BECOMING GOOD: THE SPIRITUALITIES, INTIMATE IDENTITIES, AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTIVISTS IN NORTH CAROLINA'S MORAL MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Timothy Donald Conder: Becoming Good: The Spiritualities, Intimate Identities, and Collective Identity of Social Justice Activists in North Carolina's Moral Movement
(Under the direction of George W. Noblit)

The NAACP-convened "Forward Together" Moral Movement exploded into national consciousness in the Spring 2013 with a series of weekly "Moral Monday" protests at North Carolina's State Legislature. What began with the civil disobedience of seventeen faith leaders and activists has become a growing non-partisan, theo-political social movement. The Moral Movement demands the attention of social justice researchers for its deployment of a theo-moral logic of justice work and its construction of an intersectional, multi-faith, "big tent" constituency that intentionally performs a liberative and prophetic mode of Black Christianity.

The diversity of the movement in logic and following provokes many questions regarding the role of spiritualities and religious ideology in public pedagogy and social justice activism. Notably, Protestant Christianity has historically positioned itself in opposition to critical, liberative social theories and the work of social justice (Kruse, 2015; Marsden, 1980; Milbank, 1990). The sharp contrast between the theo-moral politics of the Moral Movement and the social justice aversion of particularly White U.S. Protestantism demonstrates what ethnographer Siobhán Garrigan (2010) described in her study of peacemaking, "Christian worship [rituals] walk a line between peace-making and evil-tending every time they are performed" (p. 31). Noted critical theorists such as Cornel West (1999), Antonio Gramsci (1935/2000), and Louis Althusser (1971) have warned that theorists and activists ignore this double possibility in religion at the peril of seriously impairing the work of justice.

This heart of this post-critical ethnography (Noblit et al., 2004) of the Moral Movement is the narrative life study (Maynes et al., 2008) of nine individuals in the movement. These nine represent significantly divergent positionalities, a variety of locations in Protestant Christian faith traditions, and a multiplicity of roles in the movement. Their life stories demonstrate meaningful pathways in contesting, negotiating, or deploying Christian faith heritages in the construction of activist identities. The study of the movement through a lens of ethnogenesis (Price, 2009) illustrates the potential stirrings of an evolving new people with a collective identity of justice activism.

I cannot imagine a return to the academy after an absence of decades and an entrenchment in another meaningful career without the support, encouragement, and patience of many. I dedicate this work to my partner, Meredith Conder, who maintained an imagination of this journey, encouraged this leap of faith, fiercely shared its vision, and supported this project vigorously at every step. I also dedicate this research to my children, Kendall and Keenan, who as emerging adults fully embody a passion for social justice and pursue a vision of beloved community in this world.

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was immediately and intuitively struck by its transformative value. I contacted you about studying with you that same day! Your theoretical work and mentorship redirected the direction of my nascent scholarship (as you have done with so many scholars before me!).

I want to get a bit theological about my academic journey with the cohort of friends that surrounded me. I was *blessed* (a word I don't use very often) by this *family* (another word I use sparingly) of friends and co-laborers. Alison, we have shared so many interests that it did feel like we were "writing the same paper" for many years. I have so enjoyed publishing with you and hope there are many more projects in the future. You bring a wisdom to academics and life that we all rely on (too much!). I have even more enjoyed being neighbors. Mandy, you brought an epic combination of professionalism, friendship, and dance moves to this whole PhD enterprise. "Technology (and Mandy) *is* good." Matt, you were a faithful friend and relentless encourager during the early and middle years of this project when the end seemed (and was) so far away. You were also vulnerable about what makes this work so hard and I hope you maintain that vulnerability throughout your career. Thank you. Hillary, thank you for being the navigator to so many happy hours or great meals and insisting that none of us get overwhelmed by the task. You also set the pace with a relentless scholarship that we all admire so much. Speaking of other "super-eagles", Summer I learned so much from you and equally appreciated our shared ribald humor and love of Stars Hollow. I forgive you for finishing all of your seminar papers each semester before I even started mine. And, "ultra-super-eagle" Ashley, you did far more than show us the way. You set the bar with "full Boyd" levels of scholarship, graciousness, and humility. It remains a privilege to have such good friends who are also such inspiring scholars!

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PART I: RESEARCH INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, A MORAL REVIVAL

Death and Resurrection

With Valentine's Day just two days away in 2015, a small group of less than 40 persons gather in the foyer of North Carolina's (NC) State Legislature Building. As they begin to distribute placards and buttons to wear, this small jovial gathering could easily pass as the genesis of a Valentine's Day prank or perhaps even a poorly attended flash mob. There are hugs and handshakes passed around; most in this group appear to know each other quite well. Not seeing a single familiar face, I feel like a bit of an outsider to the group and stand clearly on the edge. When the Rev. Dr. William Barber II and a small entourage with serious visages stride through the large, dual front doors, the mood changes immediately. It is time for action. Rev. Barber, the architect of the "Forward Together" Moral Movement ("FT"MM) convened by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in NC, is not wearing his usual bright red clerical vestments. For this moment, it is a pitch-black suit with a stark white clerical collar, a clerical attire entirely appropriate for presiding over a somber church funeral. His familiar deep booming voice resonates in the hard-stone foyer even as he tries to whisper: "Is everyone going to lie down?" As he asks this question, he looks intently and inquisitively at me. Though perhaps he has seen me many times at other events, as a mid-50s White male standing at the edge of the circle and holding an iPad, I realize that I look like a reporter or even an infiltrator. While I nod, several persons in the group begin to distribute yellow, transparent, flimsy hospital gowns to everyone in the group. I clutch my gown tightly as we walk upstairs in

single file without a single shout, chant, or song. This is not a traditional demonstration; it is a dirge.

As we assemble at the ornate granite pool that sits outside of the golden doors of legislative chambers of the North Carolina State Assembly, almost everyone in the group begins to lie down. Some wear the gown, some cover themselves like a blanket, and even others lie on the hard granite with the gown strewn at their side. I opt for this latter plan. The symbol is clear. The bodies lying down represent the hundreds of thousands without health insurance in NC and particularly the thousands of the uninsured who die each year in North Carolina because of Governor Pat McCrory's and the NC Legislature's unwillingness to accept federal funds to expand Medicaid as a part of the nation's Affordable Care Act (field notes, February 12, 2015). As Yara Allen, the lead vocalist of this movement, powerfully and soulfully begins a spiritual ("Keep praying until it comes. I know that justice is coming soon. Don't you know that justice is coming soon? Don't stop fighting, because justice is coming soon. Don't stop praying…Don't stop loving…"), Rev. Barber goes one by one to those who have laid down in mock death. Along with other surrogates, he lifts them to their feet, often saying, "Sister, we need you to stand. Brother, we need you to stand for justice" (field notes). For those familiar with or hail from Christian traditions that baptize by immersion in water, like myself, the physical acts of lifting with a firm hand in the back and a strong extended hand accompanied with common words of benediction immediately invokes a ritual of baptism. Though theologies of baptism vary greatly, the core representation of the ritual is a real death in sin symbolized by the covering in water and a resurrection unto new life in Christ as the baptismal candidate is raised out of the water. In this case, that sin is a collective, political "groveling in the distorted stare and state of hate" (Rev. Barber, field notes) toward the plight of the vulnerable in NC who languish and die

in thousands each year because the refusal of billions of federal dollars to expand Medicaid. The call to resurrection life is a call to march for justice.

Before this symbol of baptismal death and resurrection, Rev. Barber descried to the leaders of the state of NC in a sermonic polemic,

> Do what your constitution says! Article 11, Section 4 says that 'beneficent provision for the poor, the orphan, and the unfortunate is the first duty of a civilized and Christian state.' The constitution you swore to uphold suggests that when you do not make the first business of this house to care for the poor, it is to engage in the kind of politics that is uncivilized and unchristian. Those are not my words; those are the words of the Constitution you swore to uphold. (Field notes)

Barber's sermon stands in the biblical tradition of the Hebrew prophets that appealed to a commonly accepted theocratic legal code while speaking public and poetic indictments on the leaders that refused to adhere to that same code. This often-repeated indictment in Barber's discourse sourced in the NC Constitution encapsulates a powerful point of union at the heart of the Moral Movement: a theological notion of moral goodness delivered in the cadences and forms of the "black prophetic preaching tradition" (Barber and Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016) joined to the politics of the public sphere.

Study Overview

This joining comes in a distinct political moment in the nation and particularly in the politics of North Carolina, an upsurge of conservative political extremism like the state's unwillingness to expand Medicaid that has unleashed a torrent of other legislation that targets and vilifies the poor and vulnerable. I will describe that political context and the history of the Moral Movement birthed in this political moment with greater detail in the third chapter. Though tragic, the hegemonic politics of the dominant classes and the exercise of political power against the marginalized and politically weak is a common rejoinder, a chorus that plays endlessly (Gramsci, 2000). But there is another aspect to this joining that is of particular interest

to this study, this theo-moral dimension, namely the connection of Christian theologies and historical traditions of faith to the enactment of justice in the public arena in the midst of calcified social need and rampant social injustice in our society. Some might think this connection of Christian theology and faith traditions to the politics of compassion and the practices of justice is unremarkable or even normal. But it often is neither. American Christianity's historically evolving relationship with social justice offers some texture to understanding the unique challenges in the intersection of Christian faith and social justice practice. In the next section, I will turn to a summary of that history.

But, as an initial overview, this study looks specifically at the life narratives of nine social justice practitioners in the "FT"MM and asks how they have negotiated and contested their heritages in various streams of Protestant Christianity and their ongoing faith practices (if any) to construct personal identities as social justice practitioners. The nine include Cameron Jennings (all names are pseudonyms), an Old Testament professor at a primarily White mainline seminary who has served as a speaker and theologian-in-residence for the "FT"MM. Gene Chitwood is a retired sociology professor who is an ethical (secular) Christian who was as arrestee in the movement during the first year of the Moral Monday protests. Micah Turner is a White pastor and community organizer who teaches theology in a seminary at an HBCU and serves as an associate minister at a historically Black church. He's been a speaker for the movement and worked as a theologian on a couple of issues taken on by the movement. Bishop Suzan Robinson is a Black, queer bishop in a relatively new Black denomination and is a key leader/strategist in the inner circle the "FT"MM working closely with Rev. Barber. Molly McLean is a young White social worker who has enthusiastically attended "FT"MM rallies. Her faith journey has taken her from fundamentalism to leadership in a local congregation in an

emerging form of progressive Christianity. Pierce Mullins hails from the peace church tradition and is singer/songwriter as well as an activist/peacemaker with a high profile in the state. He has been a strategist, networker, arrestee, and main stage performer for the "FT"MM. Doug Scandrette has a similar faith journey to Molly's. He founded a network that connects progressive faith communities in missional justice work. He is both a key networker and arrestee in the movement. Nell Baldwin is a young White public school teacher in a historically Black high school who has also traveled from evangelicalism to a Christian-influenced social justice stream of faith though she is not a religious practitioner at the moment. She had a high-profile arrest in the early days of Moral Mondays and continues on as a key speaker at rallies that focus educational issues. Reggie McPherson, a young Black man, was born in poverty in what he names as a gang-infested community. He pastors a small Black church in Rev. Barber's large mainline, relatively mixed race denomination. He was a disciple of Rev. Barber and serves the movement in a wide range of primarily behind-the-scenes roles including serving on its board. In faith, tone, expectation, and idiom, Reggie is an outlier to this community of narrators. He only knows a social justice stream of Black church Christianity and is an unquestioning follower of Rev. Barber and the gospel. His triumphant theology saturates all aspects of his narration.

Regarding the life stories, the heart of this study, I am very interested in how they have negotiated their Christian heritages to become justice practitioners with all of the associated identity work in this construction. Do they need to reject of their tradition or make a transition to a different stream of Christianity to form these identities? Are there resources in their tradition of faith that supports this identity work? What do we learn from them about mobilizing persons of faith, particular in hegemonic forms of Christianity, to the work of justice?

These lives are all connected by various levels of association to the "FT"MM, from rally

attenders to strategists at the highest level with many positions in between. To state the obvious, lives are lived in social contexts. Hence, the study of lives is inherently an ethnography of social spaces. This project eagerly pursues the social space of the "FT"MM also as a locus of study. The "FT"MM is a site of cultural production of identities and agency with what I perceive to be a remarkable level of impact in the political landscape of NC. In this research, I inquire how the "FT"MM has impacted the activist identities of these nine lives with a deep interest in what is uniquely culturally productive in this movement and with a strong curiosity about the possibilities in social movements writ large regarding the development activist agency. Now, as noted above, I turn to the unique history of Protestant Christianity with social justice as an essential context to understand the "FT"MM's ability to traverse multiple traditions to energize justice activism and its ability to transgress what has become a strong historical divide between the mission of Christianity in some of its most visible traditions and the work of justice.

Christianity and Social Justice: Changing Alliances and Priorities

A historical portrait of American Christianity's experience with social justice reveals several shifts and realignments related to a social gospel as well as continually contested definitions of social justice. Historian George Marsden (1980) chronicled the severing of Protestant Christianity into liberal and fundamentalist camps and the eventual disappearance of social justice as a priority among evangelicals and other conservatives. On the brink of this radical separation, evangelicals maintained a compassionate vision toward the working classes and the poor in the industrial revolution and supported programs like public education as a liberative response to urban issues in the wake of industrialization (Marsden, 1980). But a "'Great Reversal' took place between 1900 to about 1930, when all progressive social concern, whether political or private, became suspect among revivalist evangelicals and was relegated to a

very minor role" (p. 86). The justice orientation of the Social Gospel and the earmarks of progressive Christianity were systemically rejected by a burgeoning conservative coalition.

There were many causes for this great reversal; most of these factors remain deeply entrenched in our present religious landscape. A first factor was an ascent of a highly individualistic, pietistic tradition which relentlessly championed personal faith and relegated politics to being merely a restraint upon evil so that persons could freely choose the gospel. Second, following the First World War and the Great Depression, an optimistic postmillennial eschatology proclaiming the coming of God's good reign in the present society ceded to a pessimistic premillennial eschatology that foresaw an apocalyptic destruction of the earth. This vision mitigated any need for social justice and emphasized an ardent evangelistic program that evacuated individuals from a doomed creation and the calamity of God’s judgment. In an era when Catholic immigration was just beginning to bring sizable numbers of Catholics who would have a very different history with social justice, American Protestantism had become divided with its ascending conservative wing decidedly and theologically resistant to social justice as a priority (Marsden, 1980).

Postwar prosperity, optimism, and pragmatism in the 40s and 50s saw somewhat of a softening of this stark division and a superficial healing of the old wounds related to the fundamentalist/modernist debate. A neo-evangelical movement began to build with growing concern for social issues. But eventually the gradual move to the center crashed against the rocks of sharp social chasms related to the Civil Rights Movement and protests regarding the war in Southeast Asia (Wuthnow, 1988). Increasing gaps in wealth and education in American society reinvigorated the old fundamentalist/modernist divisions. In essence, American Protestantism became so divided to the point that there became really only two meaningful

denominational differences, a fundamentalist/evangelical stream of Christianity and a mainline/liberal stream with different postures on social justice as the fracture point. Wuthnow (1988) explained, "The two orientations — evangelism and social justice — in fact became the polar positions around which religious conservatives and religious liberals increasingly identified themselves" (p. 149).

There were other deep political forces at work during this re-separation that demonstrably set the table for conservative Christianity's co-optation into the present conservative political movement. Kruse (2015a) made the case that modern 'Christian America' is the product of 'Corporate America's' imagination and profit-motivated ingenuity to align Christian priorities like unfettered liberty (hence, the freedom to choose God) with corporate interests in deregulation and the dismantling of Roosevelt's New Deal. Kruse (2015b) described the onset of this alliance as "a watershed moment — the beginning of a movement that would advance on over the 1940s and early 1950s a new blend of conservative religion, economics, and politics that one observer aptly anointed 'Christian libertarianism.'" Perhaps the most lasting legacy of this ongoing movement is the inseparable linkage forged between Christianity and capitalism.[1] To attack one is to attack the other. To defend one is to defend the other. President Franklin D. Roosevelt quipped that the moral ethic of this burgeoning movement was to "'love God and then forget your neighbor.' Off the record, he joked that the name of the god they worshipped seemed to be 'Property'" (Kruse, 2015b).

This brief history of this political project that remains in force today offers some important framing to this study of NC's "Forward Together" Moral Movement that seeks to

[1] "Ongoing" is an apt description. Within the Moral Movement stories recorded in this study, one interlocutor reports self-identified Christians in NC's legislature who theologically defend their political actions as efforts to dismantle the New Deal and the Great Society (field notes, Cameron Jennings interview).

explore the connection between Christian faith and social justice. As has been demonstrated, the notion of social justice has become not only politicized, it has become theologically divisive with the sharpest schism of difference in American Protestantism oriented around acceptance, rejection, or simply definition of this notion.

Returning to the nine interlocutors in this study, all have their identities as social justice activists reinforced, contested, constructed, or formed in the small and large public spaces of this movement (Levinson and Holland, 1998). As the history summarized in this section reveals, the practice of social justice for Christians is a highly-contested act. For some streams of Christianity, a path of social justice activism is a rejection of the faith itself. By implication, there are other trajectories of Christianity that are rooted deeply in social justice vision. The interlocutors in this study represent both sides of that divide and many differing traditions within Christianity.

With the "FT"MM and its political context in focus, several realities will emerge prominently. First, comparing the "FT"MM to its political opponents, there are theologically inflected, rival definitions of "goodness" in the current social landscape. This study steps squarely into the often acrimoniously contested notion of goodness in our present society and its politics. When a notion of goodness is defined by the practice of social justice, it is simultaneously hard to be good and to be a Christian. That challenge will be readily evident in the stories told and written in this study. The moments, choices, relationships, and opportunities that have led each of these interlocutors to form identities as social justice practitioners and the circumstances that have drawn them into the orbit of the "FT"MM are meaningful as distinct narrative entities. But, they gesture toward a discourse and, for those who have hopes and visions for greater social justice in our world, a possibility that I would name as urgent in our

present context — the intersection between a still resilient and expansive Christian community, despite the slow crawl of secularization, and the deep needs for justice in our racialized, socially inequitable, and dangerous present society.

This hope for a “good” Christianity as a resource for the imagination of a just world and a generative environment for social justice agency demands the telling of another history, a theological history, that encompasses the relatively recent divide in Protestant American Christianity between a mission of evangelism and a mission of social justice. This history moves to the development of Christian theology and hence Christian identity in the global North and West in the construction of colonialism, a racial world, and capitalist economies.

The Possibilities of Christianity: Oppression and/or Liberation

The barriers to social justice work are not merely apathy, disinterest, or distraction among the faithful in Christianity. More dangerous to the hope for a just, equitable society, Christianity both in its social performance and in its core doctrinal identity has often functioned as a force that opposes the goals of justice.

Christianity in the U.S. continues to be marked by performances of privilege and dominance exerted by Christians and Christian congregations (Blumenfeld, 2006; Schlosser, 2003). Ellen Fairchild (2009) explained "the privileging of the Christian faith in the United States has worked to establish a pseudonormalcy of the one faith" (p. 10) therefore denying similar assumed benefits to persons who ascribe to different faiths or different worldviews. Christian influence runs far deeper than privilege and religious intolerance. It extends to issues of racism, heteronormativity, patriarchy, and other contradictions to a just society.

Beginning with heteronormativity, Christianity — liberal, conservative, Protestant, Catholic, and every stream — has bulwarked the maintenance of a heteronormative world that is threatening to persons who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ).

This collusion of Christianity and heteronormativity has been so strong that the subject of spirituality has been often uniquely painful for LGBTQ persons (McNeill, 1988; Ritter & O'Neill, 1989). The lived experience of so many persons in this broad and diverse community is that of rejection by most forms of Christianity (Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005). In fact, in our current cultural context, "people of all sexual orientations often see issues of spirituality and sexual orientation as contradictory and conflicting" (Love et al., 2005, p. 193).

Theologian Willie Jennings (2010; 2011) has written often and powerfully about the deep connections between Christianity and the formation of the racial world. He lamented, "The emergence of racial identity as something people see as natural could only have come about with the powerful conceptual support of Christianity" (Jennings, 2011, p. 284). Christian theology, the optics of a racialized world, and the self-serving logic of colonialism operated in concert with each other in a form of promiscuous, self-serving play that yielded the modern slaveholding society (Jennings, 2011). Identities formed in the theological imaginaries of Christianity and the racial realities of the modern world were interpellated into a racial optic that assumed inequalities, White hegemony, and what Jennings (2010) described as "a diseased social imagination" (p. 6).

Historical Christianity has also had long, reciprocal relationship with patriarchy, drawing theological insight and ethical practice from the harsh patriarchy of the Greco-Roman world and in turn reifying these patriarchal presuppositions into sacred text and polity (Brown, 1988). Speaking the Women's Ordination Worldwide Conference (WOW), the esteemed eco-feminist theologian, Rosemary Radford Reuther, proclaimed that at its onset, the church was liberative in its relationship to slavery and various forms of oppression, truly a slave religion, "But this vision of a community…of equals was quickly spiritualized and the concrete reference to changing

social hierarchies denied" (Reuther, 2005). Reuther continued by explaining the textual codification of patriarchy in scripture's household codes demanding the obedience of wives to husbands, children to parents, and slaves to masters has become repressively intersectional creating the "same pattern of relationship in all patriarchally constructed systems of relationship" including "the colonialist who shapes the colonized into exploitative under-development or the slave-master who tries to turn the slave into a passive tool of labor" (Reuther, 2005). The persistent clericalism of the church, its durable pattern of male leadership enacted formally and informally, is simply "built on and reduplicates patriarchy" (Reuther, 2005).

The hermeneutics, theological imagination, ecclesial practices, and exertions of exclusionary cultural privilege within Christianity have been powerfully complicit in authoring a heteronormative, racial, and patriarchal world. It bears repeating: it is hard to be good, when good is defined by racial justice activism and other forms of social justice activism, and be a Christian. This challenge also extends far beyond the previously described evangelical/liberal divide in Protestant Christianity. The "diseased social imagination" that Jennings (2010) attributes to Christianity exists in the whole of its social identity, its theological imagination and in the breadth of its practices. Anticipating the next section on the significance of this study, a study of the journey and identity construction of social justice practitioners by those with Christian roots or who practice the faith has the obvious, critical significance of understanding how to mitigate the oppositional nature of an often-hegemonic Christianity toward an equitable and just society.

Naming the oppressive nature of Christianity does not preclude liberative possibility and emancipatory hope. The importance of this study lies not only on the side of the ledger of thwarting oppression. One of its many possibilities is the motivation of Christians and faith-

based communities for the work of social justice and for social justice organizing. The narratives of this study will illustrate often the culturally productive power of theology for deconstructing ideologies of complicity, inspiring liberative action, and motivating bold opposition of oppressive powers. Theological ethnographers such as William Cavanaugh (1998) and Siobhán Garrigan (2010) have made this case forcefully.

Cavanaugh (1998) wrote the history of the Catholic church's grave complicity with the murderous Pinochet regime in Chile (1974-1990). Heeding a theology of 'different and non-intersecting planes of life,' the church essentially gave over the bodies of the populace to the state and retained a sovereignty over their souls with horrifying results for their flock in this almost entirely Catholic nation. In shock and shame, the Church's hierarchy then reinvested in an embodied theology of the Eucharist, affirming the presence of Christ in the collective body and individual bodies of the church which is theologized in every Eucharist ritual. This profound shift from separate planes of bodies and souls to an embodied theology inspired bold physical acts of resistance to the regime in public ritual and in public politic (Cavanaugh, 1998).

Garrigan (2010), writing about both Christian reinforcement of and rejection of sectarianism in Ireland and Northern Ireland through public worship rituals, effectively framed the tension of the dual possibilities of oppression and liberation within Christianity: "Christian worship [rituals] walk a line between peace-making and evil-tending every time they are performed" (p. 31). It would be an error to merely conceptualize theology as hopeful or abstract thinking about a God that may or may not exist. Garrigan (2010) offered this gentle rebuke of a mere abstraction of theology: "Theologies are never just ideas about God, they are blueprints for living, because how one thinks of God conditions what one expects of oneself in the world"

(Garrigan, 2010, p. 18). The link between theology and the production of identities can be profound and durable.

Cavanaugh's (1990) and Garrigan's (2010) ethnographic work has been scaffolded by many notable critical theorists who have warned that to overlook both the potential of religion in the ideological support of oppressive hegemonies and in the possible deconstruction of those same hegemonies as a collaborator in social change is a grave mistake (Althusser, 1971; Eagleton, 1991; Gramsci, 2000; West, 1999). Terry Eagleton (1991) favorited this definition of ideology: that which "signifies ideas and beliefs which help to legitimate the interests of a ruling group or class specifically by distortion and dissimulation" (p. 30). In his writing on hegemonies, Gramsci (2000) developed the concept of *contradictory consciousness,* the acceptance by dominated groups of policies and politics against their own class interests. Contradictory consciousness is often bolstered by the practice of *trasformismo,* the intentional co-optation of subaltern voices and subaltern ideas by dominant classes (Gramsci, 2000). He understood that religion could be a power powerful tool of trasformismo, silencing oppositional voices, wooing the consent of dominated classes, and protecting hegemonic interests. Gramsci (2000) noted the power of popular superstitions and religions, especially given the "crassly materialistic" (p. 352) nature of religions, as tools in the hands of hegemonies to bulwark contradictory consciousness.

In support of Gramsci, Althusser (1971) made an argument about the significance of *ideological state apparatuses* (ISAs) such as "Churches, Parties, Trade Unions, families, some schools, most newspapers, [and] cultural ventures" (p. 144) to bulwark oppressive hegemonies. He further emphasized the dangerous possibilities associated with religion and ideology: "To my knowledge, *no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising*

its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses" (p. 146). These ISAs function by *interpellation*, that is, by "hailing" individuals to think in scripted manners about their identities and social relationships and then acting in social worlds in concert with these imposed definitions (Wolff, 2005). Interpellation imposed on individuals by ISAs is emblematic of Gramsci's notion contradictory consciousness, as those who are hailed typically perceive their scripted "subjectivities/identities [to be] internally self-generated" (Wolff, 2005, p. 226) rather imposed from without by dominant class interests. This last point conjoined to these ideas about trasformismo and interpellation resounds loudly given the history of individualistic, pietistic commitments yielding a "Christian libertarianism" (Kruse, 2015b) in the conservative Protestantism that strongly embraces corporate interests and rejects social justice. It would seem to be difficult to fully understand inequity and oppression in our present society without acknowledging the role of religion and particularly Protestant Christianity in defending this circumstance. This makes the contrarian stories of social justice practice, stories that reject corporate and pietistic cooptation, by the interlocutors in this study and the examination of theologically inspired social movements for justice like the Moral Movement more pressing and urgent.

The arguments of Gramsci, Althusser, and Eagleton also all maintain seeds of liberative hope regarding religion, hope for the unbuckling of the links between ideological worlds and hegemonic interests. Cornell West (1999) affirmed that "the centrality of morality and religion loom large in the works of Antonio Gramsci. For the first time, a major European Marxist took with utter seriousness the cultural life-worlds of the oppressed" (p. 374). He then chided the left's propensity toward casual oversight, intentional dismissal, or outright rejection of the liberative possibilities in religion:

> Yet since the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century Europe, most of the progressive energies among the intelligentsia have shunned religious channels. And in these days of global religious revivals, progressive forces are reaping the whirlwind. Those of us who remain in these religious channels see clearly just how myopic such an antireligious strategy is. The severing of ties to churches, synagogues, temples and mosques by the left intelligentsia is tantamount to political suicide; it turns the pessimism of many self-deprecating and self-pitying secular progressive intellectuals into a self-fulfilling prophecy. This point was never grasped by C. Wright Mills, though W.E.B DuBois understood it well. (p. 172)

The "FT"MM represents an ecumenical Christian and multi-faith embodiment of West's point, a broad-based mobilization that demonstrates the power of faith mobilized for social justice.

Areas of Significance and Further Questions

There are many arenas of significance for this project. But four stand out: forging a better understanding of the interaction of Christianity and social justice activism, informing the growing interest in and efficacy of faith-based community organizing and understanding the strengths or weaknesses of differing strategies of organizing, seeing the field of public education and schools of education as essential sites to contest faith-based resistance to social justice organizing and locations of important mobilization, and continuing the growth of theological ethnography as a methodological development in qualitative research and as a reflexive tool to study the various impacts of faith commitments in communities. I will elaborate on each arena here and then return to them in the final chapter.

Christianity and social justice activism

As noted, a first arena of significance is a detailed narrative examination into the role of faith and particularly Protestant Christian faith as a catalyst or deterrent for justice activism. In this point of exploration, this research is a companion to Mark Warren's *Fire in the Heart* (2010), an extensive study on how White people embrace racial justice activism. My project focuses more broadly on justice activism and give attention specifically to the connection of

Christianity to activism. Nevertheless, there were many Christian devotees and religious persons among Warren's fifty interlocutors. Most notably, my study is not specifically about the activism of White people, hence significantly broadening the exploration of faith and activism. I was also intentional about including many different streams of Christianity in the narrative sample. Nevertheless, several of his conclusions in this realm have been formative and foundational to the goals of this study to better understand how Protestant Christian faith interacts with activism. Notably, Warren (2010) had only one interlocutor whose home worshipping community provided a pathway into racial justice activism. Instead, many in his study sought racial justice activism as a reaction to the racism within these home communities and hence "branched out into new faith-based organizations …[or] networks within their larger faith traditions" (Warren, 2010, p. 49). This observation raises the possibility of "intra-tradition conversions" within Christianity, persons who stay within the broadest boundaries of Christian faith but find new communal connections to become activists.

Warren (2010) also offered this strong assertion from his data: "I conclude that the initial move to racial justice activism comes from what I call a moral impulse" (p. 52). By moral impulse, Warren is referring to abrupt moments of value dissonance, "seminal experiences" (p. 50) of shock where persons are enveloped in moments where they see racialized events that offend the core of their values. Yet, he goes to add that a moral impulse alone is merely altruism which he distinguishes strongly from activism. He also distinguished moral impulse from *moral vision*. Beyond simple altruism, working *for* those in need, nearly every interlocutor in his study (46 out of 50) expressed a moral vision, "strong views about the kind of society they would like for themselves and their children, for people of color, and for white people" (p. 90). Interestingly, this moral vision is relatively similar for his interlocutors and cuts across numerous

ethical and faith traditions including Judeo-Christianity. Despite this strong concurrence about moral vision throughout his data, Warren, in his review of research literature, also noted that "scholars of social movements and social activism have largely ignored the role of moral visions in motivating activists" (p. 110).

These strong conclusions from Warren on moral impulse and moral vision raised many significant questions for my work. Do my interlocutors experience forms of a moral impulse or moments of abrupt shock due to seeing or experiencing injustice? Are those shocks, if present, the primary stimulus toward future activism for interlocutors? Is the moral dissonance in eyewitness accounts or experiences of injustice rooted in theologies or values related to Christian faith? Do these nine interlocutors describe a moral vision, and, if so, what are those moral visions and are they the result of theological reflection. In other words, are theo-moral logics significant to the construction of activist identities and activist agency at the scale of a social movement or with individuals?

Community organizing

A second arena of significance regards faith-based community organizing for social justice. There has been extensive and enthusiastic recent research on the importance of faith-based community organizing in social justice outcomes in local communities and national initiatives (Shirley, 2001; Stout, 2010; Warren, 2001; Warren, 2010; Warren, 2011). Faith-based organizing is, by its very definition and core practices aligned with the primary hopes of this study, namely the translation of personal faith commitments into social justice activism and the motivation of faith-based institutions for this work. This translation and motivation is far more difficult than one might initially imagine. I have already described that the connection between Christianity and liberative political action as checkered at best. Rev. Barber in "FT"MM rallies often cites that less than 10% of black churches were working actively with the Rev. Dr. Martin

Luther King Jr. at Selma and in his broader social movement (field notes). In my own experiences in faith-based organizing, I have been deeply moved by 'how much' has been done by 'how few.' I have constantly witnessed the sparsity of Christian faith community support for even remarkable social justice victories (Conder & Rhodes, 2017). Sociologist Mark Chaves (2004), writing in the wake of the George W. Bush Administration's directives concerning the establishment of government supported faith-based community initiatives, offered some generalizations that confirmed the struggles to motivate Christian communities into substantive social action. According to him, U.S. congregations typically favor community outreach that is project-based with specific time constraints. Hence, short-term intensive projects to provide food or clothing to the community are highly favored and supported. But social services work as he called it, in other words, sustained efforts to address ongoing structural issues in society, is quite rare. Congregational work in this realm is typically peripheral to the life of whole body, being done only by small groups of persons within congregations (Chaves, 2004). Hence, my research that explores the narratives of how to overcome a broad-based aversion by Christians for social justice initiatives (especially those related to structural social change) and how many become engaged in social justice organizing is keenly significant.

The study of faith-based organizing specifically is not the primary purpose of this study. Comparative studies that explore the various strategies and philosophies of faith-based organizing are sorely needed. Nevertheless, there is much recent research on issue-based, power politic methods of faith-based organizing deployed by organizations like the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) (Shirley, 2001; Stout, 2010; Warren, 2001; Warren, 2010; Warren, 2011). The "FT"MM represents a different type of organizing. As I will narrate often and conclude later, it is a distinct form of theo-political theatre in a Black church prophetic tradition (Barber &

Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016) that intentionally pursues a social movement style of organizing and differs greatly from the strategies of IAF and the like. This study with the Moral Movement and its social movement philosophy presents an opportunity to explore the efficacy of faith-based organizing in this genre.

Education

Educational equity has been a centerpiece issue for the “FT”MM. At a rally in 2014, Guilford County teacher and educational activist, Todd Warren, decried the privatization of education in NC’s dominant, conservative political agenda saying "public dollars in private hands requires a profit without a nod to values" (field notes, August, 23, 2014). The “FT”MM has been adamantly intersectional about its demands, refusing to separate educational justice from justice work in healthcare, women’s rights, LGBTQ rights, the rejection of racism, and the like as well as its rejection to a broad-based, extremist political agenda (Barber & Zelter, 2014; Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016). This research will further explore the intersectional connections between education/educator activism and larger social movements of justice activism.

This project adds to the research on the training and motivation of pre-service and in-service educators for social justice work. There are some clear parallels between pre-professional and professional educators and those persons of faith. Research in the sociology of education has long highlighted the prevalence of ameliorative, religious, and salvific imagery in the justifications for modern education — namely, education as the path to class mobility, preparation for success in a technocratic society, ameliorating poverty, or other similar rationales (Meyer, 1986; Popkewitz, 2009). Focusing the lens from meta-explanation to individual educators, research about pre-service educators has often noted savior mentalities and white savior motivations held dearly by the predominately white, female, and middle class cadre of

students in teacher training programs (Boser, 2014; Ingersoll & May, 2011). Picower's (2009) ethnography described a common perception of self-identification by pre-service educators as persons of higher status and morally "good people" (p. 209) for their aspirations to work with students of color, often perceived to be as persons with deficits and in need of help. She added that some white pre-service teachers "used their religious identities not only to evade discussing their racial identity but also to deny the role of race in oppression" (p. 200). Warren (2010) described very similar aspirational barriers — good people with a strong moral impulse perceiving racial justice to be an altruistic enterprise — to be overcome or a stage of development to proceed through in the journey toward racial justice activism. This study informs the training of pre-service teachers in social justice classes in schools of education and particularly deepens the dialogue with evangelical students who may perceive social justice education as affront or even an attack on their faith.

There is some exciting research that substantiates significant successes in educational reform due to faith-based community organizing (Shirley, 2001; Warren, 2011). What is learned here about faith-based organizing that gives significant attention to educational issue offers encouragement and insight to the broader field of educational organizing.

Finally, in this category of education, research literature gives a resounding affirmation on the impact of community partnerships on both the academic and social missions of schooling (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Sanders & Lewis, 2005). Sanders and Lewis (2005) summarized a litany of these benefits including increased learning opportunities for students, ongoing social and economic development in the partnering community, improved parental attitudes toward schools, higher academic achievement of language-minority students, and the reduction of negative behaviors. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) echoed this assessment with

an even more extensive list of schooling benefits due to parental involvement and community partnerships that included higher academic performance, a rising sense of well-being among students, better attendance, greater contentment with the social atmosphere of schools, increased positive behaviors, greater homework readiness, increased family time in relationships, rising aspirations for higher education among students, and increased parental enthusiasm for classroom teachers. Despite the vast number of faith-based communities located throughout our society, faith-based partnerships with public schools have been historically rare with one major exception. Throughout its history, and across its many varying expressions of style and denominations, the Black church does have a distinguished legacy of dramatic impact at all levels of public education (Conder, 2012; Gaines, 2010; Jett, 2010; Mitchell, 2010; Morris, 2004; Warren, 2011). The "FT"MM's example of a theological engagement with justice issues in education including an organized, intersectional resistance to strategies of re-segregation and the privatization of public schools is a strong impetus for activist faith community partnership with schools. The stories told here offer compelling visions of teacher activism (in the case of one interlocutor) and the possibilities of new community partnerships with public schools.

Theological ethnography

A final area of highlighted significance for this study links its advocacy for social justice activism with the academic study of Christianity and the emergent field of theological ethnography (Phillips, 2012; Scharen & Vigen, 2011a). The anthropological study of Christianity has powerfully demonstrated the faith's inseparable entanglement with colonialism and the previously named indictments regarding patriarchy, heteronormativity, and racism. As a result, anthropology and the cultural studies project has often reflexively and accurately observed colonialism and these related forms of repression when Christianity is juxtaposed with emancipatory interests (Cannell, 2006). This predisposition has prompted much defensiveness

from Christian theologians (Milbank, 1990; Scharen & Vigen, 2011b). Milbank (1990) famously argued that social theory functions as a quasi-theology or an anti-theology relegating theological reflection to sentimental and instrumental servitude to the collectives of the state and a loosely defined humanity (i.e., humanity understood without the contributions of theology). This static of disagreement has been destabilized by significant changes that bring promise to the study of Christianity. Anthropological studies of Christianity have often been looped in generalizations that dismissed authentic indigenous expressions of Christian faith in post-colonial contexts. But the field has begun to move beyond this form of an interpretative default or automatic (Cannell, 2006).

In conjunction with these evolutions in anthropology, theological ethnography has become organized as a discipline that battles against the historical, theological practice of observing Christians and Christian communities in abstract, generalized, or idealized terms (Healy, 2000; Healy, 2012; Tanner, 1997). Applying the interests of local spaces, communities, individual lives, and human struggles for emancipation embedded in interpretative ethnography to the theoretical contributions of theology provides a vital opportunity to study a theologically inspired social movement like the "FT"MM and individual lives interacting with theology to construct activities identities in a manner that is free from dogmatic inflexibility, secular generalization, and theological idealism. The portrait of theological influences, barriers, and inducements in activism as well as the potential of exploring the theo-cultural production of identities is profoundly enhanced beyond abstraction by both of those destabilizations in the study of Christianity. And, indeed, I believe this study adds positively to the momentum and tools of theological ethnography. This word on methodological innovation and hope propels me to the next chapter, a full discussion on the methodologies of this project.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGIES

This project employs a qualitative research methodology of life narrative inquiry within post-critical theological ethnography. In this chapter, I will define, describe, and justify the combination of these genres of qualitative research in light of my research interests. Integral to those methods is the issue of researcher subjectivity; hence, I will discuss my own subjectivity in the section that immediately follows. The chapter ends with subsequent sections on research design/sampling, interview style and epistemology, data collection, data analysis, ethics, and the limits of the study.

Life Narrative Inquiry

My life narrative research of activists within the "FT"MM is inseparable from the ethnographic study of the movement. But, for the sake of ease of explanation, I will first define life narrative work and affirm its value for my research goals. Chase (2011) defined narrative as follows:

> [A] distinct form of discourse as meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience, a way of understanding one's own or others' actions, or organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time. Narrative researchers highlight what we can learn about anything — history and society as well as lived experience — by maintaining a focus on narrated lives. (p. 421)

Chase's (2011) definition above emphasizes the constructive power of stories to craft coherent accounts out of disjunct events, experiences, and contexts. The telling and writing of stories including life stories allows the listener or reader to see a journey, in this case the journey toward justice activism, in a compelling wholeness that unites the inevitable idiosyncrasies of every story into a narrative arch that inherently values contexts, sequences of events, and the

uniqueness of the storyteller's vision or narrative goals. Though in my analysis, I isolate themes, larger tropes, and performances across the stories, the life narrative context of the research continually chastens me to remain faithful to the integrity of each story. In this manner, life narrative research of multiple life stories draws some similarity to meta-ethnography where multiple qualitative studies are not simply stripped for some commonalities to make generalizations; instead, studies are translated into each other in a manner that protects the integrity of the original studies (Noblit & Hare, 1988). I have found narrative inquiry, and particularly life story research with its value of the whole life of an individual, to vigilantly guard the value of whole stories. Deploying life narrative inquiry has effectively supported my ability to retain context and progression in these accounts of justice activism.

Chase's (2011) definition also accentuated the value of "actions…the consequences of actions…and lived experience" (p. 421) in narrative research. All of these elements are obviously related to personal agency. And, indeed, Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett (2008) asserted that life stories "offer a methodologically privileged location from which to comprehend human agency" (p. 3).

Narrative inquiry also interacts dynamically with the various theoretical frames of this study. There has been a theoretical impasse in the discipline of cultural studies that emphasize the hegemony of ideology and systems of power over individual lives and other theories that posit the durability of personal identities and agency (Maynes et al., 2008). In the next chapter, I will describe my theoretical reliance on social practice theories of identity and specifically "history-in-person" (Holland & Lave, 2011). But, for the moment, a simple descriptor of history-in-person is that demonstrates the mediation of dramatic, historic struggles that are associated with regimes of power, so effectively described in cultural studies, into personal

identities and a resistant personal agency despite the universality of these structures of power and oppression. As I will describe when I introduce ethnography into the methodological discussion, narrative research retains a dual interest in the personal and the social contexts that enmesh the lives of individuals. Narrative inquiry effectively relieves some of this potential stalemate between structures and agency (especially when paired with a history-in-person lens) because it directs the researcher's gaze deep into the potential black box of individuals and their practiced lives within specific local spaces and social contexts.

Narrative research does regularly face challenges as dubious research by some who wonder loudly about the truthfulness of the stories being told. Narrators are always selective in the stories they tell (Maynes et al., 2008). Riessman (2008) agreed, explaining "narrative truths are always partial – committed and incomplete" (p. 186). Maynes et al. (2008) expanded on this reality by positing the concept of *narrative truth.* Citing the work of Ruth Behar, they explained that no *true* version of a life can exist. There are only stories told about lives. The notion of 'stories told around and about lives' is a reasonable explanation of what is meant by *narrative truth*. This does not mean the analyst does not make stringent efforts to confirm events with other historical sources. The work of verification is intricately a part of narrative inquiry. But the concept of narrative truth is a reminder of the significant value of narratives: "The value of personal narratives is related precisely to their tendency to go beyond the simple facts: They tap into the realms of meaning, subjectivity, imagination, and emotion" (p. 148). When one makes arguments from personal narratives and life stories, one does not simply take them at face value. Maynes et al. (2008) describe personal narrative inquiry always to be an intersubjective encounter where the history and subjectivity of the narrator engages the history and subjectivity of the writer or analyst. The value of meaning making in the telling of personal stories is

demonstrated in the realization that "important insights can also be gleaned from mistakes, distortions, and lies" (p. 149). In other words,

> Individuals use the narrative forms to remember, argue, justify, persuade, engage, entertain, and even mislead the audience. Groups use stories to mobilize others, and to foster a sense of belonging. Narratives do political work. The social role of stories - how they are connected to the flow of power in the wider world – is an important facet of narrative theory (Riessman, 2008, p. 8).

