

EVANGELICAL FAITH AND THE RITUALIZATION OF POLITICIZED DEATH:
THE POWER, AUTHORITY, AND IDENTITY
OF RURAL BLACKS AND WHITES

By

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“The arc of history is longer than human vision. It bends. We abolished slavery, we granted universal suffrage. We have done hard things before. And every time it took a terrible fight between people who could not imagine changing the rules, and those who said, ‘We already did. We have made the world new.’”

Novelist Barbara Kingsolver

To my parents, Alton Arthur Phillips (1941-2000) and Lorna Eleanor Phillips,
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CHAPTER 1

POLITICIZING DEATH: RITUAL, RACE, AND EVANGELICAL FAITH

Is American civil religion differentiated by region and race?

I asked the following questions: What can death studies disclose about Southern evangelical Christianity, civil religion, and the racial politics of a rural West Tennessee community? What do death rituals unveil about the history, theology, psychology, and anthropology of these rural dwellers? I argue “institutional” cultures hold the antagonisms that emerge between dissonant religious and political beliefs as well as practices of the social groups in this study. In this way, my dissertation is a study of two institutions (the Church and civil religion) and the politicization of death. The aim of this work is to demonstrate and explain how non-traditional death rituals are central to the functioning of civil religion and to show how evangelical faith undergirds its operation. Five critical findings from my field research observations support my contention.

First, rituals of intensification re-inscribe the continuity, power, and authority of social groups and communities. Thus, these rituals of intensification serve to distinguish between races, practices of faith, and civil religious loyalties. Yet, these rituals of intensification performed on Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Inauguration Day also provide social cohesion to differing segments of regional populations.

Second, both blacks and whites in this rural community theologically employ the “God vs. Devil” trope to explain “good vs. evil” (ethical conduct). However, each has distinguishable understandings of “God vs. Devil” with respect to their lived experiences.

For blacks, the “Devil” is anything that produces black distress and suffering. For instance, what blacks would consider “demonic” is the racial disparity in the criminal justice system in which black men are disproportionately convicted and sentenced for crimes for which others in similar situations might not be prosecuted. The percentage of black men in prison negatively impacts the well-being of black families. For whites, the “Devil” is embodied in the threat of secularization. For example, what is “demonic” for whites would be the role of the media in exposing young people to extremely relaxed morals and in fueling increased violence amongst members of American society. Third, “God versus Devil” language is not conventionally ascribed to Evangelical faith. I identify this language as characteristic of the beliefs and practices of this form of Christianity that stresses eschatological and apocalyptic thought.

Fourth, civil religious expressions emerge from each community’s understanding of a theology of war. For whites, it is expressed as “civic Americanism” for which upholding Christian faith, myths, and symbols are associated with American identity. For blacks, it is expressed as “civic responsibility,” for which defending democratic principles despite the imperfections of our Union displays loyalty to America.

Fifth, the research conducted in this southern farming community holds wider significance for an American public predisposed to labeling white Christians as “socially and theologically conservative” and black Christians as “socially liberal and theologically conservative.” Both are narrow typologies that have evolved into stereotypes foreclosing opportunities for members of each racial group to move beyond such constructs. Analysis of the demographic data shows that black and white Americans represent an array of complex ideological and theological positions not reducible to any sort of identity

“politic.” For that reason, blacks and whites who fall outside of the established “conventions” should be accommodated, not fearing marginalization, chastisement, or retribution for holding social, political, ideological, or theological positions that might deviate from group norms.

In 1967, sociologist Robert N. Bellah introduced the concept of an American civil religion into the American lexicon. The topic has been passionately debated by scholars who both embrace and oppose the concept. Nonetheless, from observations of the West Tennessee community where I conducted research for a year and a half, Southern civil religion figures prominently in residents’ lives. These practices reify Bellah’s definition of *civil religion* as “certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share [and] that have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions...including the political sphere. This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals.”¹ Bellah describes American civil religion (i.e., ritualistic expressions of patriotism) in multitudinous ways.² I deploy these diverse meanings throughout the dissertation. Positing that civil religion exists alongside

¹ Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 3.

² Robert Bellah has written numerous articles since 1967 further developing and refining the definition of *civil religion* to include “the religious dimension of a people through which it interprets its historical experience in light of transcendent reality.” *Civil religion*, according to Bellah, ultimately expresses the deep-seated values, commitments, and ethical principles of a people, not articulated in everyday life. Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 2. Social philosopher and sociologist of religion, Will Herberg, defined *civil religion* as “the common religion of the people.” *Civil religion* has also been understood as “ritualistic expressions of patriotism.”

the institutional Church and American political society, Bellah's remarks ground my argument for regional and racialized understandings of civil religion.

In a seminal 1980 article, Charles Reagan Wilson describes the development of a post Civil War Southern civil religion. It had rituals, a mythology, and organization distinctive from the national public faith known as American [Northern] civil religion. After losing the Civil War on a holy battlefield, disillusioned Southerners sought and found three values in their civil religion—affirmation, identity, and redemption.³ Much of Southern civil religion was constructed around death rituals that were “commemorative rites recreating a mythical time in the past and mourning rites that converted dead heroes into revered ancestors.”⁴ Such death rituals included Confederate Memorial Day, identified traditionally as “Decoration Day,” to honor the Civil War dead. On this occasion, Confederate widows and their Southern sisterhood placed wreathes and flowers on the graves of their “martyred” dead husbands, brothers, and nephews. In a twist of irony, these death rituals became an expression of Southern civil religious loyalties because ritual participants were memorializing the death of a “political” nation.⁵ Southern civil religion had become increasingly relevant to the development of a distinct Southern identity and an ever evolving American national identity.

³ Charles Reagan Wilson, “The Religion of the Lost Cause: Ritual and Organization of the Southern Civil Religion,” *The Journal of Southern History* 46, no. 2 (May 1980): 222. On page 222, Wilson explains that Southern civil religion was concerned with the “Southern Way of life” and stressed “democracy *less* than the conservative concepts of moral virtue and an orderly society.”

⁴ *Ibid.*, 223, 228.

⁵ Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in the Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause 1865-1920* with a new preface, 2009 ed., (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), x.

Patriotism, Race, and Faith in Memorializing the Dead

In the 1950's William Lloyd Warner published a five volume study now regarded as a classic text in social and cultural anthropology—the Yankee City series. Yankee City was a model New England town where Warner conducted field research. In four volumes he explores and theorizes about social life and the import of status in community; how American ethnic groups function as social systems (i.e., Polish, Russian, Irish, French Canadian); and explains the sociology of the factory. In the fifth volume he investigates the religion, politics, and history of Yankee City to determine the meaning and social functions of certain American symbols (e.g., political campaigns and conflict, cultural heroes, and Catholic mass).

With respect to his regional studies on symbol systems, Warner states: “Although the research was done on one community and consequently, in a limited sense, the results hold only for it, the nature of the symbolic life in this country is such that, despite important variations, the basic meanings of our secular and religious symbols are much the same in all regions.”⁶ Warner’s bold claim leads us to conclude that examining the symbolic life of singular regions opens the way to interpreting and understanding the religious and civic behavior of Americans in all regions. This pivotal point is made explicit in the chapter Warner dedicates to “The Symbolic Relations of the Dead and the Living” in his analysis of the Yankee City celebration of Memorial Day. There he describes Memorial Day:

⁶ William Lloyd Warner, *The Living and the Dead: A Study of the Symbolic Life of Americans*, Yankee City Series, vol. 5 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 4.

as a cult of the dead which organizes and integrates the various faiths and ethnic and class groups into a sacred unity...Its principal themes are those of the sacrifice of the soldier dead for the living and the obligation of the living to sacrifice their individual purposes for the good of the group so that they, too, can perform their spiritual obligations...by symbolically elaborating sacrifice of human life for the country through, or identifying it with, the Christian Church's sacred sacrifice of the incarnate God, the deaths of such men also become powerful sacred symbols which organize, direct, and constantly revive the collective ideals of community and nation.⁷

Warner's compelling thesis explains the pertinence of civic holidays like Memorial Day and Veteran's Day to local communities and the nation. On these holidays where ceremonial rites memorializing the dead are performed, public and private arenas are transformed into sacred spaces because of the unconscious ways in which ritual participants symbolically connect human sacrifice on the battlefield to the human sacrifice of the incarnate God. Such sacralized spaces are institutional spaces able to contain disparate and conflicting emotions and associations and thus serve to integrate the community.

Warner's investigations and thesis are important to me because he recognizes the nature of death, ritual, religion, and politics in working collaboratively to unify regional communities and the nation. My work diverges from Warner's in my accounting for race, (i.e., white, black), region (i.e., rural South), and evangelical faith as crucial to answering the following question about contemporary America: How should we live?

While researching religion and politics in a rural West Tennessee community in the summer of 2006, I observed regional and racial differences in evangelical faith and

⁷ William Lloyd Warner, *The Living and the Dead: A Study of the Symbolic Life of Americans*, Yankee City Series, vol. 5 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 248, 249, 279.

civil religion.⁸ I found whites loyal to both Southern and American civil religions when I attended a Memorial Day event held at the historic white cemetery in town.

Conversations and speeches about the Afghani and Iraqi Wars elicited a white Southern patriotism that supported America's fight for the preservation of democracy at home and abroad. An Army veteran turned Baptist clergyman preached an Old Testament message from Deuteronomy 32 about the virtues of having America's present generation draw wisdom from generations past.

Blacks in the town held their own Memorial Day celebration, but at the historic black burial ground. Their sentiments blended nationalism with a black racial consciousness that came alive as the preacher, a black veteran, delivered his sermon in the tradition of the American jeremiad.⁹ His sermon from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 advocated for healing of the American nation. Both memorial events centered on ritualistic expressions of death that combined patriotism and evangelicalism.

However, the crowds that gathered at each ceremony held different perspectives on what it meant to be an American. The white audience highlighted American

⁸ For more information on the racial distinctions in Southern civil religion, consider the work of Andrew M. Manis, *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict: Civil Rights and the Culture Wars* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002), 43. Expanding Charles Reagan Wilson's thesis, Manis explains that white and black Southerners between 1917 and 1947 displayed *ambivalence* in their civil religious loyalties. He continues, "Southern whites [were] torn between being Americans and being Southerners, while Southern blacks experienced what W.E.B. Dubois called a 'double-consciousness' of simultaneously being black and American."

⁹ The American jeremiad is described in Sacvan Bercovitch's 1978 text, *The American Jeremiad*, as a rhetorical device, mainly sermon or political themed speech, employed by speakers in the Puritan period as a commentary on the dissonance between the realities of American social life and the promise of the American dream. Invoked at the point of strain between the ideal and real public life, the jeremiad exhorted individuals and communities to provide correctives to public life while also encouraging hope for the future. It is noteworthy not only because of its religious undertones but also as a constructive critique of Puritan society that has remained part of the American (political) rhetorical tradition into the present. Refer to Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

democratic notions of freedom while also fiercely embracing Southern cultural identity. Their reaction represented an interesting historical turn because post-Civil War white Southerners stressed “democracy *less* than the conservative concepts of moral virtue and an orderly society.”¹⁰ Black attendees expressed American pride yet pointed out the racial divide and the inequality they perceived still persisted as the source of a discordant lived reality and vision of a just society.

These non-traditional but communal “death” rituals further reinforced residents’ clear avowal of evangelical Protestantism and civil religion, attributes that came to define the dualistic nature of rural Bald Eagles, that former Mayor Bill Revell described as “composed of friendly, God-fearing and patriotic citizens living in a community atmosphere...”¹¹ The Church has been the backbone of this community from the County’s inception. Religiously, evangelical Protestantism reigns supreme. In fact, Charles Reagan Wilson explains that evangelical Protestantism with its stress on a theology of inward conversion was not antithetical to the development of a Southern civil religion. Both, in the South, openly supported each other.¹²

The Memorial Day celebrations I witnessed in 2006 substantiate Wilson’s claim. Both the black and white communities’ understandings of service to this country are embodied in their civil religious loyalties, even if as social groups they differ. Such

¹⁰ Charles Reagan Wilson, “The Religion of the Lost Cause: Ritual and Organization of the Southern Civil Religion,” *The Journal of Southern History* 46, no. 2 (May 1980): 222.

¹¹ Nichole Renee Phillips, interview with Mayor Bill Revell, 7 June 2006.

¹² Charles Reagan Wilson, “The Religion of the Lost Cause: Ritual and Organization of the Southern Civil Religion,” *The Journal of Southern History* 46, no. 2 (May 1980): 232.

loyalties not only bind religion and culture but also invoke questions of how historical and contemporary experiences with death influence their worldviews and racial politics.

My observations confirmed the need to explore and complicate current understandings of evangelical faith and Southern civil religion through the observation and analysis of death rituals. I returned to Bald Eagles in 2008 to pursue the findings provoked by my initial observations. Public understandings of evangelical faith and civil religion, even amongst the educated elite, reveal both subjects are oft considered from uni-dimensional perspectives. The American public and even academic scholars fail to recognize the distinctive forms of Evangelical faith, the racialized nature of Evangelical faith and civil religion, and civil religion as a “cultural” religion—how it functions differently in different communities.

I conjectured that regional and racial hermeneutics would broaden and refine understandings of evangelical faith and civil religion. I examined the faith and civil religious practices of townsfolk by studying death rituals (i.e., American military ceremonials, U.S. civic holiday celebrations, and other practices that pay homage to ancestry by venerating the dead). My goal was to garner richer understandings of Evangelicalism, Southern civil religion, and how social groups process death via this investigation.

I bridge the social sciences and religion in this dissertation to analyze a phenomenon often overlooked in psychological, sociological, and religious scholarship. I place anthropological discourse in conversation with historical, theological, and psychological theories—what ethicist and practical theologian Don Browning calls a “critical hermeneutic”—to understand evangelicalism and civil religion in this rural

community and in the American South.¹³ Browning's critical hermeneutic and ethnographic research are the methodologies, primary to this work.

Don Browning derives a "critical hermeneutic theory of society" from Hans Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy. This critical theory accounts for and offers historically conditioned psychological and theological theories as "the sources for a vision of the good society and the good person" and is based on "critical correlational" analysis.¹⁴ A revised "critical correlational" methodology understands psychology and theology as two distinct languages that can comment on human experience(s), and when placed into conversation with each other can be mutually critical. "Critical correlation" is a secondary method applied to this work. New knowledge about human experiences emerges adding to a more profound understanding of the human condition. From this empirically-based, social psychological study of death rituals, I hoped to infer how individuals and groups might deal with life's complexities through ritual and sacred symbolism.

Method: Field Research and Theory

I used three methodologies to advance my research. First, ethnographic fieldwork in Bald Eagles included participating in and observing public events on holidays like Veterans Day and Martin Luther King Jr. Day, conducting unstructured and

¹³ Don S. Browning and Terry D. Cooper, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004), 112-113.

¹⁴ Don S. Browning and Terry D. Cooper, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004), 112-113.

semi-structured interviews with residents, and leading a macro-level case study of two congregations—one white, the other black—in this community. Second, as an exercise in the “thick description” of these non-traditional death rituals and to promote my argument for a “critical hermeneutic theory of society,” I have placed history, theology, psychology, and anthropology into conversation with each other to become sub-lenses for interpreting ritual as social phenomena. Third, I employed the “critical correlational” method in the latter part of the dissertation to demonstrate the conversant nature of psychology and anthropology and to show how they mutually correct each other. In the following section, I offer critical theories useful for understanding evangelical faith and civil religion in my analysis of death rituals. For methodological purposes, I also introduce primary questions that might be asked by experts in each of the four theoretical fields that guided my research.

Civil Religion in Southern Religious History

History offers one way of understanding death rituals in this rural community. Historians raise the following queries regarding such rites: What are their origins? How have these death rituals developed, been practiced, interpreted, and altered over generations? In what ways do these rituals inform civic life? How do they currently function in the life of the people? The works of Charles Reagan Wilson are primary to this task. Wilson adopts Robert Bellah’s concept of an American civil religion to argue for a *regionalized form* of civil religion, which he names southern civil religion. Southern civil religion had an organizational structure, myths, and rituals comparable to American

civil religion except the ideological beliefs embraced by Southerners were separate from the rest of the nation.

Related to this are the insights of historian Andrew Manis, author of *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict: Civil Rights and the Culture Wars*. Moving away from Wilson's Lost Cause version of civil religion yet extending his concept, Manis offers a *racialized form* of southern civil religion where desegregation was key to articulating notions of an ideal America. Desegregation was crucial to finding out what American values were central to whites and blacks and which commitments each group believed essential to actualizing the American dream. In contemporary times, civil religion serves the same purpose as desegregation in the past: to determine what deeply held values, principles, and commitments whites and blacks espouse as social groups.

Evangelical, Narrative, and Black Theologies

Theology presents another perspective for exploring how death is interpreted socio-politically and theologically by white and black American evangelicals in the South. American evangelical theologian Donald G. Bloesch grounds American Evangelical Christianity in the Protestant Reformation, Puritanism, and Pietism and influenced by the Holiness Movement and Dispensationalism. These historical roots contribute to the fundamental features of Evangelical Christianity as a belief in the “absolute sovereignty and transcendence of God; the divine authority and inspiration of scripture; the radical sinfulness of humanity; the deity of Jesus Christ; His vicarious, substitutionary atonement; the eschatological and superhistorical character of the

kingdom of God; a final judgment at the end of history; the realities of heaven and hell; and evangelization as the primary dimension of the Christian mission.”¹⁵

In addition to epistemology (the authority of scripture and biblical revelation), ontology (the sinfulness of humanity), and soteriology (salvation through experiential commitment to Jesus Christ),¹⁶ ecclesiology and eschatology rank as primary concerns amongst evangelicals. Bloesch comments that “in evangelical theology we do not try to bring together the answer of faith and the creative questions of culture (as in Paul Tillich); instead our aim is to challenge the culture to begin to ask the right questions.”¹⁷ His scholarship sparks conversation with the “liberation” and “narrative” theologies of James Cone and Stanley Hauerwas. I also engage the scholarship of Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition*, who argues for a “boundary (sociological)” approach to defining evangelicals because “boundaries incorporate and enclose difference” and serve as “a focal point of group distinctiveness.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology Two Volumes in One* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 14.

¹⁶ Lynn M. Hempel and John P. Bartkowski, “Scripture, Sin, and Salvation: Theological Conservatism Reconsidered,” *Social Forces*, no. 4 (June 2008): 86, 1649.

¹⁷ Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology Two Volumes in One* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 15.

¹⁸ Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997; St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 45, 48.

Were theologians to consult on this project, they might ask: What is the significance of death in light of God's purposes or the Ultimate? Said aphoristically: What do participants in these death rites believe? What do the faithful understand themselves to be doing? A corollary question would be: Where is the will of God in death and in its practices? For these rural dwellers, the ultimate patriot is one who dies upholding and protecting democratic principles while in military service to the nation. God's will is found in the eschatological and apocalyptic thought central to the evangelical theology practiced by many in this community.

Object Relations Theory

Psychology provides another lens for interpreting death rituals in the American South. Psychoanalytic psychology will assist in deciphering the intrapsychic motivations of community members. Scholars might ask the following: How have the attitudes and behaviors towards death developed? What unconscious and conscious motivations inform decision making about the death process and death rites? What psychic functions do the death rituals play in the minds and emotions of participants in these rituals? What does death mean in this rural culture and amongst different social groups in this community? Why does death function in this way?

Object relations theory generally claims that a matrix of relationships nurtures the developing self. Psychiatrist Ana-Maria Rizzuto, author of *Birth of the Living God*, and her predecessor, David W. Winnicott, figure prominently in this school of thought. Winnicott describes the "transitional space as a space of play for creative living" in his

1950's text, *Playing and Reality*. It is an imaginative intrapsychic space where art, religion (i.e., "god"), superheroes, angels, demons and death are located.

It is also a place that includes the relationship between individuals and society and hence, is a space for the formation of culture. Their scholarship compels discussion about the role of familial attachments in the formation of thought and practice. Their writings also address how the mutual relationship between individual and society shape culture. I employ psychoanalytic psychology to explain the significance of ritual space as a "holding environment" to contain emergent and incongruous emotions.

Rites of Intensification, the Religious Nature of Social Institutions, and Ritual Process

Anthropology brings a fresh perspective to my investigations on evangelical faith and death rituals in the rural American South. Anthropology asserts that social groups and institutions are imperative to both the cultural socialization of individuals and the development of social beliefs and practices deemed natural and acceptable. Along those lines, anthropologists might ask: How do two racially distinct evangelical communities frame the problem of death? What are the living doing in terms of the ritual process? What social functions does this ritual behavior reinforce (i.e. strengthening group identity, maintaining social control, fostering solidarity)?

Rites of intensification foreground and explain ritual behavior in this work. In *Principles of Anthropology*, Eliot Dismore Chapple and Charleton Stevens Coon describe the social function of rites of intensification as acts that "make up the great periodic ceremonies of a society...and provide the framework within which the interaction of the

institution is to a large extent ordered and controlled.”¹⁹ In sum, rites of intensification strengthen the power and authority of social groups through the regularity and repetition of symbols associated with such ceremonial acts.

Placed into conversation with Clifford Geertz’ seminal essay on “Religion as a Cultural System,” I examine the role(s) of social and psychological processes on shaping these rituals and how these acts, conversely, might influence the social and psychological processes of both social groups. Èmile Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* is a classic text on the religious nature of social institutions. Durkheim was the first to refer to the “social” functions of ritual behavior; that is, “social institutions are religious in character...they possess collective beliefs, values, and practices that profoundly shape moral identities.”²⁰ Ultimately, these theories contribute to our best understandings of the ways in which “death” is psychologized and politicized in the ritual process.

A Snapshot of Bald Eagles City and County in Rural West Tennessee

Situated in the Northwest corner of Tennessee is the City of Bald Eagles, the county seat for Bald Eagles County. Bald Eagles County is composed of three cities. From smallest to largest, they are Hummingbird, Screaming Eagle, and Bald Eagles. In 2006, Bald Eagles County had a population of 37,710 (approx. 18,000 males + 19,000

¹⁹ Eliot Dismore Chapple and Charleton Stevens Coon, *Principles of Anthropology* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, Inc., 1942), 508.

²⁰ Èmile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. by Carol Cosman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), xiii.

females) and Bald Eagles City an estimated population of 18,000 (approx. 8,500 males + 9,500 females). Projected to increase to 38,013 in 2011 for the County, the numbers nevertheless have remained the same for the City in 2011.²¹

According to the 2006 Census estimate, the County population by race was 85.00% white, 13.1% black, 0.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2.0% Hispanic. For the City of Bald Eagles, the 2006 numbers were 75.6% white and 22% black, 0.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2.4% Hispanic/Latino. For 2011, Bald Eagles County's estimated projections are 84.7% white, 13.2% black, 0.7% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2.8% Hispanic/Latino.²²

For Bald Eagles City in 2011, the projected numbers are 75.3% white, 22.0% black, and 1.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 3.2% Hispanic/Latino.²³ Though my field studies focus primarily on the City of Bald Eagles, I covered both city and county because of their close connection. For instance, the Courthouse where County offices are located is in the historical downtown area of the City.

²¹ Source: 2008 Demographic Data Bald Eagles/Bald Eagles County Chamber of Commerce (Orange, CA: DemographicsNow, 2007), 2, 11.

²²Source: 2008 Demographic Data Bald Eagles/Bald Eagles County Chamber of Commerce (Orange, CA: DemographicsNow, 2007), 4.

²³ Source: 2008 Demographic Data Bald Eagles/Bald Eagles County Chamber of Commerce (Orange, CA: DemographicsNow, 2007), 13.

Bald Eagles County is “100 miles from the geographic population center of the United States” and a “day’s drive from 76 percent of the country’s major markets” (Bald Eagles/Bald Eagles County Chamber of Commerce Report 2008). With 56 percent of the land used for agricultural production, farming is a \$100 million industry in Bald Eagles County (Bald Eagles/Bald Eagles County Chamber of Commerce Report 2008). Bald Eagles County is Tennessee’s primary producer of soybean and fourth largest for grain sorghum and wheat. The County also grows vegetables, rice, cotton, and corn. Yet, farming no longer dominates industry.

A diversity of manufacturing industries employ workers from around Bald Eagles/Bald Eagles County and outside counties; thus, manufacturing jobs account for almost 40% of all jobs in the County. Industries are increasingly being added to this community making it (according to Chamber of Commerce reports) one of the fastest growing in Tennessee. The average household income in Bald Eagles County, according to 2011 estimates, is \$49,056. For the City, the average income is \$48,546. The median household income is \$40,145 for the County and \$33,752 for the City. Differentials exist according to race.

There is a solid wealthy/upper white upper middle class in Bald Eagles connected to “old” money and “new” industry money. Middle class whites tend to live on one side of town (along Highway 78 and 51 Bypass N) with working class whites on its fringes. Middle class and working class blacks live on the other side of town, close to the “Historic Downtown District.” However, the influx of black doctors and other professionals from outside the area have contributed to a developing upper middle class black population that tends to live amongst upper income whites; on the other hand,

working class white and Mexican families live within the black working class and poorer areas.

For political statistics, I visited the Bald Eagles/Bald Eagles County Election Commission and learned that 1) in primary elections, individuals are asked which primary they will be voting in (residents do not declare party affiliation); 2) in general elections, residents vote for individuals (candidates are not grouped according to Party affiliation); and 3) voting by punch card changed as of the Aug 3, 2006 in local elections because punch card voting is now outlawed in Tennessee. Bald Eagles City and County are politically populous, voting Democratic in local elections and Republican in national elections.

Ethnographic Self-Reflexivity:

The Researcher and the Fieldwork Site during a Historical Turn in America

In 2008, after seven months of residing in Bald Eagles, it became a portrait of motorcycle culture and beauty pageantry, duck hunting and waterfowl gaming, faith-based non-profits against the nostalgia of a strong military presence, city life mixed with farm life, and family at the center of a community grounded in love of God and country. I entered this community during a highly charged political season in our nation's history. In both church communities—white and black—I was viewed with a “hermeneutics of suspicion” because I was an “outsider” having not grown up in the South, much less in West Tennessee, and specifically *not* in Bald Eagles County. Like the rest of America, this rural and southern locale was wrestling with notions of *identity*—racial, religious, political, age, and gender.

Presidential election politics defined the American landscape. Hilary Clinton had insinuated herself into the race for the White House being a Ivy League educated white woman with a Southern heritage, from Arkansas. John McCain, born in the Panama Canal Zone, Panama entered the race for the White House having clinched the 2008 Republican nomination. As an older affluent white gentleman with a military background, he had secured an elite education (U.S. Naval Academy), was a decorated military veteran, and a respected former POW (Prisoner of War). Mitt Romney, a wealthy corporate businessman and former governor of Massachusetts, entered the White House race as the nation's first Mormon. Bill Richardson, former Governor of New Mexico was of Hispanic descent and entered the presidential race on the Democratic ticket. Mike Huckabee came to the race a southern Evangelical and the sole candidate in the election primaries who represented any semblance of "true" Southern identity and values.

Against this political backdrop, Bald Eagles identity and patriotic conceptualizations were being challenged and contested. The community-at-large and both church communities were trying to make sense of their communal and individual self-definitions being "turned upside down" and shifting with our country's political environment. During this tenuous period in our nation and local setting, I had asked for permission to explore four subjects: ritual, race, faith, and civil religion.

Barack Obama entered the American stage with "multiple" identities—bi-racial but self-identifying as black, born to a Kenyan Muslim father precipitating questions about his religious identity although he had labeled himself a Christian, Hawaiian by birth (geographical locale) but having grown up in Indonesia (Muslim nation), and educated at Ivy League institutions (Columbia University and Harvard Law School)

while wanting to connect with middle America. By Obama's second year on the election trail, I had settled into new living quarters where both church communities—black and white—were intent on questioning my motivations for studying them in their public and private worship spaces.

Members of The First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles, a white congregation, were *welcoming and hospitable* but did not hesitate to ask: “Why are you here?” Many times as I shook hands with parishioners and received warm smiles and other greetings, I could feel them wondering: “What do you want with us?” or hear them commenting: “Interesting for you to be here with us since worship is segregated in this community.” As time progressed, I realized what I had come to represent—a liberal educational institution—ultimately subjecting this church group to doubts about my intentions. Would I pathologize or stereotype them as “stupid and conservative”? Embodied as female, black, and a researcher from a liberal and prestigious southern University, originally from the North, I was received with the “playful” trope—*Yankee*.

Later in my study, I became concerned that members were hesitant about participating in my study; that would have hindered the completion of my work. I approached the Pastor who was always open to meeting with me. As we discussed the issue, I attempted to rationalize why folks possibly would not want to speak with me (they *are* the movers and shakers in the greater community). The Pastor responded, “No, they have firm opinions on those subjects; they are able to tell you how they feel about the issues.” I took his statement to mean that articulation of their views about religion and politics was not the problem. He joked, “The problem is too many of them are Republicans.” I laughed and asked, “and you are ‘Independent’ or a ‘Democrat’? He

proudly stated that he was a Democrat. His joke piqued my interest because of its implications. Many of his members were evidently conservative and because of this, recoiled at divulging their true feelings about the questions I was asking.

His next comment, however, made me pause as I looked for a solution to my problem. Outrightedly, he said, “Well, the truth is that they may not be speaking to you because they are scared they will be cast as ‘racists.’” Now, off course, their apprehension about being stereotyped as such was in the back of my mind, but I failed to make such utterances. I am glad the Pastor was forthright. He continued: “They are scared that they have ‘latent racism’ that may surface while speaking with you.” Well, I immediately had two reactions regarding this: 1) I cannot write a dissertation simply based on a ‘cultural’ group’s racism or *fear* of being “out-ed”; and 2) if there is a ‘fear of latent racism surfacing’ then maybe they *are* racist. What other conclusions should I have drawn?

Yet, I responded empathically. Definitely this was the first time I had been forced to confront the imbalance in power between me, as the researcher, and this community, as my research subjects. I was faced with their problem of me plausibly relativizing *and* essentializing them. Injecting my black and female body into this predominantly white community and their worshiping space obviously communicated an assortment of messages that received multifarious responses. Given the report, though, I felt I was not unlike Obama who had entered the nation’s spotlight as a lone black candidate in a mostly white and privileged political presidential playing field. That caused me to raise questions about what his presence would mean for nationwide politics, America, *and* this regional community.

Members of the Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church, a black congregation, were also *welcoming and hospitable*; the edge of their queries was attenuated because, immediately upon my Sunday return to this community, the pastor called a brief church meeting where I had to explain my purpose for wanting to be part of their worship space. That did not lessen their suspicion about me because a few months after being in the community I attended a Tuesday evening church meeting. That would have been my first. Out of the side of my eyes, I witnessed some members in the meeting silently but visibly glare at the pastor, implicitly asking: “Why is *she* here?”

In response, the pastor stated that it was a delight to have me in the meeting but gently added that the “church meeting is *only* for members of the church.” Upon hearing that, I knew that was my cue to leave. Here, as well, I was the black female researcher from a liberal and prestigious southern University, originating from the North, entering their lives to study and civilize them. This black community, like many others, had been historically conditioned to respond to scientific researchers, cynically, because of the transgressions and unethical conduct of mid-twentieth century human subject researchers towards Tuskegee blacks. Even later, members who had become familiar and friendly with me would ask when I was absent from community: “What is that girl’s name? Where is she?” My “namelessness” cemented my “outsider” status. I was definitively jettisoned to the margins of their congregational community.

From their purview, I was like the Northerners who had traveled South after the Emancipation Proclamation to uplift the “ignorant, uneducated, or undereducated” black masses. I would come to embody Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham’s “politics of

respectability” race woman.²⁴ I suspect that is the key reason why some of the church’s female elders did not immediately embrace me and instead handled me, with caution.

The “Grotesque”: An ‘Alterity’ Disrupting Communities

To both communities, I was determinedly an “outsider.” As a perceived race woman—a Northerner doing doctoral studies in the south to better understand Southern life and culture, I was reminded of W.E.B. Dubois’ characterization of black existence in early twentieth century America—one of “Africanness” and “Americanness.” I tensively held my Duboisian double consciousness—Africanness and Americanness—while doing research. It was palpable because blacks and whites still apparently lead segregated lives

²⁴ American religious historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham writes about the creation of the early 1900’s Women’s Convention, an auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention. In the face of rampant racial prejudice and in the shadow of an early twentieth century women’s suffrage movement, black Baptist women carved out “sacred space” in the institutional black Church for the purposes of self-definition, self-determination, and self-esteem. With the church serving as a springboard for organizing, these women entered the public arena stressing “respectability.” Respectability connoted “manners and morals” required to combat the stigma around “blackness.” While black women were characterized as immoral, promiscuous, and lazy, black men were stereotyped as hypersexualized and brutish. Emphasizing reform of individual attitudes and behavior, blacks, as a social group, would benefit from the racial uplift accorded by these race women’s “politics of respectability.”

Yet, these black Baptist women would face criticism for employing the “politics of respectability” as an assimilationist tool. To that end, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham writes: “For the Women’s Convention, the politics of respectability constituted a counter-discourse to the politics of prejudice, but it was aimed dually at white and black Americans. Respectability held an identifiable and central place in the philosophy of racial self-help. It entrusted to blacks themselves responsibility for constructing the ‘Public Negro Self’ (to borrow from Henry Louis Gates, Jr.), a self presented to the world as worthy of respect...Uplift, however, encoded the church women’s assimilationist leanings.

Organized black church women disseminated throughout the black community the assimilationist message implicit in respectability, and they endeavored to implant middle-class values and behavioral patterns among the masses of urban blacks who retained rural folkways of speech, dress, worship, and other distinct cultural patterns. With evangelical fervor, they strove to win converts from the ranks of the poor and “unassimilated”...The evangelical message, like the historic work of Home Missions among other ethnic and racial groups, sought to bring black America in line with the both religious and class values of the dominant society.” Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 195-196.

though the ground is shifting. When it comes to this dynamic, however, the rest of America is no better.

How patriotism is defined in this community underlaid the strain of my Africanness and Americanness. White folks in Bald Eagles hold strict conceptions of what a patriot is. Generally, a patriot is Southern, male, white, a conservative Protestant, and has served the country as a member of the military. Black folks hold more fluid but racialized and social justice oriented notions of patriotism. Hence, a conversation about patriotism (i.e. southern civil religion) is inherently about what it means to be an American.

At Tabernacle, I believe my Africanness and Americanness was regionally constructed. My Africanness, my black skin and folksy ways, enabled this church community to more easily accept me. Yet, my Americanness, catchword “northerner,” labeled me an “outsider.” I was neither kith nor kin. I did not have family from that area or any other part of the South. My people do not hail from the South. They come from the South of the South—the Caribbean.

The complex political atmosphere of the nation was also at play in the minds of black people, here. Obama being a “wind of change” challenged African America on what it means to be a “true” (black) American. Blacks are not a-political nor are they monolithic. Their imaginations, like white America’s, were being stretched by Obama—a bi-racial, self-identified black American and socially liberal Protestant Christian with no contemporary Civil Rights roots or history, and with a Muslim surname.

It is not implausible to conjecture that blacks, here and elsewhere, conceived the first black president, after “Bill Clinton,”²⁵ to be someone like a Julian Bond or Jesse Jackson—a black person whose family history is anchored in slavery, Jim Crow, and last century’s Civil Rights Movement. These have become the authenticating signifiers for being black in America or for what it means to identify as African American.

I had disrupted both communities with my presence because I appeared when an American political arena was pressing the issue of what it means to be an American. For blacks, “American,” both consciously and unconsciously, is generally identified as black, Christian, and Southern or black with some regional responsibility to the South given America’s racial history. For whites, “American” is perceived as white, Protestant, and Southern with a military background also because of the racial and religious history of this nation. For instance, most of our recent Commanders-in-Chief have served in the

²⁵ Nobel Prize winning author Toni Morrison introduced the belief that former President William Jefferson Clinton was America’s first black president in a 1998 article for the *New Yorker* magazine. There she compared his impending impeachment proceedings to the daily indignities of black men in America. She comments: “African-American men seemed to understand it right away. Years ago, in the middle of the Whitewater investigation, one heard the first murmurs: white skin notwithstanding, this is our first black President.” Morrison wrote Clinton was “blacker than any actual black person who could ever be elected in our children’s lifetime.” She continued: “Clinton displays almost every trope of blackness: single-parent household, born poor, working-class, saxophone-playing, McDonald’s-and-junk-food-loving boy from Arkansas.” Further, she said: “when the President’s body, his privacy, his unpoliced sexuality became the focus of the persecution, when he was metaphorically seized and body searched, who could gainsay these black men who knew whereof they spoke? The message was clear: “No matter how smart you are, how hard you work, how much coin you earn for us, we will put you in your place or put you out of the place you have somehow, albeit with our permission, achieved. You will be fired from your job, sent away in disgrace, and — who knows? — maybe sentenced and jailed to boot. In short, unless you do as we say (i.e., assimilate at once), your expletives belong to us.” Staff Reporter, “Toni Morrison Explains that ‘first black president’ thing,” *The Daily Voice*, <http://thedailyvoice.com/voice/2008/05/toni-morrison-explains-that-fi-000536.php> (accessed May 2, 2011)

military and/or have been Southerners: Carter, G.W. Bush Sr., Clinton, and G.W. Bush Jr.

“American” never or rarely includes being female. Community member Marshall Howard was the only speaker at the Martin Luther King Jr. Day worship service to trace Obama’s political genealogy to Rosa Parks saying: “If not for Rosa Parks, there would be no King, and if not for King, there would be no Obama—Parks, King, Obama.” In this simple statement, he not only includes gender in being “American” but also demythifies and deconstructs the notion that black racial uplift emanates solely from black men.

In terms of my white congregation, my Africanness and Americanness played out in a different way. Though I was accepted as one of the lone black members of the congregation, I suspect members of The First were operating under another type of “politics of respectability.” Firstly, they were required to show hospitality towards strangers. This type of southern lore had bearing because I was often asked by leadership and close members how I was being treated. Secondly, I was accepted because I was categorized as similar to but also *unlike* many of the other blacks in the community. I was the seeming “exception” being an educated Northerner. Thirdly, they were operating under a “politic” fueled by anxiety around my potential “inaccurate” representation of them. Such politics would demand I bespeak their stories about life in this community from their vantage point and with integrity. Through the research, they were aiming to debunk some myths about rural Southerners as well as white religious and social conservatives.

Akin to President Obama, I would come to represent the *grotesque*. In classical Western aesthetic theory, the grotesque is a concept with a long history dating back to the

“Christian period of Roman culture, where there evolved a style of combining human, animal and vegetable elements, intricately interwoven, into one painting.”²⁶ In a move *beyond ontological blackness*,²⁷ philosopher of religion and ethicist Victor Anderson adopts the grotesque to argue for a “postmodern blackness,” a reconstituted black identity transcending the circumscribed spaces commonly defining American black culture and life. Writing about the grotesque, Anderson explains:

The grotesque ought not to be thought of as an opposition between two diametrically opposed sensibilities such as would occur in binary dialectics. Yet the grotesque does have to do with sensibilities that are oppositional, such as attraction and repulsion, and pleasure and pain differentials. However, the grotesque seeks neither negation nor mediation between these sensibilities. Rather, it leaves them in tension, unresolved by negation or mediation. Thompson describes the grotesque thus: “The most consistently distinguished characteristic of the grotesque has been the fundamental element of disharmony, whether this is

²⁶ Phillip Thompson, *The Grotesque*, in *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism*, Victor Anderson (New York: Continuum), 127.

²⁷ “Ontological blackness,” according to Victor Anderson, “is a covering term that connotes categorical, essentialist, and representational languages depicting black life and experience.” Anderson desires not only to enlarge this idea but also to move beyond its limitations by extracting African Americans from situations, events, and practices stifling to the progress of black people. He asserts: “Unfortunately, the need among African Americans to promote a positive racial community has too often taken binary dialectical formation against individuality. In the dialectic of community and individuality, where community is totalized, blacks who pursue goods that contribute to their fulfillment as individuals (whether in selecting marriage partners, exercising freedom of movement, acting on gay and lesbian preferences, or choosing political parties) often find themselves ostracized and their cultural fulfillment repressed by an *ontological blackness*. My attempt is not to negate but to displace, decenter, and transcend the determinative transactions and practices of ontological blackness over black life and experience.” Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 16-17.

referred to as conflict, clash, mixture of the heterogeneous, or conflation of
disparates.”²⁸

I lay out Anderson’s line of argumentation to make the following assertion: the inability of the mind (according to Thompson) to synthesize binary attributes leaves the possessor of such myriad and disparate characteristics in a state of “alterity”=“otherness.” In short, I was “othered” by both communities for different reasons. For the black community, my “othering” was based on regional affiliation. For the white community, it was based on “regional” and “racial” factors. Even I, as a researcher, participated in the cycle of “othering” as I insistently compared the regionalisms of this rural community to more urban Northeastern attitudes, beliefs, practices, and actions.

Rather than accept the grotesqueries of life, its lived contradictions, human beings instinctively respond to the grotesque by “othering.” Perceived disharmony generates this response that can be countered if we begin to “develop dual perception(s)”²⁹ of humanity that shows the grotesque as elementary to human nature and our worldviews. It is this—the grotesque—that names and describes the double consciousness I was experiencing in *Bald Eagles*. It is this—the grotesque, grasped as diametrically opposed sensibilities—that is the root of cultural and social hiccups (i.e., conflicts) and that becomes a hindrance to actualizing the good person and the good society.

²⁸ Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 127-128.

²⁹ Frederick Burwick, “The Grotesque: Illusion vs. Delusion” in *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism*, Victor Anderson (New York: Continuum), 129.

Politicizing Death: Understanding Race, Faith, and Ritual

How does service to the country, to the degree of sacrificing one's life, reflect racial and American values? What hermeneutic drives the placement of secular symbols (e.g., the American flag) and sacred symbols (e.g., the Cross) in public and private "worship" spaces? Such inquiries are at the heart of understanding southern civil religious practices and evangelical faith. In this work, they are the impetus for five core conclusions resulting from field observations. First, rituals of intensification re-inscribe the continuity, power, and authority of social groups and communities. Thus, these rituals of intensification serve to distinguish between races, practices of faith, and civil religious loyalties. Yet, these rituals of intensification performed on Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Inauguration Day provide social cohesion to differing segments of regional populations.

Second, both blacks and whites in this rural community theologically employ the "God vs. Devil" trope to explain "good vs. evil" (ethical conduct). However, each has distinguishable understandings of "God vs. Devil" with respect to their lived experiences. For blacks, the "Devil" is anything that produces black distress and suffering. For instance, what blacks would consider "demonic" is the racial disparity in the criminal justice system in which black men are disproportionately convicted and sentenced for crimes for which others in similar situations might not be prosecuted. The percentage of black men in prison negatively impacts the well-being of black families. For whites, the "Devil" is embodied in the threat of secularization. For example, what is "demonic" for whites would be the role of the media in exposing young people to extremely relaxed morals and in fueling increased violence amongst members of American society.

Third, “God versus Devil” language is not conventionally ascribed to Evangelical faith; yet, I identify this language as characteristic of the beliefs and practices of this form of Christianity that stresses eschatological and apocalyptic thought.

Fourth, civil religious expressions emerge from each community’s understanding of a theology of war. For whites, it is expressed as “civic Americanism” for which upholding Christian faith, myths, and symbols are associated with American identity. For blacks, it is expressed as “civic responsibility,” for which defending democratic principles despite the imperfections of our Union displays loyalty to America.

Fifth, the research conducted in this southern farming community holds wider significance for an American public predisposed to labeling white Christians as “socially and theologically conservative” and black Christians as “socially liberal and theologically conservative.” Both are narrow typologies that have evolved into stereotypes foreclosing opportunities for members of each racial group to move beyond such constructs. Analysis of the demographic data shows that black and white Americans represent an array of complex ideological and theological positions not reducible to any sort of identity “politic.” For that reason, blacks and whites who fall outside of the established “conventions” should be accommodated, not fearing marginalization, chastisement, or retribution for holding social, political, ideological, or theological positions that might deviate from group norms.

These non-traditional death rituals are essential to the operation of American civil religion because death is politicized. Moreover, these non-traditional death rituals demonstrate how the evangelical faith of the institutional church becomes a reflection of the religio-political “faith” of the public square.

Alongside the critical findings listed above, the politicization of death is captured in seven chapters. Chapter two describes the history, theology, and civil religious beliefs and practices of a black congregation—Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church in Bald Eagles. The focus of chapters three and four is The First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles, West Tennessee. Here the historical, theological, and patriotic assumptions of this rural white and southern congregation are characterized. In chapter five, Bald Eagles residents in the community-at-large exemplify death's role in precipitating their socio-political ideologies, positions, and concerns.

Chapter six lends insight into the social structure of the Bald Eagles community through the demographic study of research participants. Drawing upon psychological and anthropological theory, I conclude this work on ritual, race, faith, and civil religion in chapter seven. Returning to the following three questions, I ask: What do death studies reveal about the history, theology, psychology, anthropology and racial politics of social groups? What have we learned about the civil religious loyalties of blacks and whites in Bald Eagles and the American South, generally? What conclusions can be drawn about Evangelical faith, both in practice and belief?

With an interdisciplinary focus on religion and culture, this work discloses religion's relevance to discussions about morality and the theological constructions of social groups. Ritual becomes the venue for Christians to insinuate political and religious beliefs into American public life and ultimately to shape discourse around issues like family, gang life, the media, war, and violence. This project raises the more humanistic question: "How should we live in America?" Attempting to answer this question remains

the basis of my life's work, I hope to offer more constructive models of healthy American social and religious life as I venture towards an answer.

CHAPTER II

THEOLOGY AND CIVIL RELIGION AT A HISTORIC BLACK CONGREGATION IN RURAL WEST TENNESSEE

On a steamy Sunday morning in June 2008, I stood before the congregation of Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church in Bald Eagles to explain why I had selected Tabernacle and the town of Bald Eagles for my study. I emphasized the comparative nature of my project. I would observe activities at two congregations—one black, the other white—in this area. I planned to investigate the similarities and differences between black and white Christians by studying their beliefs and practices in the public square and in more private settings—the church. I wanted additionally to determine how parishioners at both churches understood civil religion—the relationship between religion, politics, and American values—displayed in patriotic sentiment and action.

The documented histories of both black and white communities in this town are mainly oral histories. In my historical sections, I weave a rich tapestry of racial and church histories from written and oral accounts. Representatives of the Bald Eagles Historical Society, established in 2004, were resourceful in providing me the names of the local black and white historians in town.

In a 2007 article from the *Bald Eagles' State Gazette*, the local newspaper, the newly elected President of the Society references the Bald Eagles' County Museum which spurred the founding of the historical society. The journalist, Earl Willoughby, writes:

The beginning of the museum and the historical society go hand-in-hand. The Downtown Bald Eagles Development Association began the historical society. But it was actually the museum aspect that started it. During the first years of the McIver's Bluff Celebration, Bald Eagles' residents shared their pieces of the county's history in a makeshift museum at the Bald Eagles County Courthouse. That interest led to the creation of the historical society in April 2004. Since officially opening on March 17, 2005, in the basement of the Professional Development Center, the museum has housed several exhibits including the Nancy Timmerman Memorial Dollhouse Collection, a collection of military artifacts from the Civil War to Desert Storm, Bald Eagles Fabrics' items, and new exhibits that will be displayed soon.³⁰

History, like theology, sets boundaries for who *does* and who *does not* belong in this town.

Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church

Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church in Bald Eagles, West Tennessee is a black working to middle class congregation with an older membership comprised of school teachers, factory workers, business owners, service industry employees, and veterans. There are no young families here. Middle aged members whose children are college educated or just finishing high school are part of the church's demographic of approximately one hundred members.

It is a congregation primarily of extremes—the very young (babies, infants, children) and aging members (mid-to-late sixties and older). Often these youngsters are the grandchildren of older parishioners or neighborhood children that members chaperone weekly to Sunday service. Tabernacle is an “ol timey” Baptist Church. There are no

³⁰ Earl Willoughby, “Historical Society Sets Goals for Coming Year,” *Bald Eagles State Gazette*, October 29, 2007.

songbooks or hymnals. The songs are often spirituals, standard hymns, or gospel songs older members remember from childhood and the congregation knows by rote.

A visitor is expected to be familiar with the words because worship leaders do not “line out the hymns” (to read or repeat each line of the hymn’s stanzas). The King James Version of the Bible—often humorously labeled black folks’ “official translation” of the Bible—is used even if members might have other versions (NRSV, NIV, NLV) in their possession. In public and from the pulpit, scripture is read from the King James Version. The church, generally, has an “old” spirit. That might be why the pastoral search committee selected a young pastor, Reverend Mitchell Matthews—a tall (6’5’”), slender (professional basketball player build) and married African American man of 41 years—to assume leadership. This brief description of the membership of the Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church founds the historical, theological, and civil religious investigations prominent in this chapter.

The Researcher and the Black Baptists of Bald Eagles, West Tennessee

A prior conversation with the Pastor and head Deacon was instrumental in my being granted permission to conduct research amongst the membership of Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church where I visited on a Sunday in early June 2008. The church building is a modern structure. Each week as I entered the church’s main doors, I was greeted by an usher who handed me the morning program. Seven-five members would attend regularly. Seated in the choir loft on the first Sunday I visited was the Men’s Choir who sang selections at designated times throughout worship.

The air conditioning on that particular Sunday was not functioning properly and subsequently, hot and sweaty, I approached Pastor Matthews after service to introduce myself. He greeted me, quickly gathering the membership, before everyone could disperse for the afternoon. Introducing me to the congregants, he told them I would be conducting a historical study of the church (well, not accurate but I concurred, nevertheless).

Though intently listening, everyone looked quite dumbfounded. Yet, I still asked for questions. Because there were none, the congregation was dismissed. The Pastor, the head Deacon, and his wife treated me to lunch at a local restaurant to become familiar with me and to ask in depth questions about my project. Members might have exited the building puzzled that day but were willing to take a chance on me—the researcher. Both meetings opened the door to my life at Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church.

***“What to do in times of national Crisis?”:
A Rural Southern Black Church in America***

Sunday morning worship services would begin at 11:00 AM, though parishioners would gather at 10:45 AM. This morning’s order of worship remained the same—praise music to usher in the spirit and to prepare the congregation for the movement of the spirit, the Call to Worship by the pastor, and devotions led by the Deacons. In keeping with the seamless nature of worship, the program earmarks the times when parishioners can enter the sanctuary by the phrase: *worshippers may enter*. While church attendees are entering, the Men’s Choir is singing two songs of praise—“By and By, when the morning comes” and “Jesus, Jesus how I love to pray.” The responsive reading is from Psalm 24,

for which a holy God claims ownership of the earth. The choir stands for another song of praise—"I want to be ready when Jesus comes."

During the altar call, deacons initiate the prayer line that stretches across the front of the sanctuary because no altar rail exists for parishioners to kneel and pray. One member's hand securely clasps another's in anticipation of the minister's morning prayer. In that moment, the minister beseeches God to answer the prayers of the people.

Listed in the church program is the "Sick and Shut-In prayer concern list" that includes the Tabernacle church family, Christian missionaries, military families, youth, and elderly members. Also included are individuals and families with specific prayer concerns. Before entering the sanctuary on Sundays, parishioners seize the opportunity to write their names on another prayer list sitting on a table in the foyer of the building. That list is also submitted to the pastor and announced before prayer begins.

Visitors receive a warm welcome after introducing themselves and declaring their church "homes" to the congregation. Immediately after welcoming the visitors, we march around the church to place our offering in the baskets being held by two deacons in the front of the sanctuary. The choir sings another selection before we stand for the reading of the scripture, Psalm 90, which is in preparation for Reverend Matthew's message, today: "What to do in times of Crisis?" Psalm 90: 1-5 declares:

¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place
throughout all generations.

² Before the mountains were born
or you brought forth the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

³ You turn men back to dust,
saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men."

⁴ For a thousand years in your sight
are like a day that has just gone by,
or like a watch in the night.

⁵ You sweep men away in the sleep of death;
they are like the new grass of the morning—

As I sit in the pew listening, I am distracted by my note taking resulting in much of Pastor Matthew's sermon becoming a record of paraphrases and direct quotes.

Reverend Matthews starts the day's message with Moses' reaction to personal crisis:

"The eternal God is our refuge. This faith is what sustained the Israelites in the wilderness for many years. People looked to Moses for this type of direction." Matthews continues, proclaiming: "God was Moses' help in ages past. Psalm 90 indicates God's eternity and human's frailty. The difference between the immortal and the eternal is that man pulls off mortality and puts on immortality. That is how man is able to possess eternal life. God, on the other hand, is eternal. In God, there is no beginning and no end. Faith in Jesus Christ allows for eternity to set in."

Matthews continues: "If we ever lived in a time, we are living in a crisis moment, now. We have leaders whose motives are messed up and it is impacting the Godly. We are in a crisis! Our government will spend \$700 billion to better our banks instead of assisting homeowners in crisis! We are in a crisis! When our men are fighting overseas, and there is no peace in our homeland, we are in a crisis! Yet, if we hold onto God's unchanging hand, we can survive crisis! For our days pass away under your wrath; our days come to an end like a sigh! Our *sinfulness* causes us to decay daily. We pass away! Man is a creature of time who needs to be rightly related to God. We need to be hooked up to God to find our purpose and to live rightly!"

Rev. Matthews declares: “Psalm 90 is a funeral scripture, but this is a long funeral scripture because the wages of sin is death. During Moses’ generation people lived longer than 70 years but God placed a limit on the length of days that people lived because people were sinning. Their sinning cut their days short (see Psalm 90: 8-9)

⁹ All our days pass away under your wrath;
we finish our years with a moan.

¹⁰ The length of our days is seventy years—
or eighty, if we have the strength;

Moses called the people to number their days and use their time qualitatively because of the limit that God had placed on the people.”

“Moses realized that man without God had no purpose,” *Matthews* claims. “So for those who don’t know: there is no ‘pet’ heaven. Pets have no soul only men have souls. Man was made in God’s image and desired life to mean something. Life is not meaningful until you place Jesus in the center of your life. Many live without purpose, but Paul said, ‘to live is Christ, to die is gain.’

Moses tells us what to do in a crisis. In verse 13, Moses says, ‘pray to God for favor’ because only God can help us. Moses tells us in verses 14 and 15 to pray for joy. We need to pray to God for joy. Each morning I wake up to news of people dying and losing their jobs. Whenever crisis comes, get on your knees to pray! I know we have no prayer in schools, but when there is a crisis in schools then we still need to start praying. That is our form of prayers in school. When there is a crisis in the White House, then people need to pray.”

In the White House, they are facing a crisis. When men want to marry men, when women want to be with other women, and when men look to other men for guidance and

leadership that is not Godly, there is a crisis! If we know how to pray to God, we can go through a crisis! We need to hold onto God's unchanging hand! We need to praise God. Praise God and He will see you through! Sin is all around us! Praise God and He will see you through!

If you don't start praying now, you will be like the children in the Wilderness and fall to your death! The children fell to their death! By holding onto God's unchanging hands, we can survive tornadoes, hurricanes, and earthquakes! We will survive other natural disasters!

What to do in a time of crisis? We need to pray! We are in a crisis! Our children are falling by the wayside, killing one another. We got to pray and trust God, and He will change things. He will see you through!" The pastor closes the sermon with enthusiasm, invites non-members to join, and afterwards makes the church and community announcements.

Sin Causes Crisis

Reverend Matthews addresses America's economic crisis in today's sermon and implicates "sin" or human "sinning" as the source of this crisis. "Sinning" includes homosexual marriage, ungodly leadership, and the lack of prayers in school. He then provides solutions for living through "crisis situations," in the nation, in homes, and in black families. His answer is to pray for favor and pray for joy. I use Matthew's message to begin to exemplify the theological and historical thinking and practices of this black church community. His message is replete with binaries: mortality/immortality, humanity/divinity, flesh/spirit, war/peace, and life/death. Such binaries come to represent

how this community understands “good vs. evil.” “Good and evil” is viewed from the perspective of American blacks’ lived realities and experiences of joy, hope, distress, anxiety, and suffering. What is “good” will be attributed to God or the Divine and what is “bad” will be identified with Satan or the Devil.

Matthews uses Moses and the Exodus narrative to explain the African American experience especially during economic hardship in our country. The Exodus is a major trope in black history and theology explaining how Africans in America identified themselves—as people without a place to call home during American slavery—yet moving towards liberation. From the chapter “Religion, Rebellion, and Docility” in *Slave Religion*, religious historian Albert J. Raboteau writes:

Slaves prayed for the future day of deliverance to come, they kept hope alive by incorporating as part of their *mythic* past the Old Testament exodus of Israel out of slavery. The appropriation of the Exodus story was for the slaves a way of articulating their sense of historical identity as a people. That identity was also based, of course, upon their common heritage of enslavement. The Christian slaves applied the Exodus story, whose end they knew, to their own experience of slavery, which had not ended. In identifying with the Exodus story, they created meaning and purpose out of the chaotic and senseless experiences of slavery. *Exodus functioned as an archetypal event for the slaves.* The sacred history of God’s liberation of his people would be or was being repeated in the American South.³¹

“Crisis” is apprehended from the theological perspective of “good vs. evil” but also from the socio-cultural perspective of the oppressor’s “wrong” behavior and action towards the oppressed; additionally, it points to the illicit behavior of the wealthy towards the poor. Given how Matthew contextualizes America’s economic problem for his audience—from a Mosaic perspective—it is not surprising that his answer to the problem derives

³¹ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South*, updated ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 311.

from “sin” or the “sinful” actions of humans. This construct we will soon see is quite different from how the clergy and members of the First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles explain America’s economic crisis. To understand the people of Tabernacle, I place history and theology into conversation with the members’ concepts of leadership and patriotism. Their history, theology, and civil religious notions will be examined from the site of worship.

Topography of Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church

I walked through the front doors of Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church on numerous occasions throughout the week. The light blue heavy steel doors belie the beauty of the church’s interior. Entering, visitors are warmly greeted by an usher. In the foyer, the wall paper is white with a floral trim running through its middle. Two striped sofas with white backgrounds stand on both sides of the main entrance into the sanctuary. This is a visitor’s first site upon walking through the front doors of the church building. At the left of the front doors and inside the foyer, is a table with Afrocentric pamphlets that read “A Healthy Weight for You” and “High Blood Pressure: Facts for You.”

Around the corner from the front doors and on the right wall, hangs a mirror for viewing the self from the waist upwards to the face. Around the corner from the front doors on the left side is a bigger than walk-in closet sized room with school age appropriate pictures on the wall and a few chairs. I learn that, at times, the monthly church newsletter is generated in this room. A guest member of the congregation, I later have my photograph taken in this room. My picture is printed alongside a brief biography that appears in one of the church newsletters not long after I first arrive.

Leaving this room, a visitor notices two square windows above the left sofa. Moving one's eyes across the main doors of the sanctuary towards the right side, one also cannot miss two square windows above the right sofa and parallel to the left window. In one of the left windows is a mini-display of the Birth of Jesus with all-black caricatures. Also noticeable is the green marble-top dark wood end table with gold trim that stands next to the left main door before entering the sanctuary. Bathrooms can be found in the foyer as well as a water fountain to quench one's thirst. Windows are lined with gold trim on both left and right sides of the foyer. On the right side of the foyer, below the windows, and adjacent to the sofa on each side, are white lamps standing on white lampstands.

Upon entering the green carpeted sanctuary, a visitor encounters three columns of wooden pews separated by two middle aisles, one aisle on the left, and another on the right. The sanctuary is a modern day structure boasting a price tag of 1,000,000+ dollars. The three columns of pews are comprised of eleven red cushioned benches for comfort. Two more red cushioned benches stand on the interior of the main sanctuary and at both sides of the main entrance. There is an island in between the back bench and the last pew where the worship service is recorded.

The interior of the sanctuary is off-white and with natural color wood trimmings. Both the left and right side of the sanctuary is decorated with stained glass windows. Trail the five natural colored wooden beams providing the infrastructure of the upper sanctuary of this church from the carpeted base and a visitor will find the beams meeting in a triangular shape at an apex—the roof of the upper sanctuary. Long rows of natural

colored wood intersect and run perpendicular to the beams. In short, the ceiling is made of natural colored wood.

