied by Jewish, White, and Black lawyers... “The only way you can agree with this is if you agree that we must keep the former slave as close to slavery as possible.” All nine Justices votes to end Plessy v Ferguson. Rosa Parks spends time training at the Highlander Folk School, a coalition of White and Blacks learning about Civil Disobedience. Her experience at that school is what empowered Rosa Parks to take a seat on the bus. K-12 schools up to universities across the South begin force integration as a result of the formation of Black and White coalitions.

The Second Reconstruction ended due to the formation of a movement called the Southern Strategy. The Dixiecrats, extremist, revolted against these coalitions by turning



to violence and terror. During this deconstruction period White supremacists: killed Martin Luther King Jr., James Reeb, Medgar Evers, Viola Liuzzo, and many others Civil Rights activists. The rev. William Barber states that the “extremists then decided to establish their own tactic, drawing from the Redemption Movement of the First Reconstruction, to form the Southern Strategy and their mantra was “We must take back America” (Barber 2016). The goal of the Dixiecrats was to “reframe moral issues and to remove it from the public discourse. The progress that were once popularized became racialized so that Whites begin seeing Blacks as the “Other” and undeserving people.

Now, returning to where I began. Children, I explained each Reconstruction period to you so that you would know what I mean when I say I write to you in the midst of the Third Reconstruction. I write to you to diversify my ways of informing and preparing you for the harsh realities of the world you have entered and to also make you aware of the hope and light that exists no matter how dark things may look.

Améiah and Faraji, I write this dissertation to explore how I used Liberation Theology as a leadership framework to help me form and lead a moral fusion coalition at a PWI arts college. Through this radical imagining of establishing coalitions, I explore how PWIs can implement coalitions between students and leaders for the purpose of creating a culture of equity for all, but especially for Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC). For that reason, it would be impossible for me to write about theology, equity, leadership, morality, and the ways I operate in the world without acknowledging the fact that I am a Black man, a husband, and the father of two beautiful Black children of whom Tiffani, my wife and your mother, and I are raising here in the United States of America.

What that means is this: how I behave when no one is looking demonstrates my true philosophy of equity, morality, justice, and the attainment of the Beloved Community more than if I were to solely theorize about possible equity frameworks that I am unwilling to exercise in practical ways. The work of equity requires the combination of both theory and practice. When I speak of equity, I do not mean equality, which is the act of treating everyone the same; equality still leaves those on the bottom with less and those at the top with even more. By “equity” I mean the measurement of access and resources given to groups who have been intentionally marginalized and oppressed by those of the dominant culture. Let me remind you that those of us who are marginalized and oppressed do not need assistance based on a lie that says we are inferior—we are not inferior, nor are we inadequate. Rather, we have not been allotted the same resources nor have we been provided the same opportunities as others due to something called “White supremacy.” By “White supremacy,” I use the understanding developed by legal scholar, Frances Lee Ansley, who described the intricacies of this complex system in her 1989 *Cornell Law Review* article entitled, “Stirring the Ashes: Race, Class and the Future of Civil Rights Scholarship.” In it, Ansley defines “White supremacy” as:

a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (Ansley, 1989, 1024)

To say it another way, in the US, the systems of White supremacy left Black people in centuries worth of deficit despite the fact that our bodies and labor made US America the richest, most powerful nation in the world. As a consequence of that reality, “equity” then

is not simply about giving more resources to people of color, it requires acknowledging the fact that institutional structures sit on uneven foundations whereby those lower in the hierarchy are disproportionately people of color. Of course, that is not to say that people of color absolutely cannot make our way to the top level. There have always been a few people in every generation to succeed despite the inequities they face; but those people are the exception—not because they had something no one else had, but because the foundation strategically restricts people of color from attaining their aspirations. How people define “equity” matters because the logic of White supremacy assumes that people of color are always begging for handouts. Many have said that we are lazy and we always want something handed to us instead of working for it ourselves. They say these things, in part, because their definition is rooted in a White supremacy lens. Take, for example, the popular image of equity below in Figure 1:

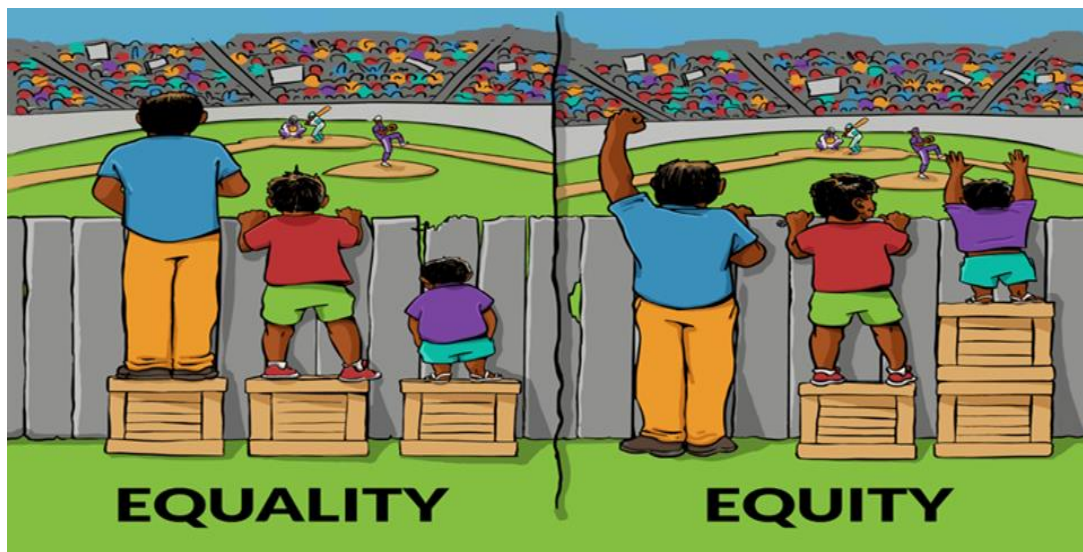


Figure 1. Image of Equality vs Equity.

Although the image appears a wonderful way of understanding equity compared to equality, the image centers White supremacy as it “blames” individuals for their inability to see over the fence in one image (equity), and the other image allows those on top to see even more as more resources are equally distributed (equality). Again, blame should not be placed on the individuals. Instead, equity lies in acknowledging the foundation is strategically designed unevenly and then providing resources to level the foundation for everyone (EquiTEA 2018) or, simply remove the fence entirely.

The second reason I write this dissertation for you is simply because I love you with all my heart and as expressed in the start of this letter, one of the roles of a loving parent is to do the best they can to protect and prepare their children. As such, I hope the information in this dissertation serves as a mechanism of education and protection for the both of you. More specifically, I hope that by describing the ways in which I navigate the world and the academy in a Black body, and as one who has been a Christian minister throughout my every step of matriculation in higher education—from my years as an undergraduate, to my Master’s degree, and PhD—you will know that you have a guide to turn to in order that you may be able to protect yourselves against the anti-Black snares embedded within the fabric of our nation—including institutions of higher education. May you enter spaces keenly aware of the landmines that exist beneath your feet simply because you were born Black in US America. Now, children, I hate to use such a destructive word usually attributed to war, but “landmine” is the word that best describes a system so strategically and intentionally set up to destroy Black people in this nation, that is exactly the function of racism. As you read through this dissertation keep in mind

that when I speak of racism I am doing so in the same way that Dr. Ibram X. Kendi does in his book, *How to Be an Antiracist* (2019). Here, Dr. Kendi defines racism as a “marriage between racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequalities” (Kendi 2019, 17-18). Racists policies and racist ideas are the perfect ingredients for the total destruction of a Black life: So, a war analogy is most appropriate as I find it the most accurate way to explain the reality of living Black in the United States. Surviving and thriving in this system takes engaging in constant battle—and the best way to do that is to learn how to fight. To put it the way our ancestors sang it during the US American Civil Rights movement:

We are soldiers in the army  
We have to fight or we have to die  
We have to hold up the bloodstained battle  
We got to hold it up until we die  
(themarch.uoregon.edu)

The fight that we as Black people are engaged in the US is a lifetime of battle and to traverse through successfully requires strategy, knowledge, and skills.

### **Nothing New Under the Sun: Just Look at History**

Before I discuss history, I will tell you ahead of time that in this work you should not expect me to prove that racism and White supremacy exist. Nor should you expect me to explain or break down why I feel that an experience I had was a racist encounter because, as you know or will learn, no explanation offered will ever go uncontested by those who fail and/or refuse to understand the racist interlocking of systems and structures. If you try to prove to others that racism exists then it will exhaust you from fighting the good fight to combat its existence; and I will tell you now that is the goal of

White supremacy, to tire you out and keep you distracted with trying to gather evidence to prove the existence of racism. To put it the way Toni Morrison did in her 1993 Nobel Prize lecture, “nothing needs to be exposed since it is already barefaced.” (Yoo January, 27:49-27:53). After centuries of evidence, research, and testimonies not only is racism a reality, its operations are audaciously public-facing; it need not be proven.

You will find that I use examples of racist acts, policies, and behaviors throughout this work, even using my own experiences, but I am not attempting to prove that racism exists. Instead, I use each situation as pictures on a canvas whereby I paint clear and honest images of the various attacks on Black people so that you may know what they look like and have the tools to morally confront inequitable systems (or at least understand the tools that I believe can work). That said, let me return to the point I was making regarding the importance of knowing the historical working of racism in the past in order to see its existence in the present. Not only is racism observed by the blatant fact of centuries of chattel slavery followed by another century of Jim Crow segregation and humiliation, but also in the fact that, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr said, White America made “the Negroes color a stigma” (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1967)—and this is still the case today. Black stigmatization can be seen today by the fact that we are still fighting the same old fight as our ancestors: the fight for our humanity. The stigmatization of Blackness is apparent when you witness the national and international response to the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). The Black Lives Matter movement “is a global organization in the US, United Kingdom and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate White supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence

inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes” (blacklivesmatter.com). Take the current climate in the United Kingdom, for instance. As of August 2020, the All Black Lives-UK organization had been protesting for months and yet, despite their consistency and efforts, organizers lament is still “we’re not being heard” (Baggs 2020) as they have not seen any change in policies from those in governmental positions concerning the inequities facing Black citizens there. Likewise, in the US, the rallying cry “Black Lives Matter” causes many to reject the aims of the organization. Many White US Americans counter the BLM slogan with their own declaration that “All Lives Matter.” Their statement suggests that BLM divides the nation based on race, a divide they feel does not truly exist. The All Lives Matter claim, however, fails to see that their counter-factual is a cruel and foolish statement that not only ignores the historical and current ways in which the US treats its Black population but “All Lives Matter” also denies the lived experiences of Black humans in favor of White ways of knowing. What many people seem to miss is that another reason the BLM declaration is rejected is because, based on what we see, hear, and are taught, the statement begins with one of the most degrading and derogatory terms: Black.

Historically, the word Black was not ascribed to anything beautiful or of value, instead, it meant the opposite. This is still the case today in many ways. For example, some years ago I was teaching children at a K-8 charter school in the Southwest. The students were taking the end-of-year test and I was asked to go from class to class and relieve teachers so that they could take a quick break, seeing that testing was an all-day affair. As I made my way through all the K-8 classes I noticed that each student had a

copy of Roget's Thesaurus on their desk to use if they needed. At that moment I remembered a speech I heard by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. quoting Ossie Davis. The speech, in substance, said that the entire English language needs restructuring because Roget's Thesaurus teaches Black children many ways to hate themselves. Looking through the thesaurus that students were using, the synonyms for "Black" were vile and negative in connotation. In it, were synonyms like "threatening," "villainous," "dusky," "dingy," just to name a few. Whereas the synonyms for "White" were positive and admirable such as "good-natured," "pearly," "pure," "spotless," et cetera. Children, this is exactly what it means for Black to be stigmatized and worse, these harmful concepts live in the psyche and soul of US America and other countries as well; they are performances of anti-Blackness. Hence it is why so many people find the BLM declaration so disgusting, the first word of the declaration (Black), many people feel, is not fit to carry the second half of the phrase (Lives Matter). To many, Black tarnishes and therefore must be protested; thus, is the creation of the "All Lives Matter" movement. As one columnist wrote, "White people who say "All Lives Matter" are the equivalent of the Founding Fathers writing "All men are created equal" while owning slaves" (Jackson 2020). In other words, hypocrisy, evidently, is our nation's love language and acts of racism is what that love looks like in action.



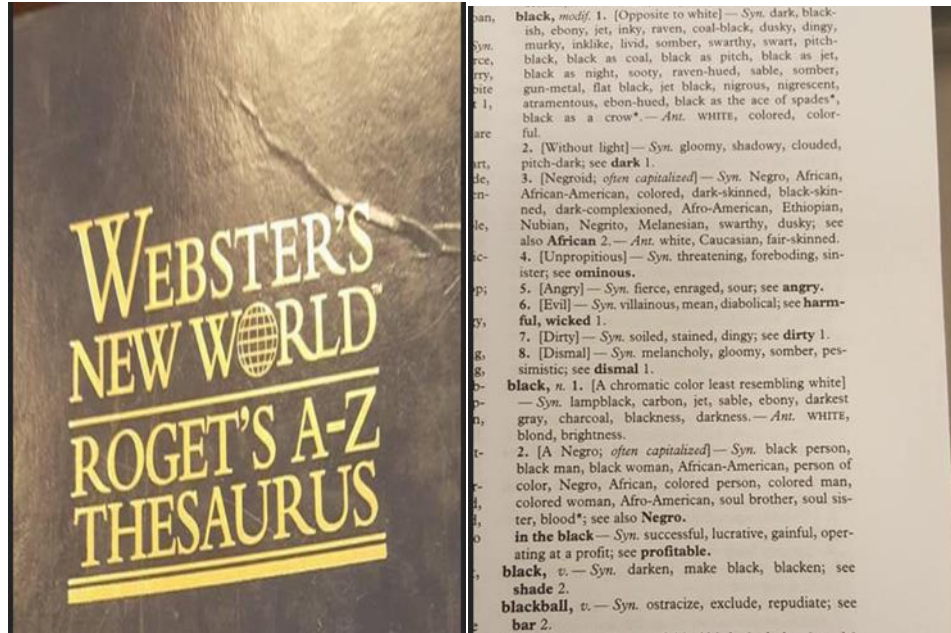


Figure 2. Roget's Thesaurus

I said all of that to demonstrate a basic fact, the injustices we as a people face today root in the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and the fact that Black has been stigmatized. The reality of this statement means that there are obstacles placed on our path that we did not bring upon ourselves, but rather we inherited. There is no gainsaying the fact that Black people in the United States face hardships simply because we were born Black in a nation whose policies and laws, for centuries, intentionally excluded Black people from “life, liberty” and every opportunity to accumulate wealth through employment or property. The point that I am making is that the landmines under your feet are there by design and those landmines exist to erase evidence of your existence and to dehumanize you and your heritage. Children, never think that you are alone in the ways you suffer, the goal of erasure did not begin with you nor will it end with you. I want you to know that the landmines I speak of are also under my feet, your mother’s feet, your

grandparents' feet and the feet of every other Black person in US America. Those landmines were also under the feet of your ancestors, many of whose names we will never know because to a larger extent those landmines erased their existence; those landmines stripped us from knowing their names and genetically speaking, it destroyed us from knowing more about ourselves because we do not have the privilege of knowing all of the people who were stolen from the continent of Africa. Despite all of the torment and chaos, however, our people, our ancestors, found a way to navigate through an evil and brutal society. Our ancestors charted a path that could be used as a guide for every Black American that came behind them. The path that they charted centuries ago is the path I follow and a path that I hope you will follow as well.

Now children, I can imagine that after hearing so much about how systems work against you and how landmines exist under your feet, you may feel discouraged and angry. The goal of this work, however, is not to feed you with reasons to walk in defeat or despair but rather, just like our ancestors, I want to share with you the good news about how to successfully navigate through life while Black. This dissertation, then, is about a theory and a testimonial regarding the ways in which I, drawing on the wisdom of our ancestors all the way up to my mother and grandmother, first learned to deactivate the landmines under my feet as I navigate through life. Children, here is the good news I want you to know: the landmines that are under your feet can be deactivated so that you are not forced to journey through life paralyzed by fear. Let me be clear about what I am saying here. The avoidance of landmines is only a temporary fix, it can only help you to a small extent. Avoiding the landmines may get you a job, but when the overt attacks of

racism happen or the microaggressions begin, avoidance cannot provide you with peace of mind. I learned that avoidance could get me into a theatre program in college but it could not keep me when I was made to feel like everything about my existence was problematic. Deactivation, however, requires an awareness of the danger that is always imminent and yet helps us remain conscious and confident about the moves we make to survive and thrive. Deactivation is not a one-time event, instead, you will have to deactivate the landmines every day you wake up and every time you enter a new space. Deactivation, not avoidance, builds confidence. Even more is the fact that deactivation does not lie in the skills of the hand, but of the spirit. Deactivating landmines is a spiritual matter that brings about peace and confidence in the midst of racist terrorist attacks aimed against the Black mind and body.

### **Early Understanding of Liberation Theology through the Black Church**

Now that I have mentioned spirituality being essential in deactivating landmines, the primary methods of deactivation that help me, and helped our ancestors, traverse through society are rooted in Liberation Theology. Academically speaking, Liberation Theology, as articulated through leadership of the Peruvian Priest, Gustavo Gutiérrez, is a term used to describe “break[ing] from an elitist notion of the Church and the return of control to the people. [It involves] involving the poor in their own liberation and offering Christianity as a tool towards a more perfect society...” (Singer 2020, n.d.). In order to understand how deeply this theology was embedded into my every movement as a youth, I need to share with you the foundation of my youth growing up in the Black church. I must be honest with you, children, like many others who grew up in the Black church,

my understanding of Liberation Theology did not begin in a scholarly fashion like the definition I just shared. Nor was I introduced to Liberation Theology through the scholarship of the theologian, Dr. James Hal Cone. Dr. Cone's theology says that God is Black and He thusly identifies with our struggles. In Dr. Cone's words, "the blackness of God means that God has made the oppressed condition God's own condition" (Cone 1986). I will come back to Dr. Cone theology in the next chapter. Instead, as with Dr. Cone who shut himself in the office of his brother's church in order to write his book about Black Liberation Theology (Smith 2018), my holistic experiences within the Black Church helped me to understand Liberation Theology in a very practical and basic way.

In the Black church, as youth we were taught to understand God as the liberator of His people. To that end, I use the term Liberation Theology to refer to the people of the Christian faith who believe in standing for the poor and oppressed. From my experiences and observations, we in the Black church took our cue from Jesus, who states in Luke 4:18<sup>1</sup>, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free." Without the help of scholars, we knew that at a fundamental level, God sets people free. From food pantries and youth explosions to feeding the hungry and giving away school supplies, everything done in the church operated with the understanding that all of our activities were tied to the liberation of others. This was not only understood based on what the pastor preached but our own

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<sup>1</sup> I will be using the online 2011 New International Version for each scripture I use throughout the dissertation.

personal study of the Bible as well. Messages of liberation were also embedded in the songs our choir sang. One example of this is the Gospel songs written by Hezekiah Walker entitled “I Need You to Survive” (2002). Some of the lyrics of the song are:

I pray for you, you pray for me. I love you, I need you to survive. I won't harm you with words from my mouth. I love you, I need you to survive. It is his will, that every need be supplied. You are important to me, I need you to survive.  
(Family Affair II 2002)

These lyrics, like many other gospel songs, make the case that God is about supplying the needs of all His creation so that everyone can survive. To state it in scriptural terms, the Apostle Paul said “And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory” (Philippians 4:19). This text explains my experiences within the Black church of my youth; we were always looking for ways to help meet the needs of others even if we were not always able to help to the extent that was needed to bring about full security.

What I am saying is that ultimately it was in the Black church that I learned to apply a Bible-based lens on every aspect of life so that my actions would center the liberation of myself and others. It was in the Black church that I learned how to organize events and social movements. As a youth growing up in a Black Baptist church, I was taught that the most important style of leadership to embody is that of a servant leader, or one who leads by being the first to partake in the work he/she asks of others. This is evidenced in Jesus’ life where he washed the feet of his disciples first, and then asked them to do the same to one another. John chapter 13 verses 13-15 reads, “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you

an example that you should do as I have done for you.” In the Black church, I came to understand that performance is empty rhetoric without deliverables, righteous deliverables are measured by their potential to bring about a more just and equitable end. This is what the scripture means in the book of James chapter 2, verses 14-17 when James states:

. . . if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

As seen in the few examples I have just illustrated, in my upbringing it was understood that any idea that could not be supported by a proper exposition of scripture was an idea that would not be taken seriously. An idea that was either unsupported by scripture or an improper exegesis of scripture was considered secular or worldly; which means that that idea was in opposition to the word of God. To offer a suggestion under erroneous biblical interpretation was met with laughter and humiliation as it signified to others that one was not biblically astute. Biblical justice, as I will refer to it for the purpose of this dissertation, was the primary lens we were trained to have as children growing up in the Black church. Micah 6:8 was a key scripture that played a big part of our understanding of justice: “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Simply put, biblical justice was not just the center of what we did as a church, it encompassed all the ways we operated. This justice framework still orients my own

practices as an activist, an artist, a leader and a researcher/scholar. Again, as I said before, the work of justice requires the combination of both theory and practice.