Analysts and writers are implicated in this statement as well. There are no innocent stories and there is a politic behind the telling and writing of every story.

This presence of politic and agenda affirms to the researcher that histories and social context cannot be divorced from the study of life stories. Personal narratives, by their very nature, are stories within multiple histories, stories of a near or distant past told within a present context (Maynes et al., 2008). Individual lives are not only connected to near and distant histories; they are also embedded in a variety of social relationships. Maynes et al. (2008) argued strongly, "It is inappropriate to regard life stories primarily as idiosyncratic" (p. 3). They defined personal narratives as "complex forms of evidence that demand sophisticated analytic techniques that build on the recognition of their location at the intersection of the individual and the social" (p. 41). This is particularly important in the study of identity and agency where temptation can lie in an overemphasis of the solitary, human actor. Defying this temptation, "human agency and individual social action is best understood in connection with the construction of selfhood in and through historically specific social relationships and institutions" (p. 2). The result for the researcher is that every life narrative project is embedded in an ethnography.[2]

[2] Dr. Charles Price impressed this essential point on me and others many times in his seminar on qualitative research and the writing of life stories. That insight has significantly shaped the design of this study.

Postcritical (Theological) Ethnography

The ethnographic component of this project design is a theologically informed postcritical ethnography. Postcritical ethnography conjoins critical theory with interpretative ethnography (Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004). Interpretative ethnography brought to this union sensitivity to the social construction of knowledge correcting the assumptions of objective critique and fixed representation in critical theory and providing a much-needed methodology for the more philosophical posture of critical theory. Critical theory embraced these influences "to the extent that [interpretative ethnography] accepted the centrality of power and ideology in social constructions" (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 3) which spoke strongly to the colonial past of ethnography. In this manner, theory and method are enmeshed with the ongoing sensitivity "that methods are ideas and theories in themselves" (p. 3). Hence, postcritical ethnography transgresses any hard demarcation between theory and methodology.

As a practice, it adheres to deep interests in the representation of intersectional difference and the intersubjective (reflexive) encounter between the researcher and the researched. The result is neither a fixed, determined theory nor practice. As Noblit, Flores, and Murillo (2004) explain, "For us, postcritical ethnography is not one single thing, rather it is many. It is less about unity and more about difference" (p. 2). All of these descriptors speak to a moral and ethical nature of the discipline:

> [Postcritical ethnographies] require considerable theoretical and methodological thought. They involve working through positionality, reflexivity, objectification, representation, and critical sufficiency. Postcritical ethnographies in an important sense are not designed, but enacted or produced as moral activity. Postcritical ethnographies then must assume they exist within a critical discourse that in part makes them responsible for the world they are producing when they interpret and critique. (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 24)

The moral ambitions of postcritical ethnography are direct products of its fluidity, its inclusive value of difference, the absence of reliance on a single dominant theoretical lens, the constant

tension of balancing theoretical application with the ethical methodological commitments of ethnography, and significant emphases on researcher positional reflexivity. In other words, critique is not only reserved for regimes of power and ideology, critique is also applied to methodology and every aspect of the research process.

I have described my methodology as postcritical and theological ethnography for several reasons. It is certainly theological in the object of its study, practicing Christians or persons who have narrative histories in the Christian tradition who have had their activism influenced and in some cases culturally produced in an overtly theological social movement. It is also made methodologically theological by my affirmation of the importance of religious ideology and religiously inspired cultural worlds within ethnographic observation (Althusser, 1971; Gramsci, 2000; West, 1999) and my mingling of theologically sourced (Jennings, 2010; Jennings 2011; Tanner, 1997; West, 1999) or theologically sensitive (Price, 2009) theory within the larger theoretical constellation of the study.

This use of theological sources is certainly postcritical as previously defined where theory and methodology are intentionally and inevitably entwined (Noblit et al., 2004). Methodologically, I have pursued a theological ethnographic gaze that has followed in the evolving growth of anthropology in the study of Christianity by attempting to avoid grand dismissals of value or authenticity despite Christianity's very real entanglements with inhuman and repressive practices while also fully acknowledging that shameful history as an ongoing struggle in its present practices and forms (Cannell, 2006). Theoretically, postcritical ethnography has been a companion project of the postmodern rejection of grand, encompassing narratives, the postmodern rejection of objective knowledge so common in critical ethnography, and post-structuralism's linguistically rooted rejection of "a final signified" and "the possibility

of an objective reality" (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 17). Postcritical ethnography retains the political, moral vision of critical ethnography, but it is sourced in its intellectual companionship with the postfoundationalist postures of postmodernism and post-structuralism. It is important to note that these epistemological moves are rejections of a previously argued foundationalism-relativism binary (p. 20). This retention of political vision and moral practice accompanied by a resistance to objectivity profoundly impacts a view of cultures such that "[c]ultures are not objects in any simple sense. They are ephemeral and multiple while our interpretations are always partial and positional" (p. 22). My reliance of theological critical theory mirrors these epistemological developments and their resultant view of culture.

My use of theological-cultural sources follows strongly the work of Tanner (1997) who also rejected the foundationalism-relativism binary, writing against the relativism of correlationalism and the de facto ecclesial foundationalism of post-liberalism. She critiqued theological correlationists who situate theology in the broadest possible reference point such that theology and culture mutually inform "a general understanding of the basic tasks and questions that define human life as a quest for meaning" (p. 65). Such a view renders theological thought to a disembodied existentialism and hence disengages it from the particular. In contrast, she located theology as enmeshed within communal forms of life. On the other hand, she also challenged post-liberals (Lindbeck, 1984; Hauerwas, 1988; Milbank, 1990) who emphasize an overly sacred particularity and distinctiveness of the church in its boundaries, beliefs, traditions and practices. Rather than this vision of a purist and distinct Christianity in belief, mission, and practice, Tanner (1997) noted that "Christian practices are always the practices of others made odd" (p. 113). Echoing Noblit et al.'s (2004) declaration on the fluidity of cultures, Tanner (1997) embedded Christianity and church within a variety of cultures. Also, significantly for this

study of identity, she explained that her practiced understanding of Christian identity "cannot be secured by a sharp cultural boundary" (p. 108). I will elaborate further on Tanner's position in chapter three in the discussion on cultural production. But, for the moment, her social practice vision of church and Christian identity is what sets the stage for theology to function as cultural production. These commitments and theoretical framings from postcritical (theological) ethnography were strong tools for me in my study of the "FT"MM. From the smallest planning sessions to the largest rallies, I was constantly confronted with a movement that was distinctly Christian in its performance, liturgy, and logics while simultaneously functioning as a space of practice that borrows from numerous cultural worlds and histories (see chapter three).

The liberative goals, moral world production, and strong awareness of intersectional differences of those studied in postcritical ethnography translates into a keen interest in avoiding the objectification, reification, and mystification of the studied, but understands that objectification is never fully eluded in the act of writing (Noblit et al., 2004). The recognition of inevitable objectification is closely aligned to a commitment toward researcher reflexivity. In reflexivity, the researcher, as the key implement of research, acknowledges the significance of her, his, or their positionality in all aspects of the ethnographic process. The researcher also is deeply aware of the issues of representation, acknowledging that the writing of an ethnography always involves uncertainty, researcher positionality/bias, objectification, and partiality in describing persons, communities, and social relations (Noblit et al., 2004). With that in mind, I turn now to my own subjectivity as a researcher and my positionality in the "FT"MM.

Researcher Subjectivity

Gunzenhauser (2004) emphasized how the dual tasks associated with critical ethnography of "raising their voice to speak *to* an audience *on behalf of* their subjects as a means of empowering them" (p. 79) and then also connecting the lived experiences of the same subjects to

social critique are inherently in conflict. This tension demands the "additional promise of being self-reflexive" (p. 91). Hytten (2004) added that the absence of reflexivity could yield theory-driven ethnographies steeped in the privilege of the researcher and profoundly separated from the lived experiences and knowledges of the researched. "The worst case scenario" is research where "data from a field study is forced to fit into a predetermined theoretical box, one whose walls are hermetically established prior to any actual empirical research" (p. 100).

With these strong cautions in mind, my positionality is that of a White, cisgender male — all positional identities in our society of great privilege that mingle with the inherent privilege of being a researcher in the academy. In addition, I have served for three decades as a working pastor and the last decade in faith-based community organizing. I have also worked for over twenty years intricately involved as a leader in various expressions of progressive Christianity that have strong leanings toward social justice and the critique of traditional forms of Christianity. I currently pastor a local community with all of those earmarks.

In addition to these present associations, my home community was rural and blue collar, the kind of place where NASCAR, casseroles filled with cream of mushroom soup, post-depression pragmatism, apocalyptic fears of a “one world government,” and nationalistic enthusiasm all were welcome guests. I was raised by faithful parents in a rural, fundamentalist Southern Baptist church. As a classic pop song (alluding to the longevity of recovery) echoes, "You can check out anytime you like, but you can never leave" (Felder, Frey, & Henley, 1977). True to that chorus, I am certainly still running and recovering from that heritage that was filled with racist, homophobic, and patriarchal constructions of faith along with many more generous enactments of faith. I entered junior high school at the height of the desegregation and busing litigation involving Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools that was often strongly opposed with

Christian logic. My own story has some worn, deep grooves of sadness and embarrassment emanating from painful experiences regarding the conjunction of racism and church. All of these positions are strong reminders that I have a deep investiture in the critique of Christianity and its historical connections to colonialism, racism, homophobia, and patriarchy.

In contrast to these constant impulses for critique, I have continued to maintain and contest a Christian identity. I certainly have the hope and motivation to tell the stories of persons who construct identities of social justice activism within and despite the historical narrative of Christianity. Maynes et al. (2008) asserted that the collection of stories by every analyst is motivated. As I prepare to do this work, I certainly do so with a reflexive awareness of my dual motivations of critique and hope.

My Christian identity and vocation was often in full display as an ethnographer and pastoral leader in the "FT"MM. In its performance of Black church liturgies, hierarchy, and formalism, the movement constantly privileged the leadership of faith leaders and pastors. As a result, I was regularly positioned behind Rev. Barber in his preaching/oration at rallies and press conferences. In marches in the streets or into the NC State Legislature, it was common for pastors and faith leaders to march in the front. In addition, after becoming an arrestee, I was often asked to stand behind the speaker, march in a privileged position, or wear a symbol that denoted that I had practiced civil disobedience within the movement. I was also asked at times to help plan key events or to participate in conference calls about future strategy. I was never in the "upper circle of leadership" that Bishop Robinson describes in her life story, but I was often in the next circle of communication and leadership. One at least one occasion, I spoke at a major public rally and I had a prominent role in a press conference after my arrest. My position in the "FT"MM was privileged, politically biased, and theologically biased. My politics and reading of

the Christian scriptures placed me squarely in affirmation of the theological-moral logic and political goals of the movement.

Participants

The life narrative component of this study includes the nine interlocutors that I introduced in the previous chapter. I constructed a strategic, purposive sample (Patton, 2002) related to my research questions. All of these interlocutors have heritages in Christianity and most are ongoing practitioners of the faith; all have also been involved in varying levels in the "FT"MM and are practicing social justice activists. Chase (2011) suggested that there is great value in narrative work that focuses on success related to a research question:

> …I suggest that we have as much to learn from narrative inquiry into environments where something is working as we do from inquiry into environments where injustice reigns. And I don't believe we have to give up intellectual skepticism to ask these questions. When something is working — when individuals, groups, or communities marshal ordinary resources in their everyday lives to strengthen their relationships and their communities — what is going on narratively in those environments? (p. 431)

The success of the "FT"MM in gathering a large and sustained movement of protest with victories in the courts over voter suppression laws and potentially in the ballot box (depending on how one interprets the failure of Gov. McCrory's re-election bid) paired with the success of these interlocutors in becoming substantive agents of change form an essential background to the design of this study.

Despite the value of selecting interlocutors who fit the parameters of the study (association with Christianity and the "FT"MM) and have been successful in the primary research question, Maynes et al. (2008) offered two cautions regarding the choosing of interlocutors. They warn researchers to make the criteria of choice clear so that selection is not done with predetermined outcomes in mind. They also recognize that engaging interlocutors from the network of the researcher is natural, but care must be asserted to avoid the researcher

finding only the stories she, he, or they wants to hear. This first warning directed me to be more detailed in my selection criteria and to ardently pursue a significant diversity of interlocutors. Since I have served as pastoral leader as well as an ethnographer in the "FT"MM, the latter warning also offered due caution in my choice of interlocutors.

The interview process was quite arduous for me, taking approximately 18 months to complete. I will comment further on this process in the next section on data collection, but one of these reasons for this challenge is that I insisted on a diverse sample and, at times, resisted easy-to-get interviews within my networks. Several interviews required months and even years of relationship building and co-labor in the movement to procure successfully (cf. introduction to Bishop Robinson in Chapter 7). Maynes et al. (2008) also cautioned life story researchers about the importance of obtaining a "number and array of life stories…to fit the analytic aims of the research" (p. 134) maintaining a balance between enough stories to make effective comparisons and too many stories that preclude detail and depth. As a result, I targeted successfully nine interlocutors to allow for an adequate diversity of respondents while also not overwhelming my ability to interview, transcribe, and write these stories in detail.

This collective of interlocutors includes three women and six men. Seven of the nine identify as straight and two identify as queer in their sexual orientation. The group also includes three persons who identify as Black and six who identify as White. This last parameter of racial diversity was extremely significant for me. Having observed many "FT"MM events in my ethnographic work, the racial diversity of these interlocutors helped my strategic sample to also become a reflective sample, as this diversity approximated the racial diversity of movement events. Wanting to offer narrative insights about the journey to justice activism across as broad a spectrum of Protestant Christianity as possible, I diligently pursued a Christian diversity in

heritage and practice. Four of these persons have sustained experience in the Black Church. Of course, the Black Church is not a unity. These four were or are currently involved with Black churches in a multi-ethnic denomination (Disciples of Christ, the denomination of Rev. Barber), traditional Black baptists (National Baptist, Missionary Baptist), and a queer Black denomination (Unity Fellowship Church). Five interlocutors hail from White evangelical or fundamentalist roots or were involved in an evangelical ministry at a time. Two of these persons with an evangelical or fundamentalist background are currently involved as leaders in very progressive Christian communities that have connections with emergent Christianity.[3] Two of the others with evangelical roots are in black churches and the fifth (at the time of the interviews) remains a theist but is no longer a practicing Christian. The sample also includes two devoted mainline Christians, both serving as leaders in liberal denominations. One of these mainliners does not identify as a Christian, being a secular humanist who continues to fellowship in a Christian body. The sample also includes a significant hybridity with many interlocutors, through both heritage and practice, fitting comfortably in more than one of the categories that I have described.

As previously noted, these interlocutors have varying roles in the "FT"MM. Three are leaders in the "FT"MM who have been or remain to be deeply engaged in the planning of movement activities and have had highly visual leadership/teaching roles. Five others have been highly involved in various roles in the "FT"MM. One of the interlocutors has been minimally

[3] The emergent movement parallels many of the intellectual shifts in culture and epistemology that I described earlier in this chapter. The momentum of postmodernism, post-structuralism, and post-foundationalism accompanied with their more dynamic views of culture (cf. again Tanner, 1997) and dismissal of meta-narratives of truth (cf. again Noblit et al., 2004) has had a significant ongoing effect in Christian doctrine and community practices. This movement surfaced to some international acclaim first as radical reform within evangelicalism, but was quickly rejected as heterodox, ultimately yielding a larger countermovement that embraced the "sociology" of emergent Christianity but not its epistemology. For a description of this movement's detachment from evangelicalism, see Conder, T. (2006). *The Church in Transition: The Journey of Existing Churches into the Emerging Culture.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. For a more definitive description of "emergence Christianity" in a wider historical lens, see Tickle, P. (2008). *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

involved as an attender in large protest rallies. Six of the nine are arrestees having practiced some form of civil disobedience. About half are significant leaders in the movement and are also prominent in other statewide social justice organizations; the others are less prominent. Maynes et al. (2008) noted that the subjects of life stories and life history research are often different from the prominent lives or powerful individuals typically highlighted in biographical projects. The most powerful in our society are "often simply presumed to be masters of their own fate" (p. 138). Whereas, the narrators in life stories are often 'ordinary persons' who are in an ideal position to "question power, agency, epistemology, and historical metanarratives" (p. 138). None of these interlocutors would fit in that category of ‘the most powerful.’ Most of my interlocutors are not well known outside of local circles.

Data Collection

Ethnographic research

I have attended numerous “FT”MM events beginning in summer of 2014 to the present. This includes large and small rallies, press conferences, regional events and regional trainings, pastoral retreats for theological instruction, action planning meetings, and conference calls. I have also observed many events that I missed by livestream or watched them later on the Forward Together YouTube Channel.

At these events, I wrote field notes using the distinctions and methods detailed by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) including head notes (mental observations when an ethnographer is not able to write), jottings (quick inscriptions of impressions, emotions, events), and more extensive written field notes. The use of an iPad that was unobtrusive and offered the ability to simultaneously take photos or videos, make voice recordings, and write notes was extremely helpful in generating field notes. Many of the events have been outdoors, often in extreme heat or cold, and have regularly involved the prolonged movement of marches of

various forms of social engagement. Often, my hands were full carrying my iPad and perhaps a placard or sign. As a clergy member and an arrestee, I was regularly invited to stand on the stage behind the speakers and or be in the news shot for press conferences. All of these conditions made head notes a critical necessity. I regularly observed with inner speech narration that enhanced my recall. As a repetitive practice, I would depart actions to go to local cafes or fast food restaurants in the transitions between events (such as during the transition between a training to a rally) or immediately after the action to translate head notes into jottings or more detailed field notes. There have also been many events like trainings where I have been able to write and record comfortably during the gathering. I have also taken field notes before, during, and after the life story interviews. Each of these encounters was treated as an ethnographic event.

Life narrative research and interviewing

I collected data through unstructured and semi-structured interviews (Bernard, 2011) using the three-part interview process described by Seidman (1998). The first interview "construct[s] a range of constitutive events in [participants'] past experience that places the participant in the context of their lives" (p. 12). Hence, my first interview with each interlocutor focused on broader life histories with each person being asked to describe their personal story as it related to their Christian heritage, ongoing faith formation or rejection of faith, development of their understanding of a rationale for social justice work, and key events that led to their becoming a practitioner of social justice. The second interview shifted to current contexts and experiences. In this encounter, my primary interest was current practices of social justice (both inside and outside of the "FT"MM), specific actions and interactions within the "FT"MM, and current Christian faith practices or reflections about each person's Christian heritage. The third interview was reflective, asking the interlocutors to ascribe meaning to their activist identities

and social justice practices as these intersect with their past Christian formation or present Christian practices. As Seidman (1998) explained, this reflection does not focus on satisfaction, but "intellectual and emotional connections between participants' work and life" (p. 12).

The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that I created broad interview guides and specific goals that were designed to create some consistency across the interviews with all of my interlocutors (Bernard, 2011). But, the common form of these interviews was unstructured. According to Bernard (2011),

> Unstructured interviews are based on a clear plan that you keep constantly in mind, but are also characterized by a minimum of control over the people's responses. The idea is to get people to open up and let them express themselves in their own terms and at their own pace. (p. 157)

In almost every interview, I allowed those being interviewed to speak at long intervals without the interruption of a question. All of my interlocutors are (with one exception, Molly) preachers, organizers, media veterans, public school teachers, university professors, and theologians — experienced orators and public speakers in realms that require a measure of vulnerability to be successful. The unstructured quality of long portions of these interviews allowed these experienced speakers to craft stories that were wonderfully illustrative. At transitional moments, when I was moving to wrap up an interview or change subjects, several of my interlocutors felt comfortable interrupting the transition or refusing the ending and added significant accounts that shed great light on their life stories.

But, in a stylistic change-of-pace to the unstructured format, I was often dialogical at times, creating a quality of reciprocity in portions of every interview. Yow (2005) admonished qualitative researchers and oral historians to, "beyond techniques bring to the interview your own unique approach to others and to life" (p. 115). She continued by quoting Beatrice Webb who named it to be "a delight in watching human beings as human beings quite apart from what you

can get out of their minds, an enjoyment of the play of your own personality with that of another, [a gift] of rare value in the art of interviewing" (as cited in Yow, 2005, pp. 115-116). Fostering reciprocal dialogue has been a significant portion of public discourse and relationality in my professional life outside of the academy and has been often attributed to me as a unique skill. It is certainly one of my greatest professional delights. Following Yow's (2005) advice, I added a conversational element to portions of these interviews with another set of excellent results. In addition to being another encouragement to vulnerable storytelling as my interlocutors often responded to my own vulnerabilities, I believe this dialogical style was very effective in establishing credibility with my interlocutors.

In advance, I knew only three of the nine interlocutors well. As noted in the previous section on participants, some of the initial agreements to interview were quite challenging to secure. Most of them did not return initial queries by email or my follow-ups to face-to-face requests until I had a common and mutually respected friend or acquaintance contact them. And, at least two of the interview relationships were difficult to move through the progression to the second and third interviews. In one case, this appeared to be due to the heavy schedule and media demands on one of my interlocutors. In another case, I suspect that the delay was partially due to my positionality as an older White male from the academy interviewing a younger Black man who was possibly well aware the long history of White persons ethnographically studying persons of color for dominant culture gains and goals (cf. next paragraph). And, in every case, my interlocutors remain extremely busy; they are practicing justice activists who strongly privilege action over discourse. Others had heavy travel schedules or significant teaching demands which often created delays in the progression of their interviews. And, as a group, they were all astonishingly humble. In other words, I would not classify even a single one of these

persons as ‘needing to tell their story’ or hungry for recognition in the intersubjective exchange of the interviews. I strongly believe that the dialogical component, my sharing of my own experiences and vulnerabilities in social justice work, created a sense of kinship and mutual respect as well as breaking down barriers of positionality.

Noted above, in one case, I tried for several months to schedule and complete the second interview with long intervals without response to communication by email or text. This person is tremendously humble and soft-spoken. I suspected that he had many more urgent needs in his pastoral duties and his work with incarcerated or transitioning from incarceration young men of color than to schedule interviews to talk about himself. When were able to set a date on a couple of occasions, he was a ‘no-show’ or had last minute conflicts. Our first interview had been brief and had to be more ‘to-the-point’ than other first interviews because he had arrived late and had another appointment immediately after our designated time together. But when we finally got to the second interview, I started our time together with personal sharing about the results of presidential election that had concluded two days before; we connected over this event and several current events. Our time together was originally set to be abbreviated yet again, but this time he stayed well past our agreed upon end time. In our final interview, I shared a story about my time as a high school and collegiate athlete. A former star football player himself, this sharing greatly energized him. He prolonged this interview beyond its end with a wonderful story and then has since followed up by sending me some illustrative media material about his life in the projects as a youth football star.

Riessman (2008) explained that when research interviews become conversational, the structure and rules of the interview change dramatically. A rote rhythm of question-and-response or merely a more formal, distanced tone yields to informal rules of conversation such as

taking turns, transitional niceties (e.g., “Excuse me for a second, but…”), and other informalities of dialogue or friendship. This transition happened often in these interviews. I watched dogs when toddlers cried for their mother. I made tea for an interlocutor and me when an employee stopped by to chat. I was asked to describe my background and my own social justice activism when the Dean came into the office to discuss an event earlier in the day. Spouses were brought by to meet me and chat before interviews began (perhaps as an evaluation in one case regarding the value of continuing the interviews). In these relocations of the tone and rules, Riessman (2008) explained that “the specific wording of a question is less important than the interviewer’s emotional attentiveness and engagement and the degree of reciprocity in the conversation” (p. 24). The conversational and reciprocal element of the interviews paired well with the unstructured nature of these encounters. I was often astounded by the vulnerability and depth of the responses that I received.

The lengthiness of my interviews and the resulting written life stories are a product of this unstructured and conversational style. Many of the additions and “tangents” in the interviews were not only critical to the arc of the life story being told, they often included essential data to my developing thematic analysis and I eagerly wanted these narrations in the story data. This style of interviewing also increased the time to write the stories. In addition to the increased length of transcription time and the ultimate size of the stories, their sharing often disrupted a narrative order of the interview forcing me to rely heavily on coding to reassemble the transcripts into a story. In other words, I was rarely able to simply edit the original shape of the completed transcription (despite the logic of Seidman’s methodology) into the written narrative.

Data Analysis

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explained that, in qualitative research, interpretative tools emerge from the data and warn against beginning the process with fixed interpretative methods. With this caution in mind, my data analysis began with a methodical commitment to numerous approaches. I spent considerable time collating my field notes, transcribing various short hand jottings into longer and fuller notes (Emerson et al., 2011), listening to various audio recordings of events, and watching recorded "FT"MM events from various internet sources.

Transcription of life story interviews is a valuable interpretative practice that results in a closer proximity to the narrative data (Emerson et al., 2011; Maynes et al., 2008). But, because of the longevity of the interviews, I outsourced most of the transcription and, hence, only personally transcribed two of the nine life stories. To compensate for this lost time with the data, I made a commitment to read the transcriptions repetitively before beginning a coding process.

Upon receiving the complete transcriptions, I put all three interviews in a single document and then open coded them with MaxQDA using the natural codes that emerged from the text. Emerson et al. (2011) described open coding as "seek[ing] to generate as many codes as possible, at least initially, without considering possible relevance either to established concepts in one's discipline or to a primary theoretical focus for analyzing and organizing them" (p. 182). Nevertheless, these codes were often common across the interviews usually based on normative life stages (e.g., "childhood", "collegiate years", "professional life," etc.) and topics related to the research goals often corporately held by this strategic sample (e.g., "The 'FT'MM", "social justice work", "Christian heritage and evolving faith", "philosophy/theology of social justice", etc.). This did not mean that theory was absent from the creation of these initial codes, only that I resisted overly specific and refined theoretical distinctions in the initial coding (Emerson et al., 2011). For example, I used codes like "conversion" and "turning points" which have dual

applications as potentially common life events as well as being implicated in religious theories of identity development (Price, 2009; Rambo, 1993) and theories regarding the assumption of political or activist identities (Cross, 2001; Price, 2009; Warren, 2010). I primarily used the many open codes generated from each story to construct the written life story. This process forced me to "sit" in these open codes a substantive length of time before moving to forms of "focused coding" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 172).

I then began the crucial process of shifting to analysis across all the interviews. As many qualitative researchers have noted, this shift from individual interviews to more composite analysis runs the risk of damaging the integrity and losing the context of the original stories (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Riessman, 2008). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) submitted the concept of montage to describe this process:

> Montage uses sparse images to create a clearly defined sense of urgency and complexity. Montage invites viewers to construct interpretations that build on one another as a scene unfolds. These interpretations are built on associations based on the contrasting images that blend into one another. (p. 5)

Montage, as an interpretative technique, encourages research interpreters to incorporate stories or units of narrative data across multiple narratives nonsequentially, hence avoiding insistences on linearity, antecedence, or even causality in an interpretative commitment to reads narratives simultaneously (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

I created a single document of all the stories as a base for various forms of thematic and focused coding. I was informed by Riessman's (2008) descriptions of both thematic analysis and dialogic/performance analysis. Thematic analysis "theoriz[es] across a number of cases by identifying common thematic elements across research participants" (p. 74). As implied in the previous definition of montage, scholars using this approach still work diligently to "keep a story 'intact' by theorizing from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across

cases" (p. 53). Dialogic/performance analysis is particularly sensitive to the preservation of life narrative sequences and the contexts in which these stories are told or performed for listeners or a researcher. "It interrogates how talk among speakers is interactively (dialogically) produced and performed as narrative…requir[ing a] close reading of contexts, including the influence of investigator, setting, and social circumstances on the production and interpretation of the narrative" (p. 105). In other words, the life narratives I heard and analyzed where not only recollected, constructed, sequential performances of lives, they were constructed and performed in an intersubjective encounter with me as the researcher. As an analyst, I remained committed to "hear" narrative cuts within the whole case and to be sensitive to their production in the research encounter with all the varied positionalities and power differentials present in such an encounter.

The focused and thematic coding began with the use of what I would call broad "spaces of practice" or "spaces of contention" that were prominent in open coding categories" (like "the 'FT'MM" or "heritage") that ran through all of the stories. That assertion reveals that this stage of analysis was also persistently cognizant of theory. "Spaces of practice" or "spaces of contention" are conceptual results of sociocultural practice theory (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; cf. Chapter 3). Theoretical lenses, some named in chapter one and still others described more fully in chapter three, were always present in my analysis. I tried to be deeply aware of their presence in informing my analysis while also constantly open to tensions between theory and narrative data that would produce nuances to these theoretical positions or my own independence from these lenses as I heard and wrote these stories. Maynes et al. (2008) affirmed the reciprocal relationship of theory to narrative analysis and also illustrated the ability of narrative analysis to generatively stray from theoretical impasses:

> Analyses of personal narratives, beyond the contributions they make to specific areas of empirical research, can also serve to reorient theories about the relationships between the individual and the social by calling attention to the social and cultural dynamics through which the individuals construct themselves as social actors. In so doing, they have the potential constructively to intervene in the theoretical impasse resulting from the collision between skepticism of hegemonic individualism, on the one hand, and the persistent, even increasingly urgent interest in understanding selfhood and human agency, on the other. (p. 2)

I focus coded from theoretical categories and observational categories to maintain that tension between theory and lived experience. As another example, the code of "conversion" which was retained from open coding, as previously mentioned, a concept rooted in both life stage and theory, was ultimately nuanced by theoretical notions (e.g., "encounter", cf. Price, 2009) and lived experiences (e.g., "intra-faith conversion", see Chapter 13). I focused coded at least twice for each story. The first pass usually included the creation of topic and thematic codes from theory and the narrative. Subsequent coding produced the kind of nuancing mentioned above.

Ethical Issues

This study was submitted to and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. As directed by my own personal intent and the permissions of the Review Board, I took every reasonable measure to protect both the identities and interests of my anonymous interlocutors. This protection included giving prospective interlocutors a one-page prospectus that outlined the goals of the study, my methods including the three-interview process (Seidman, 1998), and the approximate time commitments of each interview. After receiving affirmations to participate, each interlocutor received a university generated consent form that carefully detailed my commitments to their anonymity and the avoidance of any harm as well as their freedom to end their participation at any desired point. The interviews were audiotaped (with permission) and I wrote corresponding field notes electronically on my iPad which also served as the recorder. The interviews were transcribed

with careful efforts to remove all identifying information (cf. Introduction to Part II of this study). The audio files, field notes, and transcribed stories have all been removed from my iPad (which is password-protected) and collected on my password-protected personal computer. In Seidman's (1998) three interview process, the final reflective interview functions as a member-check. Transcripts of the first two interviews were provided before the final interview to enhance reflection and to give interlocutors an opportunity to offer any corrections. When the writing of their stories was complete, I have sent those full narratives to the interlocutors for final feedback before their inclusion in this dissertation. I received a few significant corrections and many points of clarification from some but not all of the narrators.

The field notes for this project which included audio recordings of rallies, press conferences, training sessions, and pastoral retreats as well as photos of the same were all taken in public events or in events targeted to specific populations (such as meetings for pastors or arrestees) that were not conducted with an expectation of confidentiality. For example, in pastoral trainings, members of the public and retreat center staff were free to enter and listen to sessions. On the rare occasions, when the media was excluded for civil disobedience training, Rev. Barber or another speaker asked that no recordings be made, or when the conversations could be construed as within attorney-client privilege, I refrained from making recordings.

CHAPTER THREE: THE "FORWARD TOGETHER" MORAL MOVEMENT — POLITICS, HISTORY, AND THE CULTURAL PRODUCTION OF ACTIVIST IDENTITIES

The Big Tent

Monday April 25, 2016, the date that marked the third anniversary of Moral Mondays, dawned bright and beautiful with a level of energy and early preparation resembling the first stirrings of an outdoor festival. I got out of my car on a street beside the NC Legislature, adjacent to a large grassy field known as Halifax Mall. The field was empty, but later that day buses filled with Christian school and Bible school students on excused absence will arrive and the field will be filled with several thousand counter-protesters singing traditional Christian hymns and celebrating the biblical faithfulness of the NC Legislature's political agenda. An enterprising vendor has already set up on that corner ready to sell religious and political buttons and badges descrying God's sure judgment on "fags," "sodomites," and other categories of the 'sexually reprobate' all named in similarly offensive terms. I walked briskly to the South side of the legislature toward Bicentennial Plaza, a large concrete, open air assembly point between the NC Museum of Natural Science to the West and the NC Museum of History to the East. Looking at the NC State Capitol with its prominent rotunda just to the South, I saw a small camper outfitted with two side billboards proclaiming the "human holocaust" of abortion and displaying large Bible verses from the King James Version which conveyed a life-or-death, or more accurately, an eternal life-or-hellfire imperative of repentance. This camper will continually drive without respite around the demonstrations and events of the day like a forlorn watchdog of a threatened past.

As I reached the grassy park with its scattered benches and various historical monuments that seemingly guard the hallowed and beautiful grounds of the NC Capitol Building, I saw a few friends and acquaintances primarily from the National LGBT Task Force, the National Center for Transgender Equality, EqualityNC, and other groups who champion the rights of LGBTQ people in NC or nationally gathering on the street's edge near a park bench. I have met with several of these leaders in person and by phone over the last few weeks to plan for the day's actions. Our friendly gathering by the park bench attracts a few of the key leaders from the NAACP. By 8am, there were about 30 persons standing, giving hugs, and stacking some print materials for the later demonstrations. As we stood and chatted, an SUV marked "State Capitol Police" pulls off of the street and backs slowly onto an adjacent sidewalk on the Capitol grounds. Then the officer backs the vehicle right into the midst of our gathering on these public grounds. After he scatters us and disembarks, he shouts brusquely to us, "Your permit is for over there!" pointing to the opposite side of the Capitol at Fayetteville Mall where the day's first press conference sponsored by TurnoutNC (a voter action wing of EqualityNC) will be held in an hour at 9am. The police presence was more than highly visible, it was palpable. Officers were visible not only on the State Capitol grounds, but also at the Bicentennial Plaza where the day's largest gathering will be. They were generally holding coffees, joking, smiling, and apparently ready for yet another Moral Monday action, though the scale of this day will be much larger than most. As we casually left this public space, a smiling officer who identified herself as LGBTQ, thanked us for our work and reminded us that they, or at least she, saw protecting us as the primary mission of the day (field notes, April 25, 2016).

There have been many Moral Monday protests in NC, but the NAACP, statewide partners, and national partners have gathered in force on April 25th in Raleigh to focus their

anger, power, and voices to demand a full repeal of NC's infamous House Bill 2 (HB2). HB2, or "Hate Bill 2" as it will be described throughout the day, has been dubbed in the media as "The Bathroom Bill" because it restricts the use of public restrooms to the restroom corresponding to one's gender on one's birth certificate rather than the bathroom corresponding to one's gender identity. The bill was passed in a hasty special session of the legislature as a response to the City of Charlotte's (NC's largest municipality) passage of a local ordinance that provided LGBTQ protections including the use of bathrooms corresponding to gender identity in all city properties. The protection of public restrooms and school locker rooms from supposed sexual predators, who would supposedly take dangerous advantage of this freedom, became the media and public flashpoint for HB2. The bill's inhospitable targeting of transgender and non-gender binary persons often masked other insidious elements of the legislation including the censure of municipalities to pass ordinances supporting living wages or local hiring incentives and the abrogation of the wide-ranging freedoms of any protected class of person to sue for harassment or discrimination in the state's courts. Since its passage, HB2 sparked dramatic national reactions including the relocation of the NBA All-Star Game, the relocation of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) championships in all sports to other states, and termination of several new business moving headquarters or facilities to the state.[4]

The day of protest began with the 9am rally and press conference on the NC Capitol grounds led by TurnoutNC and then would proceed to a noon "SpeakOut" against HB2 at the doors of the Capitol. The morning press conference against hate and intolerance ironically was located on a portion of the Capitol grounds haunted by several Confederate memorials and monuments and occurred on the very day that some Southern states celebrate Confederate

[4] For a timeline of the controversy and its soft repeal see http://www.charlottemagazine.com/Charlotte-Magazine/April-2016/HB2-How-North-Carolina-Got-Here/

Memorial Day or Confederate Heroes Day. The morning's rational, fact-based, and history-based press conference yielded to a passionate "SpeakOut", an indictment of HB2 characterized by personal testimonials from affected persons, political outrage from professional activists, and preached theological vignettes from clergy. An unseasonably hot day, as one of the speakers, I found that the heat reflecting off of the concrete steps and stone pillars of the Capitol's entrance had shut down my iPad and hence I was forced to make my brief comments extemporaneously. The noon sun that had finally emerged above the trees on the grounds and the surrounding buildings seemed to represent a sharp heating up of the event's discourse and an acceleration toward the major rally to follow including acts of protest resulting in eventual civil disobedience (field notes).

Throughout the day, there were two civil disobedience trainings for possible actions to risk arrest after the afternoon's plenary rally. Throughout the "FT"MM's history, these trainings are typically held in neighboring churches (field notes). A pattern with the force of a liturgical[5] form had developed. Those wishing to risk arrest would sit in the front and middle sections of small historical Black churches like Davey St. Presbyterian or First Baptist Church in downtown Raleigh. They would be surrounded on the periphery by NAACP field staff, representatives from partnered organizations, and former arrestees who were part of the family. And indeed, these events often took on the emotional tone of a joyous family reunion. When press conferences accompanied these trainings, the press would be ushered out before the actual training began. Typically, Rev. Dr. Barber would address those risking arrest with theological-

[5] Liturgy is typically understood in its most common application: the construction and enactment of formal worship rituals. Its literal definition is the "work of the people." Understood this way, a liturgy is a formative practice that expresses the faithfulness of worshipping communities as defined by their alignment with traditions, sacred text, and interpretations of the God's presence in this world. The patterns of teaching and protest in the Moral Movement are highly liturgical, combining Christian religious forms (such as preaching and worship styles) with distinct practices perceived to be not only the products of faith but also reproductive of greater faith.

prophetic[6] words that set the political moment of the day and then encouraged the value of this form of witness. Following Rev. Barber's words, the NAACP legal staff then would teach about both the history of civil disobedience in the Civil Rights Movement tradition and the mundane nuts and bolts of the arrest process as they had been carried out in previous years by the Capitol Police at Moral Monday protests. On this day, it is unknown how the State Capitol Police will handle any perceived lawlessness in this new season of Moral Monday protests. Also, the trainings, in a significant change, would be held in an open-air format on the grounds of the Capitol after the opening press conference and at the side of the stage before the main rally began. This plan eliminated the familial warmth and strong communal resolve fostered in the church spaces as well as the prophetic political preaching that accompanied past trainings. In replacement for this religious component, several veterans of the movement led by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) shared stories and advice for disruptive, non-violent action at the final training before the rally. Also in contrast to the church site training traditions which were entirely focused on and almost entirely attended by potential arrestees, these gathering were attended by approximately 200 persons, well beyond the 54 persons who were arrested later that evening. As one who was planning to risk arrest later that evening, I noted that the familial atmosphere of the past was replaced by a broader, communal sense of movement and resistance regarding the legislation of HB2. That certainly buoyed my own resolve (field notes).

The final training concluded as the major rally began. Standing on wall stage left parallel to the podium, I could see a line of 15-20 speakers, many of them friends who I had met in my

[6] The prophetic tradition is often confused with solely acts of foretelling the future with apocalyptic overtones. This form of prophesy certainly exists in current Christian expression. But, the core of ancient Hebrew prophesy and its use in "prophetic traditions" centered on correctly naming the present, describing the social and theological reality of the moment in light of a theological understanding of God's covenant with the people. Prophetic preaching today often functions in the same manner, applying a theological lens to a season, issue, or struggle. When I write of the "Black prophetic tradition," I am using term "prophetic" in this latter meaning of theological-social-political commentary.

three years of participation and leadership in the movement, in a line stretching out the back of the stage roped off from the public like a clergy bullpen. Having participated in several planning summits and conference calls including one late call the night before, I was very familiar with the organizational representations of most of the speakers for the afternoon. By the time Rev. Barber stepped to the microphone, a crowd, many having left work early for the 3pm rally, had swelled to nearly 2000 filling the Bicentennial Mall fully with many standing outside the rope barriers and filling the concrete decks outside the museums on the wings of the event. Rev. Barber did not disappoint the crowd, truly a congregation, with his oratory (field notes).

Flanked by all the previous speakers on a now very crowded stage, Rev. Barber began by calling forward three high school students who had left school early from Wilmington to join the rally. They stood beside him as a clear symbol of hope. As many leaders of color in the "FT"MM have said to me then regarding the repressive work of the NC Legislature and more recently regarding the victorious Trump presidential campaign that was saturated in the invectives of racism, "We've endured this before — and often — and this too shall pass." The three young women of different racial heritages were arrayed as embodied declarations of resistance, hope, and an inevitable victory of this moral cause. Wearing a black robe adorned with a bright scarlet stole marked by a gold cross and descending dove, all recognizable Pentecostal symbols of fire, blood, and Spirit declaring the gracious expansion of God's reign beyond familiar boundaries[7], Rev. Barber plunged into a powerful sermonic discourse that

[7] The season of Pentecost in the Christian calendar celebrates pouring out of God's Spirit at the festival of Pentecost. It is recorded that the disciples spoke in languages of all the nations (Acts 2:4). The Apostle Peter declared to those gathered in Jerusalem that "your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will *pour out my Spirit*; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, *blood, and fire,* and smoky mist…before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:17-21; NRSV, emphasis mine). In this liturgical season, many Christians celebrate the expansion of God's grace beyond familiar confines, native languages, and religious boundaries and prepare themselves to join this expanding good work.

immediately mingled the NC Constitution's demands of a government to protect the vulnerable and a New Testament text that declares the indiscriminate grace of God ("…for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous," Matthew 5:45; NRSV). Throughout the 20-minute address, Rev Barber mixed folk idiom ('let me drop the plow one more time"), memorable repetitions ("this is our time…"), and call-and-response with the gathered crowd, all familiar with the iconic earmarks of Black church prophetic preaching style.

And, indeed, the remarkably diverse crowd of Blacks, Whites, and Latin@s; gay, straight, and transgender; soccer moms, countercultural teens, and former hippies; middle class professionals and blue collar workers; feminist activists, LGBTQ activists, union organizers, and church deacons; Atheists, Christians, Jews, and Muslims; and churchgoers, those who do not attend church, and those who would never attend a church was transformed into a 'big tent,' inclusive, politically evangelistic congregation (field notes). The diversity of the community and the intersectionality of the platform was intentional and unmistakable when Rev. Barber named the Legislature's voter suppression, apartheid-style gerrymandering, and sexual fear politics represented in HB2 as a "poisonous brew of racism and homophobia" that is simultaneously "anti-worker, anti-LGBTQ, and anti-American" (field notes). It was also imminently clear that Rev. Barber, speaking for the "FT"MM, saw this as a battle for true Christian faith and the very definition of goodness:

> [The General Assembly] called themselves right when they are as wrong as two left shoes. HB2 is not a bathroom bill. We've said to the media, 'Don't let them play you; it's not a bill to protect women and children from predators. It is a cynical attempt to pit supposedly Christian values against our families' best interests and our faith's highest morality.' And, in fact, to call this bill Christian is, in fact, unchristian. We cannot be silent, especially when our faith and religion is being distorted — oh my God — true evangelicalism starts with how you treat the poor, and how you treat the least of these, and how you treat the bruised and the broken and unacceptable. There are 2000

> scriptures in the Bible they put their hands on [to be sworn in]…that talk about how you treat the poor, the stranger, and people on the margins. (field notes)

Those memorable words were spoken in the tone of a wise observer, the proverbs of an aged sage, and a priest of common sense staring out from a country pulpit, a city diner, or from the front of a general store staring incredulously at morally inverted world. But, the end of his address would gather into a passionate, tonal crescendo of a Spirit-anointed preacher and a morally outraged political prophet.