Towards the ceiling in the front of the upper sanctuary, a visitor will find an elevated stained glass window. Unlike the windows at eye level, this window is picturesque featuring a black Jesus or black Shepherd holding a long white staff with two white sheep flanking him on both sides. Moving down from this stained glass window to view the front of the sanctuary, a visitor will see on the floor of the church a communion table and a smaller statue with a wood crucifix carved atop the wooden block. A standing podium as well as a black piano is also located on the floor of the church on the visitor's right.

Walk up five green carpeted stairs and one stands at pulpit level. Behind the pulpit are five chairs. Three red cushioned, on the back and on the seat, majestic chairs are directly behind the pulpit which is flanked by a red stole embroidered with a gold colored Cross. Of the three majestic chairs, two are separated by small tables that likely support water and other miscellaneous items for pulpiteers and the main preacher. On the right and left of the three chairs are two other red cushioned but simple chairs. Dividing the pulpit area from the choir loft is a white wall with natural color wood trim.

The choir loft has approximately twenty seats for members. And behind the choir loft in what seems another area of the pulpit [in fact, I believe that area must possess the wading pool often used by churches for baptism], a beautiful mural is painted on the wall. The mural is painted in blue. Blue hands stretch towards the congregation transforming into a blue dove which becomes the background for a black Jesus in a lightly colored

tunic/robe embracing a black man, probably a new believer. The mural is framed by a natural colored wood trimmed wall that separates the wading pool from the mural.

To the left of the pulpit, in an enclosed area, are the drums and are other percussion instruments. Standing on the floor in a corner to the right of the pulpit is the American flag. Next to the flag is another piano or is it an organ? As one turns to leave the sanctuary and looks upward, five more small stained glass windows come into view. Each of these windows has biblical image. For instance, in one of the windows is a dove diving face first towards the earth. Leaving through the main doors of the sanctuary and walking through the foyer towards the front steel doors, then exiting, the visitor is led back to the outside world.

“Man is only the dreamer of dreams”:
Tabernacle’s Baptist History and the Community

Mrs. Johnnie Parker Whitelaw is designated the “local” black historian. I had a conversation with the “local” white historian who encouraged me and confirmed my inclination to also speak with the local “black” historian. Whitelaw is a member of Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church and has also been designated the church’s historian. We meet on the west side of town (one of two black areas) at Carol’s Restaurant, an establishment patronized predominantly by the black members of Bald Eagles. A simple but warm environment, people gather to eat and fellowship during lunch hours.

Mrs. Whitelaw is a slender, silver-grayed, light brown skinned, eighty-four year old black woman who does not look a day over 70 and still has a very sharp mind. I meet her at 8:00 a.m. Whitelaw reminds me of the late Rosa Parks—in physical features,

stature, intellect, and her commitment to certain causes. Whitelaw who is a shade darker than Parks, participated in chartering the local NAACP chapter and establishing race relations in the city of Bald Eagles.

Whitelaw often travels between the town and Memphis to stay with family. Formerly a schoolteacher in the Bald Eagles school system, she has taught in the local “white” and “black” schools, when the school system was segregated. I capture the role of Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church, a signature black church, in the early years of the developing Bald Eagles community.

Tabernacle in the 1870s: The Mule and the Wagon

Tabernacle was established in the 1870s after the end of the Civil War. Former slaves who remained in Bald Eagles needed a place to worship. Accordingly, a group of men and women who identified themselves as Baptists initially gathered at different homes to hold worship meetings. “Money was scarce, but each individual gave a part of his meager earnings toward a *dream*—to own their very own place, dedicated to God, where people of the Baptist belief could gather and worship according to the dictates of their hearts.” (Tabernacle Baptist Church Centennial Celebration 1880 – 1983, p. 3) With these monies, early members of Tabernacle rented an old four room frame house that was once the site of the town’s jail. Though beneficial to church members, the house had to be vacated in late 1879 to make room for the County’s jail.

This news galvanized the membership and the appointed leaders; once again, they gathered meager financial resources to make a move. Since their desire was to purchase property, on March 3, 1880 with the guidance and bargaining power of the deacons, the

church bought a building and the surrounding land. “The deed to the property provided Tabernacle with historical data about their first deacons, the first purchase made in the name of Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church, and solidified their role as part of Bald Eagles early history.” (Tabernacle Baptist Church Centennial Celebration 1880 – 1983, p. 5) This first church building was located on the early east-west connector routes that would take residents and visitors toward and away from the Bald Eagles historic downtown area to points north and south of the town.

Tabernacle grew and prospered during the late 1880s to the 1920s. An agricultural area, Bald Eagles drew black day laborers to the house, fields, and to other areas of commerce. Yet, there were also enterprising African American men who started their own businesses as draymen, physicians, barbers, blacksmiths, and carpenters. This group of men provided leadership to Tabernacle during this period. Meanwhile “members were not bothered by the church facing a westerly direction or that it sat on a dead end road. Nor did it cause any raised eyebrows, when negroes who lived all over Sampson Avenue to the north, had to cross a plank to get to the church from the Bald Eagles–Teapots Road. Sunday mornings saw the crowds gather in time for service. Walkers came on foot, visiting as they trod the rutted road to the church. Those who could afford them, rode gracefully in their buggies. Yet, others came by mule and wagon, picking up passengers as the slow progression made its way to Sunday service down the narrow dirt road known as Baxter Street.” (Tabernacle Baptist Church Centennial Celebration 1880–1983, p. 8)

Though Tabernacle experienced the Great Depression along with the rest of the country, between 1920 and 1940, the church witnessed significant growth. Under the pastoral leadership of Reverend W.M. Harris alongside the board of deacons and trustees,

in 1922 they demolished their first church building and constructed a church basement where the growing membership could participate in church activities. The church basement was the initial phase of what eventually would have become a new church building. Tabernacle would also experience a changing of the guards starting with Reverend W.M. Harris as a series of senior pastors, once assigned to the church, either retired or moved onto other churches. On August 20, 1940, Tabernacle once again purchased a new church building but for \$4,750.00.

On the first Sunday of September under the leadership Reverend C.E. Davis, members moved from the basement to the new church building. The record shows: “At promptly 11 o’clock, the pastor, Rev. Davis, dressed in full clerical garb, bible in hand, stepped out followed by the Deacons in their best Sunday suits. Trustees, Mothers Board, Ministers, and Deacon Wives, all other officers, organizations and members followed in order. The march led from the basement to the new church, where it officially ended with the pastor’s arrival at the church steps. From there, he and the members entered their new homes together.” (Tabernacle Baptist Church Centennial Celebration 1880–1983, p. 15)

Tabernacle, Civil Rights, Mai Mai Watkins and 21st Century Civic Responsibility

Tabernacle’s early history demonstrates the church had attracted a combination of professional and working class members who were involved in the development of Bald Eagles and its black community. Because the archives do not record the Church’s activities beyond the 1950s, much of my conversation with Mrs. Whitelaw focused on race relations in Bald Eagles and Tabernacle’s role in Civil Rights and beyond (*See Appendix D. The Church, Civil Rights, and the Election of President Barack Obama*).

However, in comparing notes from my conversation with Mrs. Whitelaw to another prominent member of Tabernacle and the black community, Ms. Mai Mai Watkins, I later learn some residents have memories of Bald Eagles' race relations that are in conflict with Whitelaw's version as the following conversation indicates.

I explore Ms. Watkins answer to the question: How did whites and blacks interact during the 1950s and 1960s? Her answer sharply contrasts Mrs. Whitelaw's.

Nichole: Did they interact? Well, I guess I should say in the 50s and 60s. And forward.

Mai Mai Watkins: People from the east side of town, across the tracks, went to Kennedy Rogers; it was as big as Wal-Mart. It was a little store, but as far as names go, it was as big as Wal-Mart because people from all over town, especially people from west end of town came to Kennedy Rogers to buy groceries. I knew that Kennedy Rogers was next to Tabernacle.³² Now, that was a white person's store, Kennedy Rogers. And, (pause) and the stores downtown, Gravis—black and white—all the stores downtown we went in, and Brewers, we went in and out of. And then you had the farmers—we worked in their fields. Now when you think about the farmers, they were very kind people and accustomed to being around blacks, that's the way I look at it, more than anybody else. But you also had the women working in the household, doing housework for white women. And, even though we didn't come in contact with that side of the white people, very often, we were in contact with the farmers very often. And the farmers chose to be in contact with us. And, uh, and as far as...

Nichole: And this was during segregation.

³² In Bald Eagles, the "east and west sides" of town traditionally were and continue to predominantly be the black areas of the city. The "west side" of town was "across the railroad tracks" and was/is considered the poorer of the two sections. The Bruce Community Center is symbolic of the west side of town. Railroad tracks are still physically present and on occasion residents will hear freight trains crossing. The "east side" of town was considered the more upscale of the two black areas with its mainly residential homes.

Mai Mai Watkins: before.

Nichole: before desegregation.

Mai Mai Watkins: ...before desegregation. Because when you got up into desegregation, things start to change in terms of working in stores downtown and other places. Before you didn't see a black person working at the cash register anywhere 'cept when you step into some little corner cookie or candy store on the west-side or something. Something like that. But your question was...was it interacting with white people?

Nichole: Yeah, you're answering. You've answered it.

Mai Mai Watkins: I'm trying to see, to answer your question. I think we all kept our distance. Even though we did certain things together such as in the fields and working for...but then there was, you know, you knew as blacks which side of the street to walk on.

For instance, going to the movies, we had two theatres here—the Francis and the Capital—and even though they were open for us as well as the whites on the same day—that's where the shoe store is, I think that's the right place, I think that was the Francis theatre. To enter we went around on that little alley, alley-like side. That was the door there and we had to go upstairs. And on the Capital theatre, it [the entrance] was around the corner on Main Street and you had to go upstairs there. Now we didn't buy popcorn, even though you could smell the popcorn; the white kids bought popcorn, but we didn't buy no popcorn.

Nichole: Hm.

Mai Mai Watkins: And uh, we just, we knew where to go and where not to go and when we went into those stores downtown and went shoppin' on Saturdays and, we knew what to do and what not to do.

Nichole: MmHm. So, so, I mean, blacks and whites led separate lives. I mean during segregation and the only time there was real interaction was in a working relationship.

Mai Mai Watkins: MmHm. And that didn't come until the kids started going to school together.

Nichole: What didn't come?

Mai Mai Watkins: The change in, uh, feeling comfortable saying, uh...we grew up in that 'Yes, Ma'am' and 'No, Ma'am' period.

As our country moves into another historic direction with the election of President Barack Obama, I ask Mai Mai Watkins to consider the impact of his election on the Church, more generally, and Tabernacle Baptist's mission to the community, specifically. In answering this question, Mai Mai Watkins verbal exchange with a local pharmacist makes evident how Watkins relates the church, civic responsibility, and social change, all of which have historically been part of the prophetic role of the African American church in the United States.

In their 1990 sociological study of the black church entitled *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, argue for a "dialectical" social scientific model for interpreting the Black Church. Dialectical tensions typify the black church tradition. Mai Mai Watkins focus on civic responsibility and social change illumines the dialectic *between the priestly and prophetic functions* of the black church. Accordingly, Lincoln and Mamiya write:

Every black church is involved with both functions [the priestly and the prophetic]. Priestly functions involve those activities concerned with worship and maintaining the spiritual life of members; church maintenance activities are the major thrust. Prophetic functions refer to involvement in political concerns and activities in the wider community; classically prophetic activity has meant pronouncing a radical world of God's judgments. Some churches are closer to one

end than to the other. Priestly churches are bastions of survival and prophetic churches are networks of liberation. But both types of churches also illustrate both functions, which means that liberation churches also perform the priestly functions and priestly churches contain liberation potential. Much of the discussion of black liberation theology has tended to neglect the priestly element within black churches.”³³

What Mai Mai Watkins envisions for the future of Tabernacle and its contribution to the Bald Eagles’ community is good citizenship and each member’s participation in a continuously changing social landscape. Involvement with the political process lays the foundation for social change and builds a better American society. The church definitively has a role in reshaping America.

Tabernacle’s History: From House Meetings to Community Institution

Tabernacle’s history and interaction with the community starts with its post-emancipation development from house meetings to a self-sufficient “institution” with a solid governance structure, committees, and social control of its membership. History shows that Tabernacle’s leadership in the community has been in ebbs and flows. The church was socially, politically, and economically involved in the lives of parishioners in the years after the end of slavery to the 1950s.

However, like many of the black churches in Bald Eagles, its leadership and congregation chose not to become institutionally involved with the Civil Rights Movement, even if members like Mrs. Johnnie Parker Whitelaw and Ms. Mai Mai Watkins were active. Though Tabernacle currently has an older membership who still believes in the political process and revels in the election of President Barack Obama, it

³³ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 12.

remains a “priestly” institution, hoping for the fire of the “prophetic” through the leadership of its new pastor, yet supporting and guiding its present body into their twilight years.

Baptist: A Denomination Accommodating Theologies of the Disinherited

In this next section, I analyze Wednesday evening and Friday noon-day bible studies as well as Sunday morning sermons to articulate the various theologies operating at Tabernacle Missionary Baptist.

The Evangelizing Baptist

Every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. would be evening bible study at Tabernacle. On those evenings, I would enter the rear door to the basement of the church and walk into a large room with the other participants. After entering, I would settle into my chair anticipating the evening’s discussion. The Pastor returns to a study entitled, “101 Bible Reasons Why I am a Baptist.” Tonight, we start with number 71 of 101. We close the evening parsing 71 because of participant interest. This congregation strongly identifies with being Baptist and more specifically, Missionary Baptist, warranting instruction on Baptist theology. Members want and need to be educated about what the Baptists believe, according to Pastor Matthews.

The annals of American history record the largest numbers of slaves experiencing conversion happened during the Second Great Awakening. American religious historian Albert Raboteau explains:

The increase in conversions of Negroes under the impact of revivalism was due to several factors. The evangelical religion spread by revivalists initiated a religious

renaissance in the South as a somnolent religious consciousness was awakened by revivalist preachers. The revival itself became a means of church extension for Presbyterians and, particularly, for Methodists and Baptists. The mobility of the Methodist circuit rider and the local autonomy of the Baptist preacher were suited to the needs and conditions of the rural South... The individualistic emphasis on revivalism, with its intense concentration on inward conversion, fostered an inclusiveness which could border on egalitarianism. Revivalists had little doubt—indeed they were enthusiastic—about the capacity of slaves to share the experience of conversion.³⁴

Bondwomen and men were attracted to the Baptist tradition and Methodism—evangelical religions—because of the missionizing efforts of revivalists, focus on transformation of the heart, and recognition of their membership in the human family. Thus, in this week’s exploration of Baptist theology, associated with a historic tradition, seventeen regular Wednesday night attendees of the bible study are present (including me and the Pastor) ranging from mid-to-late thirties into late seventies/early eighties. Deacon Parsons starts this evening’s bible study with prayer. Afterwards, participants sing “What a Friend we have in Jesus.” The Pastor follows with a prayer for “all the residents of Bald Eagles, the soldiers fighting the War, for both sides in the War—the enemy and our men, the cyclone victims, the earthquake in China, and the floods in Iowa and Missouri.” Deacon Wilcox requests a volunteer for a scriptural reading, testimony, or “to say a word” before the Pastor assumes the rest of the evening’s responsibilities. A member rises to read Matthew 7:12-20; with no other additions, Deacon Wilcox gives the study over to the Pastor.

³⁴ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South*, updated ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 132.

I am a Baptist because the Baptist Church is a Missionary Church

Pastor Matthews declares, “Many Baptist churches are taking the ‘missionary’ out of their names. But if you take the *mission* away then you might as well take *the Church* away. You can start a mission in your house, next door, the community and then spread. One thing, we have a serious dilemma in – Baptists want to “GO” and travel but they do not want to do the mission in their home. Missions work starts at home and spreads abroad. Are we (Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church) doing Christ’s mission? We are supposed to do it—in our home, communities, state, and the world. Often we understand missions as Ethiopia and other faraway lands. But missions are for the rich and the poor. You can’t look and determine who is who.” The pastor’s question and charge leads into a round of discussion about the role of missions at Tabernacle (*See Appendix E. Missions versus Ministry at Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church*)

Pastor Matthews concludes the evening’s discussion on missions proclaiming: “Salvation carries a bigger paycheck than any job. You take abuse from the job, for that 40 hour week for a paycheck, but salvation carries a bigger paycheck than that job. People willingly suffer abuse on the job for a paycheck but shy away from spreading the Gospel with its lesser degree of suffering.” He ends the study with his initial question: “Is the Baptist Church a missionary church?” Yes, it starts with us. If we were hauled off to court and charged with being a Christian, would some of us be found *not* guilty?

Evangelism in Black Baptist Theology

Tabernacle is a Missionary Baptist Church, meaning one cannot be Baptist without doing missions work—the work of evangelism. The people’s stress on

evangelism hearkens back historically to the slave conversions, both pre and post emancipation. Evangelism was the mode employed by revivalists to convert slaves *and* slavemasters to Christianity. Evangelism is a character trait of Baptists therefore Baptists are evangelical; evangelization changed the unconverted to black and white Baptists during the Great Awakenings.

Though evangelism is connected to Baptist history, it is also a dimension of Tabernacle's group theology. As Matthews teaches, he appeals to the culture of the people in the evening's discussion by speaking in parables and resurrecting the folk sayings of a former generation. His metaphors resonate with the black residents in this agricultural community; they clearly understand how swimming and fishing are being used to address an actual problem—the seduction of gang membership. For this congregation and its pastor the spiritual “life preservers” for today's black youth is proselytization leading to salvation.

Fight the Devil with the Sword

As a dimension of Baptist theology, this next study yields a different message. On this night, we cover two more characteristics on the list of “The 101 Bible Reasons Why I am a Baptist.”

The first attribute: “I am a Baptist because the weapons of the Baptist Church are spiritual and not carnal.” Ephesians 6:10-20; Romans 12: 17, 18

The pastor explains there is no need to use “physical” weapons when an individual has the Word of God as their sword. However, David Jordan, a participant declares: “Pastor, there are going to be times when you must fight if the devil keeps at

you.” Pastor Mitchell responds: “if you are a Christian you must as much as possible lean towards the peace side.” Deacon Wilcox reminds Mr. Jordan that the Ephesians passage exhorts the believer to “step back and resist” if the devil attacks.

Wilcox continues: “Ephesians teaches us our responsibility. It encourages us to understand our responsibility and to learn the truth. The truth should hold us together. The Gospel is our peace. It is our stability. The key phrase in the scripture is ‘for you to resist.’ The Word of God is a ‘sword’ used to sharply cut—divide lies from the truth. It is also a ‘shield’ which allows for resistance.” Pastor Matthew closes this discussion with “If you don’t have on the full armor [of God], then you will react from ‘self’ or the ‘flesh.’”

The second attribute: “I am a Baptist because Baptists believe in and die for religious liberty.” Romans 14:5

Starting the discussion, Pastor Matthews explains “even though salvation is free, religion is a freedom of choice. The same way that you have the choice to serve God, another has the choice to serve the Devil. We have a choice between right and wrong. If I live for God, then you can’t make me be convinced otherwise. However, it is a matter of being convinced. If you are fully convinced, you won’t allow for threats and intimidation to sway you from your belief. For example, we will know if we are fully convinced of our faith, as Christian believers, in the face of persecution. Those fully convinced are willing to die for their religion. If not, in the face of persecution, they may decide to leave the Church.”

Brother Jordan chimes in “what is going on over in Iraq [suicide bombing], those people are convinced of their religion which is why [American] service men and service women have their hands tied. You’ve got to be persuaded in your mind, but you can’t

take that persuasion and force it on someone else. You should not be mad or upset if people don't want to go the way you go, in terms of your religion." Agreeing with Jordan, Pastor Matthews uses his children to exemplify Jordan's point: "All I can do is convince them that Christ is the Way, but in the end, they will make their own choices." He then refers to Aretha Franklin who exercised her choice, what the Pastor defines as liberty, to sing rhythm and blues as opposed to Gospel music. "Reverend Franklin was a big Baptist preacher who had problems with his daughter being an R&B singer. He did not like his daughter's choice, but [had to respect her liberty to make that choice]."

Brother T. Russell, then asks a question about the structure of the Army and how it defines religious liberty. He wants to know why Catholics and "everyone else" are categorized as Protestants. Reverend Matthews answers: "Formerly the Armed Forces distinguished between Jews and Gentiles which allowed for Catholics to be defined as Protestants." Both continue the discussion illuminating the ways in which the Armed Forces must now provide spiritual leaders for Catholics, Jews, Protestants and adherents of other religions including Islam and the anti-Christ.

Resistance and Religious Liberty

The exchange between Pastor Matthews and Mr. Jordan shows the limits of Jordan's tolerance for the devil, known as people who would "keep at him." Although Pastor Matthews and Deacon Wilcox encourage Mr. Jordan to broaden his thinking about spiritual weapons, Bro. Jordan informs everyone that "there are times when you must fight with physical weapons... regardless of the spiritual weapons" you have at your disposal. Mr. Jordan's response provokes inquiry about the ways in which the

dispossessed and disinherited interpret the religion of Jesus. Writing on Howard

Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited*, African American systematic theologian, James

H. Evans, Jr. claims:

Thurman's discussion of Jesus is predicated on two questions. First, what is the significance of the religion of Jesus for "people with their backs against the wall?" Second, why is it that Christianity is impotent in dealing effectively "with the issues of discrimination and injustice on the basis of race, religion and national origin?"³⁵ For Thurman, it is not a question of the moral obligation that Christianity lays upon those who have much, but the existential meaning of Christianity for those who have little or nothing. "The masses of men live with their backs against the wall. They are the poor, the disinherited, the dispossessed. What does our religion say to them? The issue is not what it counsels them to do for others whose need may be greater, but what religion offers to meet their own needs."³⁶ The question is who Jesus is for the downtrodden.³⁷

For Mr. Jordan, a devil who "keeps at him" is also an entity that "pushes his back against the wall." Thurman teaches that the religion of Jesus is not impotent. Instead, Christianity is vibrant and active; it is a religion that has something to offer to those in need. Even if contestable, the religion of Jesus grants Jordan permission to fight, both spiritually and physically, against people or institutions that prove, repressive. Further,

³⁵ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1949), 7-11, quoted in *An African American Systematic Theology: We Have Been Believers*, James H. Evans, Jr. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 83.

³⁶ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1949), 13, quoted in *An African American Systematic Theology: We Have Been Believers*, James H. Evans, Jr. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 83.

³⁷ James H. Evans, Jr., *An African American Systematic Theology: We Have Been Believers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 83.

Mr. Jordan and the Pastor show that the God and Devil, good and evil pairings are employed to explain threats against black wellbeing and livelihood.

Resistance characterizes life in this farming community. Another attribute that defines the people is religious liberty. Religious liberty is crucial to the residents of Bald Eagles, located at the interior of the Bible Belt. Religious freedom refers to the preeminence of familiar forms of Christianity over any other religion. In the following exchange between me, Louise Hall, and Sue Simpson—older members of The First United Methodist Church in Bald Eagles, West Tennessee—this is explicit.

Sue Simpson: You know, after 9-11, everybody was, if anybody had dark hair or looked like they were Arab or something, everybody was scared of ‘em. And, I think the one... Was it Cecil Kirk that we, we studied? We studied the Muslims, I mean not, not in depth but we studied the Muslim religion and it’s basically peaceful. And, it’s just the radicals, but now, I mean, I think still people look on, if you’re a Muslim, you’re bad. And that’s not right.

Louise Hall: Well, and and the same way with other Christians, you see. A lot of people think the Mormons are bad, and they’re some of the most humble people I’ve ever seen. And then we think sometimes with the Amish, and they are some of the best peacemakers people could have. It’s not knowing individuals; we’re getting away from knowing each other. When you know each other, you don’t have any problems.

Nichole: Okay. Now, that’s interesting. I never knew that people had any questions about the Amish. Because they live such simple, kind of, lives.

Louise Hall: Well, people don’t know them.

Islam is perceived as the religion of the Anti-Christ for three reasons: media portrayals of Islamic extremists, residents' unfamiliarity with the religion, and the military influence that suffuses the culture and life of Bald Eagles residents. Having travelled overseas to serve on battlefields, older veterans, both black and white, habitually invoke America's greatness, in conversation. Yet, that provokes me to ask: Do blacks and whites have the same perspectives on Islam? Regional mindsets, in such instances, hold sway over social group thinking and attitudes.

"Praying for Sight": Existential Theology and Tabernacle's Rural Baptists

Today's Sunday morning sermon entitled "We Need to Pray for Sight" demonstrates the existential theology operating in the lives of these rural black Baptists. Reverend Matthews' begins: "Sight is the most essential of all our senses. Through sight, we gather information. The Bible speaks of *sight* as spiritually being able to *see*."

Elaborating upon the three types of human sight, Matthews explains: "We have *physical sight* which relies upon retinal activity. This sight can be evaluated by an eye doctor who uses technological advancements to tell us if our sight needs correcting. If our sight needs correction we rely on eyeglasses, our second pair of eyes, to alter how the eyes in our head, see. The second type of sight we have is *mental sight* which is different from retinal activity. Our mental sight deals with our mental comprehension. Mind readers exercise mental sight. And mothers and fathers, who are endowed with 'eyes in the back of their heads' also exercise such mental sight. The last type of sight is *spiritual sight* which is the providence of God. How God enters into our presence in the midst of trials and tribulations requires spiritual sight."

He proceeds: “If God is for me, I am stronger than the whole world against me. The person who spiritually walks and talks with God is able to impart that everything is going to be alright. For instance, supposed someone gets into a car accident? The woman with spiritual eyesight knows God is behind the scenes even in the midst of escalating medical bills. Our foreparents possessed this eyesight even in the midst of trials. With the auction blocks and cotton fields prominently in their faces, even with all they were going through, they could sing ‘Trouble Don’t Last Always.’”

A God of Providence and Creation

Though evangelical, existential theology also functions in this body of Christian believers. Their “God-talk” precisely reflects the particular and peculiar lived experiences of black residents in this agricultural community. Their “God-talk” communicates their conceptions of God. “The idea of God as spirit in black theology is not the opposite of the idea of God as person. Rather they are complementary,” declares James H. Evans, Jr.

He continues:

To speak of God as person affirms the human need to relate to God as a significant other, thereby contravening the objection that what one calls God is simply the glorification of human sentiment. To speak of God as spirit affirms the human need to understand God as that intimate force that buttresses the humanity of black folk, thus avoiding the pitfalls of alienation and objectification that have often accompanied the idea of theism in Christian theology.³⁸ God’s providence in African American theological discourse is intimately related to God’s creative activity. God, then, is not only the source of dignity and worth of humanity, but God also sustains humanity. Thus, when African American Christians declare that God cares for them, it is a corollary of the statement that God created them.

³⁸ James H. Evans, Jr., *An African American Systematic Theology: We Have Been Believers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 74.

Implied in African American religious expression is the notion of creation and providence as God's *work* in history... To work is to accomplish something in spite of resistance. To work is to enter into a formative relation with someone or something outside oneself. One can act in the abstract. One works in the concrete reality of history.³⁹

A God who bestows clairvoyance upon seekers is a providential and creative God. God is in partnership with the community, empowering and strengthening members to travail against a recalcitrant world.

As Matthews preaches his sermon, he makes reference to the power of unjust people, situations, and systems to victimize (*See Appendix E. God Imparts Spiritual Clairvoyance*). Pilate, Nero, and J. Edgar Hoover are enemies. Attacks on families, finances, marriage and the home are exacting. Slavery, gossip, exclusion, racism, fear, and victimization are “buzzards”—brutal institutions. Though these forbidding and severe people, events, and institutions produce black suffering, stress and distress, Matthews extols a God able to overcome the burdens of his parishioner's daily living. This God has worked in history to render sight to Da Vinci, Edison, Carver, Martin Luther King Jr., and Stevie Wonder; Matthews ends his sermon declaring this same God can give the people in his congregation—victory.

Existential theology is a liberation theology; yet, for a conservative evangelical community it is dissimilar in its morphology than the black liberation theology of James Cone. A black theology of liberation identifies the gospel of Jesus Christ as emancipatory, finds Jesus Christ at the center and in the midst of liberation struggles, and

³⁹ James H. Evans, Jr., *An African American Systematic Theology: We Have Been Believers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 75.

historically locates the black power and black consciousness raising movements with the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁴⁰

From the perspective of Cones' black liberation theology, Jesus Christ comes to liberate African American and all other oppressed communities in the world. "Blackness" is not only a theological construct, but also a political one. For the blacks of Bald Eagles, their more conservative version of Christianity neither politicizes God or Jesus Christ, even if their wall murals meld "blackness" with God. They fully embrace and practice a politically-laden black consciousness outside of church walls through membership in social justice organizations like the NAACP as well as black fraternities and sororities.

In Bald Eagles, God is familiar with the black American experience even though this God is not the God of Cone's black liberation theology. God fittingly enters into the events and lives of this group of believers to empower them to defeat the enemy. God *works* in the present to guide, care for, and to establish a historical record of acts done on behalf of this group of people. God, in practice, reflects the emancipatory Spirit that supported Martin Luther King Jr.'s black liberation movement. That is the God these community members, know.

From Black Magic to A Look into Heaven

At tonight's bible study the pastor continued his study of the "spirit of divination," a section in the book, *The Devil: Strongman's His Name...What's His Game*. Present at bible study were approximately twelve members of the Church. At six thirty in

⁴⁰ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*, 5th ed. (Marynoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 8.

the evening, prayer meeting preceded bible study, was officially opened at seven by a deacon, was followed by a song, prayer requests and eventually led by the pastor.

The study is based on Titus 1:1-11 which treats the appointment of “elders or overseers” as administrators over God’s household and silences detractors of the faith who were leading the Christian community astray by their false teachings. These false teachers were identified as fortunetellers and “seers” whose beliefs and actions opposed the lifestyle and teachings of the Christian community.

In the workbook, *The Devil: Strongman’s His Name*, “divination” is defined as “the practice of attempting to foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge by occult or supernatural means. God’s Word goes a step further by showing that people who divine are controlled or possessed by supernatural spirits which enable them to receive information beyond the human realm at a particular time. God’s prophets receive their divine revelation by the Holy Spirit. On the other side of the spectrum are demonic spirits feeding information to fortunetellers and sorcerers (p. 13).”

In tonight’s study, we focus on fortunetelling, hypnotism, and magic as the antithesis to divine revelation. Pastor Mitchell asks for a definition of fortuneteller. A member responds that a fortuneteller is a predictor of the future and prophesier. The pastor agrees, reinforcing that Satan is also involved in fortunetelling based on the scripture Micah 5:12: “I will cut off witchcraft out of thine hand; and thou shalt have no more soothsayers.” Pastor Mitchell queries: How many of us have thought of binding fortunetelling in the name of Jesus? Do Christians have the right to bind the fortunetelling business? Why? He answers his question with Matthew 18:18 proclaiming, “Whatever

we bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever we loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Pastor Matthews subsequently testifies: “We have authority to bind non-Christian elements. For instance, the store Pure Passion located in Memphis was recently closed down. Christians in that area also prayed for the club to be closed and it was. I can understand you going to a strip club and not being saved. But if you are saved, you should not be found in the strip club! Another example of binding non-Christian elements on earth is the abuse of alcohol. Alcoholism is something that must be bound. According to Micah 5:12 fortunetelling is considered witchcraft. Don't you know that a lot of businesses stay open because we as Christians won't bind the businesses?”

After ending his discussion on fortunetelling as a form of witchcraft, Matthews moves to hypnotists, charmers, and passive mind states. He defines “hypnosis” as the strongman that Satan uses to alter a person's mind. Hypnosis is dangerous because the mind is left unguarded and susceptible to any spirit that may be waiting for just such an opportunity. He admonishes his students about leaving their minds open for Satan to manipulate it then references the workbook lesson on the topic. It says, “Not every case of hypnosis results in demon possession, but it can be the beginning of a very negative experience that can affect the person spiritually (p. 17).”

Once again Brother Jordan adds colorful commentary to the study, announcing: “I listen to jazz music, easy listening jazz, to relax. I do not consider my habit of listening to jazz as a form of hypnosis.” Debate ensues amongst bible study participants about leaving oneself open to Satan by listening to easy jazz because of the subliminal messages in this type of music. The pastor responds saying, “Relax by reading the word

of God. That is how I relax and it makes me fall asleep. When we are meditating on God's words, it is not hypnosis. Instead, it is an exercise of the spirit. It is God's way of speaking to us. We can meditate on God's word without opening a door that needs to be shut later."

The pastor then proceeds to read the definition of "black magic" from the printed lesson. "Black magic" is an attempt to produce evil through the particular methods of curses, spells, the structure of models of one's enemy, and an alliance with evil spirits. He gives an example of "black" magic as found in black culture—the use of voodoo dolls to harm individuals. The pastor reminds Bible study participants that the devil will use spirits to get into you. People controlled by the practice of witchcraft, the source which is the Devil, are similar to believers controlled by God and who practice Christianity. "White" magic is used to get somebody to undo what was done to you.

The pastor introduces sorcery as a form of witchcraft, as well. Witchcraft, accordingly, is the magical practices associated with witchery. Matthews guides his students to Galatians 5:19-21 to warn them about the consequences of practicing any form of sorcery, whether black magic or white magic. Galatians 5:19–21 says, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

At this juncture members begin to share different stories of familiarity with "black magic." One participant confesses that black women and men of earlier generations practiced forms of witchcraft like hoodoo. Others begin to also share their experiences

with black magic. Sister Yvonne Brent talks about a spooked book that a neighbor had. The Pastor talks about an experience with a woman whose daughter had a voodoo doll. We also learn that practitioners of Christianity would wear a string of dimes as anklets to ward off bad spirits. The conversation becomes extremely interesting when members of the bible study talk about their childhood and adult experiences with sorcery. Bible study ends there and we close with prayer.

Conjuring a Syncretistic Christianity

The Devil lurks behind practices of divination, hypnosis, and magic. Through an exploration of the hypnotic power of smooth jazz, this group identifies Satan as a *strong man* yet not mightier than God. This study is another example of how these black Christians parse “good and evil.” Though antithetical to Christianity, black magic is a response to evil, reinforcing it as a dimension this group’s cosmology.

Black magic is an integral part of this community’s worldview because members have been exposed to a syncretistic form of Christianity—what African American religious historian Sterling Stuckey would identify as an “Africanized Christianity.” For instance, Christians who wear a string of dimes to ward off “bad” spirits has conciliated particular occultic practices with Christianity. Yet the opposite is also true. The practices of black magic and sorcery contravene Christianity.

Black magic and sorcery do exist and are real. During slavery and even today, black magic, sorcery, and hypnosis are identified as *conjure*. “Conjure was a theory for explaining the mystery of evil, but it was also a practice for doing something about it,” explains Raboteau.

Because the conjure doctor had the power to ‘fix’ and to remove ‘fixes,’ to harm and to cure, it was possible to locate the source of misfortune and control it. Therefore the conjurer, as a man of power—and supernatural power at that — enjoyed a measure of authority in the slave community directly proportional to belief in his power. Various known as root doctor, hoodoo doctor, two facer and wangateur (from *oanga*-charm), he was respected and feared by those blacks and whites who had implicit faith in his power.⁴¹

Though conjure is theoretically in conflict with Christianity, it possesses a degree of power for defining “evil” in the minds of these bible study participants.

Exploration of the stressors of black life in this rural area is achieved through this bible study series on demon possession. The devil is absolutely at fault for human actions that cause ill-will. The members of Tabernacle invoke “devil-talk” to explain individual “bad” action as well as the evil that besets the person in this world. Nevertheless, their use of devil-talk provokes me to wonder: Is there a role for this anthropomorphic figure in the *collective* speech, thought, and actions of *the* social group versus that of the individual? and What is the role of the devil in systemic oppression?

Devil-talk in the church, quite an oxymoron, also leaves me with these series of questions: What kinds of questions does the devil answer for these black folks? What do we ascribe to the devil in terms of evil and Why? What kinds of earthly, systemic, social and political issue does this community rule out or overlook in their devil-talk? What kinds of social and political as well as existential and interpersonal critiques does their belief in the devil open up with regard to the evil they are experiencing in the world?⁴²

⁴¹ Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The ‘Invisible Institution’ in the Antebellum South*, updated ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 276.

⁴² Nichole Renée Phillips, in conversation with conversation with Michael Brandon McCormack and Karlene Griffiths Sekou, Fall 2007.

A Look into Heaven

Wednesday evening bible study discussions dealt with Satan while Friday noon-day lessons investigated the apocalyptic literature of Revelation. Revelation 4:4 was the focal point of a study attended by twelve members in early spring 2009. This scripture declares: “Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.” From the sheet the pastor has handed to participants, we learn Revelation 4 is “A Look into Heaven.” Matthews explains: “The word ‘throne’ appears 12 times and ‘the book of Revelation makes it clear that the throne is the throne of God who rules in the universe, not the thrones of men’.”

The elders are church representatives who will stand in place of specific churches from Pentecost to the Rapture. These elders will wear white raiments; these raiments signal their triumph over evil and symbolize the righteousness of Christ. They will also wear gold crowns connoting the Church’s rule with Christ. By correlation, Matthews seeks to convey that Tabernacle’s membership has the potential to reign with Christ in God’s future Kingdom. The crowns, which are divided into five categories, are rewards that will be given to saints in heaven. The first is the Crown of Righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8). Added to that are the Incorruptible Crown (I Corinthians 9: 24-27); the Crown of Life (James 1:12); the Crown of Rejoicing (I Thessalonians 2:19); and the Crown of Glory (I Peter 5:4).

As Pastor Matthews continues instructing, he talks about the importance of the elders and follows by distinguishing between elders and angels.

Pastor Matthews: There is a difference between elders and the angels. Our writer gives us eight reasons why elders cannot be angels. *The first* is that you will never see an angel on the throne. *The second* is that you will never see angels with crowns (angels do not wear crowns). *The third* is that Revelation 7:11 distinguishes between angels and elders. This scripture sets angels apart from elders. Elders are assigned. Angels are identified. *Fourth*, Revelation 5:8-10 says that elders sing the hymn of praise. We have no records to show that angels sing. However, we also have no records to show that they do not sing. *Fifth*, in their song, elders claim to have been redeemed (Christ died for sins and the church and therefore by Jesus' blood we are redeemed). Angels can never say that they have been redeemed (that is, they have been bought or purchased by the blood of Jesus). *Sixth*, Revelation 7:2-3, says that angels speak while elders, sing. Angels speak but do not sing. *Seventh*, Hebrews 12:22 reminds us that angels are never numbered, *but* the elders are numbered. There are twenty-four elders. Finally, elder signifies maturity and angels are timeless beings. When you speak of elders, you speak of maturity.

***From Genesis to Revelation:
A Black Apocalypse and Eschatology, Solutions to Black Suffering***

Tabernacle's bible studies involved reviewing the book of Revelation on Fridays and parsing Satan on Wednesdays. Such studies, seemingly distant, are not paradoxical. Targeting the spirit world on Wednesday nights established rich debate on black pain amongst participants. On the other hand, Friday's conversations about the apocalypse—a prophetic revelation especially concerning a cataclysm in which the forces of good permanently triumph over the forces of evil—and eschatological concerns, began to answer questions about how to address the pain and suffering.

Precisely what this congregation is communicating about black life through both bible studies—psychologically, anthropologically, and religiously—is worthy of examination. Is evil central to their understanding of their existence? And does apocalyptic literature provide an answer to how evil will be conquered in their lives? Can evil be attributed to behavior or systems? What behaviors? What systems? What resources do they have to overcome evil outside of the spirit world? These questions are precipitated by both studies, but there are more.

While the difference between elders and angels is important, what is notable about the lesson, “A Look into Heaven,” is the pastor’s and parishioner’s identification with the white raiments (purity and triumph) and gold crowns (rewards). The white raiments and crowns resonate with these black rural dwellers because they denote the apocalyptic and eschatological moves of this community—prevailing over the burdens, affairs, and other unexpecteds of daily life while separating from this earthly existence to inhabit a better home. Addressing the eschatological in black theology, Evans writes:

Eschatology, along with Christology, were the two most controversial themes in early black theology. While Jesus Christ is the primary symbol of the Christian faith, eschatology points to the moving force within the believing community. In nascent black theology three eschatological motifs were clearly present. The first related eschatology to the existence of evil in the world, reflecting what M.H. Abrams called the “theodicy of the landscape.” The second related eschatology to God’s benevolence within the created order, reflecting God’s terrestrial promise. The third motif related eschatology to the determination to survive and prosper in difficult circumstances, reflecting the anatomy of hope.⁴³

⁴³ James H. Evans, Jr., *An African American Systematic Theology: We Have Been Believers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 147.

Tragedy and triumph define the experience of Africans in America, from slavery to the present. As such, black apocalyptic and eschatological thought must be apprehended and comprehended from the perspective of hope. Hope in replacing the “evils” of this world with “good,” hope in a God who works on behalf of the disinherited and who rectifies a skewed social order, and hope in the ability to garner the resources for emancipation from challenging circumstances founds the apocalyptic and eschatological attitudes and mindset of these black Baptists. Further, Evans declares:

The key to understanding the complexity of eschatology in African American Christianity is the inseparability of the material and the spiritual dimensions of life. This is reflected in the language that black Christians have used to express their hope for better things to come. Talk about “new shoes” and “white robes”—concrete earthly images—are juxtaposed with talk about “crowns and wings.” For [Gayraud] Wilmore, this points to the “worldiness and concreteness of the black religious imagination.”⁴⁴ It draws from ordinary life the tropes of transcendence. It addresses the satisfaction of physical needs *and* fulfillment of spiritual hunger.⁴⁵

Carrying forth the early black theological tradition, these black Baptists of Bald Eagles, embrace the “white raiments” and “gold crowns” as eschatological expressions of transcendence, but in the here and now. Unlike their white counterparts, their ideas about transcendence connect the mundane and the divine. Evans illuminates that the community focus on the material and physical reflects the need to satiate both spiritual and physical hunger and to find contentment with present realities as these black Christians envision a better future.

⁴⁴ Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Last Things First* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 77, quoted in *An African American Systematic Theology: We Have Been Believers*, James H. Evans, Jr. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 151-152.

⁴⁵ James H. Evans, Jr., *An African American Systematic Theology: We Have Been Believers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 151-152.

*How the African American Community Processes and Practices
Leadership, Patriotism, and the Politics of Dying*

Sociologist Robert Bellah coined the term American Civil Religion. He argued that certain rituals and symbols borrowed from Evangelical Protestantism contribute to creating a cohesive America by establishing a spiritual foundation for and providing political legitimacy to the nation-state through the loyalty of citizens to universal values and principles. For instance, the President's oath of office models civil religion. While the ritual is political, God imagery is invoked. Though civil religion borrows language from Protestantism, salvation is not the goal. Said aphoristically, civil religion is a mix of religion, politics, and American values.

However, there are regional exceptions to this rule. Religious historian Charles Wilson Reagan declares evangelical faith has historically supported civil religion in the South.⁴⁶ This is the case, in Bald Eagles, West Tennessee. In this particular section, we investigate ideas about leadership and relate them to civil religion as ritualistic expressions of patriotism. I seek to understand how service to this country—to the degree of making the ultimate sacrifice, giving one's life—becomes an expression of racial and American values. Further, I examine how these black rural Baptists understand the insinuation of secular American symbols—the flag—into their worship space. What does this infiltration say about how they understand ritual? What they are communicating about their America?

⁴⁶ Historian Andrew Manis, explaining southern civil religion, writes: "What I am calling southern civil religion is one of the subcultural, or regional, manifestations of the American civil religion. It is an American faith, but one with its peculiar distinctions. It is, above all, a system of mixed symbols. The images of this public faith resemble a mythic Rorschach. At one glance they embody and communicate the faith of an American's American; another peek, and they gather before the undulating Stars and Bars and intone, 'Forget Hell!'" Andrew M. Manis, *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict: Civil Rights and the Culture Wars* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002), 23.

At the heart of patriotic loyalties and representations, lay people's proclivities about and towards leadership. Black leadership is characterized as values driven, in-group oriented, and generationally linked with a focus on church, community, and society. In the following conversations about leadership and the black Bald Eagles community, I demonstrate how the former attributes are connected.

The Problem with Integration: Black Life has No Value

I introduce the problem of integration with a conversation by Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway and Sampson Frye Brown who talk about the values they think African Americans possess and would die for, today. (*See Appendix G. The Problem with Integration: Black Life has No Value.*) Both are deacons at Tabernacle, men in their late 50s to mid-60s, and also military veterans. According to them, integration has eroded the civil rights generation's notions of freedom and equality.

Of greater concern is the impact of integration on the perceived worth of a black life. For these men, integration has twisted the thinking of younger blacks who neither place any value on their own lives nor on the lives of other blacks. They point out younger blacks are killing themselves and one another at rates unseen by previous generations of African Americans. Having received the benefits of integration, younger blacks no longer hold life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness at a premium. Instead, they have adopted the rules and principles of the social group and institutions into which they have integrated, leading both men to conclude there are no values that younger blacks willingly die for. In assessing this dialogue with Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway and Sampson Frye Brown, I determine black leadership is in-group oriented and communally focused towards social ends.

Leadership in Black Female Headed Households in the 1940s and 1950s

Deidre Abraham is a petite, dark skinned woman of sixty-four years. She is married and is an usher who drives a school bus during the day. She talks with me about black female headed leadership given her experiences of “not having a man in the house.” (See Appendix H. *Leadership in Black Female Headed Households in the 1940s and 1950s.*)

Abraham stresses the importance of parental and teacher involvement in a child’s life. She implies such involvement is lacking in the growth and development of today’s black youth. Even in her formative years (1940s and 1950s) alternative family structures existed. She learned values like honoring her elders, saying ‘yes ma’am and no sir,’ respecting herself, valuing a dollar, and earning an honest living in the confines of a *matriarchal* home.

Not having her father under the same roof as her mother did not adversely affect her. Her experiences in a matriarchal family contradict the 1965 Moynihan Report (i.e., *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*) imputing single black female headed households as the source of the economic and socio-political degradation of the black family and enervation of black males as family authority figures. This exchange exemplifies an orientation towards leadership that is communally focused, values driven, and generationally linked.

The Church in the Community and the Community in the Church

Moses Synclair is in his mid-fifties and is presently a deacon in the church and a factory worker. He has been in Bald Eagles for fifty years, having moved there with his

family at the tender age of five. Moses Synclair strongly believes in the church's role in the community and as a social influence. (*See Appendix I. The Church in the Community and the Community in the Church.*) He talks about a form of leadership that is in-group oriented as he reveals his role in Brother Simpson's life. In this case, Jesus would resettle a former convict and his family into a new area while also spearheading efforts at finding the family employment opportunities; that is "what Jesus would do." That is and should be, according to Synclair, Tabernacle's stance—to help the marginalized in the community.

The Practices of Patriotic Blacks

In practicing patriotism, blacks in this community elevate democratic principles. Of significance are equality, rights, and freedoms associated with being a citizen of this country. What distinguishes the patriotic practices of this group from their white counterparts is the emphasis on service, allegiance to racial, ethnic, and/or cultural group, and sacrificing one's life for a higher purpose, cause, or calling.

The 2008 Presidential Campaign, Republican Propaganda, and Patriotism

Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway chides his fellow veterans and active soldiers for their "unpatriotic" behavior during the 2008 presidential campaign. Treadway is offended by Republican propaganda suggesting those who are not in support of the Iraqi War are unpatriotic. Further, he takes exception to his plant manager's unwarranted assertion that servicemen and servicewomen are complicit with dying because they have volunteered to

defend their country. (See Appendix J. *The 2008 Presidential Campaign, Republican Propaganda, and Patriotism.*)

Irritated and incensed, Treadway counters: “We don’t join the military to die.’ You know what I’m sayin’? Even though we know that is a possibility.” Despite confronting death in the throes of battle, military men and women serve the nation by protecting fellow citizens and American interests at home and abroad. Treadway does not mince words as he declares support for the troops even if the public is averse to war. Patriotism demands Americans recognize the sacrifices of men and women on the battlefield, regardless of their political or ideological positions about specific wars or war, more broadly. Otherwise, our troops die politicized deaths in vain.

Patriotism, Faith, Flags, and Guns

In another conversation with Cowboy “Wonderful” Treadway and Sampson Frye Brown, we discuss the meaning of the American and Tennessee state flags in Tabernacle’s sanctuary. (See Appendix K. *Patriotism, Faith, Flags, and Guns.*) For both men, the flags are a patriotic display of the freedoms guaranteed to Americans and an acknowledgement of the type of life provided to residents in the state of Tennessee. Their presence in church space is tradition in this part of the country. While exemplifying the ways in which evangelical faith undergird civil religion in this rural community, these American symbols undoubtedly intimate the state into church affairs.

Another topic addressed in this conversation is the role of faith on influencing patriotic belief and action. From his experience of combat, Treadway is convinced Christian faith can affect a soldier’s decision to kill or not to kill—the enemy. He continues to explain that faith based decisions cannot be challenged by higher ranking

officials. In such cases, patriotism is about sacrificing one's life for a higher calling, principle, or cause even if the cause might preserve the life of an adversary.

Stars and Stripes in the Church stand for 'One Nation Under God'

Ms. Elizabeth Ainsley is married, retired, and is sixty three years old. She is also an usher in the church. We discuss the meaning of the American, Tennessee, and Christian flags in the church's worship space. Elizabeth interprets the presence of the three flags in Tabernacle's worship space as America being "one nation under God." (See Appendix L. *Stars and Stripes in the Church stand for 'One Nation Under God'*)

God is the glue that holds family, neighborhood, community and nation in balance. Without God none of these institutions would be functional. Elizabeth provides an interesting twist on service to the country offering that missional service is just as costly to life and limb as military work. Equating the sacrifices of American soldiers to Christian soldiers, she proposes both represent God upholding life, liberty, and justice for all.

Military Service and Black Men in the 21st Century

Mai Mai Watkins and Georgia Wilder talk about the ground breaking nature of black men's service in the military during the time when the military was a racially prejudice institution. Patriotism for blacks, in that era, meant honoring and upholding democratic values in the face of the country's and the military's undemocratic actions. Nevertheless, the opportunity to serve abroad and die for American democratic principles instilled confidence, dignity, and racial pride in these black servicemen. Both women,

however, point to the lack of interest in volunteering for military service amongst today's young black men. This is surprising given the institution's history of traditionally being a vehicle for black men and women to gain discipline, a chance at an education, and to grow.

Nichole: Okay. Let, let me because both of you, um, let me ask you, um, historically, what did it mean, what do you think it meant for black me—because it was mainly black men at the time, what did it mean to enlist in the military? Like, you said it was honorable. Why was it honorable? What did it mean for black men to be in the military despite, and it sounds like you were implying, despite the racism in the military?

Mai Mai Watkins: Well, my mind is running long, and you don't need to hear about that history about the black men in the armed forces. But, let me see, to answer your question there, I would have to say...what made it honorable there...

It was a sense of, first of all, serving the country and feeling that 'I am somebody, and I am representing, uh, my people.' Because you see, they [the military] was highly prejudiced, towards black men. It was not easy at all for them. And they [the military] was down and very dirty, too. Very, very dirty. But, the men had the strength to endure and they also developed strong relationships with their comrades. And, and they, it was a growing, it was doing things for them, and it was a feeling of, of strength — worth. And they were praised by their family members and friends.

Nichole: MmHm. And they were praised because —?

Georgia Wilder: To see what their parents had to go through in order to get through the walk [life's journey]. And if this is what they can do in the military, they were willing to step and take this risk, 'cause it will help them help another person that's comin' this route. Um, to, to my advantage to do what I can-

Mai Mai Watkins: I see the same thing with today's men, as we just expressed with the men of the days before.

Nichole: You see what same things?

Mai Mai Watkins: They see a way out, a way to improve, a way to grow-

Nichole: MmHm. MmHm. But, I guess the difference, though was also that they were breaking new ground.

Mai Mai Watkins: Indeed. Indeed.

Nichole: And, I guess that may be the difference with this generation. It's not ground-breaking.

Mai Mai Watkins: Right, I guess that's true-

A Dishonored Soldier Returns Home

In this final conversation, Sinclair and Terrence define patriotism as the ability and necessity to transcend the most humiliating situations in order to serve fellow citizens and the country. When they assert patriotism is the reason why Sinclair had to leave Bald Eagles to eventually return, this is what they mean. Sinclair exercised altruism to prevail against the racist barrier that prevented him from initially receiving his “bars and stripes.”

“Bars and stripes” (a military analogy) are very American. Sinclair confesses he was denied them as a youngster when the Bald Eagles community disregarded and dismissed his athletic prowess. Instead of recognizing his gifts and talents, the community conferred honors upon the children of the town's white leadership—those offspring of the doctors, lawyers, coaches, and bank presidents.

Another attractive aspect of this exchange is the way Ossie *distinguishes* yet *compares* Sinclair to Paul Revere—an illustrious, historical, and mythical figure commonly identified as a “model” American patriot. In making this move, Ossie transforms his friend into a “historic” and mythical figure. While this is the case, Ossie and Moses do not fail to communicate the cost attached to black patriotic service.

This type of service requires loyalty to country and community and instills racial pride. In the process, both men suggest a person might have to sacrifice the loss of “home” (i.e. identity) even while claiming one’s homeland. In this illustration, sacrificing oneself for a higher cause requires having to leave the place where one was initially dishonored only to return to assist the future generations and those left behind.

Moses Synclair: Yeah, you know, I just feel that like that, you know, I probably had a goal when I was a little fellow of what I wanted to be in life and if I didn’t get to be that, I didn’t want nobody to say ‘well, you didn’t make it’ you know? I probably could have been a professional athlete in any three sports; basketball, football, baseball-any three. I was pegged in the community to be the one to make it. But, it takes determination, it takes that drive, it takes that push. In our community, when I was coming up in high school, I probably would have been, I hate to boast, Terrence ain’t never heard me brag or boast or ever hear me talk about what I used to do.

Ossie Terrence: Well, you said you played football.

Moses Synclair: I told everybody I played football. I would have been the first black quarterback that Bruce ever had (all laughing) if I had a been here, but in Bald Eagles-

Ossie Terrence: You can play now!

Moses Synclair: But, I had to leave Bald Eagles because uh, uh, of patriotism.

Nichole: Meaning what?

Moses Synclair: Because the doctor's kid, the uh, the president of the bank's kid, the uh, let's see the coach's son, there's some more names I could put in there, but uh, you know, "I could never get to the top. Being the best on the team, you had to take, uh, second uh, fiddle if you were black, for what was coming. You know everybody in the stands knew you was the best, but when it comes down to the awards, giving the awards—you get awards for being in the Army, you get honorable mention—you get them stripes and stuff.

Okay, I don't think I reached, when I was here in Bald Eagles, I didn't reach my stripes so I had to go to Paris, Tennessee to reach my stripes. I can go to the state championship in the Paris, Tennessee anytime and somebody will know Moses Synclair. They will find out ahead of time he is on his way, there. Everybody will say 'Well, Moses Synclairs in town.' But, I grew up here [in Bald Eagles]. I could have come back here a young man and played basketball here. But if I had played basketball here and they were winning, then everybody would say this is a black kid. So, I didn't come up playing basketball. Okay, it was okay then because I was still the best around West Tennessee for a black kid. *Now*, however, I have come back home knowing that I was one of the best that ever come, doesn't matter, I was a black man, black kid. But, I didn't get my just due, they messed me around in Bald Eagles.

Nichole: Okay, how, how did, because I really want to understand this. I guess I don't really understand how, I understand that you had to leave in order to get your due. But, how did that leaving-

Moses Synclair: I came back. I had to, when I came back, I tried to work in the community doing some things in the community of

Bald Eagles, they didn't have a black—they didn't have a black prom when I—

Ossie Terrence: He wanted, he wanted ours to be better. He came back after he left.

Moses Synclair: I wanted-

Ossie Terrence: He saw the same thing that happened to him was still happening here. So when he left and got into another environment and saw things different, he came back here and said 'Look!'

Nichole: Oh! That's what—

Ossie Terrence: That's a patriot!

Nichole: That's a patriot. Okay that's what you're saying.

Moses Synclair: They didn't have any proms when I was here. But when I came back they had to have two proms: a black and a white.

Ossie Terrence: Yeah, we know, we understand that in Philadelphia that a historical figure rode down with a gun, saying, 'The British are coming! The British are coming!'—

Nichole: Paul Revere.

Ossie Terrence: Paul Revere. He was also a patriot, but you know, but hey, if he had come down to Bruce, he'd have keep going on that horse! (all laughing).

*A Historical, Theological, and Civil Religious Exposé
on Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church*

In this chapter, I have laid the foundation for understanding Bald Eagles' rural black Baptists by doing a historical survey in addition to theological and civil religious analyses of the Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church membership. History informed the reading audience of Tabernacle's humble beginnings and growth into a well-respected and active institution in the town of Bald Eagles. Such activity has waxed and waned over the years. Thus, we now await, in this historic moment, to see what Tabernacle contributes to the growth and development of black youth and a black community in need of assistance.

Our theological discussions revealed a medley of theological constructs operating in this body: Baptist, evangelical, existential, and eschatological. Conversation partners disclosed this social group's preoccupation with "God" and the "Devil" as metaphorical for "good" and "evil." These tropes have become a way to explain the inexplicable, are a means of social control, and offer moral and social order in a disorderly and chaotic world. Additionally, they express the joys and hopes of and make manageable the stressors and anxieties of living "black" in this rural community.

Regarding leadership and patriotism, we leave with the following interpretations: black leadership is values driven, in-group oriented, and generationally linked with a focus on the church, community, and society. While patriotism is associated with democratic principles, is service oriented, focused on racial, ethnic and/or cultural groups, and connected to sacrificing one's life for a higher purpose, cause, or calling.

Members of this church community believe faith influences patriotism. This is revealed by Ms. Ainsley who professes the flags in Tabernacle's worship space reflect

“one nation under god.” Finally, making the ultimate sacrifice for kin and country might demand black members of this community to experience dislocation and to eventually return home in order to pave the way for future kindred. In Chapter 3, I unfold the historical beginnings and theological foundations of The First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles.

CHAPTER III

HISTORY AND THEOLOGY AT A WHITE CONGREGATION IN RURAL BALD EAGLES, WEST TENNESSEE

The First United Methodist Church

The First United Methodist Church in Bald Eagles, West Tennessee is robust and growing. At six hundred members, this white congregation is comprised of middle to upper middle class, and wealthy families. Three services—8:30 a.m., 10:50 a.m., and 11:00 a.m.—attract a healthy mix of all ages, from toddlers to the elderly. Its worship, education, music, adult, and youth ministries host programs tailored to parishioners. Additionally, the Family Life Center is the venue for a number of activities and other programs like Alcoholics Anonymous that attract Bald Eagles’ outside community members.

Two summers before my 2008 return to Bald Eagles, I learned this church’s pastor—Reverend Dr. Phillip Cook, D.Min.—and many of the members are leaders in the community. A flagship church, the former mayor of the City of Bald Eagles, Mayor Bill Revell, is an exemplar of the community leaders drawn to this congregation. I was also recently informed about this church’s “star” status, meaning it is also a congregation for persons who want to be “seen.” Some members attend more for social networking reasons and for the benefits of increased social status than for worship and catechesis.

The church’s prestige contributes to the somewhat guarded nature of congregants. Hence, it was refreshing to hear the newly hired worship leader, Minister Darin

Lightfoot, say he wanted to invite a new “atmosphere” into this community. In his position as minister of worship, he desires to create an environment where people can become more “real” or feel as if they can reveal more of themselves and their flawed natures to others in the church community. In this chapter, exposure to the personality of The First United Methodist Church is scaffolding for an examination of the congregation’s history and theology. Chapter 4 follows with a focus on the patriotic attitudes and ideals of members where I showcase how differently than their black counterparts in Chapter 2, these rural white Christians construe leadership, ritual, death, politics, and their commitments to America.

A New Atmosphere at The First United Methodist

Passing through the halls of the First United Methodist Church on my way to a women's Bible study event, I bumped into the recently hired worship leader from Frazier United Methodist Church in Alabama. His name is Minister Darin Lightfoot. A newcomer, Darin was able to speak with me about the church’s structure and ministries.