Figure 3. Me at age 12 speaking before a local Baptist Church congregation. 1997

Everything done in the church required a biblical justice orientation and as youth, we were often tested on both our scriptural knowledge, and our ability to accurately interpret and implement scriptures into everything we did. Every song we sang, every speech or short talk we delivered, every program or event we put together, and every game we played at church or for the church required us, as youth, to have a biblical understanding and an explanation that was backed with scriptural evidence. In fact, I can

recall a hilarious story that illustrates just how serious the demand of having a biblical justice-based orientation was for us to express in everything we did as youth. There was an interestingly funny situation that happened when I was about fourteen or fifteen years old going witnessing in our neighborhood as we did every week. Witnessing was what we called the door-to-door evangelizing action whereby we would ask people if they have accepted Jesus as their Lord and savior. If a person replied by saying they had not accepted Jesus as Lord, we would talk to them (sometimes for hours) about the importance of knowing who Jesus is as we directed them from one scripture to the next (many times without using an actual bible but recalling scripture from memory) so that the person would understand that God's love for them requires them receiving the gift of His son, Jesus. The community that we would witness in was a community known for its ruthlessness; it was a community of violence and crime and the church sat right in the center of this community. In fact, the church's motto was "Church in the midst," meaning that the church was in the center of all the debauchery that one could imagine.

The people we had to evangelize to were people who society often overlook or render invisible. Next to the church was a run-down motel known for luring teenage girls into the prostitution business. Surrounding the church on every side were Section 8 apartments that were known for high crime, gang violence, drug dealing, and people who were recently released from prison. These were the people we had to witness to every week: the dope boys and the dope fiends, the prostitutes and the pimps, deceivers and the deceived, those who had given up on their dreams and those who were still chasing theirs. It was our norm, they knew us and we knew them.



One day we were witnessing to a group of teenage boys in one of the apartments near the church while the boys were playing a game of pick-up basketball. They expressed, with all the profanity one can think of, that they did not want to listen to us talk about God. In order to get them to hear what we had to say, we asked if we could play a game of basketball under one condition—it would have to be our “church team” against their squad. If we won they not only had to listen to what we had to say, they would have to visit our church. If we lost, we would go about our way. They agreed. Most people saw us as “church kids,” and to them that equated to being lame, boring, weak, unathletic, and anything but cool. What many failed to understand was that we participated and competed in sports just as much as anybody else. We ended up winning the basketball game, talked to the guys about God, and they visited the church. Some guys joined the church and because we were successful in our method of getting people to come to church and at “winning souls to Christ,” we continued competing with different guys every week we went witnessing and every week more and more guys would come to church.

Our method was unbeknownst to our pastor and when he questioned how we were so successful in witnessing, we were hesitant to share with him what we were doing because we were afraid that he would think that we were wasting time playing around when we were sent out to do “the Lord’s work.” Once we told him we had been making deals with the guys as we played basketball against them, with joy, and to our surprise, the pastor responded, “To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.” (I Corinthians

9:22). In other words, the pastor quoted the words of the Apostle Paul to express his approval of how we had learned to make whatever changes necessary to the witnessing structure that we were trained in so that we could be relevant enough to appeal to a greater number of people. From our pastor's point of view, our method of witnessing demonstrated our courage and wisdom and the fact that more and more people were joining the church and being baptized was evidence that we were doing something right. To quote the scripture often referenced every time we prepared to go witnessing, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the one who is wise saves lives." (Proverbs 11:30). From that experience, as a teen I began to understand that performance structures can be redefined, especially if they do not speak to everyone. Meeting those teenage boys where they were, on the basketball court, was the only way many of them would listen to what we had to say, but in order for that to happen we had to be willing to redefine the evangelical witnessing structures (and performances) we were trained to use.

The courage and creativity that I embodied as I successfully combated the traditional evangelical structures of witnessing taught to me as a youth, are the very lessons and revelations that empower me as I stand against structural White supremacy embedded in higher educational institutions today. In order to execute courage and creativity well, one has to begin with an accurate understanding of how systems work. The first system that I began actively studying was the Bible; I wanted to understand what it means to be in the business of caring about souls in a system where so much is dependent on the body, and Black bodies in particular. Was the church avoiding the reality of oppression by pointing to an eternity that happens after the body has been used,

abused, and discarded by racist systems? That question and others like it hung over my head like grey clouds all throughout my youth; they kept me guessing, pondering, and researching the importance of the church, the characteristics of God and His dealing with injustice on earth. I would later learn that one of the aims of the church is to help others deactivate landmines and the primary function of the Black church was to confront systems that oppress. Granted, I recognize the church is not a perfect place and as such, the church as a whole, and the Black church specifically, continues to fall short of accomplishing its aims for total liberation of all people. In fact, instead of liberating people, many committed church-goers are guilty of condemning, rejecting, and judging people. People have gone to church and come out more wounded by the politics of the church seen in the: patriarchal structure of many churches which denies women from certain leadership roles; the church's rejection and exclusion of certain lifestyles (i.e. LGBTQIA+); the church's overemphasis on receiving money and lack of emphasis on giving to those in need. Church pastors and leaders have been guilty of, physically and sexually, abusing adults and children alike. Although there are still many areas that the Black church itself needs liberation from, I guess the reason why we practically lived in the church was so that we could remain in a place of deactivation. The Black church for us was a place of safety from oppressive systems and from the explosion of landmines. The older I got, however, the more I realized that hate-filled people have no boundaries that they are unwilling to cross. As such, landmines have also claimed Black bodies of children and adults gathered inside of their house of worship such as the case with 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963 (English 2020), or most

recently, Emmanuel A.M.E. in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015 (Ellis 2020). For us, as youth in Dallas, somehow adults knew that despite the hateful attacks of White supremacists, the church was still a safe space and, children, your grandmother made sure we were always there before the doors opened and long after services ended.

Admittedly, as a child, like many children who spend just about every moment of their everyday life at the church, I felt that much of what I was required to do was unnecessary. I did not think that all the hours and training I was engaging in at the church would have any bearing on my adult life. I thought that once I became an adult I would be able to call my own shots and avoid drowning myself in church work, at least to the extent that I was mandated to do as a child. As it would turn out, however, I drastically underestimated the power of a divine calling. The older I got the more I saw the need to speak out for the cause of equity and justice as a divine calling and as the first in my household to go to college, the university was a unique location where I experienced inequity, racism, and discrimination. I quickly realized that the childhood religious experiences that I ran from as an adult, were the very experiences that I would need in order to have the mental stability and the fortitude to survive and thrive in a space that was radically different from the Black-centered environment of my childhood. God called me to the university because of His plans for me but that first required me to be baptized by fire.

As my childhood pastor always said, “Your ministry is birthed out of your misery.” Those words from the pastor are even clearer today than they were when I was a youth—especially after learning about Lesley McSpadden’s ongoing fight for justice.

Mrs. McSpadden is the mother of four children—one of whom is Michael Brown, the unarmed eighteen-year-old who was shot and killed in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. Like a landmine under the feet of its target, the encounter between Brown and the police officer “left Brown’s body on the hot asphalt for more than four hours” (Secret 2020) and it left Mrs. McSpadden mourning her son while still actively fighting for the arrest of the officer six years later. When I heard Mrs. McSpadden, I was deeply moved by her remarkable display of wisdom concerning the fatal and unjust ways the justice systems in the US work. Responding to the question, “What kind of talks did you have with your son? . . .” (Link 2012 March 2018, 31:17) regarding how to, as a Black man, respond to an encounter with the police, Mrs. McSpadden admitted that not only did she not have “the talk” with her son, Michael, neither was she aware that those conversations were happening in other people’s homes. Explaining her reason for being in the dark on what seems to be a national discourse occurring in the homes of many families of color, Mrs. McSpadden’s had the most insightful responses I had ever heard. She stated that since the death of her son she has attended “many panels and conferences where they hand out pamphlets” about the ten steps to take as a Black male if you have an encounter with an officer of any color. Mrs. McSpadden’s response to that idea was “what happens when you do all ten and you still don’t make it? So, I am not a believer in that conversation (about parents “having the talk” with their children), I don’t feel that that is a conversation for parents to have with their children; that conversation should be a part of the training for an officer.” (Link 2012 March 2018, 32:43-33:38). Like the image of equality vs equity in Figure 1, Mrs. McSpadden’s logic, “what happens when you do all

ten and still don't make it?" points to a systemic flaw. This flaw, known as White supremacy, tries to leave those who are harmed as a result of an act of White supremacy feeling guilty for not operating according to its demands. Mrs. McSpadden's insightful response indicates her understanding that at the core, there is nothing anyone can do to adequately prepare themselves or their children for the racism embedded in the fabric of our society.

Whether or not parents have "the talk" with their children or whether an individual follows every step of prevention that he/she is taught, landmines exist because racism exists. As a consequence of this reality, like soldiers delivering a death notification to the family of a deceased soldier, many Black mothers and fathers are left weeping over the unjust death of their children. In Mrs. McSpadden's case, she found herself joining the ranks of other Black mothers who carry the mantle of justice for their deceased children. An outspoken leader against injustice, the misery Mrs. McSpadden experienced with the death of her son, Michael, is now her ministry; she has dedicated all her energy in getting justice for her son. In other words, we become advocates, performing solidarity with and for those who are co-sufferers.



Figure 4. Lesley McSpadden and I.

### **White Supremacy in Higher Education and Learning How to Fight**

In a much different way than Mrs. McSpadden, misery and ministry intertwined in my life and educational journey the moment I began my undergraduate studies. The beginning of my undergraduate experience was indeed miserable and, although I did not know it at the moment, the misery I experienced during that period was the introductory course of my ministry of advocacy. I advocate for equity and justice for Black and Brown communities inside and outside university spaces because of my personal experiences with inequity. The University of North Texas, at the time I was enrolled there, was (and still is) a Predominantly White Institution, that alone was an entirely new experience for me. The professors and students talked very differently than teachers and students in the

Southern city communities I was reared in and many within the university (some professors, and some students) along with many within the college community outside the university (specifically the Denton Police), made it clear that the university was not a space where people like me belonged. From the first time I raised my hand to answer a question in class my freshman year and seeing the professor and students laugh at my response because I was so nervous that I choked on my words, to the time I was pulled over by the police near campus, harassed, and carted off to jail (the first time) I knew that I was fighting a different battle than what I was used to fighting growing up in Black and Brown communities. The university community showed itself to be one of racism and discrimination deeply rooted in White supremacy.

At the time I knew I had one of two choices to make: 1) I could leave the university and transfer to a different one, or, 2) I could stay at the university until I graduated. I chose the latter. To stay until graduation, however, required me to develop my own trusting relationship with God and see if He could sustain me through multiple years of study—something that I did not believe I could do. The decision to put my trust in the Lord and stay at the university, despite the inequities I faced, showed me how faithful God is; it showed me that God can be tested and trusted, and that all the religious experiences of my youth prepared me for moments I faced as an undergraduate in a school that made me feel that my existence was a problem that needed to be corrected by teaching me to have a Eurocentric lens. In fact, by my third year in college, I despised the theatre program so much that I decided to switch my major to sociology. The switch in majors did not happen randomly. I had fallen in love with sociology based on the few



courses I had taken along the way; I found its content incredibly fascinating and insightful. For the first time in my life, I started to understand the roles of systems, policies, people, cultures, and institutions. By way of sociology, I was able to see, for the first time, the role policy and politics play in city planning, zoning, and gentrification. I then understood the reasons why communities I grew up in were all Black and Brown and low income. For me, sociology was a doorway to understanding how White supremacy operates within our nation and within the theatre department at the university as well. Taking note of the inequity that I and other people of color were experiencing in the theatre department, as well as the university as a whole, the knowledge I was learning in the sociology department coupled with the biblical justice knowledge gained from my youth taught me how to survive, navigate, and graduate. I graduated from that university thanking God that the experience was finally over, or so I thought.

Upon entering graduate school, I learned that the inequities I experienced as an undergraduate were not exclusive to that university nor to me. Rather, similar inequalities are the reality many Black and Brown students face at other Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in the US. By the time I entered graduate school I had already fully accepted the call of preaching and emancipation; in fact, I accepted the call while still an undergraduate. My observations of the inequities that students of color experience in PWIs caused me to question the ways in which biblical justice could help transform the culture of the institutions of higher education. At that moment I was studying social justice movements like the American Civil Rights Movement while simultaneously studying what theologians had to say about matters of justice. It was in that same time

period that I first learned about Dr. James Cone's Black Liberation Theology. While taking trips throughout the US South studying the Civil Rights Movement that I began to see how the Black church has always existed as counter-institutions in the US performing interventions of biblical justice confronting secular leaders on issues of inequity, injustice, the poor, and anything else that causes the marginalization and oppression of people.

Invigorated by my awareness of the power of the Black church, I researched the ways the Black church, ministers and lay leaders of the Black church, organized mass movements like the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955. I researched the leadership models of Christian-based organizations that called for equity such as the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Then, I also researched the way liberation ideologies were performed by those who were engaged in the Civil Rights Movement. What I noticed was that the vast majority of the Christian-based organizations that participated in the Civil Rights Movement were diverse in race, sexual orientation, class, and education. The diversity and equity seen in public was partly based on rehearsed performances that first took place privately in the non-violent training classes. This showed me that equity can be first performed privately in the imaginary as an idea that one longs to bring into reality, and then practiced publicly and brought into existence. These three observations together, the Black church's organizing principles during the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Church's leadership

model, and the performance elements of the Civil Rights Movement, have brought me to the point of my dissertation research inquiry and exploration.

Upon enrolling in my third PWI, like my experiences at the first two PWIs, I continued seeing policies, curriculum, and behaviors that caused harm to me and other students of color. In fact, prospective Black students, many of whom I did not know, nor did they know anything about me except for the fact that I was a Black man in a theatre program, reached out to me on social media to inquire about my thoughts concerning theatre programs at various institutions. The question that many Black students asked me was “how racist is the university?” In other words, Black and Brown students matriculate through college with the understanding that they will face racism and other forms of inequities. Prospective students wanted to know if the level of racism was so intense that it would knock them out for good (cause them to walk away from the program or force them to leave); or could they expect to take a few punches of microaggressions here and there but still make it to the end of the 12 rounds where they would be able to graduate. My own experiences of inequity tied with the experiences of other students of color, brings me to my primary question about the role of Liberation Theology.

**Primary Research Question, Approach, Methodology, and Archive:**

My question:

- 1) How does one develop a diverse equity coalition that is BIPOC-centered within a Predominantly White arts college?
- 2) What leadership roles must be in place in order to develop a diverse equity coalition that is BIPOC-centered, within a Predominantly White arts college?

As I explore these research questions, I do so in the same tradition as other Black activists and scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and Zora Neale Hurston—just to name a few. These scholars, and many others, used autoethnography and storytelling as a form of resistance to White hegemonic methodological and ontological frames. I center my own stories and lived-experiences in the context of and related to the experiences of other Black people. The knowledge system I build in this dissertation cannot be separated from either the lived and ancestral experiences of Black people, nor my specific Black embodied existence. Additionally, my choice to write my dissertation in the form of a letter is also in the same storytelling tradition of Black/African culture rooted in oral traditions, my theatrical training, and Black preaching practices. This work moves from storytelling to storytelling. Story and experience are both my archive and a methodological tool allowing me to pass on my learning and ideas. Letter writing is a particular form of storytelling utilized in the Black tradition as observed in James Baldwin’s 1962, “Letter to my Nephew,” whereby Baldwin moves from story to story as a way to inform his nephew, James, about his life and family history as well as the evil systems into which his nephew was born. Dr. Imani Perry also utilizes the letter writing tradition in her book, *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons* (2019), which is a letter to her two sons about the ways in which US America villainizes Black men. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1963 “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” is also an example of a letter as a storytelling tradition. In his letter, Dr. King wrote to Alabama clergymen who criticized him and his protest methods. Dr. King, writing on newspapers given to him inside a Birmingham jail, informs the White clergyman why he chose the

method and timing to advocate for justice on behalf of himself and the Black people in Birmingham. Another example of letter writing in the Black tradition can be seen in Tanehi Coates' book, *Between the World and Me* (2015). The book is a letter to his son, Samori, explaining his life and thoughts regarding what it means to live in a black body in US America. Finally, letter writing is also a stylistic choice observed in the Bible as seen in the Apostle Paul's epistles to various churches and pastors. The letters Paul sent to the churches and pastors were for admonishment, advisory, and encouragement. In this way then, I use the traditions of Black experience and the Black church to frame both explanation and information, theory and action.

I also employ the allied methodology of autoethnography. Autoethnography as a qualitative research method allows scholars to use their own lived experiences to explore topics related to the larger society. Using my lived-experience in the following roles helps me communicate as I move through this work:

- my experiences as a Black male,
- a minister,
- a student attending three Predominantly White Institutions in the Southwest,
- a student activist who has led a graduate and alumni activism campus movement
- and an employee hired to build practices centering equity and honoring diversity within an arts college in the Southwest.

Pivoting from story to story and organized by these roles, I outline a theory for how Liberation Theology helps me practice in the world and the university as a Black man and a Christian minister attending Predominantly White Institutions. Again, I approach this research as a demonstration informing university design and arts school leaders how they can create an equity leadership model centering both BIPOC communities and

BIPOC knowledge systems. To my children especially, I want you to understand how Liberation Theology can be applied to help *deconstruct* structures of White supremacy and *construct* Beloved Communities.

Children, as I am sure you can tell by now, this dissertation, though written for you and leaders in Predominantly White art colleges in the US, can also be useful to other college students of color who are interested in knowing how to navigate secular PWIs while remaining committed to their faith. Equally important, this letter is also written to those who do not consider themselves religious, and to those of diverse faith traditions. I am sure that after reading my introduction and learning about my background of witnessing and seeing how steeped in religion my life is, there are some who may feel that this research exploration has nothing to offer them. Not only do I disagree, but I ask that you approach this work in the same way any good scholar approaches material when researching and discovering information they may or may not agree with on a personal level. I ask you, scholars, to read this dissertation to investigate what Liberation Theology can offer the ongoing conversations about equity and justice in university spaces. After all, it was the practices of the people in the Black church who, by way of the US Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s, demonstrated what can happen when the ideas of Liberation Theology become ecumenical performance; it has within it, the elements necessary for our institutions to seriously consider those who have historically been overlooked, and in the language and structures of the oppressed. Why not investigate how these strategies, philosophies, and organizations utilized Liberation Theology to perform equity?

The lived-experiences from which I draw are both testimony and manifestations of the ways in which I and other people of color have been harmed as a result of White supremacy; these include: police harassment on and off college campuses; racial violence, racism and discrimination inside and outside of the classroom. These experiences are what legal scholar, Patricia Williams, refers to as “spirit-murdering” (Williams, September 1987). In her article “Spirit-Murdering: the discourse of fingerpointing as the law’s response to racism,” Williams describes “spirit murdering,” as “as a crime, an offense so deeply painful and assaultive . . .” (Williams September 1987, 129) it grievously wounds the spirit. For my autoethnographic case studies, I draw on my specific experiences and roles leading a group of graduate students and alumni of an arts college and as a subsequent administrative leader in the Equity Department within the arts college. The experience leading the student-group was instrumental as a location for my practice and development of an equity leadership model based in Liberation Theology as situated in the Reverend Dr. William J. Barber’s national movement called Moral Fusion Coalition while my appointment as an administrative leader allowed me to explore how Liberation Theology and Servant leadership can function within administrative hierarchies of a Predominantly White Institution itself.

Moreover, by using as archive my lived experiences, my body, and documentations of the work and efforts I and others have engaged in, I draw attention to the additional steps and hurdles that I and many other BIPOC students are forced to navigate as we pursue higher education degrees. Examining my body as an archive allows me to think critically about the ways I have been harmed as a result of White

supremacy and how I performatively combat racist structures by embodying Liberation Theology. Additionally, as this is my story within a specific context, I do not pretend to work within an objective epistemological frame in which knowledge is disconnected from the very bodies engaged in the knowledge-making enterprise. My thought, word, and deed as well as the real contexts (populated by real people) in which I operate are all held up for examination here. I operate in a real place, a large arts college in the Southwest. That said, where there is some expectation of privacy (beyond publicly known figures), I do not use people's actual names unless that name is necessary for full understanding or where I am honoring an individual's particular work or legacy.

### **Framework and Theoretical Underpinnings**

Throughout this dissertation I employ Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework to examine the effect of race and racism on individuals, societies, and cultures. I am aware that my usages of CRT, to some, may seem bold. I employ CRT as a framework at a time when some of the most highly debated discussions surrounds the question "Why are states banning Critical Race Theory?" (Ray and Gibbons 2021). My decision to employ CRT despite how I believe many are misinterpreting the framework, is due to the fact that I understand what CRT is and what it attempts to do.

Critical Race Theory "critiques how the social construction of race and institutionalized racism perpetuate a racial caste system that relegates people of color to the bottom tiers (George 2021). As CRT scholar, Dr. Aja Martinez, explains, CRT "originated in US law schools, bringing together issues of power, race, and racism to address the liberal notion of color blindness and argues that ignoring racial difference



maintains and perpetuates the status quo with its deeply institutionalized injustices to racial minorities” (Martinez 2014, 9). The failure to address race in the curriculum, the classrooms, and other decision-making areas of leadership and in higher educational spaces is to “perpetuate the status quo” and serves as an injustice to BIPOC students.

Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, in their introduction to the third edition of *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* (1995), explains the importance of developing this theory and the powerful impact stories are to the process:

Our social world, with its rules, practices, and assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed; rather, we construct with its words, stories and silence. But we need not acquiesce in arrangements that are unfair and one-sided. By writing and speaking against them, we may hope to contribute to a better, fairer world. (3)

Based on this explanation, CRT scholarship is dedicated to social activism. In fact, scholars in the field refer to their work as “scholarly resistance” as it is their “hope that scholarly resistance will lay the groundwork for wide-scale resistance. [They] believe that standards and institutions created by and fortifying white power ought be resisted” (Bell 1995, 900). Employing this theoretical tool to deconstruct white supremacy structures allows me the opportunity to participate in the scholarly resistance as well as advocate for a fairer world for BIPOC communities by centering our narratives and methodological tools.

Améiah and Faraji, my goal is to instigate you to be the kind of change agents that our ancestors were, rich in spirit and bold in the way they practice their beliefs; indeed, principles I aim to live out in my own life. Our ancestors were the embodiment of James 1:22-25:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

Courageous enough to act on what they heard and believed, our ancestors were motivated beyond theorizing about freedom, they fought for freedom even though they knew it could cost them their life—a price many of them paid for liberty.

I am aware, however, that there are scholars who believe that Critical Race Theory is a theory and not a doing. Some scholars believe CRT require a call to action but it misses the mark of providing real examples in which change can be and has been made. They therefore claim that Critical Race Theory is limited in scope and actionable steps. Other scholars have made the claim that “CRT does not necessarily provide a clear road map for teaching about all forms of oppression simultaneously.” (Abrams, L. S., & Moio, J.A. 2009, 17).

Children, let me emphatically state that I believe CRT is both a theory and a practice. In fact, to engage in CRT appropriately requires one to be an active participant in the process of dismantling racism. In fact, the originators of CRT were all legal scholars who practiced law. These scholars include: Kimberlé Crenshaw (who coined the term), Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Cheryl Harris, and Patricia Williams, to name a few. “CRT challenges white privilege and exposes deficit-informed research that ignores, and often omits, the scholarship of people of color [ . . . ] It persists as a field of inquiry in the legal field and in other areas of scholarship” (George 2021). As a response to

criticism, however, in the vein of CRT, I emphasize the historiographical approach. Pointing to history helps specify and highlight the struggles surrounding the subject of race and other inequities faced by BIPOC communities. Furthermore, doing so allow me to explore the actions that were taken throughout history that challenged systems and brought about positive change.

Emphasizing the CRT approach of engaging in historiography serves as a broad contrast from the oppressive traditions practiced in many PWIs in the US. Operating in the system of White supremacy, much of the curriculum in these institutions exalts Eurocentric epistemologies as not only the most valuable of all other ways of knowing, but sometimes the *only* way of knowing. Institutions deny the existence of other knowledges and call it science, progress, or simply knowledge, as such, they fail to include diverse perspectives and ontologies. In that case, my use of CRT as a theoretical underpinning recognizes the fact that there are many ways of knowing.

My research considers the other “-isms” attacking BIPOC communities in addition to racism, as racist acts are often perpetuated and inspired by other acts of oppression as well. CRT helps me to communicate the interconnections of varying oppressions and how they have shown up the most, in places where they go unnamed. Scholars in the field of education note another limitation by pointing out how “CRT has yet to make significant inroads into other important areas of study such as educational administration, politics of education, policy studies, and political science...” (Lopez 2003, 86). Taking it one step further, Peter McLaren, suggest all critical pedagogical approaches “need to be made less in-formative and more per-formative, less a pedagogy

directed toward the interrogation of written texts than a corporeal pedagogy grounded in the lived experiences of students.” (McLaren 1998, 452). In other words, according to these scholars, not only is CRT limited in demonstrating how oppressions exist across academic disciplines, it also lacks in providing actual steps one can take in order to combat the injustices (the performative); this is where an emphasis on historiography fits into the equation.

By emphasizing the CRT component of historiography, I able to draw on the lived experiences and stories of the past as a tool of comparison and evaluation to the present. Assessing history by way of the interconnectedness of the first two Reconstructions allows me to pivot back and forth in my narrative. In this way, the Black Freedom Movement (BFM), which encompasses the Civil Rights Movement (CRM), will help provide examples of the performative roles that people have played, throughout history, in deconstructing White supremacy and reimagining of equitable frameworks and Beloved Community. The Black Freedom Movement provides a critical lens in understanding how people have, historically speaking, successfully and unsuccessfully advocated against institutions for the rights of Black people and in turn, was a way of liberating other oppressed people. In particular the Black Freedom Movement helped connect the ways organizations built consistent counter-institutions working to change policies and laws; some of these organizations included organizations rooted in Liberation Theology. Historian and Sandford University professor, Dr. Clayborne Carson, describes the Black Freedom Movements in this this way:

Although subsequent studies of this black movement usually stressed its Civil Rights goals and national leadership, the movement generated its own local institutions and leadership seeking economic and political reforms that went beyond the legislation sought by the major preexisting civil rights organizations. Indeed, black participants often called their movement a freedom struggle in order to express its broad range of goals. The southern movement was characterized by unconventional and increasingly militant tactics, locally initiated protest activity, decentralized control, and an increasing sense of racial consciousness among participants. (Carson, n.d.)

What Dr. Carson is saying is the Black Freedom Movement describes a broad movement that existed, nationally and internationally, to bring about just laws for Black people around the world. Religious leaders were also a part of the freedom struggle and many within the Christian faith used Liberation Theology as grounds to build a coalition of diverse people fighting for the freedom for and with Black people. This period in history helps me set the stage equity built through coalitions. And, CRT as a theoretical underpinning also helps me interact with specific actions of a people who courageously advanced based on what they knew and what they believed. Additionally, I engage with the historical texts of Black playwrights and theatre practitioners to help get a more accurate view of the performance of equity frames. Their scholarship helps me to understand the ways in which Black people resisted systems of oppression to perform equity. Not only do these scholars point us back to some of the darkest moments in history of Black people in United States to show how they resisted, they simultaneously helping us reimagine what the future could look like for PWI design and arts schools in the US. Furthermore, their histories help me to see that there is no such thing as ushering in equity without resistance; every imagined future comes with a history of battle. Or, to

put it the way Frederick Douglass did, “power concedes nothing without demand.” (Douglass 1857, 367). As the saying in Black communities goes: “and a fight come with it.”

Understanding the Operations of Liberation Theology and the Structure of this Study

## Understanding the operations

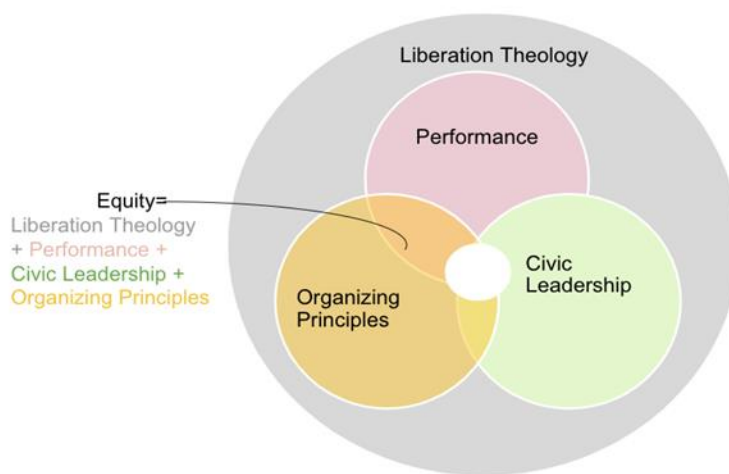


Figure 5. Understanding the Operations of Liberation Theology

As you can see from Figure 5, three interlocking operations of Liberation Theology as a leadership framework are: performance, civic leadership, and organizing principles. Each of these three elements are woven into the chapters and sections of this dissertation. The performative aspect of my dissertation describes actions and highlights the ways in which I perform Liberation Theology as well as demonstrates how design and arts schools could perform equity. Here, I draw from the scholarship of Diana Taylor’s *Archive and the Repertoire* (2003). Taylor’s scholarship understands the archive or, the written texts, and the repertoire, or embodied knowledge and performed memory, as equally important ways of storing and transmitting knowledge. *Archive*, in this context, is

different from the way I reference it above when describing my methodological approach. In the performative context, I understand *archive* as the organizing principles, civic leadership, and performances of history, Black experience and story. By *repertoire*, I refer to my experiences in the sense of memories and embodied knowledge over time. Consulting Taylor allows me to explore past and present higher education institutional policies and observe them as anti-soul performances that impact the mind, body, and soul of students of color. Taylor's scholarship also allows me to investigate ways in which *equity* can be understood as both archival and repertoire performances. How can leaders in an arts college perform differently — equitably, in both the archive and the repertoire? What does it mean for so much pain and trauma to be stored in the body that is difficult to trust one another enough to build coalitions? How can BIPOC students partner with non-BIPOC students and design and arts leadership to perform equity collaboratively? Each of these questions are lifted and addressed throughout the dissertation.

I understand civic leadership as organized around the fundamental idea that higher education institutions are designed as places whereby *the public* has the opportunity (though under specific qualifications) to attend for the purpose of learning and collective knowledge production. I am not particularly interested in atomized economic understandings of tertiary education, but rather higher education as civic institutions. Because tertiary institutions are organized and operate in ways that perpetuate White supremacy, I focus on grassroots organizations of the past that operated as institutions countering White supremacy and hegemonic practices. Therefore, the civic practices and organizing principles I refer to in this section highlight the behaviors,

practices, and policies that grassroots organizations successfully used to counter White supremacy during each Reconstruction. In this way, I build organizational models organized through collective thriving rather than competitive and individualized structures.

One of the most effective ways to counter White supremacy is to organize, which is what I am doing at the grass roots level with the students as well as at the leadership level, although it looks different in both spaces. Using organizing principles and civic leadership as through-lines, I describe the tactics of working at each of these levels. Woven into each chapter are ways in which people and organizations have historically come together as counter-institutions to establish equity frameworks centering morality and communitarian principles. This includes people and organizations like, social justice leaders of the past, the Black church, and some Black theatre. Although I focus on Black experiences, by extension, this research overlaps with other marginalized communities. Therefore, the more that justice for Black people becomes a reality in PWIs, the more that other groups can also experience justice—as I mentioned previously, anti-Blackness is a thread that runs throughout repressive structures.

Additionally, I use popular culture to broaden my definition of "civic," and as a response to traditional political and economic frames that prioritize particular epistemologies while omitting many culturally unique ways of knowing. To put it another way, popular culture is essential to my research for the same reason that it exist as a category: it creates room for inclusion. Black Studies and Urban Culture scholar, Dr. George Lipsitz, describing why popular culture exists, states that:



the creators of popular culture do not think of themselves as operating within an endeavor called “popular culture”; they see “themselves merely creating signs and symbols appropriate to their audiences and to themselves. It is only from the vantage point of Enlightenment ideals of “high culture” that something called popular culture can be seen to exist” (Lipsitz 1990, 13).

The elite class’s rejection of certain patterns and behaviors in which people operate, gave way to counter understandings of popular culture. As a result, popular culture is a set of operations that communicates and creates with others based on common experiences. Popular culture differs from “high culture” in that it is more accessible to the general public. “Unlike ‘high culture’ where a dogmatic formalism privileges abstraction over experiences, the effectiveness of popular culture depends on its ability to engage audiences in the familiar process “(Lipsitz, 14). For this reason, throughout this study I use articles, online journal articles, YouTube videos, social media posts, and personal photos in addition to scholarly resources to engage in familiar processes with you, my children, and readers within design and arts colleges, as well as other students or education leaders who wish to explore another type of equity leadership framework. Furthermore, by making this decision, I am questioning many design and arts institutions’ current inequitable framework. I’m asking these leaders to consider what kind of reforms might be required to establish a more equitable knowledge culture. A transparent theory of change says to the leaders or communities: what change should we be accountable for? As I move through this work, my next chapters will be outlined in the following ways:

- The case for liberation theology and the Black prophetic tradition
- Autoethnographic case studies

- Pragmatic and core principles of liberation theology and servant leadership as a model for equity performance

## **Chapter 2 – The Case for Liberation Theology**

This study centers liberation theology. In the second chapter, I explain what Liberation Theology is, who has inspired my knowledge of it, why I utilize this lens, and what I believe Liberation Theology can provide for equity leadership frames. I also explore the Black prophetic tradition in this chapter. As you will see, in the spirit of Liberation Theology, the prophet plays one of the most important roles in the fight for justice. As a result, I use the prophet as a metaphor throughout this study. Some of the questions I address in this chapter include: What is the Black prophetic tradition? What is the role of the prophet? The prophet's duty as a seer is the central theme of this chapter.

## **Chapter 3 – The way things can be: The Beloved Community**

Continuing the metaphor of the prophet, this chapter illustrates how the second role of the prophet requires the ability to see the way things can be and present an image of an equitable and just alternative reality. The alternative reality is what the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. refers to as the Beloved Community.” The notion of the Beloved Community is essential to the overall equity leadership model in design and arts schools in that, after being made aware of the injustices BIPOC students face, the prophet assists higher education leaders in envisioning an attainable reality that illustrates how people of all backgrounds can co-exist as equally important.

Taking it a step further, I introduce the Reconciliation Process as a document illustrating the product of performance coalition’s work in attaining the Beloved

Community. Here, I incorporate into the conversation, my experiences of being a part of an Equity Performance Coalition while a college student. I draw from Diana Taylor's *Archive and the Repertoire* (Taylor 2003), to connect the notions of embodied performances performed by myself and the coalition as we practiced "Scenario" (Taylor 28) performances in order to create the Reconciliation Process. The Reconciliatory Process stands as a culmination of the work we, as a student coalition, created as a need for an accountability process that honors students' voices, leaders' perspectives, and dialogue. The Reconciliatory Process was a manifestation of Liberation Theology and Moral Fusion Coalition principles.

#### **Chapter 4 – Case Studies**

In this chapter, I employ the case study approach as I draw on two separate autoethnographic examples. The case study's approach illustrates how I use Liberation Theology, observed through a moral fusion coalition, as an equity leadership framework with administrators and students in an arts college. The case studies employed, then, illustrate how I implemented these same sets of principles to create a leadership framework with the arts college administration as I did with graduate students and alumni who were a part of the Liberation Coalition. Here I discuss how our Liberation Coalition first came into being via social media to address the inequities we all have witnessed and experienced as students in the arts college. Not only that, the second case used here illuminates those same principles and philosophies to examine the operation of Liberation Theology in my role as a Dean's Equity Fellow. The goal of using autoethnographic case

study is to point to ways in which the performance of equity by way of Liberation Theology can be used to improve the work of equity.

**Chapter 5 – Equity Performance Coalition Made Plain**

Lastly, in the concluding chapter, I summarize and create a visual of the core principles for applying Liberation Theology as an equity leadership framework. I bring the discussion back around to my idea of Equity Performance Coalition as the amalgamation of Liberation Theology, organizing principles, civic leadership, and performance. Using a visual and a table for each category, I breakdown what it would take for one to employ this framework for themselves or for an organization. Following the breakdown of principles of operation, I reflect on the overall dissertation by discussing some of the limitations of this work. Finally, I end this study with a charge. Here, I talk about my end goals and next steps regarding what I will do with the information presented in this study. I also address what my future study plans are as it relates to this research study.

*The essence of each of the following chapters can be seen as such:*

<b>Chapter 2: The prophet: Sees the inequitable ways things are</b>	<b>Chapter 4: Autoethnographic case studies in action</b>
<b>Chapter 3: The prophet: Sees the equitable way things can be</b>	<b>Chapter 5: Understanding the operations of Equity Performance Coalition in practical terms</b>

Figure 6. Chapter Overview Simplified.

## CHAPTER 2: THE CASE FOR LIBERATION THEOLOGY

### **Homily: Matthew 11:28-30 New International Version**

*<sup>28</sup> Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

Although there are other liberation theologies practiced around the world, the one I was introduced to as a child and continue to follow now has its roots in Black Liberation Theology. Children, this chapter introduces my personal Liberation Theology framework as a dualistic manifestation of Black church experiences in the United States and the Black prophetic tradition. I want you to understand that Liberation Theology is a study and a practice always in communication with and on behalf of those who suffer, who are disregarded, and those who feel like they don't belong. Liberation Theology honors Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) ways of knowing and bids individuals who are plagued by inequity to come “and you will find rest for your souls.” Liberation Theology helps weary souls find rest and recovery. Where racism causes spirit wounds and heart death, Black Liberation Theology is a day-to-day practice rooted in Black church traditions, expressed in the scholarship of Black theologians, and widely used as secular organizing principles for civic organizations working to oppose White supremacy and other forms of oppression. Children, my hope is that you will understand that the major duty of Black Liberation Theology is to enact equity on behalf of the oppressed (particularly BIPOC communities). Due to the prophet's crucial role in the Black Liberation Theology framework, the leading question of this chapter is the same one that the biblical prophets essentially asked themselves. The biblical prophets would

always inquire, "How are things?" as they surveyed the land and the people. That question is still important today, and is one that underscores the need for a prophet. As you read along, may you come to comprehend that the case I make for Liberation Theology functioning as an operation of leadership simply means engaging in a framework useful for both your personal life, and a framework to gather others to join in the fight for Beloved Community with you. Liberation Theology's framework may and has been used not only in religious places, but also in non-religious institutions as well due to its primary concern for those who are marginalized. I strongly encourage you to use this framework as you encounter and transition between different frameworks used in higher education institutions and other social institutions. Liberation Theology asks you to live with spiritual integrity and no matter where you find yourself: at home, with friends, at school, or with your spiritual community. That said, before I respond to the prophet's inquiry, I must first define Black prophetic tradition and its relationship to Liberation Theology. Following that, I will respond to the prophet's inquiry "how are things?" in the vein of several Black liberation theologians who inspired my framework of operation.

### **The Black Prophetic Tradition: What is it and Who Belongs?**

The Black prophetic tradition lies at the heart of Black liberation theologies. What is the Black prophetic tradition, and why is it crucial to embody it as a framework promoting equity leadership? In their book, *Black Prophetic Fire* (20014), Dr. Cornel West and Dr. Christa Buschendorf offer a response as they describe the essence of this tradition. Although intentionally broad, their description speaks of a tradition in which

sufferers unite in order to force collective social change. Their book takes the position that as a result of unfettered capitalism in our nation and other parts of the world, there has been a “shift from a “we-consciousness to an I-consciousness” (1). That transition of consciousness is “not only a growing sense of Black collective defeat but also a Black embrace of the seductive myth of individualism in American society” (1). The authors feel that Black prophetic fire is necessary in that it operates as “a strong counter-force to the tendencies of our time” (2). In other words, Black people's embrace of a mythical framework centered on individualism is the polar opposite as what Black people have historically operated within. The authors believe that at some point, Black people surrendered to these atomizing mythical frames rather than confronting them with the fervor and spirit of earlier Black freedom fighters. Their title, *Black Prophetic Fire*, refers to the courage that individuals and groups show when they join the chorus of disadvantaged voices imagining and then calling forth justice. Despite this perceived shift in Black culture, the authors express hope in the Black prophetic tradition's long-term legacy. As they say, “Black prophetic fire never dies, that the Black prophetic tradition forever flourishes, and that a new wave of young brothers and sisters of all colors see and feel it is a beautiful thing to be on fire for justice...” (West and Buschendorf 5). The Black prophetic tradition lives on; prophets will always exist as long as there are people.

Like Dr. West and Dr. Buschendorf, I, too, feel there are voices functioning in the Black prophetic tradition, and I see a need to increase the number of voices acting with Black prophetic fire. Based on the definition of the Black prophetic tradition offered, the 19th and 20th century produced powerful Black prophets who were aware of social

movements. Some well-known names include: Ida B. Wells, Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and Ella Baker are just a few of the well-known names. These luminaries transformed the nation and the world with intellectual and spiritual critiques on race and (in)justice in the US. Their work and legacies empower and challenge us today to have the courage to speak truth to power as we walk in the same tradition as they did. Speaking through the vista of time, Black prophets of the past invite all who are willing, to stand on behalf of those who are oppressed and marginalized and join in the prophetic tradition. That open invitation informs us who can be a part of the Black prophetic tradition: anyone with a heart for serving the needy.

Due to how prophets operate through their service to others, I consider the prophet to be a servant leader. A servant leader is not merely someone who wants to help by serving others; they are also individuals who know how to urge others to do good. Business professor, Dr. Van Dierendonck offers six characteristics of servant leaders' behaviors as experienced by followers. These characteristics are: 1) empower and develop people; 2) they show humility, 3) are authentic, 4) accept people for who they are, 5) provide direction, and 6) are stewards who work for the good of the whole (Dierendonck 2011, 1232). Each of these characteristics also depicts the attributes of a prophet, therefore assisting the poor or fighting for those who suffer is an important component of the prophet's identity.

In addition to the categories mentioned above, children, the Black prophetic tradition encompasses more than Black literary writers, scholars, and social activist leaders. Many Black religious leaders of various faith groups belong to this tradition as



well. The Black prophetic tradition was reflected through the life of religious figures such as Pauli Murray, an Episcopal priest and legal scholar who coined the term “Jane Crow” to describe discrimination Black women face, to Malcolm X, a Muslim who fearlessly challenged White supremacy throughout the US. In the Christian faith particularly, many preachers, laypeople, and theologians are also a rich part of this tradition. Faith adds an additional layer to the Black prophetic tradition. The Black ordained minister is said to be a part of the Black prophetic “preaching” tradition if, homiletically, she or he advocates against oppression (locally, nationally, and globally) based on the words of the sacred text. The Christian layperson or leader (non-minister or non-priest) operating with a Christian worldview, or biblical lens, is oftentimes said to be operating in the “prophetic tradition,” or the “Black prophetic Christian tradition” (usually used interchangeably). Now, I must pause here because, children, I know that if you are anything like me (and you are), you are inquisitive and you want to know how I define the word “prophetic” and, if you are anything like your mother (and you are) you refuse to move forward without knowing this key piece of information so you can fully understand what I am communicating. Noted.