First, Rev. Barber chronicled the ravages of the current legislature and its political agenda that attacked and demonized the poor of NC. He noted the huge cuts in expenditures for public education, the 500,000 denied healthcare because of the rejection of federally funded Medicaid expansion, the 900,000 families denied earned income credits on their tax burden, and the 1,600,000 poor persons including 600,000 children all in the state of NC. He mocked with horror and outrage that with issues so great and a mandate from the state constitution for "beneficent" care for the poor, the Legislature chose to focus on bathrooms and the protection of North Carolinians from a non-existent threat. "They chose to do this?" His final shouted and poetic proclamation was an unmistakable clarion call for action:

> I tell you we cannot stand for this.
> This means we must come together.
> This means we must stand together.
> This means we must fight back together.
> This means we must organize together.
> This means we must protest together.
> This means we must vote together.
> This is our moment to say no to hate and racism and classism.
> This must be a movement of love and a movement of justice.
> This is our moment to reject the politics of fear and division and hate.
> This is our time!
> This is our time.
> This is our time,
> THIS…IS…OUR…TIME! (field notes)

And, indeed, as Rev. Barber's call still echoed on the concrete, the crowd immediately organized itself with the quick directions of NAACP representatives into a march toward the NC Legislature Building.

Movement musician Yara Allen began singing a protest spiritual ("Someone is hurting my sister, and it's gone on far too long. And we won't be silent anymore.") to initiate the march which began with clergy at the lead, walking in groups of two and three abreast. They were followed by the hundreds in the crowd who formed themselves into a singing and chanting ribbon entering the Legislature Building, typically called "The People's House" in the movement. I joined the 53 other witnesses who would risk arrest that evening (by staying after the building's closure if necessary to teach and instruct members of the NC House and NC Senate) walking at the end of the procession. Led by Rev. Barber, who was flanked by Rabbi Lucy Dinner of Temple Beth Or on his right and Bishop Suzan Robinson, the Executive Director of the Civil Rights and Justice Center, on his left, those entering the building streamed past the reception area into the small foyer leading to a grand staircase which ascends to the fountain lobby between the two legislative chambers. The marchers avoided the staircase, turning left into a vast high ceilinged lobby outside of the first floor offices of NC House members and winding slowly up a single small staircase to the balconied second floor of the legislative offices where the office of the Speaker of the House, Rep. Tim Moore sits in the far corner. Rev. Barber, a large man who walks with a cane and has faced a lifetime of medical conditions that have threatened to take away his ability to walk (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016) took the elevator.

Emerging from the elevator, he led the marchers as they circled the balcony in a form of a

symbolic Jericho walk.[8] Rev. Barber in an address to the crowd proclaimed the symbolic density of the moment: "We are here symbolically for all the people of NC" (field notes). Eventually the trailing marchers filled in the remaining empty spaces on the second floor while others positioned themselves on the first floor looking to up to Rev. Barber perched at the head of the balcony. Those choosing to risk arrest were guided to the left of Rev. Barber, strategically positioned adjacent to the door of Speaker Moore's corner suite of offices.

Some of the crowd thinned as the building was closed; others remained on the balcony to watch an occupation of Speaker Moore's outer office by a group of approximately 20 moral protesters. By 8:15pm that evening, the last of the 54 witnesses had been arrested for an unwillingness to depart after the building's closure. Cuffed in plastic bracelets, we were led by an escorting officer to the elevators outside the assemblies to a basement cafeteria for what had become, now entering its third year, a ritual of an initial booking by the State Capitol Police. Eventually, we were put in Department of Corrections buses for transport to the Wake County Detention Center. The first bus, leaving nearly two hours before the last bus, exited from the central underbelly with still a crowd of several hundred waiting across the street. In what had become a tradition of the movement, the onlookers waved and chanted repetitively, "Thank-you, we love you!" A fourth year of Moral Mondays had begun with yet another powerful demonstration. But, as described in the brief history that follows, the NAACP "FT"MM has

[8] As reported in Joshua 6 of the Old Testament, the Hebrews in pursuit to occupy the promised land of Israel laid siege to the city of Jericho by circling its outer walls for seven days. The tradition proclaims that one the seventh day, the blaring of their trumpets and a great shout from the people caused the city's walls to fall flat and the defenses of the city to crumble (Joshua 6:20). This symbolic circling, invoking the biblical image of a smaller force of witnesses arrayed against a greater power, has been a common practice and symbol of the Moral Movement when entering the NC Legislature. On many occasions actions in the building have begun with a circling of the fountain outside the huge golden doors of the legislative assemblies or this second floor rectangular balcony which provides access to the legislative offices on this floor.

been birthed in both the centuries old struggle for civil rights and recent organizing that pre-dated the 2010 ascent toward Republican control of the state of North Carolina.

Fusion Politics, the NC NAACP, Historic Thousands on Jones Street, Moral Mondays, and the Birth of The Forward Together Moral Movement

Rev. Barber often explains that the NAACP and the Moral Movement is non-partisan. In his speech on April 25, 2016, he echoed this familiar refrain: "The NAACP is not a Black organization. It is not a White organization. It is not a Democrat organization. It is not a Republican organization. It is a civil rights organization!" (field notes). In many teach-ins, preach-ins, and rallies over the last three years, Rev. Barber is quick to point out that the "FT"MM began in earnest around 2007 when Democrats controlled the governorship and both state houses in NC:

> We had first gathered on Jones Street when Democrats were in power. We had said from the beginning that our agenda wasn't Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative. We weren't advocating for left or right, but for all that is good *and* right. (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016, p. 52)

This battle for the good, to both name the good and enact it in public politics, and the powerful rallies that garnered national attention and came to be known as Moral Mondays were forged in several distinct historical contexts:

> Moral Mondays had not 'just happened.' They resulted from the efforts of 140 organizations that had worked together as a grassroots coalition for seven years. When crowds chanted, 'Thank-you! We love you!' each week to the scores of arrestees leaving the Legislative Building in Department of Corrections buses, they were cheering on their pastors, their union leaders, their professors, and their grandmothers. We didn't just know one another. We were family. (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016, p. xi)

The familial nature of the movement, a kinship among remarkable diversity, is strikingly obvious at every event, small and large. But those bonds were constructed in many inertial histories beyond the first gatherings on Jones Street.

The first and second reconstructions

Historical teaching is common in the "FT"MM, teaching moments from the U.S.' past as a slaveholding society to its present struggles for justice abound in every scale of the movement's gatherings (field notes). Telling of its history in the longest frame from emancipation to the present, the current movement for justice and particularly its diverse constituency is commonly named a third reconstruction of fusion politics. The first reconstruction refers to the formation of a fusion party of Blacks and Whites in NC during the reconstruction era in the aftermath of the Civil War. A small fellowship reflecting the leadership of the current "FT"MM, namely a Black preacher named J.W. Hood and a White preacher named Samuel Stanford Ashley, conferred to rewrite the state's constitution with a moral vision that stated that "beneficent provision for the poor, the unfortunate…is among the first duties" of the state.[9] Throughout the South, fusion coalitions formed resulting in the election of 16 Black men to the U.S. Congress and over 600 Black men to southern state legislatures between 1865-1880. More Blacks served in the NC Legislature during that time than the number presently elected. Notions of White solidarity eroded somewhat during this era along with the passage of some of the most progressive educational and labor laws in our nation's history. A backlash of southern White supremacist racism accompanied by a national indifference destroyed the breathtaking gains of the first reconstruction and ushered in the insidious racial re-entrenchment of the Jim Crow South and persistent, overt racism around the country (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016).

The second reconstruction, far more widely known though the true mission and facts are often now lost in sentimental narrative, began with the hard, dangerous work of voting rights

[9] North Carolina Constitution, Article I, Section 1 and Article XI, Section 4, retrieved from http://www.ncga.nc.us/legislation/constitution/ncconstitution.html.

organizing and ultimately resulted in the fusion justice coalition led by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s resulted in the landmark passage of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965). But yet again, these notable advances prompted an immediate racist backlash of now a coded, colorblind racism that over the past years has very intentionally and now quite successfully has sought to undermine President Johnson's "Great Society" and defang the power of these significant legislative landmarks (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016; Omi & Winant, 2015; field notes).

The third reconstruction

The "FT"MM consistently names itself as a third reconstruction and heir of those first two fusion coalitions. Much of its agenda has been to undo the great losses of justice in the wake of the racial realignment and resegregation after the 1960s and confront the powerful arms of coded, colorblind racism that threatens the quality of life of every citizen and deconstructs the goodness of our democratic society. Its dreams are to go far beyond this defensive battle and fight for a beloved community that exceeds the successes of the first two reconstructions. Those dreams are often couched in theo-moral visions that challenge the Christian rationalizations and theological constructs that have been deployed by the racist opponents of the first two fusion movements.

The revitalization of the NAACP and the first people's assembly

This fusion coalition began to coalesce in 2005 after Rev. Barber successfully campaigned to become the next President of the NC State Branch of the NAACP. As a seminarian, Rev. Barber had been influenced by Duke's renowned theologian Stanley Hauerwas who had long advocated for the peculiarity of the church by its distinct witness to God's just reign in public spaces. In other words, that the church is distinctly political by being the social embodiment of a distinctly theological and humanly recognizable social ethic (Hauerwas, 1988).

But, after his years as a pastor and his networking as the NC-NAACP President, Rev. Barber pushed back on Hauerwas' notions regarding the uniqueness of the church as God's agent in the world. He saw God's Spirit blowing in many places:

> …it wasn't only the good church folk who made up that 'city on a hill,' shining the light of justice and love in our community. As a matter of fact, it was often folk outside the church who inspired us the most, standing as examples of what the church should be. (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016, p. 38)

This profound theological shift sent Rev. Barber in the direction of a highly successful search for diverse justice partners for his vision with the NAACP. The big tent fusion coalition was poised to form. But first, he needed to reform NC's NAACP to make it ready and worthy to convene a movement.

The NAACP often rightly boasts as the nation's oldest anti-racist, civil rights organization (field notes; Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016). But the organization had lost a bit of the sense of that legacy and "had become a top heavy social club for civil rights elites" (p. 44). In response, Rev. Barber had run for the presidency on a platform of "from banquets to battle" (p. 44). And this is exactly what he did; he called the NAACP into confrontational action. Reading the rich biblical texts of the social justice imperatives of ancient Israel in the prophets like Amos and Ezekiel and fearing (quite prophetically) of what America could become, he urged the NAACP back onto the battleground for justice:

> And we know that those who want to 'take back America' don't have a point in history to take us back to where we experienced greater freedom. Even the strides forward that have been made cannot be preserved without vigilance. A justice movement can never circle camp and make celebrating past victories its primary function. No, the future of the NAACP must be as a militantly pro-justice, antiracist, antipoverty fusion coalition. If we were to have a future, I said, then it must be as a leader in helping America realize the promise of justice that had not yet been fulfilled. (p. 46-47)

While Rev. Barber transformed the internal culture of the NAACP and revitalized its mission, the vision of a People's Assembly emerged.

In traveling the state and listening to issues that beset North Carolinians and the causes that potential partners were working for, a potential multi-point agenda was developing. A group of sixteen organizations attended an open called meeting about social justice. On a large sheet of butcher paper, the organizations wrote down the issues they cared the most about. Then they named the forces that opposed them. There were three galvanizing outcomes to the dialogue: they generated a fourteen-point agenda for action that remains today the marching vision of the "FT"MM, they realized they had interests in a diversity of issues but that they all were opposed by the same opposition, and that they greatly outnumbered those opponents. In unison, the group called for a major citizens' teach in and mass march to Jones Street in Raleigh, NC, the site of the NC Legislature Building on the second Saturday in February, 2007. They dubbed it the "First People's Assembly." To their delight and partial surprise, a huge and diverse assembly of concerned citizens arrived on a cold Saturday morning. On that morning, imitating in a way Martin Luther's nailing of his 95 theses on the door of the church at Wittenburg marking the beginning of the reformation, they posted their 14 points on a 14-foot high placard at the door of the NC Legislature. After the momentous day, the civil rights veteran from the Southern Conference Education Fund in the 1960s, Al McSurely, who had become the Legal Redress Chair for NAACP, renamed it the Historic Thousands on Jones St (HKonJ). HKonJ marches have continued on the second Saturdays of February every year through the present and have shaped the form of action that ultimately became Moral Mondays.

Moral Mondays

Between that first People's Assembly and the present, NC experienced a seismic political shift. This shift was not isolated from a dramatic political realignment taking place across the whole nation. In the 2010 national midterm elections, two years into the first term of President Obama, the Tea Party Movement exploded into national prominence and the Republican Party

experienced historic gains. These victories including a net gain of 63 seats in the U.S House of Representatives to seize majority control, increasing their minority in the U.S. Senate by 6 seats, and an astounding increase of 680 seats in state legislatures.[10] Few, if any, states felt this shift more acutely than NC. A historically moderate southern state in national politics with a long history of Democratic Party control at the state level, NC saw the Republicans resoundingly win both the state house and state senate in 2010 with margins that would balloon even further into supermajorities in 2012 after the new majority redrew of the state legislative maps. Then in the 2012 election, Pat McCrory won the state's open governorship when the Democratic incumbent chose not to seek re-election giving the Republicans effective and dominant political control over the state.[11]

Republican party control of NC accompanied with the inertia of the Tea Party's national successes resulted in a legislative agenda that the "FT"MM would eventually and consistently name in its actions not as simply conservative, but extremist (field notes). The sweeping legislation

> eliminated the earned-income tax credit for 900,000 North Carolinians; refused Medicaid coverage for 500,000; ended federal unemployment benefits for 170,000; cut pre-K for 30,000 kids while shifting $90 million from public education to voucher schools; slashed taxes for the top five percent while raising taxes on the bottom 95 percent; axed public financing of judicial races; prohibited death row inmates from challenging racially discriminatory verdicts; passed one of the country's most draconian anti-choice laws; and enacted the country's worst voter suppression law, which mandates strict voter ID, cuts early voting and eliminates same-day registration among other things (retrieved from http://www.thenation.com/blog/178291/north-carolinas-moral-monday-movement-kicks-2014-massive-rally-raleigh).

[10] Results retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_elections,_2010 and https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2010/results/senate.html and https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2010/results/house.html

[11] State results retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_party_strength_in_North_Carolina and https://www.nccivitas.org/2012/will-republicans-become-a-lasting-majority-in-north-carolina/

Not only was the content of the legislation morally offensive, its timing was also an insult to justice-loving persons of faith. The voter suppression bill was introduced on March 9, the week remembered in the Civil Rights Movement for the bloody March on Selma and those acts of courage made necessary to secure the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Other portions of this legislation were passed during the Christian Holy Week. All of these assaults by law[12] were deemed by the NAACP of NC and its partners as unjust, immoral, racially biased, and parcels of an all-out assault upon the poor and vulnerable in NC (Barber & Zelter, 2014). An organized reaction was inevitable and desperately needed.

On April 29, 2013, meeting at the historic Davie St. Presbyterian Church, 17 moral witnesses and a few friends prepared for the brief walk over to the NC legislative where the General Assembly was due to begin a short session at 5pm. They had learned well from the freedom lessons of Dr. King that sometimes a "faith act" of civil disobedience was the only way forward in the face of sustained, powerful assaults against justice (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016). The group consisted of 10 clergy, 2 students, and 5 activists (field notes). They gathered outside of the golden doors of the General Assembly and began praying, singing, reading the State Constitution, and chanting. They were quickly arrested by the Capitol Police. The local evening news showed what has become iconic video of a woman in a wheelchair being led away in handcuffs (field notes). The news of this courageous action spread quickly in faith and activist circles. By the early morning, hundreds of people had contacted the NAACP or had assembled at the corrections center ready to help and act in any way. The moral witness of the first 17 had clearly become a rallying cry to what would become a remarkable community of protest (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016). They returned the following week and 32 were

[12] For a fuller description of this legislation and its impact on poor North Carolinians, see Barber and Wilson-Hartgrove (2016), p. 97-99.

arrested. At the end of that second protest, the NAACP leaders announced that "Moral Mondays" would occur each week (Barber & Zelter, 2014). The crowds were swelling with each passing week. Rev. Barber had the excellent idea to focus on one key topic on the agenda each week and this only increased the ranks of the burgeoning coalition (field notes).

In what became one of the rainiest springs and early summers in NC history, not a drop of rain fell on Monday evenings during that season (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016). The final tallies of attendance and civil disobedience were remarkable:

> Total attendance at the Raleigh Moral Mondays exceeded thirty-five thousand. People of all races, classes, sexual identities, and political persuasions drove hundreds of miles from the mountains and the coast to Raleigh for 13 Moral Mondays during the 2013 Raleigh legislative session…Nearly 950 persons were arrested: some in wheelchairs, some with cancer, some unemployed and seeking work, some overwhelmed with college debt, some police officers who understood the flaws in our criminal justice system, and regular people who simply knew things were stacked against their hard-working habits… (Barber and Zelter, 2014, p. 4)

The Moral Monday component of the "FT"MM continues to this day in various forms. There have been victories in the court (the U.S. 4th Circuit Court overturned the Republican sponsored voting changes on grounds of intentional racial bias in July of 2016) and Gov. McCrory was denied re-election in November of 2016. Moral Mondays regularly become a road show by traveling all over the state from the mountains to the coast. They held large rallies in larger cities like Asheville and Winston-Salem. In the Summer of 2015, the NAACP inducted lawmakers with abysmal civil rights ratings into a "Hall of Shame" in their own districts. They also continued holding teach-ins and organizing events at key NAACP local chapters all over the state (field notes).

In its short legacy, the "FT"MM and its most public expression in Moral Monday events had become a very intentional performed liturgy of the fused traditional forms of American Christianity including social justice allergic evangelicalism, the Black Church, and the liberal

mainline in a fusion coalition that extended far beyond the boundaries of Christian faith. Rev. Barber (2016) offered this summation;

> It seemed as if a new kind of revival had taken hold of us, reminiscent of the camp meetings at which people gathered outdoors to hear the message of America's Third Great Awakening in the late nineteenth century, when evangelical preachers made a direct connection between personal salvation and social justice. We improvised a liturgy that was deeply rooted in the lessons of our fusion coalition. (p. 103)

This revivalist conjoining of particularly Christian forms and symbol into a broad-based social movement for justice has already reaped a dramatic social impact in NC and beyond. That momentum does not seem to be waning even as the movement now attempts to become a National Poor People's Campaign in the legacy of Dr. King (see introduction to Chapter 14).

The Cultural Production of Activist Identities in the "FT"MM

The energy "FT"MM is not only directed outwards in its battle for justice, theological inhabitation of the political moment, and fierce theo-moral rhetoric against extremism. When a lens of individual activism is introduced, one sees the "FT"MM as a verdant site for the cultural production for activist identities. Rev. Barber and Zelter (2014) strongly affirmed this individual reality in the midst of their championing the social impact of the movement:

> For both rally participants and those engaging for the first time in civil disobedience, this was a brand new and scary experience. But the moment demanded action and the Forward Together Moral Movement was a catalyst with an open door for ordinary people to speak their minds. (p. 4)

This declaration echoes the research questions of this study. How do persons construct and embrace practiced activist identities? How are Protestant Christian legacies and faith commitments negotiated or contested in this process of identity formation? As previously described, Protestant Christianity has been a source of privilege, power, and embedded racism that constrains justice activism while retaining the potential, a potential that is so often sensed in the "FT"MM, to inspire and form justice activism.

Significant theoretical shifts in the last decades regarding the nature of cultures and cultural production within cultural studies as well as the study of personal identity and agency provide important lenses in understanding how activist identities are encouraged and constructed in the "FT"MM. Two theoretical considerations are immediately relevant to this analysis: the transition in thought from social reproduction to cultural production within a changed understanding of cultures and the contributions of sociocultural practice theories of identity.

Social reproduction to cultural production; a changed conception of cultures & peoplehood

The concept of social reproduction emphasized the transmission of powerful cultural ideas or values and material constructions of those ideas (like social class) in subsequent communities and generations. Relying on strong notions of power and dominance, social reproduction theories demonstrate the reproductions of class, power, and inequity from one time period to the next or from a specific social construct to another setting (like social class in society to social class being reproduced in schools) (Levinson, 2011; Noblit, Flores, and Murillo, 2004). Althusser's (1971) previously described argument about interpellation, persons being called or hailed by dominant ideological and class structures to think and act in manners against their own interests, is a classic example of social reproduction.

Althusser (1971) wrote in a time when structuralists and cultural functionalists still dominated sociological thought; hence, culture was often conceptualized as a fixed and monolithic entity powerfully ascribing the identities and lives of individuals. Fixed cultural entities like the capitalist state were narrated as powerfully irresistible leaving little space for personal agency (Wolff, 2005). But with the ascent of cultural studies, modernist views of culture as a static force and fixed body of knowledge have yielded to concepts of culture as processes and texts that are perpetually produced in tension with other cultures (Levinson &

Holland, 1996; Tanner, 1997). Given this development of understanding, theories of social reproduction in their turn have yielded to theories of cultural production. In cultural production, cultures become active spaces where new texts, knowledges, and cultural artifacts are constantly being produced (Levinson & Holland, 1996). Rather than subjects being simply interpellated into subject positions, cultural production "provides a direction for understanding how human agency operates under powerful structural constraints" (Levinson & Holland, 1996, p. 14). Tanner (1997) helpfully bridged this shift toward cultural production (as well as social practice theory) into theology by noting that the doing of theology is an act of cultural production and that theology is impacted by social practices. Within Christianity, culture as often been understood as "world," an attitude and posture that rejects and defies the 'truths' of theology. Tanner (1997) has powerfully undermined this isolationist perspective of a purist theology that functions within clearly marked cultural boundaries and hence is separate from the lives and practices of humans. She along with others challenged the post-liberal theological conceptions of Christian congregations of Christian peoplehood as sacredly distinct from other communities and cultural perspectives, the "light on the hill" ecclesiology favored by post-liberals like Hauerwas (1988), Milbank (1990), and Lindbeck (1984). Instead, Christian interaction with other cultures and ways of life rarely occurs as distinct wholes (Bretherton, 2012; Healy, 2000; Tanner, 1997). Tanner (1997) added, "The Christian case relations with the wider culture are never simply ones of either accommodation, on the one hand, or opposition and radical critical revision, on the other, but always some mixture" (p. 119).

This point of view not only shapes the expectation of Christian rituals and liturgies as culturally productive in regarding personal and collective identities, it invites new conceptualization of what it means to be "church" or a people in a Christian theological frame.

The “FT”MM readily embraces the ritualistic, liturgical shape of its actions and Rev. Barber has resoundingly embraced the notion of the “FT”MM *primarily* as a site of theological cultural production:

> Our opposition helped me to see clearly that our fusion coalition’s work wasn’t *primarily political but cultural*. If we were to overcome the divide-and-conquer strategy being used against us, we had to learn how to offer North Carolina powerful images of solidarity — not just as our annual People’s Assembly but in daily acts of justice and community building. Those determined to ‘take back America’ helped us see how the battle, while deeply political, wasn’t fundamentally about campaigns and elections. Long before people went to the polls, our struggle was to reshape the stories that tell us who we are. (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016, p. 68, emphasis mine)

Rev. Barber’s declaration of the “FT”MM as a site theo-cultural production invites a next topic of theorization, the cultural production of identities, and eventually the theo-cultural of identities and the construction of agency in a social spaces like the “FT”MM.

Sociocultural practice theory and the contestation of identities

Why identity?

The study of identities has been more recently entangled in acrimony related to identity politics (both in the academy and more popular political discourse) and related concerns about essentialism despite some continued political efficacy related to organizing around identities. Urrieta (in press) acknowledged these concerns noting that “interest in identity studies has drifted since the late 1990s due to a perceived exhaustion of the concept.” But, as one who critically studies identity, social movements, and justice activism, Urrieta (in press) retorted to those claims of exhaustion noting that “identity continues to be attractive” because the study of identity is inextricably linked to power, the inequitable distribution of power in society, and the use of power to dominate others. Therefore, identity remains as a “powerful, political concept and organizing principle for people of color” (Urrieta, in press). Reading the truly ground breaking work on identity by Holland et al. (1998), Urrieta & Noblit (in press) also explained

that identities “often function as agentic and transgressive” and hence are “semiotic mediators for agency” (Urrieta & Noblit, in press). Taken together, Urrieta’s (in press) (in press) retorts to the purported exhaustion of identity study based on power, race, and, agency make a compelling case for this study’s strong interest in identities. From that case, I turn to Holland et al.’s (1998) and Holland and Lave’s (2001) ground breaking exposition of sociocultural practice theory.

History-in-person

The developments on cultural production (above) in the understanding of cultures as overlapping, active spaces dramatically impact the study of identities. Similar to the movement away from static views of culture, sociocultural practice theory is a rebuttal of the "general 'Western' notion of identity that takes as its prototype, a coherent, unified, and originary subject" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 7). In other words, identities are constantly forming; humans are perpetually *becoming* rather than products of a fixed identity. Holland et al. (1998) also described identities "as social products...lived in and through activity and so must be conceptualized as they develop in practice" (p. 5). This meta-theoretical shift toward practice has been made prominent in the work of theorists such a Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and Michel de Certeau (1984).

Continuing this logic, the human work of becoming, forming, and reformulating identities occurs in social environments and in *local spaces of practice*. The value of the local space cannot be overstated in sociocultural practice theory; local spaces — the distinct spaces in life where we gather, work, exchange, worship, play, imagine, struggle, converse, and…protest — are the critical fulcrum. To demonstrate the value of local spaces of practice, Holland et al. (1998) theorize identity construction on three time/space planes: socio-historical identities related to historical issues often associated with power and powerful divisions in our society like race, gender, and sexual orientation; local identities performed in local spaces usually in distinct

moments; and personal or intimate identities that can be vulnerable or changing in their practice but can also be durable over the extent of a lifetime. Identities on the socio-historical plane are related to what Holland and Lave (2001) call “enduring struggles,” historical legacies of great struggles like those of racial or gender equality that are often life-and-death in nature. These enduring struggles, with their inertial power from the past, demonstrably impact personal identities — but they do so *through the mediation of local spaces.* Holland and Lave (2001) name this translation of enduring struggles into personal identities through local spaces as “history-in-person” (p. 6).

Figured worlds

Another significant and perhaps the most memorable contribution to sociocultural practice theory by Holland et al. (1998) is their conceptualization of *figured worlds.* This theorization sheds much more detail on the mediation of local spaces in the formation of intimate identities and subsequent agency. Put most simply, figured worlds are horizons of meaning against which everyday life is interpreted in local spaces of practice. These are frames of meaning that interpret characters, actors, and actions. They constitute imaginary, "as if" (p. 52) worlds that are not abstractions but materialized in practice as "social realit[ies] that [live] within dispositions mediated by relations of power" (p. 60). In other words, the idea is not to contemplate them as 'everywhere, ethereal abstractions,' but to attend to how they are materialized and made real in spaces of contentious practice. Figured worlds can come into being through storytelling and other cultural performances. Persons are recruited or drawn into figured worlds. These cultural worlds are produced in historical time but also are developed anew by the work of current participants. "The potency of a figured world is in its practice and performance" (Holland, personal conversation, 2012). And indeed, the concept of ‘figuring’ in space highlights the contention and practice in identity work and also the fluidity of identities;

identities are always being figured and in a state of becoming (Urrieta, in press). Figured worlds have addressivity; individuals are constantly being addressed in a manner that requires a response. Those responses to the addressivity of figured worlds are not foreordained and this dialogism of being addressed and answering in critical tension where agency is formed (Bakhtin, 1981; Holland et al., 1998; Urrieta, in press).

Despite the presence agency in local spaces, positionality remains significant in figured worlds and local spaces. Social status, race, gender, sexual orientation and other positional identities may deny access to or determine the manner of one's entry into specific figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998; Urrieta, 2009). Positionality is a key aspect of what Bourdieu (1977) refers to as symbolic power relations and a key means by which larger social formations such as those of race may become critical in local interactions. Local spaces of practice are neither innocent nor placid. They are spaces of contention where durable positionalities matter, motives such as prestige or power are often at stake, and strong resistance to specific figured worlds may be present. In addition to these inevitable contentions, "activity predicated upon a figured world is never quite single, never quite pure" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 238). In a local space of practice, many figured worlds can bump up against each other and their presence has to be arbitrated by persons in some manner.

History-in-Person and Figured Worlds in the "FT"MM

Having described some of the key components of sociocultural practice theory, I now turn these theorizations on the "FT"MM. Key leaders in the movement constantly name the movement with its liturgies, logics, and actions as a space of practice:

> Because we knew that the opposition would fall back on so-called political reason ('You may not like it, but this is simply how it is')…we created space in our liturgy for economists, public policy experts, and lawyers to lay out our agenda and explain how it would work. As the great American pragmatist John Dewey taught us, 'learning by doing' is key to internalizing the principles we hold dear as a people. Moral Mondays

> became a space where a new North Carolina could practice democracy together. We were learning the principles of our state constitution by putting them into practice. (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016, p. 105)

As defined earlier, a liturgy is in and of itself a practice, literally defined as a work of the people. The liturgy of Moral Mondays mimicked both a distinct practice and a distinct, popular image — the camp meeting revival:

> [The] public proclamation was essential to our liturgy, but it was not the end…Like the old revival services, each week concluded with a sermon and an altar call, when those who wished to make a new spiritual commitment were invited to come forward publicly…Every week when I was finished preaching, I invited people to come forward and make a public profession of their faith in a new North Carolina by exercising their constitutional right to petition their legislators in the General Assembly… As a Christian preacher from a revivalist tradition, I knew this pattern well. (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016, pp. 105-106)

The impact of this practice-soaked, image-driven strategy has been powerful on the lives of North Carolinians. A Presbyterian minister at his first rally offered this summation: "Never in my life have I seen the proclaimed Word put on flesh and move into such a direct action" (p. 106). The clergy leaders of the movement were equally astounded: "Some of us who'd been doing liturgy all of our lives began to realize its power in the public square" (p. 106).

The Moral Monday rallies quickly evolved to be a distinct local, familial space where history-in-person is dynamically negotiated. For example, images, histories, and discourses from the enduring, life-and-death struggle for racial justice in the American South from reconstruction to the current political moment are perpetually present in "FT"MM events. Samples of this rhetoric and its conveyed histories abound in every meeting. When NC Governor McCrory refused to accept federal funds for the expansion of Medicaid, it was proclaimed that "the sick in the South are soldiers in someone's regressive army" (field notes). Noting the long and bloody struggles of "the mothers of the church" for the franchise and eventually the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, when the Republican dominated NC Legislature passed the nation's

most restrictive voting legislation that mocked the provisions of that 1965 landmark, it was declared that "when Black women weep they are getting their power…how DARE you trample on the graves of our mothers! We are fighting the same devils my grandmother fought!" (field notes). Looking at the present struggle for racial justice in America's judicial systems, Rev. Barber opined, "Ferguson could be every town in North Carolina" (field notes). This long history of racial struggle, a struggle with uncounted fatalities and an infinitude of tragedies, lands vividly in the local space of the movement at every convening. Positionalities related to the historical struggle of race dominate the acts of figuring in identity contestation and mediate agency in the movement.

When Rev. Barber framed the liturgy and practices of the Moral Monday rallies in the historical image of the camp meeting revival, he also implied another reality pertaining to the evocative images that accompany the practices in the local space of the "FT"MM. Rich figured worlds teem within the movement, imaginaries that become realized in the identity performances of those present. One only has to watch the legion of aging hippies and ethical secularists singing movement spirituals and joining the call-and-response of the meeting to realize the productive power of these evoked images. Among these figured worlds, three stand out in significance because of regularity of their presence in "FT"MM public discourse and their recollection by my interlocutors: figured worlds of the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Church, and salvation. Each of those merits further comment and a bit more nuanced description.

Figured world of the civil rights movement

The Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s, Rev. Barber's second reconstruction and second fusion movement, is more than just part of the persistent historical narrative of enduring struggles in the movement, it is an imaginary that is constantly evoked from the stage

and among the followers. Major events in the "FT"MM are often placed within the imaginative framework of the great movement that proceeded it.

For example, the onset of the NAACP's legal case against Gov. McCrory and the State of North Carolina in Winston-Salem, NC was accompanied by a large statewide rally with the moniker, "This is our Selma." The march on that day was an awesome spectacle to behold, easily conveying the imaginary power of the many marches led by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and his national coalition. I was standing with several old friends who lead a variety of progressive Christian networks; they had been asked to meet at the courthouse stairs with other "national leaders" who were in attendance. The march would begin several blocks away and circle the courthouse in yet another Jericho symbol and then swing by and pick up the national leaders and Rev. Barber. This would put national leaders at the head and would effectively shorten the march for Rev. Barber who struggles with his cane to walk great distances. As the march rounded the corner and straightened itself out so that its numbers began to be revealed, we were staggered by the sight. Leading the march at that point was the Black clergy of Winston-Salem, a score of young Black men in dark slacks and pressed white collared shirts with slim black ties or clergy collars, many in dark sunglasses. With serious unsmiling visages, these young men walked in a tight military unison evoking every googled image of MalcolmX for the uninitiated. As they neared us, the song that rang out above the din was "Eyes on the Prize," a great anthem of the MLK-led Civil Rights Era Movement. The march literally grabbed us and propelled us forward. We felt the inertia of a great history had swept us away. I literally gasped in the moment.

The march and intricate planning of the event was obviously on a scale that was larger than most "FT"MM events. Nevertheless, the symbols are consistent. Images and practices of

the Civil Rights Era pervade the "FT"MM. Veteran leaders from that era like lawyer Al McSurely heavily populate the leadership. The old movement songs and texts are equally as prevalent. The imaginary of the Civil Right Era is unmistakably powerful and inclusive. Like the narrative of a million sports fans who claim to have attended a momentous game in a stadium that holds 50,000 persons, so many imagine that "they were there," "wish they had chosen to be there," or "like to imagine that they would have been there if born then or had the opportunity." Most significantly, the movement of that era, despite its tragedies and coordinated efforts in the present to undo its successes, represents a win for civil rights. It yields a strong sense of hope, significance, and inclusion.

Figured world of the Black church

The Black church is not a unitary, monolithic denomination of Christianity. When one speaks of "Black church," one is really referencing many varying denominations, traditions, and worship expressions. It even spans across the Protestant/Catholic divide. Nevertheless, as an imaginary, as a figured world, it represents many common images and expectations. There are expectations of prophetic, poetic, rhythmic preaching in a call-and-response style accompanied by booming choral spirituals. Beyond any matters of style, the prophetic power of the Black church has been in sustained social changes against overwhelming fear, prejudice, and opposition. In a "FT"MM pastors' summit in 2014, Rev. Dr. Bill Turner of Duke Divinity School and Mt. Level Missionary Baptist Church in Durham, NC, spoke of the regular political and media "punking" of the black pulpit. Referencing the wide ranging outrage at Rev. Jeremiah Wright during President Obama's first national election, he explained that Rev. Wright's thoughts about society and the necessity of radical economic, political change are commonplace in the Black church. Continuing, he added when (FOX News opinion and info-tainment host) Sean Hannity says, "If your pastor preaches social justice, you should leave," he is "punking"

and repudiating the Black pulpit (field notes). This sharp, racialized opposition conveys societal fear in the power of the Black church. And, indeed, the lynching of leaders, church burnings, and murder in church meetings have not diminished the real and imagined power of the Black church.

The impact of the Black Church in the public square in indisputable. This began during enslavement and continues to this day with powerful church-sponsored Community Development Organizations (CDOs) (Tucker-Worgs, 2011). Esteemed Black church historians Lincoln and Mumiya (1990) described the breadth of this history:

> The economic ethic of the Black Church was forged in the crucible of the slave quarters from whence an ethos or spirit of survival and self-help emerged. The origins of the black self-help tradition were found in the attempts of slaves to help each other survive the traumas and terrors of the plantation system in any way they could... During illness, injury, and death the slaves learned to take care of each other and depend on one another because there was no one else. (pp. 241-242)

They described how this slave quarter ethic continued to develop as "mutual aid or beneficial societies and churches were among the first social institutions created by black people" (p. 242). Some of the most successful Black owned businesses, like North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance in Durham, NC, trace their roots to these mutual aid societies (McKinney, 1992).

The unique power of the Black church at the informal and personal level is perhaps even greater. Lincoln and Mumiya (1990) wrote of the *fictive kinship* of African Americans and the power of their social networks in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Systemic prejudice and oppression formed a crucible, a context that formed the identity and galvanized the collective will of Black people. Morris (2004) echoed that analysis: "…a certain consciousness fostered what anthropologists term a 'fictive kinship' and a sense of peoplehood or collective identity because of Black people's continued subordination in U.S. society" (pp. 101-102). That fictive kinship has always had strong associations with the Black church. Lincoln and Mumiya

(1990) explained that the Black church historically existed squarely between "the poles of survival and liberation" (p. 241) in the realms of politics, economics, and education. Throughout the history of African Americans, there has been an unquenched passion for liberation and a desperate need for sanctuary in the struggle to survive. Gregory (2001) reported the recollection of longtime Queens, NY, community activist, Arthur Hayes, on the Black church, "See, the church has always been a sanctuary for blacks... It was the only place where we could be complete men for a few hours a day" (p. 138).

This social efficacy attributed to the Black church certainly explains some of its imaginative power for the Christians, persons of other religions, and the non-religious in the movement. But there is more to its imaginative draw and its invitation to formative justice work than its power. The Black church as a figured world, because of its unique positionality within the racial history of Christianity, represents a space of moral religious — “religious” defined broadly in the sense of the existential questions associated with and the humanistic goals of all faiths and ethical worldviews — engagement with the injustice of our society. This unique positionality comes to light when one remembers the confrontational space the Black church has occupied in a slaveholding society and a racial world. The conversion of Black Christians, enslaved persons in a racial world sculpted around the White/Black binary, challenged the very ideals of America and its vision as a Christian nation. Theologian Willie Jennings described the abrasive juxtaposition of converted Blacks in ‘free, Christian America’:

> As the planters formed this New World into America, they formed it into a Christian nation. From its beginnings, the dual identity of American and Christian seemed not only appropriate but also compelling. To be a part of America was to be part Christian and a part of the New Israel, and also to be white. To be Christian in America was to be white. Thus an African as a Christian was, in a real sense, a contradiction. Yet as Africans began to convert in significant numbers, the question of the status of their conversion in relation to the nation-state, that is, a nation of free Christians or Christians who valued their freedom, became a real question. (Seminar Lecture)

Jennings continued by explaining the Black church was propelled into existence by a similarly confounding and challenging presence of the Black preacher in a slaveholding, White supremacist society:

> The black preacher embodied all that was central in the critique of slaveholding Christianity, as well as the transformation of African existence in western culture...Out of this experience came the posture that challenged racial identity…Black preachers sought to subvert the dominant culture by turning its language and logic against itself. Black preachers engaged in an ongoing critique of White Christianity and slaveholding society. This is always the backdrop of their ministry. The black preacher used the language and ideas of slaveholding society to challenge their hegemony, their power. But the preacher also used the language of the slave community, its stories, songs, and symbols to speak words of comfort and hope to the slaves. This ability to 'double-speak,' to challenge and comfort, to speak the language of dominance and subversion, to bring together both the ideas of the European and the folk wisdom of the African slave, was a point of great distinction for Afro-Christian preaching and ministry. (Seminar Lecture)

The "FT"MM, as it performs the discursive, liturgical traditions of the Black church and as it resides in this unique space perpetually occupied by the Black church in a racial world — in this case, convened once again by a prominent, prophetic, and civilly disobedient Black preacher — fashions an invitational imaginary into a religious/moral space (again in the widest definition of that term) that by its historical existence challenges the racial world and the intersectional characteristics of an unjust society. This point stands out even more prominently given the overwhelming evangelical support for Donald Trump's recent successful campaign for the U.S. Presidency with racially charged, overtly White supremacist messaging. This is an imaginative, figured space that invokes the positionality of protest and change that cannot be convened in White religious constructions.

Figured world of salvation

This third figured world is inextricably enmeshed with the second. This illustrates the assertion of Holland et al. (1998) that figured worlds are never singular and never pure. If the previous figured world of Black church is one of a location of protest within an unjust society,

this figured world is an imaginary of salvific triumph proclaimed by the Black church its locations of oppression, faith, and protest. Religious/ethical communities inevitably have an eschatology, a telos, a vision for 'how it ends.' As noted earlier, American fundamentalism and evangelicalism developed around an eschatology of world's ruin that affirmed evangelistic zeal and rejected social justice concerns (Marsden, 1980; Sandeen, 2008). Leaders of the "FT"MM and particularly Rev. Barber regularly embrace labels as "evangelicals" or "progressive evangelicals" (field notes). Yet within this tradition and its specific location in the Black church, the "FT"MM constantly evokes a moral vision for a good and just society, an eschatology that is realized in the present. This vision is the heart and soul of the movement. Rev. Barber (2016) perpetually and powerfully reaffirms that point: "[T]he most distinctive mark of Moral Mondays — the focal point of our liturgy that gave the movement its name — was our insistence that, at its heart, our movement have a moral framework" (p. 105). One can hardly underestimate the impact of this moral imaginary and contested vision of what the good is in our society as a powerful figured world becoming realized in practice by old and new activists around the movement. Remembering Warren's (2010) study on racial justice activism, he affirmed the presence of a common moral vision in almost all of his 50 activist interlocutors and confirmed that most of these activists considered themselves to be "moral agents" (p. 100).

This figured world of salvation is more than a moral vision for a good society, it is an embodied, realized eschatology where that moral vision becomes salvation. This is the invitation of the altar calls that Rev. Barber noted was intricately woven into the "FT"MM liturgy, an invitation to act immediately and make this hope an immediate reality (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016). Other images of a realized salvation are present in the movement. A common biblical trope is a portrait an exceedingly diverse humanity, "every nation, from all tribes and

peoples and languages, standing before the throne" (Rev 7:9, NIV) in worship of God. The "FT"MM takes that vision of the telos and embodies it in the present. The "FT"MM demonstrates the immediate presence of that moral vision in every rally and action with diverse bodies — gay, transgender, straight, black, latin@, and white —gathered in song and worship in pursuit of hope and goodness. Other biblical, salvific images such as just judgement ("What was done in the darkness shall be shown in the light"..."Taking the midnight train to justice") "promised land" rest (regularly events began with the blowing of the shofar, the Hebrew horn blown in the occupation of the land after the exodus from enslavement), vicarious atonement ("Remember the blood, there's power in the blood, power wonderworking power in the blood") and the path of salvation ("the narrow path, the stony road to justice") are all commonly present in the music and preaching of the movement (field notes).

The "FT"MM salvific images are part of a larger societal contestation of what it means to be a good society. From a theo-moral lens, this is a struggle regarding the locus and timing of a promised hope. Perhaps never before have people in the U.S. been confronted with more divergent narratives about what that good is. Slogans like "Make America Great Again" appeal to a memory of goodness and a vision of future goodness that contradicts the current vision of goodness held in the movement and the justice activist community writ large. Those hopes of a realized moral vision are the visible and invisible soul of the stories that follow. Each of them, though in very different ways, are journeys of becoming good in a society that powerfully resists that good.

PART TWO: LIFE NARRATIVES

This section of the study consists of the life narrative stories from nine individuals who are practicing social justice activists. Maynes et al. (2008) the stressed intersubjective nature of this work. The stories were collected by the telling as a narrative performance by each interlocutor and dialogical listening by me, the researcher, in one intersubjective encounter. These stories were also co-created in the writing by me and the storytellers in a second intersubjective encounter.