Sunday school classes, according to him, have their own personas and function like small groups. Each class appeals to specific segments of the church population according to socio-economic level, age, interest in serving, and nature of bible study. Darin learned this by observing how the needs of the church are handled throughout the week. For instance, the church secretary will direct a person to a respective Sunday school class officer according to person’s interest and the class’ service to the church and wider community. Some classes are more visible in their service, others less so. Particular classes want to delve into the “Word of God” (Bible) without being bothered by outside

distractions. Others combine community service with their study of the bible, applying biblical principles to their daily lives.

For example, I was directed to an extremely service oriented class (the Sojourners). Members of this class are mainly married couples in their mid-30s to early 50s with families; these couples are active in the church, church leadership, and the larger community. While I was living in the town of Bald Eagles, they volunteered with the Salvation Army, participated in a live Christmas Nativity Scene, prepared and sent cards to the National Guard battalion that has been deployed from the area, and served a night at the Bald Eagles' County Fairgrounds in early September at the county fair. Unlike the Sojourners, other Sunday school classes might give monetary donations to particular causes as their contribution to the town's religious life. Certain other classes based on social connections and networking possibilities will attend particular events to show their support.

I ask Darin how this traditional congregation has reacted to leadership instituting the more contemporary worship service, *Atmosphere*, that runs in parallel to the traditional 10:50 AM service in the upper sanctuary. Darin states the congregation has generally reacted positively to the contemporary worship experience. Nonetheless, there are those who challenge identifying the *Atmosphere* service as "contemporary" worship. "Contemporary" means *here and now* and suggests "traditional" worship is outdated. Being labeled contemporary worship is not what drives worship in the *Atmosphere service*; rather, it gives members an alternative to more conventional worship.

Atmosphere is an attempt to create a new "atmosphere, attitude" in the congregation. Explaining why the name, *Atmosphere*, was selected, Darin says,

“*Atmosphere* means my sphere is being allowed to touch your sphere; that can provide encouragement, acceptance of differences, and unity.” On the other hand, there is a positive side to sitting in classes with individuals from the same background and experiencing the same struggles. Darin points out, in such cases, group members benefit from group dynamics that build intimacy, develop empathy, and foster encouragement. Nevertheless, these same small group communities have a tendency to become cliquish.

“Billy Graham” and “Max Lucado” Generations in Worship

Regarding the “traditional” versus “contemporary” worship, more senior women in the church weigh into the debate during their women’s bible study. Every Thursday at 10:00 a.m. in the morning, Dr. Cook would lead a bible study for the female retirees of the Church. The women ranged in age from sixty years to early eighties. Many grew up Methodist (more specifically Southern Methodist). The Methodist Church was historically divided into regions—the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and the Methodist Episcopal Church, North. Quite a few of the women have been members of The First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles even before Dr. Cook assumed his senior pastoral position, seven years ago (i.e., 2002). He had served the congregation as an associate minister for four years in the late 1970s, left to assume leadership responsibility in other churches, and returned in 2002 to The First United Methodist Church as senior minister.

I customarily joined these women for early morning bible study and was the only “youngin” amidst this bunch of salt and peppery haired disciples. They were always engaging interlocutors. The morning of our conversation about “traditional” versus

“contemporary” worship, Pastor Cook was on his way to Florida affording a member of this cohort of women to lead bible study. Though Reverend Cook was not present, the leader did an excellent job guiding participants through and explaining 1 Corinthians 1, with the assistance of scholarly resources.

These women are of the “Billy Graham” generation as some made reference to, and have facility with academic texts like Barclays commentary, the Interpreter’s bible commentary, the Message, Revised Standard Version, and the New International Version of the bible. The member leading the study favored inclusive language substituting “brothers, sisters, and friends” in place of “brothers” to represent the “family of God,” a non-gender specific phrase. The women’s interpretation of scripture was at times conservative and at other turns, progressive, always ending with what they understood as the simple message of the Christian scripture: accept Christ as Savior and be a good Christian.

More intriguing was their post bible study discussion about their preference for the “traditional” service and its rituals over the more relaxed nature of the “contemporary” worship service. One member explained: “I really don’t connect with the words or the rhythm of the praise and worship songs in contemporary worship. I find the standard hymns easier to sing because I can read music but also the words are more meaningful to me.” Another chimed in: “Contemporary worship is drawing members away from the 10:50 a.m. service and younger couples seem to attend the contemporary worship more often because they have families.” Still another participant responded: “I attend about once a month and even though I get more out of the traditional service,

contemporary worship appeals to the ‘unchurched’ and draws them into this worship community. The service is definitely growing.”

I later have a conversation with Dr. Cook about the interplay between religion and culture. As we talk, he engages this particular issue from the perspective of culture impacting religious belief and practice.

Dr. Phil Cook: Well, on a very practical level, I think the kind of community organizations that want to use our church building, for instance, is one way that culture impacts our practice of religion. And, as well, the kind of things that are going on that our people find important to be involved in this moment in the life of the church instead of simply being involved in the religious issues that are going on, is another example of the influence of culture on religious belief and practice.

*I think the culture around us is the culture within us. And it affects everything we try to do on a religious level as well. I think the *Atmosphere* service is an attempt to build a new bridge to the culture in the community, to the musical culture that is ever present on the radios, in the cars, in the homes, in the minds, and in the ears of the people. We are trying to say we want to build this religious bridge over. It may be the same beat that we hear on the radio and in our cars but we develop words that are different. Is that fair?*

America’s Cultural Influence on Evangelical Belief and Practice

In describing The First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles, West Tennessee, it is difficult to dismiss this congregation’s engagement with local and American culture. Parishioners invest in both cultures as revealed through their social and political relationships and in their religious belief and practice. Here the influence of American culture on religious beliefs and practices is pellucid.

For instance, the guardedness of this church's membership can be attributed to the size of the congregation but more significantly to the social position of the church in the community. This aura persists because of the congregational history and the types of individuals and families attracted to worship services; the doctors, lawyers, presidents of businesses and corporations, local politicians, and educators in attendance are also city leaders.

Social networking has become part of the fabric of this congregation, yet not unlike other churches similar in size and stature in the community. Hence, the president of the local bank who knows the CEO of a local industry will likely attend this particular church adding to its country club attitude and atmosphere. A study participant suggested that environment often distinguishes larger churches and especially white mega-churches, from smaller and other types of churches. Darin, however, articulates a different vision for this church and those similar to it, one that might not be readily available because of the more professional and corporate nature of The First United Methodist Church. His vision is for all members to come to the church and to be themselves before God.

Evangelicalism in the early-to-mid 20th century came to be identified with "conservative" Christianity as a response to Modernism. Enlightenment thinking and values permeated American culture triggering a split amongst evangelicals into three groups: fundamentalists, moderates, and liberals. Fundamentalists separated themselves from American society and decided not to participate in secular culture; they were ultimately viewed as anti-intellectuals.

Moderate evangelicals determinedly forged relationships with individuals and organizations outside of their sect resolving not to mimic the behavior or lifestyles of

those with whom they partnered. They maintained the theological beliefs of Fundamentalists, embraced education and intellectualism, and participated in the social and political life of the nation. Leaders like Harold Ockenga, a founder of Fuller Theological Seminary, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and the National Association of Evangelicals launched the Neo-Evangelicalism movement in the mid-twentieth century to reform Fundamentalism.

Still identified with conservative Christianity because of their theology, Evangelicals are members of both the Christian Right *and* the Christian Left—political entities—although evangelicals are mistakenly and confusingly labeled a political entity. This is a misnomer that has been caused by the conflation of religion and politics. Those part of the Christian Left are *not* liberal Protestants. The movement has produced various types of evangelicals, from those more conservative to those more moderate and progressive. For instance, a Billy Graham is to a Carl F.H. Henry what a Rick Warren is to a Jim Wallis. What is noteworthy about The First is that members attend this mainline congregation [mainline denominations tend to hold liberal theologies] but are strongly influenced by the evangelical movement because of their *political* conservatism. Their type of political conservatism is at times represented in their theological beliefs and practices.

This is clearly indicated in the discussion about the pleasures of the traditional versus the contemporary service conducted by the older women at their bible study. Their comments also represent a generational divide. The “Billy Graham” generation connects with the more traditional service while the “Max Lucado” generation finds contemporary worship alongside the unchurched more inviting.

Intriguing, however, is the conservative character of this congregation in today's liberal United Methodist denomination. At The First, many members identify as evangelical where "old line evangelicals" and "new line evangelicals" connect because of Methodism, American culture, and the influence of the evangelical movement on congregants. Both groups accommodate each other as they gather together in the church's worship spaces where ritual is reified.

E Pluribus Unum: The Methodists of Bald Eagles meet the Researcher

I was introduced to The First United Methodist Church in summer 2006 when I first visited Bald Eagles to research how residents understood the relationship between religion and politics. My field partner and I had attended service at this local Methodist church two days before the Independence Day holiday. What captured my attention was watching this congregation, other churches, and the rest of the town and county celebrate the holiday on the Sunday *before* the occasion.

Upon entering the church building for the 10:50 a.m. service, I was greeted with the organ prelude, a rendition of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, followed by the opening hymn, *America*. Renowned American religious historian, William G.

McLoughlin asserts:

The story of American Evangelicalism is the story of America itself in the years 1800 to 1900, for it was the Evangelical religion which made Americans the most religious people in the world, molded them into a unified, pietistic-perfectionist nation, and spurred them onto those heights of social reform, missionary endeavor, and imperialistic expansionism which constitute the moving forces of our history in that century. Both as motivation and as rationale evangelical religion lay behind the concept of rugged individualism in business enterprise, laissez faire in economic theory, constitutional democracy in political thought, the Protestant ethic in morality, and the millennial hope of manifest destiny of white,

Anglo-Saxon, Protestant America to lead the world to its latter-day glory. The national anthem of the evangelical movement was the ‘The Battle Hymn of the Republic,’ whose words, now empty symbols, once surged with the emotional fervor of three whole generations of pious Americans.⁴⁷

Historic evangelicalism is the subtext for the Methodism practiced at The First United Methodist Church, Bald Eagles. McLoughlin argues this form of Christianity was the force behind early social reform, missionary zeal, territorial expansionism, and the rugged individualism of Americans, characteristics of a nascent republic ultimately defining the nation. Evangelical religion lit the embers of nationalistic expression in the worship service on that Sunday prior to Independence Day. During the offeratory, we sang *Song for the Nation* which praised America’s greatness, elevated the virtues of other nations, and recognized America’s partnership with the rest of the world. *America the Beautiful*, the sermonic selection, prepared the congregation for the delivery of the morning message.

In tribute to the founding of this country and the July 4th holiday, Reverend Cook preaches a message entitled “The High Cost of Freedom.” For this town and church community, the costs associated with maintaining U.S. citizenship and *freedoms* can never be forgotten. Cook launches into a historical explanation of *Lady Freedom* in the first part of his sermon. *Lady Freedom* is the small statue that sits atop the Capitol Dome in Washington D.C. and is described by Danielle Scull of the United States Capitol Historical Society in the following way.

⁴⁷ William G. McLoughlin, ed., *The American Evangelicals, 1800 – 1900: An Anthology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968; reprint, Gloucester MA: Pete Smith, 1976), 1 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

This bronze Statue of Freedom by Thomas Crawford is the crowning feature of the dome of the United States Capitol. The statue is a classical female figure of Freedom wearing flowing draperies. Her right hand rests upon the hilt of a sheathed sword; her left holds a laurel wreath of victory and the shield of the United States with thirteen stripes. Her helmet is encircled by stars and features a crest composed of an eagle's head, feathers, and talons, a reference to the costume of Native Americans. A brooch inscribed "U.S." secures her fringed robes. Ten bronze points tipped with platinum are attached to her headdress, shoulders, and shield for protection from lightning. Her crest rises 288 feet above the east front plaza.

The Lady of Freedom is a national treasure, crowning the United States Capitol Building's gleaming Dome. Her strength and beauty are a source of inspiration to all Americans. Standing a magnificent 19 feet 6 inches tall, weighing 14,985 pounds, the Bronze Lady stands upon an iron globe inscribed with "E Pluribus Unum," our nation's motto. The lower part of the base is decorated with fasces (small bundles of rods, a Roman symbol of authority) and wreaths. The statue was erected in 1863 during the Civil War under the presidency of Abraham Lincoln.

There is a vast amount of artwork in the Capitol created by and portraying women. The Capitol is a symbol of our nation's history and the artwork conveys the importance of women as contributors to American society in the roles of creators, or onlookers in various scenes. The Statue of Freedom, atop the Capitol Dome, serves as a constant reminder of this important, but sometimes overlooked, fact.⁴⁸

After Cook explains the significance of The Lady of Freedom, we take Holy Communion.

Cook delivers the second part of his sermon from Galatians 5:1 which says, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage." (NKJ Version) After sharing the history and

⁴⁸ See Danielle Scull, "Women, Art, and the Capitol," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Capitol Historical Society, 1999) http://uschscapitolhistory.uschs.org/articles/uschs_articles-03.htm (accessed July 5, 2006); Katya Miller, "A Statue Called America, Liberty, and Freedom" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Capitol Historical Society) <http://www.ladyfreedom.net> (accessed July 5, 2006).

purpose of this epistle which is based on Gentiles' conversion to Christianity and the resultant Jewish-Gentile conflict, Cook talks about the movie *The Patriot*.

The Patriot is based on a soldier who has fought in the Revolutionary War. The protagonist "long fears his sins would return to visit him." According to Cook, this man's words represent the common experiences of humanity: we carry memories of guilt that make us slaves to our spirit. However, we are free to be whole. Cook continues: "We are no longer slaves to things of this world. The yoke of the law has been removed and the power and responsibility of the Cross has been laid upon us. Genuine freedom comes from knowing we are children of God and living in that freedom. We are called to be custodians of this freedom."

He then shares that Thomas Jefferson was selected as one of the framers of the Declaration of Independence because he was adept at summarizing and reflecting the sentiments of the rest of the founding fathers. As soon as the Declaration of Independence was signed, the founding fathers adopted the Bell of Freedom rung to symbolize the freedoms this new land had to offer. Cook ties this civic lesson to the spiritual, declaring Holy Communion as the ringing of this bell. The "ring! ring! ringing of the bell," he proclaims, "means individuals can now walk in freedom and no longer have to submit to the yoke of slavery." Cook closes his sermon with "We no longer are bound by the shackles of the Old World; we are free in Christ."

On that Sunday in July 2006, I learned that in this church and this region evangelical faith and civic Americanism are imbricated. Reflecting the patriotic tenor of this town and church community, Cook's sermon is couched in "God and Country" imagery. Such imagery prompted my consistent return to this congregation for the rest of

summer 2006 and my unhesitant participation in worship services, Sunday school, bible studies and other events in the life of this church upon my return to the City of Bald Eagles in summer 2008. Thus, within this ritual space, I connected to members of The First United Methodist Church as a researcher. This association was solidified via my participation in church activities making manifest the statement inscribed on the Presidential and Vice Presidential seals of the United States, on our U.S. coinage, currency, and on Lady Freedom who sits atop the U.S. Capitol dome—*E Pluribus Unum*, the many uniting into one.

***“Who Says’... our Nation is in A Mess?” :
Rural White Methodists and the Question of Authority***

In September 2008, at a weekly 8:30 a.m. Sunday worship service, Reverend Prosser, an associate pastor at The First United Methodist Church, preached the message, “Who Says...?” A sermon about “authority,” the scriptural basis is Matthew 21: 23-32.

The Authority of Jesus Questioned

²³Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?” ²⁴Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?” They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ²⁶But if we say, ‘From men’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” ²⁷So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

The Parable of the Two Sons

²⁸ “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’ ²⁹“I will not,’ he answered, but later he

changed his mind and went.”³⁰ Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.³¹ “Which of the two did what his father wanted?” “The first,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.³² For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

Reverend Prosser ushered the congregation into his sermon saying, “Lord, help us to see what’s wrong in this world and help us to make it right.” The sermon demonstrated America’s economic crisis derived from people’s refusal to recognize God in their decision making, the country’s lack of spiritual authority, and the failure of earthly leaders. (*See Appendix M. “‘Who Says’ ...our Nation is in a Mess?”: Rural White Methodists and the Question of Authority*)

Lack of Authority and Leadership Precipitates Millenarianism Madness

Similar to Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church, the leadership of The First United Methodist Church addresses the national economic crisis. Interestingly, both sermons are delivered on the same Sunday (September 28, 2008). The difference between the two sermons can be found at the conclusion. For the leaders and members of The First, America’s economic crisis has been precipitated by a lack of leadership and authority.

Leadership of American households, educational, judicial, and economic systems in contemporary times is being questioned. Rosser’s response is nostalgia—to have people return to a place where leadership in the home, school, and government is clearly delineated, defined, and unquestioned. His sentimental yearnings locate such authority in American history, family heritage, and in the Church. To restore social and moral order

to an America spiraling out of control, he advocates that his listeners access and exercise the institutional and familial authority of bygone days. His message begins to reveal the historical, theological, and socio-political thinking and practices of members in this white church community.

To grasp how this church community processes the nation's economic mess, the language and subtexts of neo-Evangelicalism, practiced throughout the town, must be also be understood. For instance, like the black community, this community employs the theological language of "God vs. Satan" to explain the moralistic ("good vs. evil") lifestyle and experiences of whites living in this rural area and throughout the South. Here, Satan represents ungodly leadership and authority certifiably dangerous to the perceived goodness of American identity and prosperity.

Further, apocalyptic and eschatological urgency is expressed in Rosser's declaration: "These are the sign of our times." This comment reflects the millenarianism that marks evangelical thought. Explaining millenarianism, Johann Peter writes:

At the end of time Christ will return in all his splendor to gather together the just, to annihilate hostile powers, and to found a glorious kingdom on earth for the enjoyment of the highest spiritual and material blessing. He Himself will reign as a king, and the just, including the saints recalled to life, will participate in it. At the close of this kingdom, the saints will enter Heaven, while the wicked, who have also been resuscitated, will be condemned to eternal damnation. The duration of this glorious reign of Christ and His saints on earth is frequently given as one thousand years. Hence, it is commonly known as the 'millennium,' while the belief in the future realization of the kingdom is called 'millenarianism' or 'chiliasm.'⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Nicole Guélin, *Religious Ideology in American Politics: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 174.

Fundamental to millenarianism is the battle between good and evil, recast as saints against the wicked. Good versus evil refers more to ethical conduct than to ontology in the white community. Prosser knowingly advocates for a millenarianistic showdown between “good” and “evil” as a solution to the domestic strife in American leadership and authority. I unfold the historical and theological thoughts and practices of this church membership, in the next sections, to comprehend their mindset, worldviews, and perspectives on subjects like leadership and patriotism covered in Chapter 4.

First United Methodist Church: The Physical Design

Driving down North Main Street towards McGaughey, one faces an imposing structure. The edifice is The First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles, West Tennessee. At the North Main Street entrance, the building has two sets of stairs that a visitor must climb before opening one of three sets of green colored wooden doors. The second set of stairs is flanked by an ivory colored cement center encircled by black grill work. Standing atop each cement center is an outside lamp (the lamps total four). To a visitor’s left is a sign giving an overview of The First United Methodist Church of the City of Bald Eagles.

The sign reads: Robert M. Tarrant held a courthouse revival in 1840. The first church built in Bald Eagles County, First Methodist, grew out of this meeting. A frame church built in 1844, deteriorated from disuse during the Civil War. In 1864, a new structure at Church and Market Streets was dedicated by G.W.D. Harris. In 1923, this building was completed. First Methodist has built two churches: Boose Memorial named for the first woman ordained in the Memphis Conference, and Second Church, later Ross

Memorial (a predominantly black Methodist church in town). Strongly supporting foreign missions, county disaster aid, and community service, their motto is, “*the Church in the heart of the town with town at heart,*” erected by the Memphis Conference Commission on archives and history, 1994.

In comparing The First United Methodist edifice to Tabernacle Missionary Baptist’s building, we discover vital differences. The First United Methodist Church has more land space which is populated by multiple structures (i.e. the playground, the Family Life Center, the Fellowship Hall). Adversely, church activities at Tabernacle Missionary Baptist are contained by the sole structure standing at the corner of a major intersection as visitors approach the historic downtown area of Bald Eagles.

The Fellowship Hall at the First United Methodist Church serves as an additional space where the “contemporary” worship service, *Atmosphere*, occurs each Sunday alongside the “traditional” service held at the 11’ o’clock hour in the upper level of the building. Further, the Fellowship Hall is a place where other ministries, groups, and people gather throughout the week for social and non-social occasions. Smaller in comparison to The First United Methodist, the two fellowship areas at Tabernacle usually cater to weekly Wednesday and Friday bible studies and serve as “social” spaces for eating and conversation after special Sunday services of worship. The physical arrangements of the fellowship spaces at each church are dissimilar and differ in function yet meeting the needs of each community.

Each building also reflects the denominational, regional, and racial culture of its inhabitants. At Tabernacle Missionary Baptist, black characters surround Jesus at his birth in one of the stained glass windows and a black Jesus embracing a new believer is

part of the mural on the wall of the sanctuary; both communicate the black cultural consciousness of the congregation. The large hands of the shepherd metamorphose into blue doves in the mural, inviting attendees to experience the God of this Christian group. At The First United Methodist, the stained glass windows pay homage to deceased members of this church family and a gold colored Cross hangs prominently from the front of the pulpit. Both artifacts remind visitors The First is a place where worship is welcomed and is a setting one can call “home.”

The First United Methodist Church is a flagship church in the community, addressing the concerns of its members and greater Bald Eagles. Members often make headlines in the local newspaper for their contributions or leadership in the community. Entering the McGhaughey side of the church building, visitors walk on a slightly raised emerald carpeted ramp and at the top are greeted by one of two male ushers. Once inside, a visitor sees that the main sanctuary is divided by a wall that stretches from the ceiling to floor and that makes an archway. The archway separates the sixteen wooden pews (eight on the right side and eight on the left) with emerald green and brown patterned cushions in the mid-to-rear part of the church from the twenty-two pews that comprise the mid-to-front part of the sanctuary (eleven pews on the left and right sides of the church). The middle aisle divides the left and right sides of the sanctuary.

In the utmost rear of the sanctuary to the right side is the audio-visual equipment area where Mary Elizabeth Worthington, Director of Christian Education, records both services and where another member of the church operates the computer screen that faces the congregation. The church combines the traditional with the technological, meaning that members can follow the order of worship in the paper bulletin and hymnals *or*

members can follow the order of worship on the computer screen. Built on the back sides of the pews are shelves that hold United Methodist hymnals and holy bibles. In the utmost rear of the church to the left of the audio-visual equipment area is a table and wooden bench for extra seating.

The ceiling above the rear part of the sanctuary is decorated with five by five rows of floodlights. Ventilation openings are situated where the ceiling drops and this part of the ceiling is decorated by seven by seven by seven floodlights formatted in a semi-circle on both the left and right sides. Six stained glass windows dedicated to deceased church members (three on the right and three on the left) decorate the front part of the sanctuary from the ceiling down to covered radiators. The stained glass windows are huge and made of pale colored pink, green, and violet glass. The tops of the window forms into the shape of an oval separated by a length of wood and morphing into a rectangular shape with floral decorations. In the corner front left of the sanctuary the American flag stands noticeably and in the right front corner is the Christian flag. (In Bald Eagles, church members salute the American flag, Tennessee flag *and* the Christian flag).

In the upper most front and center of the sanctuary, facing the congregation is the pulpit area. A wooden altar rail separates the front pews from the pulpit area. Entering the pulpit, a guest walks up the center stairs either to stand at the podium on the right or the podium on the left. Behind the podiums are five upholstered chairs—two on the left and three on the right. Looking up, a guest cannot miss the colossal gold covered Cross that hangs from the ceiling squarely from the middle of the pulpit area. Floodlights, vents, and other ceiling lights also hang from the ceiling in the pulpit area. Under the Cross is a table

separating the upholstered chairs. On the table (an altar) is the Holy Bible flanked by two candles on each side.

A wall separates this space from the choir loft. Three rows of green cushioned chairs comprise the choir loft. On the left side of the choir loft is the piano. The Men's Choir graces 8:30 a.m. and the Chancel Choir graces 10:50 a.m. services each Sunday even if special musical guests and other selections are on the program. Clergy members can enter the pulpit from the 51North bypass side of the church by walking through that entrance and into the brown wooden doors leading into the pulpit. In each front corner on the right and left sides of the ceiling surrounding the pulpit area hangs ceiling lights shaped like scaled down chandeliers.

The ceiling design in the front part of the sanctuary is unique. The ceiling looks much like the shape of the ceiling in the Sistene Chapel. A round circle defines the front part of the ceiling. Eight ceiling lights are built into and towards the middle of the circle and numerous small ceiling lights are tucked into the inner perimeter of the circle. Brown trim encircles the white area of the circle moving into a brown and white rectangular ceiling design. Flood lights, audio speakers, and other ceiling lights also hang from the sides and front part of this area of the ceiling.

Exit doors border the left and the right areas immediately outside of the pulpit and face the congregation. Around these exits are walls with columns made of marble-like material that extend from the ceiling to the floor. These columns similarly adorn the archway separating the front and back parts of the sanctuary.

***From Revival Meetings to the ‘Church House’:
The History of Bald Eagles Methodist Church***

Though the county and town of Bald Eagles was formally organized in 1825, the introduction of Methodism into this area was earlier, following the westward movement of frontier pioneers who had signed an 1818 treaty with the Chickasaw Indians to settle surrounding land. Not until 1842 was the first Methodist society in the town of Bald Eagles formed and led by a young preacher named Reverend R.M. Tarrant. Mrs. M.A. McGaughey, the spouse of one of the local doctors, writes in her 1892 historical account: “R.M. Tarrant commenced [the society] by holding a series of meetings in the log courthouse, or a small building as such. Our preacher started out by asserting that God’s grace is the beginning, increases, and is the perfection of all good. So eloquently and forcibly did he present the subject that he soon had the congregation too large for the house, the interest increasing daily.”⁵⁰

Under Tarrant’s leadership, revival swept through the area and seventy-five to one hundred people joined the society. Exceeding the physical capacity of the log courthouse, new converts in 1843 built a small frame *church house* that would eventually become the first church to be constructed in Bald Eagles.

The church made an excellent meeting place for both the old and young. Six to eight young gallants would hitch up their lumbering old surreys and take their girls to church. It was considered scandalous to pair off in buggies. At the church, there were no street loafers after the conch shell had been blown for the audience to come into the building. Seated decorously at the right were the men and at the left the women.⁵¹

⁵⁰ M.A. McGaughey, “A History of Our Church—1892,” in “A History of the First Methodist Church,” Jack Hudson Jr. (Bald Eagles, TN: Memphis Annual Conference, 1973, photocopied), 1.

⁵¹“Early History of Bald Eagles,” *Bald Eagles State Gazette* (Bald Eagles, Tennessee, n.d.).

This small frame church house would, by all accounts, accommodate the members of the growing United Methodist Church located in the center of town.

The Civil War, Negro Methodists, and the Jackson Circuit

According to oral tradition, this first church was located at the end of “Church” Street (named after the construction of this new church). “Church” Street was near the banks of the Forked Deer River. Revival continued to produce a steady increase in membership from 1843 to 1861. During this period, the church at Bald Eagles remained an “appointment” on the Jackson circuit of the Memphis Conference. Scholar of Methodist history, Robert Drew Simpson writes: “John Wesley’s Methodist plan of multiple meeting places called “circuits” required an itinerating force of preachers. A ‘circuit’ was made up of two or more local churches (sometimes referred to as societies) in early Methodism. In American Methodism circuits were sometimes referred to as a “charge.” A pastor would be appointed to the charge by his bishop.”⁵²

Robert Drew Simpson continues his discourse:

During the course of a year [a pastor] was expected to visit each church on the charge at least once, and possibly start some new ones. At the end of a year, the pastors met with the bishop at annual conference, where they would often be appointed to new charges. A charge containing only one church was called a “station.” The traveling preachers responsible for caring for these societies, or local churches and stations, became known as “circuit riders,” or sometimes *saddlebag preachers*. They traveled light, carrying their belongings and books in

⁵² Robert Simpson, “The Circuit Riders in Early Methodism,” *General Commission on Archives and History, The United Methodist Church*, http://www.gc.ah.org/site/c.ghKJI0PHIoE/b.3828779/k.87C4/Circuit_Riders.htm (accessed January 19, 2011).

their saddlebags. Ranging far and wide through villages and wilderness, they preached daily or more often at any site available be it a log cabin, the local court house, a meeting house, or an outdoor forest setting. Unlike the pastors of settled denominations, these itinerating preachers were constantly on the move. Their assignment was often so large it might take them 5 or 6 weeks to cover the territory.⁵³

In 1852, the First United Methodist trustees were gifted with a plot of land “for the use and benefit of the Methodist Episcopal Church South at Bald Eagles...for the purpose of promoting Christianity.”⁵⁴ No building was constructed on Lot no. 58, part of the original plan of the town of Bald Eagles, until after the Civil War. Yet, the Methodist Society weekly added to its growing numbers so that by 1853 the Bishop established Bald Eagles as a “station,” appointing W.J. Mahon as the first “official” pastor of this newly recognized church. Tarrant remained as a supernumerary preacher.

In 1854, Mahon was replaced by Samuel Hawkins as pastor. Under his leadership Bald Eagles’ membership grew to include one hundred thirty whites and 30 colored members (likely the slaves of church members).⁵⁵ The church prospered from 1854 until

⁵³ Robert Simpson, “The Circuit Riders in Early Methodism,” *General Commission on Archives and History, The United Methodist Church*, http://www.gciah.org/site/c.ghKJI0PHIoE/b.3828779/k.87C4/Circuit_Riders.htm (accessed January 19, 2011).

⁵⁴ Jack Hudson Jr., “A History of the First Methodist Church” (Bald Eagles, TN: Memphis Annual Conference, 1973, photocopied), 2.

⁵⁵ Albert Raboteau declares: “More than the Presbyterians, the Separate Baptists and the Methodists reaped a revival harvest of black and white members in the South. By the end of the century these two denominations were in the ascendancy in the South. Slaves and free blacks were among those swelling the Baptist and Methodist ranks. Methodist itinerants frequently commented on the presence of blacks in their congregations. Joseph Pilmore wrote to Wesley in 1770 that ‘the number of blacks that attend the preaching affects me much’...The increase in conversions of Negroes under the impact of revivalism was due to several factors. The evangelical religion spread by the revivalists initiated a religious renaissance in the South, as a somnolent religious consciousness, was awakened by revivalist preachers. The revival itself

the onset of the Civil War when worship services ceased. Neglected and abandoned by members, the original frame church fell into disrepair. In 1868, the second small frame church house was built on the lot deeded to Bald Eagles' Methodist in 1852. Post-Civil War conditions proved harsh to attracting and rebuilding church membership. By Mrs. McGaughey's account: "The old frame church (built in 1868) was dedicated by G. W. D. Harris (the presiding elder at that time); G.W. D. Harris is too well known for me to make any comment. The first to fill this new church was a soldier preacher, D. W. Priest. In the unsettled conditions of things he could do little toward building up the church. Then Allen, (replacing Priest), did less. Then W.T. Harris, zealous and eloquent, doing much to elevate the Christian character and restore unity and brotherly love."⁵⁶

By 1875, a noticeable change to the church membership of one hundred thirty-one members was the absence of any "negro" members. The absence of this population is attributed to Reconstruction conditions in the South. Nevertheless, changing times restored the stability of South and overall American society. That change began to again attract members to Bald Eagles Methodist Church. An expanding membership proceeded

became a means of church extension for Presbyterians and, particularly, for Methodists and Baptists. The mobility of the Methodist circuit rider and the local autonomy of the Baptist preacher were suited to the needs and conditions of the rural South. In the heat of religious fervor, planters became less indifferent about their own religious involvement and, potentially, about that of their slaves. The individualistic emphasis of revivalism, with its intense concentration on inward conversion, fostered an inclusiveness which could border on egalitarianism. Evangelicals did not hesitate to preach the necessity of conversion to racially mixed congregations. Revivalist preachers had little doubt – indeed they were enthusiastic — about the capacity of slaves to share the experience of conversion." Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*, updated ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 130, 132.

⁵⁶ M.A. McGaughey, "A History of Our Church—1892," in "A History of the First Methodist Church," Jack Hudson, Jr. (Bald Eagles, TN: Memphis Annual Conference, 1973, photocopied), 3.

to leave the 1868 structure which had become inadequate to house the people and activities of the church. Hence, in 1889, a brick building replaced the frame structure on the lot where the church had been located. For the next thirty years, the activities of the church were housed in this brick building; but, by April 21, 1919, the building was sold to the neighboring Church of Christ.

The membership of Bald Eagles' Methodist had also outgrown this structure. A lot of land was purchased on May 3, 1919 with the intention of building a beautiful building at the north end of Main Avenue (then the main street that ran downtown). However, the agricultural depression during that period stalled the laying of the church's foundation. The completion of the new church building occurred in 1923. A Byzantine design, the building attracted a membership of 750 members by 1925. The architecture of the building was suitable for its place and space, making it unlike any other buildings in town. Adding to the \$160,000 cost of construction was the \$12,500 pipe organ purchased by the Ladies Aid Society. Total membership exceeded 800 people by 1941 when the building was dedicated by the Bishop under the pastorate of Reverend G.C. Fain and the mortgage was burned.

You Can't Fight the Flag: 21st Century Civic Americanism at Bald Eagles Methodist

In 1950, an educational annex and chapel were added to the church school facilities. Additionally, this period marked the church's support of its first missionary couple, Reverend and Mrs. Donald E. Rugh, who were sent to India. The First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles supports missionary endeavors, today. By 1963, to meet the demands of an exploding congregation of over twelve hundred members, church

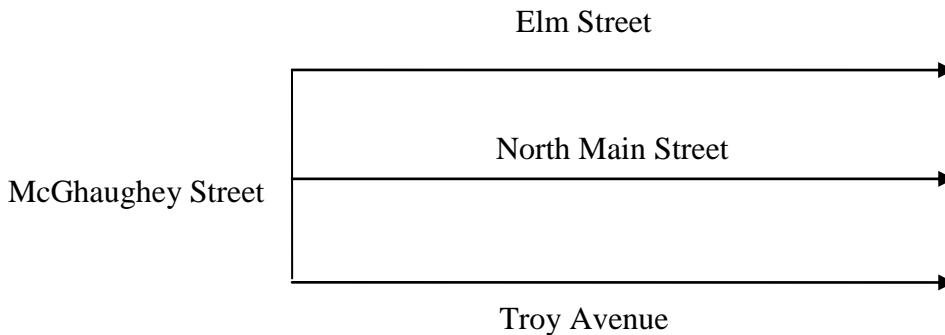
grounds were once again remodeled and expanded to include a new education building, administrative offices, a fellowship hall, and kitchen. By 1969, the church had again enlarged with the addition of a parsonage and youth center.

The First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles is presently still expanding its facilities to house the medley of church activities that serves its increasing membership. I have a conversation with Dr. Phillip Cook and the Youth Pastor, Reverend Robert Craig, to ask about the national and local socio-political issues important to this contemporary congregation. Helping to contextualize this Church's present contribution to the town, this dialogue also communicates their musings about its potential legacy in this new century.

I leave the conversation with a sense of how the congregation would explain the historical, *now*—with an eye towards the mutual conversation between evangelical faith and civil society. “You can’t fight the flag” describes one way this congregation chooses to define what it means to be an American in the 21st century. “You can’t fight the flag” also reflects the theological mindset of an increasing, perduring, and powerful congregation on the topic of war. (*See Appendix N. “You Can’t Fight the Flag”: 21st Century Civic Americanism as a Theology of War*)

Church Council members recently hired an architect for the Church's expansion. The Church's campus is enclosed by Troy Avenue, McGhaughey Street, and Elm Street. The front of the Church is on North Main and McGhaughey Streets that welcomes visitors to a campus sitting on 4.5 acres of land. The sanctuary can seat 500 members and currently has 172 parking spaces between the Troy Avenue and Elm Street sides of the building to accommodate the membership. At any one time, there is usually no more than

200 members present in the building.



The Church has a playground close to the childcare and pre-school wings of the building. The main Chapel opens into the playground. The Family Life Center is a stand alone building that was built in 1999. This Center diagonally faces the lower level of the Church building; the lower level entrance at Elm Street is a front door to the community. Currently, there are nineteen entrances throughout the campus and there is also, on the McGhaughey side of the building, an entrance to the administrative offices. The main social space for the Church is the Fellowship Hall on the Elm Street side of the building. It has a 150 member capacity.

The First wants to restructure and connect parts of their present campus to make room for an expansive alternative worship area for “Atmosphere” and for a children’s worship area. To augment fellowship opportunities amongst parishioners, they also want to design shared fellowship and social areas between the alternative and traditional service spaces.

The history of The First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles is closely tied to the history of Methodism in this area. Throughout this account, membership decline and

growth has been in response to the historical conditions affecting the town and wider America. In its most prosperous periods, the church has experienced an increase in congregants whose benefit from larger facilities.

*Historical Beginnings and 21st Century Civic Americanism in Justifying War
At The First United Methodist Church*

The First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles was birthed out of the revivalistic camp meetings that swept across the country and through the South during the Second Great Awakening. The fervor of itinerant preachers swelled the numbers of those joining Methodist societies. Their religious impulses also made Methodism relevant to the expansionist leanings of an American nation in the nascent stages of defining itself. American religious historian William G. McLoughlin writes: “Camp meetings were communal in nature; churches became centers of community life; and, above all, although a conversion was an individual confrontation of the soul with God, the sustaining fellowship of Christian brethren provided the continuity that routinized and canalized the fervor of the awakening into orderly social institutions.”⁵⁷

Bald Eagle’s First United Methodist has the historical distinction of being the first church constructed in the town where it continues to maintain the tradition of being a place for families, for the connection between younger and older generations, and for the social interaction of members. Its history is captured in the movement from a single story small framed building to a contemporary church complex that will eventually house three

⁵⁷ William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 132.

worships areas for traditional and contemporary services and for the youth. From pre-Civil War times to the present, the First has generated activities and developed programs to accommodate its increasing membership whom today primarily represent professionals, landowning families, merchants, as well as civic and political leaders in the community.

This group practices a “civic Americanism” that upholds American symbolism and embraces evangelical faith.⁵⁸ Members have not experienced much cognitive dissonance with having the American flag in the midst of the worship space supporting the pastor’s declaration: “You can’t fight the flag.” In places where religion and patriotism are inextricably linked, one cannot fight the flag.

The people of the First make no apologies for their southern civil religious beliefs and practices. For them, being American means being a patriot and a person of faith. Civic Americanism provides a divinely supported justification for participating in war especially if American interests are threatened. A defense of rights devoid of the abuse of power is the type of civic Americanism performed by members of this congregation. This is what lies at the heart of the statement, “in God we trust.”

⁵⁸ Charles Reagan Wilson explains that Evangelical Protestantism with its stress on a theology of inward conversion was not antithetical to the development of a Southern civil religion. Both, in the South, openly supported each other. Charles Reagan Wilson, “The Religion of the Lost Cause: Ritual and Organization of the Southern Civil Religion,” *The Journal of Southern History* 46, no. 2 (May 1980): 232.

Methodism: A “Religion of the Warmed Heart”⁵⁹ and of Social Mission

John Wesley experienced religious conversion while someone was reading Martin Luther’s preface to the Epistle of Romans at a meeting in London at Aldersgate Street on May 24, 1738. Describing his conversion experience, he explained his “heart was strangely warmed.” As a result of all the experiences leading up to this event, Wesley’s focus turned to what would eventually become the cornerstones of Methodist theology: justification by faith only through Jesus Christ, holiness, and a converted heart manifested through social action—the love of neighbor. Sermons are the focus of the following section in which the theological beliefs and practices central to Bald Eagles’ United Methodist Church are studied and interpreted. Each sermon holds a distinct message thereby conveying the array of theological positions and practices present in this congregation.

John and Charles Wesley and the Compassionate Methodist

I commenced this February morning attending the 8:30 AM service at The First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles. The ushers handed me a church bulletin as I settled into my pew. Church bulletins always reveal the order of the morning’s service. Enclosed in this Sunday’s bulletin is a plea for *Project 20/20*. Project 20/20 is a United Methodist missions program that provides gently used sunglasses and eyeglasses to medical teams freely serving countries with little to no medical care for the poor.

Approximately two hundred individuals filled the sanctuary this morning, from the smallest baby to the eldest man and woman. Betty Wagner, a church member who

⁵⁹ John Telford, *The Life of John Wesley* (Niagara Falls: Wesleyan Heritage Publishing, 1998), 101.

works with the youth ministry, illuminated the importance of Project 20/20 during young disciples (three to five year olds) moment. Children are instructed in biblical principles and are celebrated in this part of the service. Children begin to understand and participate in the ministries of the Church during this time. This brief moment in worship prepares young hearts and minds for the day's preached message and provides a generational link to the beliefs and customs of older church members. Enculturation marks this space.

Pastor Cook arises to give an overview of the day's sermon before the Men's Choir sings. Today, they sing the well-known African American spiritual, "There is a Balm in Gilead." Then Cook ventures into his sermon, "Searching for Jesus." The scriptural basis is Mark 1:29-39 in which a demon-possessed young man approaches Jesus for relief from his affliction and Simon-Peter's mother-in-law (one of Jesus' disciples and apostles) desires Jesus to restore her to good health. The crux of the sermon is Christian discipleship. To be a disciple, a person must display compassion towards those in lowly positions. Similarly, to be a Methodist requires focus, purpose, and compassion for individuals who clamor for assistance. The message makes accessible to parishioners one of the tenets of Methodist theology—regard for the other. (*See Appendix O. Compassion Drives Social Action*)

Compassion's Role in Methodist Theology

Noted United Methodist authority and theologian Dennis M. Campbell writes:

[John] Wesley came to the theological conclusion that the work of the Holy Spirit might occasionally move beyond, and work outside of, the established forms of church order...The evangelical priority of mission, perceived as the direct work of

the Holy Spirit in both individual and community, became an important theological principle of Wesleyan theology.⁶⁰

Dr. Cook commonly preached self-actualizing messages to his congregation. Exemplary of this practice the aforementioned sermon in which Cook draws upon Wesleyan heritage and theology to empower the people of Bald Eagles United Methodist Church to serve the world. Cook introduces the stories of Jesus and USC student, Joel to show that church members' passion, purpose, and mission will be activated if only they compassionately serve their neighbors. Throughout the homily, the movement of the Holy Spirit is revealed through ministry to those outside of church walls—at hospital visits, soup kitchens, Meal-on-Wheels deliveries, food pantries, and even abroad in the form of Project 20/20.

By stressing compassion's role in moving people to meet the needs of their fellow humans, Cook also illustrates the significance of Methodism being a "religion of the heart." Accordingly, American Methodists were the first evangelical body to embrace a free will doctrine.⁶¹ A free will doctrine [by another name Arminian theology] ensured humanity's co-participation with God in effecting its salvation. Central to conversion experiences, the free will doctrine furthers Evangelicalism, standing as one of the defining features of the faith. For Methodists:

God had sacrificed his son in a spirit of free grace and love for humanity, and all those who acknowledged their sins, repented and accepted Christ into their hearts

⁶⁰ Dennis M. Campbell, William B. Lawrence, and Russell E. Richey, eds., *Doctrines and Disciplines*, vol. 3, *United Methodism and American Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 4-5.

⁶¹ Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770 – 1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 29.

were candidates for salvation. The emphasis in Methodism was on the human role in the process. God's desire for men and women to be converted and his mercy were constants; humans were the ones who had to be moved to acknowledge their sinfulness, repent, and accept Christ.⁶²

The conversion experience, also identified as the "born-again" experience, is grounded in the love of God toward humanity.

This love is meant to bring about individual transformation which then effectuates social change. That is also what makes Methodism a "religion of the heart." Methodists are compassionate because renewal of individual hearts yield communal transformations and "transformation of the community was a deep concern of the Methodists, but it would come as a result of changing the lives of persons..."⁶³ This is how, according to Cook, Methodists "lose themselves in service to the world."

Brer Rabbit, Tar Baby, and a Family Feud

On this hot June morning, I join members of The First United Methodist Church (FUMC) for worship service. Dr. Philip Cook, the pastor of FUMC of Bald Eagles, informs me he is conducting a series on "Journeying through Genesis." The preacher is Cook's associate pastor, Rev. Terry Prosser. His sermon, "Family Feud," is named for the 1976 game show that presently continues to be on television. His sermon is not about the game show; rather, it is about the consequences of family feuding. (*See Appendix P. Brer Rabbit, Tar Baby, and a Family Feud*). The source of family feuding and jealousy is the

⁶² Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770 – 1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 29.

⁶³ Dennis M. Campbell, William B. Lawrence, and Russell E. Richey, eds., *Doctrines and Disciplines*, vol. 3, *United Methodism and American Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 6.

devil, according to him. Here, God-talk and devil-talk are theological constructs. At this church, devil-talk diverges from the way in which it is apprehended and interpreted in the black congregation, Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church.

Devil-Talk as Spectacle at The First United Methodist Church

Lucifer is the main antagonist in Reverend Prosser's "Family Feud" sermon. In the mindset of this church community, familial divisions, social rupture, and global conflict derive from Satan. Similar to the black church community I profiled in the previous chapter, members at The First United Methodist of Bald Eagles use God-talk and devil-talk to begin to describe good and bad action in their Christian experience, local community, and the wider world. Such language is a display of evangelical theology in theory and practice. "God-talk" and "devil-talk" vernacular contributes to characterizing contemporary evangelicalism as spectacle.

Under the guise of family feuding, Prosser first uses devil-talk to explain why the American family is being destabilized. Family feuds are caused by the following distractions—listening to iPods, blogging, texting, and e-mailing. By being absorbed in his or her own world and not communicating, each member contributes to the family's instability.

Prosser further argues such disruptions take precedence over God and the family. Without question, Satan becomes the source of idolatry. Idolatrous practices lead to a lack of family conversation and cohesion. Not only is blogging, texting, twittering, and facebooking, upsetting to family dynamics but also such idols are blinding people to the presence and existence of their maker and creator—God.

In delivering his sermonic message, Prosser additionally insinuates another idea about the devil. Sin enters the life of the Christian believer by way of jealousy; jealousy is one of Satan's weapons. Jealousy was at the heart of the New Testament religious leaders' stoning of Stephen and crucifying Christ. More significantly, jealousy is always percolating in people's hearts, including those of church parishioners. With ease, this emotion can lead to the murderous thoughts of a mother, the irrational actions of a co-worker, and even the poisonous and ungrateful attitude of a minister blessed to have the opportunity for a personal and spiritual retreat.

Near to the close of his message, Prosser discloses what devil-talk ultimately represents for this church community and the white community at-large. His verbal attack on materialism signals what Lucifer symbolizes—the threat of secularization. A fragmented family plagued by ungodly habits, venomous jealousy, and menacing materialism point to an American society that has lost its spiritual moorings and moral foundations.

Yet, Prosser closes his sermon with an interesting twist. Utilizing the folklore of American slaves in the tale of "Brer Rabbit and Tar Baby," he makes an implicit declaration about righting unjust wrongs. "Brer Rabbit and Tar Baby" hail from the social protest tradition of the slave animal trickster tales recounted within the private confines of slave settings to address the master's injustices.

Writing about the animal trickster tales, the late and renowned cultural historian Lawrence W. Levine asserts:

In their transmutation from their natural state to the world of African and Afro-American tales, the animals inhabiting these tales, though retaining enough of their natural characteristics to be recognizable, were almost thoroughly humanized. The world they lived in, the rules they lived by, the emotions that

governed them, the status they craved, the taboos they feared, the prizes they struggled to attain were those of men and women who lived in this world...the one central feature of almost all trickster tales is their assault on deeply ingrained and culturally sanctioned values.”⁶⁴

Prosser leaves his audience with both a moral mandate and a warning: when the weak resist, the powerful do fall. His closing words are an indictment against the “foreign” structures of power and authority he perceives as perilous to the livelihood of his rural congregants and to the best of America.

Presidential Inaugurations Transmutate American Social Identity

Anticipating the 2009 historic presidential inauguration, Reverend Philip Cook preaches the message “Jesus’ Inauguration Day,” at a Sunday morning service in early January. (See Appendix Q. “Jesus’ Inauguration Day”). Cook prepares his church fellowship for the changes in American executive leadership by connecting the 2009 presidential inauguration to the commencement of Jesus’ ministry. Highly anticipated throughout the world is the inauguration of America’s first African American president. Cook’s tributary sermon marks the historic nature of this event. With the inauguration as subject, he also stresses the rituals associated with the start of each new year because inaugurations represent new beginnings. He reminds listeners that Americans engage in making new years’ resolutions, writing mission’s statements, and outlining visionary plans because January holds the promise and hope of their realization of each new year dream and vision.

⁶⁴ Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*, 30th Anniversary ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 103-104.

In addition to being a sermon about presidential inaugurations and new beginnings, the sermon illuminates changes that might, for some, be anxiety provoking because of the dawning of new days. New beginnings modify ‘who we are.’ Given this, seasonal inaugurations provoke metamorphoses that establish fresh identities and that challenge individuals to live out the remodeling process.

Engaging narrative theology, Cook raises questions about personal and corporate identity by relating spiritual lessons to daily life practices. Accordingly, Cook says, “At the onset of his ministry, Jesus asks the following question of his disciples: ‘Who do you say I am?’ Likewise, replacing one president for another prompts Americans to ask a closely connected question, ‘Who am I?’ or more aptly, ‘How is American being defined now?’ ”

Speaking of the connection between speaker and listener, in *A Short Apology of Narrative*, Johann Baptist Metz adapts the thinking of W. Benjamin to maintain:

Most storytellers pursue a practical interest [in narrative traditions]... This is the distinctive nature of all true stories, all of which have a hidden use—a moral, a practical instruction, a rule of life. In every case, the storyteller is a [person] who knows what to do with the listener... His stories are based on experience, either his own or other peoples which he transforms into the experience of those who listen to the stories.”⁶⁵

Like any good storyteller, Cook translates religious myth into the question of identity, clearly linking evangelical faith to civil religion. A query about Jesus’ identity excites musings about individual and corporate American identity.

⁶⁵ Johann Baptist Metz, “A Short Apology of Narrative,” in *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 253.

In the sermon, Satan's adversarial position, though problematic, has a role in the temptation of Jesus. Satan mightily tries to assail Jesus by challenging his self-definition and relationship to God. Satan's actions are an attempt to hinder Jesus' ministry. Similarly, amongst these rural dwellers, Satan is any outside influence proving antagonistic to American identity. Consequently, Cook admonishes the congregation not to succumb to the wiles of the devil.

Shaping Fierce Patriots for a Good Fight

I am greeted with pre-service announcements on this early spring morning as I await the beginning of the worship experience and watch parishioners visit with each other. "When Morning Gilds the Skies," played by the organist begins the 8:30 a.m. Sunday morning prelude; followed by the choral call "A Lenten Call to Worship" led by the Chancel Choir. Afterwards, parishioners affirm their faith reciting the Apostles' Creed. The pastor has recently instituted an *altar prayer time* that draws members who are burdened and seeking God's guidance on specific issues. The *altar prayer time* precedes our ritual morning prayer, a recitation of the Lord's Prayer. The choral response signals the end of prayer followed by receiving the morning's offering. Once we sing our doxology and celebrate our young disciples Dr. Cook proceeds to the pulpit to preach the message, "Nic at Night" based on Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus in John 3:1-21. A homily about God's grace and the necessity of being "born again," this sermon simultaneously pinpoints the "born again" experience as primary to making a fierce patriot.

Wesley's Theology of Good and Evil in Pushing the Boundaries of the Good Fight

Reverend Cook implies fierce patriots are birthed out of political and spiritual revolutions. Promoting this idea, he declares: "Nicodemus was a fierce patriot. He was looking for political solutions as he awaited the Messiah." Fierce patriots not only participate in social and political upheavals but they also are people with transformed hearts. That is where God's grace enters. Cook preaches this evangelistic and revivalistic sermon to encourage his listeners to experience what it means to be "born again." To be born again requires the movement of the Holy Spirit and God's grace to produce a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Ironically, conversion experiences are also spiritually conflicted experiences demanding the loyalty of a fierce patriot. Caught between sin and salvation, the believer works out spiritual wrestlings in his physical body—the focal point of the battle for spirit and soul.

Cook's language is provocative as he links the material to the spiritual. Patriots defend countries. Here patriots also defend the Christian faith. Using metaphor, Cook delivers two lessons to his audience. First, born again Christians are constantly at war with the world. They must guard against physical and spiritual enemies. Second, born again Christians uphold the faith; such protection feasibly translates into safeguarding of family and homeland. His message underscores the ways in which God and country, in this church and community at-large, are constantly bound together.

Cook's metaphor calls attention to John Wesley's theology of good and evil.

Interpreting Wesley's spirituality, American religious historian Jeffrey Williams writes:

John Wesley's spirituality depended heavily upon the notion of conflict between saint and sinner, good and evil, the redeemed and the demonic... Through fighting the good fight, even as God conquered penitents in conversion, believers moved from enmity with the divine to an intimate relationship in which they worked for

the transformation of their communities and the fruits of redemption for eternity in heaven.⁶⁶

Here spiritual conversion has a direct impact on the growth and development of communities. Williams continues:

The battles Wesley found so important for the Christian life also came to shape Wesley's view of temporal struggles, whether in the form of England's wars or personal conflicts between individual human beings. Wesley often discouraged Christians from using force against other human beings... Yet at various points throughout his life, Wesley allowed for the possibility that aspects of the Christian's fight might intersect with that of the state. In this intersection the boundaries of the good fight became more permeable and contested as Wesley's followers struggled to apply the fight to their own lives and communities.⁶⁷

Though inciting internal conflict, the spiritual practices of believers pushed the boundaries of the good fight into the social realm. A person can reasonably conclude the inextricable interaction between God and Country finds Wesleyan faith as one of its sites of its inception.

⁶⁶Jeffrey Williams, *Religion and Violence in Early American Methodism: Taking the Kingdom by Force* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 39.

⁶⁷ Jeffrey Williams, *Religion and Violence in Early American Methodism: Taking the Kingdom by Force* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 38-39.

The Role of History and Theology at The First United Methodist Church

This chapter illuminates the historical and theological constructs vital to the thought and faith formation of the people of The First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles. In the first section, we attempt to ascertain the personality of a congregation that attracts a cadre of couples and families who are leaders in the church and outside community. While this special group elevates the status of the Church to one of the leading congregations in the town, the guardedness of members precludes, to a certain degree, their engagement with each other. The First, however, is vibrant and healthy as generations—from the very young to more aged—eagerly interact and find spaces to learn and to grow.

From its inception as a frontier revival meeting to its move into the first frame church house built in Bald Eagles, The First United Methodist Church has been at the forefront of history. Methodism was introduced into the area because of the fervor of itinerant preachers whose convicting yet salvific messages drew crowds that at certain points welcomed both white and black members. The First has the historical distinction of spawning two churches. One is named after the first woman ordained in the Memphis Conference and the other was founded as the first black Methodist Church in Bald Eagles. Presently, the Church sits on a campus with a complex set of buildings that accommodate the burgeoning membership through an assortment of programs which also appeal to town and county members.

Operative in this congregation is a Methodist theology accentuating scripture, reason, tradition, and experience; evangelical theology rooted in God vs. Devil language to understand good vs. evil; and narrative theology magnifying the power of myth and

story to convey the psychology of and worldview of this social group. Here, a theology of war is expressed as a type of civic Americanism embracing myth, history, and leadership authority as requisites for authentic American identity. Anything that threatens this identity is evil or devilish and what preserves it is characterized as good or divine. Assortments of theologies work effectively at The First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles paradigmatic of the diversity of theologies functioning in most churches and religiously oriented institutions. In Chapter 2, I have elucidated the ways in which the black community links leadership, patriotism, and the politics of dying. Similarly, in Chapter 4, I address how the membership of The First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles describe and translate the relationship between leadership, patriotic acts, and politicized death.

CHAPTER IV

DEFENDING AND DYING FOR THE AMERICAN FLAG AT THE FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Institutional structures are crucial to understanding white leadership in the town of Bald Eagles and the surrounding county. Providing community stability are the church, family, school, and military. Within these infrastructures, individuals promote their moral positions and values that contribute to the development of cohesive working groups and networks. Below I present four case studies on leadership to ascertain how white members of Bald Eagles and in this congregation relate guidance of home, local community, and nation to their patriotic commitments.

Patriotic practices are landmark oriented. The Ten Commandments, public prayer, and American flag are indelible symbols of American identity that come to be celebrations of American ideals. Community members display their allegiance to the country by elevating these landmark symbols. While describing patriotism, the insoluble connection between God and country as well as constitutional rights and freedoms similarly express their worldviews. I share three case studies and analyses on patriotism and in the following section.

Beyond the military, members name other forms of patriotic service to the country. However, having a soldier sacrifice his or her life in defense of America remains the ultimate form of patriotic duty for many at The First United Methodist Church and in the rest of the community. This next section explores how leadership and patriotism are defined in white Bald Eagles. Examination of evangelical faith and civil religion prompts

the following questions: How does sacrificing one's life in defense of landmark symbols morph into expressions of American and racial values? What is the function of landmark symbols in rural American church worship?

Burt Harger and Pete Smith: Good Parenting is the Key to Children's Success

Burt Harger is a seventy year old retired Vietnam veteran who has lived in Bald Eagles, West Tennessee for twenty-four years. He worked with the State of Tennessee and keeps busy with the men's ministry at The First. Pete Smith is a wheel chair bound seventy-eight year old World War II veteran. He has lived in Bald Eagles for fifty-eight years, is a retired school teacher, and actively involved with the men's ministry at the church. As we converse, both men share their views on parenting as a form of leadership.

Nichole: Okay, do you think just secular values enter the urban churches and that's maybe one of the reasons why there may be a decrease [in church attendance]? Or should we blame it on street issues?

Burt Harger: I think just street issues. I can't see just secular values messin' with it that much.

Nichole: Okay.

Burt Harger: I think it's street issues. You're talking about the internet and stuff like that. I'm sort of a firm believer in "train up a child in the way he should go and when he's old he won't depart from it (Proverbs 22:6)." And, therein is the absolute major problem that this country faces. It has to do with a lack of parenting.

Pete Smith: As a school teacher, and working with elementary kids for over twenty years, you can always just look at a child and see whether they're parents are involved or not. And, most of the time, I had a special education class that I would teach. I had pre-kindergartners and kindergartners and I would teach them skills like if they couldn't walk, couldn't bounce a ball,

couldn't jump a rope. To enter my program, I had to go to their home and get permission from their parents. It was unusual for me to realize that, uh, these kids live in homes without screen doors. No screens in the window. I had a third grader and I asked him "Well, how come you smell so bad?" He said "Well because the water's fifty feet out the back door." I said, "Well, who's bathing you?" He answered: "My seventeen year old sister."

Nichole: Oh.

Pete Smith: I said, well, Sammy, I understand. So, I took him into the restroom and I sprayed him pretty good so he could smell pretty good. And, uh, one day, he brought marijuana cigarettes to the classroom, so I took him to the principal. He had a druggist who sold marijuana. So, I just asked him "Where'd you get it?" He said, "Well this is from my sister's boyfriend's hubcaps." So, we called the Sheriff and we had a stake-out. I said "Sammy, go home and keep your mouth shut, because your life depends on it. If he knew we was rattin' on him... To make a long story short, the boyfriend was arrested and so forth but fled Bald Eagles. He is still in Nashville probably. But that's what Sammy had to deal with—his environment. I realize that all kinds of people have problems. He was a good runner. If you'd let him to take off his shoes, he'd beat everybody! He became a track star! He got a four year scholarship to college just because he could run.

Nichole: Okay.

Pete Smith: So, the hope is that you've managed to instill—even if Sammy was raised by a seventeen year old sister—she did the best job she could! But that's just pitiful! Broke your heart! But, you don't have a lot of control of things like that, just have to take advantage of what you can.

Nichole: Okay. I get what you're saying, I get what you both are saying. You think environment has to do with the degree of participation in local churches.