The term “prophetic” stems from the root word, prophet. Prophets are present in many sacred texts including three of the world largest religions: Judaism, Christianity, and the Islamic faith. Some well-known prophets are shared among these three faith groups include, Elijah, Samuel, Daniel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Amos. In Christian faith, prophets are seen as people who have accepted a divine call from God as the go-between messenger on behalf of God. One of the most popular description of a prophet is one who

speaks “truth to power.” That phrasing, “truth to power” is broad but refers to the element of critique of individual behaviors, societies, and institutions. Whenever people waver from the path of morality and love, the prophet is given (by the Divine) a message of warning to communicate to those engaging in immoral practices. As a youth I was taught that a prophet is one who approaches God on behalf of the people, and approaches the people on behalf of God. The two definitions suggest the prophet’s sole purpose is to audaciously disrupt evil systems contrary to the character of God. The character of “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Part of the prophet’s role entails courageously confronting those in power whose operational frameworks are not built on love for all humans despite difference. This means when the prophet surveys the land and sees the poor being taken advantage of, the widows and orphans being overlooked, and those in positions of power lining their own pockets, the prophet confronts those in power because they see the absence of love. As Dr. Cornel West rightly says, “justice is what love looks like in public” (West, 2010). In a nutshell, the prophetic tradition can be employed wherever injustice is observed, (be it politics, community, workforce, church, or education institutions), because the prophet knows that “injustice anywhere is threat to justice everywhere” (<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/>). This takes me back to this chapter's main question: How are things? In other words, what inequities would the prophet discover if they were to survey today's PWI design and arts colleges?

### **How are Things?**

One must admit, like just like all other areas of society, inequities are prevalent within institutions of higher education no matter the dominant population. Prophets

operating in higher education spaces must be able to see things the way they are and when inequities are present, they are required to confront those responsible. As someone who operates within the Black prophetic tradition, I offer my observations of how things were for me as theatre student in multiple Predominately White Institutions.

As a student surveying the university theatre programs I attended or participated in, the primary injustice I noticed was the pervasiveness of a White dominate narrative. The best way to explain what I mean by that is to echo the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie who refers to this kind of narrative as a "single story" (Adichie 2009). Describing what a single story is and the problem with it, Adichie says a single story "creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story" (Adichie 2015, 12:49). The "one story" constantly reinforced at each PWI I attended, is the narrative that says BIPOC experiences are a monolith. Throughout my theatrical higher educational journey at PWIs, single story narratives were reinforced in many main stage theatre productions, the culture and classrooms within theatre study, and beyond that, they were present in the overall operations of the university as well. This narrative made it difficult for me to hone my acting talent because, for instance, there were not many roles to audition for me to diversify my performance portfolio. Limited number of "diverse" roles restricted me from experiencing theatre in a joyful way. Not only that, the single-story narrative caused me to question my own humanity as I began feeling like I was a "problem" (Du Bois 1903, 2). This single-story framework was, and is, a spirit-murdering framework; it is a deeply painful assault to the human spirit. In the spirit of the Black prophetic tradition, I

could not remain silent on the sin of exclusion. Prophets rise up and speak truth to power on behalf of people whose voices have been muted and excluded from various narratives throughout society. Black Liberation Theology was created due to the absence of Black narratives. Dr. James Hal Cone's Black prophetic fire was sparked when he noticed a dominance of White male theologians and an absence of Black theological perspectives on God. Dr. Cone used his theological education, compassion, and love for Black people to create a theology combining the philosophies of both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. This theological framing is known as Black Liberation Theology. Commenting on the significance of Dr. Cone's body of work, literary scholar, historian, and Christian theologian, Dr. Joseph Celucien writes:

The Father” of Black liberation theology, was America’s most important (Black) theologian in the twentieth-century who had energetically engaged the urgent issues of America’s race relations, justice, Black suffering, and civil rights. He wrote and spoke loudly against what he called "America’s Original Sin”, (White) racism, and thus pressed upon White Americans, especially White Christians in America, to stop practicing anti-Black racism and to alter their scornful feeling toward Black people. (Celucien 2020)

Dr. Cone was able to see the gap that existed (and still exists) between the nation's claim to be a Christian nation, White America's injustice based on skin color, and White Christian churches' and theologians' silence over the injustices performed on Black bodies. His theological framework counters the White dominant single-story narrative of exclusion by including a Black perspective into a theological system that once excluded Black voices. Dr. Cone's point of entry to the theological scene was based on his claim that God is on the side of Black people and other oppressed groups.

## **Liberation Theology: An Emancipative Framework**



Figure 7. Understanding Liberation Theology.

Dr. Cone's scholarship has always been important to my framework not merely because he is the founder of Black Liberation Theology as a systematic study. I employed Dr. Cone's philosophy based on what his framework says about moving through society (and higher education) in Black skin. His scholarship compels me to make room for my own voice rather than wait for others to approve the utility of my own frames. By making room for my voice, I also make room for my soul to flourish. Black Liberation Theology is an emancipative framework for souls who have been rejected by other souls but Dr. Cone helped me to see that no man-made framework can control the human spirit even as the body is oppressed. The framework of Black Liberation Theology involves understanding the relationship God has with those who are suffering. As Cone states, "any analysis of the gospel which did not begin and end with God's liberation of the oppressed was ipso facto unchristian" (Cone 1975, 36). In other words, Dr. Cone is saying that people who analyze or proclaim the gospel must have the same point of departure and arrival or else it cannot be considered the gospel. And, that point must be liberation of the oppressed.

Establishing “Black” as an ontology, Dr. Cone’s scholarship caused me to think about ways in which blackness exists beyond skin color or ethnicity. That point alone was crucial because it showed me that I did not have to perform a nationalistic ideology of blackness in order to help amplify BIPOC voices in the design and arts. Personally, I do not believe nationalism is a righteous framework to have because “God is love” (I John 4:7) and love is inclusive. Black as an ontology meant that my theological-based equity framework can and should be an inclusive one. I could include not just Black people, but anyone who was genuinely willing to side with those who observed, and or, were harmed by inequitable systems. What Dr. Cone provided me with was justifiable fierceness, he taught me about the emancipative nature of God’s love for all, but especially sufferers; and suffering is a reality for people of all backgrounds.

I put Dr. Cone’s scholarship into practice in my undergraduate theatre program after surveying the land and seeing the absence of Black stories and Black actors. I took on the role of prophet in order to emancipate my spirit and offer liberation to other Black students in the theatre department. In doing so, I was also offering students a chance for their souls to rest from the burdens of Whiteness by engaging in a cultural theatrical experience. I did so by changing my major from theatre to sociology and by writing and producing my own stage play called, *Lord Touch this Congregation*, which was based on my Black church experiences. For the production, I cast all-Black actors that included university theatre students, community members, and members of my church. We performed the play at three different locations: A Black church located in Dallas, The Black Academy of Arts & Letters, and in the lyceum of the university I attended. At each

location seats were filled to capacity by mostly African Americans. Although I had been writing plays for the Black church since I was fifteen-years-old, the *Lord Touch this Congregation* was the first play that I had written to be presented for an audience outside of the church, and it was a tremendous success and the beginning of me creating an equity leadership framework I could use to center BIPOC students in the design and arts.



Figure 8. Dallas Weekly article on gospel stage play. 2007.

# Student draws from faith for original production

By Crystal Martinez  
Intern

Preaching to a congregation of liars and gossips, Dallas junior Donta McGilvery is striving to change their ways through the words of Jesus.

This was the plot of McGilvery's play "Lord, Touch This Congregation" which was shown Jan. 24 in the Lyceum.

McGilvery has been writing since his freshman year of high school, and has been influenced by his Christian upbringing.

"Being in church my whole life, I've seen a lot of things that go on at church and have observed a lot of people's behaviors," McGilvery said. "My inspiration was observing these things and hearing the voice of God telling me to write it. Also, to speak on these things so that people would hear the voice of God and get saved if they were not saved."

McGilvery had been working on his play since August 2006, but before he brought it to NT, he had shown his play at Church on the Move in Dallas and at the Junior Black Academy of Arts and Letters in Dallas.

"He had our support all the way," said Charleston Mayes, pastor at Church on the Move. "For it being the first play he had done, he did an excellent job. They were very professional."

McGilvery said he held auditions at the church, and picked the cast two weeks later. He said the church allowed them to rehearse there anytime they

needed to.

McGilvery said he had to go through a strenuous process before he could bring the play to NT.

"I had to get a sponsor but no one would sponsor it," McGilvery said. "So I started my own student organization [Writers' Expressionists] and financed it myself through my own organization."

McGilvery said he had saved some money working at Denton State School for a year and sold tickets with his cast members to raise more money.

"Lord, Touch This Congregation" was his first play turned into a production.

"I thought it was a very good play, and I was really proud of him," said O'Bryan Hardaway, Dallas senior and friend of McGilvery. "I didn't think it would be that big of a hit and that good when he was first writing it."

McGilvery played the main character, Pastor D-Tzee, the young pastor who takes over to reform the church.

"It's a stage play about a church that has a crazy congregation," McGilvery said. "It's full of liars, gossips, snobs and even a weak pastor. A young lady needs help, but they can't even help her, and a new young pastor becomes an aggressive figure to unify the church."

McGilvery's younger sister and uncle also perform in the play.

"I enjoyed my character because it was a lot like myself when I was younger," said 15-



Rebecca Evans / NT Daily

Ashley Davis (right), Killeen junior, plays Sister Sharon in the production of "Lord, Touch This Congregation." Written by Dallas junior Donta McGilvery, the play tells of how a congregation turns back to the ways of Christ after being deceived by an ambitious assistant pastor.

year-old Tiffany McGilvery.

McGilvery said he thought the play was a huge success at all three showings and he hopes to reshoot the play later this semester.

McGilvery said he wants to continue writing plays and spreading the news of God all over.

"He is a focused young man and he has an unwavering

determination to do whatever he sets out to do," Mayes said. "God has given him a gift and we thank God for him."



Figure 9. North Texas Daily gospel stage play interview. 2007.

Drawing from the fierceness of Dr. James Cone, I grabbed hold of the Black church theatrical framework I embraced in my youth. Through that framework, I found rest. The Black church offered a framework that could be utilized in a personal way within secular institutions. I could understand why during the Civil Rights era Black people would meet in the church to plan and strategize, but they would also retreat to the



church after they were beaten or chased by those people who operated in frameworks of inequality. That is what happened in during “Bloody Sunday” in March 1965. In a march against the denial of their voting rights, John Lewis led a group of Black men, women, and children across the Edmond Pettus Bridge (now in the midst of being renamed the John Lewis Bridge) where they were met with brute force. The marchers were beaten by police, trampled by horses, and many marchers exited bloodied from the encounter. Those courageous marchers were chased down and beaten back across the bridge where they took refuge inside the church. The Black church was, for many then and for me today, a space where the human spirit could be nourished and replenished. It was the place where I found aesthetic and artistic refuge. What was inspiring for me as an undergraduate was the fact that I had a team of talented Black actors and large audiences of Black people, some religious and some not, eager to see a Black production.

### **Challenges Within Black Liberation Theology Framework**

Performing an all-Black production as a prophet operating in the Black Liberation Theology tradition, taught me some of the challenges of Liberation Theology as a framework. Through my production, I learned that while Black togetherness is an absolutely beautiful thing, disrupting the inequitable frameworks instilled in PWIs would not happen by way of an all-Black movement; we were still invisible to the larger university community and the theatre school. Despite the fact that the number of audience members at our shows far outnumbered Black audience members who supported a main stage theatre production, the chair of the theatre department never reached out to me and solicited advice or inquired about whether or not I would be interested in returning to the

program. In fact, I cannot say with confidence that the chair or any theatre professor knew about the successes of our production. That alone could cause one to feel hopeless about the possibilities of changing inequitable cultures. The experience told me that if I was interested in making a structural shift in the framework of university design and arts theatre schools, I would have to enlist the assistance of non-Black people.

The other challenge with Dr. Cone's Liberation Theology framework, for me, is that it lacks spirit-hoping. Dr. Cone helped me articulate the spirit-woundedness that I and many Black and Brown people face due to oppression. But, what his philosophy did not have enough of, for me, was spirit-hoping; that element that leads one to believing and imagining better days, or the Beloved Community. Do not get me wrong, Dr. Cone's scholarship does provide hope especially to Black people who wrestle against evil systems century after century, and to those of us who constantly find ourselves having to explain why we follow a religion that far too many erroneously believe belongs to "the White man." His scholarship is important for any generation but I can see how controversial yet necessary his philosophy was for Black people in the 1960s, a time when the racism, anti-Blackness, and discrimination unashamedly showed its face before the masses. The Twentieth Century needed to be met with the straight-forward bold declarations Dr. Cone provides. His scholarship provides the kind of hope that not only says to Black people "we belong," it boldly states that we, and all other oppressed people, are loved by God so much that he is constantly working with us and for us. For me, the hope in Dr. Cone's scholarship is such that it informs me that I can take possession of any space that ignores my humanity; I can assert myself because God says I belong. As

profound as that kind of message is, it still felt like a personal message. I needed a philosophy of hope that could speak to a diverse group of people, BIPOC as well as non-BIPOC, in this twenty-first century to show a diverse world how we need one another in order to be truly liberated.

Dr. Cone’s scholarship also, like many frameworks of the 1960s and prior (and many still today), lacked the inclusion of female voices as knowledgeable leaders. Women also need to be understood as prophets who shed light on injustices they see and experience, and they too speak truth to power. In the 1960s/70s, unfortunately, Liberation Theology frameworks failed Black women—the very same women who made the Civil Rights era as powerful as it was and whose commitment to the Black church made it a successful institution. Despite the challenges of Black Liberation Theology, Dr. Cone’s philosophy opened the door for other Black narratives to come forth and Black women prophets’ voices to contribute to the forwarding of equity leadership frameworks.

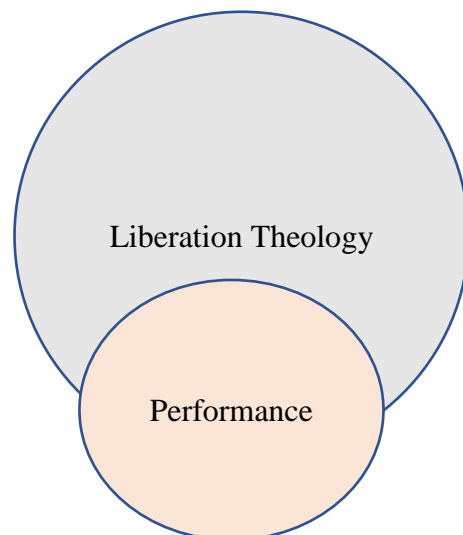


Figure 10. Liberation Theology & Performance.

### **Womanist Theology: An Arm of Liberation Theology**

“Womanist” derives from the word “womanish” which is a term that has its roots in Black communities; it is a term used when describing the adult-like behaviors of young Black girls. The term then was picked up in theology after Alice Walker used “womanist” to describe the “diverse ways in which Black women have bonded sexually and nonsexual” (Townes 2003, 161). In her book, *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), Walker gives a four-part definition for the term which set the stage for religious application. The fourth definition is often quoted to point out the inequalities that existed in the Feminist Movement which failed to consider Black women. The fourth definition reads, “Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender (Walker 1983, xi-xii). What Walker is saying is that “Womanist” considers all women, unlike the Feminist Movement that only centered White feminists. But, even Walker was a part of a larger discourse surrounding womanist. Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems introduced the term Africana Womanism in her groundbreaking book, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (1993). By including the term “Africana,” Hudson-Weems established the position that “Black women should not pattern their liberation after Eurocentric feminism but after the historic and triumphant women of African descent” (Hill 1997, 1811). With that critical analysis, Hudson-Weems pointed towards an altogether different type of framework for Black feminist model.

Womanist Theology asserts the voices, perspectives, and experiences of Black women into the Black Liberation Theology framework. The field began when Black women theologians such as Dr. Dolores Williams, Dr. Katie Cannon, and Dr. Jacqueline

Grant (to name a few), riding on the wave of the global and national Black feminist movement, drew on Alice Walker's definition of "womanist" to create an entirely new framework to be included in Black Liberation Theology. The prophet Dr. Delores Williams, a graduate of Union Theological Seminary, was the first scholar to use the term "Womanist Theology," in a 1987 article entitled "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices" (Townes 2003,164). This would be the term used to establish the field. A few years prior to that, in 1985, the Reverend Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon was the first to use the term "womanist" in the religious disciplines. The Rev. Dr. Cannon was the first Black woman to earn a PhD from Union Theological Seminary and the first Black woman to be ordained in the United Presbyterian Church in US America. Her book *Black Womanist Ethics* (1988) became the first book publication in the field of Womanist Theology. Her scholarship centered everyday Black women's daily existence as ethical and moral practices that can enrich our understanding of God and each other. The Rev. Dr. Cannon made it clear that a moral and ethical framework can only happen when we listen to Black women, include Black women, and are willing to learn from the wisdom and knowledge drawn out of the experiences of everyday Black women. She recognized that one of the most important aspects of equity is found in the rejection of single stories. As Adichie says, "when we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise" (Adichie 2009, 12:09). As a prophet, the Rev. Dr. Cannon surveyed the land and noticed that Black male narratives were seen to represent all Black people; patriarchal systems were the dominant

framework, and Black women's voices and cultural contributions needed to be amplified in order to push humanity closer to paradise and build beloved community.

Unfortunately, White feminists were not the only reason for the emergence of Womanist Theology. Black clergymen and theologians were also guilty of failing to hear from and acknowledge Black women. Womanist Theology, emerged therefore to address "the shortcoming of Black Liberation Theology and Feminist Theology" (Townes 2003, 160). Dr. Townes explains the absence of Black women voices from theological frameworks designed to advocate for matters of justice. Dr Townes states:

Early on, Black Theology demonstrated an unwillingness to deal with sexism and classism. Feminist Theology often reduced the variety of women's experiences to those of White, middle-class women, which, womanist theologians point out, does not address racism or classism. Womanist theology also addresses conscious and unconscious homophobia in theological discourse. (Townes 2003, 160)

Womanist Theology, confront all forms of oppression by drawing on the contributions of centuries of Black thinkers and Black literary writers to center the moral wisdom of Black women's everyday experiences. In addition to Dr. Delores Williams and the Rev. Dr. Katie Cannon, other Black women scholars who are considered a part of the first and second wave of Womanist Theologians include: Dr. Renita J. Weems, the first Black woman to earn a PhD in Hebrew Bible Studies; Systematic Theologian, Dr. Jacquelyn Grant; and Christian Ethicist Dr. Emilie Townes. Each of these women are a part of the Black prophetic tradition and their scholarship helped expand the field of Liberation Theology.

Womanist Theology enriched my own leadership framework by compelling me to recall the number of Black women writers, scholars, and playwrights I had in my own academic repertoire. Sadly, I had to acknowledge that I only knew a few of them. I had to question why, with the exception of some, Black women are overlooked in the field of theatre. Why were Black women—with rare exception—omitted from the literature, plays, and other aspects of my education? Why, for instance, were there so few safe set protocols in place to protect a cast of Black women, performing a play whose plot centered the life and dreams of an ambitious Black woman?

Womanist Theologians inspired me to expand my own gaze in a number of ways, most specifically, by emphasizing the significance of actively including Black women's voices. Considering all the inequities I had witnessed and participated in, as it related to invisibilizing and stereotyping Black women, I made it a point to include Black women in my own framework. In my second year at an arts college, for example, in the theatre program, I petitioned the theatre leadership team to create an African American Theatre class so that students could learn about the contributions of Black theatre-makers. The course was approved in January, and I was soon teaching the first Black theatre course the department had had in four years. Since I was able to create the course syllabus I wanted, I made sure to include Black women playwrights and actors. My syllabus included: Angelina Grimke, Alice Childress, Lynn Nottage, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Lorraine Hansberry, Gloria Bond Clunie, Katori Hall, Suzan- Lori Parks, Lydia Diamond, Cheryl West, and Kia Corthorn, just to name a few. The course drew in

students of various backgrounds and as the instructor, I was able to introduce students to narratives written for, by, and with, Black writers, including Black women.

More than an additive, that inspired me to be intentional about including the scholarship of Black women in my own framework, Womanist Theology transformed the way I see and understand inequities in art colleges. When it came to referring to inequities as evil, the scholarship of the prophet the Reverend Dr. Emilie Townes grew my orientation to justice immeasurably. Her scholarship makes plain exactly how evil works through single story narratives.

The Rev. Townes is known for her many titles and accomplishments. Some of her accomplishments include: a Baptist preacher, an American Christian social ethicist and theologian, a professor of Womanist Ethics, the first African American and female dean of Vanderbilt University Divinity School, and the first African American woman to be elected president of the American Academy of Religion. The Rev. Dr. Townes' groundbreaking book, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (2006), has had tremendous impact on the way I understand single story narratives as evil as well as the ways in which evil is perpetuated. The Rev. Dr. Townes' prophetic scholarship helped me to view dominant single-story narratives as a "cultural production of evil" (Townes, 4). Through this lens, "exploring evil as a cultural production highlights the systematic construction of truncated narratives designed to support and perpetuate structural inequities and forms of social oppression" (Townes, 4). There is always evil force behind injustice; we have to recognize it in order to stop the perpetuation of the evil act.