Besides the very rich lives of these nine individuals, I am also deeply present in these stories through the shape of the organizing questions, my probing questions is response to storytelling, the dialogue I offered during the interviews, and the myriad of editorial decisions made in the editing and writing of these stories. The transcription was a near literal. But I worked to shape their stories into a narrative thread. Because of the dialogical nature of our interviews, the stories do not always correspond to the general flow of the interviews. Many times in the process of storytelling, these narrators interrupted the flow of narrative with an aside, illustrations, and tangential stories that they perceived to be significant requiring that I significantly reshape the transcript into a narrative form. In organizing the stories, I tried to maintain the speech patterns and idiomatic idiosyncrasies of each interlocutor. But I also edited redundancies, edited false starts to sentences and excessive filler words, added punctuation, changed tenses on occasion, and occasionally reshaped sentences to help transition oral performances to written stories that are more comfortably read as inspiration for those who want to learn more about social justice activism and accessible for academic analysis. When I needed

to add words to support these goals, I only drew from words used by each interlocutor. The vocabulary of the stories is entirely that of the storytellers.

Protecting the anonymity of my interlocutors was a significant challenge and required many writing decisions. Since the "FT"MM was a NC-based movement, I made no efforts to hide the reality that all of the narrators currently reside in the state. Several of them have relatively high profiles in the state which added to my challenge. I used pseudonyms for all names, locations, programs, congregations, universities, and the like with some exceptions. When the storytellers were describing a significant historical event and location, I retained the actual names of those events or locations if they were essential to the story and could not be inherently connected to identity of the interlocutor. I also retained names if the story lost its meaning or credibility if they were edited. For example, Reggie's story and his relationship with Rev. Barber requires to name that he attended Greenleaf Church in Goldsboro where Rev. Barber pastors. Pierce did actually open for the band America. For Doug, I changed all of the programs names, but his story revolves around many actual figures (such Billy Graham or Franklin Graham in evangelical Christianity or Brian McLaren in current progressive Christian circles). This pattern and logic of careful decision making continued for all of the interlocutors. I retained the actual names (in these stories and field notes) regarding figures in the "FT"MM.

With every story, I have included a brief personal introduction to the interlocutor and often some description about how the interview relationship was secured and a description of the location for our meetings.

CHAPTER 4: CAMERON JENNINGS
"GOD HAS SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT THE WAY PEOPLE LIVE IN THIS WORLD."

Prologue

Cameron is a Professor of Biblical Studies (Old Testament) at a southern, mainline seminary. The school is beautiful, recently built with a stone exterior and a heavily wooded interior with visible wood beams, a visual combination of "old academic institution" with a sleek, urban appeal. The school, located in an affluent neighborhood in a growing Southern city, is set in the back of the property of an older, ornate church —obviously a donation of church property to accommodate the school. Cameron maintains a full calendar of speaking, training, and teaching in the white denominational tradition that the seminary serves. He identifies as black with Caribbean roots. He had just returned the morning of our first meeting from guesting on a local radio show to discuss the school's mission; the Academic Dean popped in twice during that interview to get feedback about the show. Cameron is a bit of a humble celebrity among prominent Christian leaders in the city as well as clergy activists in the community. Due to his calendar and the winter holidays, our three interviews began before Advent but continued into the spring. Cameron is a short man with a stocky athletic build. He is very quick to enthusiasm and has an effusive smile. I felt like I was friend and valued colleague already just in the small talk before our first interview began. As his story reveals, Cameron has served as a primary theologian and teacher in the "FT"MM.

Cameron's Story

Childhood

My life story begins literally with notions of poverty, alienation, and liminal identity.

My story is very simple. I was born to teenage parents in a Northeastern city, 1967. They lived two doors away from each other. My dad was finishing his last year of high school. My mom had just gotten out of high school. And they ended up with me. They were married; however, I don't think they lived together for very long if they were together at all. I was primarily raised by my maternal grandparents. I've known what it's like to be…(pauses) poor without a home. It was an odd thing for me to be in that little unit, to be without both of my parents, in a world where you watched 'The Brady Bunch'. I definitely felt odd or different in the world in that way.

My mom got remarried when I was five and we moved to Bermuda. We lived at my second Dad's parents' home. We weren't wealthy, didn't have a lot of money, that's what we could afford. We eventually moved back to the States. My second dad took my sister home to see his mother and was denied re-entry to the United States. Within three or four months, my mom left me in the States and went back to Bermuda. I ended up staying in the States for the better part of two years without my parents before I ended up going back to live in Bermuda with them when I was about 9 or so. Our family was broken because of U.S. immigration laws. So, I've experienced a, sort of, immigrant story as well.

When I eventually moved back to the U.S., I moved back with my dad and second mom. Their experience was a different experience because, unlike my other parents who were Afro-American and Afro-Bermudian, my second mom is White. So I moved back into an interracial family in the latter part of the 70s, early part of the 80s. I really got to see what it's like to live in that liminal space – in between. As an interracial family, you don't really fit anywhere. People are suspicious of you. You look for those people who will accept you. There's always that strange sense there were places we couldn't go. Like, we never came to the South. When I eventually moved to NC, it was literally years before my parents came down to visit me. They were convinced that they wouldn't make it out if they came down here.

I lived with them in West Gloucester— and I don't know what you know about West Gloucester — but it is the worst city in the nation. But I don't want to make my own upbringing sound harsher than it was. I lived on a seven-acre estate and my dad owned a marina. But you had to go through the worst neighborhood in West Gloucester get to the Marina. I witnessed abject poverty. People that I went to school with end up on 'America's Most Wanted.' People ending up in jail was routine; it was odd 'some-such-person' *didn't* go to jail — a very different world. I watched knife fights. I've seen people being hunted with guns. I had to stand-up against angry mobs trying to kill people. Growing up in West Gloucester, in part, helped me, to see that this type of hell is nothing that people should live in. The ghetto is not a place where you allow people to languish. It has got to be a place you transform.

I think one of the major paradigm shifts happened for me was when I went to high school. My parents were like 'the high schools here are, most people don't make it out of high school, let alone go to college' so they wanted me to go to a different school. An opportunity to attend New Atlantic Friends, a Quaker school presented itself. My parents knew who the Quakers were. My Dad had worked with the Quakers. I remember going when I was a student at the end of 9th grade to look at the school. We went an interviewed and had a great time. Then we came back to the school and found we out — 'oh there's a scholarship that we could get.' 'Oh, ok!' My parents wanted me to go there then it turned out that they didn't have to go into a hole to get us there. I was able to get a scholarship which meant that not only could they send me, they could also send my younger brothers which was a blessing.

I was raised Baptist, old school Black Baptist, National Baptist, old covenant, that's the covenant that says that we don't believe in the use of strong drink as beverage. It was very old school. We don't believe in tattling and backbiting. So it was very, very conservative Baptist origins. But I went through a number of different denominations as I grew up. And it was interesting to see faith that looked differently. Now granted, my Baptist background was pacifist, very much oriented towards Dr. King and his way, his modes of reading Scriptures, his modes of theology but still relatively conservative. This Quaker space, though, was different because the world was looked at through what you *do*; your role in the world is significant.

Jason Rhodes was my religious life teacher. I remember sitting in his class and we went through a whole study on capital punishment. Basically we determined that capital punishment was applied to Blacks more than it was to Whites. It was so racially problematic that you could receive capital punishment in one state for something you would get four or five years for in another state. We also saw that there were people that have been executed who've later been determined to have been innocent. So, he asks us, 'How many of you all believe in capital punishment? Put up your hands.' Then he asks, 'How many of you oppose capital punishment?' All of us raised our hands. And he said, 'So if you oppose capital punishment then what are you doing to oppose it?'

A room full of 16 year-olds looked at each other. 'What do you mean 'what do we do?' We don't do anything.' And he said, 'If you live amidst an injustice and do nothing to oppose it, then you are passively giving your support to this unjust system. You must actively oppose injustice or you are giving consent to it.' Oh man, that just raised the bar for me a bit. It was through 'a-ha' moments like that with my Quaker upbringing that helped me to reimagine the role that my faith has to play in what do we do in the public square. How do we live for justice? I was inspired to work on issues like peace in the Middle East. We had a population that was largely Jewish, but also some Arab and Farsi students. How do we wrestle with these differences with the real people who are around us? That stood out. Dealing with homelessness also stood out to me. How do we address the concerns of people who have no home, no food, and no stability whatsoever? What about the Cold War? How do we begin to protest in the nuclear stand-off? A mind of protest and the need to participate developed within me. Dr. King and his statements were ringing in my ears. If you don't oppose something you know to be unjust, you are

supporting it. Justice is necessary work if you want to maintain your own personal integrity. Jason is still a good friend of mine. We still talk on Facebook. He'll like follow me and say 'I appreciate you doing that,' and I will respond, 'Thank-you for giving me the insight, Jason.'

After four years of being immersed in a Quaker institution, I think it has been forever infused in me the notion that God has something to say about the way people live in this world.

I also credit my Dad. He's been working for justice for years. He started in West Gloucester in an Alternative Education Program (AEP) for kids who've been kicked out of schools to try to give kids a second chance. When he opened his marina, he saw it as an opportunity for kids that had been in AEP to get a job working on the river, to give them a skill, a trade that might get them out of the ghetto. Even now, he is the Executive Director of Save Our Waterfront which is a non-profit that works to revitalize West Gloucester, to bring things like supermarkets and new housing to this dilapidated area. He's been involved with social change issues constantly. That framed the way I think about life in the world. I don't imagine, I can't imagine, in some respects, trying to divorce that from my theology at this point.

I left after four years of Friends School to go off to Atlantic A&T, a renowned HBCU, committed to becoming a rock star. I found out my first semester that wouldn't work! The other thing I wanted to do was to study religion, but they didn't really have religion as a major. So, I said, 'How do I do this?' The first week of school, there's a knock on my door. It's Mason, a guy from Campus Crusade for Christ coming around and evangelizing. We go through the whole 'Four Spiritual Laws' thing. I'm like, 'I'm already a Christian!' But we go on to develop a friendship and I became a leader in the campus movement of the Campus Crusade for Christ. I ran for their weekly meeting for three and half of the years I was at Atlantic. I was the face of Campus Crusade for Christ on campus.
'Some people think the Christian life is out-of-date and second rate, kind of like a black-and-white TV. We think the Christian life is the most vibrant and vital life that one could live. Hence we call our meeting 'In Living Color'' (said in rote manner with a very rapid pace)
Oh yeah! I still remember it after all of those years (laughing loudly) walking around knocking on doors and sharing the four spiritual laws. We would invite people to small group Bible studies — a very conservative shift in my life.

But when I was in high school, I saw a movie about Mitch Synder (played by Martin Sheen) who was a homeless activist in Washington, DC. He started this community called the Community for Creative Non-Violence that took over a building, an old government building, and put a homeless shelter in it. This became a model shelter. I said, 'If I ever had an opportunity, I would love to work in that shelter.' So, while at Atlantic, I started going over to work at the shelter. At the same time, I met a young woman, Makaylah, who said she was interested in working in the shelter. She and I went through the volunteer training and started going together to the shelter every Saturday

morning. We would volunteer together all day long, her on the women's side and me on the men's side. We would get up, ride the bus to the shelter, get together for lunch, and go back and finish the day. Then come back in. We developed a good friendship, then a relationship, and we eventually got married.

We developed that sense together that 'there's something that needs to be done.' I remember getting into conflict with one of my Bible study leaders for Campus Crusade. He said, 'How do you justify spending all this time off campus working in the shelter?' I said, 'Well, what do you mean? I'm doing what I think God wants me to do.' He said, 'You should be on campus evangelizing; that's what God wants you to do. You can do all this other stuff later on.' I remember this dramatic internal tension. 'Can't God help me to change the lives for the people here and work with them. What is this message we're teaching people? How do I help to shape and reform and disciple people? Isn't this what I'm discipling students to do? — so that they'll be agents for change in the community?' After the first year working in the shelter, I eventually ended up working more with Crusade and focusing on that. It was an interesting tension.

Makaylah and I came very close — very close — to going on staff with Campus Crusade. We were girlfriend and boyfriend at this time. That year's (1988) Christmas meeting was in Philadelphia and we had a meeting with a guy in the finance department from Campus Crusade. Makaylah was a finance major so they were starting to entice her. 'You could work here, work in the finance department and Cameron could do campus ministry.' We sat down for an interesting conversation. They started off by saying to me,
'Campus Crusade for Christ does not invest in anything that's unethical.'
'Oh that's wonderful. Well what does that mean?'
'Nothing immoral, nothing that's problematic.'
'What does that mean?'
'We have no investments in alcohol.'
'Oh, that's great, that's great.'
'We have no investments in cigarettes, no cigarette companies or anything like that. We don't even invest in hotels!'
'Well, why don't you invest in hotels? Hotels seem innocuous.'
'Well they often make money from the rentals of pornography. So, we don't have anything to do with that.'
'Well that's wonderful. That's great to hear.'
Then Makaylah, thinking of apartheid, says,
'Do you have any investments in South Africa?'
'Well, yeah, we do.'
'What do you mean?'
'Well that's not a moral issue, that's political.'

(long pause). No more staff with Crusade!

I turned and said,
'How can the oppression of the vast majority of a population of people based on the color of their skin not be a moral issue?'

He sat down and scratched his head and was like,
'Oh, my Lord, maybe it is. Maybe we've construed moral too narrowly.'

That conversation was formative for me. It really shaped me and kept me from going on staff with Crusade. It also helped me to see the way that we bifurcate the moral, that is personal piety concerns from moral, social justice issues and the dangerous divide that often found in American Christianity. How do we begin to bring these together? We ended up leaving. After finishing undergrad at Atlantic, instead of going on staff with Crusade, I ended going to Atlantic's Divinity School. There, I was introduced to Black liberation theology which led me in a different direction at that point in time.

Liberation theology has been significant to me. But the first liberation theologian I was exposed to, was not Gutierrez or Hertzog or any these academicians – it was Bob Marley. Bob Marley — 'trotted on the winepress…talking about the sufferers…the heathen beaten upon on the wall.' All of these stories brought the biblical text to life in ways that impinge upon the actual circumstances of people in the world. That enlivened the text for me in a way that Sunday school often did not. It gave a different dimension to what I studied in Sunday school. And, having grown up in Bermuda, you don't get away from reggae. Both of my Dads, who were actually oddly very good friends and looked just alike, both of them had a love for reggae. I was baptized in this sort of liberation theology mode early on. I have to give Robert Nesta Marley the credit.

At that point in time at Atlantic Divinity, I was introduced to work with people suffering with HIV/AIDS and was certified as AIDS educator. I also ended up working with the Congress of National Black Churches (CNBC) which was a group of eight historical Black denominations focused on how to use the church as a mode of social response to the AIDS crisis in the Black community. I was an intern first, then a fellow, for the National Black Fellowship Program for Black Pastors. Then I served as a consultant with CNBC. And just before that, I was a consultant for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, which is a Black think tank in Washington that looks at public policy issues. Once, I gave a researcher, my new supervisor, a 'windshield survey' of available social service agencies in Washington, DC and Baltimore. And we looked and looked. We didn't see a lot of libraries. We didn't see a lot of independent health care centers. And, we didn't see a lot of community development centers. But we did see churches. There was a church on almost every corner. It just convinced me, 'We could really marshal the power of churches to begin to work as agents or agencies to promote social transformation. We've got something here.' I put ministers in different social service positions — various agencies, governmental agencies, and non-profits across the country — to support their interface with the Black Church in order to learn how can you can educate and research to help promote social transformation.

So my work with the Congress back then really in part inspired and fueled the work I'm trying to do with Moral Monday now through that same theological lens. How do I help the church to see we have a larger responsibility? The role of the pastor is not just to tend the flock that's in front of you. The church is in the world. And our responsibility is to the church that is in the larger world. How do we make sure that we're helping to

develop people that realize that responsibility wherever they're located? So, if you're a bank vice-president sitting down and looking at a 33% interest rate on a credit card that you're putting out, how do you realize that's usury? How do we get someone, wherever they are located, to realize 'we have a role to play in bringing in this reign of God.' I love the way Dr. King says it, 'Progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability, but only comes about because of the tireless efforts and hard work of those who willing to be co-workers with God.' How do we inspire people to be those co-workers with God?

That year and a half or two years before ending up going to Southeastern University for my doctoral work was really was formative. It really shaped me significantly in terms of helping me to see these great resources in churches.

The hardest point-in-time in my story for me, I guess, was this time doing doctoral studies, studying Hebrew and the Old Testament, where I spent most of that time focused on my dissertation. I just did not do as much community service. I worked a little bit with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) — that you know well — and some other work mostly through my church. But I did not have the sort of engagement that I was used to.

Biblical interpretation and social change

Studying the Hebrew and Bible was significant for me in terms of formation in a different sense. I focused on archeology. The point was that I wanted to learn about the people. Who are the people who are in the Bible? Why is their existence characterized in the way that it is in the text? What are their experiences like? What distinguishes them? How is it that their lives are real? Archaeology really helps me to see the reality that these were real people going through real things. And that made the Bible come alive to me in a different way. This study, in part, led me to where I am.

Hebrew finally allowed me to bring notions of personal piety together with social justice. I remember studying the words sëdëk or sëdëkah, references to 'doing justice' and 'righteousness.' Usually that term is translated as 'righteousness.' Literally, this means both righteousness, (i.e., personal piety, the things you do as an individual) and justice (i.e., the things you do to transform society to make it more just). So what that helped me to see was, in the Hebrew mindset, you can't be personally pious and not, at the same time, be socially just. Nor can you be socially just and not be personally pious. This sort of divide, this bifurcation that we have between conservatives and liberals, is a false distinction that I finally am able to reconcile. I think that was a significant moment for me too. I continue to wrestle with that in some of my scholarship today. When I teach Bible now as a seminary professor, I ask how do we narrate both piety and justice.

I'm probably very conservative in this regard. But I think that, a lot of times, when we read the text, the Bible, in a way that is oppressive, we're reading the text wrong. We're missing the point. We're missing the fact that the text is often quite progressive, radically inclusive in ways we're not prepared to hear.

For example, Ephesians 5:21-6:9. The Greek household codes often were deemed to be oppressive patterns. No! I started looking at this text again. And by doing some serious exegetical analysis on this, I'm starting to see, this is one of the most liberative texts in the Bible! It's literally disrupting the dominant paradigm, the Aristotelian paradigm that said 'wives are subject to your husband, children are subject to your fathers, slaves are subject your masters' because it provides a secondary clause in each of these. 'Wives be subject to your husbands' – oh! - 'husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for…' 'Children, obey your fathers,' but 'Fathers don't annoy your children.' 'Slaves obey your masters in everything with fear and trembling out of reverence for God. Masters, you do the exact same thing.' You look at this text and you look at the framing documents: Ephesians 5:21 ('Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ') and the end of Ephesians 6:9, 'For God has no favorites.') Oh my God! If you reread this passage, utilizing these wonderful exegetical tools, you know! Oh my God! Maybe we've misunderstood what this text was saying. And we've read the exact opposite in this text. Maybe we've read these things wrong. And maybe it's a much more liberative message than we thought!

One of my favorite stories, to be honest, is the Sodom and Gomorrah tale. The Sodom and Gomorrah narrative which we've read, contemporary interpretation labeled this as a text that is supposed to beat homosexuals over the head and say that they're evil, that God destroyed the city because of you. Some utilized that as an interpretative framework to look at what happened in New Orleans [in the wake of Hurricane Katrina's devastation] — all sorts of horrible interpretive traditions. But the text, if you look carefully, really talks about a group of people who were abusing the weak, the least, the lost, the otherwise left out among them. Using a larger intertextuality, read Ezekiel 16:49 ('This is the sin of Sodom, that you were haughty and had great wealth and did nothing for the poor.') Oh, my God! This text is a critique of those like me who are comfortable, who have great ease and luxury, yet who fail to attend to the needs of the sufferers, the strugglers, those who are all around us. Oh my God! Now the text that I thought I could use to point my finger at someone else is pointing back at me. If we read some of these texts, we might find that we missed the point. This is one of those things about Moral Monday that really gives me a joy to see, that this text might be saying something very different from what we've assumed it to say. And it might be challenging rather than supporting oppressive paradigms.

Genesis 9 [The infamous 'curse of Ham'] on issues of race in the South! Oh my God! That text has been used and abused in so many ways. I'm a Baptist, evangelical, Campus Crusade for Christ guy. But, oh my God, the way that Christians have misinterpreted, and I think intentionally misinterpreted, to manipulate that text! We're able to make the text say what we want it to say. Things like that. Are there aspects of our own faith that have been utilized, things that we like, we appreciate, that have been utilized in ways that have harmed us theologically? Yes, indeed!! We have to ask, 'Why have we read the Bible through a racialized lens?'

And then there's another part of me that says, 'Yeah, but even with that serious exegetical intertextuality, sometimes the text does say some really nasty stuff.' And

you've got to recognize, it comes out of a different, dangerous historical context. So, how do you wrestle with the text that has much more progressive, liberative tendencies than we might expect, but still has some troubling issues that are problematic?

I did my dissertation on issues of the intersection of what we think about race and Scripture. Is there anything about race in the Bible? Look at the text. How do you wrestle with it? As a Biblical scholar, not as a theologian, I can resonate with this more. Sometimes the text is not always our friend. I feel comfortable wrestling with these issues in my post-Campus Crusade days. Let's look at the text for its value and then let's see how it's gotten us into this pickle. How has it done this to us? The text is both amazing and odd.

We have to deal with the tensions and not deny the wrestling with these tensions. In part, you have to realize that this is a human artifice, a human construct, if you will, that it is not God, but a mode of pointing toward God. The more you wrestle with it in that regard, the more you get to see:
'Ah – ok, I can allow the text its failings and shortcomings, like I can allow the people their failings and shortcomings. But I can still appreciate the pointing, the direction where this is going, the vision they're getting that's even cast in this text in a different way.'

When you wrestle with the text, you cannot deny hearing that God cares for the poor and that makes the poor more valuable. That's the theological aspect to the whole Moral Monday movement.

Roots of "Moral Mondays" - participation and leadership

Long before Moral Mondays began, Makaylah and I were friends with Rev. Barber. He was like a big brother and I always was interested in the things he was doing. I would do supply preaching at his church in Goldsboro when I was a graduate student in 1993. I was connected to him by a professor who would preach for Barber at different points in time. At one point, he couldn't go, so they said, 'Why don't you go down.' 'Ok, sure.' We became friends with Dr. Barber and Bille and got close over the years. He always took great care of us when we visited.

I remember when my wife went down to preach for him, seven or eight years ago, and he started talking about what he wanted to do with the NAACP. I was apprehensive; I did not have any sense that something good could come out of the NAACP. I had been a member for many years before and it seemed to be defunct, having gone the way of the dinosaurs in many respects. It wasn't reaching out to younger people. It wasn't doing anything that grabbed people's attention. I was sitting down and I told him I would love, if given the opportunity, to run for senator from NC. He said, 'I want to run the NAACP.' He said, 'Come on with me and do this.' I didn't know that I had much to offer the NAACP. I was doing some organizing. But I didn't think the NAACP seemed to going anywhere.

When he became President, he would bring either Makaylah or me to do different events from time to time. I remember doing an event for him on the church as it looks at immigration issues, the church as it looks at social justice issues. I think we started to get more closely involved a few years when Billy Graham made some statements about Barack Obama and also about Muslims in the community. And then Barber said, 'I want you to come up and do some work with the NAACP on what to do.' This got me involved. Rev. Barber said to me later,
'Rev. Cojo Natambu is trying to get the NAACP in Charlotte up and running and that would be a good thing for you to be his assistant. I want you to work with him. I want you to shadow him. I want you to give him whatever assistance you can.'
'So, OK, I'll do whatever I can for him.'
And this was about 5 or 6 months before we started the Moral Monday Movement.

So, I got involved and started working much more actively with the NAACP, working much more actively on a local level and that larger network when it became apparent things had shifted in North Carolina in aftermath of the 2012 election. The make-up of the General Assembly changed markedly. Day-by-day, rights were falling. We were losing unemployment benefits. Medicaid expansion was not signed. There was this storm. Why are all these things happening? Barber said, 'We need to do something. We need to do something active. We need to figure out a way to get involved.' There was a buzz in the air. I was talking in that April to Rev. Jimmie Hawkins in April, one of the NAACP Vice-Presidents and a board member of our school at that time. He said, 'You know what's going on with Barber with all this? He's trying to figure out a way to get people involved. Let's figure out what we can do to participate in this larger movement.' I said, 'Well, of course I'll be involved in however I can be.' We started talking. He said, 'One of the things that would be good is that Dr. Barber doesn't have a lot of connections with the white churches that we've got in our own network, mostly Presbyterian. I had done a lot of work in this city talking with Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Baptists (Black and White) on issues of race. How do we try to bring these groups of people into this larger movement? We started talking early on about having a 'witness-bearing day' where we could get ministers from across the state to come together, wear their clergy attire and participate in a mode of witness-bearing against what was going in the General Assembly. I said, 'That might be good. How many ministers to do want to get out?' He said, 'How about a thousand? Yeah, let's just get a thousand. Let's just send out information on our networks and see if we can get that to come.' We starting thinking about this and we started processing it.

About a week later, Barber said, 'We are going to do something next Monday on the 29th. We're going to do something to try come together and find a way and it's probably going to mean arrests. I want you all to come out and participate in this.' I was nervous, worried, whatever, and wondering if I could participate in that. I called Rev. Cojo, 'Alright Cojo, are we going up to Raleigh?.' He replied, 'I got pneumonia, I can't go today (impersonating Cojo quite impressively).' I said, 'I can't leave my daughter, who is six, that day. I won't go today, let me see what happens.' It was also a good way to not get arrested too! So Barber went in with 16 other folks — mostly ministers, and activists — and were arrested in the General Assembly building.

Arrest

The next week was May 6; they put the call out again and we came back. We were trying to get people to come out and participate, people who were willing to participate in civil disobedience. I started talking about it to my former Dean and the President of my institution. I said, 'Well, how do y'all feel if, you know, I got arrested, bearing witness at this point in time? It's politically needed. We've got to do something in this state.' There was a sense of — ok — 'this is who God wants me to be now. Let me live into that. I know this. But, how do you feel?' My former Dean was a Republican. He said, 'Rodney, if this is what you feel you need to do, I'm behind you. And, I will bail you out myself, if it comes to that. But I want you to feel the conscience to do whatever you need to do.' My President basically said the same thing. It feels good to have the support of these members of our Presbyterian denomination. So, I went to Raleigh on that week, prepared to be arrested, and not knowing what that would mean. I ended up being part of the second group of 30 that were arrested, that second date, the 29th.

And I remember being very troubled after I was arrested – and disturbed. It may not make any sense to you. But, as an African American man, I sort of wore as a badge of honor that I have never been arrested. Never been in the back of a police car. Never had handcuffs on my hands. Never. This for me was an affront. It changed much about the way I thought about myself. It's a horrible experience — when you have someone put cuffs on you, drag you away, put you on a bus and tell you have to sit there, drag you to jail, march you in, go through your pockets and actually hear that gate close behind you and you realize you're not a visitor. They always talk about that sound of the gate closing behind you. They've actually got you! They take your fingerprints. I haven't given my fingerprints ever in my life. Now they've got them forever. Those experiences were life-changing.
'Bend over and put your hand here…'
'What are you doing?'
'Taking pictures of the …'
You become a piece of someone else's property. You're no longer in control of yourself. That notion of slavery creeps in, in that moment, even as someone who has been oblivious to the system for so long.

And those experiences are forever in the system, even though, eventually the charges were dropped. I did community service for my misdemeanor penalty. Even though that took place, the pictures are still there. The fingerprints are still there. If I'm known to the system, I'm a known commodity. Anything can happen to me as a result of that. So that, for me, that was very, very difficult.

I remember sitting down the day after I got out and made it back to my city that night. I was sitting there in my office and said 'I better write about this.' I drafted about a seven-page letter — 'This is why I never ever wanted to be arrested in my life. But this why I thought it was *mandatory* that we do it now!' I sent it to just about everybody, all of my networks. I mean literally, if you were a white Presbyterian minister that I did a Jesus talk in your church– I sent it to everybody.

I wrote that I literally have fought through my life to not get arrested, to not cause trouble with the law, and to not have that as a mark against me. This arrest is antithetical to everything we think about, how we define ourselves and everything else. It was hard for me. Just in that one moment, for me, I realized the pain that so many go through. My baby brother has been incarcerated for the last two years and will probably be so for another three years. I live in a house with a woman who is trying to end massive incarceration. And there's this strange sense of guilt too. I was there as a matter of choice. All those other guys in here that night are going to have to stay. I'll be out by 12:00am, 1:00am, or 6:00 in the morning. At some point, I'll get to go home and sleep in my king-sized bed in my nice, semi-suburban home. These guys are going to be here. Oh my God! This is what we've left these people to. This is what we're doing to human beings in our country!

Moral Monday movement

So, Moral Monday started off and we were pushing the larger issues. We were organizing, trying to get a 1000 ministers out there. We kept pushing that. And Barber came up with a brilliant idea, 'why don't we use each different week to deal with a different issue that we're trying to address?' That's a brilliant idea. At first, Jimmie's and my organizing of pastors was independent of Moral Monday events. But we said, 'Huh, well why don't we use one of the Mondays and let's just get the ministers out on a Monday.' So, the fourth or fifth Moral Monday was a clergy witness-bearing day. And we brought out, I guess, in the end, about 750 clergy wearing clergy attire that were protesting in this wonderful event — a wonderful turnout. Since then, we married our efforts with the rest of Moral Monday. And I have had a great experience, absolutely wonderful.

Here's one of those, just by coincidence, God incidences at a rally. A guy came out of the General Assembly in the expected attire. I stick out my hand.

'Hey I'm Zach Garland.'
'Hey Zach, great to meet you.'
'Oh, great to meet you. I'm one of those crazy elected officials you all are going on about.'
'You're not crazy.'
'I wanted to come out here and see this.'
I said, 'You're more than welcome. We want everybody to participate in it, to learn about what's going on. This is why we're doing what we're doing.'
He said, 'Well, I've been coming out to a couple of them and I want you to know that I believe that we have a responsibility to help the poor.'
'That's wonderful. That's what we want to hear, responsibility to the poor.'
'I believe it's necessary and God calls us to do it.'
'Oh, that's great.'
'We talk about that in my church all the time.'
'Oh great, what church?'
'Well I go to the United Methodist Church in Davidson.'
'Oh that's great, Davidson United Methodist Church, wonderful church. I know your

former pastor well. That's a wonderful congregation.'
But he said, 'In my congregation, we don't believe that the government has a responsibility for the poor. We believe that's on the individual and the church to do this.'
'No that's not – I am pretty sure that's not what your former pastor was teaching over the years. I think that you're —'
'Oh, no, no, no, no, my church doesn't believe in this.'
'Ok, we can talk about this a little bit.'
'Well, I'll think about it.'

And he's sitting there talking to me and a woman comes and puts her hand on his shoulder. 'Zach.' He turned around and looked, and dressed in a collar and a stole, it's one of the ministers from his church. He looks at her and he looks back and me and says, 'Let's get together and talk.'

So I set up this meeting as Moral Mondays are starting to go along and pick up steam. I got myself in trouble with Barber by meeting with Zach. We got some coffee and talked over coffee about what's going on in the state, why we think it's problematic morally. This is at the time when they had said, 'Moral Mondays are 'Moron Mondays', a group of disgruntled black ministers.' Then it was a group of 'disgruntled black ministers and white hippies.' I said, 'Well, how about we do this? You all need to see who we are. Why don't I bring a group of my friends in and meet with a group of your friends. If you can organize some conservative legislators, I'll bring some of the ministers from Moral Monday and we can talk. And I talked to Barber about it and he was apprehensive and pushed back. But we eventually negotiated a deal. Barber didn't want me to go in with them. He said, 'You take these people with you and have a conversation. But know that you are not negotiating.' I said, 'I don't want to negotiate anything. I just want to learn who these people are and let them know that we're not crazies. This is who we are.'

So, one day, I took a group of about 10 clergy and professors — a theology professor from Davidson College (Doug Ottati), a professor from Duke University (Rev. Bill Turner), pastors from Winston-Salem, Durham, Raleigh, and from Charlotte, a childcare worker, a great mix of people. All of us went in to sit down with them. And we went around the table and said,
'This is why what you're doing is morally wrong. This is why it violates the precepts that we see in God's Word. This why it is putting the people in our congregations and everyone at risk.
And we finished and we said, 'Now, please give us the theological justification for why you are doing what you are doing.'
'Well…(pause)… the church should be responsible for caring for the poor. And, our agenda says that we need to make sure that we reduce the size of the government.'
Huh? I said, 'No, no, *theologically*, what is the reason that you are doing what you are doing?'
'Well, you know, we're really trying to get rid of the Great Society program because it's caused so much trouble. And our agenda says…' —

I said, 'No, no, no, no! What is the theological reason? You guys all say you that you are Christians.'

I thought about this, half the people they brought in the room were Democrats because they could not bring any more conservatives in there. And Democrats were sort of on board, so it really didn't make much sense to talk to them. This was not the group of people they were promising. And then they all failed on the theological point and went to their talking points at every point in time in the conversation. And then when we ended, when we were just talking, they all tried to outdo themselves.

'Well, I was a poor guy. I picked myself up by my own bootstraps. '
'Now I was at the house and didn't have any toilet; we had no indoor plumbing.'
'OH, I was at the house (exclaiming) and we didn't have any indoor plumbing and we had to walk to school, five miles uphill — both ways.'

I've never seen anybody try to 'outpoor' themselves the way they were doing. And the whole point, the jist of the conversation, was we were doing it – 'because this is the agenda we're following. We're doing it because we picked ourselves by our own bootstraps and you should be able to do it too.' Meritocracy apparently works.

After we went through this for a first round, the second week I brought another group of clergy and religious leaders in and we had a second group of conversations. The end of that conversation we said, 'These people don't get it. We need to do something different, maybe some sit downs and intensive teaching. Let's see what it says about *misphat* [Hebrew: a judgment of justice], *tzedakah* [Hebrew: justice or righteousness], and *dikaiosune* [Greek: righteousness, integrity, virtue, purity of life].

I said later on to a state senator, 'I don't think that we we're going need to meet again.' And this was the deal — no press involvement. We didn't want it to look like we were trying to negotiate. We just wanted to get to know each other. Well, they leaked it to the press and in essence said 'The talks have failed, the ministers have thrown up their hands and walked away from the table.' We replied, 'We were not trying to negotiate; we were just trying to get to know each other. And this strategy didn't work; we're going to find a different strategy.' But it got twisted in the press and was a monkey wrench in the earlier part of the movement. It was a two-week news cycle before it all blew over.

But we kept working, kept trying to figure out how we organize. How do we bring more ministers to the table? How do we expand that base? The first year, we did an incredible job, I think. Rev. Cojo was calling people on a regular basis. I developed a fairly substantial list of people on email that I kept in touch with at least once a week if not twice to update them where Moral Monday was at that point and where we needed them to participate. We had gotten a good group of clergy that were actively involved by that period. That was my baby! Not all mine, but that was where my interests were — how to keep clergy involved and how to develop some theological tools.

At that same time Dr. Barber said, 'We need something that can bring people together so that they can teach about it. We need some special weekends to emphasize this in congregations.' So, we developed what we called 'the Forward Together lectionary.' It was, in essence, about 6 texts from the Old and New Testament to preach and teach to help generate some sort of movement within congregations, help people to see what's going on.

Barber was doing some moral work later on with groups of people from across the country and he said, 'I want you to put together another tool, another resource that we can use that will begin to respond to what is going on.' I came up with a series of thoughts, but when some of those meetings came up, I got invited to the White House to do other organizing work. I said, 'I can't be in both places the same time. Why don't I develop the talk I was going to do into a second resource that can be used by clergy to start thinking about these issues and Moral Monday. So, I developed what we called the Forward Together hermeneutic. That was sort of the role I played early on, speaking and teaching on different issues.

Reflections on moral Mondays

That is good work. But primarily, the Moral Monday model has been about drama. It is [Ezekiel, Eze. 4:4-6] lying on his side or Isaiah [Isa 20:3] walking around naked for three years. A march is drama that is meant to let people know that there's an issue, to give people a reason to come together and to work and to begin to pose a collective challenge to an unjust system. It is not meant as much to cause the change, as much as let people know that there needs to be change, to figure out who we are, and to work together toward change. You push people of power and say, 'These are the things we want you to change.' It's dramatic. This has shifted me in this moment.

It makes me ponder my own existence in different ways. Do you know I trained with Arnie Graf of IAF [the Industrial Areas Foundation] when I worked with the Congress of National Black Churches. He trained me at the 30,000 foot level with training on the ground by Gerald Taylor [IAF Regional Organizer] and Chris Bishop.

I look at the IAF model and think this model works well for the comfortable. If you don't have to force change; if change can be worked towards by developing relationships; if you can facilitate those relationships and show people that you have power — this is a good model. This model often celebrates incremental change. The IAF model is much more incremental, much less dealing with large systemic issues in a very big way. It is often frustrating because it postulates that change is growing from the grassroots up. 'These are the issues we're going to talk about because these are the issues we talk about in community.' But if you look at the way the model works, it's the organizer who says, 'Ok, well if I give you these five issues. Which of these 5 issues looks most interesting to you?' They sort of gave you an agenda without stating that they have given you an agenda! [Reflects and pauses] I guess that's not that different from the NAACP.

Moral Mondays are one dimension of a multi-dimensional mode of transformation. The protests, the street rallies — that's one mode. But it's not the fullness of the activity. So

when I try to meet with the legislators and begin to develop relationships, that's the IAF talking in me.

In some respects, I'd love to be able to say, 'How do we do both of them?' And most of the other activity I've done, the other organizing work that I've done, take this slightly different tack like Durham CAN [an IAF local organization]. This activity doesn't require quite the same burden of responsibility or witness as Moral Mondays — the dramatic aspects aren't quite as much of an issue as are the other organizing aspects.

Moral movement as Black church

There's a part of Moral Mondays, which is very much, for good or for evil, a manifestation of the Black church. In part, it's a manifestation of the Black church, channeling the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement was successful in part because it depended so much on the power of the Black church: the people and the witness. There are a number of reasons why that makes a great deal of sense. A. Simply, you've got people. B: You've got a common theological mode of thinking that inspires you to work toward change. And, I would add the fact that you've got these little organizations, various churches, these little cells where you can groom this witness and vision. All of this sort of lends itself to this larger social justice work, both in the 50's and 60's in the Civil Rights Movement and then the current era which Barber calls the Third Reconstruction.

At the same token, there's a churchiness that I think is perhaps dangerous too. It's very hierarchical, like 'Dr. Barber is our minister.' We sort of follow that paradigm. Things are not as democratic as a lot of people want. I've heard people say, particularly from white clergy, 'Hey, this is not as democratic as I would like. We don't get to make the decisions. Well actually we do, sort of, but, 'We don't get to make the decisions the way we think we ought to. Embodied leadership doesn't look like the way we embody leadership in our context.' There are those push-backs that I've heard as we've gone along the way. And some people say, 'Ok that's too much. I'm out.' Other people say, 'meh, I'm not used to it, but I can work with it.'

But, the odd thing, an interesting thing, is to watch a 60 year-old white couple, former hippies who are atheists and have no real connection with any church or anything anywhere, come out and say, 'Amen!' You have them as though they were standing in a church service. I wonder if it's a catharsis, but there's something that's rejuvenates them on a spiritual level. I've had people come to me and say, 'I've been an atheist for years having decided I had nothing in common with the church until I heard you talk about God the way that you do. I could love this God. This God actually loves me and cares about the people I care about and the issues I care about.' Wow, that's a wonderful, evangelical pronouncement there and I think a lot of people are involved in the movement because of that 'church feel.' You get to Moral Monday and hear young white kids who have never been to church in their lives, singing along with 'We shall overcome' and 'God is on our side.' I mean, it's just … it's been transformative in a lot of ways that I could have never imagined. Other people say, 'This is what I've been looking for a long time.'

People say 'I've never heard this about God!' Of course you didn't hear it! You've been going to a White church as opposed to going to a church that's prophetically saying 'there's something wrong and we have to challenge it!' That's, in part, one of the reasons why the Black church as an organization, entity, and institution, with its language of problem and possibility, has been able to give birth to this larger movement and sustain it in so many ways. There's something about that Black church dynamic. The Black Church starts off as a collection of people who are struggling to find a sense of identity, humanity, and equality in the face of horrible injustice, prefaced upon the fact that somehow or another, God still loves us and created us and supports us and gives us all value. That's where the Black Church itself starts.

This is what the Moral Monday Movement is — this is what Dr. Barber is —— introducing that mode of theological engagement to the larger world in a way that says, 'Hey this Bible is not just about the salvation of souls. It's not just about worship practices and worship rituals and so forth. This is about transformation. This is about liberation. This is about freedom and new possibilities of human community. Wow!! This is what all this is about!

Moral movement hermeneutic & scripture

I've got a book coming out in a couple of months on interpreting Genesis. That's where we're starting pushing this notion that as we start to read scripture, it opens up the channels for the possibility of freedom for a group of people who had been enslaved in this country, hadn't experienced freedom, and didn't even know what that freedom would look like. The Bible gave us the possibility to imagine freedom and the Black church became that place where we can ruminate on it! It's that reimagined version of the text which emerges in part from African American engagement with the narrative that really has fueled this larger movement.

Barber talks about going to Ferguson and being invited to speak to a group of conservative clergy. You saw that they were hostile when he walked in the door. So, he took a text and began to work through that text and they began to see and they found common places with him. He said,
'You all agree with this, don't you?'
'Yeah, yeah, yeah.'
'Well this is why I'm inspired to do the work I do. It's texts like this.'
And then they were like,
'Oh, we understand now.'

So you find that common Scriptural place, work that common place, and utilize it as best you can. This is the secret of Dr. King's Civil Rights Movement. He said,
'What do Americans believe in?'
'We believe in the Bible, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution.'
'So how do I use those common places to convict who I need convicted and to promote harmony where we can promote harmony and bring us all to a higher mission.

And that's what he did. People will often talk about the fact that King was post-Christian. And he may have been, but he definitely knew how to use those texts in a way that resonated and brought people to the table.

Cameron's practices & reflections

Hopefully I'm following Barber's advice here. Starting with the Bible. Starting with the text and then allowing the text to speak for itself.

I remember doing a sermon, when I started interim pastoring Southeast Presbyterian, a very wealthy Presbyterian church. I was thinking they'd never want to hear from me again. I switched gears on them to wrestle with this notion about widows and orphans by preaching about the widow Naomi. I actually went through and read 10-15 different passages that talked of God's view about widows and orphans. I know this was tedious, but maybe God has a thing for widows. Maybe God's got a thing for fatherless children. Maybe God is concerned about issues of justice at a much deeper level than we are. I think what I've learned … for me, that God really cares about this. That this is essential to the heart of God. That this is not peripheral and that we've made it peripheral. The church, by and large, has shirked their responsibility for deep engagement with social justice for institutional reasons. When I walked Southeast Presbyterian through this, they were on-board. I think I may have even gotten a few 'Amens.'

That's really a lot of what I'm trying to do with Moral Monday, working through that theological lens. How do I help the church to see we have a larger responsibility? The role of the pastor is not just to tend the flock that's in front of you.

I often preach to the bankers, lawyers, clergy — arch-Republicans — in big steeple White churches and talk about Moral Monday, what the Movement was about, and why it was important to God. Who do we say we follow?! Don't we say we follow Jesus? Who is a better organizer than Jesus? Isn't that what he does? Isn't that what he spends all his time doing and shouldn't we spend some of our time focusing on similar activity? How do get someone, wherever they are located, to realize we have a role to play in bringing in this reign of God. I love the way Dr. King says it, 'Progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability, but only comes about because of the tireless efforts and hard work of those who willing to be co-workers with God.' How do we bring liberals and conservatives together to realize that you both have a part of a much larger, much more significant picture and bring it together? Lord, we might actually change the world for the better. Look at that!