Using Sammy as a test case, Burt Harger and Pete Smith point to what they consider a major problem in leadership of the home, family, and community—lack of adequate parenting. Though environment might factor into a child's development,

Smith's account tells us that environment does not necessarily determine a young person's destiny. An alternative to Sammy's debilitating home environment is his school environment where Sammy is able to realize his gifts and talents. That milieu gives Sammy the blueprint for success; that is where he is "trained" to triumph.

Because his experience at school counters his experience at home, a place lacking parental guidance and participation, Sammy is able to win a four year college scholarship. It paves the way for his eventual escape from the dismal conditions of home life. Upon further analysis, Sammy's story gives the rationale for why urban churches are experiencing a decline in membership—lack of member participation.

*Abby Taylor, Rebekah Coleman, and Suzanne Dell:
A Dangerous Decline in the Membership of Mainline Protestant Denominations*

At fifty years old, Abby Taylor is married with children. A tall, lean woman, she is a hospital professional and homemaker who has lived in Bald Eagles for forty three years. She is friends with Rebekah Coleman, a forty year old married mother of three young boys. Having only lived in the town for nine years after moving from Memphis, Coleman is very active in the church. Suzanne Dell is a friend of Taylor and Coleman. She, too, is married with one child. She is a petite, thirty-nine year old homemaker who was born and raised in Bald Eagles although she left the town for college to later return. All three women represent the new generation of leadership emerging at The First United Methodist Church. Here we talk about America's status as a Christian nation and the implications of that for the future.

Nichole: Do you think there's a threat to religion *not* being in our country?

Abby Taylor: I, I think, yes, I think the Christian faith is dwindling. I mean, you know, I mean when you look at things that talk about the numbers of Christians, and, and you know...

Suzanne Dell: What'd that just say, we're not a Christian nation? What did I recently read? We don't consider ourselves a Christian nation? That quote just came out in the news.

Rebekah Coleman: I don't know, but I read that somewhere.

Nichole: Hmm. Okay. So, so there is a threat that, um, I mean I don't wanna put words in your mouth. There's a threat that, um, that we don't, that we're no longer a Christian nation, or there's a threat that—

Rebekah Coleman: ...that Christianity might be *taken* out of our nation. I think, permanently.

Nichole: Okay, Okay. Um, but I guess I don't understand where that threat comes from.

Abby Taylor: Well, I mean I don't think that, and I'm not saying that the, you mean like, I don't think it's, I think it's just that people are falling away from it. You know? You know we just have a lot less Christians in the w— in America now than we did...

Rebekah Coleman: Well, and I think statistically speaking, church growth is deteriorating, and um, new believers, they uh, everything is just dwindling, the numbers. If you look at the numbers, it's like we're not growing in our religious faith and our churches aren't growing. They're dwindling. Um, I think with that—

Abby Taylor: And part of it [the decline] just, it falls on us, not on... I think it's... I think as Christians we have to represent the Christian faith. Because if somebody looks at somebody that calls themselves Christians but are, um, you know, not uh, I mean they're out there, just being, I don't know what all. No, just being uh, not me—just, not doing things that you would think of as Christian, you know, just anything. Showing prejudice is one problem or even just... there are so many things that, people can look at to define a Christian and, um people call themselves Christian, but then they're out there trying to, um, scam somebody. Or try, just

different... there are just so many different things that, that you know [can be a problem] and so I think, so these actions make people that are non-Christians say, “well why would I wanna do that?” They don’t, you know, they’re not, so, I think it’s our responsibility.

Taylor, Coleman, and Dell are anxious about the potential loss of America’s “Christian” character. In truth, America has always been religiously plural. Spurring their fear is the rapidly declining numbers of parishioners in mainline denominations. Research from The Barna Group, an organization that studies the intersection of religion and culture, buttresses their supposition about the decreasing mainline memberships.

In a December 2009 article that examined the condition of mainline Protestant Churches (i.e., United Methodist Church, American Baptist Church, USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, etc.), researchers indicate these congregations have seen a reduction from 80,000 churches in the 1950s to around 72,000 presently. Mainline denominations account for only about one-fifth of all Protestant churches, now. With the growth in evangelical and Pentecostal churches, mainline congregations have drastically decreased and today account for a mere 20 million church attendees versus the 80 million at their apex in the 1950s.⁶⁸

Taylor, Coleman, and Dell’s fears are not unfounded. Their conversation impresses upon the listener religion’s role in the leadership of a nation and the church’s role in producing community. Without being explicitly stated, I believe their fear of America losing its “Christianity” is additionally related to qualms about being denuded of

⁶⁸ The Barna Research Group, “Report Examines the State of Mainline Protestant Churches, December 7, 2009,” *The Barna Group*, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/17-leadership/323-report-examines-the-state-of-mainline-protestant-churches> (accessed February 2, 2011).

American identity. America is not a theocracy but undeniable is the centrality of civil religious ideals and religious ecumenism to its development.

*Peter Crockett and Harry Ray:
A "Right Now" Generation: Media's Influence on Religious Culture*

Reared in Bald Eagles, Peter Crockett attended a highly selective U.S. college outside of the area, eventually returning to his hometown after graduation. A self-employed fifty year old corporate business man, he is married, active in his Sunday School class and in programs outside of the church community. Harry Ray is a forty-seven year old business executive with a wife and three adopted children. Company moves have exposed him and his family to different parts of the United States, but he always calls Bald Eagles, home. For forty years, he has been a resident and is also actively involved in church life.

Nichole: Do you believe that American culture (the internet, television, videos etc.)... you know I always have to throw some ideas out so people can really get what I'm saying because there are so many different aspects of American culture...do you believe it affects, if not *your* religious beliefs and practice, religious belief and practice and how?

Peter Crockett: Mm. I wish you hadn't thrown in videos. Well, video *games* is I guess what you meant by that.

Nichole: No, I'm talkin' I was talkin' about *music* videos, but tell me about video games.

Peter Crockett: Alright, well, no I just-'cause my son kills more people than, you know...(laughing) and I think that's not really good for your religious [formation]...but that's his past-time.

Nichole: That's his past-time, right?!

Peter Crockett: Yes, yes. But, uh, well I think it *has* to affect us. Uh, I think part of, you go back to the romantic part of, you look back at the United States, we had this nice religious culture—I don't know, you're the historian, you probably know a lot better than I do—

Nichole: MmHm

Peter Crockett: But I think, you know it seems like Harry and I grew up in a world where it did...you know you watched television if there was something on the three channels that you had and, and yet, we don't watch network television anymore. It's not because I have anything against network television, but there's nothing worth watching on network television anymore. Uh...

Nichole: You mean in your home?

Peter Crockett: In our home. Well, I mean, we're on History Channel, we're on Discovery, we're gonna be on something like that, we're not gonna be on ABC, CBS, something like that, it's not because—if there is something like American Idol or something we can sit down and watch with our kids, but there're very few things on prime-time television that you want to sit down and watch with your kid. Um, so I think it takes, I know like in a lot of families, they do sit down and watch these shows that do affect their view of what's right and wrong. But like I said, my son's not sitting down watching that, but he's going in on the computer killin' people. So, I shouldn't be pointing fingers, we're not innocent here, we're part of the problem. But, uh...

Nichole: You're the first one that's said that!

Peter Crockett: But, uh, but I do feel like it does affect people's ideas of what's right and wrong. The entertainment world, and uh, they don't uh, they don't necessarily reflect my ideas of morals. And religion, I guess it flows out, I think it's possible that it doesn't affect my religious belief and practice. I can't tell you how it affects it. But I think if you, it affects society's religious views, it affects their moral views. I think those are pretty connected.

Nichole: Okay, that's what I was about to ask you. So, you see a connection between religion and morality.

Harry Ray: Very definitely.

Peter Crockett: Now, we're not perfect, like I said...

Nichole: No, no—and that's not, no, it's not a human question, it's more, I think I'm listening, but I think it's more technical than that, you're tying them in...

Peter Crockett: I think your morality is based on your religion, and probably vice versa to some degree. Because if the church is too far from what you think is right and wrong, you're not gonna walk in the door.

Harry Ray: If the idea is too radical for you, whatever you think is radical, then you're not gonna stay there. For me, what I see or hear or do not see or hear at this stage of my life doesn't affect me that much, I guess I'm more, (chuckles) I'm not a finished being by any means, but I'm more...I am really glad, though, that the avenues, that some of the avenues and options that are available now weren't available when I was a kid. Uh, you know it's one thing to, when I was a kid, watch the season opener of Charlie's Angels and talk about how cool that was and how great that looked; it's another thing now to see the season opener of the latest show and then go on the internet or YouTube and download the opening clip of somebody jumpin' into bed eight or ten times.

I think the repetitive, the repetitive nature of all that, has a way of desensitizin'[us] and I think probably the younger people are more susceptible to that than someone our age. But, I mean, now that we can download anything we want to download, now it's more of a 'right now' society. Back then, you thought about something and uh, say you wanted to go find a picture of a movie star; you'd go to the main store that was open, search through all the magazines, find a picture or two, maybe. Now, you decide you wanna a picture of a movie star and see 35,000 of them in the space of about 15 seconds. It's, I think that kind of thing can desensitize and cloud the morality. So—

In this conversation with Peter and Harry, we explore the role of American culture on religious belief and practice and find media images bear heavily upon religious thought and moral behavior. Both men agree our contemporary times are different from the past in terms of media's powerful influence on our lives. Harry's critique of America's 'right now' society is an implied critique of technology's role in abetting people's abuse of web images and downloaded information.

If not for the simple click of a computer mouse on a link to the worldwide web, knowledge seekers might not be exposed to undesirable material. By way of technological advancements, the media opens Americans up to floodgates of information that has shaped them both positively and negatively. Without parental monitoring this can have devastating effects on youth. Therefore, the media does silently take the lead in spiritual and ethical formation of believers and other Americans.

Burt Harger and Pete Smith: Embracing Gay Rights signal "the beginning of the end" of Methodism

Burt Harger describes himself as theologically and socio-politically conservative. Pete Smith defines himself as a theological conservative and a social moderate. Both men, as stated previously, are veterans older than seventy years of age. In the following excerpt, they address how they figure The First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles fits into the wider United Methodist denomination.

Nichole: Okay. And, and then I also wanted to ask you—the United Methodist Church in *general* is considered a liberal body, and so it's interesting that you had, uh, brought up the issue of um same sex unions, same sex marriage I guess, which is not unique to the United Methodist Church. I mean, we know that that is an issue

throughout the country and Iowa just passed a same sex marriage law. We'll see if it's gonna end up like California in terms of it being turned back. But, um, I'm wondering how does that impact...how do you see this church fitting into the more liberal United Methodist Church?

Burt Harger: (*chuckling along with PS*) The way I see it, this church *doesn't*.

Pete Smith: That's right.

Burt Harger: This church is not liberal!

Pete Smith: That's right. Not in our age group!

Burt Harger: Most of the people that I know, and being fortunate enough to be an usher, I know most of the people, there's not a lot of , there's not a whole bunch of liberals amongst us. Now, there are, there are certainly—I'm liberal—so, um, uh, and, but I'm, you know, I consider myself liberal on some things, but even the liberals, I don't think, are just really big into this gay rights business. Uh, but I realize, I realize that, that we may be the exception to the rule, okay? Uh, it's just like—we're Northwest Tennessee, and there again, you're talking conservative from the get-go. And, maybe that's what it is.

I know the last general conference in Texas, I think it was, that was a major issue. And, uh, there's enough dissention about it, that it didn't go anywhere.

Pete Smith: Okay. Okay. And, it's an issue because, um, because uh some bodies are looking to, to have their clergy participate in same sex marriages?

Burt Harger: I, I wouldn't even go, I wouldn't even narrow it down to that small of a group. I, I'm just saying the gay rights whole movement. We wouldn't have, we won't have gays as preachers, or gay marriage, we won't have gays as boy scout leaders, uh, it doesn't go where I'm goin'!

Pete Smith: No way!

Burt Harger: Okay. So, it's not just limited to same-sex marriage, it's the whole gay rights, that just-

Pete Smith: It's the beginning of an end.

“It's the beginning of an end”—that's how Pete Smith constructs his analysis of the gay rights movement. Not immediately clear is what the gay rights agenda signals the end of—the church or the society. He is not alone in his stance. Identifying himself as more liberal than Pete, Burt Harger confesses even liberals at The First do not support same sex unions or rights. In this instance, the liberal theology of the United Methodist denomination does not supersede the more conservative nature of The First United Methodist of Bald Eagles.

Denominational life and policies serve a role in guiding individuals and communities; yet, there are limits to denominational sway. In the case of The First United Methodist Church—a conservative church in a liberal mainline Protestant denomination—regional alliances are more compelling than are denominational. That puts into context Burt Harger's proclamation: “We're Northwest Tennessee, and there again, you're talking conservative from the get-go. And, maybe that's what it is.”

*Amanda Martinez and Mary Elizabeth Worthington:
Patriotism calls for a Prayer for Peace instead of War*

Representative voices from The First United Methodist Church of Bald Eagles orient the discussion toward patriotism and church ritual in this section. Along those lines, Amanda Martinez, a seventy-one year old retired educator and Hispanic Lay Missioner for the Memphis Conference, speaks with Mary Elizabeth Worthington, a

fifty-six year old church employee who is Director of Christian Education at The First.

Both women engage me in an exchange about patriotism, peace, and public prayer.

Nichole: Let's move on. Alright, so my next question has to do with patriotism. So the question is, How do you define patriotism? And then if you say that military service is the highest form of patriotism, tell me why. However, are there other forms of patriotic service to this country? So that's the first two I'm going to ask you to answer it like that and then I'll ask you the next two.

Amanda Martinez: Do I think that military service is the highest form of patriotic service to the country?

Nichole: And also, include your definition of patriotism.

Amanda Martinez: That's not my definition of patriotism. My definition of patriotism is that I believe in a country that wants to be fair to everybody, to give everybody a chance. My idea of patriotism is that we go to unbounded lengths to look for peace instead of going to war. And, I don't think the American flag should be in the sanctuary. I don't believe there should be prayer in school. I don't believe that's what made us behave ourselves. As a child, we would read the 100th Psalm, 1000 times (mumbling a rote prayer) and then we said the Pledge of Allegiance and then sat down. I think that if we're going to do something then we should have the Pledge of Allegiance, every day. Because then children would know the reason why they say the Pledge of Allegiance, that you are in this school because people have paid their taxes and that the country is interested in everybody having an education. And prayer, I can pray any place, and I used to tell my students. This is a way I would get around that. I would say, "You will now have a moment of silence." And I would always tell the students we're going to have a moment of silence. I would also say, "I know what I'm going to do during the moment of silence. You may do anything except disturb me while I'm doing it." You must be silent, you must be silent, that's right. And you can do what I do, and it was very obvious what I was doing. I would bow my head and I would pray for those students for that day, which I think is very important. But that is something that you would know.

Nichole: So, in other words you're saying that military service for you is not necessarily the highest form of patriotism?

Amanda Martinez: No, and at the same time I had two husbands that were in the military, and I had three children who were in the military. And they were all extremely glad that they had been in the military and thought that it was a good idea for young people to go into military service, that that was a wonderful growing up opportunity. On the other hand, I had a husband who had a complete nervous breakdown because during the Korean War he was the first gunner on a destroyer. And he said the noise of that gun just, you know...and they were in waters where they shot and they knew that they had hit submarines and that they could tell whether it was theirs [the Koreans] or ours. And things like that. And I don't think, war isn't good, it doesn't do good things to people.

Nichole: So what I'm hearing you say is, for you, patriotic service is true equality, everyone having an opportunity.

Amanda Martinez: And voting, voting, everybody needs to vote.

Nichole: Okay, so having a voice in whom our representatives are going to be. Okay, alright, that's totally different, I like it. What about you, how do you define patriotism? And are there other forms outside of military service.

Mary E. Worthington: I would agree with everything that Amanda said. I would add to that, that you know there's some countries where I believe after high school you're required to give two years of service to your country. Now it does not necessarily mean military service, it can be service in community renewal, it can, you know. But I think that that would be a good thing for us to have, before we go to college that we give our country two years. I think we'd be a better people for that. I'm not one of these, I certainly don't believe in my country right or wrong. It's, I'm a patriot, I mean I definitely have a sense of patriotism, I hear the Star Spangled Banner and I get tingles, you know.

Nichole: Why do you get tingles?

Amanda Martinez: I always have, I mean it's my country, I mean it's. And as bad things as we have done and I realize we have done horrible things in our history, I think that we've been driven by a desire to do right. A desire for goodness, I guess. I don't think that we were founded by, that our founding fathers were, you know how, you know most of them were deists.

Nichole: They were deists, yes they were and most people don't realize that. God is out there, but he doesn't-

Mary E. Worthington: Right. I know, and I get so mad because you know 'established a Christian nation.' Well no, they established a nation where there's freedom of religion. You know, and this may be going into the second part, but I think it's real interesting-

Nichole: Which is does your faith, since you're going to go let me segue, does your faith influence your understanding of patriotism, how? Then go ahead.

Mary E. Worthington: Okay. It's real interesting to me that the Methodist Church in America, and America as a nation took place at basically the same time in history.

Nichole: In terms of birthing.

Mary E. Worthington: Uh-huh, yes. And that the structure of the Methodist Church is very much like the structure of our government.

Nichole: So there's a judicial branch, an executive branch, and a legislative branch.

Mary E. Worthington: Right, yeah. And I think that growing up Methodist and growing up American kind of blends together in me. That respect for other religions, it's Methodist but it's also American you know, there's just a lot of things that I think like that, that it just kind of—and I think it may have to do with that birth, like you said, birthing of both around the... you know, and because this was like the age of reason, you know. And-

Nichole: Yeah, exactly, we have a rational God who doesn't interfere in the affairs of the world, it's our responsibility. Go ahead.

Mary E. Worthington: Yeah. Well that's basically it.

Nichole: Okay. Well I'm glad that you, so let me ask you the second part of that question that isn't there, which you had actually brought up. The impetus for this is the fact that in both the churches that been my study churches, some version of the American flag is present in the sanctuary. Right, so I think for my black church it's the American flag, the Tennessee flag, and the Christian flag. And here it's the American flag and the Christian flag. Yeah, so how do you understand the presence of the American flag in the sanctuary?

Mary E. Worthington: Well, I don't think it should be there.

Nichole: You too? You were first. Tell me why.

Mary E. Worthington: It's there because of our World War II veterans who want it there.

Nichole: Okay, and tell me why they want it there.

Mary E. Worthington: Because when they were fighting, and I respect those men, I mean you know but - they weren't, they weren't just fighting for America, they were fighting for... I mean, I guess you know fighting for their church. And I guess we all were, I mean we were, freedom of, then you get into the freedom of religion. But I think when you stick the flag in the church that you cross the line between freedom of religion. I mean you're putting the government into the church.

Amanda Martinez' patriotism ensures peace, mitigated suffering, and equality of education. For her, public prayer is not an open demonstration of commitment to land and country. Rather, her moment of silence recognizes U.S. plurality and desires the best of and for all children. Military service is patriotic service; but, her husband's account of

wartime conditions which unquestionably involved brushes with death, predicates Amanda's decision on "war not being good and not doing good things to people."

On the other hand, Mary Worthington's patriotism would require each young person after high school graduation to serve the country in some way; service could include teaching in marginalized areas as a form of community renewal.

Despite America's present problems, racial history, and record of human rights violations, Worthington is convinced the American public is motivated to do right; she consequently admits to tingling upon hearing the Star Spangled Banner. Each woman's evaluation of patriotism slightly differs yet both women upon deeper analysis declare a similar message: that love of country does not demand blind allegiance or shed blood.

Our conversation leads to deciphering what the flags as landmark symbols mean in church worship space. We learn World War II veterans are the force behind the undeterred display of flags in the sanctuary. For this population, the flags symbolize two struggles—the fight for country and the fight for the church. In these two battles to preserve American freedoms, we leave the conversation making two extrapolations. Without hesitation, parishioners insinuate the state into their private affairs and into global contests as well as defiantly articulate God is on America's side.

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*Peter Crockett and Harry Ray:
"Patriotism's gotta be something you live"*

Earlier we encountered Peter Crockett and Harry Ray. Both are close in age and are business executives. They both identify as theologically moderate and socially

moderate. In the following excerpt, Peter and Harry elaborate on patriotism and the salience of the flags in the sanctuary.

Peter Crockett: To answer your question, I think patriotism goes way beyond military service. Military service is a wonderful way to show patriotism, expression of your patriotism, assuming that's the reason you're there. But, I think supporting your country, not blind support, but supporting your country, a healthy support for your country, is patriotism. Uh, being involved at least to some degree in the goings on of your community, your country, whatever government level you wanna work in, is an expression of patriotism. Uh, I think anything you do to promote the country is an expression of patriotism. So I'd think military service is one aspect, I'm, I'm not sure that most people in the military—most might not be right, but a good number in the military—are there for patriotic reasons. Or is it that they're just shopping? I don't know, I don't have the answer to that. It'd be interesting to survey that.

Harry Ray: Well, job training, last chance—

Peter Crockett: Exactly, there's lot of reason to...

Harry Ray: Patriotism is not the reason for them.

Peter Crockett: And not that they don't love the country as much as me, but is that reason enough?

Harry Ray: I don't know, I think military service is, can be *a* sign of patriotism, but not necessarily *the* sign of patriotism. I, I heard a statement in a movie one time, and it's one of these things that in an odd moment it brings it into focus. And, it defines for me what I believe; patriotism is a way of life. It's an attitude, it's a feeling. Patriotism is, if you hear somebody doing or saying something that makes you so mad you can't see straight, but yet you're willing to fight and die if necessary for their right to keep doing it—that's patriotism. Patriotism can't be just a Sunday afternoon feel-good. *Patriotism's gotta be something you live.* I mean I tell you somebody can get up and exercise free speech about how they

wanna bomb the Pentagon, well, uh I hate it. I think they oughta be boiled, but the fact is we gotta be willin' to fight for their right to do that or patriotism doesn't mean anything. So, that's my thoughts on it.

Nichole: Okay. I mean, I think the example about bombing is an extreme, so I won't use that, but I'm wondering—Can you criticize your country, but still love your country?

Peter Crockett/Harry Ray: (in unison) Absolutely.

Harry Ray: I think it's your responsibility to criticize what's not working right. That's how it gets better.

Nichole: Okay. Okay. Alright so, here the C and D part of the question. Let me give you D so that maybe you'll understand why I asked C. So, when I walk into The First on Sunday morning, I see the American Flag to my left and the Tennessee and Christian flags to my right. You know, wherever I'm sitting, that's how it is. So the first question is, What does that mean to you to have the American flag, the Tennessee flag and the Christian flag in, in your worship space?

Harry Ray: Is the Tennessee flag there?

Nichole: Uh, it was there awhile ago, or maybe it's not there. Maybe it's just the Christian flag.

Harry Ray: I think it's just the Christian flag.

Nichole: Okay, well the American flag and the Christian flag, but what does it mean for those flags to be in your worship space. How do you understand that?

Peter Crockett: I rarely recognize they're there. But, I think that-uh-if they're there that uh, at least that historically they're there, it just shows they support the church as another American institution that supports the country. As well as communicating Christianity, uh, it's you know. I don't know that there's, I wouldn't read a lot into them being there, personally.

Harry Ray: No, in fact it's, to me I mean, not so much the flag, itself, but the fact that it can be there is a reminder to me that we can come to a place and worship in the open with our symbols important to us all out in front of us, and we don't have to hide them under the floorboards or hide them in a case somewhere. That we can, we can do that with that and the bible and the cross and everything out in the open. They can sit there in a prominent place. That says a lot to me for the freedom that we've got. So, and I can't honestly say that I sit there and think about 'Oh, there's the American flag. I'm reverent for it' but I think it very much belongs because it's a representation that we, here, can do that.

Nichole: Okay, so it's an identification of being American *and* Christian.

Peter Crockett: Yes, and the freedom to be able to profess that.

Harry explains his perspective on patriotism saying: "Patriotism is a way of life. It's an attitude, it's a feeling." Patriotic talk precipitates a swell of emotions in Harry. Such intensity is revealed in his statement about the abuse of U.S. constitutional rights. To an even greater extent, love of country should goad a person to defend and die for the right of another to exercise his or her freedoms even if such liberties dishonor the American citizenry.

Harry and Peter go so far as to say that a patriotic person has the duty to criticize the country if there are problems with particular systems and policies. This line of thinking is fodder for the discussion about the meaning of flags in the church. Admitting to not having paid much attention to the public display, Harry and Peter declare the American and Christian flags like the other sacred symbols—the bible, and the Cross—guarantee freedom of religious expression: "That we can come to a place and worship in

the open with our symbols that are important to us all and out in front of us, and we don't have to hide them under the floorboards or hide them in a case somewhere.”

Renowned cultural anthropologist Sherry Ortner who studies the symbolic nature of culture labels the American flag, a summarizing “key” symbol. The flag is a “key” symbol of this community because it is embedded with cultural meaning. As a “summarizing” key symbol, it represents and condenses the emotions, ideas, values, and attitudes of the people of Bald Eagles. Ortner writes: “The important mode of operation of summarizing symbols, it will be recalled, is its focusing power, its drawing-together, intensifying, and catalyzing impact upon the respondent... Summarizing symbols speak primarily to attitudes, to a crystallization of commitment.”⁶⁹ Harry and Peter’s passion is exhibited by their identification as American and Christian giving evidence of patriotism and the flags as summarizing “key” symbols.

Larry Jones, Edward Smith, and Edward Jones: Patriotism is a Belief in Country

Larry Jones is a married fifty-eight year old executive in the banking industry. He moved from Memphis to Bald Eagles eighteen years ago and is more active in the community than the church because of his travel schedule. Jones identifies as theologically and socially moderate. Edward Smith is in his sixties, married, and is a retiree from the service industry. He has always been an active Boy Scout leader. Having, himself, been a boy scout, he believes scouting builds character and leadership in young men and women. He also participates in the Bald Eagles Civitan club for special needs youngsters and young adults. Another constructive use of his time is spent in church

⁶⁹ Sherry Ortner, “On Key Symbols,” in *A Reader in Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Michael Lambek (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 158–167.

activities. He labels himself socially and theologically, conservative and has been in the town thirty-five years.

Similar to Mr. Smith in his dedication to the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts is Edward Jones. Jones is a retired human resource manager who spends time in the church, and working with the Transitions program which partners with and is a ministry of The First United Methodist of Bald Eagles. It trains and gives life skills to formerly incarcerated women. He, too, is married and is socially and theologically, conservative.

In the following brief exchange, all three men regard death on the battlefield in protecting America, a sacrificial act. They relate this type of death to a strong belief in country, which they admire. In the midst of conversation, they also point out Americans have more regard and respect for our present veterans of the Iraqi War than they had for Vietnam War veterans. For them, *special patriots* are military servicemen and women to the exception of those who die on battlefields; they are the *ultimate patriots*.

Nichole: Okay, okay. Alright, well let's go to number five. So the question is how do you define patriotism? And if you determine that military service is the highest form of patriotic service to this country, why? But then are there other forms of patriotic service to the country?

Larry Jones: I guess I haven't thought about that in terms of defining the word. I mean I do believe for a young man or woman to give their life in defense of our country is the ultimate patriotism. I do believe that those people who are put in harm's way are *ultimate patriots*. But we have patriots who are not necessarily in military service. We have patriots that are in the intelligence, we have patriots that are in foreign diplomatic corps. *It is a belief in country*. But the ultimate patriot is the one who gives her life for the country. They may disagree with why they're there. But theirs is ultimately not to question. It's to defend the interpretation [of the events or the law]. So to me it, you can be a patriot and not be a military person in my opinion. But the ultimate patriot is the one who's willing to give their life for the freedom of others. Whatever you define that to be.

Edward Smith: I think patriotism to me is generally love of country, it's a love of your country. I agree with Larry. You don't have to be a military person to be a patriot. But those military people are *special patriots* and the ones that give the ultimate sacrifice are heroes, they really are. I've not served in the military, but several of my brothers have and many friends. It's a sacrifice. And it's something that I truly, truly appreciate as an American. And I'll be honest with you, since the first Iraq war, I travel a lot. And I run into those guys in airports. I try to always go up and thank them for their service. And my wife tries to buy 'em lunch. [laughing] But it, patriotism to me is love of country.

Nichole: Okay, okay.

Edward Smith: I agree with you both. I'm amazed however that just a few years back when people came home from Vietnam we didn't have that, or whatever it was, we didn't appear to have that collective attitude towards our military when they did the very same thing. But they rank up there very, very high. Training to die must be part of the military process, but I've never been in the military either. The U.S. military must have a tremendous method of driving the whole [system] or embedding that whole idea because a man just doesn't want to go out and get himself killed. It's almost as if you have to learn that and they learn that as part of training in the military. And that's a sacrifice they make. And the amazing part is there are people who went to Iraq, came home, re-upped, and went back again—a do over, a repeat. And that's amazing. But it is a love that they must have that we can't even comprehend. But, and I agree with Edward, Sue does the same in airports and stops, she'd be hurrying through but she'd find the time to walk and give everybody a hug.

Contemplating God and Country at The First United Methodist Church

Addressed in this chapter are the civil religious ideals of worshippers at The First United Methodist Church. Leadership and patriotism are conjoined for these rural dwellers. Each mirrors the other. In short, landmark symbols are patriotic identifiers that sustain the institutional leadership of family, church, school, and military. Conversely, these leadership institutions are stabilized by landmark oriented summarizing “key” symbols. In both cases, such institutions and symbols strengthen the value systems of whites in this rural community.

Members of this rural white Methodist church agree faith influences patriotic belief and behavior. Dying in defense of neighbor and country warrants protecting the rights of fellow Americans regardless of whether they share similar political positions or not. This emotionally-laden thought is best captured by Harry Ray who declares: “I mean I tell you somebody can get up and exercise free speech about how they wanna bomb the Pentagon, well, uh I hate it. I think they oughta be boiled, but the fact is we gotta be willin’ to fight for their right to do that or patriotism doesn’t mean anything. So, that’s my thoughts on it.” With a narrow focus on the political nature of death, in Chapter 5, I compare the whites and blacks of Bald Eagles to contrast the socio-political concerns and the civil religious issues that emerge out of conversations on politicized death in personal and public spaces.

CHAPTER V

BLACK AND WHITE DIFFERENCES IN POLITICIZED DEATH

Death in "Political" Production: White and Black Views

Southern civil religion emerged in the aftermath of Confederate defeat. Centered on evangelical Protestantism, the religion of the Lost Cause developed as a postbellum social movement in response to this fall, according to religious historian Charles Reagan Wilson. Connecting the church and Confederacy, the religion of the Lost Cause celebrated white Southern identity through the elevation of dead heroes, symbols, hymns, wartime artifacts, and institutions imputed mythic status. The elements of this regional form of civil religion included mythology, ritualistic practices, theology, and ideologies about the virtuous and religious nature of white Southerners despite their failure at founding a separate political nation. I examine these claims by looking at four scenarios.

Attributed to an immediate historical past marked by despondency, division, destitution, death, and anxiety, the religion of the Lost Cause would redeem white Southerners by restoring the divine approbation lost in their military campaign against the North. Disabused of their purpose for fighting, Lost Cause civil religion nevertheless reconfirmed their transcendent mission and special assignment to the American nation and world and supported their cultural and religious orientation after a brutally fought Civil War and conquest. In *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*, Charles Reagan Wilson asserts:

Every time a Confederate veteran died, every time flowers were placed on graves on Southern Memorial Day, Southerners relived and confronted *the death of the*

Confederacy. The religion of the Lost Cause was a cult of the dead, which dealt with essential religious concerns. Having lost what they considered a holy war, Southerners had to face suffering, doubt, guilt, and a recognition of what seemed to be evil, and above all death. Through the ritualistic and organizational activities of their civil religion, Southerners tried to overcome their existential worries and live with their tragic sense of life.⁷⁰

While the demise of “martyred” heroes denoted the downfall of the Confederacy, the rise of southern civil religion solidified white Southern identity and reinforced their moral values, religious commitments, and democratic ideals—all of this, by politicizing death. Writing in the 2009 preface to his book, *Baptized in the Blood*, Charles Reagan Wilson declares:

I have continued to explore issues of southern civil religion in the twentieth century. At the heart of the southern civil-religious concept has been the belief that the South has a special destiny to play. The Lost Cause version of the regional civil religion was a powerful expression, and recent scholarship affirms its continuing power in the minds of many white Southerners.⁷¹

Karla FC Halloway authors *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories* to explore the subject of death and dying in the African American community over the twentieth century. Admitting to the limitations of covering “black death”⁷² over a century, she argues for black America’s peculiar vulnerability to untimely death and

⁷⁰ Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in the Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (with a New Preface), 2009 ed. (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), 36.

⁷¹ Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in the Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (with a New Preface), 2009 ed. (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), xvii.

⁷² Karla FC Halloway introduces the concept of “black death” in *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories—A Memorial* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 1.

dying from the purview of how others represent us and in how we represent ourselves.⁷³

Throughout her text, she treats literature, the visual arts, song (spirituals, the blues, hip hop music), film, media images, news programming and articles to demonstrate the pervasiveness of death as a subtext for black culture and life. Halloway argues:

Instead of death and dying being unusual, untoward events, or despite being inevitable end-of-lifespan events, the cycles of our daily lives were so persistently interrupted by specters of death that we worked this experience into the culture's iconography and included it as an aspect of black cultural sensibility...In this macabre revision of CPT (colored people's time), death was an untimely accompaniment of the life of black folk—a sensibility that was, unfortunately, based on hard facts. Several measures of mortality (childhood morbidity, maternal death in childbearing, cardiac-related deaths of elders, suicide, death at the hands of the police, and other violent deaths of youth) documented rates that were statistically significant and comparatively higher for African Americans than for other racial or ethnic groups in the United States, even when differences in economic class and sex were taken into account. Black folk thus found a cultural code about mortality to be both usable and familiar.⁷⁴

Halloway's words are foreboding as she makes a strong case for why African Americans are positioned towards and are particularly vulnerable to death and dying. Her assertion stands within the context of the political nature of African America's deaths and the politics of their dying. From post-Civil War lynchings of black men and women to the mob-related homicides of World War I and II black veterans, "black death" has been political, interrogating American democratic mores.

From black infant mortality rates to "black death" from preventable diseases like hypertension and diabetes, from bullying and suicide to prison and gang related deaths of

⁷³ Karla FC Halloway, *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories—A Memorial* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

⁷⁴ Karla FC Halloway, *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories—A Memorial* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 6.

black youth, the politics of “black death” display the egregious social inequalities that continue to plague a presumed post-racial United States of America. In sum, Charles Reagan Wilson’s and Karla FC Halloway’s contentions augment my proposition for death’s role in revealing socio-political concerns and in making pellucid the racial, ethnic, and democratic principles that serve to divinely guide this country. In this case, we study the at times similar, yet primarily dissimilar perspectives of rural blacks and whites of Bald Eagles. Death is political when it unveils the civil religious commitments through the socio-political affairs of everyday citizens.

Cindy Jones and Naomi Smith: Protecting Children at All Costs—An American Value

In the following four scenarios and analyses, black and white community members of Bald Eagles politicize death by relating the subject of death and dying to social and political matters prominent to their thoughts about governance of the nation, guidance of family, and shaping of community. In all of the cases, participant assertions are made in light of transcendent or divine realities. Though each conversation differs in terms of the socio-political, each makes an argument for death in the public sphere as a touchstone for expressing “the deep-seated values, commitments, and ethical principles of a people that are not made explicit in the course of everyday life.”⁷⁵ In other words, understanding death’s role in relationship to the socio-political is central to figuring out how civil religion functions.

Cindy Jones is a thirty-four year old college educated African American elementary school educator who has lived in Bald Eagles for most of her life, twenty-nine

⁷⁵ Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967), 2.

years. She is a married mother of two children who identifies as socially and theologically moderate. She is also a member of a predominantly black non-denominational congregation in the area. Naomi Smith is also African American and has lived in Bald Eagles the entire 30 years of her life. She is a member of a black church in the area. A single mother of an elementary school-aged daughter, Naomi works for the Corrections Department and self-identifies as theologically liberal but socially, moderate.

Nichole: Okay, so I asked the question of the older generation, and I'm gonna be doin' it for black and white so – “What do you think, given your age, and given the times in which we live, are the causes, or the values that, um, African Americans would die for, presently?”

Cindy Jones: You know, my answer to that would be, as a younger person—mature person—they would die for their family. You know, they would die for, uh, moral beliefs within their family, first. That's just a first response, now, that that doesn't make it right. You know, we should want to die for Christian beliefs, but the emotional side of me is sayin', “If you touch my daughter, or if you harm my son...I would be caught in a bind.” If it means I gotta go to jail, what have you, to protect my children, then I would have to go to jail. However, if you burned a Bible, then I would probably say, “Well, the law gonna take care of that. You know?”

I'm not gonna shoot you 'cause you burned a Bible. But what's wrong is wrong and what's right is right. I'm human with flaws, too, so that would be my belief. Now in terms of what people of the younger generation would die for, it's money. Anything that has to do with money, or materialistic things, they're willin' to die for that kind of stuff. Now, that to me is insane. Mature-minded, young adults and the older generation, they just, they ain't dyin' for nothin', it just don't make sense. Their thinking is like, “I'm gonna die anyway, so I'm not gonna pre-meditate my death especially not for shoes, or my family, 'cause I know God gonna take care of them'.” They make the decision early on that “God gonna take care of that anyway.” I should be thinkin' like that right now, like the older generation. But in my mind I'm thinkin', “I'm gonna have to cross this out. If they hurt my child, I have strong feelin's about that, I'm gonna

give you my anger, which is not right, but, my first response would be to attack...

Nichole: Okay...

Cindy Jones: And, hopefully, in my attack mode somebody with some good Christian sense is gonna say "Look, here, girl, don't you go do nothin' crazy." It would take somebody strong, more, uh elderly or an older person to come and say, "Okay, you crazy right now, and I know how you feel. It can't be somebody my age 'cause you don't know how I feel. You have to live a little to know how I would feel about my children..."

Nichole: Okay, okay. I'm gonna, I'm gonna get your response, and then I'm gonna ask this a different way.

Naomi Smith: I totally agree with what Cindy just said. Um, for me it would be the same, uh family. You know, I feel the same way, if anybody harmed my child that would be the only thing right now that I feel like I would die for. Um, I don't really see anything that would make me lay down my life other than family.

Nichole: Okay.

Naomi Smith: Anything I would wanna give my life for.

Nichole: Okay. Well, the reason why I asked is because in the past, historically, black people have given their lives for the value of freedom and equality. And, I'm just wondering, um, outside of your family, or maybe in addition to your family, are there any values for this generation of black people that you see that we would die for? I am talking about lofty values like equality and freedom and so on, so forth. Or are we not living in that type of historic moment?

Naomi Smith: I don't think so.

Cindy Jones: I agree, I don't think we livin' in that type of moment right now. But, eventually I think we will come to crosses about religion. You gonna have to make a decision and you may have to die for that decision. You know, it just, it's just not at its head right now [at the point of explosive tension]. You know, 'cause we so liberal. We live in a liberal society and we have

so many freedoms that we don't have to deal with that because we have it all. Back in the Civil Rights Movement, you *didn't* have it all. You know? Everything you had was somethin' to fight for. But there's not much to fight for right at this point in history because you can do it all, and you can live it all. You can be a homosexual, and you can be my neighbor, and I have to like it. You know, it's just we live in a world where you don't have to do that anymore, you don't have to continue to fight because... We were brought up to think the law will take its course. Or God will take his course.

Take it to the Supreme Court if you feel that procedures were violated. Everything now has procedures. You gotta go here, you gotta do that, you gotta do this, you got to petition. Whereas then, back in those Civil Rights days to petition you would go straight to the court, you know? You would prepare for protest. You'd be walkin' up there right now.

Now, you walk straight up there and they're like you didn't even follow this, you didn't follow this, and now you goin' go to jail. So now if you want to be heard, you got to follow procedures. You know, you didn't bother to even follow the fact that there is a certain degree of respect that you supposed to give as you talk one man to another.

Deep emotions are aroused when Cindy Jones contemplates even the threat of harm to her children. A belief not yet a reality in the United States, the protection of children is a nationalistic sentiment that draws Jones and Smith into conversation about an ideology for which they are willing to die—safeguarding family. Jones artfully draws a parallel to those who “would take a bullet” in defense of the Bible to convey how strongly she feels about protecting her children and to communicate that “taking a bullet” for a child is similar in conviction.

The Bible is revered as both a political and religious symbol amongst those who would “shoot to kill and die” upon its desecration. Articulating the opposite Jones remarks, “I'm not gonna shoot you 'cause you burned a Bible’ ” yet in the same breath declares, “If it means I gotta go to jail, what have you, to protect my children, then I

would have to go to jail,” justifying any future actions by disclosing and identifying the safety of children as part of the “American way of life.”

The “defense of children” is what Sherry Ortner would recognize as an “elaborating” symbol. Elaborating symbols accordingly sort out experience; they have the capacity to order experience by their use as vehicles for sorting through complex and undifferentiated feelings and ideas, making them comprehensible to oneself, communicable to others, and translatable into orderly action.⁷⁶ Elaborating symbols are valuable because they are instrumental in enlarging our worldview and in how we conceive of ourselves and others. Hence, Jones additionally appeals to the safety of children to explain and describe the ways in which she has been socialized in this community.

While Jones and Smith elaborate on the institution and values for which they would die—family—they also critique the ideals for which young blacks are dying today. Materialism and consumerism are twin oppressive forces that encourage the wasteful and life altering actions of black youth. In contradistinction is the demeanor of black elders and mature young adults who do not die premature deaths in pursuit of material objects and comforts. Their mindset reflects a “God who gonna take care of them.”

Jones’ pointed critique about black youth culture creates fodder for a discussion about an American market system that has produced and aggravated grave inequities between those who “have” and those who “have-not.” The chasm between American producers and consumers prompts the following ethical questions: What legitimates the death dealing lifestyle of a black youth culture influenced by American consumerism and

⁷⁶ Sherry Ortner, “On Key Symbols,” in *A Reader in Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Michael Lambek (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 161-163.

materialism? How are we to think about the future of all young Americans growing up in a society where a great chasm exists between the über-wealthy and dismally poor?

Unhesitatingly proclaiming that we live in a liberal society where African America no longer wrestles with desires for freedom, Jones closes her commentary, provocatively: “But eventually I think we will come to crosses about religion.” Even if she senses that African Americans have become lax in fortifying their social and political liberties, Jones nonetheless prophesies the next major battle for all Americans will be staked on the question of political liberty tied to religious ideals.

*Frances Trumpton and Roger Charles Courtney:
The American Jeremiad, A Rhetorical yet Prickly Patriotic Device*

Frances Trumpton is black American, college educated, and a retired auto dealer. He is the married father of two daughters, has lived in Bald Eagles for twenty-four years, and is sixty-two years old. Trumpton served his country in the Vietnam War and now serves in the Baptist Church as a deacon. He is socio-politically moderate and theologically, moderate. Roger Charles Courtney is a college educated retiree from the West Coast who worked as a telecommunications engineer. He moved to Bald Eagles two and a half years ago to pursue a quieter and more reflective life. Not currently active in a local congregation, he identifies as a Christian who “speaks up for what I believe is right and am willing to help out when and where I can.” An African American, he has served in the Armed Forces from 1955-1959. At seventy-one years of age, he is a social and theological conservative.

Frances Trumpton: Patriotism is obviously love for your country, but aside from that, it is love for the prosperity and the future of the country and the

nation as a beacon and as a pattern for how justice and peace are revered and handled. Just because there are symbols of patriotism (e.g., the Liberty Bell and the Flag) and just because the guy doesn't salute the flag...if he goes and supports his family and does the things that his country expects of him as a contributor and he doesn't do anything that is subversive, he is a patriot. Now, *we overstate the symbolisms of patriotism* because say a guy didn't salute the flag but let's say he fought in the war and was willing to give his life, his person for the country, that is patriotism. But the fact that he served in a war that he may or may not have believed in...that is a form of patriotism. But to see a child not saluting the flag or whatever—that's just the sum of the symbols. But the real thing is in the heart, when the person believes in what that country stands for and the advancement of that country.

Nichole: Let me ask you a question as you two are talking. Can you criticize your country and still be a patriot (e.g., Obama's former pastor, Jeremiah Wright). Outside of how the media has portrayed him and the language that he has used like "*goddamn America*." Can his criticisms make him a patriot?

Frances Trumpton: He is a patriot! When he said, "God Damn America," it ain't like me telling you, 'Goddamn you.' *To damn a country or a person is like 'cursing' them.*

Roger C. Courtney: ...meaning you not going to get your blessings.

Frances Trumpton: Right. That is to put a curse on 'em.

Nichole: But can he be patriotic by saying that "God is not going to bless America"?

Frances Trumpton: Yeah. He didn't say...but...he is ex-military.

Roger C. Courtney: He is a Marine.

Frances Trumpton: He served his country; he is actually a brilliant man. Now, to take what he said in that context or to take it out of context, in my mind does not disqualify him as a patriot.

Nichole: Oh, o.k.

Frances Trumpton: He fought for the right to express himself as a human being—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Now, he has the liberty and *the right* of the First Amendment for saying it.

Nichole: Do you think he is a patriot?

Roger C. Courtney: Now he has got that *right, no doubt about it*. But myself? I wouldn't have said that. I don't feel that in my heart. I don't know how he could have expressed himself that way, be that divisive, and still be a patriot. I just don't, I wouldn't go there. Just like with Rush Limbaugh, I listen to him—he expresses himself, he says—however, if you are out in the public like that, in the forefront, I think you have to choose your words more carefully, you have to take into consideration that you are going to alienate people and you have to decide whether or not you want to. So, I don't know. I wouldn't have gone there.

Frances Trumpton: I wouldn't have gone there because of my poise and tact and savoir faire...

Nichole: (laughing)

Roger C. Courtney: savoir faire?...*frenchie*.

Frances Trumpton: But there...who was the patriot who said, "I may not agree with what you say, but I absolutely defend *your right* to say it."

Roger C. Courtney: Patrick Henry.

Frances Trumpton: It might have been Patrick Henry. What he said was not anti-patriotic. It might have been dumb, but it was not anti-patriotic. To me it was a statement about how he felt about why America is in the quandary it is in now. Because it has...we talk about the violation of human rights. America has always violated human rights. *This current war we are in right now, it is nothing but genocide*. It has taken out a large segment of our society who could be doing something else. We left here after 9-1-1 and went into

Afghanistan for bin Laden. *How did we end up in Iraq?* I ain't that smart in geography but...*Iraq?*

Roger C. Courtney: Iraq was payback.

Frances Trumpton: Yes, but was 9-1-1, the spill that caused that? We went into Afghanistan looking for Bin Laden if he was in fact the mastermind behind 9-1-1, but we end up over in Iraq! Is that patriotic? (for Bush) to send our young men and women into harm's way? *For what?!?!?!?*

Roger C. Courtney: The reason for Iraq is strictly oil. We are an oil based economy. And if there is a disruption, or any kind of interruption, our economy will suffer and everything will die. This country will die. Everything is propelled by plane, train, ship, and truck. Everything in your marketplace, to get to the marketplace, everything has to travel in one of those ways or all four of those ways. So, to make sure to save the economy we had to go there, to make everything flow. That is what this is all about. The same thing with Russia and Georgia when they went over there, Hussein cut their pipelines. So you mess with our pipelines and we are going to come over here and kill everybody. That's what Iraq is all about. It's all about oil. So the man is making sure we get an uninterrupted flow of oil.

Nichole: Are black people patriotic?

Roger C. Courtney: For the most part, yea. I'm thinking back to Roosevelt. Black people would take a bullet for Roosevelt, take a bullet for John Kennedy, take a bullet for Bill Clinton. And then their patriotism is a lot different than what we would normally consider patriotism. It is based on loyalty and the reward system. These men represented America, represented what is good about America. And black folks want to be part of it. So they flock to these people.

Frances Trumpton: Well, you take obviously the military side of it. Black people would have to be patriotic to participate in a segregated army. To go off to a foreign land fighting for your country that treats you as a second class citizen. Then you come into the Tuskegee experiment... "Was it one of the presidents' wives – Eleanor Roosevelt – who said, 'let's let them fly'?"

Nichole: Are we patriotic now?

Frances Trumpton: We have our issues with America and how America has executed on its promise to us. We don't live in a perfect society. Still, still, still I think the number one issue in America still is racism.

Roger C. Courtney: You think so?

Frances Trumpton: Yes.

Roger C. Courtney: That hasn't been my experience.

From historical luminaries Ida B. Wells and Frederick Douglass to present leaders like Jeremiah Wright, black leadership has conventionally armed itself and the black community against the vagaries of the American experience using the rhetorical device, the jeremiad. Emerging out of Puritan literary and homiletical tradition, political and religious leaders have since used the American jeremiad to inveigh against an anomalous public life, where the promise of the American dream is often shattered in face of American realities. The American jeremiad assumes the form of a lamentation allowing the speaker to unleash a critique of the moral and political ineptitude of the nation, demand correctives, and support a hope and a vision for progress.

Frances Trumpton might not be familiar with the American jeremiad but he remains resolute about Jeremiah Wright's⁷⁷ patriotism despite Wright's prophetic

⁷⁷ Jeremiah Wright, retired senior pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, Illinois, made news headlines during President Obama's national campaign for office in 2008. Wright is President Obama's former pastor. Employing the technique and rhetoric of the American jeremiad, Wright preached a 2003 sermon where he blamed America for the events of September 11, 2001 concluding it was a result of America's own international and domestic terrorism. During the sermon, he also indicted America for its ill-treatment of blacks proclaiming: "Blacks should not sing 'God Bless America' but 'God Damn America.' The government gives them drugs, builds bigger prisons, passes a three strike law and then wants us to sing 'God Bless America.' No, No, No, God *Damn* America! that's in the Bible for killing

pronouncement: “God Damn America!” That prompts Trumpton to invoke the aphorism: “I may not agree with what you say, but I absolutely defend *your right* to say it.”⁷⁸ The converse is true for Roger Charles Courtney who recognizes that the First Amendment guarantees Wright protection against retribution; nevertheless, he still does not consider this former soldier a patriot. Constitutional rights might allow the space to deliver a public excoriation—the American jeremiad—but Jeremiah Wright’s demeanor, from Courtney’s perspective, reflects Rush Limbaugh’s whose behavior alienates a good section of the American population.

Discussion about Jeremiah Wright’s patriotism moves into the realm of America’s perceived human rights abuses and the spoils of war being a loss of life. In this shift, Trumpton questions the patriotism of American leadership in conscripting young men and women to enter, fight, and die in a seemingly unjustifiable Iraqi war. His critique, precipitated by ruminations on death and dying, brings to fore three value-laden subjects: the merits of war, justifications for war, and young people’s role in America’s present fight, a fight that, according to Courtney, is to maintain our oil based economy. Both

innocent people. God *Damn* America for treating our citizens as less than human. God *Damn* America for as long as she acts like she is God and is supreme.” University of Chicago educated, Wright is still considered one of the country’s leading black pastors as he mixes the social gospel with contemporary socio-political issues in his sermonizing.
<http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/DemocraticDebate/story?id=4443788&page=1>.

⁷⁸ Shrouded in mystery is the original author of this dictum traditionally attributed to Voltaire. However, the maxim cannot be located in any of his works. Later, writing under the pseudonym Stephen G. Tallentyre in *The Friends of Voltaire* (1906), commentators suggest Evelyn Beatrice Hall penned the saying to summarize Voltaire’s attitude. This phrase has also been attributed to Founding Father Patrick Henry, a politician and orator, who is thought to have made the statement during America’s founding.

comments anticipate the following questions: Are the young dispensable in our efforts to build an oil-based empire? In such efforts, are these actions towards the young, moral?

In the last part of the conversation, Trumpton and Courtney ponder African America's patriotism. Their line of argumentation diverges from the previous conversation on the nation-state as Roger C. Courtney declares: "Black people would take a bullet for Roosevelt, take a bullet for John Kennedy, take a bullet for Bill Clinton. These men represent America, represent, for blacks, what is good about America. And black folks want to be part of it. So they flock to these people." "Taking a bullet" for black America means dying to ensure the Constitutional rights of liberty and equality in striving to assure the longevity and the prosperity of the race. Courtney, however, closes the conversation with a twist explaining how "black patriotism" is unlike "white patriotism"—it is based on "loyalty and a reward system," a socially constructed "reward system" delimited by the "color" line, according to Trumpton, in a post-racial America.

*Carmello Kelley, Jessica Parker, Muffin Morgan:
The Abortion Debate Reveals Theologically and Socially Conservative Bifurcations*

Carmello Kelley is a thirty-nine year old Caucasian American married mother of two pre-teen and one teenage girl. Originally from Little Rock, Arkansas, Carmello is college educated and a "cradle" Episcopalian who works for Habitat for Humanity. She and her husband moved to Bald Eagles more than fifteen years ago to pursue job opportunities. Kelley identifies as both socially and theologically, moderate. Jessica Parker grew up in Atlanta, Georgia and has made several moves with her husband and young family before settling into Bald Eagles where she owns a dance studio. She is a

college educated thirty-eight year old Caucasian American woman who converted to Catholicism from Lutheranism to match her husband's religious affiliation. Parker describes herself as conservative, theologically and socio-politically.

Born in Chicago, Illinois Muffin Morgan was raised in Bald Eagles from five years old. A stay-at-home mother, Morgan is a thirty-five year old Caucasian American woman married and with children. She is not college educated but is invested in her children's education. As we converse, Morgan is in the midst of switching from her more conservative non-denominational church to join Kelley in the more liberal Episcopal parish in town. She is both a social and theological liberal.

Muffin Morgan: And, let's see, and then, the healthcare thing bothers me, because I don't understand; sometimes I just don't understand, like, Republicans—you know like the Republicans and the different...I just don't understand their thinking. They don't want everyone to have healthcare, but yet they don't want people to have abortions; how are they supposed to pay for the babies? You know what I mean, how are you?—

Nichole: So, once you have your baby, how are you supposed to care for it?

Muffin Morgan: Yeah, what are you supposed to do?

Nichole: ...if you don't have the resources.

Muffin Morgan: Exactly. You know, it just doesn't make sense to me, at all. And let's see, what else is there? (chuckling)

Nichole: Okay, so, you don't understand the rhetoric, you don't see how the rhetoric of *pro-life* fits in with actual, real-life circumstances.

Muffin Morgan: Yeah! You know, in a perfect world, wouldn't it be nice? But it's not! And there's got to be other plans, like, who's gonna take care of these kids and, but you don't wanna give out any kind of programs to[care for the children]—duh! You know, what's gonna

happen [to them]? That bothers me. That doesn't have anything to do with my congregation, but...

Nichole: Well, it doesn't have to, you or your congregation. Whatever's easier to answer.

Muffin Morgan: Well, I mean I don't really see things like a lot of people at church do, so—

Nichole: How do they see things?

Muffin Morgan: Well, basically, if you're a democrat, you can't be a Christian!

Nichole: (lots of laughter, all laughing) Well, that's just...

Muffin Morgan: I have a bumper sticker on my facebook page declaring, "I think therefore I'm a Democrat" and then I have another one that says, "I'm a Christian and a Democrat. Yeah, believe it." Or something like that—

Nichole: I'm sorry. I read something to the same effect in an opinion letter in the newspaper that said, if you don't vote Republican, then you're not a Christian.

Muffin Morgan: Now, these are things that bother me, now they may not be my own personal beliefs. You know, it's not...like myself, I wouldn't have an abortion, but what are you gonna do with these women out here?

Muffin Morgan: You've got to have plans and, you've got to have life choices. It's wonderful to have children but, you have to teach things in school...but then I read something that they don't want programs in the schools either! You know, safe sex programs and what-not.

Nichole: So, no comprehensive [sex education], it's abstinence only.

Muffin Morgan: I don't see how it connects. Yeah. I just, I don't.

Nichole: Now, I'm going to, *now* (laughing)

Jessica Parker: Well, in the Catholic Church, off course, they're always fighting the abortion issue. Um, but it's kind of, I don't know how much I agree with it [abortion]. I do agree with it in the instance of rape and incest, you know. But then, you've got the culture; certain cultures believe that having young babies and having lots of them are okay, and they're not usually the ones that seek the abortions, they're usually the ones that *want* to have the children.

So, sometimes the people that want the abortions are, you know, maybe the young, young moms that are thinking: 'Oh, I don't want my boyfriend to find out' or 'I don't want my mom to find out', it just, I guess it all depends on the circumstances which is just, not what the Catholic Church would support. I mean, I do believe [in abortion] in situations like rape or incest, you know, if this happens then you should have that option.

Nichole: Okay.

Jessica Parker: 'cause, you know, there's always adoption, there's always; people are beggin' for babies everyday.

Muffin Morgan: When I was in high school, though, I had a friend who would have stuck a hanger up herself before she would have told her parents [about her pregnancy].

Jessica Parker: Yeah.

Nichole: Oh, lord.

Jessica Parker: Oh yeah, it makes it...

Muffin Morgan: Yeah, she would have thrown herself down the stairs.

Jessica Parker: And that's the thing, somehow, they're gonna somehow get rid of the baby, so—*We're in 2008, people.*

Nichole: MmHm. But does the abortion issue only impact children? I mean, or teenagers? I'm asking about grown women.

- Muffin Morgan:* I don't know of any of my friends or how many times my friends aborted as adults, unless, you know the amniocentesis came back indicating something was wrong with the pregnancy.
- Jessica Parker:* I think it does mainly affect primarily low-income and, um, young moms. Or, people with no options. Or just don't feel they have any options.
- Muffin Morgan:* I dealt with that in high school, I drove a friend to the abortion clinic. You know, now she has four kids. You know, but she's hardcore pro-life.
- Nichole:* Now, now why is she so given to—
- Muffin Morgan:* She's become very evangelical, feels like she really made a mistake.
- Jessica Parker:* It can really affect you.
- Muffin Morgan:* Yeah, I think it really affected her, um, she's become a strong person afterward, and regretted it deeply.
- Nichole:* Mmm.
- Jessica Parker:* Yeah, you don't consider it's gonna affect you.
- Muffin Morgan:* Yeah, when you're fifteen, sixteen years old, you're thinking 'Oh, my God, my parents are gonna find out!' But, yeah, I agree. I'm very much pro-choice, but personally I would be pro-life.

Muffin Morgan and Jessica Parker have an exchange about abortion, a topic eliciting an eye-opening and profound conversation about the mix and influence of political rhetoric and ideological belief on shaping personal opinion. Even though the city and county of Bald Eagles is described as populous, Bible Belt culture effects theological and social conservatism amongst a majority of residents. Theological conservatism is

pan-denominational and oft-identified with Pentecostal, Holiness, Charismatic, and conservative Evangelical movements.

Guiding the faith of theological conservatives are often creeds and doctrines upholding the authority of the bible and the salvific nature of Jesus Christ. Socio-political conservatives generally advocate for: the traditional “nuclear” family in family values debates, the definition of marriage as “heterosexual,” a pro-life position concerning the inception of human life, and the death penalty. They bemoan the secularization of American society, sexually saturated media content, and lack of governmental regulation in the private affairs of citizens.

Contextualizing abortion as infanticide, “the death” of the unborn child, we learn Morgan is disgruntled by the political rhetoric of a Republican party in support of healthcare policies that limit abortions but is adverse to social policies mandating monies to care for children born to mothers who decide to have their babies. This shows the disconnect between Republican belief and action. Complicating the matter for Morgan is a Bald Eagles educational system that teaches abstinence-only education versus comprehensive sex education where young people would be exposed to safer sexual conduct options, thus prompting her to comment: “You’ve got to have plans and, you’ve got to have life choices. It’s wonderful to have children but, you have to teach things in school...” Additionally, the abortion debate in this cultural context is tied to the political and ideological propaganda pervasive throughout the town’s church communities where the religio-moral conduct of Republicans and Democrats is questioned and where Democrats are typified as less christian than Republicans.