In her book, the Rev. Dr. Townes posits the idea that evil is a human construct that systematically and structurally produces such things as racism, misery, stereotypes, homophobia, hate, and other forms of suffering. Through her methodological use of interior material life of evil culture (drawing from Toni Morrison), counter-memory, and history, the Rev. Dr. Townes explores images of evil produced in our culture. She argues (contrary to the kinds of images we see of White women and White girls), “images of Black women and girls rest solidly in the imagination of US culture and must be deconstructed and understood for the awful impact they have on how a stereotype is shaped into “truth” in memory and in history” (Townes 3). To restate what the Rev. Dr. Townes postulates, Black women and girls in the US remain largely invisible and erroneously characterized due to the fact that stereotypes and disgustingly crafted images have been perpetuated for so long that they have shaped the way our society views Black women and girls. As a consequence of this prolonged evil, “truth” and “memory” regarding who Black women and girls are and what they have (and continue to) contribute, has strategically been replaced by false narratives drawn from a national, immoral imagination. The Rev. Dr. Townes’ theory explains why far too many people, for far too long, devalue Black women. If, however, we can use our imagination to construct evil, we can also use it to begin to do away with evil acts. To combat this, Womanist Theology focuses on highlighting how and why Black girls and women are made invisible while employing Black women scholarship to disempower harmful master narratives.

Of course, one does not have to be a preacher in order to operate as a prophet who sees injustice and notices evil acts. Indeed, the ability to see and interpret what you see comes through learned attention and practice. This is what I mean when I say the prophet surveys the land and they interpret the evil behind the inequities. Two ways of recognizing and interpreting inequities can be observed in religion and in theatre. In religion, we refer to this as hermeneutics, which is the interpretation of scriptures. The religious historian, Dr. Charles H. Long, tells us that surveying the land begins by reading beyond the written (texts or policies). *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (1986), his most famous works, illustrates the relationship between semiotics and hermeneutics and, as a result, helps me to understand that in some signs, symbols, and images there are implicit and explicit messages that promote White supremacy. Long's work provides theoretical insight on the meanings and significations of our world. I also see his work as a challenge for me to think about the signs, symbols, and images within design and arts colleges and schools.

Dramaturgy, similar to hermeneutics, is the practice used to research the dynamics of performance. The dramaturg is the person in charge of analyzing the signs and symbols of a theatrical production. In this role, moved by the content and context of the script, the dramaturg examines the stage design and props, the music, the programs, and the embodiment of the play's characters in order to be sure all the signs, symbols, and images send the intended message to audience members. The dramaturg as historian, assures a theatrical piece remains authentic. For instance, the dramaturg is the person who makes sure the actors' clothing matches the clothing of the time period in which the

play takes place. Or, as another example, if a play centers a Black family in the deep South during the 1950s, the dramaturg would make sure the music reflects that time period. It would be appropriate if seen in the living room set design, a record player lifting the voice of the jazz singer, Sarah Vaughan. If, however, on that same set the audience notices a Sarah Vaughan song being played on a laptop computer or iPad, some audience members would be confused about the intent of the director. Is this done intentionally? Is there a twist to this story? Is this some kind of contemporary-re-narration of the 1950s?

Beyond the historical analysis, the dramaturg is also a representative of the audience. In that case, the job of the dramaturg is to take on the audience's perspective. Theatre professor Dr. Patrice Pavis states that dramaturgy "studies both the ideological and formal structures of the work, the dialectical tension between a stage form and its ideological content, and the specific mode of reception of a performance by the spectator" (Pavis 1982, 27). They have to be able to determine how an audience might receive a performance; how would it resonate with them. The dramaturg may ask "are the themes of the play communicated in a way that the audience receives the same message? Are the stories and the cultures within the stories being presented in an honest way?" Their analysis goes beyond the historical effects, and when signs and symbols point in a different way than the director intended or spectators expected, things can become chaotic. Excited audience members can become disgruntled. They then become investigators, suspicious, and some even become distrusting of the director's theatrical knowledge and capability. The dramaturg's job is to assist the production team in

avoiding misdirection or mis-signaling. They accomplish this by ensuring that signs and symbols tell the same tale and the audience receives the intended message.

Cultural readings—hermeneutics or dramaturgy—are more common among people of color than they are among Whites because people of color must read and interpret signs often in order to survive locations hostile to their very being. Many of us, as BIPOC individuals, for example, understand what it means to reject our own cultural contributions so that we can get a passing grade on a writing assignment. So many times, we operate according to how we interpret the *mise en scène* or the environment.

By tying religious meanings to conquests and colonization, identity and culture, Dr. Long's scholarship led me to think more extensively and critically about the unique ways design and arts colleges deliver a version of equity that is different from the type of equity BIPOC students seek. Dr. Long challenged me by forcing me to point out the ways students of color understand and see equity versus pseudo-equity performances embedded in school policies. Pointing these differences out means engaging in cultural readings in ways that go beyond the most obvious surface-level examples; it requires digging into the signs, symbols, and images students see and experience in design and arts colleges. I knew that becoming an equitable community mandates rooting out any on-campus system that communicates and perpetuates evil, but before that could happen, I needed to communicate to others how these evil systems are pervasive and how they are signs and symptoms of moral decay. To combat evil, morality has to be a central motivating factor, which would be impossible without the inclusion of Womanist Theology.

For my equity framework, I drew on the Rev. Dr. Townes' notion of cultural production of evil and I translated that into the performative. I view what the Rev. Dr. Townes sees as productive as performance. In other words, I interpret the examples above, as well as various other evils I (and others) have experienced in society and arts schools, as the cultural performance of evil. I use the word "performance" because that is what evil is, a performance. As performance studies scholar, Diana Taylor reminds us, "performance is a doing to, a thing done to and with the spectator" (Taylor 86, 2016). Contemporary evil acts have a history. That history involves keeping Black students out of White higher education institutions and as a result, required the aid of the US National Guard to usher students to and around campus, even governors have stood in the way of Black students seeking education at some public universities. These are a few examples of the harm that has been performed on BIPOC students.

### **CHAPTER 3: THE WAY THINGS CAN BE; THE BELOVED COMMUNITY**

Taking the metaphor of the prophet a step further than I did in the previous chapter, a prophet is also called to be an artist. Most people would not think of a prophet as an artist but I believe they naturally belong together. A prophet not only has to possess the courage to “call out” unrighteous or immoral behavior, they must also be able to call people into a moral way of operating. The “call in” is where the artistic resides. After bringing the fire to those who operate inequitably and immorally, the prophet must also offer water to calm the fire while being careful not to quench it entirely. The prophet as artist is responsible for creating, in the minds of those they confront, a picture of another way; a more equitable way. This is the insight that Dr. Walter Brueggemann reveals through his germinal work, *The Prophetic Imagination* (2001). A Protestant, Old Testament scholar, and theologian whose work focuses on the Hebrew prophetic tradition, Dr. Brueggemann posits that we should understand prophetic texts as “acts of imagination that offer and propose ‘alternative reality’ . . .” (Brueggemann x and xi). So, the prophet, as mediator between the people and those in power, is a seer and a truth-teller, as well as an artist who uses moral conviction, story and imagination to influence others to operate within more just frameworks.

The ability to reach into a sacred and ancient text and see an alternative route that could be useful for dealing with the chaos of our day, is an essential skill to have in times like the present. “For what is now required is that a relatively powerless prophetic voice must find imaginative ways that are rooted in the [sacred] text but that freely and daringly move from the text toward concrete circumstance” (Brueggemann xii); this is the job of

the prophet. What is largely missing from what we call “prophetic” today, is an effective use of the imagination; the ability to think of creative solutions and have others imagine along with us, is an incredibly needful skill and vocation. While Dr. Brueggemann is correct in naming the lack of imagination as an element absent from the prophetic, what is missing from his argument is that in order to have the creative impulse of the imagination, we need compassion and communion. In other words, compassion and communion are the grounds of which creativity and imagination can be performed. Our lack of compassion and communion leaves confrontations unresolved and evil unchecked. Always, the prophets of the Bible were to speak truth to power and challenged unjust norms that caused others to be treated inequitably. Followed by that was an invitation to build bridges, open up opportunities of forgiveness, offer an invitation to restructure and recommit, redistribute and recreate equity on behalf of all people.

Children, operating in the Black prophetic tradition, my aim in this chapter is to paint a picture of the way things can be if performing equity is the norm within Predominantly White, arts institutions. I contend that the way for design and arts colleges to avoid the consequences that come as a result of frameworks that rob BIPOC communities of their dignity, is to implement a completely different framework. The new equity framework requires both imagining and ongoing collective re-imagining; that is the primary appeal of this chapter. In the spirit of the prophet, I make this appeal to arts college leaders currently operating within traditional frameworks of higher education institutions. I implore you to be open to creating new possibilities and, as a result of that

imagining, to build an equity framework that authorizes the performance of equity as the school's norm and daily operations. This is what I mean by Equity Performance

Coalition: consistently, collectively imagining and constructing equity frameworks with those who make up the fullness of the design and arts community. As seen in the figure below, the reward that follows collective (re)imagining by way of equity performance coalitions, is the creation of the Beloved Community.

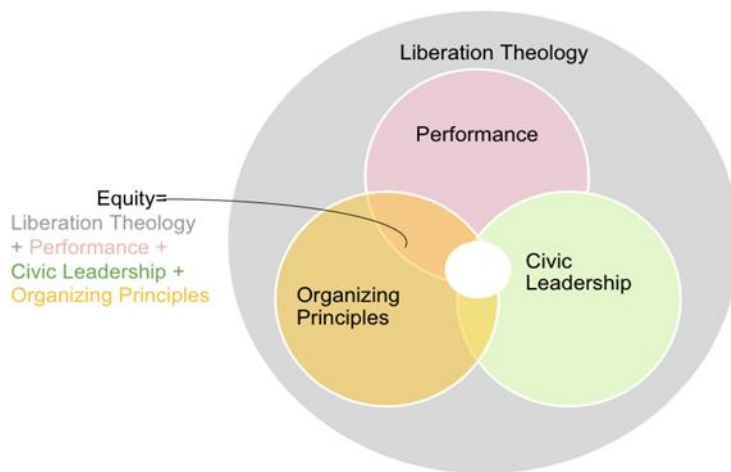


Figure 11. Liberation Theology, Performance, Civic Leadership, Organizing Principles.

### **Moral Fusion Coalition and the Beloved Community**

The Beloved Community is a diverse community where all are embraced in the fullness of their human selves. I was first introduced to this term through the sermons of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Though he spoke of it in abstract ways, what is clear is that the Beloved Community centers hope, respect, and possibility. Contrary to what some may think, the attainment of such a compassionate and just society is rooted in reality, not idealism or some far-fetched dream. The terminology the Rev. King used to



describe this community emphasizes that it is not an overly romanticized dream, but rather a community that thrives on the seeing the humanity of all people. That kind of goal requires community members to create ways to resolve disputes in a way that honors the sisterhood and brotherhood of those involved. In 1960, the Rev. King described his idea of the Beloved Community and the fight it would take to remain there. He stated: “There is another element that must be present in our struggle that then makes our resistance and nonviolence truly meaningful. That element is reconciliation. Our ultimate end must be the creation of the beloved community” (King institute 1960). As you can see from the language used, the creation of the Beloved Community is contingent on the kind of framework used by those who wish to bring it into fruition. In other words, the ends by which the community is to exist, must be preexistent in the processes of the community itself.

The Rev. Martin Luther King invited people from all walks of life to participate in the creation of the Beloved Community, regardless of their background. Just before his assassination in 1968, he was leading a Poor Peoples Campaign to converge on the National Mall in Washington, DC.; a plan that was brought to him by Marian Wright Edelman. By bringing together a broad, diverse coalition of the nation’s poor people, the Rev. King was demanding the government address all inequities seen in unemployment, housing, and other areas of life. The Rev. King’s agenda in 1968 seemed to be a political one rooted in alliance and mutuality. What ground can the prophet utilize today in order to enlist the help of students and leaders from design and arts colleges in the creation of the Beloved Community? Religious principles? Political beliefs?

This was the question on my mind when, following the death of an unarmed Black person (which made national news), I considered organizing a protest at the arts college I attended. If imagining with a diverse coalition was required for the Beloved Community to be created, on what basis might I call on a broad diverse coalition of people to come together? I found the answer in the philosophy of the Rev. Dr. William J. Barber's Moral Fusion Coalition (MFC). I learned from the MFC's concept that a prophet as artist must prioritize morality in order to inspire and interact with large groups of people. Today's prophet must understand that transforming evil systems into equitable frameworks necessitates the participation of a diverse range of individuals. To accomplish that level of transformation, morality must be a pre-existing means in the Beloved Community, and that means that a prophet must be both an artist and an organizer.

There is no liberation without morality; it is within the realm of Liberation Theology that morality exists. The Rev. Barber's theological practice and activism as a Christian pastor, one profoundly steeped in the Black prophetic tradition, emphasizes morality and coalition-building as tools for combating inequalities. Entering into the same place where the Rev. King last fought, the Rev. Barber's particular activism includes continuing the Poor People's Campaign, leading the Forward Together Movement, the Moral Mondays Movement, and the Moral Fusion Coalition (MFC). For his inclusive advocacy work and concept of developing multiracial and interfaith fusion coalitions, the Rev. Barber was awarded a 2018 MacArthur 'Genius' Award. Each of these movements carries a prophetic message that requires one to address the problems

of the impoverished, oppressed, and those who are mostly ignored on the national, social, and political stage. MFC leaders, in keeping with the prophetic tradition, not only confront those in authority by pointing out injustices, but they also research, strategize, and develop solutions that help people conceive of new futures.

The Rev. Barber's Moral Fusion Coalition and the Rev. King's Nonviolence frameworks are similar in that they both provide a method for anyone from any background to join in, or to use as a template for developing a moral movement of your own. In the Rev. King's framework, I was able to see that at the core, he invited people to operate for justice using a moral framework. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference's "Six Steps of Nonviolent Social Change" (The King Center) served as organizing principles for confronting political or institutional leaders in a nonviolent manner whenever an unjust act was committed. The six steps include (the full list and details are found in Appendix A): 1) Information gathering, 2) Education, 3) Personal commitment, 4) Negotiation, 5) Direct action, and 6) Reconciliation.

Similarly, the "14 Steps of Moral Fusion Organizing" (Barber and Hartgrove 2016, 127-130) as developed by the Rev. Barber's Moral Fusion Coalition, are the movement's organizing principles for confronting political and institutional leaders who have the power to legislate justice on behalf of those who have been excluded.

Six of the 14 principles of the coalition's principles include (the full list is found in Appendix A):

- 1) Engage in indigenously led grassroots across the state, 2) Use moral language to frame and critique public policy, regardless who is in power. 3)

Demonstrate a commitment to civil disobedience that follows the steps of nonviolent action and is designed to change the public conversation and consciousness. 4) Build stages from which to lift voices of everyday people impacted by immoral policies. 5) Recognize the centrality of race. America's First and Second Reconstructions sought to heal the wound of race-based slavery, America's original sin. 6) Build a broad, diverse coalition including moral and religious leaders of all faiths.

Each of the two organizations provides an equity framework that can be used to transform arts colleges. The Moral Fusion Coalition's principles build on the Nonviolent Social Change framework that came before it. I found the most important piece of my equity leadership framework puzzle by understanding both sets of principles. I understood that I would be calling students together based on morality, but I also knew that we would be an organization built on creating and re-creating frameworks for both our coalition and the institution. Our goal was to assist our department in achieving Beloved Community. The ideals of the Rev. Barber taught me how to form a coalition, while the concepts of the Rev. King taught me how to negotiate with those in positions of power. Both leaders taught me how to defend myself against those who participate in cultural performances of evil. Building onto the organization's moral principles of both leaders, we, the student coalition, created a list of 8 principles that guided our operations.

Liberation Coalition Principles:

1. We Engage in indigenously led grassroots organizing.
2. We Commit to grassroots organizing across campus.

3. We Call for performances across the state from BIPOC artists.
4. We hold Accountable, individuals and institutions who do not practice equity.
5. We Build transformative, long-term coalition relationships in the greater community.
6. We believe in Building a coalition whereby people from all faiths are not only invited to participate but are able to draw on their faith as a guide for liberation
7. We Educate ourselves and others.
8. We Engage in cultural arts.

The Beloved Community and the Third Reconstruction are inextricably linked to morality. In their book *The Third Reconstruction: Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics, and the Rise of a Justice Movement* (2016) the Reverend William J. Barber and the Reverend Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove posit the idea that a Third Reconstruction is already underway and that the only way to fully enter into this period is to engage in moral movements made of diverse groups of people. In the authors' own words, "A moral movement can come home to where you are, exposing twenty-first-century injustice and giving us a shared vision for a Third Reconstruction to save the soul of America." (Barber and Wilson-Hartgrove xv). This is a national call to action, one that I have answered throughout my life, but especially in my role as a student activist and university employee: to save the soul of our university's design college. However, I recognize that in order to save the soul of our arts college, the college must have a soul to begin with. If one believes the arts college have a soul because the college is made of people who have souls, then considering the inequities BIPOC students have faced by way of the

university in each Reconstruction, whose soul is does the college represent? At the PWIs, I have attended, it was evident that the structure of the colleges were White dominant spaces. From the professors to administrators, to the students and the curriculum, the majority of what I saw and learned was White dominant. That said, while I am interested in saving the soul of the arts college, I believe in order to do so requires the White dominant college to be born-again. To experience a rebirth means to change the way the college is structured (which, as a whole on the onset, did not consider BIPOC students or experiences). The old order of White superiority and patriarchy must die so that a new order of diversity and shared-power can emerge. Equity can only be a reality if diverse voices and experiences are a part of the structure.

The Liberation Coalition, on the whole, was able to discuss a variety of ideas regarding the kind of equitable change we wanted to see in the arts college. Responding to a call I sent out, a diverse group of students joined together to form our own Moral Fusion Coalition. Africa, Asia, India, and North America were among the continents represented in the coalition. Our student and alumni coalition included both BIPOC and non-BIPOC students. Using Liberation Theology as our foundation, within a year, we wrote and issued a list of demands to our department leaders, held town halls with leaders of the arts college concerning the progress of the demands. Our coalition met every week in the fall of 2020 and every two weeks in the spring of 2021 with an agenda.

Furthermore, we assisted in the establishment of a Diversity Library where the notes and narratives of our coalition and other student coalitions in the arts college could be archived and be accessed by future students. With the support of the college, our coalition

held a workshop training on Race and Theatre for our members. Our coalition (via the list of demands) was a driving factor for numerous departmental changes that occurred in the arts college during the 2020-2021 school year, including: The monthly publication called The Purview, one of the notable benefits that came out of the college's Equity Department. This publication was established to highlight the stories, ideas, and artistic work of BIPOC students and leaders. Our coalition also instigated change for the rewriting of the "Safe Set" theatre production policies in which a diverse group of students served on the committee and contributed to building the new policies. For me, and even in the midst of a global pandemic and national racial reckoning, the 2020-2021 school-year exemplified Beloved Community due to the equity our coalition performed. The culmination of this change lies in our coalition's creation of the Reconciliation Process (found in Appendix B).

### **The Reconciliation Process**

The Reconciliation Process is a system, piloted by our coalition, that offers participants the opportunity to settle disputes through a mediated-dialogical process rather than a legal or administrative one. The concept for constructing such a process came from the list of demands we submitted to the arts college. We noticed a large number of complaints about an unethical accountability system in the design and arts school. Students in particular complained that when they submitted a grievance they experienced, they would either: 1) not hear back from leadership, 2) be informed that the complaint is "being taken care of" without having a way of finding out anything more, or 3) learn that the person they submitted a grievance about, had been told about the

grievance despite their claim that the process was a confidential one. In light of those observation, we began building a process that primarily centered students.

However, once we started constructing the process, we quickly found that what we thought was a student-only injustice was a system that also narrowed options for leaders as well. Because students and leaders interact in a linear interchange (they all work with and for one another), a system that is unjust on one side has adverse effects on the other sides as well. To echo the way the Rev. King once stated it: we are all “caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly” (King 1963). There was no way to focus solely on students in a process that also involved leaders; liberation had to include everyone operating in the design and arts community, students and leaders alike.