How do we begin to work on the mission of justice and bring liberals and conservatives together? Why can't we do it? Why don't we do it? Why don't we address these issues? This is the fight that we need to be in. Let's fight it now. Every once in a while, I stop and I think, we're so frustrated by the fact that we can't get our agenda past the General Assembly — where we have the largest number of African American Senators than our state has ever had — where we have at least a handful of Democratic Senators and Representatives in our General Assembly. Dr. King changed this country with two or

three African Americans in Congress and no African Americans on the Supreme Court? If they could make those types of changes…

I think far too often we go about our days; we finish up. We go home. We say we do good things at work, but we haven't begun to move the needle on some of these big issues. So, my goal has been — I'm still going to go home and watch some football, but before I do, let me stop by and move the needle on environmental justice, and move the needle a little bit on fairer wages for all, move the needle a little bit on dealing with race in America.

We won't be able to achieve any of our goals if we continue to work in our silos. We won't be able to make any progress. What would it look like if we had middle class white folks who were involved in Audubon Society and Sierra Club come to the table with African American young people who are concerned about Black Lives Matter and issues in the street? Or coming together with people who are dealing with women's issues? What if we fuse these movements into one? What if we say that the climate is not just a white middle class issue? It's all of our issues. We've got to work together! We need mass support if we're going to make the kind of changes we'd like to see.

For me, as long as you're talking about racism and dealing with a racist issue We're putting a BandAid on a cancer that can't be cured so simply. The true issue is the idea of race itself – that we are somehow fundamentally different, which we know is ontologically not true — biologically not true — genetically not true. But socially we feel powerless to define our existence in this world. How do we begin to reverse the impact of these racial divisions that have put us in these hierarchical categories, that have given this different evaluation of human worth? I think it contributes to gun violence, contributes to the fear we all have, and contributes to the hatred that we all see being spewed on our airwaves on a regular basis. I think the issue of race is a destabilizing factor that undermines the very success of the democracy.

One of the major things we have to deal with in America, particularly when dealing with a particular brand of conservatism, is the myth of the meritocracy — that fundamentally the system works and that if you work hard, you'll inevitably succeed, because hard work pays off in our society. We think that those who are poor are not working hard. They're lazy. They're morally corrupt; there's something fundamentally wrong with them. ''Cause I've made it, you should be able to make it too.' Certain people can work as hard as they want to, 3-4 jobs a day, and will still be picked on by the police, still won't be able to get a promotion at work, and still will train their supervisors. They will go through these things because of the color of their skin, because the neighborhoods in which they live, and because we call you 'poor white trash.'

But when you change that paradigm, you say that the poor are not lazy or immoral. They are who God loves and God adores. God, in Matthew 25 likens God's own self to the poor. Let's also remember the Hebrew concept of 'shalom,' which we usually translate as 'peace.' It is much more complex in its meaning and has much more to do with notions of 'balance, wholeness, wellness,' that things are 'all in order' and that things are

aligned appropriately. Social justice, for me, is the point is when things will return to that stasis, where things are in balance, and that things are aligned in shalom, a balance in a world that often seems to work against it.

One other thing about social justice – social justice for me is not a single issue. Of necessity, it requires a fusion of different things that have often been left out of balance, so it is, it is bringing together the notion of environmental justice with LGBT rights, with racial justice…bringing together all of these issues because you only get that balance restored when all of these misalignments are reoriented.

Agency is big for me now. I'm really convinced that the reason that kids go to bed hungry every night, the reason that there's poverty, the reason people are working 4 or 5 jobs and not getting benefits – all of these things are based upon human decision. If we can change the minds of the people who are making decisions, if we can change their minds, our minds, we can change this system. The system is predicated on our thoughts and our decisions. We're part of it. It's up to us to change it and not surrender that agency. This is what I fear the church does all of the time. 'Jesus will fix it after a while – or up in heaven.' It's the White church idiom: 'These are questions that are beyond us. Christ is in control. We surrender ourselves and our agency to the providence of God.' And this is the idiom that we use. The reality is that God has given us power.

I think I've said this to you before; I don't want to be repetitive. But again, what if we all say that the reason suffering exists in the world, the reason there are hungry people in my town right outside where I live, the reason people were working without benefits, the reason we're at war in Iraq and Iran, the reason that Israel and Palestine continue to fall apart and have never found peace — is because we didn't do what we're supposed to do, because we didn't change our minds, we didn't make those little requisite shifts that will begin to change the world.' Maybe this is the quixotic part of me, but I'm convinced that we can change the world. All that's between us and the world that we want to see is the decision to do it. God has done God's part. God has laid the framework for us. God gave us the Word. God gave us Jesus. God's done God's part. While we are waiting for Jesus, Jesus is sitting there waiting for us. Come on! Let's get it right. Let's do what you can do in this moment so we change this world.' That's where I am right now. I'm hoping for a significant revolution. People have done far more with far less than what we have today. How do we begin to do our part to promote the change that we need to see?

I don't think that the challenges of my life — the poverty, the family separation, the liminal identity — were mistakes. I think God has a way of shaping your life experiences or reminding of you about them later on so that they can become useful. Yes indeed! I think God planned it all. I think God fostered this in so many ways that I wasn't aware of at the time, but looking back, I say, 'Oh ok.'

Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Buddy Whaler, Buddy the Beast, and Jimmy Cliff — all these people were fertilizers to the soul. Then you start to read the text and read beyond where you were in Sunday School. You read beyond Acts 2 when you see the Holy Spirit coming and you get to the end where it says, 'that they had everything in common, that

no one had means, and that they shared, and that this was a new way of living brought on by the possibilities of the Holy Spirit.' Then you tie that together with Bill Turner talking about the Holy Spirit.
'Oh, ok, I get it now God. I get where you're going.'
For me, all of these influences have given me a sense that the way that we live our faith is often compromised by the institutional nature of the church and the way that it is related to society, always supporting the status quo. We've lost that sense of peripheral nature. We've lost that sense of reading from the outside, of standing with the people. We're supporting the status quo. All of these things I think have shaped me in this way, and helped me to begin to realize that there's an 'ought' problem here. This is what it is, this is what ought to be. How do we get from the 'what is' to 'the ought?' Joel Siegel, William Barber — there's a quixotic quality to them. They don't mind tilting after windmills. They don't mind.

I hope that I don't waste time – God has spent a lot of time shaping me and forming me – I hope that I don't waste that by leading a life that doesn't yield any positive results.

CHAPTER 5: GENE CHITWOOD
"THERE WAS SOMEONE AT EVERY CUT POINT! HOW DO YOU PAY THAT BACK?"

Prologue

Gene is a short, very slight white 68 year-old white man. He has been retired for over five years from an academic career as a Professor of Sociology teaching Marxism and social theory at a large, Southern public university. He is quick and to the point with his words. This is largely why his story is the shortest in my collection. Gene is a "no nonsense" personality with a bright smile and an obvious intentionality in speaking with direct eye contact. We met at his "tract home", as he calls it, in a middle-class suburb of nearby city. His office is an upstairs bedroom of his home that quickly betrays his academic past. The closet has been converted to bookshelves. The artifacts of a long career are all around the room with a shelf dedicated solely to his published books. When the first year of Moral Mondays blew up into a phenomenon, Gene (and his wife) were among the first large wave of arrestees. In his youth, I learned that he was competitive basketball player and I still sense a competitive edge in his manner. In one of our interviews, he was just returning from a high level, weekly bridge game where he holds his own.

Gene's Story

Moral Mondays

For some background, for twenty or thirty years, my wife has that when she got old, she wanted to be arrested. Then all of a sudden, in front of our very eyes, there's this opportunity to make a statement and we were both arrested. This was a joint project all the way through. It wasn't on a lark or a bucket list item. It's a way of putting your body out there and making a statement about something you believe in. It was a cause we believed in.

I'm a hardcore political liberal. I believe that we need a more humane society and that has never wavered over my entire adult life. In high school, I read a lot of science fiction, especially Robert Heinlein, a libertarian Ayn Rand kind of guy. Somebody used the catch phrase one time, you read Ann Rynd as a child or an adolescent and then grow out of it. Well I grew out of it. That's not my line, but it's really a good description. From a very young age in college, I believed in greater equality and less oppression and for all human beings. It's been still an animus in my life, you know.

In a way, our arrests were completely accidental. It was really by chance. We went over to Moral Monday early late March or early April of [2013]. It might not have been the first Moral Monday. It might have been the second. I had never heard Rev. Barber before. But I have pretty good antennae for bullshit and hypocrisy and I just don't see it in him. He is a really good man and a very inspirational man as best as I can tell. I'm just totally supportive of him. His idea of fusion politics, of building alliances with those that normally don't connect, I'm just totally for.

People fought and died for this idea. I've had some conversations with my grandchildren, because they assume if you got arrested this must be a terrible thing. So, I tried to explain it that way to my granddaughter and my grandson who just accept it as a matter of faith that pappy would not do anything wrong. It wasn't that dangerous and it wasn't like anything terrible was going to happen. You put yourself on the line a little bit to send a message that what people are doing is wrong. Sometimes the law is used as an instrument of oppression to keep people from voting as the NC Legislature is doing right now. To me it was just a rerun of the 60s.

Of course, politically they were just stupid that summer. They were stupid to arrest us. They never should have arrested us. That was a fiasco. The smarter move would have been to give us all citations and say 'go away whenever you feel like it.' Arresting us just created all sorts of problems that we were happy to create.

Most of the demonstrations that I've observed, there's a choreography. That was true here. By the time we got arrested (my wife did it in end of June, I did it on the 1st of July), they'd been doing it for several weeks. You show up at the church before for training — deciding who's going to do it and learn what you're going to experience in the legislature building. And then they have the long rally on the plaza. Then everybody who is going into the capitol marches in front. People form an aisle and you march in.

They had the ritual down and they knew what was going to happen inside too. It was choreographed. There was some agreement between the NAACP, Rev. Barber, and the capitol police. The chief would say, 'Ten minutes to leave. Five minutes to leave. Two minutes to leave.' At that point, some people leave. But some would say, 'We're not leaving.' And they would foolishly go and arrest us. I know how these things work or I think I do. When I went in there; they're all videotaping us. I just stood there. I didn't sing. I didn't clap. I didn't have a sign. I just stood there. I knew they wouldn't talk to me, but my official stance was that I was standing there to talk to my legislators. And in some degree, that's ingenuous on my part. I knew they are not coming out. When you put yourself on the line, that's what you do.

It turned out that they used my particular case as the test case. They arrested 950 people that summer. Some people, about a third of the people, especially those who travelled far distances, just chose to pay the fine. Most people decided for a trial. The game the prosecution was playing was just to keep us coming over to Raleigh. If you're coming from Asheville, that gets old. But I'm perfectly happy to drive to Raleigh. I wasn't going to pay anything. If I had been found guilty, I was going to tell them, 'I'm not paying.' I was going to call their bluff. And what are you going to do to me. Could you imagine putting a 68 year-old retired college professor in jail for not paying his fine for 2nd degree trespassing? That's what the crime was. When we all went in there, it's all choreographed. Rev. Barber would say a few words. A few other people would say a few words. There would be a couple songs.

Initially I was found guilty. This judge, according to our attorney, Scott Holmes, was very inconsistent in her rulings, occasionally finding some people innocent and others guilty. But when they review some of the tapes, they saw I was not doing anything. Because I didn't do anything, my case became the test case. My case became the appeal. At the end, Scott found an argument and applied it here. He took it from Scalia of all people, a recent court decision from a year before. Basically, we had the right to stand there. Scott was going to demand a jury trial for 600 people. He was going to tie that place up. It just wasn't realistic to have jury trials for all of these 2nd degree misdemeanor trespassing. They decided to do a test case without a jury, just with a judge. And that was my case. And he found an argument that persuaded her. Basically the judge said, 'This was a total crock.'

That's sort of the legal part of it. I did buy a T-shirt from some Moral Monday entrepreneur that says 'Jailed for Justice,' and wore it to Moral Mondays a couple of times. It was showing off, I suppose.

Childhood, adolescence, and the journey of escape to college

I kicked around as a boy — lots of places. But life is like that, a lot of problems. I sought stability. I haven't talked about this a lot, for a long time. This is sort of interesting.

I'm six years old and we're living in Northern California — I get polio. Bad timing. Apparently the first case in the new year, 1954. The vaccine comes out three months

later — but I've already got it. I miss school, second grade, from January on. But they put me in the third grade. So, in the November of the third grade, we move to a small town in Indiana. I was there from 1954-1960. We left there when I was twelve. My Mom did put me back in the second grade. Now, I've already had the first half of second grade and the first third of third grade. So I knew stuff (laughing conspiratorially)! I'm starting second grade and I'm smart. All of sudden, I'm smart! I'm getting all A's and B's, but I'm acting out all of over the place. I'm totally out of control in a lot of ways. The teachers must have seen something.

I come from a dysfunctional background. My father... (pause) beat me… (pause) and raped my sister. He was an alcoholic (pause). There was a divorce. This is a little, tiny town of 15,000; my Dad's behavior had to be observed by someone. My father was the sports editor of this little, tiny town, the Whitford Morning Times. He had some visibility in the community.

But that was a big cut point. If she hadn't put me back in 2nd grade, then my essential abilities would have never been recognized. The teachers had to have seen something in this little kid who was a total behavior problem. I actually remember their names. Mrs. Kohler. Mrs. Kunis. Mr. Rickard. I must have made their lives miserable, just miserable. I was proud because I was getting A's and somehow I knew that was important. I still have my report cards.

I would have been right for child abuse, but we just didn't have it then. I showed up for school at 7:30 in the morning; school didn't start until 8:30am. I'm getting out of the house! I played basketball even though I was a tiny little guy. I played basketball so I'm there at school from 7:30am until 5pm. I'm hanging out at other people's houses. At a very young age, I knew my way out.

As a young adult, I graduated from high school, spring of 1965. I leave home; I never went back. I had enough money, and things happen**.** I wasn't a great social activist as a young man. But, at one point, I was hitchhiking around the country; you could still do this 45 years ago. You can't do it now. The summer of '69, I ended up in Fayette, MS after Charles Evers had been elected mayor of that little town. He proudly called himself 'the most hated man in Mississippi.' There's a second guy, Father Morrissey, who had a church in Natchez, who very proudly called himself 'the second most hated man in Mississippi.' Fayette was just up the road from Natchez. The place was just chaotic, so I hung out for a while. I should have stayed longer. I didn't.

I hadn't taken the right courses to get into the university, but I take the SAT. I get like 550 on the math, which is fine. And, for some odd reason, I got 400 on the Verbal, which was bizarre, because I was completely an 'A' student. I didn't think too much about it. I just took it again. In those days, you had to write an essay. And I go back to this essay, and there is this quote that you have to write about. It was from an obscure play by George Bernard Shaw called 'Heartbreak House,' which is a play he wrote in 1913 or 1914 in the run up to WW1 in Europe. The title was a metaphor for what was going on

in Europe. Well I had just read the sucker six weeks ago. So, I just said, 'George Bernard Shaw says in 'Heartbreak House…' I got a 700 on that!

At another cut point, now this wasn't somebody this time, this was just a piece of luck. But, I get into a university. I have money for one semester. My teacher said to me, 'Go! Just get there and then figure it out.' Well LBJ signs into law the Office of Equal Opportunity Programs — all of the equal opportunity programs! I'm the first student at Southwestern State to qualify for work study. So I go and get this work study money.

They say, 'We'll send you over to the computer center.'
And I meet Dr. Garber. He says, 'do you know any Math.'
And I say, 'No, not really.'
And he said, 'Do you know anything about computers?'
'No, not really.'
But then I said the magic words — 'I'll be here on time and I'll work hard.'
He said, 'We'll find something for you to do.'

I became a computer operator eventually. At first I was key punching. Do you remember key cards? I was key punching and verified those cards. Now this was an old IBM 7040 — all vacuum tubes and 'huuuge' tape drives. It didn't have a memory. I eventually became the highest paid undergraduate on campus. I'm making 10 bucks an hour, and this was the 1960s. I'm giving money to my mother — it's crazy! The example I'm giving you is about luck, but we haven't really talked about the individuals, the professors and the teachers who befriended me.

Here's an example of what I mean by people stepping up. If I graduate too early, I don't make it. If I graduate too late, I'm probably in Vietnam. It hit it just right. So I'm in college and I'm draft dodging, which I say proudly. We were right; it was a dumb war! I'm draft dodging by seeking deferments. I wasn't demonstrating or anything like that. You want to know how I beat the draft? Underweight! The minimum weight for my height (5'8') was 115lbs. I get my notice for a physical and I have ten days. Unfortunately, the boys and girls of Berkeley were doing whatever they were doing and Ronald Reagan got pissed off and shut down all the state campuses of the university. I wasn't good enough to play basketball any more. But I always took basketball classes, so I knew Coach Dean Scott. Now Coach Scott (I don't know where he is today) had been an All-American, gone to Vietnam, come back, started a coaching career. And he knew me. I said, 'Coach Scott, I've got to get into gym but they closed down the university.' He gave me his key. This African-American man who had been to Vietnam said to me, 'You've got to lose weight. You've got to sit in the whirlpool and sit in the sauna. You've got to run. You've got to work out.' He gave me his key. Thanks Coach. Why would he do this? To some little guy who he knows from his basketball classes? At every cut point there was somebody who did something for me. How do you pay that back? You don't pay that back.

After college, I actually got my application to go to Union Theological Seminary because Niebuhr was there. But I had this problem, even then I had this problem… in that…you

know… I didn't believe. I didn't believe in the magic. I hadn't studied anything, but I knew that belief was silly. I knew enough. That didn't fly. I'm like Brother Michael in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, always a sympathetic alien, and that's been my relationship to the church for most of my life. I'm an ethical Christian. That's the way I would describe it. That means that my theology, a 4th grade theology which is fine for me, is 'God loves us, be nice to each other.' I try to follow the way of Jesus and the Christian concern for humanity, for all people.

Adult life: academics & raising kids

And the goal at that point was to go back to my old high school. But I became a college professor instead. I guess I was always interested in a history of ideas in high school. At 11 years old, I'm saying to myself, 'I'm going to the University of Notre Dame. I'm going to college.' I rolled through the kids' library pretty fast. I'm eleven or twelve and I go upstairs to the adult section and I get Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. The librarian says, 'I don't know if you should be doing that.' Then I go home and tell my mother, 'Tell her I can read it.' In high school, I was involved in this church, a Methodist Church. And we would show up for breakfast once or twice a week, which was good, because I wasn't getting much to eat. And we'd read Erich Fromme's *Escape from Freedom*, Reinhold Niebuhr, [Martin] Buber and stuff like that. I started reading Reinhold Niebuhr in those days. Reading everything Marx ever wrote seemed like a reasonable idea. At the third volume of *Capital*, you say, 'Why am I doing this?'

I always wanted to be a writer. In my delusion, I thought I was a pretty creative person. Turns out I'm not creative at all — I'm pretty much a derivative thinker. But you get your degree; you get another degree, actually three degrees, all at Southwest State. Then marriage and a university job at a large public. I was trained in theory and in stratification. I wrote a book with my teacher on sociological theory. It went through eight editions and is still in print. I was 10 years at Southwestern State and 35 years as a university professor. I became an expert on Weber, Marx, and Georg Simmel - three Germans. I think it was a curiously intellectual pastime. I always viewed Marxists as absurd. Marx himself was a closet authoritarian, but he was the greatest student of capitalism that ever lived…these artists and the intellectuals in the 30's and 40's who became communists, I do not get it. I just don't get it. I mean how could you…?

Once I graduated and left Southwestern, I'm working 50-60 hours a week on a publish or perish career track. Even after I got tenure, I worked hard. There are certain occupations that once you get started, if you want to coast you can: college professor, ministry, there are a few others. Once you get that bank of sermons set up, it's pretty easy. Once you get your lectures written, it can be pretty easy. There's a small group of people who are just doing the same old stuff. They may decide not to publish. They are not revising their lectures. But if you take the job seriously, of course, it's not easy. I never applied for grants which used to piss off the Dean and Department Chair, but I wanted to go to the library. I told them, 'Look, be happy. As long as I have a book coming out next year and three to four articles every year, be happy.' I was never viewed as someone who was going to bring in a lot of money — because I wasn't. I did exactly what I wanted and I always liked it. I wrote a textbook on my own on social stratification that went through

six editions and I wrote five other books. You do your career. I was pretty good at it. I was good at what I did.

The larger point was that you can't be career-oriented and family-oriented and do much else. Before I retired, we need to be clear; I was career-oriented. It's really hard to be active. It's very hard to raise children and to run two careers, hers and mine. And we lived in a fairly small college town; there are not a lot of venues for social activism. Once we left the West coast, we marched in an Equal Rights parade in the 70s and we were active in opposing the death penalty, But, for the most part, I taught and raised my children. I didn't really do much. I was career oriented — apart from the children.

When I got married, I got a package. My first daughter was hers through a first marriage. I'm her real father, because I raised from the time of four. My wife did a lot of psychological testing as part of her career. She tests this girl and gets her placed and then the placement breaks down. So, basically, we took her in. We eventually get a foster care license. Now we have daughter #2, who was 14 when she came to us. She was never adopted. It would not have been in her interest to adopt her, because she was a high schooler at the time. She had money. She's a genius. I mean she's smarter than you or I by a whole lot. She's really smart, but really screwed up, screwed up. Our goal was for her to graduate from high school. But she's gotten a Master's Degree. She's a mess, but she's successful. Then there was this kid who had been going out with our first daughter a little bit. He's a year behind her, so when she goes off to college, he is still hanging out around the house a little bit and on the streets.

Basically, he's going to people's houses, knocking on the window, climbing in, sleeping there, and leaving before the parents find out. I told him he needed some structure in his life and he could come live with us. He came from an abysmal rate of poverty. The mother, an alcoholic, knew about his living with us. The state wasn't involved. He came to us when he was seventeen, stayed two years, and went to college. He worked his butt off. But that's not the whole story; he caught a break. He met us and a lot of other people on the way. There were some high school teachers who were on to him before we even knew him. His story is a lot like mine. It ain't hard work. It's catching a break and often multiple breaks. He was like me in the sense that he's real smart. He had figured out that being a good student was his way out. So, he graduated from high school and college. He was teaching in our college town. Then we encouraged him to come up here when we retired. He's teaching here, married, and has a kid. We're still intimately involved in his life. Once they used all their leave up, we kept their baby from April to the end of school. This is how you give back. That is where I was going with all that.

When he went to college, the kids are all gone and we're happy campers. We go to this Christmas party and a woman hits us up to take this little kid — but only for a short time. He was four years old and had got beaten up and ran away from home. From the moment this was mentioned to my wife, this was a done deed. We had gotten those first two kids in adolescence and we figured, 'We're good at this. We know what we're doing.' A fit of hubris. Now this kid, we adopted him. He had many problems — many, many problems. His mother was using drugs, serious drugs, while she was pregnant. He gets

into drugs in high school, mostly marijuana, but eventually other drugs. He's seen the world. But he's been in the abyss. It got really bad, really bad — a lot of thieving, a lot of stealing. You get into this with your children sometimes. You have to decide at what point you're going to stop. At some point, you give them money, well it's money down a rat hole. Our first son would say, 'Look you might as well open your car window and toss some money out.' And he was right. We got to the point where we cut him off financially, but we never cut off contact. One day, he walks into detox. Now here's another example of luck. Our best friend runs a Community Mental Health in that college town. There's no space, but she finds space. We've blown through about $50,000 in inpatient/outpatient detox. But we now get a cut rate. He's been clean and sober now for more than 2 years. He had one relapse, that's pretty common. But he's holding a job and involved with a good woman. He's coming around. Looks like that's going to work.

Retirement and activism

Retirement is an interesting phenomenon. I'll leave you with that.

When we retired, we had enough money for one big trip a year. But we blew through a lot of money when our last son went into detox. It didn't impact our daily lives; it impacted the cash reserve we had. Our days of foreign trips are probably over. I figured I'd teach; we would travel. That was my scenario. My observation is that retirement never happens the way you think it's going to happen anyway. I was going to teach and keep writing. We were going to travel.

My original plan in retirement was to teach a course every semester, to keep to writing, and to do research. The course part worked the first year. We showed up in this area in the fall of 2008. I know people at Carolina and Duke. So I taught. Well by the fall of 2009, the recession hits and you can know anybody in the world, it does matter. I'm expensive. Teaching stopped. By the time the offers starting coming back again, I had gotten used to not teaching. By the time they started asking again, my life had gone in a different direction.

Think about this: If I'm still at my university, I'm a full professor. I have status in the community. Even in retirement, people can still call me and I can still call people and solve problems. If you move away, you're Mr. Nobody. There are people who I play cards with who know nothing about my life — most of them probably. There are people who only know me at the church as a grandfather and chair of the Board of Trustees. 'Can we buy a new computer?' 'Sure.' They don't know anything about my professional accomplishments. When you retire, you better be willing to become unimportant. Because nobody gives a damn anymore about anything you did in your career. Watching people desperately trying to retain their pre-retirement status is sad in some ways. We live in this little tract house because my daughter lives in the next community. We don't have the big house anymore; we sold that sucker. The outer signs of status, at least for us, are gone. We don't live well, but we have enough money.

Retirement is a big change. It's really hard. But what retirement does, at least for me, is that it liberates you. We're more explicitly, ethically involved now than anything we did in the past. It's a new phase of life I did not expect.

In my experience, things happen by chance. My wife speaks Spanish. She was in the Peace Corps in Chile. A lot of local churches here supported a little bilingual exchange teaching English to Hispanics. A high proportion of the Hispanics are illegal. She was got involved in this program once a week. Eventually, the woman who had been running it for many years couldn't do it anymore so my wife started running it. Then a couple of women who were coming and they had these kids who had to be watched. Just by accident, I thought, 'Well, I'll do more than just Tuesday evening tutoring. Let's start getting a little more involved.'

It was never a tutoring program until I got involved with these children at all. I was just teaching English to adults and doing a little childcare on the side. But, one of the mothers asked if I would work with the older son. I did a little bit, but he's seventeen, eighteen years old and set in his ways. I don't think I was very effective. But then little kids started showing up.

We've gotten involved with this family, they're all from El Salvador. One sister is in a stable relationship,. Another sister and her husband are both illegal and have been here for more than a decade. They have a daughter, M, who is going to be in the first grade. She's legal. She was born here. But when they came, they have a son E., who's not legal, but he's a Dream Act kid. He should be alright. But they had to leave a kid behind when then came here ten years ago. Well they got him up here last year. He's now reading at a third grade level and doing math at a third grade level, which I view as astounding since he had zero English and very little education in El Salvador. These kids are coming to our house. They show up at 10am, four days a week, all summer long. I give them breakfast. We work for an hour, an hour and a half. Usually my wife takes the two girls and I take the two boys. This week it's been me, one on four!

I was just talking to the older girl — she's shy — saying 'You've got to sit down in front when school starts next week.' I'm just telling her how to succeed. 'Do you just want to slide into the background?' She says, 'Yeah.' 'You've got to overcome that.' She can read on her own now.. and is only a tick behind in Math.

It's interesting, because if you had told me when I retired that I'd be doing childcare and tutoring, I would have laughed at you. I spent my adult life, sitting at this very desk, writing and teaching young adults, which I quite liked. So, the idea that the center of my life would be these children — I'm just a little surprised. But much of my life has been a surprise.

I'm probably more fulfilled with my life right now than I ever have been. I was going to do the 6th edition or 7th edition of the stratification book and I realized, 'It's the same shit all over again.' The other day in the newspaper, there was a big article about housing segregation. I was talking about that 25 years ago. The long-term impact that I could

have now is zero probably on that issue. This might apply to everything I've written, 7 books, a bunch of articles. I began to realize, the biggest impact I've had has been on my children, doing the arrest thing, and teaching these kids here. It's far more meaningful.

Retirement and faith

Another thing I've done in retirement is I've been studying the early church and early Christianity. In the last few years, I've done a fair amount of reading on early Christianity that I was not able to do beforehand, reading in a way of debunking. You know, as I said, all the biblical scholars — The Jesus Seminar, [Bart] Ehrman, and others — they're really sociologists. They're doing what we would call a sociology of knowledge. They're asking how do these ideas fit into a historical-social context and what did they mean to the people involved. It's a really good question and they've actually found out a whole lot.

One example involved the early Christians being taught to help each other. So, they're living in these shit-holes, literally. Epidemics would just sweep through. The Christians were keeping each other bathed, fed, and hydrated. They survived at a higher rate. And people were looking around and saying, 'Wow, your God is pretty good.' It wasn't anything more than, 'God loves you, help each other, be nice to each other, even when you're sick.' People were attracted to that. They got lucky. And a lot of the early converts were literate Greeks and Romans. That was big.

There are thirteen books credited to Paul, but he only wrote seven. I read Marcus Borg's book on Paul. There are a lot of self-loathing kinds of statements among Paul's letters. Borg says that is because of malaria. That's a crock. I rather like Bishop's Spong's off-hand comment that he's probably an oppressed homosexual. And all this self-loathing — 'I hate myself. I hate my body. I hate my desires' — there are these things in several of the letters. I don't know. Nobody knows of course. My interest has always been in a sociology of knowledge, how these ideas developed in these particular contexts.

We belonged to a church near the university for 35 years. Our best friends were in that church. That church had a compact to the effect, 'We all believe to follow the ways of Jesus.' I can agree with that. To belong to that church, you didn't have to ask for forgiveness of your sins, any of that, which I couldn't do. I've always been an outsider looking in to Christianity, but sympathetic. I've tried to live an ethical life and contribute to this society, but I can't say it's ever been out of religious zealotry or anything. It's just been what you do. As I said, it's payback time.

But one of the things I learned in the academic life was how to run a meeting, how to get things done. I was Chair of the Tenure Promotion Committee for several years. Academics make their living giving lectures, so they're a little bit like herding cats. You've got to keep them on task and get away from the side issues that everybody wants to talk about and get decisions made in a finite amount of time. And unlike a lot of academic stuff, tenure promotion decisions are serious business, individual lives and careers are on the line. But you've got to do it without pissing people off — the other members of the committee. You've just got to get them to make decisions. So, I learned

how to run meetings. I'm now more involved organizationally with this new church here than our previous church as a result. I have been Chair of the Board of Trustees at our church here and I'll go back to it eventually. The trustees are in charge of the building. I can't fix squat. When something goes wrong around the house, I say, 'I'll try to fix it,' and my wife just rolls her eyes because she knows we're just going to call somebody. But I can run the meeting and I can get folks to make decisions. So that's good.

The motive for social activism in the past was more unconscious, I guess. We were just doing what we were doing at the time. But I can't say we were doing it because we were religiously and ethically active. The last three or four years here, I can. I really can't claim I was acting in a conscious, Christian way. Now I can.

Last year we were doing macro-political stuff. I view this work with children as micro social activism. And it's really fulfilling, even more fulfilling than the arrest thing. Yeah, sure, for the children we've brought it. For me this is payback. The thing last summer, this work, in a way, was all payback.

CHAPTER 6: MICAH TURNER
"LEARNING TO READ"

Prologue

Micah is a striking figure. He is a relatively tall white man with long grey hair that falls halfway down his back and a long grey beard to match. He often wears Birkenstock sandals. I've known him for many years and often jest with him by introducing him as "Moses", referencing Charlton Heston's representation of the Old Testament biblical prophet in the Hollywood film, "The Ten Commandments!" He is a Professor of Theology and Ethics at a seminary located in an HBCU in NC. Also, unique for a white theologian, Micah serves as an Associate Minister at historic black church in the baptistic tradition. He has a long history as a primary leader in a grassroots community organizing having helped found an IAF organizing community in his hometown. He speaks with a Southern, Texas drawl and can sneak up on you with an indisputable intellect and a sharp wit. In the "FT"MM, Micah has worked as a thought leader on a couple projects, a stage speaker for some of the larger rallies, and a point of connection between the movement and his seminary.

In addition to being friends, we have been collaborators in organizing work around the state for over a decade. Our interviews occurred over several years as Micah had consented to be interviewed for seminar project in 2013 when I was first learning the life narrative research methodology. We met two additional times for this study and he gave me permission to incorporate our earlier interviews into this life story. Sadly, between our two seasons of interviews, his wife, a scholar in her own right and a leader in public education, had succumbed to the cancer that was assailing her body when we first met to do life narrative work. Micah is

quite open about his present sadness from this loss. He wears it transparently and with grace. If anything, though, he has become more determined in his justice work.

Micah's Story

> I can tell you two different, but related, stories of my life journey to the ministry in general and to my current ministries pastoring at Mt. Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church, teaching at Howard Thurman Divinity School, and organizing with CHANGE (a local IAF organizing group).
>
> **A Call to ministry**
>
> My parents raised me well. I was never mean to anybody. I was raised to look for the good.
>
> It is the classic story: 'Mom's a schoolteacher and Dad's a preacher.' I have a sister; both us became ministers. We were very comfortable in the skin of a pastor's home, being in a pastor's family. We saw the good our Dad did. We saw good models of dedicated ministry and teaching, people who believed they were essential cogs in making a difference in the lives of others. That largely shaped who we are.
>
> As a teenager, I already was, as we say in the Baptist church, 'wrestling with surrendering my life to ministry.' Dad would always say, 'Now was not the time; you have to wait on this.' But when I got to college, he couldn't tell me 'no' anymore and so I did enter on that path in my first year in college. Over time, I started to believe I probably was going to be in teaching rather than pastoring. I wasn't sure I had the constitution he had to work 70 hours a week. I also had a certain kind of scholarly interest that I didn't think I could deny.
>
> We could spend all day here if you get me started on the Bible. This was my upbringing; my whole life was a shaping to read the Bible.
>
> We were Southern Baptist. Now I am 'formerly Southern Baptist,' formerly in — as far away as you can get from that. When I got to seminary, I was one of the bright lights, the shining star of seminary. It was all paid for in those days. But all the schools were still competing to get me in. I worked for the President at West Coast Baptist seminary where I attended. He was one of the golden boys of the SBC [Southern Baptist Convention]. Eden, my wife, and I figured we would teach overseas and were in our conversations with the Foreign Mission Board. By the time we got to our doctoral work, things had really started to turn over in the SBC. I had spent a couple years in the middle of the fight, working with the Christian Life Commission. But it was starting to be the beginning of the end. Our next-door neighbors, classic dedicated-to-ministry people, got denied by the Foreign Mission Board because the church they were serving had ordained a woman. I had been an advocate for women in ministry. It had been central to all that I had done so far.

So, I just knew, all of those litmus tests they had, I would have failed them all. That is when we realized that it, our life, was going to be something different. It was not going to be what we thought. All my institutional friends — the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and the Christian Life Commission, have always been sort of disappointed in me for studying where I did for my doctorate instead of a Baptist school.

Occasionally I feel it, when I'm around these guys from before, I'm the last person on anybody's mind. I'm sort of de-centered. I don't have a place that is my place. On my last trip home to the southwest, my former colleagues in the Baptist Peace Fellowship wanted me to meet with a potential donor in Texas. Lo and behold — guess what happened? One third or more of the meeting was me and this person talking about all the people we knew. And these two co-directors were just sitting there amazed, thinking, 'Golly what a genius idea it was to bring Micah.' So, you know, the remnant of that other life is still there. It's just not really in reach any more. Everybody in Texas knows me; they just don't have any plans for me anymore.

Learning to read

Another version of my story, my journey to my present life at Mt. Shiloh, Thurman, and CHANGE is a story of real hermeneutical change. I've written a version of it in the past in an essay called 'Learning to Read.' It involves reading, learning to read the Bible in the same pew with others. You come to one of those moments when it hits you right in the head, 'Of course I thought about it that way because I'm white and middle class and that is not necessarily what the text is about!' Think about Jesus' story of the unfortunate widow (Luke 18:1-8). The real issue is the flawed character of the judge. From my privileged, white upbringing, it always seemed to me that this judge is an anomaly — because judges are public servants and they're always looking out for our good. But hearing that story at Mt. Shiloh with someone on the same pew with a child in prison is radically different. You are in a different part of the world. If Jesus had told that story in Mt. Shiloh, they would have said, 'That is the way judges are. They don't care about much. They don't fear God or anything.' I have experienced a real awakening about social location and positioning. Here's is how that shift happened…

I was trained by my parents that people were good. My mom wouldn't ever let us say certain words. She was an English teacher. It was a long time before I realized that 'ain't' wasn't as bad as saying 'damn.' And I knew I couldn't say the 'n-word'. I wasn't allowed to treat people bad.

I remember my grandma watching Sammie Davis on TV. You know how they do those variety shows where everybody kisses each other? Grandma would say, 'Did that Black man just kiss that White woman? Right in front of everybody!' That was my heritage. But we also knew when Grandma said that, it was a bad thing that she said. We didn't think she was a bad person. But that was a bad thing that Grandma said.

This part of my story relates to my virtue and my weakness. When I was in the third grade, I was living in Carlyle, a White flight suburb in the Southwest. There was a railroad track, and it's like what they say, 'If you're Black you live on ''that other side.''

Well, at the beginning of the school year, they brought a young Black boy to sit next to me and they introduced us. I didn't get it. I knew they wanted me to be nice to him and I would do that. I played with him a little bit at recess and then I ran off and did something else. I'm sure he got treated really badly. In a few days, he didn't come back. A few years ago, I asked my Dad, 'Did they talk to y'all about that because they knew you were the pastor of the biggest church in town and you weren't preaching race hate? Did they talk to you and say 'we want to put your son in connection with this boy?'' He and Mom said, 'We had no idea. We didn't know that happened.' I don't what it means. I guess the teachers saw something in me that said I wouldn't be ugly to him.

Regarding my Dad, in the 60s, African Americans were just showing up in White churches, just to see what would happen. Sometimes trying to join. Sometimes just trying to get in the door. That had been happening and the deacons were worried. So they called a meeting and said, 'Brother Turner, we need to know what are you going to do if these 'you know whats' show up and try to come in our church'?' I guess at that point he was in his 30s. It was the 2nd largest church in a large southern city. He said, 'I told them, 'I only know one thing to do. If somebody wants to come to church, we welcome them in. If Black people come to church, we seat them —anywhere they want to sit. And if they want to join our church, we'll receive them the same way we would receive anyone else.'' These deacons, who were also ushers, were waiting to hear that. They said, 'Alright preacher, I tell you what, if they show up, we'll walk them right in and sit them in the front row and we'll turn around and go out the front door and you'll never see us again.' That never got put to the test. But he got put to the test. I didn't know that story until probably five years ago.

Those are the times when folks who never were public activists of any sort, like my Dad, face a test. And they at least passed it. My parents obviously made an impact on me. But I don't remember them ever getting all serious with me about race equality.

But there was a real puzzle for me as a teenager and a young man. It seemed to me that what I was being taught from the pulpit and the Scriptures was to follow Jesus was a kind of living in the world in a distinct way. Yet, so much of church culture, it seemed, was about being a respectable part of the society. And so, in that sense, it wasn't clear to me that there was anything that was different about being a Christian from being a good American. But that didn't settle with me because there were too many texts telling me to expect to be persecuted. Nobody persecuted me because I was the best little kid in the school. I was President of the class, an All-state singer, an athlete. I did everything that people would admire. They would tell us in evangelism training, if somebody closes the door when you're doing door-to-door, that's persecution. But still that didn't ring true to me. When I was a teen, I was really trying to figure out — just what is it that is different about you if you're a Christian. The only answer my church could give me was that, if you are a Christian, you smile a lot. I could see through that as a teenager; it sure seemed empty. Who's going to persecute you for smiling? Even then, I think that really set my theological agenda. It drove me. I've used that to explain for decades why I studied Christian ethics.

I was always very interested in sort of liberation ideas. When I was in college, it was about women in ministry and I was championing that cause in seminary as well. I was still fairly blind to racial issues and feeling like that issue was already done. It didn't become clear to me that it was on hiatus. It took quite a while.

But when I was in seminary, I did observe what was happening in Central America in the struggle between the two great superpowers over these tiny little countries and how in this struggle, US power and wealth and weapons were being used in genocidal warfare against the native peoples. Then the Reagan State Department put out a white paper against liberation theology. The puzzle that began to arise for me theologically was how is it that people who claim to follow Jesus moved into other places in the world — with this result? Why wasn't the result very different?

Leaving our church

We moved for my doctoral studies to an elite school in the Southeast of the U.S and we started attending a small local Baptist church. I don't want to berate them. But that was very difficult. We went to this church because we were looking at an integrated church that wanted to be more integrated, and to some extent it was true. But we didn't understand the deeper politics. That's one my virtues and shortcomings. I see good. When I see good, I'm often to blind to what else is going on. And so, we were there a decade and it was eight or nine years before I realized the actual politics of the organization. I ultimately became the chair of a racial conflict resolution committee. I tried to get in the middle of it. I thought if I could get in the middle of it, I could fix it. But it was a lot bigger than me.

Probably the beginning of the end for us was in a meeting when we were discussing these surveys we did with the congregation. That day, this older man, a deacon, a father, a man I admired and loved for his Christian faith and discipleship said, 'What would be wrong with being an all-White church. We have to be with them at work and schools. Why can't church be a place where we can be on our own?' That is when I realized how deep it went. We had an African American woman on that committee and after that day she was never able to come back to church because she admired him also. She had no idea that somewhere in his consciousness, in the consciousness of a generation, there was this kind of thinking.

I didn't really have the tools or a framework to work with at that point to resolve those issues and my own struggle at that church. It was pretty nigh impossible for me to try to identify White privilege, Whiteness, and how they function. At that time, I just had the blunt tool of — you know — claiming racism. I didn't know about this subterranean level where, although you've swept away many of the outwards symptoms of racism, the core logic remains and is embedded in how we read our confessions.

At the same time, some of my teachers failed by continuing to say that the story of the Black church is *their* story because that thinking continues to operate in a normativity of Whiteness which says that 'whatever their story is' and 'whatever that past was that brought it about is somehow not my past.' In the moment that I'm in now, it's a moment

which requires acknowledging Whiteness as a particular point of view in the church and in theology and it requires crossing over that chasm or that river, or whatever you want to call it, to make friends with people who you don't know. As Professor Davis (a black theologian at the school) would put it, 'that we would develop a desire for intimacy with people who aren't presented as our people.'

But then, I just didn't have a clear framework of how to think about the racial problem. But I was beginning to learn from Professor Davis and the other Black Church Studies faculty at school. I was privileged to talk to John Perkins [the famed pastor, civil rights advocate, and founder of the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA)]. He told me that he worked with all these White churches in the South. They recite the creeds every Sunday and they have all their good doctrine. They're saying all these right words, but, somehow, they can't see that these words should be telling them to live a very different way and think a very different way about the world they're in. He said, 'There is something in between those words, in between those lines, that's really controlling the theology.' That, as much as anything, pushed me into this pursuit of trying to understand Whiteness as a theological frame.

So, it became no longer a time when 'it's not my story' could be a final answer for me. It is my story too, because it was my ancestors who were fighting for the confederacy somewhere and there were probably some who had slaves. There are certainly a lot of Black 'Turners' around and so in that way, it is my story. We have to do this as intellectual. I'm in the position often at Thurman Divinity, that there's a conversation going on, a conversation that's fully informed by experiences other than mine. But I have to be ready to step into it anyway — to reweave the artificially separated stories. So many local structures and so much of social existence resulted from the severing of historical truths. You know this. One of the key features of Whiteness is forgetfulness. It is to forget who we are. That is what liberalism is — forgetting. At the heart of Black resistance, of Black theology, of liberation theology, is to say, 'We can't forget. We've got to remember.' And that is a very Christian thing to say.

For me, it is critical to understand that there is not really any part of their story that is not also mine. I guess if you're going to talk about identity, that is where I want to locate it. Coming together and combining these stories is what constitutes who I ought to be.