A more theologically and socially conservative Jessica Parker offers an opposing opinion about the Republican Party's political rhetoric. The Catholic Church's imprint has been left on Parker whose stance on the "abortion" issue derives from a "family values" perspective as she remarks: "But that's the thing, we've got all these laws and things to take care of people's mistakes. And, that's what aggravates me. So, let's work on the things to deal with the aftermath of all these mistakes, but let's *not work* on the prevention? Which is, it all boils down to *family values*, you know?" Although Parker admits there are exceptions to the "family values" rule, having an abortion is the less favorable of two options: "taking care of people's mistakes" versus "having the unborn child."

Morgan's and Parker's abortion deliberations, by the end of the conversation, can be reduced to the following. Morgan, while socially and theologically progressive, confesses she is *pro-choice* and *pro-life*, as the circumstance dictates. Though she would "never have an abortion herself," in high school, she had a friend "who would have stuck a hanger up herself before she would have told her parents [about her pregnancy]." Morgan is split on the subject of abortion; she reveals a bifurcated self. Parker concedes teenage pregnancy can happen to young people who hail from "good" families but later claims: "I think abortion does mainly affect primarily low-income and, um, young moms. Or, people with no options. Or just don't feel they have any options." Parker assesses correctly.

Economic disadvantage, higher pregnancy rates, and higher rates of conception contribute to higher abortion rates amongst racial and ethnic minorities, low-income, and

poor women, according to the 2002 report, “Patterns in the Socioeconomic Characteristics of Women Obtaining Abortions, 2000-2001.”⁷⁹ From 2000-2001, the Alan Guttmacher Institute conducted a national survey which included approximately 10,700 women across different races, ethnicities, ages, social (i.e., unmarried, married, divorced) and economic levels. It is common for women across racial and ethnic subgroups (i.e., White, Hispanic, and Black) to have abortions and for abortions to be the result of unintended pregnancy.

Research data however reveals abortions are typical amongst women who have never married, are 20 to 30 years old, have one child, live in a metropolitan area, are impoverished and identify as Christian, including non-evangelicals and evangelicals, alike. Through this study, the authors continue to explore factors that contribute to increasing or decreasing pregnancy and abortion rates—contraceptive use, sexual patterns, and changes in public policy. In fact, researchers found higher abortion rates among poor and low income women (200% below the poverty line) due to higher pregnancy rates. Pregnancy and abortion rates for middle and higher income women are dramatically lower. For economically disadvantaged females, investigators propose changes in welfare policy parallel increased pregnancy and abortion rates.

Amendments to welfare policy benefitted low income women in terms of more job opportunities, economic development of families, and access to college tax credits. Nonetheless, these benefits were met with a decline in Medicaid coverage to a great majority of women and a proportional increase in the numbers of poor women who no

⁷⁹Rachel K. Jones, Jacqueline E. Darroch and Stanley K. Henshaw, “Patterns in the Socioeconomic Characteristics of Women Obtaining Abortions in 2000-2001,” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 34, no. 5 (Sept/Oct 2002): 7, 1-10.

longer had insurance. For these women, contraceptive and family planning services were covered by Medicaid; these services were not replaced by free or low cost services when Medicaid was removed. Accordingly, the authors of this 2001 study conclude effective contraceptive use and family planning services might curb the pregnancy and abortion rates of the economically disadvantaged.

Thus, these statistics support Parker's claims but her position can nonetheless be perceived as prejudicial because she neither explains why she has arrived at this conclusion about low income women nor does she explain what constitutes a respectable family model; for, even in "great" families abortions do exist; her classist statement about young people from "good" homes makes them exceptions to the "abortion" rule. In the end, her line of reasoning also reveals a bifurcated self.

*Sue Simpson and Louise Hall:
Praying Our Local Men Do Not Return Home from War in Body Bags*

Sue Simpson is a Caucasian American woman in her seventies and has lived in Bald Eagles for fifty years. A retired state worker for Tennessee, she is active in the ministries of the Bald Eagles United Methodist Church. She describes herself as a moderate, both theologically and socially. Louise Hall is a retired school teacher in her seventies who has lived in Bald Eagles for fifty-four years. Engaged in caring for her grandchildren, she is a grandmother who participates in church ministries at Bald Eagles United Methodist Church. A Caucasian American woman, she identifies as a conservative, both theologically and socially.

Nichole: Okay, now nationally, because I've got the issues in your local community, what are your concerns? Are there any national issues that are pressing to you?

Sue Simpson: Well, I think crime and then I think, like the war. Afghanistan. Iraq.

Nichole: Now, people are still concerned about that? Why?

Sue Simpson: What? The War?

Nichole: I mean, you know...

Louise Hall: Well, we still have men from Bald Eagles there.

Nichole: Okay. MmHm

Louise Hall: And, and even from other sections that we know. And, anytime you have a loved one, or someone you know...in the Bible Belt it's constantly on your mind.

Sue Simpson: And, it seems like uh, how long has it been going on—six years?

Nichole: Yeah, it's been going on awhile.

Sue Simpson: It seems senseless to me. It hasn't gotten, so far, it hasn't done any good.

Nichole: Alright. Okay, okay. It's actually been going on, since, it was September 11th, 2001, so it has been longer than that. Like, uh, at this point, maybe eight years.

Louise Hall: Well, even before that we had the Gulf—

Nichole: Gulf War, yeah.

Sue Simpson: Um, I don't know, seems like we want everyone to do what we want 'em to do and everyone doesn't want to. They've got their own cultures, and we're tryin' to make every dag...I better get off of my—

Nichole: Soapbox.

Sue Simpson: Soapbox here, but, it seems like that. That, that we want everybody to do, have a government like we do. They may not want it like that.

Louise Hall: I know that there have been, been...that there are governments that need to be overthrown.

Sue Simpson: But, it seems like we try to step in there too often. I don't know.

Nichole: Okay.

Louise Hall: And the thing is, today, if um something happens on the other side of the world, we hear it tonight. You know, when we were growing up...

Sue Simpson: Well, you hear it just right after it happens on CNN or—

Louise Hall: And sometimes we get one picture, and sometimes we get another picture and you don't really, unless you're there in the circumstance, you don't really know what's going on.

Nichole: Do you feel like the government sometimes keeps certain things away from its citizens?

Louise Hall: Yeah. I think that there are sometimes things that *need* to be kept away like when my brother was serving in Vietnam. If it would have saved his life, then keep it away from me. If it would save his life, uh, but we are, nationally, um, it seems like we're too concentrated on money.

Death and dying punctuate the air as Sue Simpson and Louise Hall address their concern about the “men from Bald Eagles” serving in both Afghani and Iraqi Wars. Rural Americans have a history of sending their young into military service to fulfill their patriotic duty and a tradition of receiving them back in body bags. It is no wonder Sue Simpson and Louise Hall protest America's occupation in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Persian Gulf before that. Hence, Louise reflects: “Anytime you have a loved one, or

someone you know...in the Bible Belt, [the wars are] constantly on your mind,” a comment that cannot be ignored or dismissed.

Tied to the potential loss of their fighting men, Sue contests U.S. political involvement with countries, peoples, and cultures seemingly resistant to a democratic form of government. Her sentiments are captured by the statement: “[It seems like] we want everybody to have a government like we do. They may not want it like that.” Still, the heart of Sue’s and Louise’s political protest is a desire to see the return of their locals from active duty.

Louise closes with a critique about living in a “sound bite” culture where American citizens never receive enough information to know what is happening at home or abroad, though media outlets like CNN have the technology to flash news stories across the airwaves as they unfold. When I prod her about wanting to know more, she answers in both the affirmative and the negative—not if such information will place our soldiers in harm’s way. She then avoids a more complete and possibly compelling answer by deflecting to another subject.

The Socio-Politics of Death in Disclosing Civil Religious Loyalties among Whites and Blacks

Death and dying in the public realm has much to tell about American values and allegiances especially in regard to the socio-political affairs we find relevant, address, and that affect us. In fact, southern civil religion and American civil religion function from the worldview of how local cultures understand their historical experience in light of death dealing and divine encounters. In short, there is an aspect of civil religion that is both ontological and existential.

Social group loyalties might be expressed from the purely socio-political but the socio-political must be held in tension with and contextualized from the perspective of people's lived realities and relationship to others in the world. We have seen that from Cindy Jones and Naomi Smith to Sue Simpson and Louise Hall. These four case studies demonstrate a link between how cultural groups and individuals view and process death and death's connection to the social and political. In Chapter 6, I describe the data collection process, capture the demographic profile of study participants, and explain why I use mixed methods (i.e. qualitative and quantitative) to investigate the religious and socio-political beliefs and practices of this rural community.

CHAPTER VI

A SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE RESIDENTS OF BALD EAGLES

Research Design

I have argued that the socio-political nature of death and dying is exemplified in the beliefs and practices of residents in the rural community of Bald Eagles. I now turn to describe the data collection process and demographic characteristics of study participants.⁸⁰

I entered the West Tennessee farming community of Bald Eagles and used ethnographic research methods to understand how residents synchronize their religious and political worldviews. Ethnographic research captured the thoughts, opinions, vernacular—the voice and actions—of community members. Additionally, ethnographic research allowed me to approach the broad question fueling this project: How should we live in America? Reductionism characterizes the American mindset on subjects of race, region, evangelical faith, and politics.

For instance, of the total number of research participants (n=83) in this study, thirty individuals identify as social conservatives, fifteen individuals as social liberals, and thirty-eight as social moderates. These numbers are telling because social

⁸⁰ A 2006 summer fellowship with Vanderbilt University's Project on Religion and Politics funded through The Center for the Study of Religion and Culture, supported my participation in the first of a three year longitudinal project on the relationship between religion and politics, administered in different locales throughout the state of Tennessee. Fieldwork was approved by the Vanderbilt University Institutional Review Board. That summer marked the first stage of my research plan.

conservatives, liberals, and moderates comprise our democratic nation *and* all three champion a *liberal* democracy. However, Americans have embraced a countercultural ideology pitting conservatives against liberals, by stereotyping liberals and their agenda as unchristian and bad. For an American nation-state that eagerly accepts liberal democracy, our numbers tell us that conservatism abounds across the land; isn't that oxymoronic?

I tackle reductionism around race, region, religion, and politics and engage in this data analysis to uproot traditional ways of thinking about mainline and black evangelicals, specifically, in addition to whites and blacks, more generally. Even though research is based on a small, rural, Southern and theologically conservative community, the findings are suggestive of what is happening throughout our American nation.

White Christians as fundamentally “socially and theologically conservative” and black Christians as largely “socially liberal and theologically conservative” are narrow typologies that have evolved into stereotypes foreclosing opportunities for members of each group to move beyond these constructs. This data, alongside the rest analyzed in this section, leads to the present conclusion: black and white Americans represent an array of complex ideological and theological positions not reducible to any sort of identity “politic.” Spaces for blacks and whites who fall outside of “tradition” need to be created without fear of marginalization, chastisement, or retribution.

I observed the town's public events on civic holidays (i.e., Memorial Day, Juneteenth, and Independence Day). Being present at town ceremonials like military funerals and being invited to participate in church events permitted entrée into spaces where religion was insinuated into political life and politics introduced into religious life.

Knowledge about this rural culture was additionally culled from reading the local newspaper, watching local television programming, and listening to radio programs.

I used participant-observation to study individual and group behavior and to record information about group and individual thought, speech, actions, and feelings in field notes. Unstructured and semi-structured interviewing of townsfolk, church, and political leadership paralleled participant-observation as tools for gathering more information. Reading and writing fieldnotes stimulated conscious awareness of the relevancy of civic holiday rituals to this town's people in both public and private settings. Alongside this, conversation with community members and event observation prompted my return to Bald Eagles in late spring 2008 to summer 2009.

In the second stage of research, I secured permission to conduct my studies in congregational settings from two of the community's key informants: the white pastor of a leading church and the black pastor of a historic congregation in the city of Bald Eagles. Participant-observation of both church communities included attending weekly bible studies, Sunday School, Sunday worship services, Christian liturgical calendar worship services (i.e., Ash Wednesday, Easter), special services reinforcing American nationhood (i.e., Memorial Day, July 4th, Thanksgiving), church events where townsfolk were invited (i.e., Women's Sunday, Mission Blitz), church business meetings and socials. In addition to active participation in the programs and ministries of both churches like Mission Blitz—a faith based community service day orchestrated by The First—I continued to attend public events and converse with townsfolk about life in Bald Eagles. In many instances, individual interviews were formally conducted.

I generated a questionnaire and distributed it to members of The First United Methodist Church and Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church which denoted the third stage of my investigation. A total number of thirty questionnaires between both congregations were completed accounting for six surveys from the predominantly black Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church and twenty-four surveys from predominantly white, The First United Methodist Church. Each questionnaire had a cover sheet requesting information about ethnicity/race, age, gender, occupation, years living in Bald Eagles, veteran status, theological status (i.e., conservative, moderate, liberal) and socio-political status (i.e., conservative, moderate, liberal). These nominal variables were used to conduct categorical analyses of the demographic data according to the theological and socio-political distribution of research participants.

I asked respondents to answer a series of questions. Sample questions included: What socio-political issues are important to you, locally and nationally? Why?; Do you believe American culture (media, the arts, social beliefs etc.) affects your religious belief and practice?; Do you identify as an Evangelical Christian? Please define the term.; How do you define patriotism?; Do we live in a post-racial society?; What are your beliefs and practices around death and dying? (*See Appendix A. Evangelical Faith and Southern Civil Religion Survey.*) Members in both congregations initially found the questionnaire complex and asked for simplification. Clarification of terms and questions were supplied by way of a clarification sheet with definitions of terms. (*See Appendix B. Clarification Sheet: Evangelical Faith and Southern Civil Religion Survey.*)

I used the questionnaire to inform the development of a semi-structured interviewing format conducted with fifty-five volunteers from throughout The First

United Methodist Church, Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church, and the outside Bald Eagles community, who were placed into focus groups. This was the fourth phase of research. Formal focus groups involved two–four participants per group and were organized along veteran, age, gender, church, community, and racial lines. The fifty five research participants formed twenty-five semi-structured focus groups. Black participants in the study represented fourteen focus groups and white participants, eleven focus groups.

I interviewed participants in the study rooms of the Bald Eagles State Community College. A few were held in natural occurring settings (i.e., homes, church, personal businesses). Informed consent of interviewees and focus group sessions were audio-taped. Interviews lasted from one and a half to four hours. However, the average length of group interviews was two hours long. Interviews were later transcribed.

Ethnographic field notes, questionnaires, individual, and focus group interviews gave me four data sets with analyzable content. Material in this collection of data were read to find emergent themes and analyzed to develop coding categories. I used the software program NVivo 8 to code the data into 24 categories that in some cases were divided into subcategories. Here is a sample of the categories: American culture on religion, defining evangelicalism, gender, leadership, patriotism as civil religion (subcategories: blacks on patriotism, whites on patriotism, faith and patriotism, military), regional culture, ritual (subcategories: myth, symbolism), socio-political issues (subcategories: family/youth, rights vs. responsibilities), socio-political issues with moral bent, and violence. I amassed comprehensive and rich knowledge about race, faith, ritual,

civil religion and even practices and beliefs about death and dying in this community of rural dwellers from this collection of data.

Data Analysis and Research Findings

I numbered and randomized twenty-two semi-structured focus group interviews but selected eleven for this study. Random.org is an internet random number service that generated the randomizing process. Because this group of eleven did not represent an even distribution of ages, I also randomized seven of the remaining eleven focus group interviews to capture younger voices (ages 19-50). I selected three of those seven focus group interviews for this study. In total, I randomized fourteen focus group interviews to add to the rest of the data I had collected and analyzed for this study. (*See Appendix C. True Randomness.*)

For this investigation, I focused on research subjects who completed the questionnaire and participated in the semi-structured group interviews in 2008-2009. A representative sample of eight-three individuals (n=83) were research participants. However, a sample of sixty-two individuals (n=62) are central to this analysis.

Eighty-Three Research Participants versus the Sub-Group, Sixty-Two Participants: A Summary of the Results

Regarding age distribution, 59-69 year olds predominate in both study populations for n=83 at 34.9% and for n=62 at 37.1%. Age distribution patterns then diverge for both full and partial populations. For n=83, the age groups are listed in descending order of statistical dominance: 20-45 years (27.7%), 70+ years (21.7%), and 46-55 years (15.7%). In the partial population, n=62, the age groups are listed in

descending order of statistical dominance: 70+ years (27.4%), 20-45 years (19.4%), and 46-55 years (16.1%). (See Table 1a. Age Distribution for n=83 and Table 1b. Age Distribution for n=62.)

In the City of Bald Eagles with a population of 17,170 residents, people ages 45-55 were projected for 2011 to be the most prominent group at 13% (2,238). Those ages 55-64 (11.7%) and 35-44 (11.7%) are equal in number; the 65-74 age group represents (8.7%), 20-24 years (7.3%), and 25-34 (12.6%) of the city's population.⁸¹

I assigned study participants to three groups: Group A (focus group interviewees), Group B (focus group interviewees), and the Individual Survey Group. An almost equal distribution of participants exist in all three groups for the full population (n=83). For the partial population, persons in the individual questionnaire group (46.8%) are slightly more represented than individuals in either of the semi-structured focus groups (38.7% and 14.5%, respectively). (See Table 2a. Group Distribution: Focus Group Interviewees and Individual Surveys for n=83 and Table 2b. Group Distribution: Focus Group Interviewees and Individual Surveys for n=62.)

In both populations, Caucasian Americans comprise almost twice the number of African Americans. For n=83, 60.2% vs. 39.8% of participants are white. Similarly, for n=62, the number is 64.5% vs. 35.5%. (See Table 3a. and Table 3b. Percent Composition by Race.) Women represent almost half of the study populations in both the n=83 and n=62 cases. (See Table 4a and Table 4b. Gender[ed] Participation.) In the city of Bald Eagles, women comprised slightly more than half of the population at 53.4% and men

⁸¹ Source: 2008 Demographic Data Bald Eagles/Bald Eagles County Chamber of Commerce (Orange, CA: DemographicsNow, 2007), 11-12.

46.6% of the population in 2006.⁸² The ratio of females to males in the study is not unlike that in the city of Bald Eagles.

With respect to occupation for n=83 and n=62, white collar professionals were the largest group represented (37.3% and 40.3%, respectively), the next largest group were service employees (22.9% and 24.2%, respectively). (*See Table 5a and Table 5b. Workforce by Occupation.*) Though the WalMart Supercenter is a service employer and one of the largest employers in the city and county of Bald Eagles, manufacturing (labor) still draws the largest percentage of employees at 34% of the county's population. Service industries (i.e., banks, hospitals, casinos, waste disposal, government) are a near second at 33% of the population.⁸³

The high percentage of white collar professionals drawn to this study is noteworthy given white collar employees compose a smaller percentage of the workforce than labor and service industry workers in the city and county of Bald Eagles. For n=83, labor employees are equal to retirees (8.4%) for those surveyed. For n=62, retirees and homemakers are equal (11.3%) and those in labor stand at (4.8%). According to the 2008 Demographic Data booklet generated by the Bald Eagles Chamber of Commerce the average number of employees on any given day is 10,934. Of the 7,498 subjects surveyed

⁸² Source: 2008 Demographic Data Bald Eagles/Bald Eagles County Chamber of Commerce (Orange, CA: DemographicsNow, 2007), 12.

⁸³Source: Statistical Directory, Bald Eagles/Bald Eagles County Chamber of Commerce (Bald Eagles, TN: Chamber of Commerce, 2008), 27.

for occupation, 3,736 (49.8%) are employed as blue collar workers yet 3,762 are employed as white collar workers (50.2%).⁸⁴

Participants in the n=83 group mainly identify as social moderates (45.8%) with social conservatives close behind (36.1%). Members of the n=62 subgroup almost equally identify as social moderates (45.2%) and social conservatives (43.5%). Not surprising is the small numbers of social liberals in both groups, n=83 (18.1%) and n=62 (11.3%). (*See Tables 6a and 6b. Socio-Political Representations: A Summary.*) As far as participants' theological identification, the n=83 group shows little statistical significance between theological moderates (48.2%) and theological conservatives (41.0%). Both theological moderates and conservatives are statistically equal at 45.2% and 43.5% in the n=62 subgroup. In both groups, n=83 and n=62, theological liberals are smallest in number at 10.8% and 11.3%, respectively. (*See Tables 7a and 7b. Theological Perspectives: A Summary.*) In the n=83 group, a mere 19.3% of the respondents have served the country as military personnel, while 22.6% of participants have been captured in the n=62 subgroup. Such numbers are miniscule in comparison to a geographic area that boasts unbounded patriotic loyalty to the country; not counted are men and women presently in military active duty. (*See Tables 8a and 8b. Veteran Status Distributed by Percentage.*)

Cross tabulating Race, Faith, and Politics for Sixty-Two Research Participants (n=62)

Now we turn our attention to cross tabulations of different combinations of variables in the n=62 set. Cross tabulation tables illustrate the ways in which respondents

⁸⁴ Source: 2008 Demographic Data Bald Eagles/Bald Eagles County Chamber of Commerce (Orange, CA: DemographicsNow, 2007), 17.

answered particular questions by demonstrating that the two or more variables being considered by each respondent is jointly distributed. For example, occupation is cross tabulated with race in *Table 9. Occupation Distribution in Black and White*.

Of the 22 African Americans randomly selected to be part of the subgroup of 62 individuals, the highest distribution of black employees were in the service industry (36.4%) and the professional arena (36.4%). This was not the case with Caucasian Americans. Of the 40 randomized individuals selected to be part of the subgroup, professionals (42.5%) far exceed the other occupational areas with service workers/homemakers in second place at (17.5%) each, combined to total (35%). In comparing whites and blacks, whites accounted for more than twice the number of professionals in the study 68% vs. 32%. Blacks, in contrast, had larger numbers in the service industry at 53.3% vs. 46.7%; the three individuals who identified as labor industry employees at 100% are also black.

With respect to race and age—(*Table 10. Age Distribution by Race*), the 56-69 age group was the largest of African Americans to participate in this study at 50.0%; following that was the 70+ year group at 22.7%. Both the 46-55 year old group and 20-45 year old group were at 13.6% for both age groups. Caucasian Americans had an equal distribution of 56-69 year olds and 70+ year olds at 30%, the next significant group was the 20-45 year olds at 22.5%, and 46-55 year olds were at 17.5%. Comparing blacks and whites with respect to age, we find whites predominate in all age groups in this study. The number of white people is three times more than blacks in the 20-45 age group (75% vs. 25%), more than twice the number of blacks in the 46-55 age group (70% vs. 30%), and approximately two and half times the number of blacks in the 70+ age group (70.6%

vs. 29.4%). The 56-69 group for whites and blacks are almost equal at 52.2% vs. 47.8%, respectively.

I looked to the socio-political realm to understand how blacks and whites think, ideologically. (*Table 11. Race from Socio-Political Perspectives*) The African American population reflects slightly more social moderates at 45.5% than social conservatives at 40.9%. The smallest group of African Americans in this study is social liberals at 13.6%. For the Caucasian American population, social conservatives and social moderates are equally represented at 45%, social liberals account for 10% of the participants in the investigation. Comparing whites with blacks in this investigation, we find whites are twice the number of socially conservative blacks (66.7% vs. 33.3%), higher in number than blacks as social moderates (64.3% vs. 35.7%), but slightly larger in number than blacks (57.1% vs. 42.9%) as social liberals.

Seizing the opportunity to understand how blacks and whites think, theologically, our results display the following—(*Table 12. Rural Whites and Blacks from Theological Perspectives, n=62*). Similar to the results for the socio-political chart, whites who identify as theological conservatives and theological moderates stand equally at 45% each; theological liberals comprise 10% of the 40 participants in this subgroup. African Americans are represented by slightly more theological moderates (45.5%) than theological conservatives (40.9%); theological liberals account for 13.6% of the 22 participants in this group. When we contrast whites and blacks, our findings show whites are more highly represented in each of the three areas under consideration. Twice the amount of whites identify as theologically conservative than blacks (66.7% vs. 33.3%), almost twice the numbers of whites than blacks identify as theological moderates (64.3%

vs. 35.7%), and slightly more whites than blacks claim to be theological liberals (57.1% vs. 42.9%).

I cross tabulated race and gender in *Table 13. Gender[ed] Participation along Racial Lines*. Among African Americans, men represented 59.1% of participants, while women were 40.9%. For Caucasian Americans, men were 47.5% of research subjects, while women were 52.5% of those who were actively involved. Thus, intra-racially, more black men than women actively engaged in this study; yet, more white women than white men were more highly represented.

In comparing genders, white women were almost two and a half times more likely to be involved than black women at 70% versus 30% for the 30 females who participated. At the same time, white men were significantly larger than black men in this study at 59.4% versus 40.6% of the 32 males who were participants. Hence, the most active group in this study were white women, followed by white men, black men, and lastly, black women.

When I cross tabulated veteran status with ethnicity, (*Table 14. Veteran Status by Ethnicity*), I found a majority, 82.5%, of Caucasian Americans answered in the negative to the question of being a veteran. For African Americans, 15 answered in the negative at 68.2%. In comparing whites and blacks (48 individuals in total), 68.8% of whites were not veterans, while 31.3% of blacks were not veterans. Upon examining those who answered affirmatively to veteran status, we see among whites, 17.5% are veterans and among blacks, 31.8% are veterans. However, once whites and blacks are compared, findings indicate that 50% of whites and 50% of blacks comprise the 14 individuals who answered affirmatively to being veterans. In 1990, 32 men in the City of Bald Eagles

were employed by the Armed Forces, the number projected for 2011 is 26 men.⁸⁵ For the three cities that comprise Bald Eagles County, those numbers jumped to 48 men in 1990 and for the 2011 projections, it jumped to 35 men and women who serve the country in the Armed Forces.⁸⁶

The numbers of men serving the country in the Armed Forces are small though Bald Eagles County has historically sent men and some women into the Armed Services. As is the custom, young men and women who are students at Bald Eagles County High School are members of Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) and enlist during their senior year of high school. The Bald Eagles City High School tends not to draw recruits. Local soldiers are typically members of the National Guard Unit or active duty military assigned to the likes of Fort Campbell, Kentucky or Fort Hood, Texas. Presently, soldiers from that West Tennessee regional area hail from Bald Eagles and surrounding counties as far as Memphis, Tennessee.

The cross tabulation of age and socio-political status for both races produces the following information. (*See Table 15. Age Groups by Social Status.*) The most prominent age group among social conservatives are the 56-69 year olds (44.4%), followed by 70+ year olds (25.9%), 20-45 year olds (22.2%) and 46-55 year olds (7.4%). Interestingly among social liberals, the group that predominates is 70+ year olds at 42.9%, followed by 56-69 year olds and 20-45 year olds who are equally distributed at 28.6% each; 46-55

⁸⁵Source: 2008 Demographic Data Bald Eagles/Bald Eagles County Chamber of Commerce (Orange, CA: DemographicsNow, 2007), 18.

⁸⁶ Source: 2008 Demographic Data Bald Eagles/Bald Eagles County Chamber of Commerce (Orange, CA: DemographicsNow, 2007), 9.

year olds are not represented in this grouping. Among social moderates, 56-69 year olds are slightly higher than the other groups at 32.1%, followed by 46-55 year olds at 28.6%, 70+ year olds at 25%, and 20-25 year olds at 14.3%.

Comparing social conservatives, liberals, and moderates within each age group produces some profound findings. In the 20-45 year age group, social conservatives are dominant at 50.0% with social moderates following at 33.3% and social liberals at 16.7%. In the 46-55 age group, social moderates are dominant at 80.0%, followed by social conservatives at 20.0%. Social liberals are not present in this age group. For 56-69 year olds, social conservatives are largest at 52.2%, social moderates at 39.1%, and social liberals at 8.7%. For the 70+ age group, social conservatives and social moderates are equal at 41.7% and social liberals stand at 17.6%. These patterns defy conventional thought about social conservatism and social liberalism. Conventional thinking suggests social conservatives are commonly older and social liberals are younger. However, these results propose the reverse: the older an individual becomes, the more moderate to liberal he or she likely becomes, meaning younger adults might be more rigid in thinking and behavior than older adults.

Regarding age and theological orientation—(*Table 16. Age Groups by Theological Orientation*)—we find the most theologically conservative age group to be 56-69 year olds (44.4%) with 70+ year olds (25.9%), 20-45 year olds (22.2%), and 46-55 year olds (7.4%) following behind. The most theologically liberal age group is 20-45 year olds at 42.9%. At 28.6%, 46-55 and 56-69 age groups are equal; 70+ individuals are not represented in the theologically liberal category. As for theological moderates, the 70+ age group at 35.7% and the 56-69 age group at 32.1% are almost equal. Following both

groups are the 46-55 year olds at 21.4% and 20-45 year olds at 10.7%. In sum, 56-70+ year olds comprise 70.3% of theological conservatives, while ages 55 and under constitute roughly 71.5% of theological liberals.

Comparing theological conservatives, liberals, and moderates for each age group, in the 20-45 age range, theological conservatives dominate at 50%, followed by theological liberals and moderates at 25% each. Among 46-55 year olds, theological moderates are predominant at 60%, followed by theological conservatives and liberals at 20% each. In the 56-69 year age group, theological conservatives are highest at 52.2% followed by theological moderates at 39.1%, and theological liberals are a mere 8.7%. For the 70+ age group, theological moderates are in the majority at 58.8% followed by theological conservatives at 41.2%; theological liberals are not represented in this group. Regardless of age and race, the numbers display the preeminence of theological conservatives and moderates over theological liberals in this rural community.

Cross Tabulating x Three Variables = Findings at (n=83)

In the next tables, I simultaneously cross tabulate three variables to yield the following results. Table sixteen measures theological positions and socio-political perspectives of all Research Participants (n=83) against each age group—(*Table 17. Theological Orientations and Social Perspectives against Age Groups*). Of significance is the following finding. Regardless of age group, social conservatives tend to also be theological conservatives. For 20-45 years social and theological conservatives are represented at 100%; 46-55 years social and theological conservatives at 100%; for 56-69

years both social and theological conservatives at 91.7%; and for 70+ years old both social and theological conservatives are at 87.5%.

While this is a trend, we still witness a .066667 deviation from the norm: two of the thirty who identified as socially conservative are *not* theologically conservative. Both individuals can be accounted for in the 56-69 year and 70+ year age groups. In the 56-69 year age group, one individual identifies as socio-politically conservative but theologically moderate at 8.3%. Likewise in the 70+ age group, the other individual identifies as a social conservative at 12.5% and a theological moderate.

Another matter of great importance regarding this cross tabulation is the existence of theological conservatives who are *not* social conservatives. While a pattern of theological conservatism implies social conservatism across age groups on this table, this pattern also deviates from the norm. In the 20-45 age group, theological and social conservatives predominate at 60%; for the 46-55 age group, theological and social conservatives are dominant at 100%; in the 56-69 age group, theological and social conservatives are in the majority at 91.7% and; for the 70+ group, theological and social conservatives stand at 87.5%.

Of the 34 individuals who label themselves theological conservatives across each age group (20-45 years with 10 people + 46-55 years with 4 people + 56-69 years with 12 people + 70 plus years with 8 people = 34 people), 6 individuals are *not* socially conservative. Four of the six individuals who identify as socially liberal and socially moderate at 10% and 30%, respectively, are in the 20-45 year age group. The fifth individual who is a social moderate at 8.3% is in the 56-69 year age group and the 70 plus group is represented by the last individual who is also a social moderate at 12.5%.

These 6 of 34 individuals represent a 0.176471 deviation from the norm. Deviations from the standard challenge prevailing ideas about the direct correlation between theological and social conservatism; theological conservatism does not unquestionably anticipate social conservatism nor is the opposite the case, social conservatism does not consistently reflect theological conservatism.

Nonetheless, the relationship between theological conservatism and social conservatism is notable, as our findings show. Considering the data macrostructurally, the numbers leave us with the following: social conservatism controls more of the worldview of U.S. residents than does theological conservatism. Broadly speaking, theological conservatives are more fluid in their outlooks than are social conservatives. That is, theological conservatives have a greater chance of being socially liberal and moderate than do social conservatives being theologically liberal or moderate; social conservatism is more strongly linked to a “conservative mindset” than is theological conservatism. Such knowledge has ramifications for how Americans play their politics; in other words, both conservatisms in various ways become the subtext for socio-political trends that wind throughout the medley of terrains landscaping this country.

The data additionally offers the following conclusion: older people are more open minded than younger people, supported by a socially conservative statistic showing individuals 56 and over as more liberal than those ages 55 and under when age groups are compared along socially conservative, moderate, and liberal axes. Contrary to the dominant narrative asserting older adults as more rigid in their thoughts and actions than younger adults, this finding also emerges in the shadow of and has implications for a

citizenry frequently deciding on social policies that pertain to shaping and building the nation; simply, those things that contribute to the flourishing of America.

Even now, the executive and legislative branches of government are haggling about how to reduce a formidable national debt to balance America's budget. One of the proposals is deep entitlement benefit cuts to Medicare, Social Security, and Medicaid. These types of benefit cuts will undoubtedly impact low income wage earners and families while also directly affecting the elderly who have invested in the growth and development of the nation throughout their lives. With respect to the aforementioned perspectives on older and younger adults, issues like these provoke the following questions: Who is most influential in deciding which social concerns will structure public policies? Which group(s) will benefit from such decisions?

The Theology and the Politics of Race: A Social Scientific Perspective on Black and White Social Liberalism and Theological Conservatism

In the article entitled, "Scripture, Sin and Salvation: Theological Conservatism Reconsidered," authors Lynn M. Hempel and John P. Bartkowski posit:

Race is a second critical fault line within conservative Protestantism (Steensland et. al. 2000; see Bartkowski and Matthews for review). Black theological conservatives exhibit more liberal attitudes on social justice issues (e.g. racial equity and social welfare policies) while the theological conservatism of whites is tied more closely to political and social conservatism.⁸⁷

Hempel and Bartkowski declare what has become a truism in black and white conservative Christian circles and even in more liberal public spheres—a universally

⁸⁷ Lynn M. Hempel and John P. Bartkowski, "Scripture, Sin, and Salvation: Theological Conservatism Reconsidered," *Social Forces* 86, no. 4 (June 2008): 1650.

accepted axiom contending blacks are theologically conservative and socially liberal while whites are more theologically, politically, and socially conservative than their black counterparts. Their statement is all the more important because mainline and black evangelicals are central to my research in rural Bald Eagles. This last table explores theological position, ethnicity, and social perspectives where I test Hempel and Bartkowski's supposition that black people are socially liberal but theologically conservative and white people are socio-politically and theologically conservative, against my research data results (*Table 18. Theological Positioning, Race, and Socio-Political Perspectives*). In this section, I explore how ways of thinking about mainline and black evangelicals affect and infect public perceptions of whites and blacks as social groups.

In this study, I find 91.7% of African Americans are strongly drawn to social conservatism and theological conservatism. They additionally classify themselves as social and theological moderates at 62.5%, followed by social liberals and theological moderates at 60%. African Americans who classify as social liberals and theological conservatives or social and theological liberals are small but equal in number at 20%.

Social conservatism and theological conservatism appeal to Caucasian Americans at 94.4%; close behind are social and theological moderates at 86.4%. Farther away are social liberals and theological moderates at 60%. Such findings are crucial because they describe how African Americans and Caucasian Americans self-identify and how they perceive themselves in this new century.

However, when we examine the data from a macrostructural perspective, of the total number of research participants (n=83), thirty individuals identify as social

conservatives, fifteen individuals as social liberals, and thirty-eight as social moderates. These numbers are telling because social conservatives, liberals, and moderates comprise our democratic nation and all three champion a *liberal* democracy. However, Americans have embraced a countercultural ideology pitting conservatives against liberals, by stereotyping liberals and their agenda as unchristian and bad. For an American nation-state that eagerly accepts liberal democracy, our numbers tell us that conservatism abounds across the land; isn't that oxymoronic?

Upon comparing Caucasian Americans and African Americans, we witness the following cases. Caucasian Americans are one and half times more likely to be social and theological conservatives than African Americans (60.7% vs. 39.3%). However, Caucasian Americans are also four times more likely than African Americans to be socially and theologically liberal (80.0% vs. 20.0%). In contrast, black Americans are four times more likely to be social moderates and theological conservatives than white Americans (80.0% vs. 20.0%). Further, in comparison to whites, blacks more readily identify as socially liberal and theologically conservative at 100%.

The above demographic findings suggest. First, white Evangelicals are frequently typified as “social and theological conservatives” and black Evangelicals as “social liberals and theological conservatives” because we have developed a habit of *comparing* both social groups though members of each group reflect a spectrum of ideological and theological perspectives. Comparing both groups inclines us to develop an understanding of each culture *solely* in relation one to another and thus eviscerates the essential components of each social group depriving us comprehension of each culture as a vital and sui generis social entity. Second, though the traditional labeling for blacks and whites

is plausible, both groups need to recognize and develop categories beyond such constructs to better understand and explain their theological and socio-political realities in America. Third, how white Americans and black Americans perceive themselves is at times at variance with the ways in which they are apprehended by their respective “publics”; this warrants extending to both social groups opportunities at self-definition and self-identification.

I tackle this subject and engage in this data analysis to uproot traditional ways of thinking about mainline and black evangelicals, specifically, in addition to whites and blacks, more generally. Even though research is based on a small, rural, Southern and theologically conservative community, the findings are suggestive of what is happening throughout our American nation.

White Christians as fundamentally “socially and theologically conservative” and black Christians as largely “socially liberal and theologically conservative” are narrow typologies that have evolved into stereotypes foreclosing opportunities for members of each group to move beyond these constructs. This data, alongside the rest analyzed in this section, leads to the present conclusion: black and white Americans represent an array of complex ideological and theological positions not reducible to any sort of identity “politic.” Spaces for blacks and whites who fall outside of “tradition” need to be created without fear of marginalization, chastisement, or retribution.

Understanding the Theology and Socio-Politics of Mainline and Black Evangelicals

American Evangelical Protestantism is composed of a heterogeneous mixture of denominations with diverse institutional histories, doctrinal systems of belief, and

behavioral patterns. Evangelicals are conservative Protestants. Denominational sects widely associated with conservative Protestantism and therefore considered evangelical in the past and present are: the Churches of Christ, Charismatics, Holiness, Pentecostals, Baptists, Wesleyans, Nazarenes, Black Methodists, Lutherans of all types, and even Seventh Day Adventists, to name a few.⁸⁸

Because a medley of subcultures comprise American Evangelical Protestantism, theologians and historians, such as Richard Quebedeaux and Robert Webber, have striven to create typologies that define who an evangelical *is* and *is not*. Scholars, within and outside the evangelical camp, have encountered challenges to defining evangelicals along the boundaries of theology and history; nevertheless, they still press towards a precise definition of evangelicalism and who belongs to such a group even with the maze produced by the 21st century splintering of “evangelical” groups.

Webber takes no exception in finding a typology that works. Developing his fourteen group categorization, he employs a social compositional framework to “ideal-type” evangelicals because he explains:

All these groups reflect a theological unity at the center—in their confession of Christ and the doctrines which the Protestant Church has always believed. But because of their various historical origins and cultural shapes they reflect a diversity of expression in theological particulars and practice in areas where differences of opinion have been tolerated.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 24.

⁸⁹ Robert E. Webber, *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 31, quoted in Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 35-36.

After much deliberation, I adapt two of the fourteen subcultural types to fit members of The First United Methodist Church and Tabernacle Baptist Church in Bald Eagles because many label themselves, “evangelical.” The First, as a church body, is assigned to *Mainline* Evangelicalism. Mainline Evangelicals stress a “historic consciousness that returns as far back as the Reformation” and are classified by “movements in major denominations: Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopal and Baptist.”⁹⁰ In contrast, Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church is designated a *Black* Evangelical body, although I question the degree to which members embrace The National Association of Black Evangelicals as a symbolic presence. Nonetheless, in their every day speech and actions they emphasize a “black consciousness”⁹¹ that cannot be denied.

By attending to the mainline and black Evangelicals of Bald Eagles in this section, I am afforded the opportunity to think critically about moving beyond the constructs of “theological” and/or “social” conservatism which reinforces society’s reductionistic thinking *about* and *toward* evangelicals. Our efforts are to gain entrée into their theological stances on socio-political and moral concerns like homosexuality, affirmative action, poverty, and teenage pregnancy. Our aspiration is to form a more empathic perspective on and response to the people of this community and others like them in wider America.

⁹⁰ Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 36.

⁹¹ Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 36.

Conservative, Progressive, and Emergent Evangelicals: Moving Beyond Constructs

White evangelicals cannot escape the “conservatism” related to the “evangelical” identifier. Fundamentally labeled “social” and/or “theological” conservatives, they tend to exhibit moral intolerance on issues like homosexuality, pornography, abortion, divorce, school prayer, imprisonment, and capital punishment.⁹² The wider American public perceives them as politically intolerant to special populations like undocumented immigrants *and* documented immigrants, as they deny them the protection of civil liberties.⁹³ Despite this characterization, conservative white evangelicals are unquestionably politically astute as candidates garner their support during election cycles because of their strength as a voting bloc.

Even considered to be racially intolerant, white evangelicals are thought to support discrimination in housing, employment, and marriage to maintain the status quo.⁹⁴ Though likeminded on some issues, black evangelicals are frequently abstracted from public policy conversations based on factors like America’s historical legacy of slavery and struggles around the social justice oriented Civil Rights and black Nationalist

⁹² Karen Stenner, “Three Kinds of ‘Conservatism’,” *Psychological Inquiry* 20 (2009): 150. Though I use the terms (i.e. racial, moral, and political intolerance) to describe and point out how the American public perceives white evangelicals, Stenner discusses racial intolerance, political intolerance, and moral intolerance as examples of ‘status quo conservatism’ and as statistical measures of general intolerance of difference. Earlier she defines ‘status quo conservatism’ as an inclination to favor stability and preservation of the status quo over social change.

⁹³ Karen Stenner, “Three Kinds of ‘Conservatism’,” *Psychological Inquiry* 20 (2009): 150.

⁹⁴ Karen Stenner, “Three Kinds of ‘Conservatism’,” *Psychological Inquiry* 20 (2009): 150.

Movements. As well, the American public fails to identify the relevance of their voice on issues that impact the nation.

Race and gender become fault lines in conservative Protestantism, particularly in evangelicalism, when the treatment of marginalized groups in American history is considered and when “evangelicals” are intractably labeled “monolithic.” To move beyond constructs into a refurbished interpretation and understanding of white and black evangelicals, we must remember, as philosopher of religion Andre C. Willis, writes:

U.S. evangelicals of all stripes are deeply modern; they presuppose liberal values of individual agency of human subjects, embrace rational propensities of the human animal, confirm the constitutionality of representative democracy and its concomitant market arrangements around private property, and they prioritize freedom as a necessity for subjects, communities, institutions and nations. They have a strong desire to influence democratic culture and politics along the lines of Christianity as they believe it has been revealed to them.⁹⁵

With Andre C. Willis’ declaration comes his recognition that evangelicals in the early 21st century are now separated into three groups: conservative, progressive, and emergent. If evangelicals, white and black, can theologically be typified according to each of these three groups, then a similar argument can be made, politically. This is the case. Conservative evangelicals lean towards the moderate and extreme right, ideologically, while progressives and emergent evangelicals are bent towards the left and far left. Bald Eagles’ residents can too be classified according to these three groups even if they tend towards the more moderate and conservative sides of the spectrum.

To a large degree, reductionism marks our thinking about evangelicals. To challenge such thinking, I did an in-depth exploration of socio-political issues paramount to white and black townfolk in Bald Eagles. While conducting research on the *mainline*

⁹⁵ Andre C. Willis, “Theology in Post Democracy,” *Political Theology* 10.2 (2009): 212.

evangelicals of The First United Methodist Church, we learn white members of this community express concern about: 1) the local economy, job creation, and mentoring young people to prepare them for the future job force; 2) young people and the moral life; 3) the threat of secularization on the wellbeing of family, church, and community; 4) the welfare state and American dependence on the federal “big” government; 5) family values and issues related to the sanctity of life (i.e., women’s role in society, teenage pregnancy, and abortion); 6) the defense and leadership of America (i.e., safeguarding the American flag and American way of life, Constitutional freedoms: freedom of religion, school prayer, bearing firearms, freedom of press and speech); and 7) the relationship between church and state.

Surveying the black citizens of Bald Eagles along with the *black* evangelicals of Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church we find black townsfolk care about: 1) the national economy and the recession’s impact on the country; 2) the implications of delimiting social welfare programming and potential effects on increasing poverty; 3) Constitutional rights and “rights” abuses; 4) American military power and the Military Industrial Complex; 5) educating black youth; 6) African American youth, drugs, and gang culture; 7) black men and the penal system; 8) the demise of the black family; and 9) the implications of a “post-racial” society—socially, economically, and ideologically.

Both whites and blacks in this rural community share similar concerns about the longevity of our nation’s current wars and strong positions on the growing gay rights movement. These are the ties that bind whites and blacks together. In this last section, each of the three forthcoming cases and analyses advance a new “hermeneutic” about white and black evangelicals making Willis’ argument credible and therefore, true.

Tom Belkin: The Media contributes to the Reductionism surrounding Evangelicalism

Tom Belkin is a 50 year old white American worker who has been living in Bald Eagles for five years. A family man, he is actively involved with the ministries of The First United Methodist Church while also attending law school in Memphis. He identifies as a social and theological moderate. Asked about his stance on “evangelicalism” in addition to the national and local issues of concern to him, he comments:

Tom Belkin: I don’t identify with the term as it is used by our media today. I am not a social conservative bent on interjecting my personal religious and moral standards into law of the land. That is what I perceive as the usage of Evangelical Christian by the media now.

I do believe that most Protestant churches are evangelical in a Biblical sense. I am not exactly sure about the Methodist Church. We do believe in baptism of infants and we don’t then require a public confession of conviction of sin and remorse to be considered a church member. I personally believe there is a time when each of us becomes aware of our personal sinful nature and realizes we can’t save ourselves. We must turn to Christ. I don’t think this must come as some blinding, sudden, and traumatic event. It can be the result of teaching and eventual understanding.

Tom Belkin: The issues that are of primary importance to me are related to economic opportunity in all of the diverse groups in our society. The extreme stratification of our society by economic level is causing a new generation of people to feel abandoned by all of the existing social institutions, including our churches. The existing churches in poorer levels of society are struggling to reach the young people in the neighborhoods because of the alienation they feel. The jobs that were available for people to have an alternative to welfare, that gave the opportunity for a decent life within their community, are vanishing. They are faced with the option of giving up their cultural identity and trying to break into closed ranks of another culture or falling into a culture of welfare and/or crime. This is a national problem manifested on a local level.

Tom Belkin: The injection of religion into the issues regarding birth control is also a concern to me. I see this as an ethical issue, but not a religious one. Our modern society has pushed back the age of adulthood to a point that is actually several years past the age when our bodies naturally start telling us to bond together and mate. We have created a structure that makes it very difficult for young adults with children to continue their education to the level necessary to prosper. This has driven society to recognize the need for birth control, even for married couples.

Pre-conception birth control, by whatever method available, is generally accepted now by most churches, but abortion is a major issue where the churches seem led to take a front line position. I don't understand or agree with this. The Bible is filled with examples of God ordering the death of huge groups of people for one reason or another. We currently have many other types of killing in our society that are not viewed as murder under law or perceived as a religious. And even if we do choose to consider it a sin, we don't try to criminalize all sin. Why is this issue one where the churches feel the need to demand criminalization of sin?

Tom Belkin is evangelical, a *mainline* Evangelical, more progressive in thought and action. His critique of media is an implicit argument against their role in contributing to the reductionistic culture around the term, "evangelical." According to Belkin, the media portrays all "evangelical" Christians as "social conservatives" inclined towards insinuating their religious and moral beliefs into every aspect of American daily life.

He takes exception to that caricature offering his slant about the nature of Protestantism, and particularly of the evangelical variety. He closes his commentary making clear statements about: 1) his desire for economic parity amongst diverse groups; 2) his resistance to making birth control a religious rather than a medical or ethical issue; and 3) his objection to the Church's disparity in ranking "sin." In Belkin's words, "...we don't try to criminalize all sin. Why is this one [abortion] where churches feel the need to demand criminalization of sin?"

Rebekah Coleman: A Solution to the Cycle of Inner-City Poverty—Follow the Rules

Introduced earlier in this work, Rebekah Coleman is a forty year old married mother of three young boys who has resided in Bald Eagles for nine years after moving from Memphis. Actively involved with The First United Methodist Church, she represents a new generation of lay leaders at church. Rebekah is a theological and social conservative. She begins this exchange sharing her desire to improve the lives of inner city black children through her church work in that area; the conversation however shifts to her position on teenage pregnancy and its linkage to cycles of poverty.

Rebekah Coleman: I have a real heart and passion for inner city, the inner city. Um, worked there for three years in Memphis and, um, just had to recruit tutors to come and tutor the inner-city children. It just breaks my heart to know that these inner-city children have to live on junk food because they don't have access to fresh vegetables and fruits. And, have a mother that doesn't want them, and a dad that they don't even know, and um, there's just a real burden in my heart for that. And um, it's just so hard to break the cycle. And I don't know how you go about doing it, and I don't know how, how it ever stops.

There's a family in our church that came and, there's like twelve of 'em, and there's just lots of anger issues and volatile situations and, and our church opened up our arms to 'em, but what we tried to instill in these children is there's rules. There's rules for our kids, and there's rules for you. And, they didn't want the rules, so they left. Yeah, which is sad.

They had a free meal offered to them every Wednesday night, we had bible activities planned and they chose not to obey the rules. And, it's really hard in situations like that, but I have, I just have a little burden in my heart for that. I'm real sensitive to that, and it breaks my heart. I don't know how you break the cycle, because it seems like it's never ending.

Nichole: So, so are you talking about the cycle of poverty, or the cycle of lack, or...

Rebekah Coleman: Well, the cycle of poverty, because they're not educated, they don't have a mother who will sit there with them and read their AR books. And, then, they get so behind in school. With this No Child Left Behind in school, a lot of times they're just bumped and so they get so frustrated that they just end up dropping out of school, and getting pregnant and having another child and here goes the cycle.

Repeat, then repeat, then repeat. Um, and I don't know how to fix it. I don't know how you fix it. But...

Nichole: Yeah, I don't know either.

Rebekah Coleman: And, I promise you, and I hate to say this, one of those little girls was already startin' to dabble, in promiscuity, and so, I just see before long that she will be a young, young pregnant mother.

Nichole: MmHm, yeah, more than likely a teen-aged mom.

Rebekah Coleman: MmHm. If she makes it to teen-aged years.

Nichole: Oh. How old is she?

Rebekah Coleman: She's like ten.

Nichole: Oh. Okay.

Rebekah Coleman: It's very sad. But, that that is a real passion of mine.

Nichole: Okay.

Rebekah's social burden is inner-city poverty. Her wrestlings involve effective ways of addressing and preventing the cycle of poverty caused by limited educational

opportunities, school drop-out rates, sex, promiscuity, and teenage pregnancy. Her work with black families and youth is laudatory; however, what cannot be dismissed is her judgment about why the black family under her church's care left the congregation—"they didn't want to follow the rules."

Without explicitly articulating it, her position speaks for the many that maintain the premise that cycles of poverty produce or reproduce the welfare state. Bald Eagles' residents share a strong communal belief in individual responsibility, hard work, and self-reliance often challenging the idea of a welfare state. Their resistance to the federal government's role in "taking care of you"—primarily in the form of federal assistance programs for low income women and children—is revealed through conservative attitudes toward the poor and racial minorities who are then stigmatized as abusers of the 'social security system.' It does not help that throughout the nation political rhetoric becomes a push for such branding which manifests as local intolerance towards both groups. Thus, even if a mainline Evangelical, Rebekah's statement casts her as a social conservative.

Karen Stenner pens the article, "Three Kinds of Conservatism," to explain the differences between 'status quo conservatism,' 'laissez faire conservatism,' and 'authoritarianism (social conservatism),' not as political ideologies but rather as psychological dispositions akin to universal personality dimensions.⁹⁶ More than studying how such "conservatisms" work politically, her purpose is to address the medley of value commitments that individuals tensively hold together.

⁹⁶ Karen Stenner, "Three Kinds of Conservatism," *Psychological Inquiry* 20 (2009): 144.

Rebekah's comment about the family "not following the rules" illustrates the "authoritarianism (social conservatism)" that Stenner defines as "an enduring predisposition, in all matters political and social, to favor obedience and conformity (oneness and sameness) over freedom and difference."⁹⁷ Stenner further argues:

that authoritarianism is an individual predisposition—a system of *functionally related* stances—addressing one of those 'basic human dilemmas...common to all mankind' (Dukitt, 1989, p. 72)⁹⁸: that of the appropriate balance between group authority and uniformity and individual autonomy and diversity...authoritarianism is far more than a personal distaste for difference (and libertarianism more than a mere preference for diversity). It becomes a normative 'worldview' about the social value of obedience and conformity (or freedom and difference), the prudent and just balance between group authority and individual autonomy (Dukitt, 1989), and the appropriate uses of (or limits on) that authority. This worldview induces both personal coercion of and bias against different others (racial and ethnic outgroups, political dissidents, moral 'deviants') as well as political demands for authoritative constraints on their behavior.⁹⁹

Said aphoristically, "authoritarianism (social conservatism)" favors group loyalty, authority, obedience, and behavior over the individual. Stenner later explains "authoritarians" are boundary-maintainers and norm-enforcers who respond to the threat of a complex and diverse society by delineating between "us" and "them." What makes

⁹⁷ Karen Stenner, "Three Kinds of Conservatism," *Psychological Inquiry* 20 (2009): 142.

⁹⁸ John H. Dukitt, "Authoritarianism and Group Identification: A New View of an Old Construct," *Political Psychology* 10, no. 1 (1989) 72, quoted in Karen Stenner, "Three Kinds of Conservatism," *Psychological Inquiry* 20 (2009): 143.

⁹⁹ Karen Stenner, "Three Kinds of Conservatism," *Psychological Inquiry* 20 (2009): 143.

“us” an “us”, according to her, are common authority (oneness) and shared values (sameness).¹⁰⁰

Threats to unity and uniformity activate this latent predisposition. Social conservatives prefer the cohesion of the collective over the uniqueness of the individual. Group authority becomes the response to threat while supporting a desire for simplicity. That is what drives Rebekah Coleman’s more social conservative bent, mirrored in her commentary about the family who left the church: “There’s rules for our kids, and there’s rules for you. And, they didn’t want the rules, so they left. Yeah, which is sad.” A need for social processes more than individual processes justifies how Rebekah rationalizes the effect of the family’s departure on the congregation and explains her type of social conservatism as a mainline evangelical.

Roger Charles Courtney: Affirmative Action’s Bad Connotations in Post-racial America

Roger Charles Courtney is a college educated retiree from the West Coast who worked as a telecommunications engineer. Introduced earlier in this work, he moved to Bald Eagles two and a half years ago. Though he is not now active in a local congregation, he identifies as a Christian. An African American, he has served in the Armed Forces from 1955-1959. At seventy-one years of age, he is a social and theological conservative.

Frances Trumpton is black American, college educated, and a retired auto dealer. He has lived in Bald Eagles for twenty-four years, is sixty-two years old and is a veteran of the Vietnam War. He serves in the leadership of one of the local Baptist churches. He

¹⁰⁰ Karen Stenner, “Three Kinds of Conservatism,” *Psychological Inquiry* 20 (2009): 143.

is a social and theological moderate. In this final conversation, Roger Charles Courtney speaks with Frances Crumpton and me. Affirmative action in a post-racial society is the topic under discussion.

Nichole: So, I'm going to nuance the question for you a bit and ask "does a post-racial society include other people and ethnic groups?" You can still answer the original question, though, in the way I asked it.

Roger C. Courtney: My experience has been a little different from his. I worked for the government all my life so I never had any problems. I always got my raises and my promotions and what I wanted, so I guess I got it pretty easy. So, I've never felt any pressure in being different or being otherwise, because I was treated just like everybody else was. So that's my attitude. I just hadn't had to deal with that.

Nichole: O.k. but you also grew up in California.

Roger C. Courtney: California, yea. No doubt about it.

Frances Trumpton: Allow me to ask a question so that we can all get a better understanding. Would you have experienced the same occupational and career deal had it not been for the equal opportunity law etc.? The government ain't always been straight up because the government is the same one that had segregated armies in the 40's and the 50s or whatever.

Roger C. Courtney: You're right.

Frances Trumpton: So, yeah, our experiences have been different, but whatever level you have attained in government services, had it not been for the Hank Aarons and the Jackie Robinsons of the world...

Roger C. Courtney: ...had it not been for the people who had gone before me. Off course, the place where I worked, people had gone before me and opened doors for me. But I was the first African American my department, ever. And that company had...and that department had been there for the vehicles and buses—the transportation department had been there for a while. I was a telecommunications engineer, and I helped to put together their communications system

for all the trains, buses, and trucks. There had never been an African American in that department; I was the very first in 1972.

Frances Trumpton: O.k. what did your dad do?

Roger C. Courtney: He was a driver was the City of Los Angeles.

Frances Trumpton: So, he worked in government, in a sense. So, like what I was talking about in private industry.

Roger C. Courtney: Oh yeah, yeah, we all got different situations.

Frances Trumpton: I look on my experience for example. I became a corporate representative for Ford and I showed up to be the representative for an area down in Dothan, Alabama; and I would get out of my car, back in those days everybody wore a dark suit, necktie, and I got out and carried a briefcase—my boss and I. So, after I had been in that territory for several months and they had gotten comfortable with me, they said, “Man, we are so relieved to find out that y’all weren’t from the NAACP because we had just fired a black guy.” And this is in south Alabama in the early 70s, so that’s the kind of things that we had to face back then so that we have to now position ourselves so that our children don’t have to go back to these same kinds of things.

Roger C. Courtney: Umm...huh...sure.

Frances Trumpton: So, that’s why affirmative action and those kinds of commitments from the courts that say, “you got to treat him equal,” like the EEOC and affirmative action and those things are a *must* as we go forward.

Nichole: O.k. so I got that. But I still am asking you, “I hear the two experiences which are different and also regionally, I mean, out West has a different history. And in terms of black people it has a totally different history. But, today, do you believe we live in a post-racial or post-racist society? and is that inclusive of other races and ethnicities?”

Roger C. Courtney: Yeah, I think we do, I just don't think that people have the time to plot and scheme and sit around and think about how they are going to hurt people of another race and ethnicity. I do believe we live in a post-racial society because my experiences have been different. I have prospered and have seen those around me, prosper. I have a different experience.

There was talk about "quotas" where I used to work—people were not thought of as good enough. "Quotas"/ "tokenism"/ "affirmative action" had bad connotations. When affirmative action started to change, it included other minorities and women. But, the original intent of affirmative action was to secure employment for black males. Recently, those marching for affirmative action (especially in California where I am from) have been Asians (i.e., UC Irvine). Affirmative action has served its purpose. Before Coretta Scott King died, she said the new frontier of the Civil Rights Movement is the Gay Rights Movement. Supreme Court Justice nominee Sotomayor recently ruled against eighteen whites and one Hispanic who took the test to become captains in the New Haven Fire Department because no African American had passed the test. These men were denied their promotion. Because this stuff is divisive, we need to get away from it.

Affirmative action is confusing because you don't know who is favored from one day to the next. Since we have these positions, those who are qualified (regardless of race and ethnicity) should be considered. Thinking about representation in society and other issues that arise around affirmative action is problematic. It has run its course.

For instance, let's return to the Supreme Court nominee Judge Sonia Sotomayor. The feeling is that because she is a woman and a Latina she will make better lawful decisions and these decisions will be based on her experiences. Personal experiences should not be involved in making law and especially Constitutional law. The thought is: "Get rid of all the white guys and put all the women in there. Get rid of all the Hispanic guys and put the black guys in there." It has run its course.

The only reason Sotomayor was chosen is because she is Hispanic and a woman. That is playing into identity politics regardless of qualification. Other people have her similar story. But, they were not chosen because it's not their turn. Once again, I say, it has run its course.