Taking that into consideration, we began to understand that the challenge was much bigger than grievances and harm; it was not merely a question of: “What to do when a harm is done?” Instead, the better question was “how do we operate on a daily basis within a broad and diverse community where conflicting thoughts, ideas, and expectations do not leave individuals with their spirit wounded? The complexity of that question exposed the need for a system not built on discipline and punishment but rather a moral process built on harm reduction and reconciliation. Knowing this, when someone informed our coalition of the harmful comments a leader made regarding a student, we began forming a process that could be used to possibly liberate both the student and the leader. The Reconciliation Process, therefore, is a process intended to do more than seek



to hold individuals accountable, driven by the belief that every human soul is redeemable, it opens up space for fellowship and communion:

An empathetic process that aims to impact the heart, mind, and spirit, the Reconciliation Process operates through: Love and not hate, reconciliation and not humiliation, honest dialogue between those who participate in the process, coalitions of diverse groups of students and faculty/staff/admins of good will and moral aptness in higher education, and by centering the voices and needs of BIPOC and other marginalized communities. (Reconciliation Process Philosophy found in Appendix C)

### **Scenarios of Reconciliation**

The duration of building this pilot process took 7 months and through the creation of creating this new framework, we had to envision how the dialogue between the mediator and the participants might look. Again, we were mindful that the process we were creating had to go beyond the scope of the one situation that was reported to us. We decided to use performance to help us think through the possibilities. The structure we used to ask questions and gather information needed for building a reconciliatory process was “scenarios.” Diana Taylor explains the utility of scenarios. These “portable frameworks” (Taylor 2003, 28) are a “paradigm for understanding social structures and behaviors [that] might allow us to draw from the repertoire as well as the archive.” (Taylor 29). This was the case for us as we invited three trained mediators into the creation space and as we selected characters for each of the five roles (two participants who have a dispute, two mediators, the dean, a notetaker). For our improvisations, participants were able to first, “recall, recount, or reactivate a scenario [and] conjure up the physical location” (Taylor 29). This included the dance room, theatre space, classroom and other on-campus spaces where students and leaders interact. Secondly, as

participants reflected on various reasons students and leaders might engage in the Reconciliation Process; their gestures, voice, and movement indicated that the participants as social actors “wrestle[d] with the social construction of bodies” (Taylor 29). This was indicated by the transformation from sadness and fear that participants had when they entered the process (representing how others participants may feel when they first enter the process), to smiles and/or a change in tone and temperament as the participants engaged in dialogue and gained better understanding (representing the transformation some may experience through the process). Thirdly, listening to each participant allowed our coalition to create “formulaic structures” (Taylor 31) that were mending but safe enough for us to offer as a fixed-framework that could be put into practice. Fourthly, we recognized the “multifaceted systems at work in the scenario itself” (Taylor 31) which occurred during the transmission of knowledge or the “passing it on” (Taylor 31) from the archive and/or repertoire. An example of this is seen in the transmission of our scenarios that utilized various systems such as: telling, writing, enacting, gestures, and movements. Fifth, Taylor states that “scenarios force us to situate ourselves in relationship to it; as participants, spectators, or witnesses, we need to “be there,” part of the transfer.” Being there, a part of the improvisations, allowed us to collectively envision different ways leaders and students could benefit from a system that offers opportunity to operate in spirit-nourishing ways. To image the possibilities of a more just community built on harm reduction and reconciliation helps eliminate fear that usually comes with engaging in a punitive system. Taylor ends the six-step scenario by stating that “a scenario is not necessarily, or even primarily, mimetic.” Through our own

scenarios, I understood that most likely, none of the ways the scenarios were playing out would go exactly the way we practiced it. The limitations of scenarios are that we can only think of responses and outcomes based on our own point of view as students and alumni. We did not, for instance, invite professors into the space to see how they might that professor respond. Then too, scenarios are never performed the exact same way no matter how many times they are performed. This is why Taylor says, “rather than a copy, the scenario constitutes a once-againness” (Taylor 32). Despite the limitations, our purpose in conducting scenarios was to gain some insight into what would occur during the process, and from there, we knew we would be able to create a Reconciliation Process. In addition, in order to address the constraints, we made sure to mention that the reconciliation process is adaptable to the needs of individuals who utilize it. In the end, the process we created was only a pilot draft and needed to undergo revisions that aligned with the safety policies and guidelines established by employment laws, human resources, and university policies. Although there was still much work to be done to create the kind of process we envisioned, the joy, for me, was engaging in the process of imagining and creating alongside others.

### **We were the Beloved Community**

What we found fascinating was that, despite the fact that we were acting willingly, people opted to use a true traumatic experience of hurt or offense that occurred during their time in the arts college. Although I cannot tell why it happened that way, I believe it speaks much about how at ease individuals were in that virtual zoom area

together. Being a part of it was a wonderful experience. White, Black, and Brown individuals came to discuss concerns that threatened our personal safety, the safety of the students we represented, and the safety of others who enter the PWI design and arts space after us. That was an aspect of Beloved Community. We existed as a diverse group (in every way) of students and alumni who committed ourselves to the work imagining and enacting equity. We shared and listened, letting BIPOC voices lead until we found a place where all voice could merge into one voice with many beautiful sounds. We made the space comfortable for religious and political conversations. We supported one another. We laughed. We cried. We collaborated with administrative leaders. We collaborated with other student groups. We created documents of joy, safety, and peace. We joked. We argued. We settled disputes using the same document and processes we were creating for the college. We were the Beloved Community. This is the way things can be. The Beloved Community is not a community that asks us to be more moral than those who are a part of an immoral education system, “but becoming freer than we’ve ever been, free to engage our fullest powers” (Thurman 1976, xvii).

## **CHAPTER 4: AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY; LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN ACTION**

Améiah and Faraji, in this chapter I give specific examples of how, as a prophet in the Black tradition, I developed a BIPOC-centered equity coalition within a large arts college at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). I participated in a yearlong experience that include a call to action, listening sessions, development of guiding principles and I participated in various actions taken throughout the academic year. Not only that, children, in this chapter I also reflect on what leadership roles are needed for others to also develop a BIPOC-centered equity coalition within an arts college at a PWI. This chapter answers my research questions by reflecting on the steps and power needed to develop a coalition. I want you to remember that the work of equity requires the combination of both theory and practice.

In the previous sections of this work, I shared the stories, philosophies, and key individuals upon whose shoulders I build my framework and leadership practice. But, I recognize it can sometimes be difficult to translate theory into action. As you read through this section and the next, you will notice that I list key takeaways for adoption into your own equity performance and coalition building—community, especially a Beloved Community, does not just happen. We build Beloved Communities through hard work and intentional action aligning both the processes and the products of equity performance. I share these "takeaways" as these actions helped me maintain my prophetic operations while helping the arts college develop strategies to center its BIPOC populations. My overall goal within the arts college was to help the college enter into the Third Reconstruction and I learned through trial and error what worked well and what

potentially lead to failure. I offer these to you so that you can further advance our family's legacy of love and hope within the joyful work of enacting positive social and cultural change for your own and others' thriving.

### **Data Design**

In *The Art of Case Study Research* (1995), Dr. Robert E. Stakes lays out 20-point criteria for determining what makes a good case study. Some of the criteria include: "Is the report easy to read?" "Are its issues developed in a serious and scholarly way?" "Is the case adequately defined?" "Were sufficient raw data presented?" And, "is there a sense of story to the presentation?" (Stakes 131), to name a few. I engage with Stake's criteria as I move through my own cases. Throughout each case study, I employ the qualitative methodology of autoethnography and I utilize multiple data sources for each study, such as: the Facebook call to action, direct observations, meeting notes, journal reflection, the letter of demand, and process and procedures for developing the pilot of the reconciliation process documents.

As it relates to the narrative form, I use the holistic, single-story narrative; holistic because I am focusing on one case, myself. Single-story narrative because my perspective is the only narrative being used to tell this story. This study is considered instrumental because the purpose of "this case study is to understand something else" (Stakes 3). Understanding how I work can help others see some of the advantages and drawbacks of an equity leadership model founded on Liberation Theology and demonstrated through coalition-building. As our world enters the Third Reconstruction, understanding this will allow us to reinvent how leadership should work equitably.

The qualitative case study is the best approach for me to use since it allows me to use "thick description" to explore my case. Clifford Geertz, an anthropologist, coined the term "thick description." In his essay "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" (Geertz 1973), Geertz lays out the qualitative method of thick description as used in ethnographic research. Much later, Albert J. Mills, Gabrielle Durepos, and Elden Wiebe also help describe this term even more, commenting that thick "description must be balanced by analysis, seeking to establish the significance of actions, behaviors, or events for the participants involved." (Mills, et al., 2010, 2). This definition is important to my research as both the analysis and the significance of the actions in each of my case studies will be listed following the description of the case and I include "take away" lessons following the analysis. The thick description within my case studies are the details of each event that I list. The purpose of a case study is to "seek greater understanding of the case." (Stake 1995, p.16). That said, my purpose for using autoethnographic case study is to clarify how Liberation Theology (via the prophet) helped me to activate the Beloved Community in a PWI arts college.

Although, I have built the previous sections using my personal story, traditional Black Christian narrative practices, and my experiences as a Black man and father, I turn to autoethnographic case study so that I can clarify how the theories I have discussed become actions which led to change. I divide the cases using the different leadership roles I played: student organizer and administrative leadership. I have found autoethnographic case study a pragmatic methodology for my research as it allows me to draw from specific events and phenomena to show the practices of Liberation Theology

as a leadership frame. I specifically explore two important events that I led in order to observe the intersection of Liberation Theology (via the prophet), while borrowing from the language, purpose, and goals of the Moral Fusion Coalition. I explore these specific events through a combination of storytelling (using thick description) and questions I asked myself about the *how* of the events as well as what I learned in each instance. Additionally, this autoethnographic section illustrates the prophet's horizontal role (working side-by-side with leaders and students) in working with the people and, the prophet's vertical role (hierarchical leadership structures) with those in power and working for the institution.

### **The First Case: Development of a BIPOC-Centered Equity Coalition**

#### **Call to Action**

I wrote a Facebook post asking “all BIPOC students, grads and allies of justice in the arts college: “what changes do y’all want to see in our department moving forward?” I asked that specific question because I knew that the arts college’s leaders wanted to hear from students regarding ways we believed the department could center equity for its BIPOC students, but they did not know what platform would be most effective. The townhall meeting they originally setup following the death of another unarmed Black person was no longer an option. Almost a month earlier, the dean issued a statement denouncing racism. Mentioned along with that statement was the promise of a town hall “on the crisis unfolding within our American communities [. . .] and strategies to a new ecology of arts [. . .].” The town hall was to also “include listening spaces, panels, healing activities, and opportunities for strategizing with radical creativity.” Since the dean’s



email had gone forth, however, a month had past and many leaders were still trying to determine whether or not a townhall was the best option. That was when I decided to take my curiosity to social media and inquire of my peers what changes they would like to see. Once a friend of mine shared my post, people began sharing their thoughts, experiences, and grievances.

In the midst of all the grievances students shared on social media, two arts professors, joined the thread and began defending themselves—though the students had not called them out by name. The professors suggested students were the problem, to which the students disagreed. Referring to the failure of the department to handle grievances, one student expressed that they feel the arts college protects faculty over students to which the professors disagreed. This kind of exchange went on for a while before a third professor gave thoughtful words that brought an end to the contentious discussion.

### Listening Session

At the end of the exchange, the other students and I immediately began organizing. We set a date for our first meeting. I shared my idea about writing a list of demands to submit to our school. People began volunteering to be the notetaker, researcher, and administrator to help set up the meetings. At that same moment an alumnus quickly set up a Google document to be filled out by students who planned on attending the meeting. Within moments our first agenda was set and shared with all who filled out the Google form.

Questions for and from this experience:

*Why did I choose to move with a coalition and what is the potential for the institution's transformation long term?*

The decision to move forward with a coalition rather than moving individually stemmed from my belief that more can get done with collectives of people than can be done alone. We are stronger together in the “WE” than moving from an “I” perspective. I knew that with a collective of voices amplifying the need for antiracist practices, university leadership could not ignore our voices or sweep our concerns under the rug. By calling on a coalition of voices, we could focus on collective action through a student-led structure rather than the proposed town-hall frame administration had suggested after the death of an unarmed Black person. Additionally, by working together to share our stories and experiences, we built and controlled the narrative rather than allowing other stories and White supremacy master metaphors to proliferate; we defined equity practices and performances. When I say we controlled our own narrative, is that we, as students, did not have to wait for the leaders of the Predominantly White arts college to set a date for us to speak about what changes we wished to see. By responding to the Facebook post, we were able to engage in that discussion the same day I made the post. We controlled our own date as well. Not only did we meet over social media that day, we also collectively decided when would be best for the majority of students and alumni to meet again. The listening sessions over Facebook and setting up our future meeting meant that we were able to avoid the White savior trope that says that Black and Brown people need White people to rescue them. And, by working together across identity locations, we collaboratively built a deeper understanding of one another and of how

equity performance and Beloved Community could come into being for the collective thriving of all. We imagined together by sharing our different experiences of inequity, trauma, and the institutional disdain for difference.

Take away lesson: In order for higher education administrators, staff, and faculty to perform equity and help usher an arts institution into the Third Reconstruction, leaders must first believe that a more equitable future can come into being by way of a diverse groups of voices. Leaders must be intentional about including the voices and ideas of those who will be directly impacted by leadership decisions. This can be done by establishing Equity Performance Coalitions.

#### *How Did I Call People to Action?*

When the arts college leadership team seemed unsure about choosing the right platform to use in order to hear from students, I leveraged my position as student to hear from my peers and to call them to action. That organizing, in turn, was a call to action for the arts college's leadership as well. To get the ball rolling, I turned to social media and asked students and alumni, "what changes do y'all want to see in our department moving forward?" By asking the question that way, I was calling the people to action by assuring that the ends by which the arts college's leadership sought (which was equity for BIPOC students) was preexistent in the means (student voices). The way I saw it, the difficulty leaders were having choosing the right platform to hear from students was because they were not asking students. I wanted to assure that the equity framework leaders wanted to build, included the voices of the students— "nothing for us, without us," in other words. My call to action made it impossible for leadership to build further communitarian structures without treating students as essential members of the community with diverse voices, needs, and belief structures. My call to action:

- 1) Utilized social media to get the conversation about equity started with students and therefore making sure the ends (establishing equity on behalf of BIPOC students) preexisted in the means (the inclusion of BIPOC student voices in the decision-making process). Our experience with the two faculty members who argued that change was not necessary (and the one faculty member who joined the conversation as an ally) also showed how necessary coalitions would be toward enacting positive social change and antiracist practices.
- 2) Emphasized active listening by creating a space where stories of inequitable treatment could be heard and shared, making it easier for me, as a prophet, to create a picture of the need for equity coalitions amongst students, faculty, and administrative leaders to students and leaders.
- 3) Made it possible for students and alumni to participate in a moral fusion coalition creating equitable solutions; beginning with our creation of a “List of Demands” (found in Appendix C)

Take away lesson: In order for higher education administrators, staff, and faculty to perform equity and help usher an arts institution into the Third Reconstruction, leaders must be sure that the end (equity on behalf of BIPOC students) for which you seek, is preexistent in the means (include BIPOC students in decision-making processes). That alone is a moral obligation. Begin by building Equity Performance Coalitions to amplify voices of students, leaders, and faculty who will be impacted by policies and decisions. (Inspired by Moral Fusion Coalition principle #4.)

#### *How Did We Establish Our Purpose?*

In the beginning, I thought our student group met solely for the purpose of writing a “List of Demands” to submit to leaders within the arts college. I was wrong. Our purpose grew as we communicated in the online space about our grievances and our ideas

for equity and beloved community. By listening to one another we discovered our purpose and built the stakes in our collaborative thriving. This experience reminded me of the value of hearing firsthand from others. In this experience, I learned that allowing space for people to represent themselves without first trying to figure them out based on preconceived assumptions has a tremendous amount of power. People are experts in their own experiences. To put it another way, injustice is the result of acting on what we think we know about someone based on partial information (stereotype and single stories) we gather in their absence. So, our purpose was established:

- 1) By listening to understand how each person viewed trauma, racism, and discrimination based on the policies, curriculum, and behaviors demonstrated within our department.
- 2) By establishing hope through active listening.

Once I realized that hope was not found entirely in the prepackaging of antiracist product written by well-informed authors exactly the way I needed it, but rather, it was found in the empathetic process of active listening. I became more encouraged the more I listened to stories about the hurt people experienced within the school as a result of unjust policies and behaviors. I know that sounds odd, but the more I listened to each person's story, the more I felt in communion with them. I could understand the different expectations they had of the school, as well as their personal understandings of equity. Active listening caused us to imagine in the same direction collectively. Through our collective imagination we became a coalition of artists imagining what equity would look like. We were performers in the sense that our behaviors, actions, and language were in sync with

one another as we focused on developing a coalition that would write a “List of Demands” to address the inequities students experienced within the arts college.

Take away lesson: In order for higher education administrators, staff, and faculty to perform equity and help usher an arts institution into the Third Reconstruction, leaders must create listening spaces where people can express themselves without fear of retaliation. Only through active listening can imagination and hope work together to produce more equitable centered systems for BIPOC students, faculty, and staff.

### *How was Leadership Establish?*

In a Liberation Theology framework, leadership is understood through the service one renders. From the outside looking in, I may have been identified as “the leader” of the student coalition but I view leadership differently. To me, everyone who served and contributed was a leader. For example, I may have been the person who called the group together over social media, but other students shared their stories, offered suggestions on how to have an equitable department, contributed to agenda items and documented our work. I could not consider myself the sole leader. Once we began our consecutive meetings, leadership was still shared. I may have been the person holding space for the bi-weekly meetings or the one who with access to leadership, but I was not the only person committed to serving. Other leaders in the group designed flyers, promoted events, took notes for the group, contributed ideas, created policies, set up meetings and workshops, and offered directions for next steps. We were all leaders because we all committed to serving. This built power-sharing participatory structures and modeled for us practices for coming together around value propositions with real stakes and specific desired outcomes.

Take away lesson: In order for higher education administrators, staff, and faculty to perform equity and help usher an arts institution into the Third Reconstruction, they must reframe the way leadership is understood. When working in Equity Performance Coalitions with students, replace the hierarchical framework with a communal, service-framework. Make sure the higher educational leaders within the coalition do not take space from the students nor fall into traditional hierarchical power relationships.

*How Did I address Conflict?*

The way we addressed conflict in the coalition was a lot like the way we resolved conflict in the online space we shared the day first came together: Through dialogue. As a leader who respects the human personality and worth of all humans, I dealt with conflict through dialogue and invitations to reconciliation. This was the case later on as we moved forward together as a coalition. In an email from a coalition member, two days after we submitted our List of Demands to leadership, the member expressed concerns with the tone we used to list our demands. The student expressed how they felt the letter was toned aggressively and lacked compassion and as a result, the person decided to step away from the activist group. As a prophet, I believe that conflict is inevitable and I also believe that conflict is not bad in-and of itself. Nothing teaches you how to address conflict like living it. When the individual decided to no longer participate in the student group, one reasons that stood out to me the most was moral. Was the individual saying that our approach was immoral? Was the student saying that the goal of our student group was admirable but the means by which we pursued our goal failed to match the ends we sought? In other words, was the student suggesting that our student group's goal of equity (the end) was just, but our letter (the means) was unjust? Admittedly, at first the email baffled me on one hand, and I felt defensive on the other. For a moment, I took the email

as a personal attack on me. After taking a step back to process what the individual was saying, I realized that conflict in that moment, speaks in reciprocal language. Conflict not only allows space for people to speak, but also be heard. One has to believe that what is being shared, however painful it may be, has the potential to strengthen an individual or organization. I handled the conflict by:

- Getting past my own defensiveness, so as to really listen to what the person had to say, and then do my best to answer the person's trepidations and concerns.
- Reviewing the morality of our protest, and looking over the tone, and tenor of our demands to make sure the ends we sought were contained in the means.
- I learned from this specific experience that we needed to foreground the establishment of collective values and principles and align them with our methods.
- Based on my own research and framing through Liberation Theology and moral fusion coalition, I believed our protest was moral, but if one person questioned it then I knew others had also. This highlights the clear need to use moral language structures explicitly and build collective language for the hard discussions necessary in healthy laterally organized structures.

Take away lesson: In order for higher education administrators, staff, and faculty to perform equity and help usher an arts institution into the Third Reconstruction, leaders must reframe the way you see conflict. Conflict in a coalition, should not be seen as a divisive tool but an opportunity for understanding and compromise; a tool to be used to



chiseling past the stone of individualism and egotism, so to arrive at the beautiful creation of a beautiful synthesis of new ideas.

*What method was employed by the student group?*

Our student group's methodology was not established based on a specific template. We did not plan to mimic any other organization's method and outside of the formation of the List of Demands, we did not consider what methodology other student groups may have taken. Other than the fact that I was the moderator and someone else was the notetaker, we had not thought about organizational structure; there were no group discussions or consensus taken to map out how we would work together as a group.

When we first gathered as a student and alumni group, our goal was to instigate equitable change within the arts college by writing a List of Demands. That was it. From June 26th through December, our group met every Friday to plan and discuss our next steps. For those weekly meetings there was an agenda set for every meeting, and although we never discussed a certain method of operations, our planning was methodical. Take, for instance, our student group's "Letter of Demands." We intentionally decided to email our "Letter of Demands" to all directors and deans of the arts college on a specific day and at a specific time: the final Monday in July at 8am. We selected that day and time because we felt that because Monday is the beginning of the week, most likely arts college leaders would begin their day by checking their email. We wanted our demands to be one of the first emails they saw so that they could make accomplishing our demands, their top priority. Not only that, timing was also important because we also wanted to be sure to send the List of Demands out before the month of August – a time

when arts college leaders' workload picks up and calendars fill up with the planning of the start of a new semester. The intent was that addressing our demands would be a part of the semester planning discussions.

It was not until mid-December that we implemented a methodological approach. It was at that time that I learned how, historically speaking, activist movements on college campuses (activist movements) borrowed from the momentum of national movements. American Civil Rights Movement, my vision for the student group became more serious and intentional. From mid-December to early January, I began reading books that centered Black students' fight for equity on college campuses across the nation. I read: Ibram H. Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Radical Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972* (2012); Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* (2007); Joy Ann Williamson, *Black Power on Campus: The University of Illinois, 1965-75* (2003); Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (2012); and, Stefan M. Bradley, *Harlem vs. Columbia University: Black Student Power in the Late 1960s* (2009). Each of these books enlightened me so much I could hardly put them down; I read all day and all night long. Based on what I had learned from those books, I knew that if our student group were to see progress moving forward as it concerned our student demand letter, we needed to talk about our establishing our own identity, philosophy, and methodology as a student group. Learning that the issues of inequity that our student group engaged were much of the same issues that students fought against in the 1960s truly amazed me.