Mt. Shiloh and a journey to "Blackness"

Ultimately, the connection to Mt. Shiloh was Professor Davis. During all this struggle at that Baptist church, Dr. Davis' oldest daughter and my youngest daughter were in dance class together as three year olds at a local Arts Center. So on Saturday mornings, we were drinking coffee while our little girls were dancing. And he would get an earful about what I was going through. Little did I know how much it was affecting him; I thought he was just counseling me. Eventually he said, 'If y'all are not going to be there, maybe you should come over to Mt. Shiloh. John Perkins had influenced me that I really needed to be in a church in my neighborhood. We had already visited churches in our neighborhood, but they tended to be churches without a person of my education. I'm not

trying to judge that by a class comment. I was looking from power relations — the white PhD comes into to the high school educated church.

My understanding of what I had to do was to relinquish power and authority to go into a Black church. I had to go in as a person who was learning rather than a person who knew. I didn't want to do that in a White church. I didn't want to go to the back row and be the observer, but I understood theologically and politically the role I should take if I went into a Black church. I also needed to go in as the person who needed to learn again what it means to be a Christian and that was not going to workable in a small church as 'Mr. Theology PhD.' Maybe that was a failure in my part to imagine it. But what I saw at Mt. Shiloh was a bunch of PhD's in a Black church. Nobody was going to be impressed that I had a PhD. I'm just one more. So, that political aspect was gone.

A weird thing happened later: I kept meeting students from seminary who kept saying 'I've wanted to meet you' and I had no idea why. Finally, Dr. Davis told me what I didn't know. He said, 'Do you know I how I end my course [on Race, Christian identity, and the Church]? The last day is all about you. I tell them your story. I tell them that I don't know anyone who is trying to be a Christian more that this person.' I had no idea the impact my crying stories had on him. I thought he was just trying to help me out. But in the meantime, he was shaping his theology in certain ways. I think an important part was how I was raised and who I became was my openness to be his friend. That is at the core of his theology, the desire for intimacy that White people don't have with other races. That is the heart of the heresy of Whiteness, that there is nothing to be gained by knowing Black people. Theology, to know God, is to know that God created humanity. If you could say this anthropomorphically about God, God longs for intimacy with us. To the extent we are formed to be like God, then that's what we long for with one another. I not trying to say that Dr. Davis invented that theology because I talked with him. I am trying to say that he saw something in me that he hadn't always seen in others I guess. I'm not saying that to brag.

I'll you tell you another story. I'm still trying to figure out how to tell it. I hope it isn't self-indulgent. I don't think it's a story that makes me a hero. This is what I've tried to say when I've testified particularly with Black folks. They want to know my story. It tells them that I'm somebody different from what they have known. And it's important for me to get that across at some point in my teaching at Thurman Divinity — to say that whatever you've faced with White people, I'm doing my dead level best not to be that. There's an extent that over time I've figured out how I can say 'we' when I'm with black people. Years ago, I was at an academic meeting. I was sitting in a conference room and the thought that flashed through my head was — 'I'm the only Black person here.' Now I know that's ludicrous and it's also very presumptuous. But it also began to indicate to me that there was a change happening to me that was pretty deep. Interpreting it, I think it meant that I identify with the Black church. My context of academic work is among African Americans and I was surrounded with folks for whom that was still foreign.

There is a very, what is the right word for it, public and obvious process by which a change in who I am is occurring. Students are observing it. And I'm observing it. Over

time I figure out how not to be too presumptuous about it. I haven't become Black. To my students I say, 'I don't understand your whole life and history. I don't have all the same experiences. When I sing 'Stony the road we trod' I understand which side of the chastening rod I'm on. And I also understand there's some extent to which I could be on either side.'

I talk to my students often about this. I'm fairly open. At some point in teaching, I would bring it up saying, 'I had this thought…' trying to get a reaction out of them. I'm sure some of them thought 'that White man is crazy.' Some may have been insulted. But they also try to help me feel it out. Because they would tease me over time as I learned to preach again, being at Mt. Shiloh. They would tease me and say, 'Are you sure that you're not part Black?' And when they heard me preach they would say, 'Dr. Turner, are you going to hoop? I thought you were about to hoop.' (Do you know that word? Sometimes the preacher in the Black Church develops certain gestures or certain body movements, perhaps on their face, a certain pattern of shaking their heads. Often a hoop will almost change the subject of the sermon. A sermon that's going a certain way, but then the preacher may go into a hoop into which he links it to the passion story. But the point is it's a move toward a more ecstatic finish to the sermon.)

I'm so appreciative for Dr. Davis, Bishop Laney [the pastor of Mt. Shiloh], and other Black theologians for engaging me as a colleague and being appreciative of the thoughts I had saying, 'We need to work on this.' So, my identity and vocation resulted from people who were willing to not to draw a line of territory, to recognize that I was in their … well actually that their territory was my territory.

Growing moments

There were many points in my history that gave rise to this identity and sense of social position — key points in my trying to work out my understanding of the heritage of the African American Civil Rights Movement and African American thought. It often took somebody to finally ask me a hard question, to realize how a lot of what I was, whatever I was doing, was always entangled with white guilt issues.

My first day in class at Thurman University, as the most junior member of the religion department, I had an older undergraduate in his early 30s ask me an obvious question. I was teaching with the syllabus I had been given including the textbooks I had been assigned. One text was a standard philosophical ethics intro and another was a readings book from the Western tradition. This student asked me, 'Why are we starting with Socrates? Wasn't there anything in Africa before him?' Of course, the larger question was 'why is this course organized around Europe?' And I had the good sense to say, 'I think you're right. Let me work on this. I'll get some readings.' And so, I started a new education. I looked back at my doctoral studies and realized that there hadn't been any Africans. As much as we actually did talk about race with a lot of seriousness there, it clearly hadn't played any role in my research. Although I had learned a lot that was relevant to understanding race in my study, it had been because of my fellow students, not because of anything in the curriculum or what some professors had done. And so, I started a kind of a self-education, reading Cornell West, bell hooks James Cone, and

Malcolm X. By the second year, I had presented a redesign for the course. I had included a textbook *Liberating Visions* by Franklin, a prominent African American theologian, that takes Booker T. Washington, WEB DuBois, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and interprets them through an Aristotelian framework. What were the virtues that they promoted? What was their understanding of the human person? What was their idea of a good society? I found a way to recreate the course using that book along with the other books. Figuring out how to be a good teacher for 18 year old African Americans who, for the most part, hadn't been very successful in school did not come naturally for me.

Another key moment came from the questioning of a very kind friend who was the chaplain, the Dean of the Chapel at Thurman. We held a weekly meeting for everyone who was in Ethics 100, about 200 or 250 students. I was in charge the meeting. I would show films and have different faculty members make presentations on some of their better topics so that everyone got a taste of all the faculty. One of the presentations I had been doing this with my class was about a comparison of MLK and Malcolm X. I'm a pacifist, so I was always would try to be persuasive toward non-violence. In my limited study of Malcolm X, I observed there was a lot of talking about 'by any means necessary' or 'if not the ballot, then the bullet.' But I hadn't found any case in which he had incited or led any violent action. I was making the argument that neither Malcolm X nor King, in all their resistance to society, neither one had ever advocated in an active way taking up violence. From my point of view, I saw that as a larger strategy of encouraging the philosophy of non-violence and pacifism. The chaplain did what was a good mentor does in the Black church. He just asked me a leading question. After the classroom had cleared out, he asked, 'I just wonder, Micah, how you think that comes across to a room full of Black students, hearing it from a White person?' Of course! I didn't want to believe that I could be that blind, but the fact that I still remember this in great detail shows you that it was a very important moment.

They had hired me to teach undergrads. I became fulltime and I taught undergrads for six and half years. I taught the same course 50-something times! Then the position in theology became open and I had caught the eye of the Interim Dean. In my teaching of graduate divinity students, another key moment occurred. I had been showing the film 'The Gods Must Be Crazy' as a challenge to colonialism. I guess I did see the ways it was a repristination of colonialism. Finally, some African students said you couldn't show this. I got very defensive and said, 'Wait a minute, this depicts these people very honorably, blah blah blah.' I was very resistant to the criticism. I showed it one more time and then I called in an African student from the class. I said, 'So tell me about that film.' And he wouldn't say anything. And I realized that I didn't get it. And so, yeah, there are these clear moments where I had to face up to my formation in a White supremacist mode and in my incapacity to see how to see that worked out in various forms of rhetoric and the power that I exercised as a professor. Those were good challenges to my formation and opened the door to find better ways.

A Story of loss, invitation, and acceptance

There is still another way of telling my story, as a story of loss. I was one of the bright young stars of the moderate Baptist movement. I'd been positioned all along. People knew who I was. People expected a lot of me. I'd had every opportunity to be in places of influence. I stepped out of all that and that world has gone on without me. Sometimes I wonder where my life would be if I had hung out with the people who had been planning to elevate me.

I was pretty nervous about coming to Mt. Shiloh and eventually going on staff as an Associate Minister. I mean, how do you make friends with people, you've never lived around and with good reasons to be suspicious of you. We had been invited, so some of that was diminished. There were folks at Mount Level who were very suspicious of us and we couldn't warm up to. I remember talking with somebody who was close to us at Mount Level about another family. They had some kids that were roughly my son's age and so every time I tried to talk to this woman, it was just 'yes' and 'no' and there really wasn't any conversation. This person said, 'Yeah, they had some bad experiences with White people and they don't trust easily and teach their kids that.' Over time, we became very good friends. But, yeah, there was plenty of reason to wonder how that would be.

It was hardest for my son probably. He was just coming to middle school and leaving his lifetime friends at the other Baptist church. They couldn't understand why he had left. He understood, but he probably didn't like it. If you observe kids in middle school, they divide racially, because they have these identity issues they're starting to develop. So what used to be kind of a jumble in elementary school becomes segregated. That carried over to church.

What pretty well took care of most of that fear was that I went to Sunday School in their adult men's class. All the men were older that I was. Being in their late 40's or even into their 70's. A number of them were deacons. Others who weren't have become deacons. They were all the main families of the church. Mt. Shiloh's heritage is that of a family church. That's who was in this class. They were the backbone of the congregation, people of deep faith, and I was just a broken person. Most anything we'd study would lead to me crying. They were willing to listen to me talk. Sometimes I'd talk about some stuff I'd been through. When I pontificated as a theologian, if they didn't think I was right, they would question it. But mostly they just cared about me in my deep sadness. That was probably the most important thing in helping me to not be afraid. The people I first opened my life to were very caring and willing to listen. I'm sure they had opinions about stuff that I ought to think differently about and occasionally they told me those things. But it was never as if I was an outsider. Once they'd embraced me, I was somebody they needed to nurture.

I've been there 20 years and I'm a part of them. But there's another side of it because I'm not that gregarious and because I really don't know the life that most people in that church have had. My life has been so different, that I don't know, I don't know if I'll ever quite get there. Here's an interesting conversation with one of our associate ministers recently at a graduation party. We had already gotten food and we were talking

about this and that and then they opened up the dance floor playing these songs that go back into the 60s and 70s. He starts laughing. He said, 'This right here. This is the liturgy of the Black church social event, of going to a black party. If you grew up here, you know all this and you expect it.' That was a very interesting conversation. I grew up in a non-dancing church. They wouldn't have a dance at the church probably, not an official one. We didn't dance on the side either. This just makes me realize that there's just so much more to becoming a part of a group than even just being together and around people on a regular basis. When Prince died, everyone was posting all this stuff on Facebook. I made myself listen to 'Purple Rain' once. But I don't know if I would recognize anything else that Prince had done. I'll never arrive, given the pace I'm going, of understanding that liturgy at all.

Organizing for Justice

Change

There's an analogy from the party to my work leading in organizing. At Mt. Shiloh, I don't really understand the lives of the adults of my age, older and younger. I don't understand the lives they've had in the depth that they understand of one another. It is interesting and complex to be a White leader in a Black church.

Regarding organizing, there are parts of organizing that are not very natural for me. I'm not gregarious. I'm much more to myself and I can go for a few days and realize I didn't call anybody up. I was attracted to organizing because I believe in its philosophy. I believe in the power and the capacity people have to make change. I believe in the power of symbolic actions, the confrontation of public servants, and attempts to win people who were previously not working together to work together. I believe in all of that so that's what initially drew me to organizing. It seemed to me, through the early years of my training, that I would never be very good at it because I just didn't have the same level of social impulse, desire, and the ability to work with the kind of energy that some of the best people I saw were doing.

At the same time, I was developing a lot of good skills. I seem to have a really good insight into the power analysis part of an organizing action. If I can get all the pieces in front of me, I can see, 'Oh here's the pressure point and here's angles to take and here's where we can draw someone to our side.' I think Gerald Taylor [a renowned, now retired, organizer in the Southeast for IAF] really saw that gift in me and encouraged it. I was also able to lead and run a meeting and make sure we were heading in the right direction. I also get frustrated by the bullshit, and I would interject a pointed question to make people to either give us an answer or show that all they were going to do is bullshit. In the national usury campaign [an IAF action entitled '10% is Enough' targeting banking practices including wrapping subprime loans to communities of color, excessive finance rates on credit cards, and payday loans] I, along with others, was clearly able to offer a theological understanding related to biblical justice and current injustices. All that helped me gain some confidence.

At present, I'm trying to do some effective power analysis in the clergy caucus of CHANGE to help us develop more shared leadership. I have also tried to engage prima donna leaders and encourage them to embrace our team philosophy of organizing.

Moral Mondays

The Dean of our divinity school has called on me to help the students and the other faculty realize the significance of Moral Monday Movement and to encourage involvement among our students especially. I will speak in Chapel and interpret the movement theologically. I recently spoke on a 'Liturgy for a Moral March.'

My leadership in Moral Mondays has been accidental. I want to participate, but I'm not tight with anybody locally who would keep me in it and so it's mostly through friendship with a few leaders.

I was able to participate in the discussions with Attorney General Cooper about the Jonathan Ferrell case. That's the case where a young man, a recent college graduate, had an accident in Charlotte and was injured. He went to the door of the nearest house and an older white woman was frightened by his presence and called 911. She gave the impression that he was trying to do something criminal. When the officers arrived, he ran toward them and they shot and killed him. I was present for that meeting and made some comments. I didn't contribute anything original. I just listened well and took notes and then wrote it up. Then after it was all over, I blogged about it. So again, this is one of the things I'm good at. I thought through everything that had been said, organized it, and summarized it within a larger blog post. They went nuts, because they're not used to that! The person who's an organized thinker in their group is Rev. Barber and maybe some of the others are, but they were not used to seeing a summary of their thinking. There was this back and forth and I received lots of nice emails from people I didn't really know.

I'm trying to link the three groups, CHANGE, Moral Mondays, and the CCDA. But, there's three very different strategies of organizing with them. What Moral Mondays are doing, I would say they represent what sometimes organizing criticizes as mobilization. It's not the full caricature of mobilization. But it is close at times.

You know the full caricature of mobilization? — there's an issue in the city with the bus transportation system. The City Council has received from the City Manager a proposal about changing the bus routes. So, all the bus drivers and a whole bunch of people who depend on the buses come and flood the City Council Meeting. You can't even fit them all in the room. They all sign up to speak. It's mobilizing because they're mad. They show up one time and you can never get that group together again.

There is an aspect of Moral Monday that is mobilizing. It has a greater continuity than that story. Yet it has a thin layer of leaders and a few followers so its penetration into congregations is pretty hit and miss. But it does keep in wide public vision, a theological frame on some major systemic issues for states and cities. I think of it as a primarily a

kind of advocacy work, but advocacy with a rich theological frame that can be very useful for churches if they were drawn into it.

In the meetings I've attended, I see a fairly rich set of relationships where people know one another and feel accountable to one another. They're doing good power analysis at least in their local work. I haven't been in on the statewide stuff much. But my impression of it is that you've got this bigger than life figure surrounded by other people who do what's expected of them but aren't as near as talented. You do have some very strong localized leaders. But then you have some others; they're good at standing behind the speaker. I'm not sure they're doing any local organizing. It's more of a patronage system. Tributaries or whatever. And I think they may have people who are in charge of organizing or whatever. But if that's their job, I don't see it happening.

Rev. Barber and I have met each other on numerous times. He recognizes who I am. But as a whole, the people in the organization, *I meet them new every time* because what really matters to them is their connection is to Barber, not to growing the Movement. They've liked what I've contributed, but they're not really trying to grow the movement to pull me in. I understand you need to earn it. I don't mean that. I haven't really earned it. I mean, I've made a couple of good contributions. I'm happy for those. I don't think I have the energy to do as many things that they do. I don't want to show up every time Rev. Barber needs to walk across the room. But, in a way, it's more like an entourage than a leadership cohort. I mean, their primary leaders now ought to know me. Eventually they figure out, again, who I am. You know, it's not like I'm not notable in my appearance (winks and chuckles). It's not that. It's not that I just blend in.

I don't want resent; I don't want to say I'm resentful. They're not organized to do work that I'm more comfortable with and I don't have the same desires as most people. But, like anyone, I do want to be in the 'in group,' right? On the other side, I have this internal resistance to ingratiating myself to an entourage and I'm not trying to be ugly about it. I'm just saying that I don't push my way in on Moral Mondays and partly because I just don't want to be in it. We ministers always want to be helpful and want people to need us. So you're often doubting yourself. You're thinking, 'Am I … Is this just my desire for people to know my name?' It's always there. On the other hand, if there are Black leaders who can't remember this White man's name, that's part of my penance.

We cannot and will not do that kind of work in CHANGE. We're not going to be that group that is just out there making public speeches all the time. We're not going to make the speech until it's time, when we think we're going to turn something. We put the bait out there or when we have them on the hook. Sometimes we might come out and make a public statement in order to get the conversation going. The point is that all of those actions are very strategic actions, actions to get a reaction. Whereas, this thing [the 'FT'MM] – I'm not sure the reaction they want is. Sometimes the reaction is we'll get some people arrested so these people will be shown to be abusers of power. Ok, we've made that point. Is there any way you can do to get them to change what they're doing? And I'd say the NAACP does most of its work in the frame of the courts and their work

in the courts is good. On the other hand, we might wonder why they keep doing what they do because it's not clear that it's anything but a 'clanging cymbal.' Except that sometimes what you need to do is tell the gospel. Put it out there, even if with 'eyes they don't see and ears they don't hear' it, you still say it!

I understand all that but that's not what we want to do with organizing. It's definitely not what you want to do in community development where you want to identify what's crucial and possible. Then you want to do something about it; you want to see the change. I don't mean that they don't want to see the change, but the strategy of how to get there is not real clear beyond continuing to ring the bell.

When I try to think about what the Moral Movement does, as much as anything, it's an attempt to sway public opinion and to try to move that line of opinion more and more across that 50/50 line. But if it was more like organizing, then we'd be paying attention to how these people got elected, how Pope and the Koch Brothers identified these isolated legislative districts where they could spend a couple of hundred thousand dollars and win elections. So, they figured out a way to win a whole bunch of these remote districts through doing statistical analysis.

What Gerald Taylor wants to do now is to organize in certain counties where they realize they could actually be winning these elections. His idea is not so different from Moral Mondays in that they see these power-related groups — labor unions and churches — who would be interested in changing state-wide legislated politics. Yet, they're not going to do it through a bunch of public speeches and getting arrested in the legislature; they're going to do the math on where you can get control on the legislature. The Moral Movement seems to consistently target the Speaker, the Governor, and the Senate Pro Tem, who are obviously the ones who could allow a bill to make it to the floor. But so far, that hammer hasn't driven in any nails. It is doing this important work of moving public opinion. I think it's doing it well. But it's not actually doing the nuts and bolts of winning elections. They don't really know how to do that, I gather.

These are very different strategies. Gerald just invited me over to his house because he wants to talk to me about this elections project. I don't know if it will really take off. While there, I said something about attending The Moral Monday Repairers of the Breach training. And you know, you know, he gave — he wasn't particularly rude — but he gave the kind of response I expect of IAF organizers as well: 'Well that's something that's going on, but not like it's going to make a difference.

Hope for the church

Making a difference is the work of the church, it's the revival we work for. The NAACP is struggling with getting beyond this patronage thing, trying to avoid people who just want to be somebody and then creating a cadre of workers instead of selling memberships. As far as my work and research, I'm constantly working to frame the significance of Whiteness for various aspects of theology in church practice. And so, within a larger critique of race and imperialism and colonialism, the angel I'm I keep trying to press myself into is to understand the dynamics of the claiming of this unique

and supreme position in the world by the church and how this claim has led theology to be distorted and abusive of its true purpose.

The initial response I saw in White churches of my own heritage toward race as they began to reject fixed doctrines of race, they would talk about the doctrine of creation and in particular the doctrine of humanity and creation. They would note that God has made all nations and they would say we have failed in our ethic to live up to this understanding of all people as God's children. In the late 60's, churches one after another began to say, 'Ok, well yeah, we understand, we White churches, we understand we shouldn't exclude Blacks, so our doors are open now. And then two decades later, they're saying, 'Well why didn't they come?' This is because they are still operating within a White frame of normativity. The book I'm writing to challenge the normative gaze of the White church is titled *No More Jim Crow Church.*

I'm concerned about the identity of the church. This is the critical thing that I think I learned from CCDA, before getting into organizing, is that we're trying to form a movement; we're trying to reform the church to recover a holistic identity as the work of God in the world. So many say, 'Well, we've got a few people in church who are interested in justice and so we'll do this on the side, even though our real purpose is saving souls or whatever we want to call it.' No! The work of justice is the real purpose and this is itself saving souls. That hope forms my view of what I want to be doing with churches and organizing. I don't want to organize people just because they are mad about a crime problem in their neighborhood. Now I may hook them that way. But I want them to realize that the crime problem matters, not just because it's making it hard for them to park at church or is making them afraid to go. It matters because all the people are the ones God has sent you to — the ones who are committing the crimes and the ones who are victimized are your brothers and sisters and they ought to be in your church.

CHAPTER SEVEN: BISHOP SUZAN ROBINSON
‘‘MULTIPLE WORLDS’ WAS MY NORMAL.”

Prologue

There are some people who command your attention without physical movement or raising their voices. Bishop Robinson is certainly one of those leaders. The pace of her speaking is measured. She tunes into in the person who is standing before as if that were the only person in her world. Her compassion for individuals or the world we live is constantly on display. Whether speaking to her one-on-one, working together in a planning group, or hearing her speaking publicly, I always feel like Bishop Robinson has planned for the context she is in and is working that plan comfortably. Remarkably, given the calm she exudes, she is very used to not fitting into social or professional contexts. As an identified, Black, “out lesbian” pastor she constantly works with people who do not share, and perhaps even oppose, her life experiences. In the face of opposition, she is graceful — and wise. She is a relentless promoter of younger leaders while often bringing a perspective from many years of justice work gently into the conversation.

I surely worked the hardest to get this interview. I was present with the Bishop on many FT“MM” events (well over a year) and worked closely with her on the planning group for the third anniversary Moral Monday kick-off and nationwide HB2 protest before I felt comfortable approaching her and asking to write her life story. She confirmed my caution with a thoughtful response to my request. She said, “I agreed because I think this is very important work.” There were many misfires in scheduling and lots of driving for these interviews, and I never regretted one second. We met each time at the offices of the Civil Rights and Justice Center, the non-

profit that she directs. The organization is housed in an aging office park in a part of her city that was once a bastion of the White middle and working class. Most of the plentiful apartment homes and businesses appear by architectural design to my eye as having been built in the 50s to the 70s. The only new construction appears to be fast food and chain restaurants on the heavily trafficked road in front the Center's office. Several drives through the community and waits in nearby fast food restaurants revealed that the community has diversified significantly.

(Note: In the case of this story, because the Bishop is narrating some historical events from a distant past, I have not changed the locations of Newark and Manhattan in her story.)

Bishop Robinson's Story

> I was born in Newark, a city in the Northeast in a predominantly African American and Puerto Rican community, also predominantly lower working class. There have been four pivotal points in my history that I think really help lay a solid foundation to my activism.
>
> **Four pivotal moments**
>
> The first was being predominantly raised with my mom as a single parent. She was actually married several times, but my constant was her and a lot of that time was as a single parent. I note that because I do believe that this frame helped me to see what is possible as a woman. As a young girl, I had models of very strong women in leadership roles. My mother was a textile designer working in Manhattan designing prints. She was in a field where there were not many people of color at all. So, besides Newark, there was this other Manhattan life that my mom had where she was one in a handful of black folk in the textile industry.
>
> It was a very interesting foundation. What was important about that upbringing was, right out of the gate, I was taught to judge people based on character. There was no distinction for me, particularly as a child, around what it meant to be a White person, a Black person, a Brown person, a Puerto Rican person, an immigrant, or a Native born. There weren't those distinctions in my home life. That was powerful for me because it also exposed me to multiple worlds very early on. Multiple worlds was my normal. My normal was dual, multiple identities at the same time. I was very comfortable with the very community oriented life we lived. I had lots of my friends in my neighborhood; I went to a neighborhood school. My mom had her Black friends; I was at home with that. But I was totally comfortable jumping on a train with my sisters and going into Manhattan to meet my mom to do something at Rockefeller Center or go to her workplace to see the studio she worked in and the like. It's interesting. While I lived in Newark, I never felt like Newark was my frame. My neighborhood wasn't my sole

frame. It was an unapologetic part of my frame. But my actual frame was much bigger than that.

It's interesting because it's only coming to mind now; I hadn't really thought about that fluid nature until you framed the question. It brought that up.

I had another very interesting moment with my grandmother when I was very young. My sister Selena and I were 11 months apart. When I was four and Selena was three, my grandmother made a determination that she was not ready to be called 'Grandma.' And mind you, I was born in 1958, so if you can imagine this, my grandmother was of an age when women were not really owning things. Many of her contemporaries were not owners of things. They definitely weren't doing international travel. But prior to my birth, she used to own a small kind of convenience store of sorts. Actually, she owned a couple of properties. And then when I came of age, she was actually working at the Picatinny Arsenal in New Jersey. This was part of a period when women had started working in support of the war. She was one of those women who would make ammunition at this particular arsenal.

She was a single woman; she and my grandfather had been divorced for many years and they never chose to marry again. She had a longstanding 'friend,' you know, that she had for years that the family was very accustomed to.

She didn't make a ton of money, but the thing that was powerful was what she did with the money that she made. She worked very methodically with the money she made feeling that it was important to leave something for my mother who was an only child. I have no sense as to where she got this, but she had a global view of living and life. So early on, my grandmother would do annual trips to different parts of the world. She would save all year for this one trip. My grandmother was an only child like my mother. She was like, 'I need to leave something behind for her,' which again was a very interesting and forward-thinking thought for a woman who for all virtual purposes was just slightly above the working poor.

That was to give you a little context for who she was as a woman. So, at four and three, she said to us, 'Girls, I want to have a conversation with you. I'm your grandmother, but that's not a term I'm comfortable with. So, you two can pick the name that you will call me. Go away, come up with a name, and then come back and talk with me about it.' This was a very adult-like conversation she was having with us. We were like (adopting a child's voice), 'We can just pick the name?' 'Cause a lot of our friends were like, 'This is my grandmother. This is my momma. This is my daddy' and now it was like, 'Pick the name.' So, we came back because we adore our grandmother and decided to pick names thinking about things we both loved. I loved potato chips and Selena loved pretzels. At four and three, we're thinking we have to give her a name that reflects the feeling we have for her. And we couldn't think of things we loved more than potato chips and pretzels. So, we came to her very seriously and said, 'We've got the names but we can't decide which one …' I wasn't big on pretzels and Sabrina wasn't big on potato chips. We gave her the two names. She didn't put the two names down. She said, 'Now

that's interesting. This is what I need y'all to do. I want you to come up with another name that's not part of a food group and you have to be in agreement of the name.' That was so masterful and brilliant. She sent a four and a three year-old away – 'You have to figure out how to build this bridge between your differences and come up with a name that works.' And what was powerful about this was that she didn't say, 'I'll just take whatever you'll give me.' Because it also had to work for her. It was this notion of how do we — I can give language for it today and say, how do we create a win-win for everybody in this situation where it may not be perfect for anyone, but at the end, we'll have something good. We went away. I have no sense of where we came up with it, but we came up with the name 'Donna.' We came back to her and we said, 'We've got it!' We said, 'Donna!' And she pondered for a second and she said, 'I like that. Donna it is.' And from that day forward we and everyone we knew called her Donna. It would freak people out on the street first of all. I was at an age in the community where you never call an adult by their first name until you got to be a certain age and, even then, you had to think about it. Because respect was so important to my mother and grandmother, we were clear that when we say 'Donna,' we mean 'grandmother.'

There's no link between Jennell, her name, and Donna and it amazed people. That was the name. It was Donna. The thing that moment presented was a sense of agency that I got very early on — that we had naming power, as a young child, as a young Black child, and as a young, female, Black child. It validated us in a way that really did matter to her. She could have come up with a name and given it to us. And she decided not to do that. She wanted a name that meant something to us. That someone would give me that kind of agency to name them, to rename them! That story happened 52 years ago and I still remember it like it was yesterday. It left such an imprint that I could have that kind of impact that literally would shift the way even the world looked at a person. And each time I've told the story, it impacts the world again and again and again and again in small and large ways.

I don't ever remember with her or my mother being overly political, but there were moments like that that showed their commitment to a way of thinking, a certain world view that was transformational. Their very presence queered spaces as Black women. I use that term broadly; their presence could queer the spaces they landed in because of how they landed in those spaces.

One of the other very profound moments touching on my activist life was when I was five or six. We're living in Newark and the Newark riots have broken out. This was in the 60s when riots were hitting the major cities. Then when I was ten; Martin Luther King died. After his assassination, all hell broke out in many places. When Newark was hit, it was a terrible, terrible riot. Lives were lost; fires were all over the place. The day he was assassinated, my mother kept us home from school. We were like, 'What is going on?' Mom is crying. We're hearing all this stuff on the news and people are just traumatized. I said, 'What is happening? Why are you crying?' And she sat us down and said, 'Well, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed and he was a very powerful man, one who stood for our community.' That wasn't a phrase she would use often, but she owned it then. That is something that affects you as a Black person. Because of what happened,

we honored that anniversary. She never sent us to school again on Martin Luther King's birthday, ever. Before it was a legal holiday, my mother kept us home and stayed home on the anniversary of King's birthday.

But another big thing happened when the riots ensued. We were in the house on the day of the riot. It was so bad and I remembered hearing gun shots 'cause the worst of it wasn't too far from where we were living. When it settled, she took us by our hands for a walk through our neighborhood. She walked us through the downtown area and we saw that it was like Beirut. We didn't recognize the neighborhood. There was broken glass and windows. Cars had been bombed and all of this kind of stuff. She slowly walked us past a store where we used to get our shoes and the place where we used to get ice cream cones. She just walked quietly with us and we were devastated. Because it looked like war, we were just like, 'What happened Mom?' She said, 'Some people were in a lot of pain because Dr. King was killed. Remember me talking about him? But what I want you to remember is it's ok to be angry. But you never tear your own stuff up — ever.' She said it looking deeply in our eyes, 'You don't ever tear your own stuff up. It's ok to be mad, but you don't tear your own stuff up. You find other ways.' In essence, I can give the language she would not have used. But the essence was 'it's ok to be political and it's ok to be radical.' Because she wasn't against what happened; what she was against was how they did it and the ways it impacted our community. I think there was a part of her that, had it been done in the White community, she might have actually lifted that up. My mother was angry and she was anti-violence. So, while she wouldn't have wanted it to happen anywhere, she really did not want it happening in the Black community. Because in her mind, how do you do that? We're already in desperate straits. You don't do that. You don't tear that up. That was big for me, seeing a neighborhood that I loved and grew up in destroyed literally.

That story is important to me because of the nature of the work I do; it often confronts my own community. It challenges my community. Two-thirds of my work is with people of color. So how do you do that work, move people and not destroy your community?

People say, 'As an 'out' lesbian, how do you keep winding up in these rooms with these Black preachers and how do you go with these conservative clergy and sit across with them? How are you doing that?' In essence, what they are really asking me is how do I do that with integrity. I do it with integrity because I was them in my own journey. I had my own struggles and my own issues around gender and orientation. So, what I have to do is give space to the thing I had to walk through myself. I get it. I can do the ride.

A last young framing moment — a really big moment — came when I went to college. I was a gifted student in high school, very interested in the world and in science. I had wanted to be a doctor from the time I was about four…so all things science…always …don't get me a doll, get me a chemistry set. What was I going to do with a doll? I was literally that kid. Literally. 'Oh my God, thank you so much.'

At home, some of my friends were just wanting to get through high school. My mother wasn't the person who sat down and did homework with you. She really was an artist.

But she knew two things. One, we'd always be respectful. And, two, we were going to college. She didn't care where we'd go. But this was also very fascinating: we had to go away to college. She did art college at home and she always had desire to go away for school. It was a thing for her, for us to not go to school at home. She wanted us to have a campus experience; she was very intentional about that. I didn't consider anything but Ivy League schools. I graduated very high in my graduating class. When it was time to pick a school, right after I filled in all my applications, I ran into my 5th grade English teacher. She asked me where I had applied. She said, 'Have you ever considered Southeastern University, an elite university in the South?' I said, 'Where is that?' I had never heard of it. If you're from northern Jersey, that's not a name that just pops up. She said, 'My niece just applied there and I really think it would be a good school for you to consider.' Because of who she was in my life, I put my application in — and got accepted. So it came down to 2 schools: an Ivy League school or Southeastern. And I didn't like cold weather! That's literally is what did it. I didn't want to be in the cold.

That experience at Southeastern was the worst and best of my life. It framed me; it set a frame for me and I am still impacted by it today. It took me 20 years to step foot back on campus after I graduated.

I came in pre-med. After you finish your first semester, you have a freshman consult, a meeting with a freshman advisor who takes a look at how you're doing and supports your next steps. In my high school, if you had an A average, you were exempt from final exams. Well, I got primarily straight A's so I had very few finals to take. When I got to college, I didn't know how to take a cumulative exam. They weren't prepping us for rigorous environments like Southeastern and I was about to go to school with peers who had primarily been to private schools or boarding schools.

Now my freshman year, I flunked all but one class — all but one class! If you can imagine, this is the first time I'm away from home. I'm in the South for the first time. I'm on a campus, where at that time, it was only 2% people of color - not just Black, but any color other than White. There were only 2% of us! The only real Black adults I saw were maids or cooks or people cleaning up the grounds. I went into that consult so excited to get in here because I was drowning and I had never failed before. This was real trauma for me —'Oh my God. I'm failing. What is happening here? This has never happened.' At Southeastern all of our professors are leaders in their fields. The gift of that is you get very cutting edge knowledge. The downside of that is you get research leaders who have to work with silly freshmen, right? It was not a nurturing environment. There had not been real thought put into how to support kids who were coming in and needing transitional support.

So, I finished the first semester and clearly I'm having major problems and I am distraught. The gift of the freshman advisor is someone supposed to help you in these moments. They know the environment is tough. When I get into her office, I sit down across from this White woman, of course. She says to me,
'Well Suzan, I can see that you're really struggling. This is pretty rough here.'
'Yeah I know. I really want to get a sense of what I need to do.' I was working as

hard as I knew how to work, but you only know what you know. What can I do to make this better?'
'Well, let me just say, when I was looking at your file, what I can see is that you were an exceptional student at home. You had lots of interests and you excelled in everything you did. So, what I was just thinking — have you considered another school maybe like a Howard University. You could be an A student again.'

Yes, she did! Yes, she did! (said with a smirk and a shout)

For me, it wasn't about Howard; it was about that she didn't think I could do it there. And I was doubly offended. Why not say another school? Why would you just tell me about a historically Black college. There was no discussion about how to help me through where I was. I had enough in me to know … and I'm 18 years old … I'm not going to give her the satisfaction of seeing me cry, even though inside I was wailing. I held it together enough to say,
'Well I want to figure out how to make this work.'
'You didn't fail your history. You did pretty decently with that one.'
I think in English I may have gotten a D or a C-, something like that. So, in English and History, I survived. She said,
'You know there is the option of switching majors. If you find this major to be too aggressive for you, you can think about other things that interest you.'
Then she started acting like a counselor:
'Tell me what you liked about the History. What worked for that? What didn't?'

We had that conversation. I left owning that it was not impossible. Somewhere in my 18–19 year old head I felt it was possible. I made it out of her office. I got to the other side of the door and I rushed back to my dorm room and fell apart. I don't even have words to describe what it felt like for me in that moment. I called home and talked with my mom.
'Ma, I said, it's impossible.' John Kennedy Jr. was one of my classmates. 'Mom, they're all so smart. There's no way. And I'm not prepared for this. Oh my God!'
She listened to me and let me cry it all out. Then she said these powerful words:
'Suzan, I want you to know. If you decide to come home,' (I was saying that I wanted to just stop now and come home because I couldn't do it.) 'If you decide to come home, I want you to know, I am so proud of you because I know you gave it your all and you did your best. If you come home, I'm proud. I also want to say that I know you can succeed there. If you decide to stay, I know you can make it.'

She offered those little points of wisdom because she knew she couldn't hold my hand through this experience. If I was going to make it, it would have to come from some place inside of me that felt I could do it. It was really something that she said that it was ok to come home and she'd still be proud of me. I had never failed. I didn't know what that conversation with my mother would be like. That changed everything. What she gave me was a safety net that I did not have, that was not given at Southeastern. I owned a couple of things: One, if I was going to succeed, I'd have to do it by myself. I could

not look to the school to give me things. Two, I had an understanding that I could not let this thing beat me. It was something because I'd always felt that I'd won all the time, that nothing should be able to defeat me. I also had a profound faith in God from my Baptist upbringing. I loved God and the things of God. I loved the church. That was a key part of my life and upbringing. I believed God could get me through it. I just knew inherently it could happen. And I prayed my way through all those classes at Southeastern. My faith was the glue.

My family's been Baptist my whole life, National Baptist. We were members of a decent sized church, it would probably have about 500 members. My pastor had a doctorate, a D.Min. [Doctor of Ministry], which again wasn't typical for a lot of Black churches of that time. We were considered the uppity Baptists because a fair number of people had been college educated and were middle class in our congregation. There was a 'kind of way' to be. There wasn't a bunch of shouting and all that kind of stuff in my church upbringing. But we were very, very, very committed to education — particularly Christian education. Out the gate, I just loved the church. I think part of why I loved it was because of my grandmother's deep love for it. My mom went some, but my grandmother went all the time. I was like, 'Donna, I want to go to church. I want to go to church too.' So, she would take me all the time. Sometimes I would spend Saturday night over with her to make sure I could go to church on Sunday.

While at college, I had another sobering, eye-opening experience. It's interesting because was I wasn't fully accepted in either setting, on the Southeastern campus or in community around Southeastern. If you can imagine, here I am, this Black kid who loves the church, loves God, and she's coming to church because she's looking for basically a tick to lay on. You know, I'm looking for the familiar; I'm looking for this space where I can engage with elders, that is what I was accustomed to. But when I get there, I'm a Yankee. You can't deny my accent. I was also a Southeastern student. I was at church with people who used to clean my dorm. It was a little Black church; I can't remember the name of it. I remember I had asked someone, a groundskeeper I think, 'What's the name of some of the churches in Durham that I can go to?' He had flippantly given me a name, probably not thinking I would be interested in really going. When I went what I found was fascinating. That was a level of distrust because they weren't sure why I was there. Like, why wouldn't I go to chapel on campus or why wasn't I going to a higher brow church like my home church? But that's not what I needed. What I needed was a place where I could really engage. And I know God led me there. So, I was the little runt that was like, 'Now you might thump me in the head every now and then, but I ain't going, ok. I'm going to be right here.' And I was there, as uncomfortable as my presence at times may have made them. It was so weird. I had never experienced something where Black people were uncomfortable with me and that really threw me. That was a 'throw me moment' because that's when I first got in touch with my privilege. I had never — privilege was never a word I would have thought of in reference to myself. I had to own it. Because I wanted to understand, I went into prayer about it. I realized that I'm privileged. I'm in college. I'm on this campus that's a major employer and has a sucky relationship with the community at the same time. I'm from the North. It was all of these things that presented otherness. That taught me to trust where God put me even

if it was uncomfortable for me or for others. That was a big lesson, because discomfort isn't always our own. If I'm only going to be places where people are comfortable with me, then how can I truly affect culture shift and how can change really manifest itself. It can't always be about the places I'm comfortable with. That experience early on taught me a lot about trusting and following God.

So, in due time, I switched majors to history and sociology. That second semester, I think I failed one class, but I passed the others. So, you can imagine what my score looked like at the end of my freshman year. It sucked. But I was still breathing. I worked through the summer and took classes. I was also a work/study student. So, when my other friends were hanging out, I had to work to help supplement my scholarships to school. Then comes my junior year and my mom relocated from New Jersey to L.A. because the textile arena was changing. So much work was going to Asia now and there was a firm in L.A. that wanted to recruit her. I had to take a semester off to go home to take care of my sisters. We didn't have nanny money. But I went back and did summer school again.

Reflecting on Southeastern, I have never had an experience that desperate before or since, because no matter what I experienced, I knew I could make it. Having that experience so young, where I could have either been broken or made, let me to know anything is possible. I may not have been prepared traditionally, but what I had was more than enough. I could make it through and others who had been much more fortunate didn't survive it. I did. And I did it emotionally and I did it academically. Do you know what I'm saying? I got through it. But it also groomed me in an interesting kind of way for being comfortable being in a lot of different rooms. I can be comfortable in a board room and working at a soup kitchen because I have lived in that spectrum. Because I have lived it, people can't deny me that, you know what I'm saying? So, when I see people who want to be — whatever — it's like, 'Ok that's nice, but what are you really doing of substance?' Your bank account doesn't make you a person of substance. Your degrees don't make you a person of substance. What's beyond that? I'm not moved by those things. I think that has protected me over the years because I'm less influenced by them. But it also has girded me in a way that enables me to not think it strange when I am in situations where I'm kind of an 'only.' I'm not afraid to blaze my own trails. Because I've been alone already. That was four years of really being in a wilderness experience.

I preached a sermon one day titled, 'Me and the Dead Presidents.' It was inspired by my experience at Southeastern. Have you ever been to the Southeastern Chapel? The cathedral itself is magnificent. What many people don't know about it is a little room that is right off of the pulpit. There is a little door. When you go down the stairs behind this door, there is a tomb where they have buried the former presidents of the school. And they have the wooden chairs and stuff.

On a particular day, I was just in a way. I needed solitude. There were some people in the chapel and I noticed this door. So, I decided to just walk through the door. The whole experience of getting to the dead presidents was a journey in following God's leading blindly. I opened this door. It's dimly lit. You have to walk down, down, down,

down, down — I don't know where I'm headed. Then it opens up into this big space and I notice tombs. I'm not totally afraid of dead people, but I wouldn't run into a graveyard per se. But instead of frightening me, it fascinated me. I walked a little further in and God said, 'I'll meet you here' and that's where — I get emotional thinking about it — that's where I spent my time. That's where I prayed and that's where I would sometimes take my papers and lay them on the altar. God and the dead presidents comforted me because I thought about the fact that those presidents couldn't imagine a day when a little Black girl like me, born in Newark, New Jersey, from a single parent, could dare to sit among them.

This sermon about me and the dead presidents was about what is possible from this historical context. Remember history was one of my majors and in particular I studied the antebellum South. The end of this story is that I graduated with two majors, on time, with my class. I still don't know how that worked out, but it did. It wasn't all bad by any stretch of the imagination. I still have lifelong friends from it. The rigorous academic experience helped groom me for my future life in learning. The school's archives held one of the largest collections of original slave writings. As I look back now, everything I did there helped gird me. Do you know the song, 'My Soul Looks Back and Wonders?' I realize that each slave writing I'd read as a young Black kid in this environment I was thinking, 'Oh my God, they made it through slavery. Oh my God, they made it through Jim Crow. Oh my God, how did she survive that? How did he do that?' I wasn't thinking it from an activist's vantage point by any stretch because at that point I was totally on a corporate track. But God knew that I would need those seeds and I would need those learnings for the time that was appropriate. I never lost that. Being from the North, isn't it interesting God would educate me in the South? I would have had no natural path down here. So, when I came back, I came back to a familiar place, but I came back differently.