Roger Charles Courtney is black, evangelical, and a social conservative. His social conservatism shows through his ideology on affirmative action. Never disregarding the historical weight of forbears in paving his way to a successful career in the Los Angeles City government where he was the first African American in his department in the 1970s, he is still vocal about its limitations (e.g., “Quotas”/ “tokenism”/ “affirmative action” had bad connotations) and confident that affirmative action is a vestige of an American past. The death of affirmative action is proof we live in a post-racial society.

Affirmative action is puzzling for Courtney who disagrees with any sort of privileging of race and gender over qualifications and merit. His contestation of such preferential treatment extends to even the Supreme Court nominee Judge Sonia Sotomayor who had been portrayed, during the media's frenzy and within public circles, as the president's most recent Supreme Court choice because she is a woman and Latina.

Courtney sees no room for ignoring qualifications and merit in the fight for equalizing an unbalanced system; we hear it in his biting criticism of affirmative action: “Get rid of all the white guys and put all the women in there. Get rid of all the Hispanic guys and put the black guys in there.” In Courtney's final analysis, affirmative action no longer serves any valid purpose because it is not based on the value of diversity and inclusion instead its basis is “representation in American society” where the “representative” is arbitrarily selected to a meet the needs of the people during particular historical moments.

His critique does prompt me to ask: If affirmative action is in need of an overhaul, can we trust the American public to find a suitable replacement that is equitable for all? How would that system be constructed to fit social needs for representation and diversity? Courtney is flat-footed in his social conservatism around an issue that provokes serious debate amongst racial and ethnic groups, individuals in the educational arena, institutions in corporate America, and mostly all areas of American society.

***The Cultural Significance of American Evangelicals:
Racial, Gendered, Religious, and Socio-Political Identities***

Moving forward, new constructs require more fluid standards for defining “white,” “black,” and “evangelical.” Reductionism denotes our current attitudes towards evangelicals and limits our understanding of the term “evangelical” and them as a social group. Religiously, diverse Protestant denominations and Christian groups constitute what it means to be “evangelical.” Politically, “right/left” and/or “liberal/conservative” designations do not adequately capture *who* or *what* an evangelical is. Evangelicals cannot even be strictly classified according to theological belief systems, even if to a greater degree than the religious and the political.

Evangelicals are white but also black, male and also female, social conservatives and also social liberals, theological conservatives as well as theological liberals, though these latter typifications are held in tension, one to another. In other words, rarely will a person find an evangelical who is both a social and theological liberal although among mainline Evangelicals they are more likely to exist. Most importantly, as Andre C. Willis notes, evangelicals are part of the American fabric. Their active civic engagement and passion for a representative democracy, though at times exposing them to malignment, is what makes them culturally significant at the dawn of the 21st century. In the final section, Chapter 7, I demonstrate how Bald Eagles—a politically patriotic, religiously Protestant, and racially diverse town—uses ritual as a device to harmonize disparate theological beliefs and civic practices with the result being a well-orchestrated, safe, and livable rural community.

CHAPTER VII

rites of intensification shape the good person and the good society

Honoring the Dead: A Community Processional for a Fallen Soldier

On the morning of Friday, January 16, 2009, I jumped into my car to join the procession honoring Corporal Keith Eric Essary. The procession had been delayed for a few days because his body had not yet returned to Bald Eagles. On Sunday, January 11, 2009, the headlines of the *Bald Eagles State Gazette* read: "Local Soldier Killed in Afghanistan." On January 8, 2009, according to the newspaper account, Anita Essary, Keith's grandmother, received a knock at the door from two soldiers from Fort Campbell, Kentucky around 9:30 pm. They were casualty-notification officers there to tell her about the death her grandson.

Essary was the second casualty from this area whose life has been taken in the War on Terrorism. According to the paper, he was the latest casualty in the United States Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, which had lost 561 US military personnel since it began. Essary was killed in the village of Maiwand, Afghanistan which is 50 miles northeast of the city of Kandahar in Kandahar province. While the details surrounding his death had not been released, the cause of death has been determined as an impact from an improvised explosive device (IED) while he was on dismounted patrol. Due to this suicide bombing, also killed were another American soldier and three Afghan civilians. Essary was a 2006 graduate of Bald Eagles County High School who enlisted in the Army at the beginning of his senior year.

Based on Sunday, January 11, 2009 gazette headlines which read: “Honoring One of Our Own,” I went to observe how the City and County honor their military dead. It was a bitterly cold morning yet multitudes of people—old and young—braved single-digit temperatures to salute the hearse carrying the casket with Corporal Keith Eric Essary’s body. The procession journeyed up 51 Bypass North towards Bald Eagles County High School. Because I had nowhere to park my car, I joined the automobile procession at the corner of 51 Bypass North and North Sampson Ave (turns into Highway 211) where the grocery store, Country Mart, is located. Throngs of people (3 lines deep) lined up on both sides of the streets, many with their hands on their hearts, to pay tribute to this fallen soldier.

The car procession included City and County police, fire trucks, civic leaders in cars, and other dignitaries. The air was solemn yet honorific. As we approached the Bald Eagles County High School, the students had obviously been given permission to leave class for this event. They lined the road on both sides of the street. Especially significant was the salute by the JROTC as the procession passed by. I later learned that Essary was a member of the group while a student at Bald Eagles County High School. The students dispersed, going back to classes, after the hearse was completely out of sight. I continued in the procession to see where the hearse would eventually stop.

It ended in the downtown area of the second city comprising Bald Eagles County—Screaming Eagles. The motorcade stopped in front of the East Bald Eagles United Methodist Church. Downtown Screaming Eagles is a mere two to three block stretch and traffic slowed to a halt as we were approaching the church. Even there, in that three block stretch, hundreds of people lined the streets. No longer wanting to navigate

the crowds in this small space, I decided to turn around and return to the City of Bald Eagles.

A Civil Religious Funeral for a Local Hero

Corporal Keith Eric Essary, according to the State Gazette, received the lateral promotion from *Specialist* to *Corporal*, upon orders from Fort Hood, Texas on the Monday morning after he was killed. Bald Eagles County High School was the funeral site for Corporal Keith Essary's body where the school gymnasium drew approximately five hundred to seven hundred community members. The casket was draped with the American flag with a poster sized picture of Corporal Essary standing to the right of it.

Next to that was a podium with a microphone beckoning those who would pay tribute to this local hero. To my right the Bald Eagles County ROTC cadets were seated. Attendees were solemn. Scattered throughout the audience were photographers and television media personnel. Army National Guard dignitaries faced the cadets and me.

Presiding over the funeral was Reverend James Wolfgang and First Lieutenant Ted Randall. Reverend Wolfgang opened the ceremony with a Christocentric reading and then a prayer committing Essary back to God in Christ. Following this was the first of many musical tributes. Wolfgang again approached the podium beginning his comments with a reflection on Thursday's procession to comfort family and friends. He commented: "This nation honors and respects humanity and dignity. Guys like Keith give us the gift of life through their death. Our nation will continue until the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ comes. Sometimes men like Keith suffer the ultimate sacrifice. They also suffer

emotional wounds that need healing: these wounds are also a sacrifice. I would now like to read selected verses from Romans 8.”

Wolfgang decides to read the following verses: “Now there is no condemnation for those who live in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). But you are not controlled by the flesh; you are in the spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you (Romans 8:9). We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). Consider the sufferings of the present time as not being equal to the glory about to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18). If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31). Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (Romans 8:35). No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Romans 8:37).”

Upon Wolfgang completing the verses from Romans 8, James from East Bald Eagles United Methodist Church who watched Keith grow up, rendered another tribute in song: “How Great Thou Art.” As he sang, I looked to my left and realized I was sitting in a row of young people who quite evidently were Essary’s friends. It was difficult for them to refrain from the quiet sobbing elicited by the loss of a loved one. Turning away from these mourners, I looked behind me to see Tennessee State Troopers lining the gymnasium wall.

Wolfgang then read New Testament scriptures, Luke 12:32-38 and Ephesians 6:10-18 (the armor of God). He highlighted that our struggles are not against enemies of the flesh and blood but instead forces of evil. He encouraged us to take up the full armor of God and to fasten the belt of truth around our waists. He read from First Thessalonians 5:17 to encourage us to pray without ceasing; he exhorted us to put on the breastplate of

hope and to don the helmet of salvation. After his exhortation, Reverend Wolfgang started his homily with an illustration.

Reverend James Wolfgang: I had a friend named Ben Stout who observed that armor is placed in the front of the body but then you are left with nothing to protect your back except God who has your back. Soldiers combat wherever they are called. Paul, in Ephesians, shows us the ideology we combat is an evil ideology. It is hard to conquer; it takes more than flesh to overcome spiritual enemies. We need to be neither hot nor cold about evil. Christians must never surrender to evil. And why would we never do so? Because Christ's limitless love and compassion will always triumph over Satan."

Reverend James Wolfgang: Why surrender to evil even if it is something that can kill your body? God gives to his children, such as Keith, his eternal life. With Christ, Keith is more than a conqueror. Switching the subject and addressing the audience, Wolfgang states: 'With Christ, you can face the future. You can face what might attack and oppose you in life. No one ever knows when that great moment in life will be. You will never know when the greatest moment in life will be — when you depart this earth to meet Christ. Who better than our Creator would know what is best for us? Resting in Christ is your spirit's DNA. Living in Christ, you will have a restful and joyous life. It might be as short as Keith's 20 years — shorter or longer. If it was lived like Keith, however, it was lived well.

Reverend James Wolfgang: To be with Christ is to be part of the triumphant Church in heaven; that is an unmatched gift. In spite of our sorrow, loss, and grief, we can still experience joy and peace. God's gift of peace is greater than sorrow. Keith lived his life with purpose and was therefore prepared to meet the Lord. Let us be like Keith who must have said, 'I am prepared to meet evil even the worst kind of evil in Afghanistan because I have Jesus as Lord and Savior. Even if death takes me, I am more than a conqueror.

Nichole: At the close of Reverend Wolfgang's sermon, a recorded song by Johnny Cash is played. The lyrics for Johnnie Cash's song are: "I will drink the cup, the poison overflowing. I will lift you up, watch over where you are going. First one in, last one gone, I'll be the rock to stand upon. My spirit aches, and I can't stop this river flow; in fear, I take this breath, labored. This could be my last and final hour. In faith and hope I live my life for you. I pray Psalm 23 in the meantime. I will drink the cup, the poison overflowing. I will lift you up, watch over where you are going. I'll be the first one in; the last one gone. I'll be the rock to stand upon—for you, for you, for you."

Nichole: Captain Trevor Vogel, the Company Commander, offers a reflection after the tribute in song, ends.

Captain Trevor Vogel: I'm blessed to attend today. The Taliban controlled the area with no presence of officials for over a decade. Keith was a dedicated and loyal soldier. His dedication and loyalty were displayed to soldiers around him especially when he helped in constructing the floor at the local community center. His eyes would light up when he saw children around him. He was always willing to help. He was a man of character and loyalty. He knew what this meant and unhesitantly defended our freedom. Let this flame of patriotism that burned so brightly in this community never flicker. Keith joined the Armed Forces to serve this country. You, too, can serve this country as citizens of character, strong morals, and values. Our policemen, firemen, and factory workers serve this country by exemplifying strong morals, character, and values. By being a good neighbor, you serve this community. This area truly represents America—it is America—and it has never forgotten our sons and daughters! May God bless you, your family, soldiers, and God bless America!

Nichole: Afterwards, Army chaplain, First Lieutenant Ted Randall, walks to the podium to offer his reflections on Keith Essary from I Samuel.

Army Chaplain Ted Randall: In I Samuel, David mourns his fallen soldier friend Jonathon. *The mighty* has fallen in the midst of the battle. *The mighty* continue to fall in the midst of the battle. O, how *the mighty fall* in battle! However, the Mighty One has not fallen in battle! God knows the depth of your pain. He will sustain, provide for you, and uplift you during this time. The Psalmist reminds us that 'God is the strength of my life and portion, forever.' For some of you, your faith is a comfort. Some of you are angry because of this evil. Yet, God is not offended by your anger. God is not intimidated by your questions. If you are wondering why this has happened, ask Him (God).

Army Chaplain Keith Randall: I pray that Keith's closest friends will eventually be able to laugh about the good times. A memorial garden will be established in his honor. Keith's life must be celebrated even in face of the difficult days ahead. In your grief, remember to tell his story. While you mourn his death, continue to celebrate his life.

Nichole: Another recording is played at the close of the Chaplain's message.

The words of the audio recording follow. “I can rest in peace. I’m one of the chosen ones. I’ve made it to Arlington. Son, this is what it cost to keep us free! I’m proud to be on this peaceful property. I’m on sacred ground. I can rest in peace. I’m one of the chosen ones. I made it to Arlington. And when I hear twenty-one guns, I will know they brought another hero home to us. We can rest in peace. We are the chosen ones. We made it to Arlington.”

Nichole: As we approach the close of this service Corporal Essary is awarded the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart. Military service members are asked to stand to receive both honors that have been bestowed upon this serviceman. Ending this two hour civic minded and faith filled service, we sing a song followed by the benediction given by Reverend Wolfgang.

Benediction: May the peace of God that surpasseth all understanding, guard your hearts, and minds in Christ Jesus.

Essary’s military funeral is a compelling example of a Rite of Intensification. I witnessed rites of intensification in both black and white communities in the rural West Tennessee of Bald Eagles on many occasions but to an exceptional degree on civic holidays where the dead were memorialized (i.e., Memorial Day, Veteran’s Day, Independence Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day). Rites of Intensification are ceremonies that reaffirm the identities, beliefs, values, commitments, ideologies, and structures of social groups and institutions. They are Rites of Passage, *writ large*, “making up the great periodic ceremonies of a society, as well as the less spectacular daily, weekly, monthly and yearly rituals...[which] help to reinforce the habitual relations within the society.”¹⁰¹

Rites of passage restore order to a family unit after individual crisis; yet, rites of intensification recover equilibrium after group disturbances.¹⁰² These disturbances are

¹⁰¹ Eliot Dismore Chapple and Carleton Stevens Coon, *Principles of Anthropology* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1942), 508, 528.

¹⁰² Eliot Dismore Chapple and Carleton Stevens Coon, *Principles of Anthropology* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1942), 507.

cyclical in nature. They emerge during circadian, seasonal, annual, and other cycles.¹⁰³ Notable examples of these are the speeches and patriotic displays (e.g., flying the flag and singing the national anthem) that mark American nationhood during special holidays like Inauguration Day and Presidents' Day; displays of military might and tradition as viewed at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery; and even the special programming and events (e.g., prayer, fasting, Seven Last Words services, caroling) that distinguish religious occasions like Easter and Christmas.

Through the performance of values and commitments, rites of intensification assure participants of their allegiances and loyalties. Here is the linchpin for my assertion that studying death rituals refine our understandings of race, evangelical faith, and southern civil religion. For as stated in the introduction, by way of re-inscribing the continuity, power, and authority of social groups and communities, rites of intensification, specifically those politicizing death, served in rural Bald Eagles to show the similarities of and distinguish between blacks and whites, their faith beliefs and practices, and how they enact civil religious loyalties. Rituals of intensification performed on civic holidays like Memorial Day, Veteran's Day, and Juneteenth additionally provided social cohesion and solidarity to each of these differing segments of this regional population.

Second, the funeral of Corporal Keith Eric Essary is paradigmatic of the civil religious nature of rural Bald Eagles where evangelical faith supports regional and national commitments disclosing racial values. Civil religion operates like an "institution" for it is fundamental to the character of this rural community and manifests

¹⁰³ Eliot Dismore Chapple and Carleton Stevens Coon, *Principles of Anthropology* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1942), 507.

structurally in the social behavior of the people. Hence, as I previously declared in the introduction while I focus on the ways death is politicized in the realm of ritual, this work also becomes a study of two institutions, the Church and civil religion, and how each functions within both racial groups as well as throughout the community.

Ritual in the Vision of a Good Person and Good Society

Sociologist Robert Bellah published *The Good Society* in 1991 to explore the power of institutions in shaping American public and private life and to argue for their role in helping Americans lead more fulfilling lives. The text addresses the questions: “How ought we to live? How do we think about how to live?” However, the true focus of the four authors’ writing is “the patterned ways Americans have developed for living together, what sociologists call institutions.”¹⁰⁴ According to the authors, Americans do not realize the extent to which institutions influence their daily lives nor are they aware of the ways in which their existences rely upon institutions. Still, institutions are subject to the societal conditions under which they are established and thus are, at times, in need of reformation or complete transformation to ensure freedom, justice, peace, and the pursuit of happiness. Whether Americans identify with cultural, political, religious, and/or economic institutions, these principles are the moorings for their quest after the “common good” or the “good of the common.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Robert N. Bellah, Richard Marsden, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swindler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart*, in *The Good Society*, Robert Bellah et al. (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 4.

¹⁰⁵ Dennis McCann, “The Good to Be Pursued in Common,” in Oliver F. Williams and John W. Houcks, eds., *The Common Good and US Capitalism*, in *The Good Society*, Robert Bellah et al. (New York: Random House, 1991), 9.

Global events contribute to American strivings after the “common good.” As I write, a democratic America is witnessing social revolutions throughout North Africa and the Middle East—Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya, and Yemen—while Americans also live through a national crisis spawned by corruption, greed, and the mismanagement of economic institutions. Such an economic upheaval has impacted global markets. This proves institutions are not always healthy and therefore become ill-suited to meeting the needs of the people and to creating a “good society.” The consequences of such institutional failings and demise can be revolutionary movement to change the state of and the conditions under which people live.

In a similar vein, ethicist and practical theologian Don S. Browning tackles the queries: How should society be? How ought it function? In what ways should it be transformed? in *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*. These questions, if proposed succinctly, reflect Robert Bellah’s query: How ought we live? Browning’s approach to actualizing a “good society” deviates from Bellah’s in his offering a “critical hermeneutic theory of society.”¹⁰⁶

Bellah’s theory of the “good society” models the ways in which the social sciences have submitted to a critical social theory; nevertheless, Browning’s proposal broadens critical social theory by “taking history, its religious classics, and hence theology as sources for its vision of the good person and the good society. Critical theory alone tends to neglect history and its religious classics.”¹⁰⁷ Elementary to Browning’s

¹⁰⁶ Don S. Browning and Terry D. Cooper, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004), 112-113.

¹⁰⁷ Don S. Browning and Terry D. Cooper, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004), 113.

theory is the “revised critical correlational analysis” where Browning adapts a hermeneutic perspective on psychology *and* theology to guide the critical conversation between Christian thought and the modern psychologies.¹⁰⁸

Fittingly, Christian theology and the contemporary psychologies are distinctive as *interpretative* rather than *explanatory* frameworks for understanding human experience.¹⁰⁹ A mutually critical conversation between psychology and religion recognizes the limitations of each discipline to exclusively interpret human experience yet adds to the fund of knowledge about culture. When both enter the dialogical

¹⁰⁸ Don S. Browning co-authors *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies* to assert that modern psychologies — theories that have emerged during the 20th century — possess religio-ethical dimensions. He associates modern psychologies with four cultures: the culture of detachment, culture of joy, culture of control, and the culture of care — to denote their capacity to guide and order people’s inner life, offer purpose for living, and be the standards for individual and/or group behavior, in light of the demise of institutional religion. Because Christian thought has an affinity for these cultures, Browning places Christian theology into conversation with the modern psychologies. He continues, “If these different psychologies were strictly psychologies, Christian thought would have little say about them [the cultures] (p.5).” Conversely, Christian theology is also critical of these cultures. In conversation with the modern psychologies, Christian thought not only augments the production of knowledge but also critiques the quasi-religious character of the modern psychologies. A hermeneutic philosophy of social science facilitates Browning’s undertaking.

It is a philosophy of science arguing against the objectivity of science and against the notion that empiricism (the scientific method) is only the source of truth and knowledge. Browning is part of the post-modern school (i.e., Thomas Kuhn) proposing that scientific findings are historically conditioned. He adopts Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutic philosophy to show how the hermeneutical model explains theology’s relationship to psychology. The hermeneutic experience is a process of interpretation and understanding. Gadamer’s philosophic hermeneutic is a movement into dialogical community where effective history (linguistic and cultural traditions) and prejudgements (inherited interpretive perspectives) point to the contextual nature of thinking. In the process of understanding, historically conditioned psychology and theology are brought into dialogue with one another. Their discussion produces a ‘fusion of horizons,’ knowledge from both fields morphing into a the fount of new information about human experience. This new understanding, according to Browning, is then applied to the happenings of daily life to give shape to and develop our practical moral reasoning (“phronesis”), the guiding force behind how we should live our lives. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (New York: Continuum, 2000).

¹⁰⁹ Don S. Browning and Terry D. Cooper, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004), 6.

community with their respective prejudgments and interpretive lenses both contribute to generating new information that more satisfactorily describes the human condition.

Though the task of theology is to interpret the entirety of life while the task of psychology is to interpret the individual,¹¹⁰ Browning declares that in dialogue each discipline approaches and enriches practical moral thinking about daily existence by asking: How ought we live?

Robert Bellah's "good society" and Don S. Browning's "critical hermeneutic theory of society" inform my thinking about rites of intensification in cultivating the good person and developing a good society. Do these rites communicate knowledge about how we should live? Where messages provoked by death shift the "intensity" of interaction in human relationships, Does a more harmonious or more violent American culture derive from practicing more politically laden rites?

Rites of Intensification in Public and Private "Worship" Spaces

Ritual spaces facilitate rites of intensification. To study these rites serving to concretize social identities and ideologies, induce conformity and allegiance, to reassert order and structure in groups, is to examine sacred activity and spaces. Though anthropologists Eliot Dismore Chapple and Carleton Stevens Coon elaborate on the mechanics of rites of intensification, I characterize the inner workings of ritual space that accommodate such rites as witnessed in rural Bald Eagles. First, ritual space is moral and ordered space. It induces social order. Bald Eagles small town atmosphere draws residents who relish quiet and safe living, the reflection of orderly and stable

¹¹⁰ Don S. Browning and Terry D. Cooper, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004), 6.

surroundings. Ritual operates in public and private “worship” spheres in continuity with this deliberately planned and orchestrated milieu.

Rituals in the civil religious public sphere mirror rituals in the church’s private worship sphere. Public worship spaces attract the entire Bald Eagles community or at least, segments of the population, while private worship spaces are designated according to denominational affiliation, age, and racial groupings. Liturgy, symbols, as well as religious and historical mythology embody and organize each space. Both spaces parallel one another. Each space reinforces the other.

Faith and politics enjoy a symbiotic coexistence made possible by the ease with which religious symbol, language, history, and myth is insinuated into centers of political activity and political symbols, language, history, and myth are welcomed into the church house. In the introduction, I recount the 2006 Memorial Day ceremonies held in the black and white communities; and in Chapters two and three, I detail the black and white versions of worship services addressing America’s economic crisis to foreground the power of religious ritual to fortify group allegiance and identity. In public and private “worship” circles where ritualizations, symbols, and language mimic each other, group loyalty is solidified and sustained. Elaborating on this idea, Èmile Durkheim asserts:

As rich in emotive power as an idea may be, it cannot add anything to our natural vitality, it can only release emotive forces that are already within us, neither creating nor increasing them. From the fact that we imagine an object as worthy of being loved and sought after, it does not follow that we should feel stronger. Energies greater than those at our disposal must come from the object, and, more than that, we must have some means of making them enter into us and blend into our inner life. To achieve this, it is not enough that we think about them; it is indispensable that we place ourselves under their influence, that we turn ourselves in the direction from which we can best feel that influence.

In short, we must act; and so we must repeat the necessary acts as often as is necessary to renew their effects. From this standpoint, it becomes apparent that the set of regularly repeated actions that make up the cult regains all its importance. In fact, anyone who has truly practiced a religion knows very well that it is the cult that stimulates the feelings of joy, inner peace, serenity, and enthusiasm that, for the faithful, stand as an experimental proof of their beliefs. The cult is not merely a system of signs by which faith is outwardly expressed; it is the sum total of means by which that faith is created and re-created.¹¹¹

Symbols (i.e., the Cross, American flag, Tennessee State flag, Christian flag) demarcate the sacred centers of ritual movement and space in Bald Eagles. As Durkheim theorizes, faith is strengthened when it grows up around a sacred center where ritual action is repeatedly expressed. Reciprocally, where repetitive action surrounds a sacred center, group behavior is cemented.

Second, ritual spaces are cultural spaces. In the community of Bald Eagles, religious practices are cultural practices as evidenced by the re-enactment of civil religious and faith centered ritual in public *and* private domains. Regarding this, Clifford Geertz explains “religion as a cultural system” saying:

...the culture concept to which I adhere has neither multiple referents nor, so far as I can see, any unusual ambiguity: it denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.¹¹²

The symbols that dwell in ritual spaces—myth, language, art, sacred artifacts, words, hymns, and song etc.—are “meaning-full” containers that become the blueprint for what

¹¹¹ Èmile Durkheim, “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,” in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Michael Lambek (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 47.

¹¹² Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 89.

people believe (worldview) and how they behave (ethos). Therein lay the essence of religion as a cultural system; religion dictates thought and action in the place where ritual is able to furnish a schema for how to act.

Third, ritual spaces are repositories for the “emotional” life that underlie the dialectical nature of humanity. Death, in general, affects the emotions but politically oriented death definitively inflames passion. In chapter two, Harry Ray’s extreme emotional display reminds us that all deaths are not the same. He states: “I mean I tell you somebody can get up and exercise free speech about how they wanna bomb the Pentagon, well, uh I hate it. I think they oughta be boiled, but the fact is we gotta be willin’ to fight for their right to do that or patriotism doesn’t mean anything. So, that’s my thoughts on it.”

In chapter one, Cowboy “Wonderful” Treadway expresses emotion to a similar degree upon describing his exchange with his supervisor: “He responded that way because I was upset every time I woke up and found out there was two and three soldiers killed and stuff like that... This guy was a big-time plant manager, and he says ‘They knew what they were doin’ when they volunteered’ and I looked at him and I said, ‘You know, that’s the most ignorant comment I ever heard and I find that really disturbing, you being a plant manager with this position and you gonna make an ignorant statement like that. We don’t join the military to die.’ You know what I’m sayin’? Even though we know that’s-a possibility.”

In the chapter on “Constructing Ritual” in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Catherine Bell attests to the dialectical nature of ritual defined by the “underlying dichotomy between thought and action.”¹¹³ She argues:

Ritual emerges as a means for provisional synthesis of some form of the original opposition...ritual is a dialectical means for the provisional convergence of those opposed forces whose interaction is seen to constitute culture in some form.¹¹⁴

In the above examples, an unfortified building represents a “dead” military nation and alongside “dead” soldiers morph into sacred symbols unconsciously reifying America’s might as a leading nation in the world.

Regarding sacred symbol systems, Geertz tells us they are cultural patterns that provoke moods and motivations affirming *models for* and *models of* reality. Said another way, sacred symbols induce emotions and attitudes that shape how we live (ethos) and the ways in which we think about our universe (worldview). Likewise, the ways in which we carry out our daily tasks and conceive “of nature, of self, and of society”¹¹⁵ give meaning to the symbols we find sacred.

In being reductionistic, I understand Geertz as also saying our emotions and attitude bear heavily on our sociology (how we interact with others) and psychology (how we think, see ourselves, and respond to the world) and vice versa our sociology and

¹¹³ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 21.

¹¹⁴ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 23.

¹¹⁵ Clifford Geertz, “Ethos, Worldview, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 127.

psychology inform emotional life. In that process we are then affirmed in how we come to understand cosmology and ontology. That is the “real” of reality.

Further, Catherine Bell insists that ritual space can withstand the dialectics of cosmology and ontology—the self in relation to the universe—that distinguish humans from animals. In short, the emotional life lays bare the dialectical nature of humanity and thereby, the townsfolk of Bald Eagles. Rituals resolve the dialectical tension that might prove problematic if there were not a socializing force to hold sometimes dichotomous, binary, and at times explosive dispositions and emotions. Says Catherine Bell:

...the dichotomous nature of conceptions of order (worldview) and dispositions for action (ethos) is fundamental to Geertz’s approach, as is their resolution in such symbolic systems as ritual. The *temporary resolution* of a dichotomy is cast as the central dynamic of life.¹¹⁶

In sum, the social solidarity effected by rites of intensification; birth, reformation, and reaffirmation of rural life; and resolution of townsfolk dialectical nature, occurs in public and private ritual spaces. More specifically, public and private “worship” spaces are liminal spaces where cultural sedimentation exists yet cultural transformation germinates, thus securing the identities of and producing social allegiance amongst members of the Bald Eagles community. Though Arnold Van Gennep was the first to identify the ‘liminal’ phase as a transitional phase in “the rites of passage,” anthropologist Victor Turner much later undertakes in-depth study and analysis of the *limen*, the threshold, initially characterizing it as a place of chaos, confusion, and social limbo.

For a rural community like Bald Eagles that has a rich public and private ceremonial life and regularly participates in ritual, I refer to Victor Turner to give expert

¹¹⁶ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 27.

opinion on what is happening with the community in liminal space. Writing *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, Turner says:

In writing *The Ritual Process*, I noted that: Liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority are conditions in which are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art. These cultural forms provide men with a set of templates, models, or paradigms which are, at one level, periodic reclassifications of reality (or, at least, of social experience) and man's relationship to society, nature, and culture. But they are more than (mere cognitive) classifications, since they incite men to action as well as thought.¹¹⁷

Liminal space is a place of great irony and paradox for while it affords 'antistructure'—the relinquishing of social structures, orders, hierarchies, and norms that is the seedbed of innovation and creativity—it is embodies 'structure,' effectuated by cultural forms.

Cultural forms supply ritual participants with designs for readjusting their relationship to nature (the outside world), society (others), and to the psyche (themselves).

Further, liminality is structured by forces that compel individual and group compliance as both the means to and the price of belonging, solidifying identity, and engendering security. In other words, the group pressure to conform is based on a system of discipline comprised of three major components: pride, respect, and honor. Seemingly simplistic, the discipline system nonetheless is a socializing force, demarcating to residents of Bald Eagles, both young and old, the boundaries of good and bad behavior. Inextricably connected to this disciplinary ("honor") system are feelings of marginalization and isolation. These rural dwellers teach us that marginalized groups compensate for being on the periphery by developing and/or complying with a system that creates dignity and adulation, operating even in liminal space.

¹¹⁷ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 52.

Communitas also functions in liminality. *Communitas*, liberation of human capacities from the normative constraints of social status and order,¹¹⁸ is an attribute of and predicated upon ‘antistructure.’ In liminal space, *communitas* affords the leveling of distinctions between us/them, superior/inferior, male/female, leader/follower. In simultaneously supporting ‘antistructure and structure’, liminal space as ritual space distinguishes the individual from the group while also fortifying human interconnectedness “inciting men to action and well as thought.” Thus, ritual space absorbs the tensions that emerge between social structures and self as a result of the pressures of daily living. It mediates the dialectical relationship between self and social structures that can readily innervate and/or depress individuals and social groups.

Ritual Space and Institutional Cultures: Conflict in “Holding” Environments

In chapter two, we met Muffin Morgan who finds Republican political rhetoric on healthcare and abortion both frustrating and discordant; their conservative pro-life stance is anomalous to real life circumstances. For her, those left to suffer in silence because of Republican party politics are women and children with no other alternatives to a life of poverty. If abortion is not an option and if healthcare is not option, she asks: Who is going to care for the babies? While Morgan is pressed about the care of the children, her faith convictions drive her into another direction with the following confession: “You know, it’s not...like myself, I *wouldn’t* have an abortion, but what are you gonna do with these women out here?”

¹¹⁸ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 44.

In this example, Muffin's personal politics and public faith collide. Her case epitomizes the at times incongruous nature of religion and politics materializing as a dichotomous human nature. Where ritual sacralizes institutional spaces, I have witnessed institutional cultures as having the potential to oblige the tension(s) between religious and political beliefs as well as practices. In *Bald Eagles*, these institutions are the Church and civil religion where ritual space, object relationally speaking, is a Winnicottian "holding" environment for ambivalent feelings.

"Good" Mothering and "Normal" Splitting in Psychic Development

Object relations theory is a post-Freudian theory, inspired, at various levels, by Freudian thought. Freud suggested an individual's emotional attachments to primary figures (i.e., father) in life, figured prominently in one's self-representation and God-representation. Moreover, Freud understood an important aspect of healthy psychic as well as physical growth and development is one's ability to relate to an "object," individuals and/or things outside of the "self."

Freud's notion of object-relatedness has been extended, confirmed, and replaced by different object relations theorists; yet, his thoughts remain as the framework for object relations theories which are psychoanalytic, in nature. Even if theorists cannot agree on a definition of object relations, they all agree on the importance of relationship, more than drives, as the building block for healthy self-development.¹¹⁹ A child's psychic development and maturation process happens in relationship to a primary caregiver

¹¹⁹ Jay R. Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, 12 ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 3-4.

(i.e., mother) attuned and adapted to the needs of the developing child, according to physician, psychoanalyst, and 20th century object relations theorist, Donald W. Winnicott.

The “good” mother provides care to the developing infant by creating a “holding” environment. The holding environment is non-traumatic and unobtrusive guaranteeing the safety of the child. The sphere additionally reflects the sensitivity of a mother who “holds” the emotionally developing child. This environment is the basis of “normal” (non-defensive) splitting in a maturing child.

With regard to the holding environment and normal splitting, James S. Grotstein in *Splitting and Projective Identification* writes:

In the meanwhile, I hope it suffices to say that normal splitting—cognitive, phenomenological, or defensive—is a narcissistic luxury bequeathed by an empathic self-object which serves as a background of safety for the infant and helps it symbiotically to experience its own separation (primal splitting) safely from the background object and, further, to conduct splitting “in front,” so to speak, in the field of perceptual view... Thus the facilitating environment (Winnicott) is necessary so that the infant may be able to experience a tension control and be able to focus on urgent need priorities and be able to postpone other feelings. At first, therefore, splitting is experienced as a vertical phenomenon insofar as the infant is able to separate one feeling from another, such as good feelings and bad feelings. As trust in object constancy develops, the infant is enabled to utilize the object as a reservoir or container of its temporarily postponed feelings (Bion 1975).¹²⁰

Thus, in the case of a maturing child, a successful holding environment will accommodate a child’s initial forays into the emotional life. At the start, the child is unable to keep contradictory feelings together (i.e., pleasure vs. frustration) and so chooses to keep one of the two emotions. However, as the child matures she develops the ability to sort through conflicting emotions and contain the more sensitive and/or

¹²⁰ James S. Grotstein, *Splitting and Projective Identification* (New York: J Aronson, 1985), 6.

explosive of her emotions. Developing a more trusting relationship with the “good” mother (holding environment), the child ultimately gains the ability to postpone defensive feelings, with the end result of maintaining ambivalent emotions.

Institutional Space as Ritual Space—A Dialectic “Containing” Ambivalent Emotions

“Institutional space as ritual space” behaves in like manner to the “holding” environment of the growing child. As healthy spheres where individuals and groups interact, and where individuals and group members are protected and therefore trusting, these spaces enable ritual participants to respond creatively to associates in close proximity, to those outside their spheres of influence, and to others in the world. More importantly, “institutional space as ritual space” accords individuals and social groups the ability to experience, sort through, and contain the ambivalences of emergent conflicting emotions due to incompatible Christian beliefs and political practices.

Ritual in institutional spaces holds antagonistic feelings in the same way the holding sphere serves to facilitate the normal splitting of a maturing child. The dialectical character of “institutional spaces as ritual spaces” is akin to the dialectical nature of liminal space. It befits the ‘structure’ of the institution and the ‘antistructure’ of ritual space ably preparing individuals and social groups to maintain binary and tense attitudes, feelings, and emotions.

Cosmic Warfare Discourse in the Ritual Space(s) of rural Bald Eagles

Religious rhetoric, whether theological or more civil religious oriented, emerges in ritual spaces to become a defining feature of rites of intensification in rural Bald

Eagles. To recognize the ways in which blacks and whites employ “God vs. Devil” is to begin to understand the distinctiveness of each social group. Both in this rural community theologians use the “God vs. Devil” trope to explain good versus evil (ethical conduct). However, each has distinguishable understandings of “God vs. Devil” with respect to their lived experiences.

For blacks, the “Devil” is anything that produces black distress and suffering. For instance, what blacks would consider “demonic” is the racial disparity in the criminal justice system in which black men are disproportionately convicted and sentenced for crimes for which others in similar situations might not be prosecuted. The percentage of black men in prison negatively impacts the well-being of black families. In chapters one and two, I ask these rural townfolk to share their concerns about national and local leadership. James Bond, a 59 year old African American business owner declares: “Locally and nationally, the war on drugs tends to bother me because we continue to let drugs enter the U.S. because it creates millions of dollars. Our government don’t care to put a stop to drug trafficking and drug lords; yet, eighty percent of criminals incarcerated are black.” Ironically, the U.S. government is minion to a drug culture with leaders in charge of the illegal circulation and distribution of drugs to individuals and neighborhoods throughout most American cities. Bond cites as demonic America’s monetary gain from this illegal activity and the imprisonment of black men in large numbers.

For whites, the “Devil” is embodied in the threat of secularization. For example, what is “demonic” for whites would be the role of the media in exposing young people to extremely relaxed morals and in fueling increased violence amongst members of

American society. Asked about local and national leadership, Selita Judson, a 49 year old accountant, remarks: “The issue of self-regulation is of great concern to me. If we constantly rely on the government to keep us in line then we are in danger of becoming a communist society. We do need some government regulations to keep a livable balance, but we also need to practice restraint on our own. As for religious issues, we don’t stand up for our religious beliefs enough. We have moved from a community to a “me-first” way of life that has little love for our neighbors. American culture has also become accepting of relaxed morals.” In addition to the debauchery of immoral lifestyles, to have America—a democracy—ever become communist is an oxymoron to Selita. Both are demonic.

“God vs. the Devil” language assumes two forms in both communities:

1) commentary on the social and political condition of the region and America; and
2) perceptions about the spirit world generated from each group’s respective Christian beliefs and practices. In this sense, “God versus Devil” language refers to their spiritual walk—how they work out their salvation as “born again” (evangelical) Christians. In the former sense, “God vs. Devil” is anthropomorphized. Corporal Essary’s funeral where battlefield imagery dominates, is a model for both forms of “God vs. Devil” language. Preachers stress the battle with the enemy (Satan, Afghanis) as located in spiritual and physical realms; emphasize the war as a conflict between evil (Afghanis) and good (America, the fallen soldier); and characterize Essary, thereby America, as conquerors (triumphant). Such rhetoric is meant to cement the definition of a true American.

Concerns about the apocalypse and eschatology, even if not the case for all sects, are still basic to evangelical Protestantism. Spiritual warfare signals the end times for

which God's effort to establish a new kingdom involves fighting with the Devil. Humans are expected to participate in the battle of good versus evil.¹²¹ That eschatological expectation had been historically realized in Christian practice (i.e., prayer, fasting, bible study, scriptural readings) and in struggles against oppressive human conditions (i.e., slavery, poverty, homelessness, war).¹²² The residents of Bald Eagles teach us that eschatological and apocalyptic expectations of the past and the present continue to be disclosed in the spiritually combative language of adherents to the evangelical faith. That is my rationale for proposing that "God versus Devil" language be ascribed to Evangelical faith, even if not the convention. I identify this language as characteristic of the beliefs and practices of this form of Christianity that stresses eschatological and apocalyptic thought.

However, there is a threat associated with "God versus Devil" language as pointed out by historian Jeffrey Williams and psychologist of religion James W. Jones.¹²³ Both authors concern themselves with the connection between religion, religious

¹²¹ Jeffrey Williams, *Religion and Violence in Early American Methodism: Taking the Kingdom by Force* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 173.

¹²² Jeffrey Williams, *Religion and Violence in Early American Methodism: Taking the Kingdom by Force* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 173, 176.

¹²³ In writing *Religion and Violence in Early American Methodism: Taking the Kingdom by Force*, Jeffrey Williams attends to a topic historians have often neglected: the military rhetoric and warfare imagery of early Methodism. A history of Methodist tradition, his narrative traces the religious life of Methodists to ascertain how the language of spiritual conflict translated religiously and socially. Redemptive aspects of violence played out in the lives of this religious group. James W. Jones scribes *Blood that Cries Out from the Earth: the Psychology of Religious Terrorism* to unearth the psychological dimensions of religious terrorism and to add to body of knowledge scarcely studied: religious understandings of terrorism. The thrust of his work is found in the question: Are there dynamics inherent to particular religious systems that lead to violence? (Introduction, xvii).

discourse, and social violence. Quoting James Jones and other scholars, Jeffrey Williams writes:

...religion not only provides meaning and value but...is also a container for aggression, self-hatred, sacrifice and various anxieties.¹²⁴ In fact, belief in cosmic struggles between good and evil, apocalyptic predictions of God's divine judgment of the sinful world, theologies that characterize the world as deeply sinful and in need of purification, and images of humans as divine warriors are all characteristics that scholars have associated with religious violence.¹²⁵

We have to defend against the potential for religious discourse to intensify social grievances, facilely transforming benign and/or dormant emotions into violent behavior. In the faith convictions and political practices of both church communities and the rest of Bald Eagles the cosmological conflict of "good versus evil" is lived out.

Blacks and whites might differ on social, religious, and political issues; however, they are symphonious about having language to communicate their desires for change in their local community and American society. Their theological rhetoric captures visions of the good life and yet condemns. I concur with Jeffrey William who says: "...the belief in cosmic warfare helps orient people in the world and can help them make sense of social marginalization and feelings of anger."¹²⁶ In thinking about the people of Bald

¹²⁴ James W. Jones, *Blood that Cries out from the Earth*, in *Religion and Violence in Early American Methodism: Taking the Kingdom by Force*, Jeffrey Williams (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 168.

¹²⁵ For example, see Gorringe, *God's Just Vengeance*; Jensen, "Religious Cosmologies and Homicide Rates among Nations," 1-14; Bromley and Melton, *Cults, Religion, and Violence*; Hal, Schuyler, and Trinh, *Apocalypse Observed*; Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*; Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, in *Religion and Violence in Early American Methodism: Taking the Kingdom by Force*, Jeffrey Williams (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 202.

¹²⁶ Jeffrey Williams, *Religion and Violence in Early American Methodism: Taking the Kingdom by Force* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 175.

Eagles, “good versus evil” language conveys discontentment with marginalization, decries the evil of conspicuous consumption, fear of a “godless” nation-state, anxiety about moral laxity and the education of their children, and resistance to being stripped of religious freedoms and other Constitutional rights.

***“Civic Responsibility versus Civic Americanism” in Ritual Space:
How the American Dream becomes a critique of American Exceptionalism***

In Bald Eagles, rites of intensification amplify the distinct civil religious experiences and values of white and blacks. Civil religious rhetoric and behavior exhibited in ritual space ultimately impart each community’s respective understandings of a theology of war, politicizing death. For whites, civil religion is expressed as civic Americanism for which upholding Christian faith, myths, and symbols are associated with American identity. Consider Larry Churchill’s speech at the 2009 Bald Eagles Veteran’s Day parade as an example of civic Americanism.

Folks, we live in the greatest country in the world. Tell your children and family about the sacrifice made on behalf of them. Folks, God sent his Son here for us. America is the greatest nation on earth because we have citizens who are willing to give back and sacrifice their lives. There has been more done in the last 100 years than we can stop to count. We went through World War I and the Depression. Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. We sent our men over there to keep this country free.

Women did a whole lot also to keep this country free. Look at how great a military we have now. We have the best technology to contribute to the progress of America. We love each other, here. We might have our differences and our disagreements, but the rest of the world knows do not mess with Americans. We are not going to let another country take this away from us...Folks remember

this...Look at the monuments here and in Washington D.C. Men have given their lives.

Have they ever said, 'You owe me.'? No, they have not. Instead, they will say, 'Love your family, neighbor, Love the Lord, and do something good for somebody.' We are proud of the State of Tennessee. It is the Volunteer State. A volunteer will always do 10X more than a person who is getting paid. Volunteer to serve this country and fight for this country. Do not forget to tell your children about the service to this country.

For blacks, civil religion is expressed as civic responsibility, for which defending democratic principles despite the imperfections of our Union displays loyalty to America. Marshall Howard's words spoken at the 2009 citywide worship service for Martin Luther King Jr. Day captures this concept.

Why are we here today? We're not here because of Dr. King but because of Rosa Parks. If not for Rosa Parks, we would not have Martin Luther King Jr. Had there not been a Dr. King, there would not be a Barack Obama! Dr. King said that our dream is rooted in the American dream.

What is the American dream? The American dream is *first, the right to vote*. Cheryl Simpson registered one hundred eighty people in Bald Eagles County on the weekend because of Barack Obama and because of Dr. King's dream. The American dream is *second, the right to shelter and jobs*. Dr. King fought for shelter and better jobs. Black folks went north from the south because we did not want to be in the fields all our lives. The American dream is *thirdly, about education*. Dr. King fought for education. We must commit ourselves to education not just as children but even also as adults. Take classes at Bald Eagles State Community College even if it is to learn a trade. *Dr. King's dream is deeply rooted in the American dream and you too can achieve it.*

In *Religious Ideology in American Politics: A History*, Nicole Guétin explains the religio-political term Manifest Destiny, its historic entrance into political discourse, and its strength as an American and religious ideology even in today's political arena. She claims:

...the concept of, “American exceptionalism,” inscribed in the genes of the country’s forbears, still appears to be linked to the myth of a historical redemptive mission. Many Americans are, as in the past, convinced that America has a divine mission, but, as in the past, this opinion is not shared by everyone worldwide. This, obviously, generates political tensions. In American historiography, the religious interpretation of many events may have denatured the core of the Christian faith and contradicted its truthfulness and its authenticity. If American exceptionalism today gives rise to serious questioning, one must admit that such ideological patterns were largely reproduced in many nations throughout the centuries. Since the origin of the world, nations and empires have claimed their supremacy over other countries or continents. However, what makes it original when it comes to America is the deep conviction that this supremacy is expressed in moral, religious, and missionary terms.¹²⁷

How shall we apprehend the ideologies of our speakers in light of Guétin’s declaration and critique of American exceptionalism with its missionizing message? While the “civic Americanism” of Larry Churchill calls attention to the sacrifices of American military on foreign soil, encourages volunteerism and service to the region and country; and charges us to share moral lessons with future generations, it sacralizes and sanitizes his political discourse when he proclaims America’s superiority over other nations. The American exceptionalism of Churchill appeals to a “heritage” that can only be claimed by a select group of Americans. With respect to this, historian David Lowenthal avers: “Heritage passes on exclusive myths of origins and continuity, endowing a select group with power and prestige.”¹²⁸ Thus, American exceptionalism is not an inclusive ideal.

¹²⁷ Nicole Guétin, *Religious Ideology in American Politics* (London: McFarland & Company, 2009), 173-174.

¹²⁸ David Lowenthal, “Letter to the Editor,” *Perspectives: Newsletter of the American Historical Association* 32 (1994): 17-18.

Important to the civic responsibility of Marshall Howard is acknowledging and grasping our responsibilities as American citizens—to vote, to work, to have access to housing, and to get an education. As simple as Marshall’s ideas are, “civic responsibility” makes us accountable to each other in the pursuit of freedom, equality, and justice. That is why the American Dream becomes a critique of American exceptionalism; it is *not* exclusionary. It calls forth the best in all of us—to live a full life, one of continual growth and development for which our innate abilities and learned skills will be put to good use for the betterment of America and the rest of humanity.

The myth of American exceptionalism diminishes the degree to which we will admit that our regionalisms, racialisms, genderisms—biases, prejudices, ethnocentricisms—contribute to our failings to obtain a more perfect Union, beloved community, or good person and good society. Moreover, fundamental to American exceptionalism, as a civil religious ideology and practice, is the element of violence. Cognizant or not, Larry Churchill and others like to him, have embraced and justified the use of violence in preserving democratic (American) liberties. This espousal of violence is in glaring contrast to the evangelical faith and civil religion commonly depicted, accepted, and upheld by Christian congregations and the American public.

In considering the deficiency of American exceptionalism, an unconscious imperialism mimicking a “theocratic” system, I appeal to renowned professor emeritus at Indiana University, Conrad Cherry who, defining civil religion, writes in *God’s New Israel, Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*:

The civil religion, like any religion which becomes an established part of culture, is always in danger of sanctifying the virtues of a society while ignoring its vices...America’s present position as a great world power intensifies the peril; Americans have long lived under the conviction that their nation always comes to

the defense of other countries for the sake of “free institutions” and “democratic governments.” Can we admit...that we have also rushed to the aid of military dictatorships when we believe such action will serve our national interests? ¹²⁹

American exceptionalism grants “insider” status to its enthusiasts but at a cost—the cost being the threat of violence precipitated by an expansionist and messianic imperialist project. As Cherry astutely observes, another cost of unconscious imperialism (i.e., American exceptionalism) is the inability to be self-critical, to see blindspots that, in this case, is exemplified in “[America’s] rush to aid military dictatorships.” Is there another way to make America great without militarism (i.e., violence)?

Guétin further adds that American exceptionalism blinds us to the importance of creating and maintaining connections to a more global world, a world that cannot be overlooked especially in a technological age where the tools of science place us in more immediate contact with the other. If nothing else, the Middle Eastern and North African social movements and our undocumented illegal immigrant problem teach us that our expansionist and missionizing leanings will require us to enlarge our borders (i.e., social, political, religious etc.) in more ways than can be counted.

In Bald Eagles, civic Americanism ascribes to the community’s key symbols, exceptional and exclusionary meanings that are messages not shared by civic responsibility. Said aphoristically, civic responsibility at its core is a profound critique of civic Americanism—the American Dream holds values and commitments, and expresses a way of life different from American exceptionalism. The core symbols shared by both whites and blacks in ritual space have entirely distinct meanings except in cases of war

¹²⁹ Conrad Cherry, ed., *God’s New Israel, Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 17, quoted in *Religious Ideology in American Politics: A History*, Nicole Guétin (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2009), 161.

(i.e., young person's death) and the presence of a new outsider (i.e., illegal immigrants). In those scenarios, key symbols maintain the contradiction inherent to civic Americanism and civic responsibility but individuals and social groups become fluid.

A "new" American exceptionalism would recognize the complexities of living in America; would realize no single social group or culture can adequately represent America because from its origins, America has been syncretistic (insiders were once outsiders and outsiders who eventually become insiders will always exist); and would appreciate that America's "exceptionalism" currently rests in the ability of Americans to resolve cultural conflicts on American soil without necessarily resorting to explosive violence.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Nichole Renée Phillips, in conversation with Alyson Dickson, 29 July 2011.

*Grotesqueries, Dialectics, and Ambivalences in Pursuing
the Good Person and the Good Life*

A vision of the good person and the good life is a challenging pursuit for it is fraught with grotesqueries, dialectics, and ambivalences that humans are still learning to contain. Rites of intensification, particularly those exaggerated by the politicization of death, reveal these opposing thoughts, behaviors, and emotions. Nevertheless, blacks and whites in rural Bald Eagles model how public worship spaces mirror private worship spaces to become holding environments for thought and action with the potential to be at variance with each other.

Both social groups work through contradictory feelings and actions in ritual space, affording the illusion and emergence of new truths. Social conformity demands relinquishing individual autonomy and requires the consent, participation, agreement, and actions of individual members to the benefit of the group. While the psychology of group interactions cannot be dismissed, social constructs moor the ritual process.

Thus, ritual space is the medium for a display of the differences and similarities between these black and white rural dwellers, their evangelical faith beliefs and practices, and their civil religious commitments and loyalties. It also serves to restrain deeply profound but potentially explosive ambivalences.

Appendix A. Evangelical Faith and Southern Civil Religion Survey

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Due Date: Sunday, March 15, 2009 Please submit to Nichole R. Phillips
Evangelical Faith and Southern Civil Religion Survey

*Name_____ Gender: Male Female

Ethnicity: African American Caucasian American

Age Range: 20-45 46-69 70-beyond

Occupation: _____ Years in Bald Eagles _____

Veteran: Yes No Wars served in? _____

Theologically: Conservative__ Moderate__ Liberal__

Socially: Conservative__ Moderate__ Liberal__

1. What socio-political and religious issues are important to you, locally *and* nationally? Why?

2. Do you believe that American culture (media, the arts, social beliefs etc.) affects your religious belief *and* practice? How *and* Why?

3. Do you identify as an Evangelical Christian? Please define the term.

4. Do you participate in activities that identify you as an Evangelical Christian? and What *causes* and/or *church ministries* do you participate in? (For example: Family life organizations, disaster relief, the fight against poverty, HIV/AIDS, environmental issues, NAACP etc.)

5. a) How do you define patriotism?; b) Outside of military service, are there other forms of patriotic service to the country? (For example: military service, community organizing etc.); c) Does your faith *influence* your understanding of patriotism? How?

6. In this age of *Harold Ford and President Obama*, do we live in a *post-racial society*? Why or Why not?

7. What are your *beliefs and practices* around *death* and *dying*? Please provide an example of a particular practice.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.
Please indicate if you are willing to join a focus group!

Appendix B. Clarification Sheet: Evangelical Faith and Southern Civil Religion Survey

**CLARIFICATION SHEET for Evangelical Faith and Southern Civil Religion Survey
by Nichole Phillips**

Definition of Terms

Very generally speaking, **theological conservatism** is often identified with *religious movements* such as Holiness, Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Conservative Evangelical Movements. Most *theological conservatives* uphold specific belief and practices associated with *creedal statements* like the Apostle's Creed and Nicene Creed. *Theological conservatives* also believe in the Virgin Birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Jesus' second Coming, and the authority of the Bible, even if they are not confessional Christians (meaning that the denomination does not uphold any particular doctrines).

A **theological moderate**, as the name suggests, holds beliefs and practices between that of **theological conservatism** and **theological liberalism**.

Speaking generally, **theological liberalism**, has been identified with *mainline Protestant Churches* like the Episcopal and United Methodist churches. However, that is not necessarily the case, today. Instead of being guided by a particular belief system (creedal statements), *theological liberals* understand the "truth" of the Bible from cultural perspectives (i.e. class, race, gender, the social and political). God's movement is seen from the perspective of what is happening in the world and how these events impact individuals, today.

Social conservatism is usually described as a belief in traditional values. Most *social conservatives*, for example, are pro-life, pro-traditional nuclear families (meaning wife, husband, and children), pro-death penalty. They are generally against issues like same-sex marriage and stem cell research.

A **social moderate**, as the name suggests, has beliefs and values that cut across **social conservatism** and **social liberalism**.

Social liberals are also described as *social progressives*. They usually stress a redistribution of wealth and the social welfare provisions for individuals. Most *social liberals*, for example, are pro-choice, for stem cell research, pro-educational reform, and for the legalization of same-sex marriage. They are generally against the death penalty and choose diplomacy over military action.

PLEASE NOTE: These definitions do not fully encompass the meaning of these terms. For instance, a *theological conservative* can be *socially liberal* and a *social conservative* can also be a *theological moderate*. Use your discretion in describing yourself and belief systems. This sheet is merely meant to CLARIFY these terms.

If you have not filled in a SURVEY as yet, please WRITE your AGE instead of circling your age range.

1. a) What community (social) issues are important to you? What national (social) issues are important to you?

b) What community religious issues are important to you? What national religious issues are important to you?

2. Do you believe American culture (the media, arts, societal beliefs, etc.) affects your religious belief *and* practice? How *and* Why?

For example: I was speaking with a resident who believed that MTV, VH1, and BET aired too many sexually explicit videos and programs that could easily impact a young person's religious belief system.

3. a) Are you an Evangelical Christian? Yes or No

b) Please describe what being an Evangelical Christian means to you.

4. What *organizations* and/or *church activities* do you believe are reflections of your Christian faith?

5. a) Please define the word *patriotism*. b) Are there *other forms of patriotism* besides military service? c) Does your Christian faith *influence* your understanding of patriotism? How?

6. Do we live in a *post-racial* society? (*Post-racial* means we no longer categorize people according to race)
Why or Why not?

7. Explain *death and dying* according to your Christian faith. Please give an example of a death practice.

Appendix C. True Randomness

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Max:

Result:

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Generate random integers (maximum 10,000).

Each integer should have a value between and (both inclusive; limits $\pm 1,000,000,000$).

Format in column(s).

Part 2: Go!

Be patient! It may take a little while to generate your numbers...

Note: The numbers generated with this form will be picked independently of each other (like rolls of a die) and may therefore contain duplicates. There is also the [Sequence Generator](#), which generates randomized sequences (like raffle tickets drawn from a hat) and where each number can only occur once.

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Random Integer Generator

Here are your random numbers:

3
15
13
14
9
8
21
1
6
20
19

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Part 1: The Integers

Generate random integers (maximum 10,000).

Each integer should have a value between and (both inclusive; limits $\pm 1,000,000,000$).

Format in column(s).

Part 2: Go!

Be patient! It may take a little while to generate your numbers...

Note: The numbers generated with this form will be picked independently of each other (like rolls of a die) and may therefore contain duplicates. There is also the [Sequence Generator](#), which generates randomized sequences (like raffle tickets drawn from a hat) and where each number can only occur once.

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Random Integer Generator

Here are your random numbers:

1
4
3

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Appendix D. The Church, Civil Rights, and the Election of Barack Obama

Johnnie P. Whitelaw: Tabernacle was a leading church dating back to when it purchased its first building in 1880. It was a leading church because it was the largest black church in the community. However, that is not the case now. Initially, the CME Church drew the black professionals; it was what we would call the “style shop” because its members were the black elites in town. Tabernacle also drew professionals (doctors, lawyers, and dentists), but it was still essentially the “poor man’s” church. It was a “poor man’s” church, yet it drew many members. Under the leadership of Rev. G.W. Tyus the church nurtured a lot of young boys and shaped them into young men. You had to belong to the church in order to be a “young ambassador” (an early church activity for the young men) or to be on the baseball team. We belonged to a lot of associations.

Since Rev. G.W. Tyus left, the church (Tabernacle) has changed its name several times. We have no mother’s board anymore; we don’t have a “church aide” or a “pastor’s aide.” Previously, the church paid the pastor, the landscaper, and the secretary. I was the secretary for a long time, and I thought that if you had the skills, you were giving back (to the community) what God has given to you. Now *everyone wants to be paid*; black church culture at Tabernacle has changed.

Whitelaw explains the role of the mother’s board and deacons in the Church.

Johnnie P. Whitelaw: Our mother’s board sat to the left and the deacon’s board sat to the right, filling the first few pews in the church. Before the service officially started, the mother’s board would sing and the deacon’s board would pray. But now the whole musical composition of the church is led by the Choir. The mother’s board used to set the tone for the service. When those sistahs got to singing and praying you knew you had been to church.

Nichole: Who comprises the mother’s board?

Johnnie P. Whitelaw: The wives of the deacon’s and the older mothers of the church made up the mother’s board. The pastor and the congregation chooses the “mother’s board” based on a woman’s dutifulness, life lived, and whether she can be a role model for the younger folks. You can be any age and be selected to serve as a “mother” of the

church. It is all based on lifestyle. Usually, deacon's wives were chosen as "mothers," regardless of age.

Whitelaw continues the conversation by speaking about her participation at Tabernacle and the Bald Eagles school system.

Johnnie P. Whitelaw: When I was growing up, we had a special day where we dressed up in a long dress and sang our little hearts out. We had quartets (for the young men), chorus, and the young ladies choir. We had to dress to the best of our ability because we were on the program. Regardless of how good (or not so good) you were, you received the applause and approval of the adult congregation and they thought you were great! As I look back and think about it, those were really good programs. In addition to Tabernacle, we had the 'sanctified' churches in the community; they became the Church of God in Christ. We had the Presbyterian Church, and we also had Ross United Methodist Church (located on the east side of town, the other designated black area in Bald Eagles, and on Fair Street). The "sanctified" sisters could dance, and there were times when I would join them.

Whitelaw's comment about the role of the black church in socializing children into the social graces as well as instilling self-confidence is confirmed by Ms. Mai Mai Watkins, a member of one of the leading families at Tabernacle. Mai Mai Watkins is a sixty-nine year old retired school teacher who has attended Tabernacle from birth and been a resident of Bald Eagles for fifty-nine years.