Driven by the insights of *The Black Campus Movement* (Rogers 2012) of the past, I was eager to inform our student group that it was time we consider our identity and create a set of principles reflecting the way we operate. I informed the group that I had been personally operating according to the principles and tactics of both, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's., Nonviolent Movement for Social Action ([thekingcenter.org](http://thekingcenter.org)) and Reverend Dr. William J. Barber II's, 14 Principles of Moral Fusion Coalition ([breachrepairers.org](http://breachrepairers.org)). Borrowing from the language and objectives of those two movements, we created our own set of principles and methods that would define our own framework. I included this framework in the previous chapter, but include it once again for easy reference ease. Building this framework allowed us to do three things: 1) formally codify our beliefs, intentional practices, and communal commitments. This was seen in the fact that after we conducted research of the two organizations, we named ourselves the Liberation Coalition. 2) We were able to have strategic discussions about our desired ends and the language we would use to explain and explore them. The philosophies and organizing principles of the SCLC and the Mural Fusion Coalition provided us the language we needed to communicate our aims. We knew we wanted to a more equitable environment but that was a broad statement. We needed to be more specific. The language of equity, as we learned, includes engage, commit, accountability, build, transform, just to name a few. 3) Lastly, the philosophies and organizing principles of the two coalitions we studied allowed us to connect into wider networks of individuals and organizations committed to the same structures and practices. Our organization's name reflected our mission: "Liberation" and "Coalition." Our name

informed others what we, as a coalition, wish to do (liberate) and how we wish to do it (through coalition building). From that moment forward, we began meeting with other student-led activist groups on and off campus and city leaders in order to get advice, discuss how we could collaborate, or simply learn of unique and important ways others were advocating.

**Liberation Coalition Principles:**

1. We Engage in indigenously led grassroots organizing.
2. We Commit to grassroots organizing across campus.
3. We Call for performances across the arts college, and across the state from BIPOC artists
4. We hold Accountable, individuals and institutions who do not practice equity.
5. We Build transformative, long-term coalition relationships in the arts college and the greater community
6. We believe in Building a coalition whereby people from all faiths are not only invited to participate but are able to draw on their faith as a guide for liberation
7. We Educate ourselves and others.
8. We Engage in cultural arts.

Take away lesson: In order for higher education administrators, staff, students, and faculty to perform equity and help usher an arts institution into the Third Reconstruction, leaders must connect their department’s equity practices and philosophy with that of a morally justice-centered movement of the times. To do that, leaders must “use moral language to frame and critique [...] policy, regardless of who is in power.” (Inspired by Moral Fusion Coalition principle #2.)

**The Second Case: The Leadership Roles Needed to Lead a Diverse Equity Coalition that is BIPOC-Centered**

**Positions of Power**

In this section I outline the various roles I held in a 12-month process. I believe that these roles were integral and interconnected to the success of the equity coalition. Throughout the 12 months I was an Equity Leadership Fellow (as a student) and a Dean’s Equity Fellow (student and employee). In addition to explaining the chronological

development of these roles in this section, I will also highlight the spaces of power, seats at the table and conversations that I engaged in as a part of my role.

### **The Creation of the Equity Leadership Fellow program.**

Knowing the history of how Black people have been harmed led me to Liberation Theology. This framework is replete with examples of how to counter cultural performances of evil—not by educating others to assuage their guilt, but by assisting others in seeing the harmful legacies of evil acts. In other words, sometimes, the way things are is the way things have always been. I was reminded of this lesson while operating in my role of prophet who was trying to help a donor see the way things are in terms of being Black in America. Before I explain the conversation the donor and I engaged in, let me explain the equity framework I had built which was part of the reason I was invited to the meeting with the donor.

One semester, I approached the Dean of the arts college and told him about my ambition to one day become a university dean. Previous to our conversation, I had already visited with a community college president who offered me advise on how to get my foot in the door for a higher education leadership position as soon as possible. After sharing that information with the dean, together, we created the Equity Leadership Fellowship program. The Equity Leadership Fellowship is a one-year program that allows a student interested in working as a dean or administrator in higher education to: 1) be mentored by a dean or high-level administrator, 2) conduct interviews with various deans across the university's four campuses, and 3) travel to a college to shadow a dean or administrator. At the end of my year as the first fellow, I was invited to a leadership

meeting that summer, when, due to a few impromptu inquiries, I performed the role of prophet, in order to assist leaders in seeing how things were going.

### **Impromptu Questions**

At the invitation which came from the Dean's office, I and another graduate student joined meeting with a group and high-level donors which revolved around how the arts college would move forward in the new school year. The other student and I were invited to share our thoughts about how we were thinking about our school, work and career.

I was the last person to speak in that meeting and I remember hearing everyone discuss their ideas of a possible new operations of learning. They discussed the possibility of creating hybrid classes which means that some classes would take place in person and some classes online. While I agreed with everything everyone said, I felt that it would not be moral for the school to try to build a new operational framework while we failed to address the racism and unjust killing of Black people. When it was my time to speak, I stated that I believe "we need to be discussing how we are going to move forward with equity in mind since . . . White supremacy and racism has always endured." After I spoke, a donor asked me what I thought was the primary reason for racism in our nation? The question may have taken some by surprise, but not me. Although I had no way of knowing that question would be asked, it was a question I had asked in my head over and over as I grappled over the reality of hate, sin, and evil and how they operate. Without hesitation I responded that the primary reason is power. I was considering the donor's question in light of the race relations of the present and the past. I considered the

Redeemers Movement that brought an end to the progress of the First Reconstruction as well as the sly coded language that was used by politicians to bring an end to the Second Reconstruction. I thought about my own experiences of inequity in higher education that came from White professors who exerted their power over me and how theatre programs perpetuate evil and racism. One thing history taught me is that the White supremacy framework does not allow for shared power. I wanted to communicate to the donor and all the leaders in that meeting, that the reality is that many White people in our nation are afraid of losing power and out of that fear comes racist and discriminatory practices that oppress Black and Brown people.

The donor had one last question to ask me. The donor then explained how a friend had mentioned that white men have always been inadequate in their feeling about their manhood compared to the black man and the root of the problem is insecurity within the white male population. The donor wanted to know if I agreed with that statement. I responded by explaining that I think White men will have to answer that but some White men are insecure because they fear that if Black people can accomplish so much given what little we have had to work with, they wonder what might Black people be able to accomplish if we have the same amount of resources, access, and power that they have. The donor thanked me for my remarks and told me my voice needs to be heard in times like these. As prophet, it seems I helped at least one person see things as they are.

### **Employed in an Administrative Leadership Position**

Later that summer I received an employment offer from the Dean of the arts college. The offer was an opportunity for me to join the executive leadership team as the

Equity Fellow. Created by the dean, the mission of Equity Department was to bring about equity for students, staff, and faculty across the arts college while building a culture of empathy. The department also works to dismantle systems of oppression that affect marginalized students.

The dean's offer did not catch me by surprise. I had been invited to numerous leadership meetings over the summer, in addition to serving in the year-long Equity Fellowship position. That summer, I participated in multiple meetings with deans, directors, and unit leaders, advising them on how to effectively move forward equitably in light of the various "Lists of Demands" that the arts college received. By my first week employed by the department I knew I was in for a ride. In the following examples, I use different moments to communicate the diverse and difficult complex layers of working as prophet in a position of power in partnership with other administrative leaders in positions of higher power.

#### My First Week in the Equity Department

During my first week on the job I was informed that the Associate Dean and I were tasked with creating a presentation for a "Friday Huddle" with the academic and staff directors across the college. Presenting information to leaders is something that I am well-acquainted with, even on the subject of race and equity. However, I wrestled with how to call an arts college leadership team into the same organizational practices used with the Liberation Coalition. I finally decided that I would make my presentation on equity explicitly using the lens of Liberation Theology as an entry.



After I finished speaking to the leadership team, I received a number of complimentary responses as well as some questions about my decision to center Liberation Theology in a secular institution. One individual was taken-aback by theology considering the oppressive histories of theology and the church. I told the person that, while I understood their argument, religion was not the central focus of my presentation. I told the individual that I used Liberation Theology to describe equity as a concept that has helped reframe (lawfully) how the nation regards Black people. After our conversation, the individual understood what my aim was and noted that the term theology may have thrown them off.

*What Worked and What Did Not Work? What Lessons Did I Learn?*

As a result of that conversation, I started wondering if my concepts about an equity leadership framework were really as complete as I thought they were. Améiah and Faraji, they were not. That experience taught me that there are some things you cannot know until you try them out and, once you discover what works and what does not, you have to adjust.

Two lessons that I learned about my presentation by way of that conversation:

- 1) There is a need for leaders to choose the right language when urging broad and diverse people to join a moral movement. I had to think carefully about whether or not Liberation Theology was the right language to describe the equity framework I was calling on leaders to join.
- 2) Due to the lack of practicality, others may be unable to see what a new reality looks like. The lessons I presented were rooted in theories and they did not

lead to actions the way that they instinctively operate in my personal life. This made it difficult for others to envision an alternative reality. And, not incidentally, led to many of the structural choices made throughout this document.

After much thought and study, I realized that while Liberation Theology is the foundation, the phrase “Moral Fusion Coalition” holds language that better defines what I was trying to communicate.

<p><u>Take away lesson:</u> In order for higher education administrators, staff, and faculty to perform equity and help usher an arts institution into the Third Reconstruction, before urging others to be a part of an equity movement, leaders must be sure they are able to effectively communicate and make practical, equity framework they are asking others to join.</p>
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What is The Purview and Why was it Important?

As a prophet, one of my roles is to see things the way they are and to communicate both the current landscapes as well as ways to solve those problems morally and ethically. In my work with the leadership teams, I noticed a lack of awareness among (the mostly White) arts college leaders about the various injustices BIPOC students, faculty and staff face inside and outside classrooms, labs, and studios. We identified a need for a platform whereby BIPOC students, faculty and staff could share their thoughts, experiences, and stories across the arts college on a consistent basis especially as it relates to race, equity performance, and justice issues. With this division between BIPOC students, faculty and staff and leaders, I could see how leaders' unconsciousness could be interpreted as carelessness, rudeness, or racism, but I saw something else. Noticing the various kinds of conversations employees were having with each other and with me, I observed the

problem of a fixed-gaze. In fact, this was more than a problem rooted in single-story narratives, the framework by which they operated was controlled by a gaze too narrow to meet people where they were. Their framework prevented them from recognizing when someone was in pain, seeing weariness on a coworker's brow, or comprehending what was causing some BIPOC students and colleagues to fear. As leaders within the Equity Department, we wanted to know what we could do to enable leaders in the arts college to become more aware of the diverse challenges that BIPOC populations confronted on a daily basis. We discovered that the answer to our query required us to try our best to widen their purview from focusing primarily on the dominant culture.

*How I addressed the problem: Rejecting cultural performances of evil.*

As a response to the problem, the Equity Department created an in-house journal called *The Purview*. I immediately drafted the journal's purpose because I wanted BIPOC students to know that the arts college could produce something equitable; I wanted BIPOC students and leaders to be thrilled and hopeful about the possibilities that lie ahead. The Purview offered critiques on issues of race, equity, justice, diversity and inclusion to leaders across the arts college. The journal welcomed creative artistic expressions that call on leaders to readjust their lens in order to hear, see and empathize with experiences occurring outside of one's own purview.

We designed the publication and the reception (prompts) to foreground an avenue to lift up the college's BIPOC community and we tried to build many of the same active listening strategies used by the Liberation Coalition. In addition to the journal being

distributed to leaders and students, each journal also had prompts attached to them. Our department used the prompts to figure out who was actually engaging and who was not.

Take away lesson: In order for higher education administrators, staff, and faculty to perform equity and help usher an arts institution into the Third Reconstruction, leaders must create innovative avenues for BIPOC communities to express their thoughts, experiences, and cultures with the masses while inviting other leaders and students the opportunity to widen their purview.

### **Reported to a High-Level Administrator My Second Week on the Job**

After my presentation to the faculty and staff which occurred on my second week on the job, to my surprise I received my first “write-up” from one of my colleagues. I received a call from a high-level administrator informing me that someone from the meeting reported that I “made the room unsafe” during the faculty and staff zoom meeting. The administrator asked if I recall saying anything that would make a person feel unsafe because the person who submitted the report did not name exactly what I had done. While I did not know the answer to that question, my response to the administrator was that I had given a presentation on how Liberation Theology can be a significant tool used to help usher in equity on behalf of all people but especially BIPOC communities – a presentation I was asked to give again following the one I had given in the Deans and Directors meeting during my first week. I also explained that during the same meeting I was asked by a faculty to join a breakout group made up of “student allies” who wanted to ask me questions about ways they could support students.

When I joined the breakout group of about 20 people, I noticed that all but two, including myself, were White. Someone in the breakout group asked me many questions

regarding the student and alumni's "List of Demands" and they questioned me about the way students felt about the overall leadership of the arts college. I explained to the administrator that one of the questions I was asked was, "What did the student group think about the faculty/leadership's response to students and alumni's "List of Demands?" to which I responded by saying students did not feel it was sufficient. I explained to the administrator how silent the room grew following my comment; it was as if they were not expecting students to feel that way. As I said to the committee in the breakout room that day, the students felt that the faculty/leadership's response lacked real effort. Their response to the students' demands pointed back at the current system as the solution to the problems students had named and some of the contacts they listed for students to follow up were the same faculty members and leaders who some students said caused them harm.

***What did I learn, as a leader, from that experience?***

- 1) When discussing racism and discrimination, some White people become enraged, and when they become enraged, they attack. I feel that the individual's purpose in reporting me to a high-level administrator was a retaliatory response meant to silence my voice.
- 2) A leadership position can put BIPOC people even more at risk of facing attacks.

<p><u>Take away lesson:</u> In order for higher education administrators, staff, and faculty to perform equity and help usher an arts institution into the Third Reconstruction, leaders must understand and accept that not everyone will want to follow BIPOC leadership, especially when such leaders confront patriarchy and White supremacy. As a result, arts leaders must be aware that some individuals may misuse policies and processes to</p>
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silence BIPOC leaders from confronting race and racism. To achieve the Beloved Community, protect BIPOC in leadership.

## **CHAPTER 5: EQUITY PERFORMANCE COALITION MADE PLAIN**

I return to you, Améiah and Faraji. Since you have read this letter, I hope you have a better understanding of how I operate in the world. And, I hope you will take up the role of prophet in your own lives, practicing and advocating Liberation Theology as a leadership framework. May you take the lessons I have laid out seriously, as they are ways and strategies for deactivating landmines under your feet and as well as the feet of others. Make no mistake: you want to know how to deactivate landmines so that your soul can rest and thrive and flourish. You need to know how to deactivate the landmines beneath your feet so you do not exhaust yourself trying to persuade others that the single-story narratives they have heard about you, or your culture are untrue. You want to know how to deactivate the landmines under your feet so that you do not have to experience the pain that comes from feeling like you have to limit your dreams because you have been told you are not good enough, or smart enough. You want to know how to protect yourself from the harm and trauma that come as a result of spending years overworking because you believe in the false narrative of meritocracy; the narrative that says if you work hard enough you can experience the success you desire, and if you are not where you want to be that indicates you are not working hard enough. You want to free your mind to envision creative ways to help bring about the Beloved Community. A work we cannot imagine without a loving heart, a courageous spirit, and a studious mind.

Children, all of the things I warn you about are the hardships I have personally experienced and more, which is why I write you this letter. Like our ancestors, I share this information with you in order to chart a path for our family's heritage. I pass down to

you a legacy of knowledge born out of the Black church and the Black prophetic tradition. I am sorry that there are no frameworks that can offer you full protection from harm that comes by way of inequities, discrimination and White supremacy. Liberation Theology, however, can offer your soul respite from the burdens of this inequitable life.

The war that we, as a people, are waging and have always waged in this nation, is a war for humanization expressed through equity and justice. My life's journey has been no different, but through this study, I share with you what has helped me battle as successfully as I have. Furthermore, children, I hope that this letter accompanied by the many lessons your mother and I teach you on a daily basis, help you to be prepared in whatever anti-Black situation you may happen to find yourselves. May you be able to analyze and respond in a way that guarantees your survival even if it means you have to bite your tongue in moments you do not feel like extending mercy. Know that your life is more valuable than whatever response you might wish to express in the moment of confrontation; walking away with your life presents an opportunity to make an even greater impact for yourself and others as the days unfold. May you never feel that you have disappointed me or your mother because you chose to be silent so that you could live another day.

Living in an oppressive system requires you to have a discerning spirit so that you can negotiate the most basic issues—fundamental and rudimentary subjects can sometimes mean the difference between life and death for us. May you understand that the lens of Liberation Theology does not let offenders off the hook, but holds them accountable in the most lovingly, creative way possible. Keep these lessons and



testimonies near your heart and practice the principles below each time you have the chance. Lastly, I want you to know this letter is not written in a mean-spirited way, nor do I write with a heart of despair. Instead, I author this work in great and tremendous love for our nation, our world, God, and each of you. In reality, this dissertation is not merely an informational treatise, but a love letter—perhaps it will be the first and longest love letter you will ever receive—and, I say this with much hilarity, I hope it remains that way. With tremendous love and much anticipation for the day we can call ourselves inhabitants of the Beloved Community in the Third Reconstruction,

Love, Daddy

P.S.: Below are practical ways in which you, arts college leaders, or anyone reading this, can understand what the operations of an Equity Performance Coalition inspired by Liberation Theology.



Figure 12. Liberation Theology in the Equity Performance Coalition

**Liberation Theology as a leadership framework:**

1. Provides a replicable emancipative leadership model that can be used to build justice-centered movements. This requires leaders to become familiar with previous movements upon which we can build.

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| <p>2. Employs the prophet as servant leader to observe how things are and how things can be. The role of prophet requires confrontation and compassion; and prophets possess the ability to recognize evil and corruption, as well as the ability to imagine alternative realities.</p> |
| <p>3. Draws from the scholarship of Black liberation theologians, Black church operation, and the Black prophetic tradition to comprehend how to see injustice as moral imperatives.</p>  |
| <p>4. Creates platforms that counter single-story narratives by amplifying the experiences and cultures of BIPOC communities.</p>   |



Figure 13. Performance in the Equity Performance Coalition

**Leadership Theology/Black prophetic tradition as a performance frame and symbolic system:**

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| <p>1. Rejecting cultural performances of evil by advocating for culturally inclusive curriculum and pedagogy, cultural representation in symbolic performances, and cultural representation in hiring practices (including high-level administrators).</p> |
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| 2. Speaking truth to power by calling out injustices wherever there is an absence of inclusion, justice, and love for all humans despite difference.  |
| 3. Mediating between people in position of power and students. This happens when the prophet effectively communicates how things are and how things can be.   |
| 4. Performing ongoing dramaturgical analysis on the design and arts school's operations, as well as encouraging others to do so, in order to find signals, symbols, and images that signal welcoming/unwelcoming spaces for BIPOC students. |



Figure 14. Civic Leadership in the Equity Performance Coalition

**Leadership Theology in prophetic civic leadership:**

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| 1. Recognizing inequities as “cultural production of evil” and addressing inequities by revealing the evil at the foundation of unjust policies or behaviors. This requires leaders to understand injustices as anti-soul acts. |
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| <p>2. Building Equity Performance Coalitions with diverse groups of students, alumni, staff, faculty, and administrators to work on a consistent basis to ensure those who are impacted by policies and other decisions, have an opportunity to be included in the conversation.</p> |
| <p>3. Educating yourself and others on movements that use democratic frameworks. This includes studying BIPOC histories of resistance.</p>   |
| <p>4. Creating new and exciting ways of highlighting BIPOC students' stories, cultures, and experiences by employing various epistemologies and methodologies. This can be done by way of podcast, journals, exhibits, et cetera.</p>  |



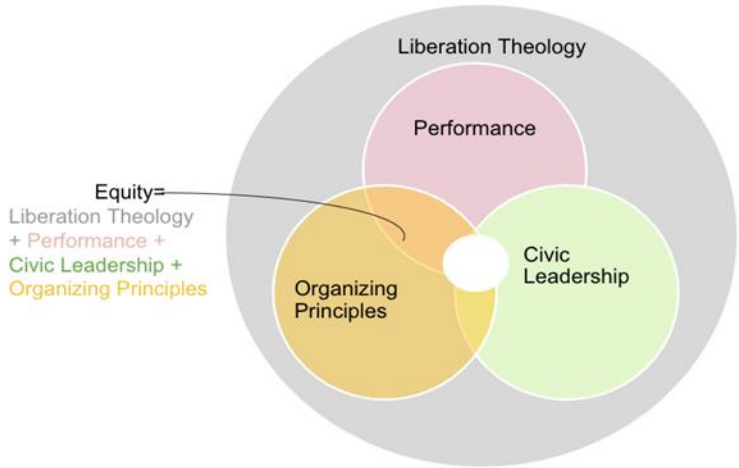
Figure 15. Organizing Principles in the Equity Performance Coalition

**Leadership Theology and prophetic centering of organizing principles:**

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| <p>1. Bringing together and facilitating a broad, diverse coalition of stakeholders within the organization to participate in a moral movement centering equity for BIPOC students in thought, word and deed.</p> |
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2. Encouraging active listening as an avenue of building hope and discovering purpose as a coalition. This happens when leaders make space specifically for listening to the thoughts, ideas, and experiences, of BIPOC community members.
3. Advocating for shared-power and equitable compensation for BIPOC students who volunteer their time and energy to make organizations a more equal environment. Leaders must understand that any work that advances the culture of the design and arts college, must be compensated (pay check, credit hours, gift cards, funding for class books, etc.). Honor labor.
4. Operating with the mindset of advancing the Beloved Community. This happens when leaders imagine collaboratively and work together cohesively.