I would say that those experiences framed who I am today and all in extremely profound ways, each pivotal moment at critical points in my development as a woman. At three, naming Donna — or at 10, when you're really coming into your own and seeing the riots — seeing my mom at work and being able to go into a city like New York and the broader frame that it gave — or my grandmother and the trips she used to take around the world — and then the Duke experience happening as I'm entering womanhood. There hasn't been a set path for what I've done; I'm either the only one or one of a handful to do these things. But if you think about my trajectory, I can look back and see how the whole time, God was doing it, the whole time was preparing me for this kind of activism. God was preparing me for being able to come into environments that seem so opposite from who I am. I kind of have to hold onto that myself. I don't think of it consciously, but I walk with it everywhere I go. I just take it everywhere. So that's the foundation.

Advertising, international Black traders & entrepreneurs expo

So, in the story, my mom's now on the West Coast., not New Jersey. I graduated on Mother's Day and I'm on a plane to the West Coast. I took the proverbial year off and wound up working in advertising. The criteria for my work —this is how deep I was at that time —was I had to make enough money to get my own place, because I wasn't

going to live with my mother. I didn't want to think, so I needed a job that was mindless, and I had to have enough money to party because I was a partier. I'm looking through the newspaper and I see this ad as a tear sheet clerk. Tear sheets are a billing function in advertising. You cut out the ad the client ran and then you give it to the billing department with proof of publication.

I'm like, 'Oh God, this is crazy! They're going to pay me a decent price to do this? I get the job. Little did I know that I would be working with the world's leading advertiser. I had no clue. I could have cared less to be quite honest, because I was going to be a lawyer.

Six months into the job, I would finish my work so fast that I would wind up doing other things. I didn't want to be bored, so I'd find other stuff to do. Finally, they break down and said,
'Can you come and talk to us? We don't understand what's happening here. This is normally an entry-level post that is highly coveted for people who want to enter high-level advertising. You have expressed no interest in advancement with the business. You've just graduated from a great school. What do you want to do?'
'No I'm happy right where I am.'
Of course, I didn't share my law stuff because I didn't want them to not think I was not vested in what they were doing for me. So, they finally said,
'What we have an opening that's just opened up on one of our teams and we can see that you are a strong writer. You're a good researcher. Would you be open to that?' 'Well, heck yeah.'
I could make a little extra money and that just means that I get my apartment quicker. They wound up putting me with the only female account executive in the organization. It was a predominantly male environment, but she, of all things, was working on aerospace accounts.

There was this day that there was some copy that needed to be written. Nobody could crack this thing – the teams or the writer. They figured, 'What the hell. We don't have anything to lose. Just give it to the kid and see what she can do.' I hit a homerun. Who knew I could do great copywriting. I loved it. So, a year and a half in and I am in love with advertising.

Spiritually I'm thinking, 'God what are you doing here. Here I am. I'm supposed to be an attorney. I wanted to help people and now here I am in this weird field.' What God helped me to understand was — and this was very important — sometimes you will have an idea where the path is supposed to go, but that's just a shadow. 'In reality this may be the place that I'll use to get you where I need you to be, quicker. So I need you to stay open to things.' And that lesson spiritually was very important for me because it enabled me to understand God uproots us from time to time.

That was a big uprooting for me. It freaked me out so bad because I have never not finished something and I was thinking I was failing by not going on to law school. I had called back to Southeastern,

‘I need to talk with somebody about what I’m experiencing right now.’
‘Listen, we have a strong alumni chapter in LA. We’re going to put you in touch with somebody and let them talk to you.’

You can throw a rock and hit an attorney in the area of L.A. I was working in. This older White attorney takes me to the top of this incredible skyscraper that has one of these revolving restaurants, very exclusive, and he gets me to talk about what I’m doing. He said,
‘So tell me about what you’re doing. You’re working with a great firm.’
I started telling him about my advertising and my heart is just exploding in the conversation of joy and excitement and fascination. He said,
‘Tell me about law.’
‘I really want to help people. I’m committed to do this, but it’s like a downer.’
‘I want you to look around this restaurant. What do you see?’
‘I see a lot of people in suits.’
‘I want you to see bigger. You see all these people walking around these tables serving you today? Half of them are law graduates. They’re here because they want to meet people like me and they haven’t yet found the place to be. So, what I want to share with you is …’
(the thing that God wanted me to understand)
‘Your success is not contingent on how you prepare. It’s how contingent upon what makes you happy and what is the right place for you.’
It was a lesson I never forgot. It wasn’t about the degrees. He wasn’t moved by that. What he was asking me was, ‘What makes your heart sing?’ Because where your heart is singing, you can sustain that.
‘Law is no guarantee of success, Suzan. You being a lawyer doesn’t guarantee you success. Clearly, you’re already successful doing what you’re doing now. Why would you not continue that path?’
He gave me permission, as God has done through the years, to be ok letting go when it’s time to do so and to trust the unknown.

It’s what led me to Africa. I did some development work in Africa. I worked in Ghana for a while, working with an apparel manufacturer who was looking at bringing their businesses to the US.

Another of my bodies of work is the International Black Traders & Entrepreneurs Expo and Conference, a global conference that I co-founded when I was working in Washington DC. I was working as an advertising and marketing consultant and so worked with this small but impactful Black greeting card company. They manufactured greeting cards and sold them primarily wholesale. But they also had a little shop where they did retail as well. As part of the process of doing the marketing for their business, we hosted a trade show, a small little gathering in the basement of a church in Northeast Washington DC where we had 25 Black owned-and-operated retailers and 25 Black owned-and-operated manufacturers and various crafts people who came together to do trade with one another prior to Kwanzaa.

You don't just mobilize, you also have to educate along the way.

We brought in experts to talk about how to do retailing, display merchandising, and do accounting to keep good books. It was an amazing success for these 50 businesses that were at least 51% Black owned-and-operated. The phone started ringing off the hook, not necessarily to do business with my client, but people calling to say, 'When is the next trade show?' That group of 50 businesses grew. Now this was before I realized that what I was really doing was organizing. I'm just thinking that what I'm doing is corporate business and that group of 50 businesses grew to 100 businesses the next year at Howard University. We wanted to make sure, as much as we could, that we kept the dollars within the Black community. That 100 businesses at Howard University, housed at the Howard Hotel, the only Black owned-and-operated hotel, led to ultimately 1000 Black businesses from the US, the Caribbean, the UK, Africa – all different parts of the diaspora – participating at the DC Convention Center at its height.

There hasn't really been another global tradeshow like we did. In fact, we're archiving the work as we speak. We're able to film all of our workshops and are in the process of shopping that to the new National African-American Museum of History in Washington. How do you not only do the work, but how do you memorialize it also? How do you leave things behind that enable the next generation? My two partners and I are not looking to do that body of work again. We've all kind of moved on. They are growing mangos on an island in Africa and I'm here as a Bishop!

Coming out, call to ministry

All that global effort was done when I was a young person of faith. I was also growing my ministerial life then too. Another big, big pivotal moments came around my sexual orientation and gender, mainly sexual orientation. I did not come into a same gender life until after I graduated from college and moved to the West Coast

About a year after that, I fell in love with a woman. I had never been with women. I had never thought about it. It was the first of experience for both of us. She had been around lesbians but had never… she was a dancer, a beautiful dancer. We just bonded and connected. I just fell in love. It wasn't about being a lesbian; it wasn't about anything other than, 'Oh my God, what has happened to me?' I found a home. I have to say, my story wasn't one like, you know, 'I felt I was a lesbian at the age of two.' I had wonderful relationships with men prior to this experience. But, with this experience, I found my home place. It was beautiful and totally devastating at the same time because I had no spiritual place to put it.

At this time, I was with a traditional black denomination, because it was the closest church to where I lived. My pastor is now the head of that denomination. I got to a place where I felt I had to choose between God and this part of who I was. It was not a choice for me, even until this day. I said, 'Well God, if you don't love this and don't accept it, then neither can I.' I left the relationship I was in with another partner. We loved each other very much. But I left that relationship and came deeply into the church.

My day would look like this: at 6:30 am I was at morning prayer and Bible study. I would go to my job. Then, I would then go home unless there was a service at church. Literally, if I had been Catholic, I have no doubt that I would have been a nun. No doubt whatsoever. Gratefully I was not a nun, uh not Catholic (huge grin). But I was celibate for seven years as God was grooming and growing me. I became a licensed evangelist missionary in the denomination. I skipped a couple of steps. But I'm just cutting to the chase of it in terms of the profound impact of this experience. That was the highest a woman could go in that denomination. That was the second level position, because it wasn't ordination. Being an evangelist missionary means you could pastor or lead *outside* of your home church basically.

I was really excelling. I loved God. I loved the church. I was vested in her growing. I was in a 10,000 member congregation so there was lots of opportunity and space for me to see what is possible in terms of what a church can do and can be. We were not political. That denomination is not known for coming out on a lot of political positions, but it gave me a foundation that rested upon my past Baptist experience. This entrenched me in a view of God that was fundamentalist, but also incredibly liberating. I was about to get married to a man. We were taught, the girls were taught, when the man finds a wife, he finds a good thing and we were taught to yield to that. The elders in our church where grooming me for leadership, for being a first lady. I was young. I was fairly successfully in my advertising life. I was worldly of sorts. They were like, 'Oh, she'll be a perfect first lady for somebody.'

At this point, I was in my late 20s, maybe 30. There was an elder who was in line for becoming a pastor. He was the number three person at the church, which is pretty significant. He was 25 years my senior and I made twice as much money as him. He worked part-time and the other time he was spending spiritually. When he asked to be married, I said 'yes' because I felt I was supposed to and there were those who felt I should have been honored that such a man would ask. When we get together, he lets me know about some of his past, that he's a 'delivered' pedophile. And at 25 years younger than him, that should have put a flag up for somebody. I wanted to meet with our pastor to seek his advice. He said, 'Well has he told you about his past?' I said, 'Yes he did.' I guess he wanted to make sure I was clear about that. And then he said, 'Are you attracted to him?' Nobody had given me permission to think about sex, to think about my own sexuality, to think about what it would mean to be married to a man who had children my age. Nobody— because it was just all so…spiritual. And spiritually, he was everything I had asked God for, everything I had wanted from a spouse. The Bishop's office was just asking me carnal things, 'Can he provide for you?' He knew me and knew my background. I said, 'No, but I make enough for us to be ok together.' You'd be saying all this stuff too if you'd been brainwashed like this.

I get home and this is what really shaped my body of work. This is the pivotal piece that set the stage for how I do what I do today.

I got home to my apartment that evening and, remember, I had already said 'yes' to the engagement. I had been serving God with everything I knew and had. I mean, I had not

been kissed for 7 years. I didn't even masturbate. I didn't feel that any sexual expression was acceptable. And, I wasn't a bad looking young woman (said with knowing smirk!). I had people approaching me and that kind of stuff. But none of it connected. I just assumed that when I got married God would give me an attraction for a heterosexual experience because that had not been my truth. All those prayers for deliverance — still there! At worst, I felt I would just remain a celibate because already I was doing it and it's interesting. When I talk to young people about celibacy, it is so doable depending on where you are. Spiritually where I was, it wasn't difficult to me because I was so surrendered inside to God that that was all I thought about. But — I also wasn't given permission to think about sexuality and to think about my humanity. The whole focus was being the strongest spiritual being I could be.

So, I get home and I am perplexed and angry for the first time with God. I was angry because I was seeing the gender injustices. I would see women who could preach men under the table and they couldn't step into the pulpit. I would see young boys, 12 years old, wake up after eating some black-eyed peas and feel that God was calling them to preach and the church go up in a shower because this was one has been called of God! And I would see 8 year old girls or 12 year old girls never considered. I didn't understand the disparity!

I said to God, because at this point I'm really feeling like a virgin for all virtual purposes, 'I feel like a sacrificial lamb. It is obvious to me that you love your sons more than you love your daughters.' My whole experience supported that thought. In my Baptist church experience, you didn't have Baptist women thinking about wanting to pastor a church. Between my Baptist experience and my experience in this denomination, I had no frame for a woman in leadership. But I was feeling called. I didn't know where to put that. Where do I put this hunger I have? Where do I put this insatiable desire to engage with God and the people of God in a way other than what I had been told was possible. I began to weep. And this is when I learned the meaning of crocodile tears. I'm sitting in an Indian position on the floor of my bedroom and I remember a tear hit my hand and splash back up in my face. It was a soul-wrenching weep because I'd never questioned God. I never even knew I could. I never even knew that I could engage in that level of conversation with God — never before and never since. The conversation went like this: It wasn't audible, but it was a knowing that I was in the presence of God and God was ministering and speaking to me. So, God says,
'Suzan tell me what would a natural father want for his daughter if she came to him and said, 'Dad I'm about to get married. I've been asked to be married and I've said yes?' What would a father hope for in his highest hopes?'
'Well he'd want to know if she loved him first of all. He'd want to know that he could provide for her. He'd want to know that she'd be safe.'
I just went down this list of things that a natural father would want and I had to own the fact that most of it was fantasy thought. I hadn't had a dad in my life. My dad died at 36. I didn't have that father presence. So, God said to me, — and these were the wildest I could think that a father would want for a daughter —
'That is true, but I am not a man and what I want for you so far exceeds that. I am not a man. What I want for you is for you to be happy. So, if you choose to marry him

Suzan, I will bless you. But if you choose not to marry him, I will also choose to bless you because my desire is toward you.'

Nobody had ever given me that permission and let me know that God relates to God's daughters with equal esteem. Yes, we read Joel, but I wasn't thinking what it really meant when it said that 'your spirit is going to fall on your sons and your daughters.' I wasn't thinking, you know in the big process, I wasn't thinking like that really meant, 'when I give it to her, she can speak it.' Then God said something profound,
'By the way, I did not make a mistake when I created you just as you are.'
What do you do with that as a lesbian?
'I will ultimately use it to my glory. I will use your orientation to my glory.'
Now you're saying this to a kid that was just celibate for 7 years because she didn't think she could possibly be…that. And now you're going to tell me, after all these years of praying to be delivered, that it wasn't a mistake and that you would ultimately use this for good? Are you kidding me? But I knew it to be true. I knew it. I knew it to be true. Nothing, nothing in my world supported that view, not even the Bible. But that moment gave me permission to begin to seek. It freed me from this anchor that said you never ask. You never question. You never doubt. You never grapple. Well you did grapple. We were taught to grapple with the text — but to grapple in context with whatever the King James said. The real grappling is on your part. You can't engage with the Bible. It's framed. You grapple with why you're having difficulty embracing that Paul said you shouldn't ever speak.

I broke off the engagement the next day. I told my three other friends who were of similar age with me and experiencing a similar situation with men that they didn't really know. All three chose to get married instead and all three got divorced within three years and they had children. I began to ask questions. I began to read the Word. And I said, 'Show me.' That was a new journey for me. 'You teach me. You show me what I need to know and what I need to understand.' And I started reading the Word with new eyes and I found myself in there as a woman. I saw Deborah with new eyes as this amazing judge and amazing leader that men dared to follow. How do you follow her? How are you warriors following Deborah? Again, with Joel, if the spirit fell on them, the daughters, did God mean for the spirit to fall on them and then put that under a bushel — a whole new world!

And then to see that Jesus never said anything about me. Ever. Nowhere. Jesus never talked about me negatively as a lesbian. Had nothing to say about it! God had nothing to say about me. Ever. Paul had some stuff to say. There were a couple of things some people wanted to say. But it wasn't God saying it. And that's what the Lord needed me to see. That gave me permission to then understand how the Bible could be used as a true tool of liberation. The same tool that bound us. I didn't have to run from her. I ran to her. And from that place, the liberated word of God could then free others. So that's the teaching that I share. When you get free you then have the responsibility to free somebody else. You don't get a pass. This isn't a freebie. Freedom is free, but it's not cheap. So, when you pay that price, when that price is paid for you, you have a responsibility to pass it forward. So much of my life now has been about continually

learning and continually delving and continually seeking those ways of helping ensure that more of us are free.

That is the spiritual underpinnings, the worldly part and the spiritual part. It's the anchoring that's held me through the things that I experienced so that even death is no longer a fear. Like Paul said, 'Either way, I'm going to come out ahead. Whether I glory here or glory there.' For the time I have left, I feel this work is my call and that everything has prepared me for such a time as this.

Current work

The work I'm doing is very intersectional. And those intersections really bump into each other all the time. But I'll talk about it in slices. All of it has a faith underpinning. I really believe that the work I do is a calling. I don't say that in all settings, but I really do believe that. I believe I'm called to do this work and it's important to note that early on because that thread of consciousness runs through all of what I'm doing. And if we want to engage truly with one another in divine ways, I always have to be open to the possibility that just maybe there's a view broader than the one I'm holding. That creates vulnerability, but also opportunity for great relationship building.

Millennials

I'm stepping into this kind of elder field of late, as an elder, as an emerging elder in the community. And when I say community, I view myself in the kind of global context of community. I'm 58. I'm entering eldership and what does that mean? I think in terms of what, you know, as the old folks used to say, 'I've got more time behind me than in front of me.' Increasingly, what I want to do with what's left has to do with preparing others. And, for me, what that means is a degree of intentionality of working with the next generation and being clear about the need for this. I'm not doing it just because I don't have anything else to do with my time. I actually feel a desperate need for it.

I've really invested time and purpose in trying to understand millennials. There's no nice way to say it: I don't think (long pause)…we've never lived that life, their life. We've never lived in a world of HIV/AIDS. When I grew up the biggest thing I had to worry about was not getting pregnant. I mean that was really it. We weren't thinking about HIV or anything like that. I didn't have to worry about somebody cyber-bullying me. I didn't have to think about what I was going to post on the internet and how that might affect my career in the future. Thank God there weren't cameras catching me with half the stuff I did. I could make a dumb mistake and the only people who would know would be the people who saw me do the dumb mistake. Now if I do a dumb mistake and I post it, they're going to be able to pull that up when I'm applying to Law School. And it doesn't ever go away. A dumb mistake at 18 won't ever go away.

That's a different world. Also, it's a world filled with so much of the baggage that many of us carried. But they don't have the same racial baggage. They don't have the same baggage around gender and orientation. I've never seen a separate water fountain. They're even further away from it than I am. So when they hear those stories, those are

stories that are in history books. I knew that if I was going to connect, I had to grow to understand them and I genuinely was curious. I think at any point as activists, if we lose our curiosity we're doomed. You have to always be open. Always be curious. And the thing about being curious versus just studying something is —I can study a thing and it's in my head, but if I'm curious about a thing, it actually goes to a deeper place. I'm thinking about a kind of moral curiosity about creation, about how other people are wired, and how can I honor that creation. How do I honor what I don't fully understand? I think the first step to work with millennials is owning that we don't fully understand everything about them.

They are courageous in ways that I've just never seen. There's a way that when we grew up we considered appropriate behaviors. I don't know if they are bound in the same way as some of us. There were those of us who had to live by those behaviors, like it or not. When we started raising children, a lot of us rejected that. We wanted them to be respectful, but we also gave them space to have a little lip. 'We can talk about stuff. We're going to talk about this.' We said, 'Have a mind. Be independent.' And then they become independent and we're like, 'They are disrespectful SOB's. Can you believe what he just said?' Or, 'That person questioned me. Do you believe that that person just questioned me?'

We've taught them to question us. We taught them to question systems. We taught them to challenge injustice and it has created a situation. You've got the civil rights people who were chased by the dogs. Civil rights people like the Wild Goose gathering (and some of the NAACP leadership). There is a rhythm of that group. There is a 'way' to those people who have dedicated their entire lives to justice, to racial justice, to activism, and to fighting the powers that be.

When you bring those two groups together, you often have the younger generation that feels the older to be archaic. When they approach these gatherings, they can feel disrespectful to those who have literally given their lives to the cause. There can be disrespect and sometime disregard for the 'how,' not so much for the 'what' of justice by the younger generation.

But here's what I have found, what I say so unapologetically, the way I feel about them. I think they are amazing. And I think that they are brilliant and I know that they need mentoring. Mentoring is so important. But try to get close enough to them to try to mentor them, just like all of us when we're coming along. I grew because I had women who cared about me and thought about what I did. But they're each other's mentors. There's more peer mentoring among them than any other generation. But, if we don't make an effort to get into them, then I fear things will be even worse. You know, we're getting older and tired!

I'm still concerned about that chasm between the younger generation and the Civil Rights Movement. We've got to invite them in. I've told older leaders at times to get over themselves. Remember that meeting with the NAACP to plan the HB2 action last year? Wasn't that a powerful conversation? It was ironic because geo-physically, you had one

group sitting on one side of the table and the other group sitting on the other side of the table. Al Shirley, the noted civil rights attorney who worked with King, who I really appreciate, was there. And then you have these amazing young activists with Black Lives Matter and the 'Fight for 15' wage group. Both sides extremely respected and valued in their respective communities, but literally you can see the chasm. It was a physical gap, but you could see the bridge between the two.

And to see them start off with, 'Well, you never invite us to the table. We're not at the table because you don't invite us to the table. We don't get invited to tables like this. You all make all the plans and then da da da… It was very much a us vs. them conversation. We get to the end and own that we've got to figure this out together. We can't afford to leave anyone out. It's a wall, so you've gotta punch it and try to make that happen. We have a lot of them that are ready for it. We've just got to get to them. If you want it to happen, it's really going to take very intentional engagement with each other. So, that's what I'm vested in because I think it's going to be critical for our survival, for our healthy survival. We're going to always survive, but our healthy survival, we've got to figure this thing out. I don't have the answer; I know valuing them and validating them is a big part of it. Particularly getting them in positions of influence.

And I love that language of 'we work in the now,' because that's not always how we think. We typically are more forward-thinking. 'In the now' — that language is helpful. It's interesting, because their world is so instant. You take it. You make a video. You jump on snapchat. The fact that it's even called snapchat, it's faster than an email, faster than even Facebook; we're going to just snap this out. That speed! — I know I don't I feel comfortable dropping stuff that fast. We tend to be a little more cautious. But when they're ready to say, 'We got this great idea…what are we going to do…give me something to do…give me something to do.' That's relevant and I think there's a place for it for sure. In order to do that, we have to, and this is some of the biggest work I have to do, we have to trust their process at times.

It totally freaks me out sometimes, but this is what I've found, we just have to find smart people who have a moral compass. They don't have to be perfect. They don't have to agree with everything I agree with. But if they have a basic moral compass and they're smart, you just get a better product. Like around that table we had with the NAACP, there were a bunch of smart people. Really smart people of all different ages and guess what smart people do. Smart people are always going to produce something good and powerful. That model can be replicated, easily actually. But you've got to have the characters. You've got to have the provocateur. You've got to have reasonable people around the table, not even people in agreement, they just have to be reasonable. And you have to make space for things that are untidy. What I've found is that the more that you help people ready themselves for some of the negative that might happen, the more they are ok saying, 'Oh, ok I get that.' Every now and then they make some noise. So you make room for that. When we bring that understanding into the work we do intersectionally, you make space for the age and stage in the organizing work. That means there's going to be some whining and crying. There's going to be a little foot kicking. Now if you have that same thing happening five years in, that's not a healthy

organization, but I can't expect the first iteration of conversations to not have somebody act up.

The Civil Rights and Justice Center

Our first body of work with the Center was the 'Do No Harm' campaign. It started with our focusing on creating safer spaces for LGBTQ communities and also helping those clergy who genuinely want to understand this wave of change that has already happened. We're not waiting for LGBTQ stuff to come. It's here. And the question becomes, 'How do we move forward from this point, definitely how do we grapple together?' In the 'Do No Harm' (DNH) campaign, we now have over 2500 signatures collected from people of faith who have said, 'Even if I can't fully get on board with same sex marriage or I'm not fully clear about LGBTQ stuff, what we can agree on is that nobody should be harmed by our faith. Nobody should have to worry when they come to church or the mosque or synagogue about whether or not they're going to be safe in that space. Now we can have other conversations, but your spiritual and emotional safety should not be one of the things. None of our traditions suggest that any of us are ever validated in creating that kind of harm.'

We've been able to do is use DNH as a leverage point to the next phase of work called 'Upper Room Meetings.' These Upper Room Meetings are safe spaces for clergy in our state to have this kind of discussions. You might have 12 of us sitting around over a meal with a noted presenter like Rev. Barber or James Cone. These noted voices come in and talk about intersectionality, what the Bible really says about homosexuality, and what it really says about gender differences. We are amazed at the impact of conversations like this that tend to take the attendees or participants to the next level. That next phase could be something as simple as, 'I won't send people to hell from the pulpit anymore.' The goal is not to judge where they are but to just help people get moving forward. We've had amazing success with that.

The other body of work we do, probably three quarters of what we do, is focused on trans people and queer people which many people find interesting because they don't necessarily link that to us because of our civil rights work. Our first program is called the 'Transgender Faith and Action Network.' It focuses on trans people of faith and allies. It not only supports trans people, but also help build the systems the church and the faith communities that are their homes. How do we work with those communities? How do we create community for them? How do we find ways of providing them support and also how do we provide tools that help them to be effective change agents in their respective spaces. We've been incredibly excited about the progress of that work. We've also partnered with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the West Coast School of Religion. We work with a cohort of five transgender seminarians. We've created a year-long curriculum for them that allows them to have a degree of support that they don't normally have. At this point we have about 20 seminarians who have come through the cohort and now many of those are circling back and becoming our faculty. What we're doing is building a critical mass of very progressive, forward-thinking, but also supportive transgender faith leaders. Many already gone on to be pastors. Some have gone on to get their PhD's or DMin's.

NAACP

Our work with the NAACP is historic in its context because this is the first time, particularly in people of color-led organizations, where you basically have 2 people-of-color led entities, the Civil Rights and Justice Center and the NAACP saying, we are one. We are together as one, as opposed to the past where we'll invite them to our thing, the LGBTQ stuff, and then the LGBTQ community gets invited to their thing which is more civil rights. We said, what if we just tear that wall down and then all issues now are LGBTQ issues and the LGBTQ community is saying that all our issues impact people of color and poverty.

That's really the bigger thing for me. I felt that. I really felt that and knew that to be true when NC's Amendment 1 campaign came [that defined marriage as between a man and woman] and then HB2 landed. When you read past gay and trans, when you get past that first layer, underneath is all the garbage, all the real garbage, all the stank is right under there. This is bad. This is smelly. When you link that in with all the other stuff, that's just stanky. That's what we have to fight. We had to bore all the way down. Once we got to that trip past gay, past all this other stuff, we got to see the same characters every single time, the same players were down there just tossing the stank up and that was another bridge building moment for us. The same people who are coming for the gays are coming for the poor, are coming for unions, are coming for education, are coming for healthcare; it's the same players. That's the good news. The good news is that it's a small group having a large negative impact and that was a bonding moment for us for sure.

There is no longer 'this' and 'that.' There is only us. How do we find that language…how do we walk together…how do we deal together with the real tensions that exist around race, around class, around orientation, and around gender? The very act of being together is revolutionary.

The Center and the Forward Together Moral Monday movement have also just established a very exciting partnership. In fact, we met last week to talk through the next steps for an intergenerational effort to help ensure that young people and young activists get plugged into the work we're doing. The goal is how do you build the bridge between millennials and civil rights era people and really leverage it. So that's what we're really excited about. We have the groups of the Moral Monday Movement and the groups linked to the Center in terms of LGBTQ specific efforts all coming together now for us to learn together, for us to grow together and for us to fight closely together. So, there are no longer those bridges like 'this is Black Lives Matter' or 'this is the wage workers movement,' or 'this is the immigrant movement.' We're saying, 'We're all in this together.' How did we figure this out? Because these aren't groups that naturally build bridges to each other. In fact, in many instances, there is actually an antagonistic history. But we're finding that when you get around the table, it actually changes that narrative.

We knew that when we were doing this, changing the narrative, and that it wasn't happening anywhere else in the country the way that it's happening in NC. We have this confirmed by a lot of different sources. The question then becomes, is this something

that can then be transplanted? Can we take a piece of those principles and apply them in other communities and other regions of the country? Dr. Barber and I are talking about this about how we put more language and a frame around some of what we're doing and how can that then be replicated in other parts of the country. We're finding that that answer is 'yes' because the principles are eloquent. They're just simple principles that really do work and can translate very well. It's not just exclusive to organizing even in the South. I think this is something to use on campuses; something you can use in a range of spaces and ways. It's an easy translation across many different channels so that's the other piece of what we do. We are going out mobilizing and urbanizing.

Reflections

Joining the Moral movement

My answer about the start of our partnership with the Moral Movement in that it is about order. The real order is because I'm Black. Because I'm Black and my Blackness had me connect to the plight of Black people. Black people in North Carolina have a hard way to go, educationally, over-criminalization, incarceration, poverty — across the board. From the start that resonated with me.

Then Amendment 1 came. In Amendment 1, I was clear of was if the Black church doesn't fully understand how this egregious amendment in our state constitution is going to hurt the poor and people of color more than any gay person, then I haven't done my job well. It was way bigger than gay people, just like HB2. It's way bigger than trans people. I knew the NAACP was also in that fight and it was a natural bridge for me to go to the next level with my engagement with the NAACP.

I was proud of the stands they were making. I saw they were moving under Dr. Barber's leadership and then the opportunity presented itself for some collective work to be done with LGBTQ organizations and the Moral Movement. Once I got in, I was really clear that organizationally we had found a home, a place where we could rest and have an impact. And the work was going to take all of us. Also, I was in a position because of my office, my church's age and stage, and our organization's stage, to be present and come in and contribute with some influence and resources. This was a no-brainer for me. I was on the North Carolina Council of Churches Board for many years, so I had street cred with different groups already. I had been an 'out' lesbian in all those rooms so nobody could hang that 'trying to be secretive about it' on me. God knows, if you know my wife, that wasn't going to happen anyway. She's so not closet material. One of the things that I have to say is, when I came into the room, I came in surprisingly with more respect than I anticipated. Not around my orientation, around my gender! My gender is a much bigger issue in some of the rooms I'm in than my sexual orientation. People can kind of care less about my 17-year marriage. Who I am as a female bishop has been, in my experience, more of a challenge and I did not experience this because I also had coverings. I had Dr. Barber and other brothers in particular whom I've worked with for many years. We worked on HIV/AIDS together. That's the beauty. When I talk about southern organizing, that's the beauty of southern organizing. The real gift of southern organizing is we've been together a long time. It's a very different kind of rhythm and

that speaks to something. So, by the time we get a little long in the tooth, we've got years of history together. It makes it much easier when a moment presents itself. I'm not just jumping on this because it's a campaign; I'm jumping on this because 'Tim' is in trouble and he's called me and needs me to be there and we were at the Wild Goose Festival together. And part of it is that we don't have the luxury of always separating out. When we're approaching some of these big issues, we have to come together. When it was time for me to take this next step with the NAACP, what I appreciated was people's willingness to be open. I also did not feel the need to be shy. I came in the room feeling I had something to contribute and I had something to learn. I came in believing both to be true. I think when we are able to come in like that, that makes a big difference.

I now feel part of that kind of 'upper circle' for lack of another word, because I've been invited into it. I would say that Dr. Barber takes up a lot of space. He is what any founder is. He takes up a lot of room. He's brilliant, so that's understandable. Organizationally, my critique would be, I don't know that this is really an organization, for sure. I wonder if some of the things people are expecting from it are realistic or not.

One of the things that's the beauty of the Black Lives Matter movement is that it's decentralized. It moves! They can send a text out and you can have 1000 people in two hours. Just send the right text. Drop it in the right box. You're going to have 1000 people. And you're going to have a lot more who are impacting because they're going to all be tweeting, texting, snapchatting; it's going to be out. By the time we get to tonight, it's a news story. Because the movement is so decentralized.

What I've noted with the movement is that I don't know that there is a focused strategy in the same kind of way of other movements. I think we have certain core principles that we're following, but I don't know that there is a leadership structure. That probably requires another degree of organizational infrastructure. That's what I think. If I have to speak to that, there's a lack of a certain type of infrastructure that provides for that kind of advancement, that kind of shared leadership in a certain kind of way. I don't think it's not doable. I think some of it is going to be on people's willingness to call it out unapologetically. Challenge it where it needs to be challenged and see what else we can create. It's such a new Movement. It's a young Movement. I also challenge people to think about age and stage. I always think age and stage. What's the age and what's the stage? If I think about the Moral Movement, it's in its infancy. It definitely has potential that lives well into the future, but if you look at other movements, in their early days, they look just like this. They look like a handful of very charismatic, strong leaders who saw a need, had the ability to mobilize people, and that's what they did. Down the road, you then start seeing bones put on it and certain other infrastructure. You add things later that will hold that shape, but that didn't happen in the beginning. In the beginning, those movements were provoked out of need, injustice, and pain — no different than our Moral Monday movement. I do believe those are the right questions to ask and I pray that those individuals will move up and step up.

This is real and I don't think it's any different than any other birthing process. I'm really clear in my own organization here that there are things I do very well as a founder. I

believe I do them pretty decently. But, there is other stuff to get our organization at the next level that I'm recruiting for now. You can only be at this for so long. There's the birthing process, and many organizations fail because they don't put those bones in soon enough. I think that Moral Mondays is probably at a place where it's getting close to the time for that to happen or for it to shift to some other kind of ways. Maybe some of that is already beginning to happen with his Repairers of the Breach. That's another body of work that's interesting. Moral Monday has its place and it may be something that gets sustained. Or it may have been for just a season.

But not a loss. Look at what we've accomplished! I'm thinking about relationships that we've been able to establish and spinning out of the intergenerational efforts. Who knows what it will ultimately look like? What will it ultimately be? It won't necessarily be the Moral Monday Movement. But it will be something that sprung from its having created this amazing space for intergenerational work.

An organizing life

The message that I would pass on to an intern or a congregant who says Bishop Robinson, 'I want to be you in 25 years.' would be that you need to learn to organize. I had many strands of my life come together. But as I looked at those strands, organizing is a theme that cuts across it from the corporate world to theology.

I think about a woman who was an early member of my congregation that became the first out, lesbian, city council member in our city. I think about LGBTQ pastors in the region. Almost every LGBTQ pastor in the city was either a member of my church or I counseled them at some point along their journey. And many of the affirming clergy who are straight, I had time with as well. When we came to this city, there was just, Metropolitan Fellowship Church. It was the one place that would welcome black, LGBTQ people. Now you have many, many congregations. I don't take credit for those things, but I'm saying that I know I had an impact on some of those people's lives. In many instances, I have pastored them. There is national work that I'm excited about as well, in terms of projects, like some of the work I'm doing with the task force and with the West Coast School of Religion where we're grooming trans-seminarians. I look at those seminarians who are now out of school and doing amazing things. I can keep going down a list like that. I'm just honored to be able to work in these kinds of ways with people.

So, let me tell you the big secret about pain. I expected struggle from the outside. The big secret is that there has been not so much in the greater community. My greatest pain and struggle came from within communities I support and from the people I support. This is the thing that drives pastors and leaders into isolation. Because those sometimes who are closest to you and the ones you sacrifice the most for are sometimes the ones who circle back and create the greatest degrees of pain for you.

I'm not saying this in a maternalistic way, but this analogy comes to mind, when you see a child and it's time for them to leave home, that almost never is cute. It's almost always is, 'Get your ass out of my house' at some point. It's weird. There's typically some

tipping point. The kid comes up to you and smart mouths you because they're bored being home. 'I hate this place!' When I think about that context, I'm like, 'That's it. Do you know how much I sacrificed for you? Do you know? Do you know?' It's the parent thing we do, right? 'Do you know? Do you know the two jobs I worked so you could do this?'

You long for spaces where people don't walk around cowering, but at least appreciate some of what you've done. We are in a thankless profession. This is the profession to get that. You know what I'm saying. It's funny, when I am outside of my congregational life, I have a wonderful congregation. I'm not saying anything about my congregation; I'm just saying typically this is about individuals. I have been blessed always to have great congregations, but there is always that kind of small pocket, right, that's challenging. What will be weird for me sometimes is that I go out and I speak. People are like, 'Oh Bishop, you do such wonderful work.' And then I'd come back home and somebody is like, 'You didn't call me back. I called you and you didn't call and that's why I'm leaving the church.'

I've had to learn how to balance, because I'm human. I have grown in appreciation of my humanity. Parts of me that are extremely vulnerable. You know that whole Black superwoman thing, it's taken a lot of us out. I'm not immune to it. I want everything and everybody to be ok. It's part of the gift, and it's also part of the challenge. I go to therapy periodically. I call it my tune-up. Periodically, if I have to go back in, I go in. I integrate that into my life, that some of my greatest threats and challenges have come, like with Jesus, from within my own world, not outside my world. Jesus wasn't greatly threatened outside his world. His big threats and disappointments came from those within in his world, right? I gain strength from thinking about what he did. He spent time with people who mattered. He was social, you know what I'm saying? He lived a life that enabled him to truly think about 'how do I balance this? How do I do this hard work, keep myself sane and whole?' He partied a lot. Dinner parties, spending time in nature, going for nature walks, meditating. All of those are forms of therapeutic care.

That's the stuff we lose sleep over. That's the stuff, if we're honest, that brings us pain. I can say I'm mad, but what we're really saying is, 'That really hurt me. I'm really hurt by that.' Right? In my younger vocational life, I would just get mad. I'd be like, 'I can't believe you would say that, like, what?' And what I didn't understand then was the power of my voice. Because even though — as much as they stand up to us and are arrogant — they want our approval. So, my pain has not come from without, but from within. And that's the most difficult work. Really, because it's so much easier to fight the giant outside versus the behemoth inside. Because if I go inside, I have to grapple with some really hard truths about myself first — my own prejudices, my own fears, and my own insecurities.

And that's the hard work. I can face a corporation. I can face whatever. You face and they shout, whatever. But how do you do that at home? It's why preachers' kids are so crazy. What makes the preacher kids who they are? A lot of it is that they see our humanity and they see how really fucked up we are. They see the drinking, the

infidelities. And they hear the parents arguing. They see what happens when church folk hurt their people. They see all of that and then we expect them to come through that unscathed. And they're vested in also protecting the secret. We make them keep the secret. So, they do and they act out. Because they, like their parents, have to fight to keep the secret that we get hurt. That we are troubled sometimes. That we've got issues and somebody needs to help us.

But, I can say this, because this the way we can speak, I believe God's grace was given to me in a way that that grace provides space for me to do the work and allow my heart to be fully engaged and present and not harmed. Grace really is sufficient. So much of just these right steps along the way helped me to be able to sit in what it seemed to some to be the most difficult of spaces, Because, if I'm across the table, I believe that God made that moment possible. So, I just have to yield to it. I yield to the moment. I yield to the experience.

I'm so excited and I'm so excited for us. I'm excited to be a North Carolinian at a time like this. And I'm excited for someone like yourself and others where I know God's pulling us together. I can just see that happening. This is not happenstance. We're not having this interview by happenstance. Everything is happening for this season. It's a time when I think, like none other, when our prophetic voices are going to be needed. We're going to have to dust them off and be ok using them more broadly and more unapologetically. Who I am as a lesbian is not something I hide, but it is a part of who I am. I think so many of us are afraid to share authentically. I think this period is going to challenge a lot of us to be open in ways that we have not had to be before. But if we're going to be effective, we're going to have to get there.

When I started off these comments I mentioned I believe it's a calling. With that being said, I believe that one has to be equipped to do this kind of work. For me, I actually do approach the work believing that there are certain gifts that have been God-given that help me with this job. I'm using that language because I want to be totally transparent; that really is my belief and that is the platform from which I work. I do not believe that someone has to have that same background in order to be effective. I'm saying that I use every tool in my arsenal to my benefit. One of my biggest tools is my faith. And it's my core belief that creation is good. I fundamentally believe that to be true. I believe that there are systems and things that happen that lead to very negative outcomes, but fundamentally I believe creation is good. I approach things from that vantage point and I bring along my own history around my own struggles around orientation and my own struggles around gender identity. This gives me this space to be totally comfortable walking with somebody who is coming down the same street that I have walked a little earlier. I've been on that block. I know how those stops along the way can be scary. So maybe if we're walking it together, we can walk it and get through it a little quicker and it may not take the seven years it took me. Maybe we can get through this in seven months. I know we can get to the other side and I know the other side is good and I know the other side is pleasing to God. I don't feel I have to go in with a set answer. I believe that together we sort out those answers and we find those answers together and then we go from there.

My congregation, like most who have activist pastors, is very clear of who I am and supportive of that. My wife understands who she married. She's married to an activist. There are certain things that come with that package. My congregation gets that and they also understand that we live in a faith frame that is also unapologetically a social justice space. I'm really focused on Christ, the principles of Christ, and fortunately, I have someone in Jesus who has been an amazing role model of how you do that well. Jesus was an amazing radical, an amazing social justice activist. That language didn't exist back then, but that's exactly what he did. When he saw injustices on any level, if it was economic, he is in the temple square turning over money changers' tables. He dealt with health care challenges, when there were those who couldn't afford the care needed, he would put spit on the ground and put mud on somebody's eyes and give them new eyes. He challenged positions of power when dealing with the feminist issue on so many different levels. When the woman was caught in adultery, Jesus challenged the rules of the land. The law of the land was you've stolen a woman. That was a law. Jesus took that moment to say, 'But there is yet a greater law,' and 'how do we look at that law because this law doesn't seem just to me – you are just punishing her, what about him, what about all these other things? Is she due that? I'm not saying she isn't due something, but is she due death? Come on. We've got to rethink this.'

Jesus was a masterful organizer. If you think about the principles of organizing, he was not only able to inspire and offer hope, but he always gave them something to do afterward. 'Go and sin no more' or 'Don't tell anyone, but pick up your bed and walk.' There was always a next thing. He could have just healed. Even with the 10 lepers he heals, he says to them, standing in front of him with limbs missing and fingers gone and ears looking deformed, he says to them, 'You are healed. Now go and tell the priest. Go show yourself to the priest that you might be welcomed back into community.' He was always about organizing. He gave them a thing to do. Jesus had the capacity to heal them and simply say, 'God bless you. Go in peace.' It's not what he did though. He sent them someplace with an assignment.

So, if you really look at Jesus' life for real — for real — his life was one that was centered in social justice issues and in human rights. If we follow Jesus' example, that is a model that demands we 'love our neighbor as ourselves.' That really means that we have to do some personal work. How do I make the white cop my neighbor? Is the white cop my neighbor too? Is the racist my neighbor? Is the homophobe my neighbor?' And the short answer is 'yep.'

And so, that is my model. Christ is my model of how you do this work and how you do it, never settling for boxes. He never worked in boxes. That's probably what got him killed. If he'd just been able to do the work and stay in the box, he would have been fine. Martin didn't stay in the box. Malcolm went to Mecca and said, 'I can't call all white people devils anymore, because I prayed next to brothers who have blonde hair and blue eyes and we prayed to the same God. I have to come back, blowing the box up and shortly after they both got to that 'blow up the box moment,' they were ultimately killed. How dare they even think about this?

So that's what I think about leaving behind. I think about the gift of these radical thoughts and, for me, how few of our young people — black, white, and otherwise — get these thoughts. Like, where do they get these kinds of thoughts from today? Like, really? Do you know what I'm saying? In this over commercialized world, where are they challenged to think beyond existing structures? What do we say to young seminarians who are coming along?

I think words often get in the way. If we reject language, are we not more impactful? What language does sometimes is restrict us in terms of where we feel we should be or how we feel we should be. I love that quote that says, 'Preach often, and if you must, use words.' I love that because it is how I live. Do it often, and if you have to call it something, well ok.