Mai Mai Watkins: The six of us grew up in Tabernacle. And, I was baptized at age thirteen in the old Tabernacle Church. And, um, in that church we had Sunday School, Baptist Training Union (BTU), and a program led by a woman by the name of Willadee Porter. She had a group of girls from the community who met at her house every week, and she taught us to make cookies, how to say thank you, how to shake hands, how to

smile, be friendly to each other. And one thing she taught us was to never do anything to someone else that you would not like to be done to you. And even though the Bible says to do unto others as you would *have* them do unto you, she said don't do anything to anybody you don't want them to do to you. And we learned Bible verses. Um, we went on field trips, and that was what the, the people of Tabernacle did, especially the BTU teachers. Baptist Training Union, we had every Sunday evening at 6 o'clock and it was as full as the Sunday School morning classes were.

In this next section, I resume the account of my conversation with Mrs. Whitelaw by asking about Bald Eagles' educational system.

Nichole: Tell me a little about the educational system, here, in the community.

Johnnie P. Whitelaw: I taught at both the black school, Bruce, and Jenny Belle, the white school. They integrated Bruce in the early 60's by bringing white students and white teachers there [interesting reversal of integration]. The year they closed Bruce, we were not informed. I was wondering what was going on as I saw schoolchildren carrying pictures and other memorabilia. That stuff could have been saved for the archives. We didn't know they were going to close the school just because the enrollment had dropped (after integration).

Johnnie P. Whitelaw: Bill Thomas, Sammie Lee, and I started the local NAACP chapter in Bald Eagles. There have been two or three chapters since. The chapter was founded and meetings were held at Salters AME Church. Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church was a leading church in the community, however, the pastor, at that time, was apprehensive about holding NAACP meetings there. During the fight for civil rights, Bald Eagles did not have sit-ins. Members who participated went to Jackson, TN and became involved through Lane College [historically black college].

Johnnie P. Whitelaw: In terms of race relations it was about whom you knew and who knew you. I grew up in a segregated neighborhood, but some Caucasians also lived in the

neighborhood. There were quite a few who would come and eat breakfast with you. In fact, one of our neighbors, who is white, was born on the predominantly black side of town; he worked in the Cotton Mills. His mid-wife was a black woman, and to prove his place of birth, he showed me his birth certificate.

Nichole: Allow me to re-visit “race relations” in the community so that I can gain a better understanding.

Johnnie P. Whitelaw: Black people in Bald Eagles enjoyed many privileges. Black people lived on Sampson Ave and East Court Street. They went to moving them out during integration, but those white folks still took to taking care of those black people. They saw that they had a job. They saw that they had food. They saw that they had clothes. For instance, when my cousin was sick and died, her white employer came back and walked me down the aisle at the funeral.

Johnnie P. Whitelaw: My dad got his first job from one the members of a very well respected white family, here, in Bald Eagles. There was a relationship between white and black families, here. Relationship building occurred between families. It came down from the families. That was true in many families. If our church was in a financial bind, you knew who you could turn to. It is the same now with *certain white and black folks* and for those who fostered such relationships.

Whitelaw now talks about the church and politics. Who was involved and not involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

Johnnie P. Whitelaw: The Methodist Church (Salters Chapel) has a history of being involved in Civil Rights. At Tabernacle, some of our deacons felt that politics ought to be kept out of the Church because the deacons who were in leadership before them, had used the politicians to line their pockets. Off course, there was a mixture of people, ideas, and beliefs in the black churches in this community and there still continues to be. There were

also some blacks who were just as bitter against whites as whites had been against blacks. I don't see people as white and black. People are people. We all have our short-comings and we all have our good parts.

Bald Eagles, black Baptists, and the Election of President Barack Obama

As our country moves into another historic moment with the election of President Barack Obama, I ask Mai Mai Watkins to consider the impact of his election on the Church, more generally, and Tabernacle Baptist's mission to the community, specifically.

Nichole: Okay. So, uh, contextualize Tabernacle for the future especially in light of yesterday's inauguration. How do you see uh, how do you see Tabernacle? What role do you think it will play in the future? What role is it playing now?

Mai Mai Watkins: In light of the election and the inauguration yesterday...well, let's go back to the election. I think that the election opened up, uh, minds. (pause) Yeah. But I think the inauguration yesterday, slapped those minds in the face. To the point we're saying, 'Hey, it happened!' And then seeing all those people on TV who were there [in Washington D.C.], simply for the fact of being there, and like Grandmamma Stokes was not caring whether she saw...she just had to be *there*. And many people travelled for that reason, they probably didn't know the historical impact at the time that they had uh committed to [traveling], but being there they had to realize for themselves what was happening in this season and time of change. I truly think that it did not phase many people until after the words were spoken in the inauguration, until he actually became President, and not President Elect.

Nichole: Yeah. He's President Obama.

Mai Mai Watkins: Uh huh. And uh, today, I think people, because, you see, yesterday people were crying and shouting, and I don't think they really knew why, it was the spirit in them that just caused them to do that. But I think today they are, today, on the 21st of January, they are calming down and realizing that 'I have to do my part to make *the change* that he feels is gonna take place.' And even though he's saying that it's not gonna happen overnight, and it's gonna take time, but if I do my part, it will help to make it quicker. And I feel that people are beginnin' to feel that way right quick. (clears throat) Excuse me. And I think that preachers will be able to teach and preach toward that type of change in their, their different uh denominations: both black and white. That is what I envision happening at Tabernacle, also. I believe that many white people who did not vote for President Obama are willing and ready to support him in a way that has surprised even them. Realizing that this is a season of change, for instance, I ordered my prescriptions from Super D; I handled ordering my prescriptions differently yesterday. The pharmacist said, "uh, You know, I *believe* uh everything is gonna be alright."

Mai Mai Watkins: Sure! He's in God's hands, everything's gonna be fine.

Pharmacist: Well I didn't vote for him! But I'm gonna support him.

Mai Mai Watkins: Well you're tryin' to be a true American, aren't you?

Pharmacist: I'm gonna support him but I didn't vote for him.

Mai Mai Watkins: Well, he won the election. He is the President of the United States. And you are a member of the United States. Simply by being an American and living in one of the states of the United States. So it's up to you. *How you want the United States to go?*

Appendix E. Missions versus Ministry at Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church

Deacon Wilcox: Our last mission as a church was to *ask the Lord* to send us an *Undershepherd* [a Pastor].

Jeffrey Green: At the convention for National Baptists, the poorest night for turnout is missions night.

Darryl Todd: We often think about missions as something big.

Joy Snow: Pastor, you have visited the sick, shut-in, and given them Communion.

Deborah Grant: In my side of town (near the Bruce projects) across the tracks, three new families have moved in and I have been talking to the young people.

Pastor Matthews: There is a difference between ministry and mission. Ministry goes along with missions except your ministry includes issuing Communion to the sick and the shut-in. The purpose of missions is to evangelize. When you go out and evangelize, ‘you can’t catch a fish that’s already been caught.’ When you evangelize, you have ‘to go out where the fish is at and cast out your net.’

Joy Snow: Evangelize, Baptize, and Educate. The Holy Spirit must go with you on missions. He will send you to the right place at the right time. But before we go we must ask, “Am I educated enough? Have I heard the voice of the Holy Spirit?”

Pastor Matthews: In my bible, I have six reasons to Evangelize. The *first* is that “God has commanded us to do so,” according to Acts 1:8. We have already acknowledged you should not go out before you have been endowed with the Spirit of Christ (Holy Spirit). It’s a difference between *joining* a denomination and *being* saved. This is a mandate. Christ (he) has commanded us. The *second* is based on John 14:15. It demonstrates our love for Christ. If you love me, like you say you do, you will keep my commandments. These floods and these earthquakes we now have are signs that we are living in our last days. Christ is showing us we need to get our house in order. We should be concerned

because it's too many who don't know Christ. Hell does not have to be a sinner's destination. That is, you can be living in hell and yet be out of hell [on the earth].'

The *third* is found in Romans 3: 10, 23. There is none righteous, not *me*. We *all* have fallen short of the glory of God. "You have been thrown the life preserve, you caught it and don't you think they deserve it too?" As a Baptist, are we doing God's mission?

Pastor Matthews: The *fourth* requires us to share our faith with others as God's chosen method to redeem sinners (as found in Romans 10:14-17; Acts 8:3). Only redeemed sinners can tell lost sinners about Christ. We are the redeemed and our mission is to help save the lost. 'We can throw the life preserver out. What is the life preserver? the Word of God. In our mission, when we need to be talking, we usually don't say nothing. But when we don't need to be talking, we say so much.' How many of you have spoken to one child out there? Do you know why they hold so much faith in gangs? The *fifth* is "because God destines to save all people. We find that in Acts 4:12 and I Timothy 2:4. The *sixth* is because someone once shared his faith with us according to I Corinthians 15:3. "Others have the right to expect that what was done for us, we will do for others.

Pastor Matthews: 'Should we not throw out a life preserver to someone drowning?' For instance, let's take [our] gang problem. A bus driver saw a 5 year old throw up gang signs. Some 5 year olds can cuss you out in five different languages. They have been shown that (gang life), and they believe that. 'The devil is on his game, but we are not on ours.' Romans 10:14-17; Ecclesiastes 12:1 indicates the following: It is easier to catch a tap water fish than a big fish. The tap water fish represents the young and the big fish is symbolic for the old. The old fighting fish is a big fish that you sometimes have to throw out a big net for, in order to catch. 'Am I throwing this out for free?' You don't have to be called and be ordained to be a preacher. The reason we can *all* be preachers is that 'if you can open your (Pastor points to his lips), then you can spread the Gospel.'

Pastor Matthews: When you evangelize, remember that you are 'one beggar asking another beggar for a piece of bread.' We often come up with excuses around evangelizing but it is only when you do what you have been commanded to do, it is then you no longer

have excuses. However when it comes to gossip, we have no excuses; there is nothing to stop us. You might say (while participating in gossip), ‘I talk country…

With this, the Pastor implies human frailties do not prevent gossip. If this is the case, we should not stop evangelizing in the streets because of our weaknesses. Matthews proceeds with “in going out on this mission, the only thing you can do is to offer Christ, and if people reject Christ, that’s on them. People don’t want to hear this because they don’t want to be held accountable.”

Appendix F. God Imparts Spiritual Clairvoyance

Pastor Matthews: In 2 Kings 6, Elisha prays for his servant to receive sight. Sometimes you gotta go through some storms before seeing the rainbow, argues Matthews. The King of Syria is convinced there is a traitor in his ranks because every tactical move made against Israel, fails. Acting on its foreknowledge, Israel mounts offensive attacks before Syria has a chance to strike. The King of Syria eventually finds there is not a traitor in the ranks. Instead, God is telling Elisha every move the Israelites should make.

“If you listen to God speak, he will allow you to be able to be one step ahead in many areas of life—your finances, your marriage, your family, your home, your life!”

The King of Syria had equipped his army to go after Elisha, consequently. “Why would a whole army have to come after one little man?” The institution of oppression is always threatened by those whom God has given spiritual insight.

If Jesus had his Pilate,
If Caesar had Nero,
If MLKing Jr. had J. Edgar Hoover,
Then we will have to face our own enemies.

Matthews *concludes* with the question: What should be our response? When Maya Angelou wrote her famous poem, “And Still I Rise,” she didn’t know this would serve as an answer. She declares, “You may write me down in history with your bitter twisted lies, but still I Rise! If you can’t see, hold on a little while because when prayers go up, blessings come down! Leonardo DaVinci *saw* flight 200 years before the Wright Brothers flew the first plane. Thomas Edison *did not* physically see electricity but still became the father of electricity. George Washington Carver *saw* something already in the peanut. Stevie Wonder was asked, “Is there anything worse than being blind?” He said, “Having eyes and *not being able* to see.” We only *see* the problems but not the solutions. Likewise, sometimes we see the faults of friends and not their strengths.

Pastor Matthews: Have you ever heard the story of the buzzards?

The Female Buzzards bring gossip and exclusion

The Male Buzzards bring racism, oppression, and victimization

However, in all of the “-isms” you do not have to succumb to victimhood. If you do, you may fail to see the only person stopping you is you!

After the prayers of Elisha, the servant was able to see that God was there. God is not absent He is always there. When you see God, it is impossible to see defeat. We see Victory, victory is Mine! God’s grace is greater than any sin; God’s presence is greater than any fears; God’s Resurrection is greater than any death! The devil may have come to take your life last night, but I’m glad that I have mercy, goodness, protection and mercy around me to take care of me. We need to pray for sight, because God will hear and answer our prayers.

Appendix G. The Problem with Integration: Black Life has No Value

Nichole: What do you think are the values that African-Americans or black people in America, would die for? In this day and age? What values do you think, you know—black people died for in the past and think about those values with respect to the present. Or, you can say, um, what Brother Jones is saying. It sounds like he is saying that we ain't dyin' for no values.

Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway: Well, no, that's what, that's what I would say. Today. And I really believe that. Okay, today, because—

Nichole: We're not dying for any values.

Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway: No, because we think, a lot of us think today, that we have made it, so we don't have to put in any work anymore. I think there are some things we should be doin' now, like marchin' in the streets over some of these [governmental] policies. But we're too comfortable now. Now, back in the day, uh, in the Civil Rights Movement, we were dying for all kinds of values; freedom and equality, all kinds of stuff! But see, our mindset today is totally different. We don't think we have to die for anything today.

Sampson Frye Brown: Nope.

Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway: 'Cause we already made it. We think.

Sampson Frye Brown: Yeah, we think.

Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway: So, I don't think there is no values that, that a black person would — now, there are some causes.

Nichole: Okay, so tell me.

Cowboy “Wonderful” Treadway: I think, I think, I think family. But, as far as values, I don’t think there’s any.

Nichole: Really?!

Cowboy “Wonderful” Treadway: I sure don’t.

Nichole: No?! That sounds so hopeless for my generation! Really?!

Cowboy “Wonderful” Treadway: I really don’t.

Sampson Frye Brown: Your generation will do-

Nichole: My-

Sampson Frye Brown: They don’t have no values.

Nichole: That’s what you’re tryin’ to, that’s what you sayin’ to me?!

Sampson Frye Brown: They don’t have any values, they will, uh uh...look at the system, they really dyin,’ killin’ themselves, they’re even killin’ themselves. Back in the day, we wouldn’t kill ourselves. But, the values of it, like we was sayin’, you know, the Civil Rights organizations. I marched in a few. Uh, a lotta things that uh, uh, let’s say the Civil Rights organizations represented—I can really identify myself with that. And, there are other values which I didn’t identify with, that I didn’t participate in that then people died for. If it hadn’t been for those values, though, you wouldn’t be sittin’ where you are today. You believe that?

Nichole: Yeah. Okay. What are the values of today?

Sampson Frye Brown: Uh, they don’t have any.

Nichole: (giggles)

Okay.

Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway:

And those that do have a set of values is self-sufficient. It's about me. What can I get? How can I get that house? How can I get that car? That's what it's about. But, there's a reason for this decline.

Nichole:

Okay. Why?

Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway:

Because, if you think about Martin Luther King, when he had gotten the Civil Rights Bill passed, he was sittin' ponderin', and they wanted to know what was wrong with him. He was concerned, because he says that 'I'm afraid for our people. I'm afraid that we are going to become what we have fought so hard to integrate into.' That's what we had then. We had a different value system back in the day that integration was going to threaten.

Nichole:

And that was?

Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway:

And that was taking care of ourselves. Some of the old African tradition values, uh, a family to raise a village, a village to raise a family, kids or something like that. All that's gone now because we have integrated into a society that never had those values. And, we have become what we integrated into, and that is what he was afraid of, and it happened today.

Nichole:

Okay.

Sampson Frye Brown:

True, very true.

Nichole:

Okay. Alright.

Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway:

Gotta be careful what you ask for.

Appendix H. Leadership in Black Female Headed Households in the 1940s and 1950s

Nichole:

Now, tell me, like the values that your mother taught you.

Deidre Abraham:

Uh, to respect my elders. Uh, I had to say 'yes ma'am' and 'no ma'am.' Kids nowadays say yes and no. You know? And um, uh, she taught me how to respect—show respect for myself and then other people will respect me. You know? I can't get respect if I'm half-naked. I walk down the street and some man says something, you know, out of — I'm asking for it. That's, you know, there's no reason for him to go, uh.

Nichole:

Disrespect

Deidre Abraham:

Uh huh. But, if he sees me, he assumes certain things, you know?

Nichole:

You're saying scantily clothed?

Deidre Abraham:

Uh huh. And so, um, I've got to dress, I've got to carry myself in a way that I can be respected. If you don't have respect then, you know, and she taught me this. And, she taught me the value of a dollar. She taught me to, uh, earn my living honestly. And, uh, it wasn't—growing up, I didn't have a man in the house but, um, my Mama taught me—it was as if a man was there, you know? I don't feel like I have lost nothing because a man wasn't there.

Nichole:

So, you're saying your father wasn't present.

Deidre Abraham:

No, huh uh. But I don't, I don't feel like I missed that. Because I feel like, I feel like my values and growing up was just as good as the person that did have a mother and a father in their house. Because, man, it was

full of those women, but you couldn't, if you didn't know which one was my mother, you was like 'I know it's my mother' because one will reach and grab you just as quick as the other one will, you know? And see, that's another thing you know? because, nowadays kids uh, say, for instance, with going to school.

If they go to school and they cut up in school...see they got a whoopin' in school back in my day, and then they go home and get a whoopin'. Or, if somebody in the streets see your child doin' somethin', they may whoop your child there, and then you go home and you got *another* whoopin' you know? And, you can't do that nowadays. 'Cause, uh, half the time when the children come home and tell you, well the teacher was pickin' on me—you go to the school and half the time that parent's gonna be on that child's side. When they should look at both sides. You know? They don't try to...and that's the way it is in church.

Appendix I. The Church in the Community and the Community in the Church

Moses Synclair:

Alright man, I'll see you. Uh, uh, like what am I doing this week with Brother Simpson and his wife. I, I feel like I've been, working, if it works. I'm trying to put it though, it wouldn't cost me nothing to help somebody if I knew somebody needed help. Just like Brother Simpson and his wife, even though he have a felony and been in "the pen." He and his wife, they moved here and they don't have any income. And, uh, you know, I'm not doing nothing, but I consider myself as a Christian and want to help some, help him in any way I can. So, he don't have any transportation. That's not my vehicle, that's not my gas, and Brother Terrence gave me a gas card so that I could drive him around and help him find a job, go apply for social resources and stuff: food stamps and all that, and so I did that.

And, and you feel like you want to be Christ-like, and you know, we wear those 'What Would Jesus Do' bracelets, you know? We wear those and so you say what would Jesus do? Would he, knowing this man needed a job, would he let him suffer because he was in the "pen"... just not help? And I don't think, I know Jesus wouldn't do that. And, I consider myself, those bracelets have come through and gone, but the question still to ask is 'What would Jesus do?' do the right thing for people that need help and everything. And I think this church's doors should always be open. If this community is running right it should. Now, the Lord has blessed us to have two more ministers, two more reverends. Somebody should be running this church phone everyday.

And so, I think that would help, I mean even myself as a Deacon. If I've got the time, we've got seven deacons, I think we could all do it a day — come up here and run the phone because the community needs you first, that's what churches are supposed to do — help the community. And, uh, you would stop all that bad talk about your church if you was doing something. If you ain't doing nothing, that's what's going to happen, they gonna turn on you.

Tabernacle's supposed to be this and that, but they won't help this, and they won't help that...' You know, and that's where you get new members. Say, we had a chance to, we had a lady here that — what do they call it that owns all the apartments down on the East

side of town, everything. Tabernacle, if they'd have stepped forward and bought those apartments, got hold of those apartments and helped the people in the community, it would have been a big environment for this church, for this community, it woulda helped a whole lot because that's how you get members.

I went to this church in Callumet City. In Callumet City, uh, Chicago, uh, St. Matthews, my grandmother belongs to that church. We visited, me and my wife, visited that church. When we get back home two weeks later, we gets a phone call, we picks up the phone call, it's St. Matthews, uh saying prayers to us over the phone. Now, I've not suggested that to Tabernacle to do. However, we could do that to some of our members that are in nursing homes or that can't come to church on Sunday. That don't cost nothing to have the phone call out to members.

That would help.

Appendix J. The 2008 Presidential Campaign, Republican Propaganda, and
Patriotic Acts

Nichole:

Okay, okay, okay, alright. How do you define patriotism and, um, outside of military service, are there other forms of patriotic service to this country? So, if you say to me ‘Well, Nichole, I really believe that military service is the highest form’ then I would like you to tell me why. Um, so, those are the first two questions, and then I have a third question, um, that I’m going to ask you once you’ve answered those two.

Cowboy “Wonderful” Treadway:

Um, I’m gonna go first because I’m the youngest, I guess. I thought it was always age first, you know?

Sampson Frye Brown:

The more he talk, the less I have to say, you know? (humorously)

Nichole: (laughing)

Oh no, you gonna have to saysomethin’!

Cowboy “Wonderful” Treadway:

In this area, I may be somewhat biased, okay, because if you look at my license plate, my license plate; at least the vanity plate around it, says uh “Soldier Forever”.

Nichole:

MmHm

Cowboy “Wonderful” Treadway:

Because that’s the mentality of a soldier. Patriotism is in many forms. But, of course, I was a soldier for twenty-four years, you know? Vietnam and all of that stuff. So, I look at that as the highest form because, uh, what you’re involved in, and then it’s a matter of life and death, okay?—anytime, anywhere. You can’t get anymore higher than that. But, patriotism can be servin’ your country in many forms: by volunteer work, community services, um, what you call it when you go overseas to work with the um, um, Peace Corps, uh *anyway*, uh doctor, uh,

you may go to school, then serve your country and the community doing free medical clinics. Patriotism is doing something, at your will, for your country. You know? So, and that's what was so upsetting during the [presidential] campaign because soldiers and veterans allowed that ugly head to stick up and separate us. And, and just because we don't believe in certain people, we'll say 'well, you're not patriotic.'

Nichole:

Okay, help me out, you're going to have to be more specific.

Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway:

More specific about that. During the [presidential] campaign when someone denounced the war in Iraq, the Republican party was saying 'You're not a patriot, you're not patriotic.' You know 'You don't support the troops.' *I* support the troops, *I* support the troops, *I don't* support the war, you know? That's two different statements right there. And so, they were using that, using it, to distort and to deceive people, you know?

And, fortunately nobody said that to me except one person who I thought was very ignorant. He said "You guys knew what you were doing, they knew what they were doing and still volunteered and went to Iraq." He responded that way because I was upset every time I woke up and found out there was two and three soldiers killed and stuff like that. And I made that statement to this guy and this guy says, 'Well, they knew what they was doing.' This guy was a big-time plant manager, and he says 'They knew what they were doin' when they volunteered' and I looked at him and I said,

‘You know, that’s the most ignorant comment I ever heard and I find that really disturbing, you being a plant manager with this position and you gonna make an ignorant statement like that. We don’t join the military to die.’ You know what I’m sayin’? Even though we know that’s-a possibility.

Cowboy “Wonderful” Treadway:

A possibility.

Nichole:

Okay, but you didn’t give me the definition-

Cowboy “Wonderful” Treadway:

Yeah, I did! Before I said patriotism is defined as doing something for your country, on the behalf of your country, for your fellow man whether it’s state-side, or abroad, or across seas, or whatever it is. As long as you give it your service, on the behalf of your country, for the best interest of people, protection, health, whatever it is.

Appendix K. Patriotism, Faith, Flags, and Guns

Nichole:

Oh, that's okay, you can take me out another time! (laughing) Okay, so, I wanted to know—and this is the last part of the question, what does it mean for you to see the American flag in the church, the Tennessee flag and the Christian flag? 'Cause that's a form of civil religion in the house of worship. So, how should a person understand that?

Sampson Frye Brown:

First of all, the American flag is uh, is they're bein' patriotic. The state flag, uh, I really don't have a lot of comment on the state, they can be there if they want to, if they let the church decide, but by all means have the church flag. I, I, I believe in that. Now, I've gone to five churches, five churches, my church, our church, I know it has the American flag in there 'cause I put one of them in there. It had the MIA flag but I don't know what they did with that.

Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway:

I ain't seen that.

Sampson Frye Brown:

You ain't seen it? Well, I had one in there, I don't know what they did with it. Uh, the church flag has always been there as far as I can remember. Uh, what do they represent? Nothing really, in in God's house.

Nichole:

So, why are they there? That's my question.

Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway:

Patriotic.

Sampson Frye Brown:

Bein' patriotic, I guess. I guess uh, it's a symbol. I guess.

Nichole:

What do you think?

Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway:

That's, that's really some of it. We symbolize a lot—we also follow suit a lot. Well, so and so church they got this. Uh, well let's get that too, you know? I wanna be like them. But, it's symbolism, that's what it is. Uh, of course the church [Christian] flag, symbolizes 'well, this is the church.' I guess, 'We in a church, this is God's house' you know? Uh, the American flag 'We in America' you know? And that's, uh, patriotism bein' invented into the church. Uh, Tennessee, symbolize 'We in the State of Tennessee.' We got the flag, they got it in the capitol building, we got it in the church. All symbolizin' ...uh, uh, that's all it is. Uh,

Nichole:

But does it, does it trump God at any point?

Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway:

I, I don't think it trumps God, because I think we look at those symbols differently than how we look at God. Uh, we have those there to symbolize a, a, a tradition, recognition-type. Where God, we understand that the church is all about the Creator.

Nichole:

Okay.

Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway:

So—

Nichole:

Okay, okay. Now, just related to this-Do you think your faith influences your patriotism?

Cowboy "Wonderful" Treadway:

Yes. I think your faith influences everything about your, uh, being as a human being. Uh, for instance, uh, patriotism is how you feel about certain things and what you are able to do with yourself in order to be able to interject it into that. Uh, you know, your faith has something to do with it—if I, for instance, for instance, uh, there were a time where uh, people were killed, based upon their religions. Okay? If I were within that time, my faith would tell me, 'No I'm not doin' it even if I am a soldier. There were things that I just ain't gonna do.' And, and then the military says 'Okay, we can't make you do certain things if it's illegal-if it's against your religion.' Because they understand that certain things are faith-based.

Appendix L. Stars and Stripes in the Church stand for 'One Nation Under God'

Nichole: Well, I'm gonna take her answer, I'm gonna let you speak to this, but I'm gonna take her answer and I'm going to ask you a little something different. So, hopefully you can roll what you're going to say to me into this. So, in the front of the church when you enter, there's the American flag, there's the Christian flag, and there's the Tennessee flag, what do those three flags represent to you in terms of the church?

Had you ever seen it? (pause) (laughter)

Elizabeth Ainsley: They sittin' right up there?

Nichole: Yeah.

Deidre Abraham: I, I I was up there by the choir, up there, okay where Josh sit, there's a flag sittin' there, where Yvonne sits, there's two flags over there.

Elizabeth Ainsley: Oh

Nichole: Okay, if you had something else that you wanted to say I'm gonna let you say it, then I'm gonna let her respond to that.

Elizabeth Ainsley: I, I, I'll tell you this — what I think it ought to stand for.

Nichole: Okay, what do you think it should stand for?

Elizabeth Ainsley: One nation under God.

Nichole: Oh. Okay.

Elizabeth Ainsley: Uh, the that flag, it's the United States flag hang there, and I, I, I just um, uh, uh, because without God, there is no nation. Without God, there is no church. And so, whatever we do, it's got to come through him. And, as I was about to say awhile ago, I don't know, in my mind I try to think my best about that question when I was at home, but in my mind I'm thinking missionary is about the closest thing to a man that's in the service.

Nichole: Okay, and why's that?

Elizabeth Ainsley: Because missionaries are the people, they put their lives on the line also goin' in to help other countries. They are on the battlefield and a lot of time, they do get killed for servin' their country. Or servin' whatever country.

Nichole: Okay, now are you talkin' about missionaries sent by church groups, or you talkin' about governmental, like...

Elizabeth Ainsley: Yeah, any kind of missionary

Nichole: Ambassadors

Elizabeth Ainsley: It can be through church, ambassadors, or whatever. I, I, I just, I think that they show a lot of patriotism and we need to stand behind a missionary makin' every available means for them to go forward. I think that we can also put in service there. If you bein' faithful enough, if you see this missionary is goin' forth, you want to make sure that whatever means that can be available to them, that you give in support of their efforts. Give, give, give. And so, I couldn't think of too many higher things that, uh, I could speak about as far as patriotism.

Nichole: Okay. That's fine! I don't have a problem with that! Everybody has a different response. I'm just looking at the responses, I'm not judging the responses. For these questions, I'm not making a judgment, I'm really trying to get a better understanding of all these terms. That's it. Okay, now, I'm gonna move on.

Appendix M. “*Who Says*’...our Nation is in a Mess?”:
Rural White Methodists and the Question of Authority

Reverend Prosser: This is a serious time; we are living in a crunch time. Our nation is in a mess which extends from this issue of authority. Parents, teachers, doctors, dentists, and leaders: “Do you feel like you have the same authority as you used to?”

Let's look back at our past. Let's look back at our heritage. Do you feel like you have the same authority you used to? We are in hard times. We are experiencing hard times. Who is running the household?—the child or the parent? Educationally, are students dictating the rules of the educational system?

Let's look at the justice system. Criminals have twisted the law and blinded justice. And let's examine the economic system: What is the driving force behind our economic system? Greed and power seems to be driving our economic system. These are the sign of our times.

I am sure many of you are anxious about our economic condition. Some of you have been affected by the housing crisis; we know that some in our community have been affected. We have looked to the home, school, justice and economic systems for answers, but now we have to look at the church. Too many churches today are not driven by the power of the Holy Spirit. They are in ideological, mental, emotional, religious chains. We are bound by chains, oppressive chains of ungodly authority.

Prosser continues: “How can we be viewed as soldiers of the Cross when we look like a ‘chain gang’?” Satan holds the keys to the chains that bind us unless you know the truth. Too many church leaders who are called to stand up, do stand up and serve, but then often lose their sense of self and God. They lose a sense of their authority. Let's look at the words of Jesus: “There are going to be people outside of these walls to gain or get into heaven before you (i.e., prostitutes, sinners, gamblers etc.)”

Authority and Love. If you don't pay attention to Godly authority, you will be forced to obey ungodly authority. Is this not where we are? If you are confused about authority and ask, "Who should I listen to and follow?" Listen to what they [the Leaders] in 1 Corinthians 13 say, "Unless you have love in your heart, then you are a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal..."

Why do people take positions of authority when they are not called to these positions? The Sadducees and the Pharisees asked Jesus: "By whose authority do you say and do such things?" Check your God given gifts, you have the authority. Too many people have taken ungodly authority, even to the point of using God's Word [the Bible] to support their positions.

Authority and the Church. Some people take positions of authority in the Church because they have it in the world. And sometimes they take on authority because they do not have *any* in the world. God wants and needs business people in the Church. Those who have the gifts and talents of business are needed in the church. But business ways of the world must be filtered so that we can fully offer our gifts to Church committees and ministries.

Who says you don't have the authority? Who has the authority? Jesus has the authority. In Matthew 7: 28, the people recognized that Jesus spoke with authority so they commented, "Wow, this man speaks with authority!" When people speak with authority, you know it.

Jesus and the Centurion. Jesus recognized that the Centurion knew of Jesus' authority by his words and actions. If Jesus says, "your sins are forgiven," then your sins are forgiven. In the name of Jesus, demons flee. When Jesus speaks, the poor are fed and

sheltered. Stones roll away with the voice of Jesus, the dead rise up and the hungry are fed! Jesus' voice has authority! That is what the Centurion teaches us!

Where is the voice of Jesus? The voice of Jesus is in the Church. Jesus is the head of the Church. And because Jesus is the head of the Church, we are the voice of authority. Our father is coming back soon and this issue of authority needs to be dealt with soon. We need to respond to God's authority.

As the sermon comes to a close, Reverend Prosser prays: "Embolden us with knowledge and power because things are not going well. Chase away the fear. This Church can change the world today, let us believe that." Amen.

Appendix N. *“You Can’t Fight the Flag”*: 21st Century Civic Americanism
as a Theology of War

Nichole: What do you think, what are the national sociopolitical concerns of the congregation and/or what are the socio-political concerns you have?

Dr. Phil Cook: I think the level of interest and concern right now, within life of the community and the congregation, has to be on the war especially with our national guard that has just left the community and with members from this congregation who are a part of that. I think the whole...the last 21 to 22 months we've been through the election process nationally. You know that's been a part of the whole discussions that have taken place in addition to conversations about local political elections. And the economy, you know, both how it's impacting here and otherwise has been a part of the mindset. We have investment bankers and brokers and bank presidents, as well as people who are living on their retirement investments who are very concerned with where the national situation is going.

Nichole: Okay, well the economy, everybody-

Dr. Phil Cook: Sure.

Nichole: I mean, I heard it this past Sunday when Reverend Presson, addressed it in his sermon. You have done it as well. I have also heard it in the black congregation that I'm participating in. Do you have anything to add?

Robert Craig: I think that pretty well covers what I think are the top concerns at this particular time for the congregation, I think he's got his finger on that pulse real well.

Nichole: How do people square their theology with war. And so given that you're the head shepherd, 'how do you think...you can also tell me what are the attitudes toward this—well, I guess, well for me I make a distinction between the Afghani war and the Iraqi war, but I'll just say the war. You can address it however you want to address it. How do you understand your congregation's theology around war? How about that?

Dr. Phil Cook: I think their understanding comes a great deal out of *civil Americanism*, you know, as I'm sitting here looking at a flag right over your head.

Nichole: Oh, I didn't even see that, thank you.

Dr. Phil Cook: And I think it has to do with that and with the tradition of those who have defended this country—World War II and since. If you go into the sanctuary, one of the debates we've had is how, *where do we put the American flag in the sanctuary?*

Nichole: You're not the only one having that debate, another congregation—

Dr. Phil Cook: Some would say it really doesn't belong in the sanctuary, as such. Others insist that it be in a very prominent place. We have, you know we put the Christmas tree up in the sanctuary, and sometimes we...One year, we had the flag behind the Christmas tree, the American flag, and that didn't sit with some folks at all [Nichole laughing - "wow"]. So the location is of great concern because I don't think there is simply a religious and a patriotic separation, I think they're mixed and mingled in the American

culture in a very real sense. And you know there are different theologies of religion in view of war, the Just War Theory and so forth. And it's, it's a balance. There's – there are ways to share the faith and [sighing] not alienate a lot of people. It would be easy to preach a sermon on peace to the point that the patriots would all be offended, you know?

Nichole: Right.

Dr. Phil Cook: And so while some of us are feeling that we need to be very careful to defend our rights, we also know we have a great responsibility not to abuse our power, forcing ourselves on others. There are other definitions of *American* that might exist within the life of the congregation, and I'm not sure that the pulpit is always the appropriate place to fight those battles.

Nichole: Right.

Dr. Phil Cook: Because you're not going to win.

Nichole: [Laughing] Okay-

Dr. Phil Cook: *You can't fight the flag.*

Nichole: Definitely not in this community, you're not the only who has...I've been in quite a few churches here and that is [a question I've heard before]. You are raising the issue about where is the flag supposed to be.

Dr. Phil Cook: That, it's symbolic, where do we put our civil religion? Whether we do 'in God we trust', whether we do the pledge of allegiance, all those things in relation to the church: many pure religionists would say it belongs outside or somewhere, a fellowship hall, it belongs somewhere else.

Appendix O. Compassion Drives Social Action

Dr. Phil Cook: What does it mean to claim the name of Jesus? Does it mean to have the light of Jesus in us, transforming the world? Living the life of a disciple means always being in a *servicing posture*. In today's text, we discover the story of Jesus' compassion. Jesus spoke a word to Simon Peter's mother-in-law, took her hand, and restored her to health. Jesus' mind and spirit were always focused on people's needs. Restoring her health, Jesus was able to give back to Simon Peter's mother-in-law, the desire to *serve*. If we are called to follow a compassionate Christ, doesn't it mean we should have a desire to serve others?

"Methodists are known for their compassion," declares Cook. Everyday we find the needy at our door. That is why we visit the hospitals, serve at soup kitchens, deliver meals via Meal-on-Wheels, and work at food pantries. In this story, we see Jesus' compassion in his service to others, but we also see his devotional life. Jesus took time out from his eternally busy schedule to speak with his Father.

If you want focus, purpose, and energy in your life, then you must follow Jesus and make prayer a priority. We need to make time to commune with the Father. John and Charles Wesley awoke every morning at 4:00 a.m. to take time to pray. That is the heritage out of which we come. I challenge you to turn aside from the cares of the world and to pray so that you will become all that you are called to become.

Isaiah 40:31 says, "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they will mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not grow weary; and they shall walk and not faint." It takes waiting upon God to find that truth. Only a life lived in tandem with God knows that strength.

Dr. Cook continues, “Jesus knew his focus, purpose, and his mission.” In the early morning hours, Jesus was found missing from Simon Peter’s mother-in-law’s house. The manhunt for Jesus was on. The disciples eventually found him, but he was on a manhunt himself. When Simon Peter encountered him, he said, “Everyone is searching for you.” Jesus gives an unlikely response: “It’s time for us to be on our way.” Jesus did not explain his actions, yet it was clear that he had just communed with his Father because the house was yet again full of people with needs. Jesus knew the scope of his ministry. He did not come for one neighborhood or one community. He had come for the world. Jesus left Capernaum that day for you and for me. He knew his mission. *What is yours?*

He was interested in preaching the good news and calling people to change. The good news is going to mean work, risk, and sacrifice. When Jesus confronted people, he demanded a decision. We are to be participants in the life and work of Christ, not mere followers of the crowd or participants in a throng.

The USC football coach tells the story of Joel, a student at USC who felt he had no life’s purpose. His coach directed him to a convalescent home where he met an elderly woman. Not knowing she needed company, he arrived at the home expecting to participate in something grand. As Joel walked up to her she said, “Visiting anyone today?” He responded, “No.” She said, “Good, I need someone to listen to me.” Joel returned every week, after that visit, to sit with his new friend. And from that time forward, it was not surprising to see Joel leading his friends from the convalescent home to USC football game.

We are called to lose ourselves in the service of Christ and this world. *Will you accept the challenge?* It might mean saying, “I want to enlist in the army of God as a

member of this congregation.” Cook then closes his sermon with a prayer and the benediction.

Appendix P. Brer Rabbit, Tar Baby, and a Family Feud

Reverend Prosser gives an overview of Genesis 21:8-21, today's sermonic text. These scriptures recount the story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac. According to Prosser, God promised Abraham and Sarah a child. However, after years of waiting without fulfillment of the promise, Sarah grants Abraham permission to sleep with her "slave girl"—Hagar. Hagar bears Abraham a son naming him, Ishmael. Ishmael is not the "promised son," even if he is Abraham's son. Years later, Sarah produces a child—Isaac—who is identified as Abraham's heir. As the story unfolds, the relationship between Sarah and Hagar grow tense eventually disrupting Abraham's household.

Giving a summary of his message, *Reverend Prosser* reminds parishioners: "That we are familiar with family feuding, but it is problematic when families get entangled with feuds especially because within family, we are made godly; we are sanctified. We must also remember there are different types of family. We have the church family, school family, and the birth family." After the musical selection, "His Eye is On the Sparrow" (an old Negro standard), Prosser prays: "Father, we thank you for the Word. We thank you for the Spirit tugging at us. Open our eyes so that we may see what you are trying to tell us. Bless this time in your presence. In Jesus' precious name. Amen."

Reverend Prosser: Though it might be totally unrealistic to say this, family feuds are responsible for a good part of the hate, conflict, and suffering in this world. It is not totally unrealistic to blame what we see in American life today on the "family feud." What we see in American life today is a lack of communication, members of the family consumed in their own world, engrossed in television, caught up with the iPod, computer bloggings, text messaging, and e-mails to name a few distractions.

None of these are bad except they are put above *God and the family*. There is very little sitting around at the dinner table, today. In my past, Grandma and mama expected us children to sit at dinner and have family conversation. To save today's family, some of us need to go to the family porch. Consider the different problems with the family. It may be that you have been in a "church" family for 30 years but start thinking 'no one has ever asked *me* to be an usher, teacher, or greeter.' This contributes to the "family feud."

God has answers for the causes for family feuding in Christian work, home, and church. One of the causes is jealousy. For instance, Hagar thought she ought to be treated better than Sarah. Ishmael was jealous about not receiving his father Abraham's blessings. Jealousy is the cover for introducing sin into the family.

Lucifer was second only to God in power and beauty. But Lucifer looked at the throne and thought he could be God. Adam and Eve felt they could be God. Cain looked at Abel and believed his offering was than Abel's. Jacob's mother was jealous of her own son, Esau, and the position he held as the older of her two sons. In Jacob's family, Jacob's other sons envied Joseph. *Saul* was jealous of David's victories. *David* was jealous of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, and had him killed. These are the effects of jealousy on an individual.

Reverend Prosser: *Now let's look at the effects of jealousy on the family and the church.*

Cain gave into jealousy and killed his brother, Abel. Sarah gave into jealousy and ran Hagar into the wilderness. Saul gave into jealousy and made attempts to take David's life. David gave into jealousy and had Uriah killed. The religious leaders [in the New Testament Gospels] gave into jealousy and stoned Stephen to death. And ultimately, the

religious leaders gave into jealousy and crucified Jesus. Satan would like us to overlook jealousy which is one of his best weapons but we are here to uncover it.

Jealousy enters into the home when a wife says to a husband, “You don’t look at me the same anymore. We don’t talk the same anymore.” It enters into the school system where I recently read about a mother who killed another girl to prevent her from filling her daughter’s cheerleading spot. It enters when you know you’ve worked hard to get a promotion, yet the position you thought you earned is handed to someone else. It enters when you are a member of a group of pastors who meet regularly to support one another and suddenly Lucifer breaks the circle upon the announcement of you being selected as Bishop. Watch the games begin!

Reverend Prosser proclaims: “*Power and professionalism* are the root of jealousy. But the main cause is *materialism*.” The prophet Nathan confronts David about his jealousy and envy when he talks about the man with many sheep killing the man with only one sheep. What we have not, poisons what we already have. *Poison* is delivered upon the entrance of jealousy and envy.

Reverend Prosser admits: I get so angry at myself about letting Satan in. We are content with things until our neighbor has something better. Phyllis and I were afforded the opportunity to be at the footprint of God last month. We got up to meet God and God was ready to meet us. The human part of me saw cabins surrounded by boats and cars. And instead of praising God for this, I wondered ‘do these people not work? how is it that *sooo* many have *sooo* much and *sooo* many have *sooo* little?’ Satan jumps right in there

and we miss our blessings. I had to stop. God slapped me with ‘Terry, what is wrong with you? Look around you? Jealousy and materialism makes us lose all rationality.

Reverend Prosser: You remember the *Brer Rabbit and Tar Baby* story? We often lose when we strike something thinking that we will win.

We could say that it is genetic, but we need to just call jealously, sin.

We need to pray, pray for others.

We need to look at the Cross. Instantly, I am reminded of God’s great treasures.

God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to die for me just the way I am.

I must love God and love neighbor.

If we look at those below us, we will have no worries about those above us.

Prosser concludes his sermon with prayer and an invitation: “Your life could change if you are being called to be apart of this Church.”

Appendix Q. “Jesus’ Inauguration Day”

Dr. Phil Cook: Millions are anticipating the inauguration which always signifies a transition from one seat of power to another seat of power. When George Washington was inaugurated, the ritual of placing a hand on the Bible was also inaugurated; that happened in New York. Thomas Jefferson was the first president ever to be inaugurated in Washington D.C. In fact his inauguration was marked with the first ever inaugural parade. John Tyler was the first vice president to succeed a president who died in office. John Coolidge swore his son into the office of President of the United States in his home.

Jesus answered his calling as Savior of the world by coming out of the waters of the Jordan; baptism was the ritualized washing away of sin. This marked Jesus'

inauguration into ministry. Mark 1:4-11 proclaims:

And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁶John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I baptize you with^[a] water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus

⁹At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Dr. Phil Cook: Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee to be baptized by John. Upon coming out of the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit rested on Jesus. In the Markan version of the gospels, Jesus' ministry begins with John calling the people to "make ready for the day of the Lord, make his path straight." The story begins with the call of preparation

(a call to readiness). “Make ready,” draws us into a feeling of urgency indicating that God has acted in a decisive way, and also signaling we must respond right here and right now.

Like the Jews of old we often focus on traditions—with resolutions and plans, to signal the beginning of a new year. But we need Jesus’ presence to bring us into a new year. We need to shake off the dust of our sinful lives and wade in the water like Jesus, in order to usher us into a new life. We learn of Jesus (who Jesus is) by the announcement made by his Father. Even before Jesus does anything, there is a revelation: “You are my beloved son and in whom I am well pleased.” Here, Jesus is established by his identity and lives out this identity.

And that is how Jesus responds to his disciples. He asks the question: “Who do you say I am?” The answer they give is more complicated than what it needs to be. However God’s word to Jesus is “you are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.” God’s answer to Jesus’ identity is not difficult. Likewise, “who we are” is not as difficult as we make it. If Satan could have kept Jesus from believing in who he was then he would have been able to thwart Jesus’ ministry. Satan tried to tempt Jesus by challenging Jesus’ identity. He asked, “If you are the son of God then do this.”

Instead of asking a question like that, I would like to challenge you with the following questions: What are we going to be in this new year? What are we going to do? Do you know who you are today? Once we know who we are, then we will know what we should do. God is saying to us today: “You are my son. You are my daughter. In you, I am well pleased.”

Reverend Cook closes the sermon with a call to discipleship which includes a charge to receive the faith, to be baptized, and to become part of the church body. The congregation closes with the hymn, "Where he Leads Me." Walking up the church aisle, Dr. Cook symbolically "sends forth" the parishioners to do the work of service in the world. The congregation responds with the closing: "May God's blessings, God's grace, and God's glory be yours now and forever, Amen, Amen. May God's blessings, God's grace, and God's glory, be yours now and forever, Amen, Amen. Go in God's love, go in God's peace, Go and know that God be with you! A-men, A-men, A-men."

Appendix R. "Nic at Night"

Dr. Phil Cook: Driving *Ms. Daisy* is more than a movie about an elder Jewish employer and her black chauffeur. Daisy and Hoke’s relationship begin slowly but they end up becoming best friends. The movie tells us about the challenges of being transformed and shares the confidence that as we continue to develop we begin to accept our lives the way it is. Today’s lesson challenges us to be transformed in our relationship with Christ; that is the point to the Lenten season—to be transformed.

After the overview, The Chancel Choir sings “Jesus Keep me near the Cross. Pastor Cook then launches with full force into his sermon entitled “Nic at Night” based on John 3:16 (John 3:1-21 is the full sermonic passage).

Jesus Teaches Nicodemus

¹ Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” ³ Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.^[a]” ⁴ “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!” ⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit^[b] gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You^[c] must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”^[d] ⁹ “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven — the Son of Man.^[e] ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,^[f] ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”^[g] ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his

one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Dr. Phil Cook: Nicodemus belonged to the Brotherhood; he was a moralist, and was committed to living by the Torah. People looked to him for truth. If there was anyone who knew about God, it was Nicodemus. However, even as a ruler of the Jews, a Pharisee, and a member of the Sanhedrin (the Supreme Court during that period that made decisions about religious law and with regard to the person, Jesus), even with being pedigreed, Nicodemus was *empty*.

In all of his roles, Nicodemus was a fierce "patriot." He was looking for political solutions as he awaited the Messiah. Though he studied under the best teachers like Glamaliel (a premier instructor of that day), Nicodemus was a broken man who did not need more theories about God. Rather, he needed a "religion of the warmed heart," as described by John Wesley. Jesus knew that Nicodemus needed more than theories of God. He needed to be transformed. Did you happen to read the book, "The Shack"?

Dr. Phil Cook: The Word of God comes alive when we know Christ personally; it comes alive when we feel his love; and it comes alive when we return His love. Jesus said, "to be born again" is mainly what is needed to enter the Kingdom of God. For example,

Johnny Dean grew up in the South helping his uncle in the Delta region. It was hot and humid as they worked. During the evening, the night's heat and humidity forced them to stand still on the porch but they soaked in the days when the breeze would make the leaves rustle. They did not know where the breeze or the wind had come from. That's like God's Holy Spirit and grace. Grace is a mystery. No one knows where it comes from and where it is going. That characterizes "born again" experience; it happens because of God's amazing grace.

Often we ask God to show us the Holy Spirit because we can't believe in what we don't see. There was a story about a boy named Patrick. One day Patrick asked his father about the Holy Spirit and where it comes from. Answering Patrick, his father said: "Patrick, I'll show you the Holy Spirit if you can show me the wind. I cannot show you where the Holy Spirit comes from much like I cannot show you where the wind comes from. However, I can show you the effects of the Holy Spirit on a person's life. Patrick, every time you feel the wind there is a Christian in America praying for you."

Dr. Phil Cook: In Jesus Christ, God has brought history to a crescendo which is what John 3:16 tells us. God has the world in his hands although they are pierced hands. God is waiting for you to give him control. Now is the time to become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Reverend Cook closes with the following prayer.

Dr. Phil Cook: Father, we bow before you conscious that we enter the Kingdom by invitation. Lead us in the path to living out our Kingdom work. Call us to commitments, we'll have yet to keep or make. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Appendix S. Tables and Charts for Research Population, $N=83$ and Sub-group, $n=62$

Statistical Data in Tables and Graphs

N=83 refers to the total number of research participants in this study, eighty-three. Data analysis is based on the full research population but largely on a portion of the total number of research subjects—sixty-two, $n=62$. The tables and charts refer to findings in chapter six where $N=83$ and $n=62$ are compared along age, race, gender, occupational, veteran, socio-political and theological perspectives.

Tables for Sub-group of Research Participants, $n=62$

Table 1.1. Age Distribution for $n=62$

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20-45	12	19.4	19.4	19.4
	46-55	10	16.1	16.1	35.5
	56-69	23	37.1	37.1	72.6
	70+	17	27.4	27.4	100.0
	Total	62	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.2. Group Distribution: Focus Group Interviewees and Individual Surveys
for $n=62$

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Group A	24	38.7	38.7	38.7
	Group B	9	14.5	14.5	53.2
	Individual Surveys	29	46.8	46.8	100.0
	Total	62	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.3. Percent Composition by Race for $n=62$

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	African American	22	35.5	35.5	35.5
	Caucasian American	40	64.5	64.5	100.0
	Total	62	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.4. Gender[ed] Participation for $n=62$

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	30	48.4	48.4	48.4
	Male	32	51.6	51.6	100.0
	Total	62	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.5. Workforce by Occupation for $n=62$

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	College Student/Law St	1	1.6	1.6	1.6
	Labor	3	4.8	4.8	6.5
	Professional	25	40.3	40.3	46.8
	Professional/Homemaker	1	1.6	1.6	48.4
	Retired	7	11.3	11.3	59.7
	Retired Professional	1	1.6	1.6	61.3
	Service	15	24.2	24.2	85.5
	Service/Homemaker	7	11.3	11.3	96.8
	Service/Retired	2	3.2	3.2	100.0
	Total	62	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.6. Socio-Political Representations: A Summary for $n=62$

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Conservative	27	43.5	43.5	43.5
	Liberal	7	11.3	11.3	54.8
	Moderate	28	45.2	45.2	100.0
	Total	62	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.7. Theological Perspectives: A Summary for $n=62$

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Conservative	27	43.5	43.5	43.5
	Liberal	7	11.3	11.3	54.8
	Moderate	28	45.2	45.2	100.0
	Total	62	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.8. Veteran Status Distributed by Percent for $n=62$

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	48	77.4	77.4	77.4
	Yes	3	4.8	4.8	82.3
	Yes/1955-1959	1	1.6	1.6	83.9
	Yes/Berlin Cold War	1	1.6	1.6	85.5
	Yes/Desert Storm	1	1.6	1.6	87.1
	Yes/Korean	2	3.2	3.2	90.3
	Yes/Vietnam	4	6.5	6.5	96.8
	Yes/Vietnam/Desert Sto	1	1.6	1.6	98.4
	Yes/WWII	1	1.6	1.6	100.0
	Total	62	100.0	100.0	

Table 9. Occupation Distribution in Black and White (n=62)

		ethnicity		Total
		African American	Caucasian American	
College Student/Law St	Count	0	1	1
	% within occupation	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% within ethnicity	.0%	2.5%	1.6%
	% of Total	.0%	1.6%	1.6%
Labor	Count	3	0	3
	% within occupation	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
	% within ethnicity	13.6%	.0%	4.8%
	% of Total	4.8%	.0%	4.8%
Professional	Count	8	17	25
	% within occupation	32.0%	68.0%	100.0%
	% within ethnicity	36.4%	42.5%	40.3%
	% of Total	12.9%	27.4%	40.3%
Professional/Homemaker	Count	0	1	1
	% within occupation	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% within ethnicity	.0%	2.5%	1.6%
	% of Total	.0%	1.6%	1.6%
Retired	Count	3	4	7
	% within occupation	42.9%	57.1%	100.0%
	% within ethnicity	13.6%	10.0%	11.3%
	% of Total	4.8%	6.5%	11.3%
Retired Professional	Count	0	1	1
	% within occupation	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% within ethnicity	.0%	2.5%	1.6%
	% of Total	.0%	1.6%	1.6%
Service	Count	8	7	15
	% within occupation	53.3%	46.7%	100.0%
	% within ethnicity	36.4%	17.5%	24.2%
	% of Total	12.9%	11.3%	24.2%
Service/Homemaker	Count	0	7	7
	% within occupation	.0%	100.0%	100.0%

		<i>Table 9—Continued</i>		
	% within ethnicity	.0%	17.5%	11.3%
	% of Total	.0%	11.3%	11.3%
Service/Retired	Count	0	2	2
	% within occupation	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% within ethnicity	.0%	5.0%	3.2%
	% of Total	.0%	3.2%	3.2%
Total	Count	22	40	62
	% within occupation	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%
	% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%

Note: The independent variable is occupation; the dependent variable is ethnicity. Two of the three columns in this table are designated—ethnicity. Reading vertically to the “% within ethnicity” line, yields the intra-racial statistic for occupation distribution within each group—African American and Caucasian American. Reading horizontally along the line marked “% within occupation,” produces the inter-racial statistic for occupation distribution across groups.

Service industry employees provide services to businesses and consumers. Following are examples of this industry: tourism, hospitality (e.g., restaurants, hotels, casinos), hospital, and governmental jobs. Labor employees commonly work in manufacturing to produce a usable product. Individuals trained in a particular trade (i.e., carpenter, electrician, plumber) are considered laborers. Professionals have specialized training and education in a particular field (e.g., teachers, doctors, lawyers).

Table 10. Age Distribution by Race ($n=62$)

			ethnicity		Total
			African American	Caucasian American	
age	20-45	Count	3	9	12
		% within age	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	13.6%	22.5%	19.4%
		% of Total	4.8%	14.5%	19.4%
	46-55	Count	3	7	10
		% within age	30.0%	70.0%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	13.6%	17.5%	16.1%
		% of Total	4.8%	11.3%	16.1%
	56-69	Count	11	12	23
		% within age	47.8%	52.2%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	50.0%	30.0%	37.1%
		% of Total	17.7%	19.4%	37.1%
	70+	Count	5	12	17
		% within age	29.4%	70.6%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	22.7%	30.0%	27.4%
		% of Total	8.1%	19.4%	27.4%
Total		Count	22	40	62
		% within age	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%

Note: Two of the three columns in this table are labeled, ethnicity. Reading down to the “% within ethnicity” line, yields the intra-racial statistic for age distribution within each group—African American and Caucasian American. Reading along the line marked “% within age,” produces the inter-racial statistic across ages for both groups.

Table 11. Race from Socio-Political Perspectives (*n*=62)

			ethnicity		Total
			African American	Caucasian American	
social	Conservative	Count	9	18	27
		% within social	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	40.9%	45.0%	43.5%
		% of Total	14.5%	29.0%	43.5%
	Liberal	Count	3	4	7
		% within social	42.9%	57.1%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	13.6%	10.0%	11.3%
		% of Total	4.8%	6.5%	11.3%
	Moderate	Count	10	18	28
		% within social	35.7%	64.3%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	45.5%	45.0%	45.2%
		% of Total	16.1%	29.0%	45.2%
Total	Count	22	40	62	
	% within social	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%	
	% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%	

Note: Two of the three columns in this table are marked, ethnicity. Reading down to the “% within ethnicity” line, yields the intra-racial statistic on socio-political perspective (i.e., conservative, liberal, and moderate) within each group—African American and Caucasian American. Reading across the line marked “% within social” produces the inter-racial statistic for both groups along social status.

Table 12. Rural Whites and Blacks from Theological Perspectives (*n*=62)

			ethnicity		Total
			African American	Caucasian American	
theological	Conservative	Count	9	18	27
		% within theological	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	40.9%	45.0%	43.5%
		% of Total	14.5%	29.0%	43.5%
	Liberal	Count	3	4	7
		% within theological	42.9%	57.1%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	13.6%	10.0%	11.3%
		% of Total	4.8%	6.5%	11.3%
	Moderate	Count	10	18	28
		% within theological	35.7%	64.3%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	45.5%	45.0%	45.2%
		% of Total	16.1%	29.0%	45.2%
Total	Count	22	40	62	
	% within theological	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%	
	% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%	

Note: Two of the three columns in this table are titled—ethnicity. Reading down to the “% within ethnicity” line, yields the intra-racial statistic on theological positions (i.e., conservative, liberal, and moderate) within each ethnic group, African American and Caucasian American. Reading across to the line marked “% within theological” produces the inter-racial statistic for both groups along theological positions.

Table 13. Gender[ed] Participation along Racial Lines (*n*=62)

			ethnicity		Total
			African American	Caucasian American	
gender	Female	Count	9	21	30
		% within gender	30.0%	70.0%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	40.9%	52.5%	48.4%
		% of Total	14.5%	33.9%	48.4%
	Male	Count	13	19	32
		% within gender	40.6%	59.4%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	59.1%	47.5%	51.6%
		% of Total	21.0%	30.6%	51.6%
Total	Count	22	40	62	
	% within gender	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%	
	% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%	

Note: Two of the three columns in this table are designated by ethnicity. Reading vertically to the “% within ethnicity” line produces the intra-racial statistic for each group—African American and Caucasian American, against gender. Reading horizontally along the line marked “% within gender,” produces the inter-racial statistic for each gender across groups.

Table 14. Veteran Status by Ethnicity (n=62)

			ethnicity		Total
			African American	Caucasian American	
veteran	No	Count	15	33	48
		% within veteran	31.3%	68.8%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	68.2%	82.5%	77.4%
		% of Total	24.2%	53.2%	77.4%
	Yes	Count	2	1	3
		% within veteran	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	9.1%	2.5%	4.8%
		% of Total	3.2%	1.6%	4.8%
	Yes/1955-1959	Count	1	0	1
		% within veteran	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	4.5%	.0%	1.6%
		% of Total	1.6%	.0%	1.6%
	Yes/Berlin Cold War	Count	0	1	1
		% within veteran	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	.0%	2.5%	1.6%
		% of Total	.0%	1.6%	1.6%
	Yes/Desert Storm	Count	0	1	1
		% within veteran	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	.0%	2.5%	1.6%
		% of Total	.0%	1.6%	1.6%
	Yes/Korean	Count	0	2	2
		% within veteran	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within ethnicity	.0%	5.0%	3.2%
		% of Total	.0%	3.2%	3.2%
Yes/Vietnam	Count	3	1	4	
	% within veteran	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%	
	% within ethnicity	13.6%	2.5%	6.5%	

*Table 14—
Continued*

	% of Total	4.8%	1.6%	6.5%
Yes/Vietnam/Desert Sto	Count	1	0	1
	% within veteran	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
	% within ethnicity	4.5%	.0%	1.6%
	% of Total	1.6%	.0%	1.6%
Yes/WWII	Count	0	1	1
	% within veteran	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% within ethnicity	.0%	2.5%	1.6%
	% of Total	.0%	1.6%	1.6%
Total	Count	22	40	62
	% within veteran	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%
	% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%

Table 15. Age Groups by Social Status (n=62)

			social			Total
			Conservative	Liberal	Moderate	
age	20-45	Count	6	2	4	12
		% within age	50.0%	16.7%	33.3%	100.0%
		% within social	22.2%	28.6%	14.3%	19.4%
		% of Total	9.7%	3.2%	6.5%	19.4%
46-55	Count	2	0	8	10	
	% within age	20.0%	.0%	80.0%	100.0%	
	% within social	7.4%	.0%	28.6%	16.1%	
	% of Total	3.2%	.0%	12.9%	16.1%	
56-69	Count	12	2	9	23	
	% within age	52.2%	8.7%	39.1%	100.0%	
	% within social	44.4%	28.6%	32.1%	37.1%	
	% of Total	19.4%	3.2%	14.5%	37.1%	
70+	Count	7	3	7	17	
	% within age	41.2%	17.6%	41.2%	100.0%	
	% within social	25.9%	42.9%	25.0%	27.4%	
	% of Total	11.3%	4.8%	11.3%	27.4%	
Total	Count	27	7	28	62	
	% within age	43.5%	11.3%	45.2%	100.0%	
	% within social	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	43.5%	11.3%	45.2%	100.0%	

Note: Three of the four columns in this table are marked by social status. Reading vertically to the “% within social” line generates the intra-group statistic for each of the three socio-political collectives against age. Reading across, horizontally, to the line marked “% within age,” produces the inter-group socio-political statistic across ages.