*Equity Performance Coalition*



## Figure 16. Equity Performance Coalition

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The final image (Figure 17) depicts what happens when each separate component is combined, creating the Equity Performance Coalition, which builds to the Beloved Community.

The algebra of Equity = (Liberation Theology) + (Performance + Civic Leadership + Organizing Principles)

### **Limitation of the Study:**

One of my study's limitations is that it is based on a single person's experience and operational framework (my own). To that end, this research should not be taken as implying that this is the most tried-and-true leadership approach for ensuring equity. Rather, I share information about the structure that works best for me while also offering you the tools to practice it if that is your desire. In my research, I acknowledge that there are various equity frameworks, and that activists should examine a variety of others before forming one for themselves. A second, possible limitation of this study is that it employs religious terminology and metaphors, and not everyone is religious or even spiritual, nor accepts the usage of religious ideas in secular environments. I address this by centering, as the core of this framework, morality rather than religion. To do so, I reference to the Rev. William J. Barber II and the Moral Fusion Coalition as examples of what can be accomplished when morality is prioritized over politics and religion in our equity frameworks. Finally, I acknowledge that because of my unique position as a student activist and an employee hired to make equitable changes within the design and

arts college, I have access other student activists or higher education leaders do not have. While I agree that this is a valid point in terms of being in position to make the changes needed, I also believe no matter what one should enlist coalitions of others to help change the culture at your college or institution. Little can be accomplished alone, but working with a diverse group of people makes it nearly impossible to be ignored. When working in coalitions, you can always find allies to back a just cause—including those in positions of power such as faculty, students, staff, or administrators.

Charge and the Call:

As an end-goal, I plan to create pamphlets, brochures and classes to inform and train others in this method of operation. The pamphlets and brochures will highlight and breakdown the four elements that creates the Equity Performance Coalition: Liberation Theology, Performance, Civic Leadership, and Organizing Principles. The findings of this study may be useful to diversity, equity, and inclusion organizations, youth theater companies, Christian churches seeking to practice equity with diverse groups of people, and higher education institutions in general, as well as design and arts colleges in particular. Finally, as a plan for moving forward, I would like to expand this study to include more perspectives. I would like to speak with members of the Liberation Coalition as well as student activist group members from other arts colleges across the nation. Building on the groundwork I have laid in this study, my scholarly goal for future research is to provide a comparative study of the various performative equity leadership frameworks that student activist groups in arts colleges could employ to center BIPOC

students and to test the utility of the framework I offer outside of my own particularized practices.

To arts college leadership teams in particular, after hearing me describe the inequitable conditions I observed as I surveyed the land and the possibilities of beloved community I have explored, I have one question: What will you do about the suffering of BIPOC populations within your own organizations? After reading this you now have an optional alternative framework to which you can choose to employ. You have now read how Liberation Theology has functioned as a leadership framework centering BIPOC students in the arts college. Will you give this framework a chance in your college? If not, then what will you employ? How do you commit to antiracist and anti-discriminatory practices? Where is your moral center? The results of the traditional framework currently being used in many PWI's is one that leaves too many BIPOC students soulless. The result of Liberation Theology as a framework is the formation of an Equity Performance Coalition which then grants one access into the Beloved Community. Can you imagine collectively and perform equity collectively? I call you in community and to equity principles.



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APPENDIX A

ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES OF KING AND BARBER



**SIX STEPS OF NONVIOLENT SOCIAL CHANGE: Martin Luther King Jr.**

1. Information Gathering – The way you determine the facts, the option for change, and the timing of pressure for raising the issue is a collective process.
  2. Education – The process for developing articulate leaders, who are knowledgeable about the issues. It is directed toward the community through all forms of media about the real issues and human consequences of an unjust situation.
  3. Personal Commitment – Means looking at your internal and external involvement in the nonviolent campaign and preparing yourself for long-term as well as short-term action.
  4. Negotiation – Is the art of bringing together your views and those of your opponent to arrive at a just conclusion or clarify the unresolved issues, at which point, the conflict is formalized.
  5. Direct Action – Occurs when negotiations have broken down or failed to produce a just response to the contested issues and conditions.
  6. Reconciliation – Is the mandatory closing step of a campaign, when the opponents and proponents celebrate the victory and provide joint leadership to implement change.
- (The King Center, <https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/>)

### **14 Steps to Moral Fusion Organizing: Rev. Dr. William J. Barber**

1. Engage in indigenously led grassroots organizing across the campus and state.
2. Use moral language to frame and critique public policy, regardless of who is in power.
3. Demonstrate a commitment to civil disobedience that follows the steps of nonviolent action and is designed to change the public conversation and consciousness.
4. Build a stage from which to lift the voices of everyday people impacted by immoral policies.
5. Recognize the centrality of race. America's First and Second Reconstructions sought to heal the wound of race-based slavery, America's original sin.
6. Build a broad, diverse coalition including moral and religious leaders of all faiths.
7. Intentionally diversify the movement with the goal of winning unlikely allies.
8. Build transformative, long-term coalition relationships rooted in a clear agenda that doesn't measure success only by electoral outcomes.
9. Make a serious commitment to academic and empirical analysis of policy.
10. Coordinate use of all forms of social media: video, text, Twitter, Facebook, and so forth.
11. Engage in voter registration and education.
12. Pursue a strong legal strategy.
13. Engage the cultural arts
14. Resist the "one moment" mentality; we are building a movement!

(Barber, William, J., Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan 2016, 127-130.)

APPENDIX B

THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS (THE PILOTED DRAFT)

## The Reconciliation Process (pilot)

Keeping in mind:

the need for trained (PAID) co-facilitators,

the need for a trauma-informed approach,

(thinking about possible fake claims is serving the exclusionary, which perpetuates oppression; using terms that are less direct avoids acknowledgement of harm and detracts from the impact of the harm done; agreeing to the reconciliation process would take courage and precious time that are not easily come by, especially for the oppressed; knowing the offender has the option not to take part in reconciliation would be sufficient to curb frivolous claims),

our discussions about the principles we outlined on pp 2-4 of the document here and that we have used CRP only as an inspiration and do not need to hold on to its terminology or step progression, and

the terms harmed/student and offender/unintentional harm-doer/professor, participants, are fluid and chosen by co-facilitators and parties in each situation,

this is a rough outline for a reconciliation process based on our findings that we can now pass on to a professional facilitator or mediator to develop into a viable process:

**PREP MEETINGS (30 min each) --must be DETAILED and may be several meetings where both co-facilitators meet with each party separately to pinpoint the harm experienced and journal points about what each party would like to see happen as a result of this process.**

between co-facilitators and harmed/student

share process steps, story, 'I' statements, decide on how story will be told (by harmed/student, by the co-facilitators, in audio-video format, written format, etc.),

think of desired outcome for harmed/student,

prepare useful questions for offender/unintentional harm-doer/professor

between co-facilitators and offender/unintentional harm-doer/professor

share process steps, story, how will it be told, 'I' statements

what is a desired outcome,

how can offender/unintentional harm-doer/professor acknowledge the harm,

prepare useful questions for harmed/student

Co-facilitators

meet with Dean/admin to set a date and time

plan time-limits for each step in the process accordingly; plan self-care

breathing/tactile/movement exercises to use during facilitation

gather 'evidence' such as syllabus, assignments, statements from 3rd party, etc.

**FACILITATION--90 min**

Self-care/emotional-sign agreements

**RE-TELLING**

story by the participant 1; participant 2 restates what they heard  
statements (no questions!) of meaning/affirmation/understanding by others in the room,  
helped by co-facilitators

story by the participant 2; participant 1 restates what they heard  
statements (no questions!) of meaning by others, helped by co-facilitators

**BREAK TIME** (all)

co-facilitators meet the harmed/student separately to discuss feelings, re-evaluate  
upcoming useful questions, be reminded of process and steps

Co-facilitators meet the offender/unintentional harm-doer/professor separately for the  
same

**USEFUL QUESTIONS:** ask questions to better understand each other's stories and/or  
feelings

co-facilitators limit number of questions (which were prepared in prep meetings and  
revisited in the break time above)

harmed/student and offender/unintentional harm-doer/professor take turns asking each  
other, wait for answer each time; co-facilitators must be active to help with questions and  
keep answers on track with questions

**BREAK TIME**, re-visiting desired outcomes, if necessary

**QUESTIONS** from others in the room (perhaps this is limited to the Dean and co-  
facilitators clarifying the narratives); must be time-conscious and kept on track, bringing  
in the desired outcomes, especially of the harmed/student

**BREAK TIME**

Co-facilitators provide index cards & invite written opinions by those in the room; if  
someone offers an opinion, they have to include the following on their card:

first, for whom is the opinion,

second, the specific subject of the opinion, and

third, the opinion

**OPINIONS**

co-facilitators collect opinions

co-facilitators curate them, based on their usefulness in the space at that moment; they  
may be saved for later, if needed

co-facilitators choose an opinion, read the subject and ask permission of the party for  
whom the opinion is before reading the actual opinion; if permission is given, read it

Repeat for remaining opinions that are going to be shared

**BREAK TIME**, restating desired outcome

**DESIRED OUTCOMES**

co-facilitators ask each side whether they can see the desired outcome from this process  
(radical imagination);

how can the desired outcome of the harmed/student be fulfilled? (this may involve Dean);

how has offender/unintentional harm-doer/professor acknowledged harm and what  
outcome do they desire? (this may also involve the Dean/Administration)

**CLOSING** meeting(s) with verbal/written(?) evaluation of reconciliation? and what  
follow-up is needed? including how to continue doing the work of antiracist practice?

### The Reconciliation Philosophy

The current system of reporting a grievance is inequitable in so far as it: 1) excludes the students from having a voice in the process of accountability as well as excludes students from being notified about the way(s) in which the offense is handled, 2) doesn't always hold the offender accountable for their actions and, 3) leaves no room for healing and/or reconciliation between those involved in conflict. Our desire is for the arts college and the university as a whole, to live up to the ideals expressed within the university's mission. One of the greatest complaints among students and alumni is that students are excluded from the current accountability process as students are left in the dark after reporting harm.

Because of this inequitable system, students have the right to withdraw themselves from participating in the process. Students' denial of engaging in a flawed process is not only an act of protest against current policy but a withdrawal from an unethical system that further oppresses students and perpetuates harm. Students' protest of withdrawing their participation from such an injurious system is an act of mass-noncooperation with inequity. We, as students, refuse to participate and cooperate with a system that causes us even more harm. We offer instead a more equitable accountability process which students can have the option of opting into. This is called the Reconciliatory Process. We recognize this as an evolutionary process and we encourage arts college leaders, and university leaders as a whole, to practice it accordingly in every instance.

The transformative justice approach is inspired by many key collaborators including: Kimberle Crenshaw, Mari Matsuda, Mimi Kim, Resmaa Menakem, Reverend Angel Kyodo Williams, Michael Rohd and sojourn theater, Liz Lerman, Nadine Burke Harris, Maria Rosario Jackson, Bryan Stevenson Be the Bridge Facebook group founded by Natasha Morrison, Mariame Kaba and Project NIA, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Ejeris Dixon, adrienne maree brown, BYP 100, Shira Hassan and the Young Women's Empowerment Project, Philly Stands Up, Nicole Brewer founder of Conscientious Theatre Training, Barbra Ann Teer, Dr. Sharrell D. Lockett and Tia M. Shaffer, Molefi Kete Asante, Kaja Dunn, Monica Ndounou, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Dr. William J. Barber, Moral Fusion Movement, Southern Christian Leadership Conference,

Our goal is to achieve the "beloved community" of equity, justice, diversity, and inclusion in higher education. To arrive at this vision, Liberation Coalition believes that the ends for which we seek (equity) must preexist in the means by which we operate.

That said, we offer the Reconciliatory Process as an alternative to existing systems of

accountability. Our accountability process is one that seeks exchange inequitable policies for policies of, healing, grace, and accountability. An empathetic process that aims to impact the heart, mind, and spirit, the Reconciliation Process operates through: Love and not hate, Reconciliation and not humiliation, honest dialogue between those who participate in the process, coalitions of diverse groups of students and faculty/staff/admins of good will and moral aptness in higher education, and by centering the voices and needs of BIPOC and other marginalized communities. We do not recommend employing the Reconciliatory Process if physical violence or harm has been done as we believe that to be a matter to report to Human Resource.



APPENDIX C  
LIST OF DEMANDS

## **ACCOUNTABILITY AND FAIR DISTRIBUTION OF POWER**

### **Faculty Accountability**

- Create a student-centered teaching evaluation that measures meaningful information (to be defined/determined) that is fair to women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ instructors (determine what that looks like) that is used for recognition and improvement purposes, and taken seriously by the School leadership, including the personnel committee.
- Define and implement procedures for students to follow to report faculty and staff who promote problematic or toxic behavior in their classrooms, rehearsal spaces, and college community. Provide students transparent follow up by a defined date about action that was taken to mitigate the concern to the extent allowable by HR law for accountability purposes.
- Include the implementation of anti-bias and antiracist curriculum practices as criteria in faculty workload, tenure and promotion evaluation to determine merit-based rewards and motivate faculties. Most faculty in the university have a workload that is (on average) 40% research, 40% teaching, and 20% service (committees, associations, etc.). There are ways in which to implement antiracist education into faculty research (and not just teaching), so we need to determine how we can advocate for these changes to happen so that faculty can be supported and held accountable for doing this work.
- Ensure greater accessibility and responsiveness from the Director of Arts college. Such as offering biweekly or monthly open office hours for students.

### **Hierarchy and Pathway of Communication**

- Write up and publish to all students, faculty, and staff a clear list of roles and responsibilities of leaders within each department and the school at large. Transparency will keep leaders accountable and aid in student navigation of complaints and concerns in a large hierarchical system.
- Implement a non-course specific anonymous feedback system for undergraduate and graduate students at the end of each semester. Students need to be provided an opportunity to share grievances if they do not feel safe or protected within their department. Students with immediate concerns should be responded to promptly especially with issues concerning personal education, mental and emotional health. These can be created using one or more of the following ways:
  - Have feedback be collated by a faculty member outside of the program or school to protect student anonymity.
  - Creation of a protocol handbook that outlines securing non-retaliation as well.
  - Inclusion of Title IX and laws and policies within Human Resources.

### **Hire BIPOC Faculty**

- Provide administrative and financial support to hire at least four new faculty members of color in the next two years and center BIPOC & LGBTQIA+ issues as part of the hiring process to promote more inclusive practices within the program. This will support diverse academic interests and skill sets of current and future graduate students.

## **ECONOMIC JUSTICE**

### **Funding**

- Transparency and equity in distribution of scholarship money. The distribution of funds needs to take into consideration the needs of the students such as:
  - Eligibility of college scholarships to US citizens versus international students
  - Dependents in the home
  - Physical and legal ability to earn additional income beyond the school
  - Tuition cost based on the status in which the student enrolled
  - reevaluate the percentage of Need-based award and Merit-based scholarships.
- Make a GPAA leadership position as paid-work in order to resolve any conflicts among students and/or between students and the school working as a political student body.
- Implement a transparent “hiring” procedure for all available TA/RA and 598 (apprenticeships) opportunities. All incoming and current graduate students will have access to the myriad of assignments allowing for cross-discipline collaboration accommodating a wide variety of developing student skill sets.

## **CULTURE WORK**

### **Antiracist Training & Dialogues**

- In addition to the diversity training of the college, all faculty and teaching staff (including graduate students) must undergo extensive privilege and oppression training and/or civil dialogue facilitated by a third-party professional that is evaluated qualitatively and not quantitatively. Topics to be covered include, but are not limited to:
  - How systems of oppression and abusive values affect our inherent bias in and outside of the classroom
  - Tangible ways to uproot their white supremacist habits and replace them with trauma-informed ways of being in the classroom and workplace
- In addition to their professional duties, faculty must continuously engage with this training yearly, understanding that this work does not happen based on any number of training sessions, but through internal progress.
- Offer an opportunity for undergraduates and graduates on facilitating intergroup dialogue to further educate students in anti-racist and community-driven personal

practices. (<https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/evaluating-intergroup-dialogue-engaging-diversity-personal-and>). This can exist as two courses:

1. Training to be a student facilitator in intergroup dialogue
2. Participating in a course as a student with a trained student facilitator.

### **Safety and Protection of Students**

- Implement a whistleblower policy for students, faculty, and staff where those who report departmental issues are protected from retaliation. By protecting these individuals, the university ensures that an individual's decision to come forward does not include the fear of academic or professional retaliation.
- Redefine relationship with campus police and create transparent policies about their presence in our spaces. Students must feel safe to create in all on campus spaces without fear of unwanted and unwarranted police presence. If police are going to be present in rehearsals, classrooms, or performance venues that should be communicated beforehand to all faculty, staff, production teams, and students involved. An exception would be emergencies which will be clearly defined ahead of time.
- Create a graduate student representative position for meetings where a student is concerned about equity or retaliation with an individual in a position of power. This position should be introduced at the graduate student orientation.

### **Courses**

- Build a more robust review and assessment of syllabi and teaching practices that influence promotion, tenure, and hiring practices for faculty. Reviews of syllabi and teaching practices must occur on a yearly basis. The reviews must include:
  - A strong assessment on representation of LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, and female artists from any and all disciplines represented that span many sectors of the field.
  - A comparison between the success of BIPOC students in the course and the students as a whole to assess for racist or prejudiced teaching practices. Any data showing BIPOC students doing worse than other students in a particular course must be flagged for review.
  - An evaluation whether the syllabi and readings reflect current ethical standards and techniques in the professional field.
- Provide a seminar or workshop on building curriculum and syllabus for the graduate students who work as an Instructor of Record
- Reevaluate the course size requirements for non-traditional “special topics” courses such as world movement practices to support smaller classes. These special topics classes enrich the department and need an incubation period for students to discover new techniques, and for graduate students to establish a foundation of interest.

- Schedule “special topics” BIPOC centered courses at times when undergraduate majors are able to attend. Scheduling these offerings at the same time as required courses defeats the purpose of offering these courses to enrich the department offerings.

### **Structure & Culture of the arts**

- Create a course (seminar/workshop) to explain creative ownership and copyright policies to graduate students for work created in the capacity of graduate studies so that graduate students clearly understand college’s role and student’s rights.
- Implement a formalized faculty mentorship program by which all new faculty have a one veteran (3+ years) mentor as their primary point of contact. This mentor will be responsible for orientation to campus/department, monthly observations with feedback, syllabus implementation/adjustment, et cetera. This creates a formal support system for new hires. Mentorship positions include stipend.
- Allow multiple courses to fulfill a single class requirement. This will allow faculty to teach to their strengths, provide students with exposure to a broader variety of theories and techniques, and allow students to fine tune their niche as artists.
- Mandate classes that decolonize the school’s overall curriculum and promote anti-racist and fair labor practices. This includes supporting nonmajor and major courses that center BIPOC voices financially and administratively by permitting smaller class sizes of 8-10 students (instead of a minimum of 20) and extensively advertise these courses so that classes such as African American Theater, Chinese Classical Dance, Bharatanatyam, Flamenco, etc. have a chance to flourish and decenter the historically white western and European curricular foundations. It also means paying graduate students for their time, energy, and expertise in the form of TA or FAships rather than asking them to teach for credit.
- Begin the process of adding a world movement practices course as part of the technique requirements in the dance curriculum.

### **Support Students in Leadership Positions**

- Create two graduate student positions on the Curriculum committee; one of them should be a BIPOC student.
- Create two graduate student positions on faculty search committees; one of them should be a BIPOC student.
- Include BIPOC graduate student representatives throughout all preliminary phases of the production process (production choice, assignments, and casting).
- Support graduate students’ collaboration outside of classes/courses (ex. Theatre Labs with more effective support while respecting artists’ autonomy)

### **Productions**

- Make more room for BIPOC artists to develop and direct BIPOC shows and plays. Limiting directing opportunities to only directing graduate students limit the kinds of stories the college will be able to tell on stage.
- Reorganize the representation of the season selection committee to include student and faculty BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ voices. This allows for a more decolonized and anti-racist theatrical season. Redistribute the power structure of season selection itself so the committee functions as a decision-making body as opposed to in an advisory capacity.
- Appoint a Co-Artistic Director who is BIPOC, who is in the room for all decision making to support checks and balances.
- Update audition and casting practices to a culturally conscious model. This will increase equity and inclusion. Directors/Choreographers should be empowered to explore casting options outside of the audition process and department for their preferred artform if need be. They should be able to have equivalent time allotted for all auditions and casting, access the rehearsal space and performance space, resources, as well as support from the department.
- Choreographers should be able to hold auditions in their preferred movement expertise that are held either separately or in different sections through teaching mini workshops during a widely attended event time slot.
- Reassess the effectiveness of actor's equity standards at a university level. Directors, with consent and consultation with the cast and the production team, should have flexibility in how the hours are utilized to make our rehearsals humane and sustainable. This needs to be adjusted to accommodate the schedule and responsibilities of full-time students in higher education.
- Embrace a trauma-responsive theatre rehearsal process throughout the process and final product; which includes but is not limited to building shared community agreements, including and nurturing wellness practices, and incorporating anti-racist training.
- Change performance policies so that graduate student-artists working in non-White forms (often forms that require shoes) are granted equal access to performance spaces during departmental productions. No graduate student who is accepted into the program should feel excluded from spaces while performing styles that were the foundation of their acceptance at college.