Table 16. Age Groups and Theological Orientations (n=62)

			theological			Total
			Conservative	Liberal	Moderate	
age	20-45	Count	6	3	3	12
		% within age	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%	100.0%
		% within theological	22.2%	42.9%	10.7%	19.4%
		% of Total	9.7%	4.8%	4.8%	19.4%
	46-55	Count	2	2	6	10
		% within age	20.0%	20.0%	60.0%	100.0%
		% within theological	7.4%	28.6%	21.4%	16.1%
		% of Total	3.2%	3.2%	9.7%	16.1%
	56-69	Count	12	2	9	23
		% within age	52.2%	8.7%	39.1%	100.0%
		% within theological	44.4%	28.6%	32.1%	37.1%
		% of Total	19.4%	3.2%	14.5%	37.1%
	70+	Count	7	0	10	17
		% within age	41.2%	.0%	58.8%	100.0%
		% within theological	25.9%	.0%	35.7%	27.4%
		% of Total	11.3%	.0%	16.1%	27.4%
Total		Count	27	7	28	62
		% within age	43.5%	11.3%	45.2%	100.0%
		% within theological	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	43.5%	11.3%	45.2%	100.0%

Note: Three of the four columns in this table are described according to theological perspective. Reading vertically to the “% within theological” line supplies the intra-group statistic for each of the three theological groupings according to age. Reading across, horizontally, to the line marked “% within age,” produces the inter-group statistic for theological position across ages.

Tables for Total Number of Subjects, N=83

Table 2.1. Age Distribution for N=83

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20-45	23	27.7	27.7	27.7
	46-55	13	15.7	15.7	43.4
	56-69	29	34.9	34.9	78.3
	70+	18	21.7	21.7	100.0
	Total	83	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.2. Group Distribution: Focus Group Interviewee and Individual Surveys for N=83

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Group A	27	32.5	32.5	32.5
	Group B	27	32.5	32.5	65.1
	Individual Surveys	29	34.9	34.9	100.0
	Total	83	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.3. Percent Composition by Race for N=83

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	African American	33	39.8	39.8	39.8
	Caucasian American	50	60.2	60.2	100.0
	Total	83	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.4. Gender[ed] Participation for N=83

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	39	47.0	47.0	47.0
	Male	44	53.0	53.0	100.0
	Total	83	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.5 Workforce by Occupation for N=83

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	College Student	3	3.6	3.6	3.6
	College Student/Law St	1	1.2	1.2	4.8
	Labor	7	8.4	8.4	13.3
	Professional	31	37.3	37.3	50.6
	Professional/Homemaker	1	1.2	1.2	51.8
	Retired	7	8.4	8.4	60.2
	Retired Professional	1	1.2	1.2	61.4
	Service	19	22.9	22.9	84.3
	Service/Disabled	1	1.2	1.2	85.5
	Service/Homemaker	9	10.8	10.8	96.4
	Service/Retired	3	3.6	3.6	100.0
	Total	83	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.6. Socio-Political Representations: A Summary for N=83

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Conservative	30	36.1	36.1	36.1
	Liberal	15	18.1	18.1	54.2
	Moderate	38	45.8	45.8	100.0
	Total	83	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.7. Theological Perspectives: A Summary for N=83

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Conservative	34	41.0	41.0	41.0
	Liberal	9	10.8	10.8	51.8
	Moderate	40	48.2	48.2	100.0
	Total	83	100.0	100.0	

Table 2.8. Veteran Status Distributed by Percent for N=83

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	67	80.7	80.7	80.7
	Yes	3	3.6	3.6	84.3
	Yes/1955-1959	1	1.2	1.2	85.5
	Yes/Berlin Cold War	1	1.2	1.2	86.7
	Yes/Desert Storm	1	1.2	1.2	88.0
	Yes/Korean	2	2.4	2.4	90.4
	Yes/Vietnam	6	7.2	7.2	97.6
	Yes/Vietnam/Desert Stor	1	1.2	1.2	98.8
	Yes/WWII	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	83	100.0	100.0	

Table 17. Theological Orientations and Social Perspectives against Age Groups for N=83

age				social			Total
				Conservative	Liberal	Moderate	
20-45	theological	Conservative	Count	6	1	3	10
			% within theological	60.0%	10.0%	30.0%	100.0%
			% within social	100.0%	14.3%	30.0%	43.5%
			% of Total	26.1%	4.3%	13.0%	43.5%
	Liberal	Count	0	4	1	5	
		% within theological	.0%	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%	
		% within social	.0%	57.1%	10.0%	21.7%	
		% of Total	.0%	17.4%	4.3%	21.7%	
	Moderate	Count	0	2	6	8	
		% within theological	.0%	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%	
		% within social	.0%	28.6%	60.0%	34.8%	
		% of Total	.0%	8.7%	26.1%	34.8%	
	Total	Count	6	7	10	23	
% within theological		26.1%	30.4%	43.5%	100.0%		
% within social		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		
% of Total		26.1%	30.4%	43.5%	100.0%		
46-55	theological	Conservative	Count	4		0	4
			% within theological	100.0%		.0%	100.0%
			% within social	100.0%		.0%	30.8%
			% of Total	30.8%		.0%	30.8%
	Liberal	Count	0		2	2	
		% within theological	.0%		100.0%	100.0%	
		% within social	.0%		22.2%	15.4%	
		% of Total	.0%		15.4%	15.4%	
	Moderate	Count	0		7	7	
		% within theological	.0%		100.0%	100.0%	
		% within social	.0%		77.8%	53.8%	
		% of Total	.0%		53.8%	53.8%	

				<i>Table 17— Continued</i>				
<u>Total</u>			Count	4		9	13	
			% within theological	30.8%		69.2%	100.0%	
			% within social	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%	
			% of Total	30.8%		69.2%	100.0%	
56-69	theological	Conservative	Count	11	0	1	12	
			% within theological	91.7%	.0%	8.3%	100.0%	
			% within social	91.7%	.0%	8.3%	41.4%	
			% of Total	37.9%	.0%	3.4%	41.4%	
			Liberal	Count	0	1	1	2
				% within theological	.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
				% within social	.0%	20.0%	8.3%	6.9%
				% of Total	.0%	3.4%	3.4%	6.9%
			Moderate	Count	1	4	10	15
				% within theological	6.7%	26.7%	66.7%	100.0%
				% within social	8.3%	80.0%	83.3%	51.7%
				% of Total	3.4%	13.8%	34.5%	51.7%
<u>Total</u>			Count	12	5	12	29	
			% within theological	41.4%	17.2%	41.4%	100.0%	
			% within social	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
			% of Total	41.4%	17.2%	41.4%	100.0%	
70+	theological	Conservative	Count	7	0	1	8	
			% within theological	87.5%	.0%	12.5%	100.0%	
			% within social	87.5%	.0%	14.3%	44.4%	
			% of Total	38.9%	.0%	5.6%	44.4%	
			Moderate	Count	1	3	6	10
				% within theological	10.0%	30.0%	60.0%	100.0%
				% within social	12.5%	100.0%	85.7%	55.6%
				% of Total	5.6%	16.7%	33.3%	55.6%
	<u>Total</u>			Count	8	3	7	18
				% within theological	44.4%	16.7%	38.9%	100.0%
				% within social	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	<u>Total</u>			% of Total	44.4%	16.7%	38.9%	100.0%

Note: In this cross tabulation of three variables, theological and socio-political positions are measured against age. Reading vertically down to “% within social” generates the intra-group statistic for each of the three socio-political statuses against theological position and age group. Reading horizontally along “% within theological” produces the inter-group statistic for theological position along age group and against socio-political status.

Table 18. Theological Positioning, Race, and Socio-Political Perspective for N=83

Social				ethnicity		Total	
				African American	Caucasian American		
Conservative	theological	Conservative	Count	11	17	28	
			% within theological	39.3%	60.7%	100.0%	
			% within ethnicity	91.7%	94.4%	93.3%	
			% of Total	36.7%	56.7%	93.3%	
		Moderate		Count	1	1	2
				% within theological	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
				% within ethnicity	8.3%	5.6%	6.7%
				% of Total	3.3%	3.3%	6.7%
	Total			Count	12	18	30
				% within theological	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
				% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
				% of Total	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
Liberal	theological	Conservative	Count	1	0	1	
			% within theological	100.0%	.0%	100.0%	
			% within ethnicity	20.0%	.0%	6.7%	
			% of Total	6.7%	.0%	6.7%	
		Liberal		Count	1	4	5
				% within theological	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
				% within ethnicity	20.0%	40.0%	33.3%
				% of Total	6.7%	26.7%	33.3%
		Moderate		Count	3	6	9
				% within theological	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
				% within ethnicity	60.0%	60.0%	60.0%
				% of Total	20.0%	40.0%	60.0%
Total			Count	5	10	15	
			% within theological	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%	
			% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
			% of Total	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%	
Moderate	theological	Conservative	Count	4	1	5	
			% within theological	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%	
			% within ethnicity	25.0%	4.5%	13.2%	
			% of Total	10.5%	2.6%	13.2%	

<i>Table 18— Continued</i>				
Liberal	Count	2	2	4
	% within theological	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	% within ethnicity	12.5%	9.1%	10.5%
	% of Total	5.3%	5.3%	10.5%
Moderate	Count	10	19	29
	% within theological	34.5%	65.5%	100.0%
	% within ethnicity	62.5%	86.4%	76.3%
	% of Total	26.3%	50.0%	76.3%
Total	Count	16	22	38
	% within theological	42.1%	57.9%	100.0%
	% within ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	42.1%	57.9%	100.0%

Note: In this cross tabulation of three variables, ethnicity is measured against theological and socio-political perspectives. The “% within ethnicity” shows the intra-group statistic for each racial group against socio-political and theological perspectives. Reading horizontally along “% within theological” produces the inter-group statistic for each racial group along theological position and against socio-political status.

GRAPHS FOR $n=62$ RESPONDENTS

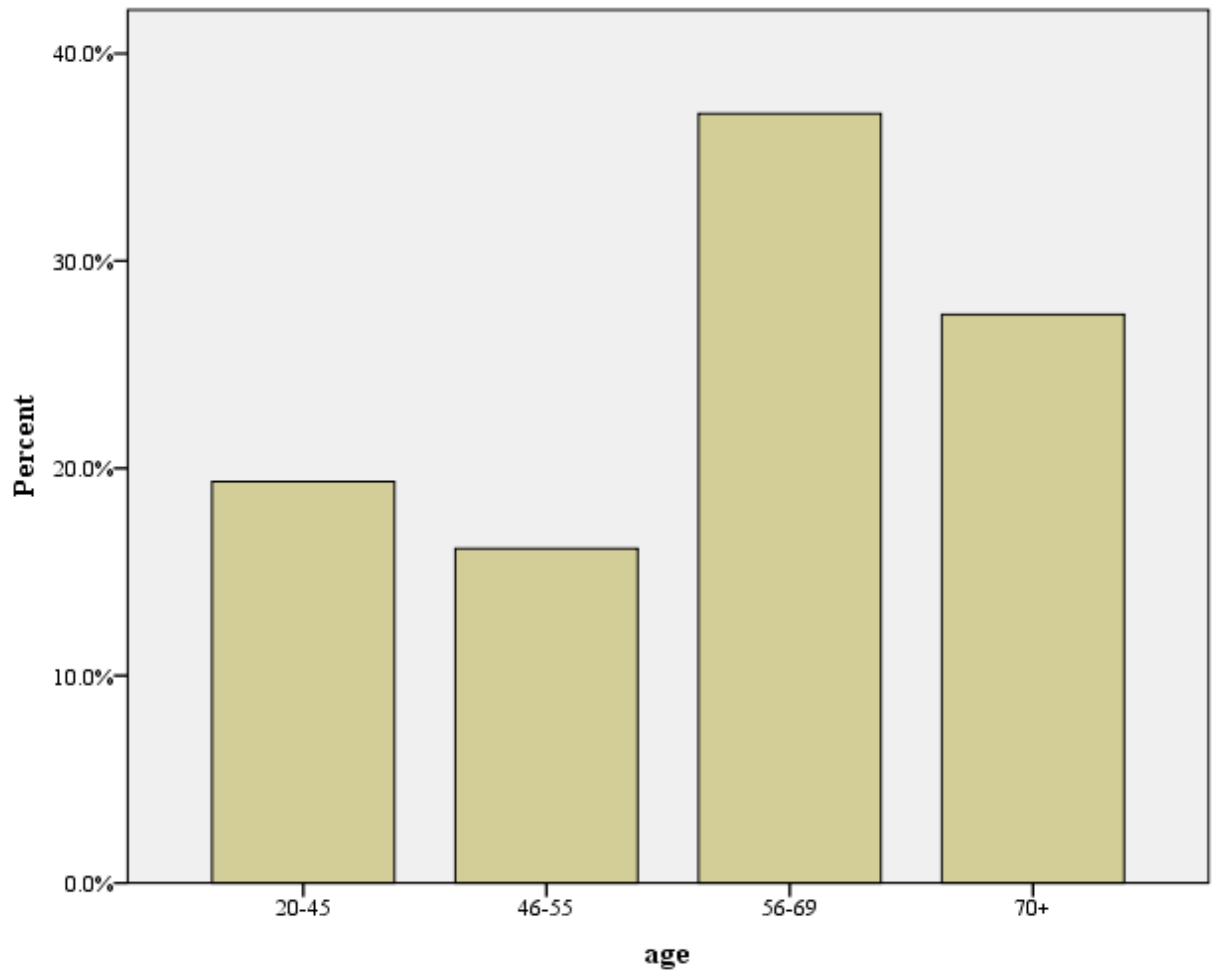


Figure 1. Age Distribution for $n=62$ by Percent Composition

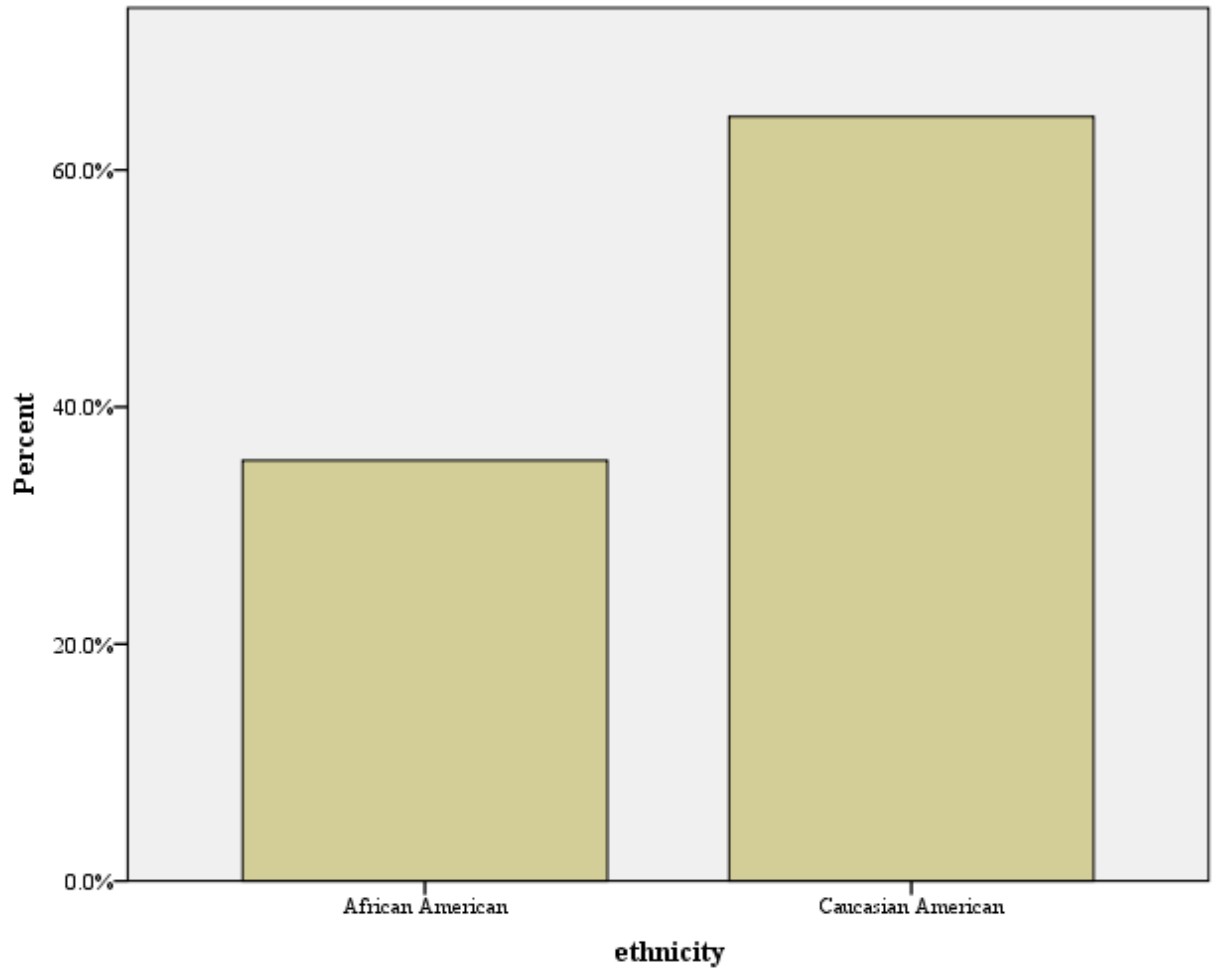


Figure 2. Percent Composition by Race for n=62

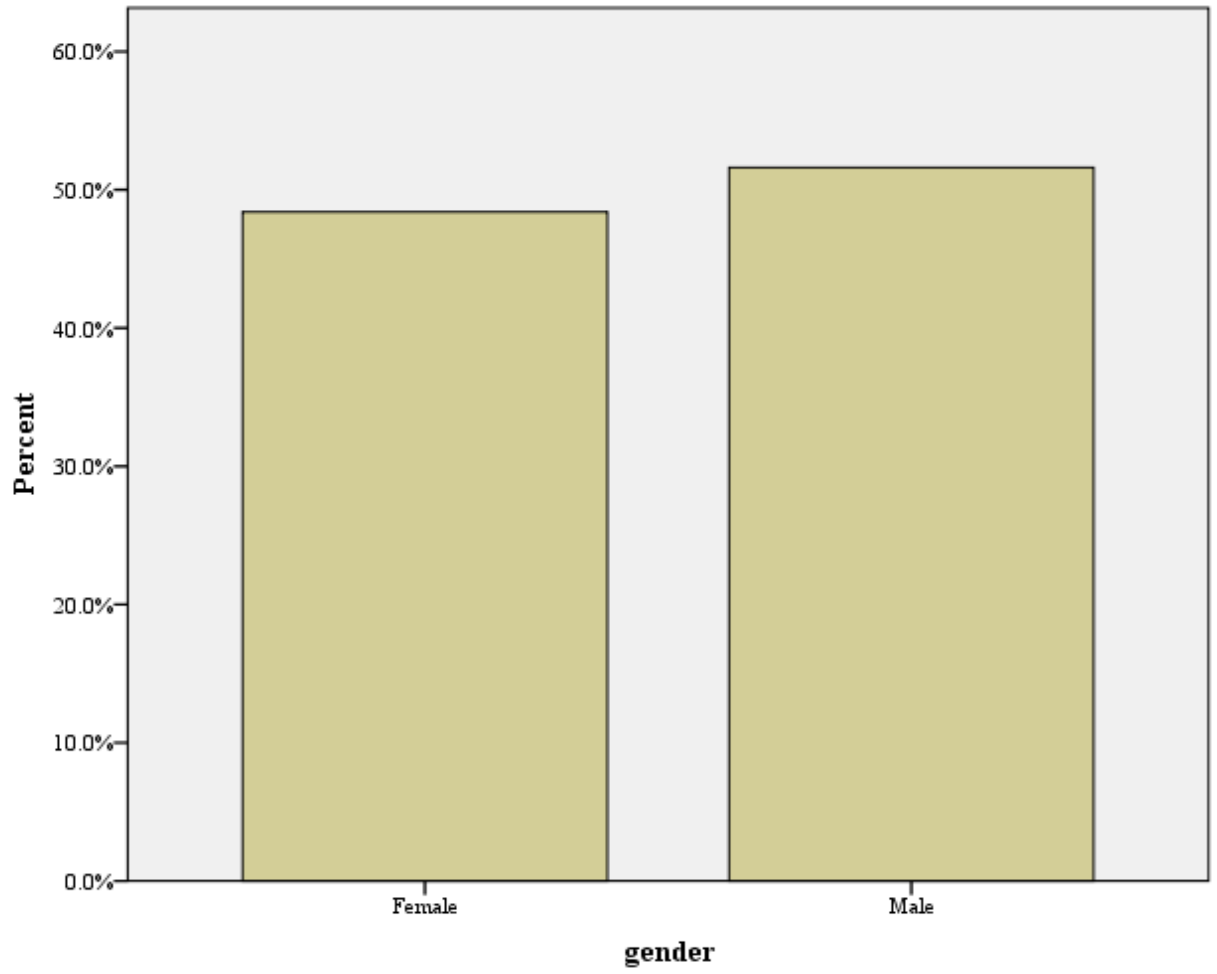


Figure 3. Participation by Gender for n=62

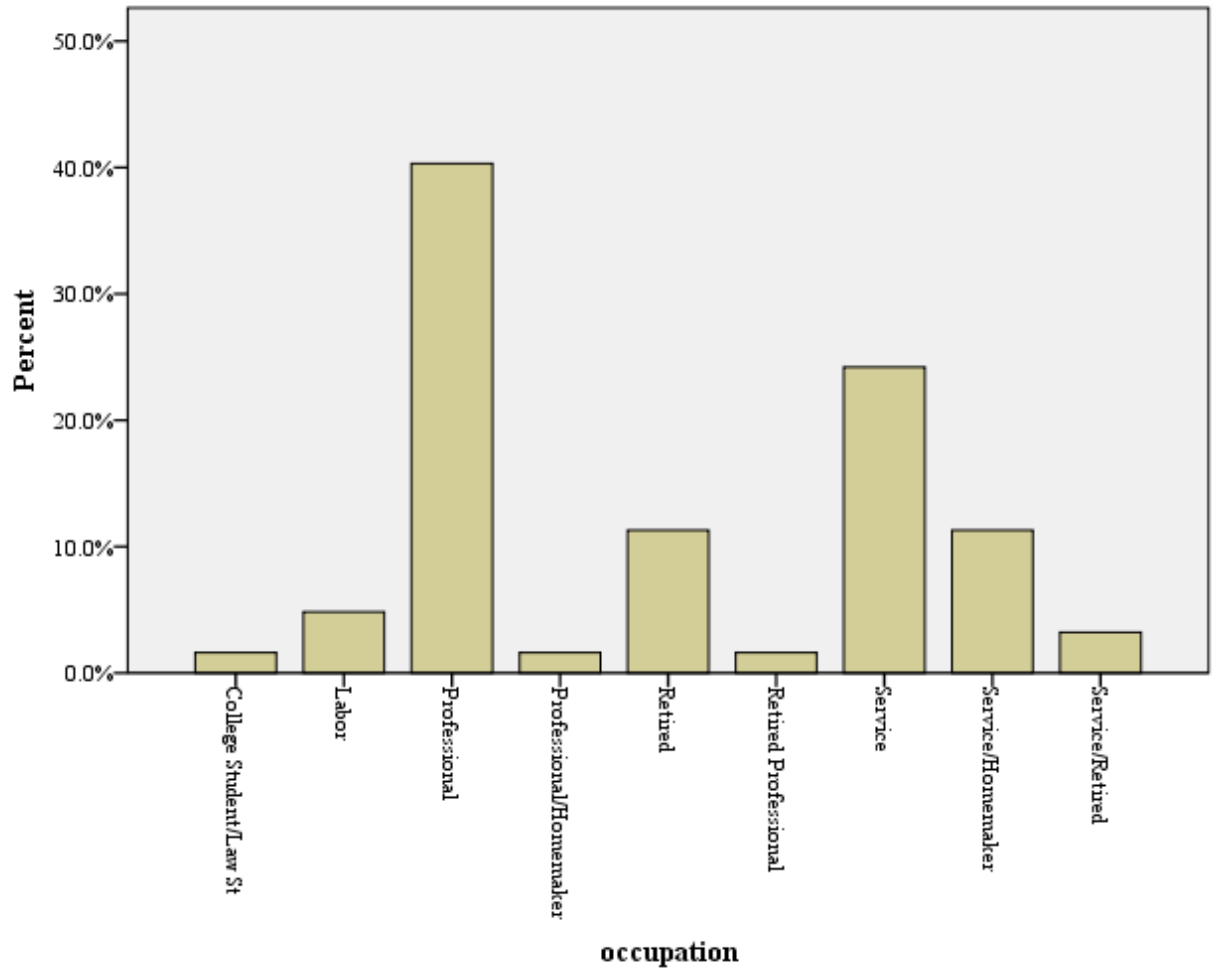


Figure 4. Occupation Distribution for n=62

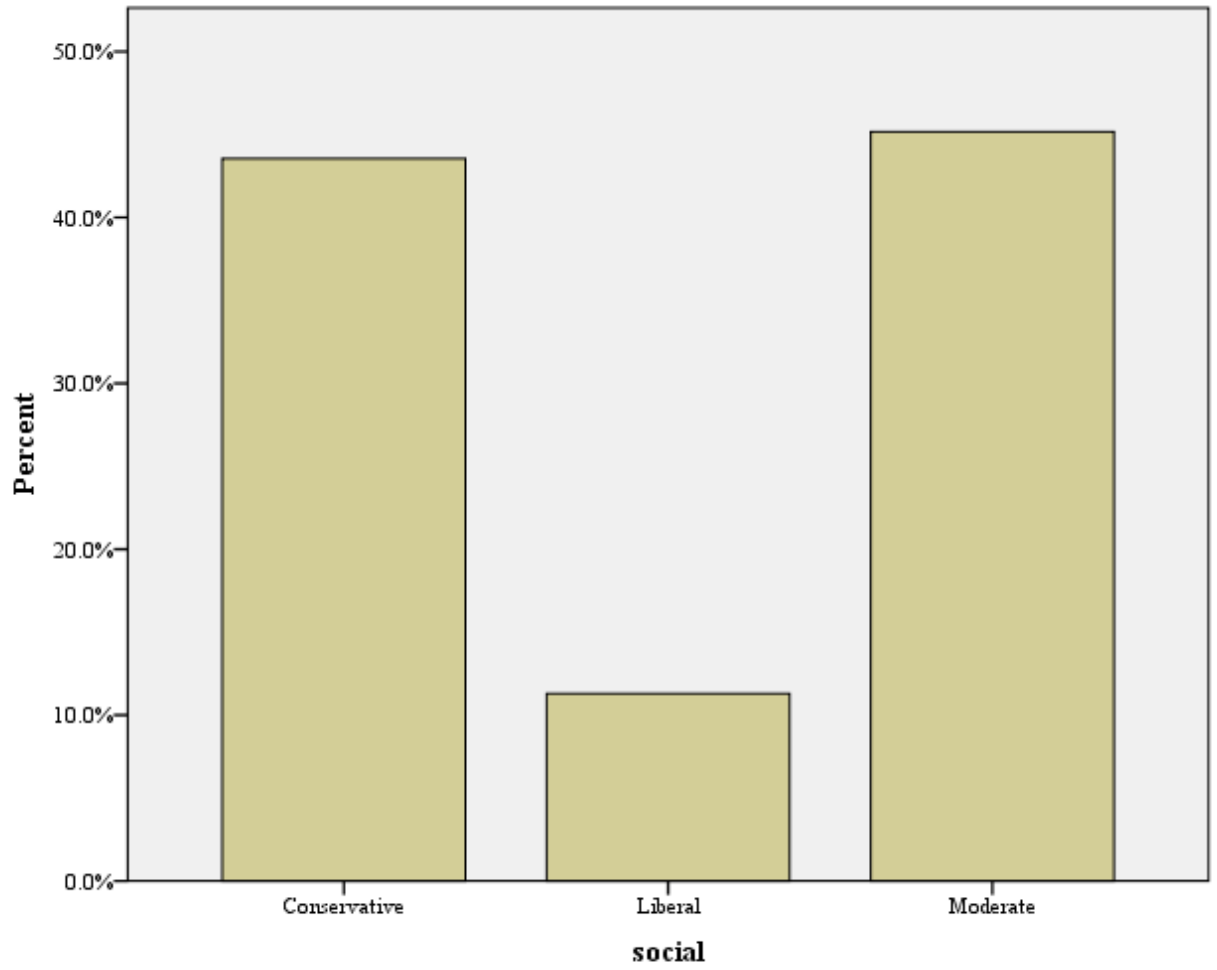


Figure 5. Percent Composition of Socio-Political Perspectives for n=62

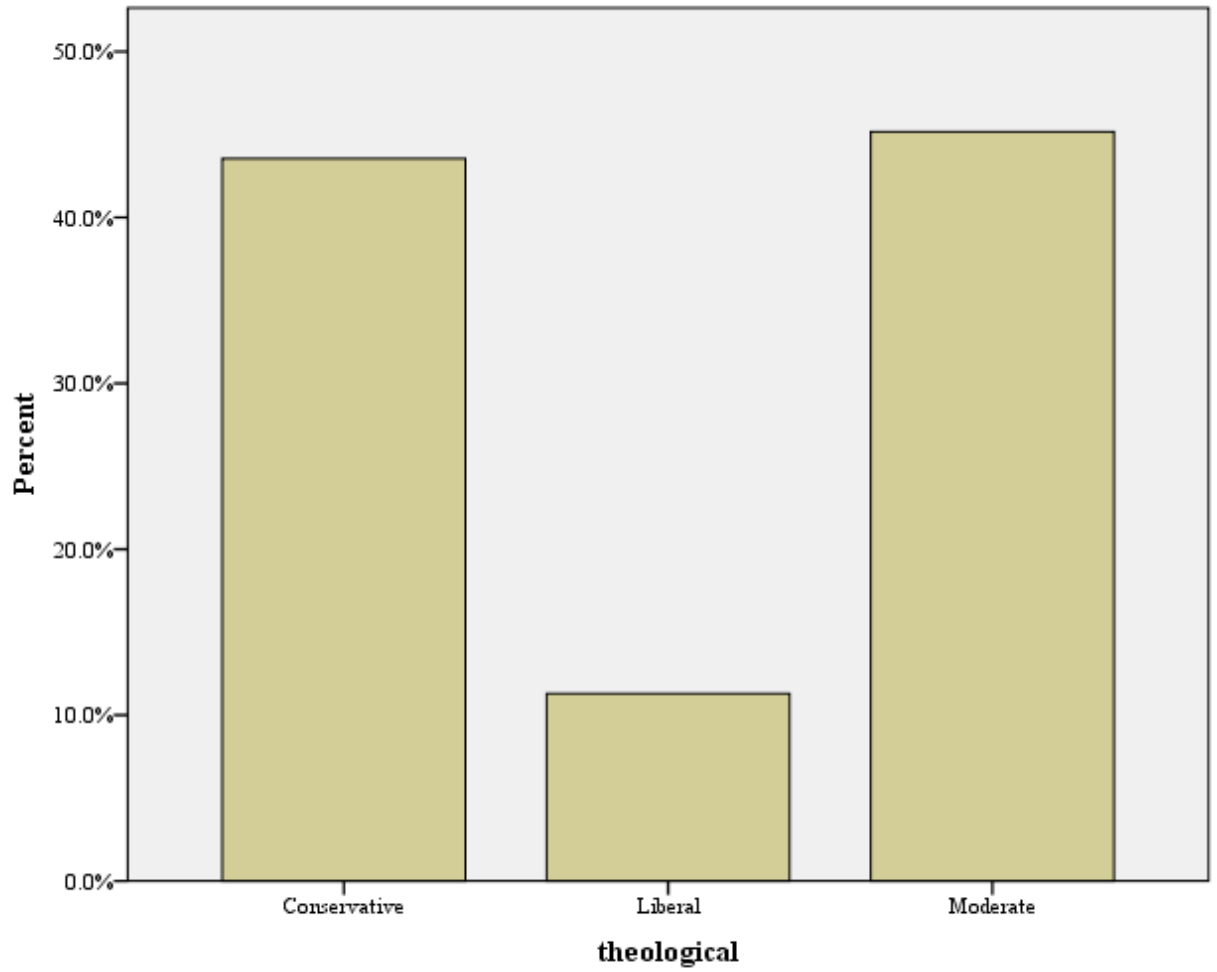


Figure 6. Distribution of Theological Perspectives for n=62

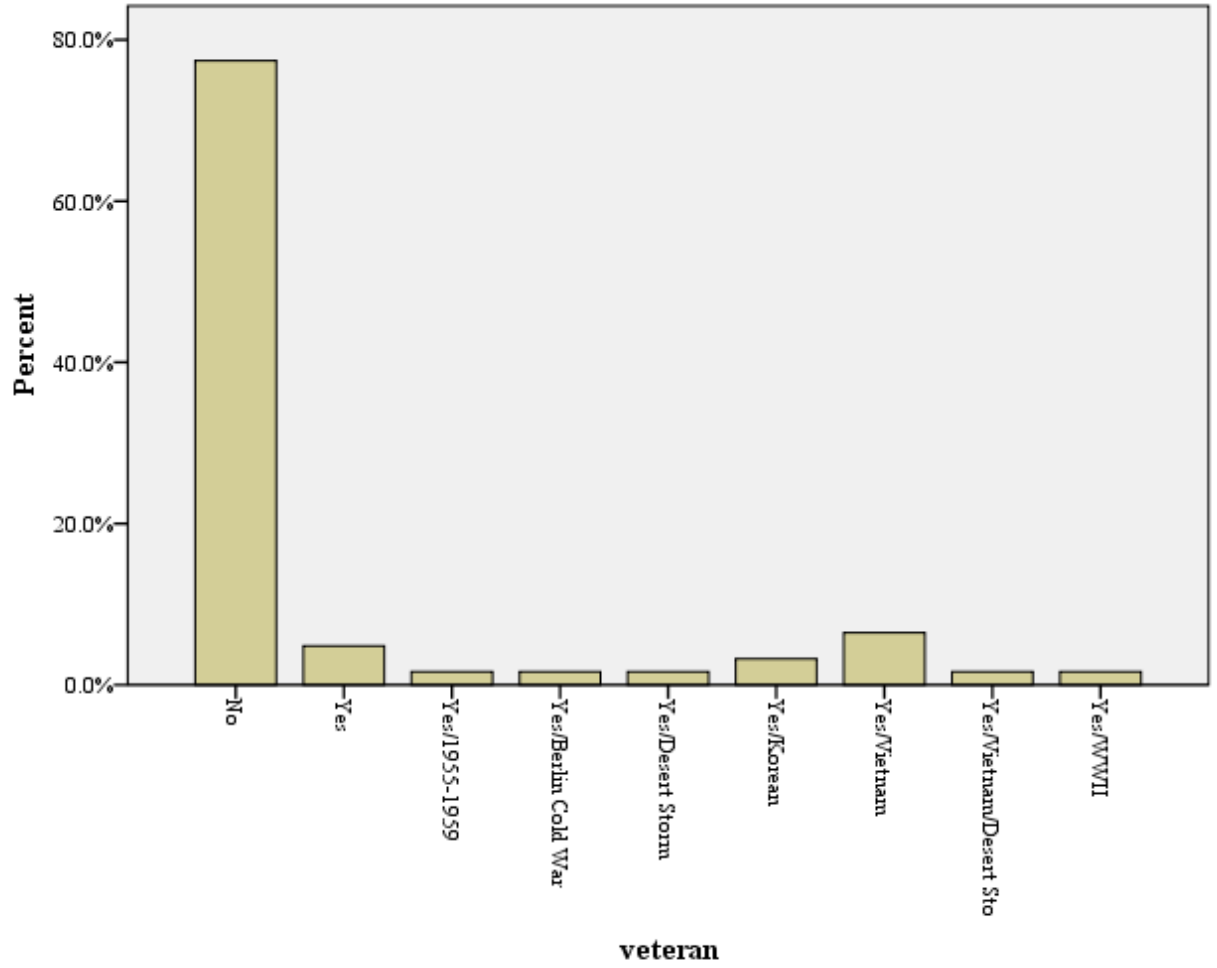


Figure 7. Veteran Status by Percent Distribution for n=62

GRAPHS FOR N=83 RESEARCH POPULATION

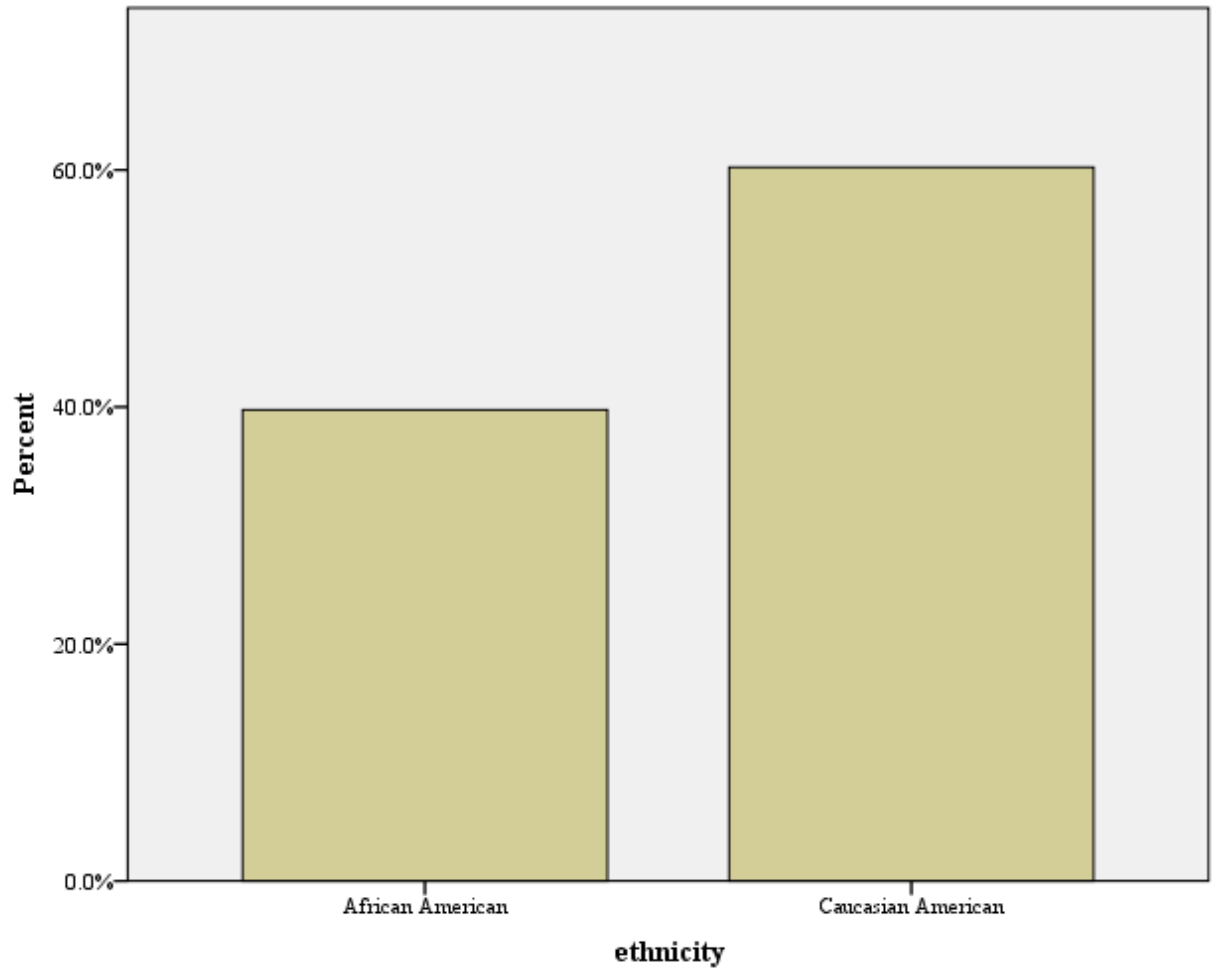


Figure 8. Percent Composition by Race for N=83

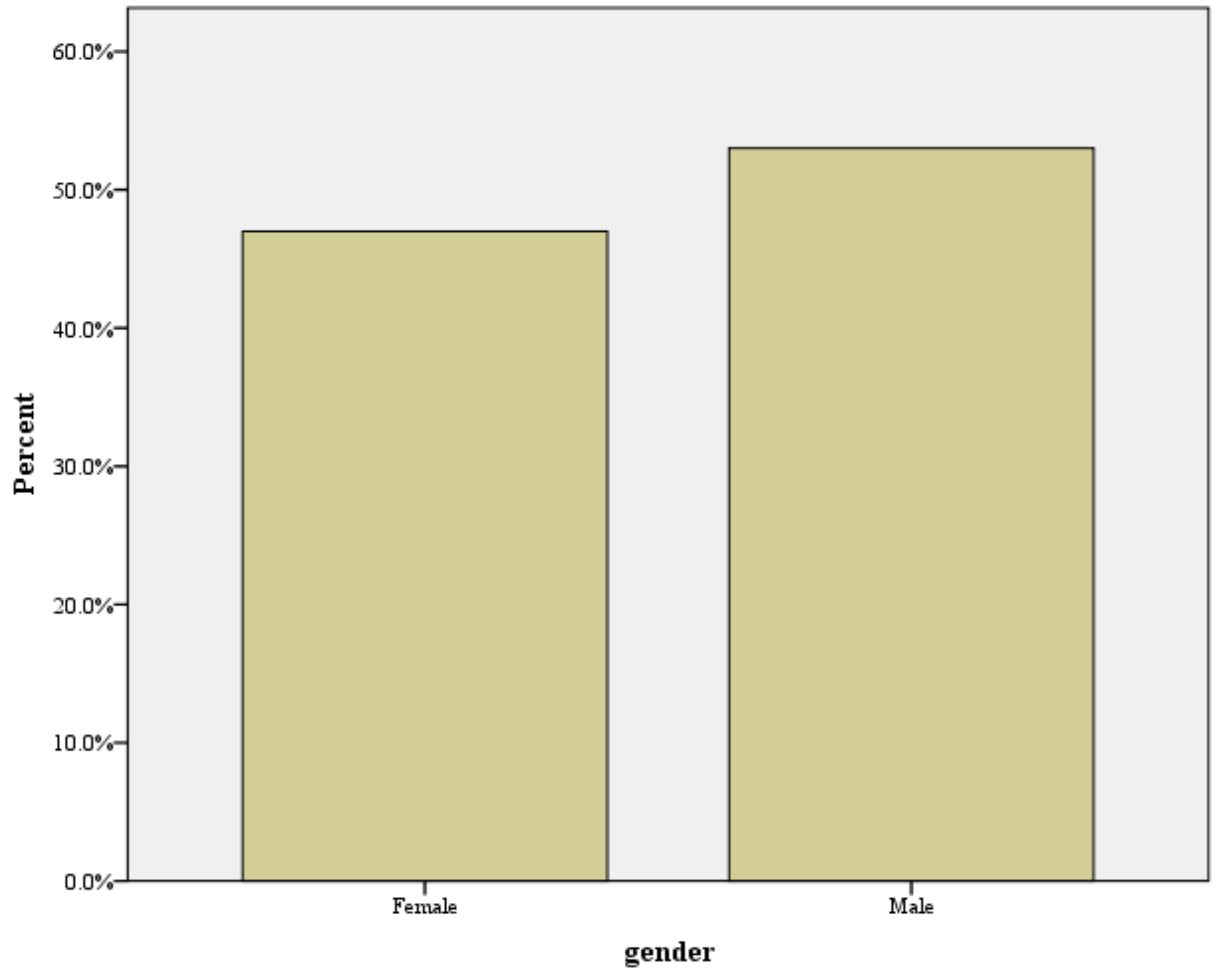


Figure 9. Distribution by Gender for N=83

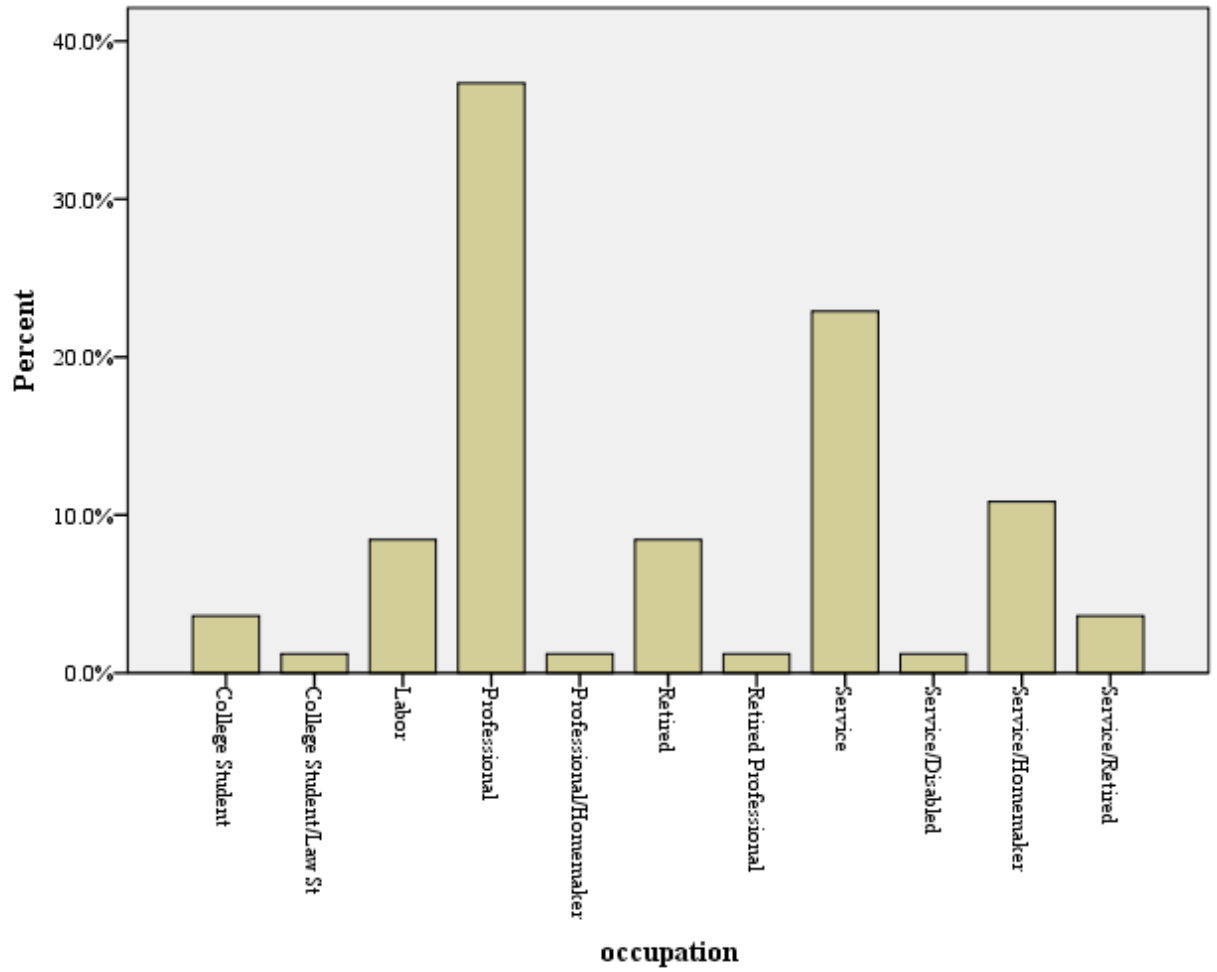


Figure 10. Workforce by Occupation for N=83

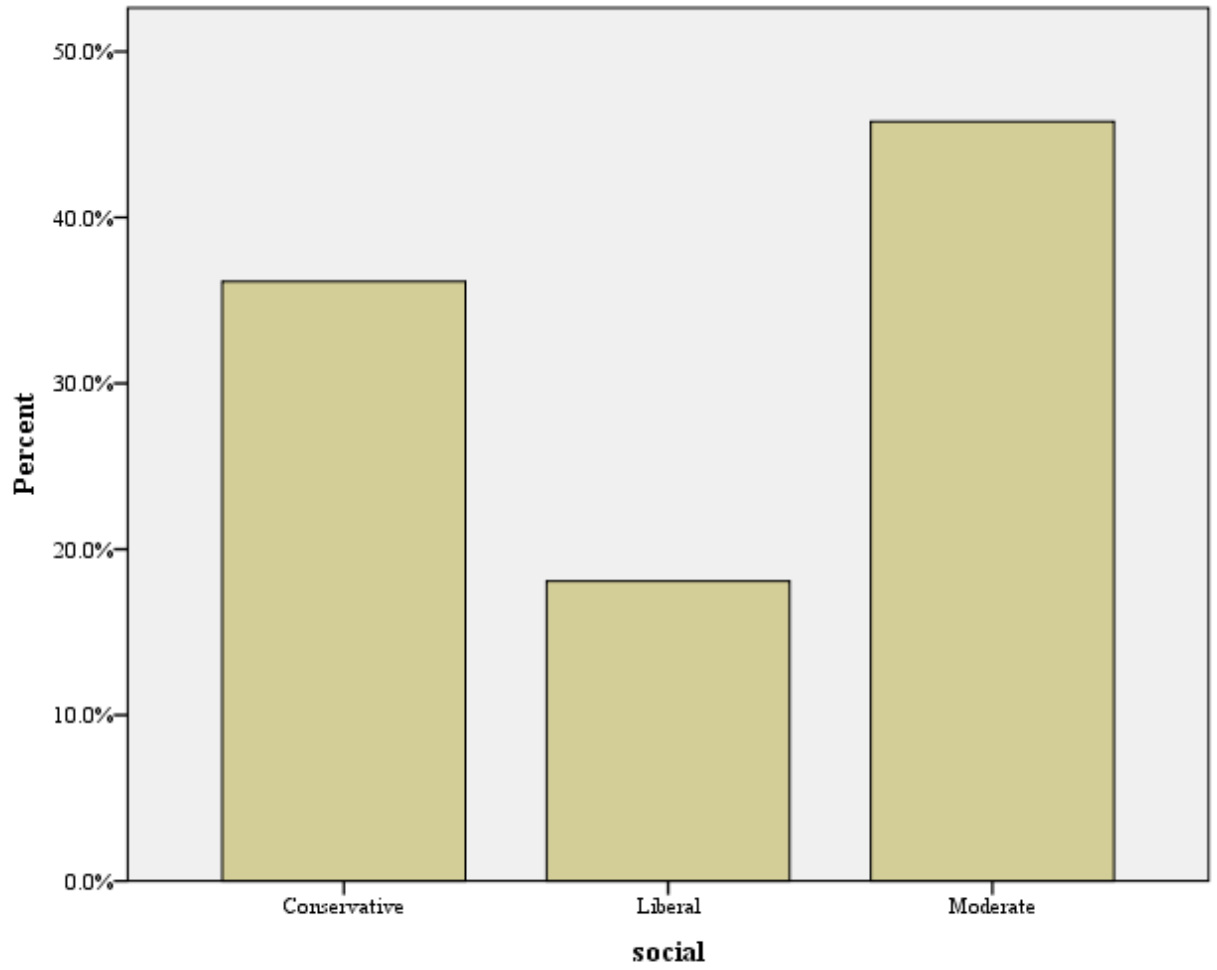


Figure 11. Socio-Political Representation for N=83

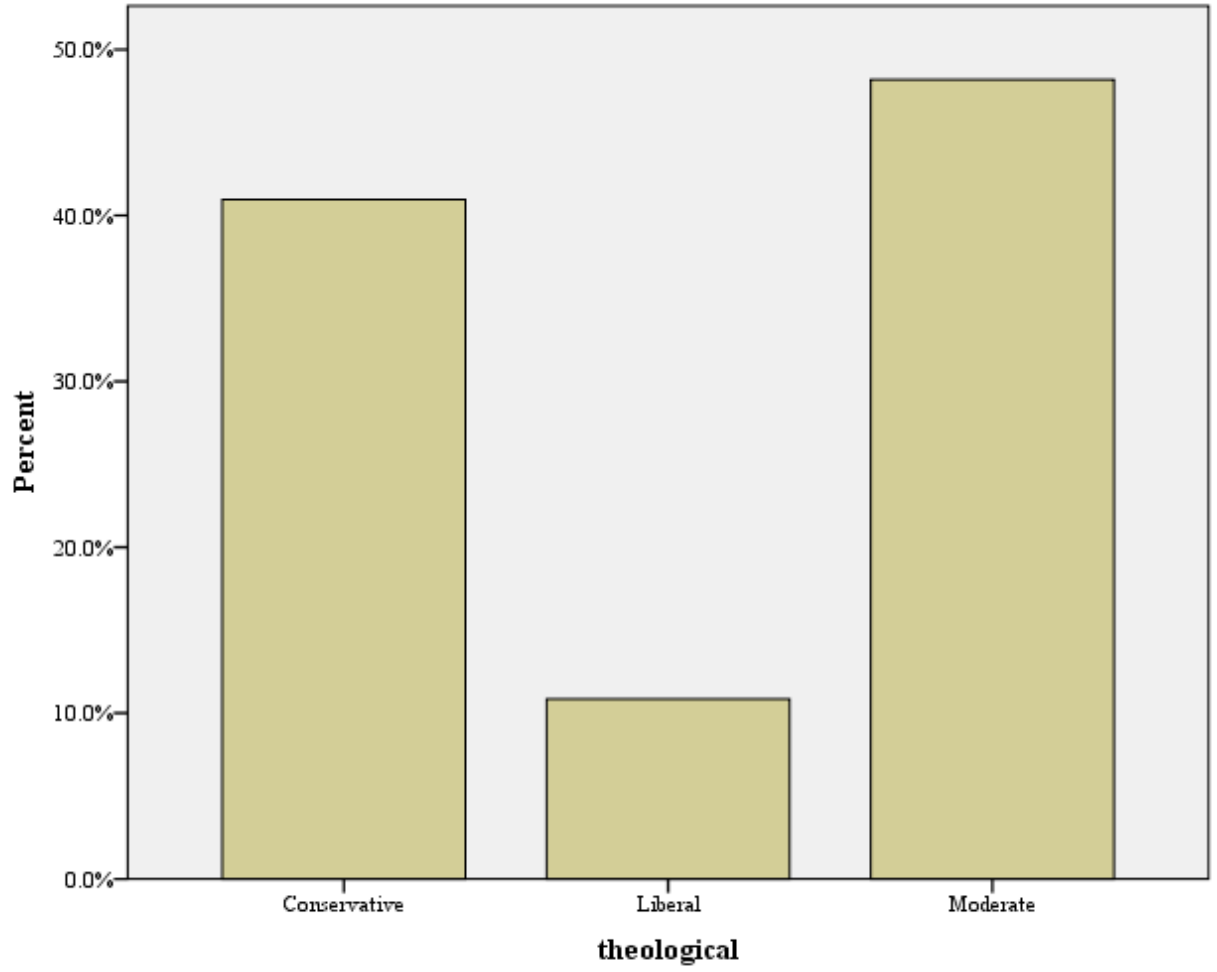


Figure 12. Theological Perspectives by Percent Composition for N=83

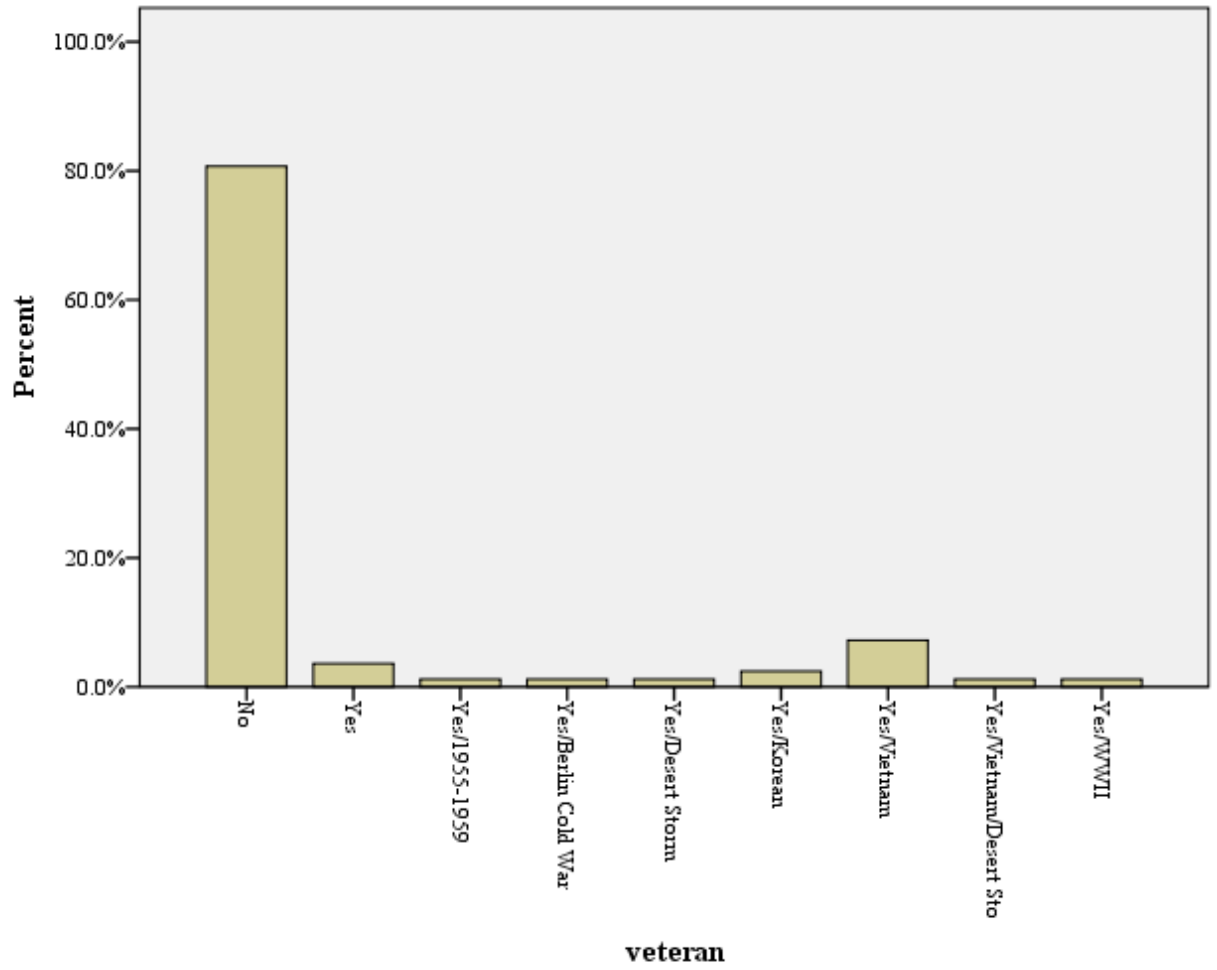


Figure 13. Veteran Status by Percent Distribution for N=83

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