CHAPTER EIGHT: MOLLY MCLEAN
"SO, WATCH OUT! I CAN BE A LITTLE REBELLIOUS TOWARDS PASTORS…BECAUSE I WAS JUST FED UP."

Prologue

Molly is one of the youngest interlocutors in my sample. Molly's positionality in the "FT"MM is also unique for this study. She is not a leader, organizer, speaker, performer, or arrestee; she is one of the tens of thousands who has held signs and attended rallies or marches. Regarding positionality, Molly is a young White woman in her early 30s. She's also a social worker and the key lay leader in a progressive Christian church. In many ways, it is remarkable that she has remained involved in and actually helps lead a church. Inclusion and helping others has been her lifetime passion. Molly's story is filled with critique for her childhood Christianity's neglect of social justice and the wounds of those who didn't fit in their theological paradigm. She has an equal disdain for current, hipster, evangelical trajectories of Christianity that follow those same trajectories of practice.

All of our interviews occurred at her home in the evenings with all the lovely trappings of a young family getting started in their first home. She, her husband, and their three year-old daughter live in a part their city that used to be inhabited by the working class in small two bedroom, "mill-town style" homes. Now their downtown neighborhood is one of the hottest real estate zones in the community with obvious home renovations all around them and an onslaught of cafes, locally owned farm-to-table restaurants, a food co-op, and pubs serving craft beers appearing almost daily. True to a millennial stereotype, their home is decorated with Ikea furniture and has a large flat screen TV (with the "cord cut") that dominates their living room.

Molly has been a friend of mine for almost five years and our interviews were a warm, family affair. Her three year-old was nearing bedtime, but she joined usually for the first fifteen minutes before her dad would start their bedtime routine. Their big fluffy labradoodle often sat in my lap and made his own contributions to the recording.

Note: Molly is well aware that I have an evangelical and a Southern Baptist "past". She also knows of my work in progressive Christianity. Hence, she uses lots of idioms from fundamentalism, evangelicalism, and various reform movements (some critical and others from new conservative expressions). She also references many programmatic expressions of conservative Christianity. I have to include some footnotes to explains some of this shorthand in places where I think that readers may be confused.

Molly's Story

> I had some role models.
>
> My grandmother, my mom's mom, worked as a codebreaker during World War II in Washington, DC. She was also a newspaper reporter and a teacher. Then she stayed at home to raise children in the rural Great Plains near the Canadian border. She also raised my uncle with Down's Syndrome in the 60s, a time when you sent 'those people' away to an institution. Then she started an Icelandic Heritage Museum. So, she's like (pauses)…a determined mother.
>
> My other grandmother, Molly — they are both named Molly — is still alive and lives in the Southwest. She met my grandpa when he was on a GI scholarship after World WAR II. She was working at his college. She was a nurse and they lived all over the world. She was like also… (another pause) a very determined woman.
>
> I grew up with that too. My mom, despite being the homeschool mother, always had the piano studio. She was always involved in her career and we were involved in it. So even though I was being told a certain narrative growing up, I knew that it wasn't… (wistfully and reflectively ends the thought). Yeah, I experienced a lot of disappointment, a lot of questioning, and self-doubt because I didn't fit in this mold that I was being told of what a woman should be. I'm stubborn and that stubbornness is what I got spankings for. A lot of spankings. And it didn't work.
>
> I had some role models.

Family life

My parents met while in college in the Southwest; my mom was in grad school studying music and my dad was in a year younger at the same university. Though neither was Baptist, they met at the Baptist Student Union. They were both kind of leaving a tradition. My mom was Methodist and my dad grew up in the Church of Christ — not the United Church of Christ — the non-instrumental kind, baptism by immersion to be saved, the whole nine yards. Yes, it was a very big deal. So, they both left their upbringings and joined the First Baptist Church in our city and became Southern Baptists. So, in fact, my mom became more conservative. I was born while they were in the Southwest.

My dad is a research chemist and worked for a chemical company. Then we moved 'down east' in North Carolina when I was 4 years old. That's where I grew up. We joined a rural Southern Baptist Church. I went to a Christian school for kindergarten and then I went to a public school from 1st to 3rd grade. We had moved in town my 3rd grade year so I was in a different school and I was really unhappy. My best friend was homeschooled, so I begged my mom to be homeschooled…little did I know [said with knowing and conspiratorial look]! So, in 4th grade, I was drawn into that subculture of homeschooling.

Homeschooling was a strange mixture for me. Both of my parents have Masters degrees. My dad's a scientist, but belongs to 'Answers in Genesis.' All of my textbooks were exploring creation with biology, anti-evolution, and anti-climate change. I was exposed those ideas ideas though. We had some secular books as well; we needed to know what the enemy had out there for us. You know, you've got to be prepared (smirks).

There was a very strong network of homeschooling moms. It was called 'Teach,' and we had meetings every month. It was a conservative Christian homeschooling organization. I grew up in that culture. It was very interesting. I knew the stereotypical people with the denim jumpers and the long hair, people who read King James only versions of the Bible.

One time our homeschool group did a clean-up day, called 'The Big Sweep.' We were cleaning up this giant ditch behind the mall in our town. On the way I home, I criticized a family whose dad was wearing shorts and all four of their girls had to wear jumpers to work in. I was really pissed off about that. I got in trouble for saying it, for over-criticizing. I couldn't criticize it. I couldn't critique it.

For many of the girls who I knew growing up, college wasn't a given for them. (I was always encouraged and expected to go to college.) But the people my parents idolized, took us to hear speak, and read their books encouraged girls were to be the keepers of the

home and to be the 'help-mates'. Mothers are supposed to have a lot of children, like the Duggars[13] and families are supposed to be 'quiverfull' people.[14]

There really was a group of girls called 'Keepers at Home' who met, sewed, cooked, and learned the 'womanly arts' (another smile). We went to one or two meetings, but it was a little too much even for my mom because they dissuaded you from reading books like *Little House on the Prairie,* books where the focus is a girl who was independent or even disobedient. That was a little much even for my mom. But we did grow up going to the big [statewide] homeschooling conventions.

It wasn't all Bob Jones' curriculum for me, though I was around that a lot and certainly exposed to it. My parents are very big readers and studiers, so they tried more than some homeschoolers. I was exposed to a lot of things like through literature, through the curriculum my parents chose. I really enjoyed literature and history and politics. I thought about being a lawyer or a politician. I was really interested in government and politics, but I never identified myself as a Republican. I was also a little oppositional there (big smile). My parents sent me to Christian worldview camp; I was definitely well brain-washed in a Christian worldview. I could defend it to this day (smiles again). I read some books. Like Michael Farris, an attorney who started Homeschool Legal Defense Association, LDA and is still its president, started Patrick Henry College which is a homeschool college in Virginia — very conservative, very conservative. He wrote these fiction books I was allowed to read basically talking about the evils of yoga and demons. Social workers were evil; they would call the cops to come investigate homeschoolers and take away the children. It was interesting to say the least.

I was very culturally isolated. I didn't know references from pop culture. I got teased a lot. I still do. If there was a movie in the theater that wasn't a Mel Gibson movie, I didn't see it. I knew some songs, because it was on my neighbor's radio. But not on our radio! I was pretty much strongly encouraged to only listen to Christian music or classical music. There was even a point in time when I was really scared that my parents would take my DC Talk and Jars of Clay away from me because we had friends who didn't listen to music with a drum beat because they thought it was satanic.

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[13] The Christian fundamentalist homeschooling family that was the focus of the popular cable television reality show, "19 and Counting" which aired 2008-2015 on The Learning Channel (TLC).

[14] "Quiverfull" is a biblical image (Psalm 127:3-5; "Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.") that also denotes a movement among Christian fundamentalists that affirms abstention from birth control and the reception of children as well as the formation of large families as a blessing from God.

Church

We attended a 'down east' Southern Baptist Church (SBC). It was a 50s or 60s plant from another very established SBC Church. I was very involved; we were very involved. My mom was a church musician and taught children's choir. My dad was a church deacon and sang in the choir. I was in Bible Drill — so I could do it — I could find Bible verses with the best of them. I was in Girls in Action, GAs, and youth group. There were some homeschoolers in our church, but it wasn't all homeschoolers.

My grandparents were very worried that we, my siblings and I, were going to hell because we didn't get immediately baptized. I didn't get baptized until I was 14. So, we would get into 'encouraging' conversations (said with a wince), which caused me a lot of anxiety like I was really going to hell. But I didn't want to get baptized just because they told me to. So, I didn't do it. I was a little oppositional.

We moved when I was 14 to a town with a Baptist seminary and joined a church that's near the school. So, a lot changed. We went from a rural SBC church to a more urban and very educated church with a lot of professors and students there including my youth pastor, Eric, and his wife, Kelly. He eventually interned with John Piper[15] for a few years and started a prominent church in the state.

This church was very intellectual and my parents' religion transitioned to become more intellectual. My dad's bookshelves are full of all kinds of Bible studies and commentaries, Josh McDowell's books, J.I. Packer's books, John Piper's books, and the homeschool people from from the 70's and 80's. Hmm mmm (sighs), in that youth group they hooked us all up with mentors who met one-on-one with us. We read books and studied together. After my junior year in high school, we went on a big mission trip to Brazil.

But that time, I was already having a lot of problems with my parents; Joel [now her husband] was causing a lot of conflict. I was not allowed to date. That was an extreme bone of contention between my parents and me. I met Joel at summer camp when I was fifteen and he had just turned eighteen. I wanted to date him and I was not allowed to.

Oh, when I was twelve, I went with the youth group to hear Josh Harris speak on *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* at a rally — which was very frightening. I remember having so much anxiety afterwards about relationships with men, 'cause basically men are like sexual predators. All men. That's what they want. And you'd better not show any skin. You'd better not hold hands or kind of do anything.

But I wanted to date and I wasn't allowed to date. It was an extremely large source of conflict between me and my parents, especially my dad. I became really kind of bitter

[15] A prominent pastor in a resurgent form of conservative Calvinist Christianity that, among other distinctions, deploys as literal hermeneutic to the biblical text to strongly affirms a complementarian, roles-based notion on gender which precludes the ordination of women. This neo-Reformed movement has now morphed into a hipster version of conservative Christianity in many city settings.

and angry with my parents because I felt like my mom was more sympathetic to me but she was deferring to my dad. She was submitting to my dad. My dad was unreasonable and would like talk to members of the church about me, like elders in the church. I led music in my youth group, so I was pretty much a leader. But I also had this source of conflict which was also a big source of guilt. I have always had a big sense of justice, so I felt guilty for standing up for myself. But I still did it. I really struggled with trying to be a good Christian. I did my quiet time every day. I struggled with the dichotomy of doing my quiet time, being a good Christian, doing all the right things, and being Baptized a member of the church — but also kind of struggling with my own personality not really fitting with that.

Eric and Kelly left to learn about 'all of the wonderful ways' of John Piper (said dripping with sarcasm). We got a new youth pastor after that, Ben and his wife Amanda, who are also now prominent pastors in the area. But he was a seminary student at the time and so was Amanda. They were in their young 20's and a part of that resurgence of conservatism. We got along pretty well, but then when I started having conflict with my parents, they stepped in and guilt tripped me.

At that same time, I had befriended the skaters in my youth group. I had also befriended another girl in the youth group. She did some modeling and dressed a little too provocatively. She was not on the 'good' list. There were written dress codes for my youth group, like music codes. I was one of those people who was a leader, but I also kind of broke the rules a little bit. One of my other good friends… I'm still good friends with him now…he does my hair. He's very gay. At the time, we didn't know. He wasn't out. But he was on the outcast list and I was friends with him.

That was toward the end of our time at that church, because we moved right after that summer. Amanda tried to get me to tell her all this stuff about Joel because she wanted to tattle on me. She needed 'to confront me in love' (quoting a bible verse with sarcasm and now air quotes). And we weren't even seeing each other. We were just talking. We were just emailing and instant messaging. So that was kind of the last straw for me. I cut her off after that, which was also a sinful thing to do.

Yeah. It was hurtful. It was hard. I care about people and I want people to like me. I like other people and I wanted to be a good Christian. I just had to stop talking to them. It was really difficult. I think about how weird it was that she was not that much older than me, but she had a lot of sway over the young women in our youth group.

We went on other trips with other youth groups and they had very similar cultures – very stifling to women. My mom at the time was the leading church musician, directing the choir because they were in between music minsters. It was tradition at that church for the minister to do a short devotional at the beginning of choir practice. But they would not let my mom do it because she was a woman. They tried to start having women deacons, and people rose up, including women, against it: 'I'm a leader, I need to submit.' It was very difficult for me.

So, right before we left, we attended the homeschool convention. Our pastor was there and other friends. I found the Youth With A Mission (YWAM) booth in the back corner and bought *Why Not Women?,* their book on why women should be in leadership in ministry. They had that — at that convention! I don't know how it snuck in. It's a good book and I read it very prominently in front of my dad and our pastor. So, watch out! I can be a little rebellious towards pastors…a little passive aggressive, because I was just fed up. This was ridiculous. I have gifts and the women I know have gifts. You'll idolize these single women from the church who went as missionaries in Scotland, Africa, and all these places. But women can't lead a devotional for the choir? My inner feminist was coming out despite their best efforts.

First social justice experiences

My last summer in the youth group, we went to Belém, Brazil (which is at the top right hand corner of Brazil) for a youth mission trip to visit with missionaries and help them do evangelism with Vacation Bible School. We had to witness to a certain number of people and share the gospel with them before we could go to Brazil. I didn't do that, but I still got to go. We were in the utter slums, but we weren't allowed to do any humanitarian work. I saw people living in cardboard boxes, like children living in cardboard boxes with no plumbing and a corrugated metal roof. We weren't allowed to bring anything we could give away. I was very angry about that and outspoken about that.

Every social justice thing was really around and about evangelism.

This was equally true for our church down east. I remember distinctly —our town was hit hard by a lot of hurricanes in the 90's. Hurricanes Fran and Floyd were huge, so my youth group did a lot of hurricane relief — foodbanks, and soup kitchens. But, of course, Jesus was the real answer. Anything we did that was like this, giving back, had to come with that message. If you didn't offer that message, and this person dies and goes to hell — then it's your fault!

But I loved it, anything that we did like that, soup kitchens, hurricane relief, and the like. We helped out often, I mean our youth group. We cleaned up the yards of people; that is the kind of stuff I loved doing. I loved the outreach and felt it was also being a good Christian. They didn't really have a word for it this kind of work. It wasn't 'social justice;' that's a kind of a liberal thing. Even 'missional'[16] was still kind of a liberal thing. Our church was very big on missions, like out *there*, international missions. We had a lot of short-term teams go to Brazil and Ukraine. I don't know what they really did there, but they went and then came back and talked about it a lot. I was a little fearful

[16] "Missional" is a term that has come into favor in both conservative and mainline Christian circles in recent decades denoting churches that align their work and programs toward issues and needs outside of their body rather than the internal preferences and concerns which so often rule the collective lives of congregations. As Molly immediately demonstrates in the next sentence, "missional" is often quite different from traditional "missions" which, despite some admirable work, often involves an element of outsourcing the burdens of evangelism and meeting the needs of other cultures with trained and "called" heroic experts. Honoring these heroic cross-cultural servants on rare visits or at annual missions conferences is a small price to pay to allow the home or sending church to remain largely unbothered by the needs and realities of a greater world outside its doors.

that God was going to call me to be a missionary. They always talked about how 'God's called me and I ran from the call' at first. I was like, 'I hope I don't get *that* call.' But missions was a big deal for our church. We always had Annie Armstrong and Lottie Moon offerings[17] and that was a big deal. There was no helping the poor without giving to missions, without being a part of missions. Not justice. Missions.

I was homeschooled all the way to the 12th grade. But, by the time I was in high school or by the end of my high school years, I realized I wanted to be working with the poor and working with disenfranchised people.

I had discovered the 'slippery slope' end of the social justice mindset by thinking about Scripture. I just got tired of the unfairness. I think it's in Galatians where it says 'there's no Jew or Greek, or male or female, we're all one.' That was my favorite Scripture. Because there's racism. There's sexism. There's inequality and injustice. And the church isn't really doing anything about it! To me, still reading the Bible very literally at that point, it said something very different. I was very fed up with that. I have always had a big sense of justice, so I had conflict with the people in authority over my version of what 'fair' was. I saw them as not being fair to me and other people who didn't fit their molds. I was discovering other ways of thinking, the kind of thinking that 'all the answers' weren't 'all the answers' any more. And I'd been programmed with all the answers. I can argue with you about why global warming never happened, why evolution never happened, or why the moral majority is correct — all that stuff.

It definitely strikes me as ironic, kind of weird, having grown up this way with all the answers, that I'm now the lay leader in a church community where it is ok on your journey to have doubts and not know answers.

Then we moved to the Midwest. I lived there a year for my senior year in high school. We went to another SBC Church there that was like a purpose-driven life[18] church. I really don't know how my parents got to that church. We visited a lot. I pretty much insisted that we go there, because on the first visit, people came up and hugged me and I cried. I was like, 'Oh people are supposed to be nice to you at church.'

Carolina Baptist University

My parents stayed there for a few more years, but I was only there for that one year. I was still texting Joel a little bit. My dad wouldn't let us talk… so we had blogs, private lives journals or whatever, that we would post to each other. My parents wanted me to go to where my sister and brother went, which is Panhandle Baptist University. They only encouraged me to go to Christian schools. I wanted to go where I had lived until I was seventeen, where my friends were. So, I went back East to Carolina Baptist

[17] Traditional SBC collections for international missions.

[18] Purpose-Driven is a specific model/template of church based on Rick Warren's (pastor of Saddleback Church in California, a SBC mega-church) bestseller *The Purpose-Drive Life*. Though conservative, purpose-driven churches tend to use upbeat, contemporary Christian music in worship, affirm very casual dress and culturally relevant idioms, and avoid excessively doctrinaire approaches to ministry that get in the way of evangelism.

University (CBU). It wasn't too bad. Some of my mom's favorite students had gone to CBU. They have a good music program. My parents probably did not want me to study my religion there, but a lot of the families in our down East church had kids who went there or their parents went there themselves in its more conservative days. We don't tell the Board of Trustees at CBU what goes on in the social work and religion departments.

So, I knew by the time I graduated from high school I wanted to be a social worker and work with people in poverty. I didn't really know what that meant, although I kind of knew the populations of people I wanted to work with. I thought I was going to work in a homeless shelter, which I guess is not too far off from where I am now! But it took a long way for me to get there! So, I went to CBU to get a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work. I started my classes in social work right away. I knew what I wanted.

My parents wanted me to go to Campus Crusade for Christ, the Baptist Student Union (BSU) or something or join a campus Bible study and I just refused. I stayed away. I wasn't interested in being Baptist any more. I said I was going to go to church on Sunday and I'm not going to worry about that the rest of the time. Anyway, I stayed away from campus ministries; I stayed away from all that at CBU. I was in my social work thing, the Social Work Club, and I just graduated.

I just tried to be open-minded as possible and my mind was very much opened and shifted. I grew. I loved it, the social sciences. My dad calls them the soft sciences. I'll never forget that. I loved my sociology and psychology classes. I soaked them up like a sponge and digested them and came to realize that how I grew up was not an accurate picture of the world.

I took a couple of religion classes at CBU including a religion and sociology class on the family. It was a combined, multi-disciplinary class on families and I decided I was going to research gay parents because I didn't know anyone who was gay. I had grown up hearing terrible things about LGBTQ people. I thought, 'I still think it's true, but I'd like to know what research says so that I can defend the truth.' I did all this outcomes research on gay and lesbian parents and found there was no difference in outcomes between gay or lesbian parents and straight parents — except that LGBTQ parents are a little more tolerant of other kids. They're a little bit nicer. That's what I learned. It was really good.

I was also exposed to Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE). I knew a little bit because I had gotten that book at the homeschool convention, read it, and passed it to my pastor very conspicuously so that he'd know I didn't agree with him and his views on women. I got to hear this view in a class; the professor was very pro-Scripture, very believing of the Bible, but was also a feminist and for women in ministry. His wife was a doctor and he was a PhD. I knew I was equal, but it was very validating.

Of course, I attended the [mandatory chapel] CBUW, Carolina Baptist University Worship, except my last year because I had an internship. I often tuned out the speaker. But the Invisible Children group came and that was influential. Derek Webb spoke and

sang (in his super-Calvinist phase then). He just talked about being depraved the whole time. I've seen him since then and it's been better. But, oh, Donald Miller came and was very influential. In fact, I think he changed my life. He was so very freeing. I felt he said a lot of things that I didn't know I was thinking and feeling. I loved the story of him being on his college campus at Reed College, doing apologies, hearing people's experiences, and just listening to what people had to say about their hurts by the church. I'd been very hurt by the church, very much so. It was so influential. I went and devoured *Blue Like Jazz.* That's how I found our current church. I had googled emergent churches in 2007 and 2008.

Getting married

We got engaged pretty quickly, right after I started college, so my parents weren't very happy with me. I was not going to be the 'married and drop out girl.' My parents had that fear, only because they didn't talk to me. If they had talked to me, they would have known. I got a four- page letter from Kristin, the wife of the youth minister who I hadn't spoken with in over a year because I just didn't want to deal with her. It went on and on about how I wasn't submitting to my father and God would never bless my marriage because I didn't know how to submit. If I didn't submit to my father, how was I going to submit to my husband. I still have the letter.

I was 19 when I got married. I graduated a year early from CBU; I was basically starting my junior year when we got married.

Social work career: college and beyond

The social work classes you take were really interesting: Human Behavior and Development, Social Welfare and Policy, Sociology classes,… They are so very life changing, especially the policy classes — hearing about how welfare reform developed and how it's really shitty to people who are in minority groups. It was awful to learn that and about the 'Myth of the Welfare Queen'. That was the first time I had heard that history and seen facts about it, to learn that I have a part in institutional racism. I had never experienced poverty or seen poverty up close. I grew up in a very Republican household where the individual is king — the individual, very puritan, the pure being of God, working with your head down, boot-strapping your way up. And if people don't do that, something's wrong with them and it's their fault. Now I was going in people's trailers or tiny apartments experiencing poverty firsthand.

My first college social work assignment was in rural NC, a county with one of the fastest growing HIV/AIDS diagnoses among rural African American women. I interned at a little tiny HIV/AIDS agency run by a gay Black man in the county near the college. That was my first internship. I learned a lot from that assignment. I loved it. I'm an '86 baby so I remember hearing a little about HIV/AIDS, but I didn't really understand it or what was happening. My parents didn't really talk about it. I mean, back then, I only knew that it was an STD and how it was transmitted. There was one lady with AIDS who came to church when I was growing. She spoke to my 'True Love Waits' class. That terrified

me about her having AIDS. I knew she looked really sick. I didn't know the whole story about what happened in the 80s.

It was eye opening to me to meet people with AIDS and hear about their challenges, how hard it is to get housing, jobs, and healthcare. It was really interesting. I think I learned the depth of the sadness of lives impacted by AIDS. I learned that people not only don't talk about AIDS, which I already knew, but it wasn't talked about. I got to experience the stigma first hand. AIDS is not just on continents like Africa, it's still happening here regularly and often. That was a big deal, just knowing people in my community who have AIDS or are HIV positive.

I helped them put together a resource manual. I learned a lot about different legislation. We did home visits for people out in the county. We helped put together and attended a vigil on World AIDS day. I also did some after-school work; they had an after-school program with kids not related to HIV/AIDS, just low-income kids.

And I just tried to keep an open mind. That was my goal. I was really self-conscious in college of coming from a homeschool background and not having a typical high school experience at all, like not being exposed to the same pop culture that everyone was exposed to and being really aware of it. I had felt judged by my church and that community and so I did not want to be a perpetrator of that judgment, so I really just tried to keep an open mind and absorb and learn.

After I graduated, I got a job at the agency, Tar Heel State Outreach, which I've been with for some time. I didn't know what I was doing for a while, but the job was very interesting. I did in-home work with families, almost all low-income families. Our agency pretty much only accepts Medicaid. Our clients were mostly families of color: African Americans, Hispanics, and First Nations folks. It was a huge learning environment having never gone to public school. I had a couple of Black friends who were homeschooled with me, but they were very different from the majority Black culture in most ways. I just tried to fit in the best way I could. But, my isolated background comes out every once a while. 'You didn't see this?' 'You were homeschooled?'

My position at Tar Heel State Outreach was to be a therapeutic mentor or a therapeutic skill-builder. I would see kids with Medicaid, so all low-income or no insurance at all. I usually was a part of a team with another therapist and another case manager. We worked with these kids with pretty intense emotional or behavioral issues. So, of course, they come to us because they had a diagnosis like oppositional defiance disorder. But when you got in the home, it was often like struggles with food, housing, healthcare, basic parenting skills, and educational problems — the myriad of problems that come with poverty and that kind of generational poverty. I know my way around most of the housing projects in this area.

I loved it. It definitely confirmed that I wanted to get my Masters. When I just had my Bachelor's, I was very aware of my limitations. I wasn't a therapist, but I was working

on these skills and I really wanted to learn how to do therapy. So, I worked for 2 years and started with advanced standing in a social work Master's program [at one of the state universities], a May-to-May one year program. Originally, I thought I was going to work with little kids and do play therapy or something, but I couldn't do that as my internship (we have to be supervised for at least two years, post your MSW in order to get your full license). So, I had to work with a different population. I started teaching the independent living skills work because we recognized the navigational challenges during the teenage years when transitioning to adulthood and moving into the adult mental healthcare system. I fell in love with that age group and that kind of program.

I did a bunch of jobs at Tar Heel State Outreach, but kept teaching those classes. My boss was able to grow this program into its own non-profit. When I came back from maternity leave a year ago, I started doing that full-time. And then in January, it became its own separate agency: Sustainable Living Foundation.

We really focus on kids who have aged out of the foster care system so we have housing, two little apartment buildings. Our office is in one of them, so there are kids all around us and across the street from us. I do some therapy with a small caseload of like 6-8 people. I also do clinical supervision for people getting their license.

Kids come by to work on their resumes or they come by to talk…somebody pissed them off and they come by to talk about it…a kid broke his ankle yesterday and came by to show me his cast and to get food…taking kids to get food stamps and doctor's appointments…navigating those systems which are always changing and are always confusing. I do a substance use group, an independent living skills group, and roommate meetings. Kids are thrust into roommate situations that are volatile. There is all this learned defensiveness and walls of mistrust of everyone. Then you're living with someone who's also that angry and mistrustful.

We have one young man who has been in our housing three times. The first time we kicked him out because he was renting out his room - our apartment. He is a very enterprising person. He ended up going away to a jobs program, got his GED, and then came back. He still wasn't doing what he needed to do. We gave him tons of chances. He ended up bombing out again and he was legit homeless, sleeping on people's couches. I think he even slept outside a few times. He finally he came back into our program and now he's living where we are so we can keep a better eye on him. He just finished a nursing program, a nursing assistant program. He's doing really well, but it took three or four chances. Now he's 21 or 22. So there's a lot of advocacy in our work, a lot of frustration, and a lot of venting.

We're there with them, walking with them through all this life stuff on becoming adults, figuring out what kind of services they can get, working on mental health stuff - usually trauma, and how to manage life for the first time on their own. Some of them have been in and out of our program. They bomb out, cuss us all out and say, 'I'm done.' And then six months later, we get a call, 'I'm homeless. Can you help me?' 'Yes, we can help you.' Seeing kids who get mad at us — 'Fuck You…I'm out…I'm leaving!' — and then

call us 6 months later is a wonderful picture. I like just knowing that there's something in there, they know we'll unconditionally love them and accept them, that we're here for them.

Resources are tight. Very much so. Every single year, my job still gets a little more challenging. Every year there would be cuts made and we would have to tweak how we did our work. My job the first 2 years of working in that field doesn't even exist anymore because they've cut all the funding for a Bachelors level persons.

I work with a lot of LGBT kids. They don't necessarily have to be in a program, but they'll come to the groups and kind of linger. We've had several transgender or gender nonconforming kids and it's really cool to see how the teenagers in the room are like, 'ok cool,' a little struggle with pronouns generally speaking, but they're very accepting and welcoming of each other. I just love teenagers. They're so open-minded.

We try to expose them to community organizers like the Southern Coalition for Social Justice and things in the community like the new Police Chief. They have all been followed, stopped, frisked, and questioned. They have all had those experiences – young Black men and women, some Hispanic, but mostly African American men and women. We also try to connect them to current events and to know what's going on. We talk about politics and elections. We tried to get as many registered to vote as we could. We talked about that a lot with them. We tried to get them empowered a little to believe they can advocate for themselves.

It's always interesting. I enjoy it. It's a challenge. And it's very redemptive. I like to say that it has made me a better person because I meet so many people who are different from me and listen to their stories and try to do something with that.

I think Tar Heel State Outreach is a really good agency to work for, especially when they were a lot smaller. They did a good job of having a good agency culture and having good supervision and self-care. I got a lot of support. I think afterwards, I definitely got burned out doing the more intensive in-home jobs. The parents were burning me out worse than the kids because they would be like, 'Here fix my kid.' But I think they were part of the problem. I was able after two years and move to other jobs at the same agency that were not quite as taxing.

It's taken me a long time to learn that not every battle is my battle. I still try to do it all on some days. But I think I just try to know where my circle is, where I have influence, and being aware that I'm putting this good, kindness, graciousness, and compassion hopefully out into the world. With my clients, I try not to expect there to be a like huge change all at once.

I tell my supervisees, 'There's not going to be this huge change overnight and there's not going to be a huge change in any system.' Hell no. That never changes overnight. But the relationships that you have can be life-changing and I think I try to focus on those things for sure.

Faith and social work

In social work, I'm sure you're aware, similar to counseling, if you're religious, you leave it at the door. Social work is not a mode to bring someone to religion. It's not like you don't engage it at all, but you don't have an ulterior motive. My boss is not religious in any way, but I would be open to him about my story and I've talked to some of my co-workers about it too. It's funny because we were approached by an evangelical church we know well with a sneaky non-profit, you know… 'We're going to love the city' but with evangelistic motives (sighs). He had no idea. He'd never heard of them and I knew what they were trying to do.

We went to a similar church right after college. They looked really cool, had really good music, were really friendly, and didn't look like the Christianity I had grown up with. We left for many reasons, like the way they treat women. To me that's also not compatible to social work, how they treat women and gay people, you know, how they raise up leaders who are arrogant assholes. How do I say this… nicely? They are very focused on money. Those things really bother me as a social worker and a woman — all of those things.

But it's interesting because I have very religious co-workers in African-American traditions that are way more conservative that I am in many ways. They'll talk about 'claiming blessings' and have a language around that theology. I have been thinking about the evangelical nature of the White churches versus Black churches. I have been a Harry Potter evangelist with a co-worker that I've worked with for two years. She started reading it last week, so I've made some inroads. I'm going to have a conversion soon … baptizing in the church of Slytherin!

Moral Mondays & theological reflection

Faith and politics is also a hard jump for me. I think I have a little PTSD from the way I grew up in the Moral Majority movement, where Scripture was coopted for political gain and certain messages. It makes me a little nervous. Even today I saw something — Reverend Barber posted something on Facebook and I was like, 'Man, there's a lot of Bible verses in that.' I was going to share it, but I'm not sure how this will be received. I shouldn't think … I've thought a lot about that … this is a very fleeting thought…but like, you know, I thought a lot about it in a second and it stressed me out.

I've been to a few Moral Monday rallies. Sometimes I'm a little uncomfortable with Moral Mondays, because it's so very religious. But I also have to recognize that Reverend Barber is a preacher and he's saying these really profound things. And I agree with him. I just have to get past the religious language. But even if I agree with him, putting those things together so publicly is, I think, for me, a little frightening.

But I love Moral Mondays. They give me hope for people in this state, which seems so backwards a lot of the time, especially in a political realm. The rural areas where I grew up are so different from the university communities in regards to talking about and acknowledging that racism exists and that sexism exists and inequality exists and we can

play a part in that. I think Moral Mondays definitely give me hope for people of faith to be at the forefront of that acknowledgement. Reverend Barber, you and others, the clergy that are there are so encouraging — when you and my friend Michael got arrested.

You just call them out on their shit and I love it. I think it reminds me of the Civil Rights Movement and the very precise way you're doing this non-violent direct action. I think people notice it and people are encouraged by it. I'm encouraged by it as one who works in the system and I find myself often so exhausted that I can't always think about protesting, because I'm so angry. But it's just so encouraging to know that others are also working and protesting.

I love Reverend Barber and like that he brings it. But, to me, the causes he is talking about are causes I would absolutely align with. And he's like talking about justice and faith as a politic. He brings in his brothers and sisters who are Muslim or Jewish or have no faith and he is so respectful and welcoming and open to all.

Of course, I'm a feminist. I get like happy goosebumps when I see my female friends in their clerical garb. It is a conundrum. He's a Black man. And I'm not going to lie— I don't think that he shouldn't be there, because he has great things to say — but it would be great if he were a woman. But I think that a Black woman or maybe even a White woman would not be heard as he is even though I know he gets a lot of negativity from certain areas. He echoes Dr. King in a lot of ways and I love that of course. He definitely has some privilege, being a man. It's definitely there. But I also see that he is a feminist too — very much so, and he uses that maleness in a positive way.

I love that he can speak that language. That's important to me, even though I would claim Christianity, even though at times I don't know what I think about it. The way he says or quotes Scripture, in some ways, is frightening to me because I haven't seen you use Scripture in a public space like that. But it's almost like he redeems it. I'm not saying that religion shouldn't be a part of it. I think Scripture is very powerful and I love redeeming the traditions in which I was raised. I was trained to only see Scripture in a certain way, and I love that they are turning it on its head, but sometimes the language is really strong.

'Always be prepared to give an answer…' — there is my old way of thinking, right? I was supposed to have an answer, trained in apologetics and look at me now. Well, I am not prepared to give an 'answer.'

It's very discombobulating and it's almost funny — the things I was raised to be scared of like universalism or 'all paths lead to God.' Whatever! Well that is sometimes the only way I can be a person of faith – like those kind of 'scary…scary' things in quotes. I was raised to fear or to reject. It's the only way I can keep faith. I have some friends that are recently leaving church — period — and are really angry and because they don't have certainty that there is a God. They're going to reject church and all that and live in the certainty that there's not a God. I think I've struggled with that too, being angry or cynical in a more conservative tradition. But I found myself searching for mystery and

finding more peace in searching for mystery than when I actually thought I actually knew things or had answers. I'm trying to be ok with that.

I try to seek God in finding places of justice, peace, and beauty. I try to focus on those things in my work and life, whether it's building a relationship with a young person I'm working with or neighbors or whoever. I'm feeling like I'm always learning about new ways I can be. I grew up with 'God is only one way!' So, I open my mind up to nature or other people who are different. To me that's where I find God — in justice work. I think I would get overwhelmed and want to give up if I didn't try to find God in justice and if I didn't have some kind of purpose in that. Scripture is about preaching the good news to the poor. And I think you can't have good news to the poor without justice.

I had this woman witness to me in Walmart a few weeks ago. She was talking about the mark of the beast. She was like my cashier at Walmart and she was talking about the mark of the beast and I kind of made a joke to deflect it. She said to me, 'If you don't have the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, you'll fall for anything. I was like, 'OK, it's been a long time since I heard that language.' That was her version of the gospel and that was her good news to me. It wasn't great news to me. But I'm trying to be really good about her boldness to her customers to say that. That is how I was raised, that was the gospel and you've got to drop little gospel bombs on people because they could die tomorrow and go to hell. We passed a church over the weekend with 'You think it's hot now, hell's hotter' on the marquis. My gospel is different. It's been relocated to me into a gospel for the poor.

I think it's partially a reaction, like I said, being so close-minded for so long. My reaction has been to be more open-minded and try to be curious and to learn, to be open to new experiences or new stories. Once you're accepting, the whole world opens up. Spiritually so many things open up to you and you don't have to be concerned is this way right or wrong? You can search for beauty in those things and search for truth in those things.

It's a different logic, a different way of looking at and defending things. I do not have the energy…I don't feel the need to defend what I think. Of course, women should be pastors and I don't need to go to the Greek to tell you that. Of course, gay people can be leaders in the church. I choose not to fight and some people may need to work through that. There was a time in my life when I needed to work through all that in my mind because of how I was raised. I used to like to debate my position, but I don't really feel I need that anymore right now.

Now, in general, who is God and how are humans a part of that story —I'm definitely still working that out.

But, wow, at times, I miss the certainty. I'm nostalgic for certain traditions my family had, the things we read together, listened to, or watched. Because I was homeschooled, the religious was tied in with the education. Every night we would listen to Adventures in Odyssey from Focus on the Family. I like literally owned every cassette. I miss the

innocence. I wrote this as my lament on Sunday in church. I lament not knowing what to tell my daughter about God, because it was so black and white for me as a kid. Whether or not that was good is another story, but there was some assurance knowing the answers and having Focus on the Family wrap everything up so nicely at the end of the day.

Yeah, I lived with it. I accept it. Putting my daughter to sleep is sort of like moving through the Kübler-Ross stages of grief with my childhood — the denial, definitely denial, anger and cynicism, sadness, and now a sort of acceptance, grieving that this was part of me but accepting that it's not part of my present life. But it is part of me, who I am, and my family still.

I struggle with what we tell her about God and church. I think, I hope that she gets, from an early age, to love and accept everyone. I always worry that we're not exposing her to enough people of color and people with two moms. I want her to know people who are different than her at an early age and learn that acceptance. Wanting her to be aware of and accepting of people who are different is some of my own privilege. I have the privilege of letting her know when there's inequality rather than it being a norm like for some of my friends.

Final thoughts

When I started Carolina Baptist as an 18 year-old, I knew I was going to be a social worker. Back then, I didn't know what being a social worker really entailed. But I love what I'm doing. I love being a therapist and I think I see myself doing that long-term. I thought for a hot second about going into private practice, but I really love the population that I work with, people with lower incomes and Medicaid, kids, teenagers in the foster care system. To me that work is really fulfilling. Yeah, it's difficult. But to me, I just love the holistic nature of this work.

I was a little bit different from my peers in social work and non-profits. I moved. I lived in three different places when I was in high school alone. I think I spent a lot of time being ashamed when I was in my early to mid 20's, ashamed about the way I grew up, being home-schooled. I didn't want anyone to know that I was raised in basically a fundamentalist cult. I wanted that to not be a part of me because I was ashamed of it. It was weird and different; I was so very aware of that difference. I think as I've gotten older, I've gotten a little more open about it. Even today, I was in a training with other people who work in non-profits and we were talking about Harry Potter. I was like, 'Yeah, I wasn't allowed to read Harry Potter.' I'm obsessed with it now. I shared that I grew up in a very religious home and wasn't allowed to read it. That is something I wouldn't have shared eight years ago or so.

This has become my new rule: keep an open mind, absorb everything I can, learn everything I can, and not be a judgmental person. I have become aware of the social justice aspect of Christianity. And if you don't talk about social justice, that's the real watering down of the message. The gospel without social justice is not what the gospel was ever about.

CHAPTER NINE: PIERCE MULLINS
"I HAD THESE EXAMPLES IN MY LIFE."

Prologue

Pierce is small framed, thin White man in his 40s with his hair completely shaved — a far cry from all of the web and promotional photos from his 20s and 30s where he has long straight hair all the way down his back. But, the first thing you notice about Pierce is his eyes. He looks straight at you; he listens intently and demonstrates his attention with an unbroken gaze. His voice, unsurprising for a musician of some renown, is melodious and inviting. He speaks softly and with thought. But disregarding the clear insightfulness of his thoughts, his voice has an enchantment to it that makes you want to hear more. For a man whose career requires constant self-promotion, there is nothing self-promoting about Pierce. Our interviews and long conversations never found their way to the awards and recognition that he had earned as folk musician or a life spent in peacemaking. He was intently interested in my own work and often paused our interviews to ask me questions. Interestingly, Pierce was the easiest interlocutor for me to secure. Though I had met him briefly before, we were introduced by a musician who was a common friend. Pierce said "yes" to the project almost before I asked; he is utterly committed to work that furthers our understanding of social justice and invites others into this work.

We met at his relatively small home in the mountains of NC. His living room was filled with music, books on theology, literature, and some art. Though only an impression, I sensed with the rustic and comfortable feel of the home that it was the site of much hospitality. The property includes another small house that had been converted into a studio for Pierce and a smaller building that served as the office for his non-profit and his promotional work for his

artistic/speaking career. He and his wife also own another house on the street that they use as a rental for some additional income. Their small town is a haven for mountain getaways, a community where opportunities abound to buy art or antiques, enjoy local music, outfit for outdoor adventures, or simply to rest and enjoy the vibe. Pierce travels often and has an incredibly full schedule. Hence, our interviews occurred over a five month period and were booked far in advance. I would typically travel to mountains for day, spend the mornings with Pierce and the afternoons writing field notes or transcribing in the one of the excellent coffee houses in his town.

Pierce's Story

> I grew up a pastor's kid, a 'PK,' in a manse directly across the street from the church with people coming through all the time, people with spiritual, emotional, and financial needs. I treasure that part of my childhood, although it was a little bit weird from time to time. I had a brother who was less receptive to that. One time after he had moved out, my folks asked if he was coming for Thanksgiving and he said, 'Will there be any transients there?' — a line that lives on in our family lore.
>
> My dad was a Presbyterian pastor. He's retired in his mid-80s now. We were in a really large church in the deep South and people were knocking on the door all the time, literally all hours of the day and night. The phone rang all the time. Sometimes it was laughing friends stopping by with a bottle of wine to hang out with my parents and sometimes it was a guy who drifting through town and was asking if he could mow the lawn for 20 bucks. And sometimes it is people who were hungry. I'm sure it has grown in my memory. But it feels to me almost like every night we had extra people at the dining room table.
>
> I'm also the youngest of four. With three older siblings, they always had friends in and out of the house too. It was an almost downtown church in a time when people did a lot of living downtown so it really was a steady stream of people. I loved that openness. We had it here this weekend with a musician friend staying and another friend who is going through a tough divorce — on the front side of that. She brought her kids and came for the weekend, just to be here and be away. I love that. I want my house to be that. I'm not a preacher who lives right across the street from the church as my dad was, but I want people to come through all the time. I want that open table to be our story as well.
>
> So, with my parents, there was always an open-door policy. There was not a distinction between 'people who matter' and 'people who don't.' We had extremely wealthy people in the church and they would also swing by. All sorts of different mainstreams and all sorts of different margins were constantly coming through the house.

My dad was a pastor and that was his activity-ism. But he became somewhat radicalized in the mid-80s when he went to Central America on a fact-finding mission for the church. He became aware of some pretty disturbing roles that the US was playing in various countries in Central America, still. By that time, was in the mid-Atlantic and he insisted on preaching about that because he felt called to it. He felt that was being faithful. And was asked not to, repeatedly. And, he was eventually, more or less, run off from that church.

My mom was involved in the reconstruction of the Presbyterian Church, the North-South stuff, heavily, doing that work. But she was also involved in peace issues to some degree. I remember being in her Sunday School class, and her doing that thing — I'm sure that you remember it from the 80s —that was a really effective way of conceiving how many nuclear warheads there were in the world at the time. They used a metal trash can and dropped a BBs in for each warhead. They would eventually pour all the BB's in — just the sound of that! I remember her doing that little demonstration for friends in her Sunday School class on nuclear disarmament. It's a beautiful thing for me to remember. And inspiring. Later she went with a group of women friends and wrapped a ribbon all the way around the Pentagon. I don't know if you remember that, but it was beautiful demonstration. When we moved to the Mid-Atlantic, she also began a Habitat for Humanity chapter and was a fulltime volunteer director working 35 hours a week for seven years.

My mom also had this group of women, eight of them, she hung out with, 'peace people.' They were awesome, just amazing, very different from each other in a lot of ways, but all of them incredible women. One of them, Dottie, was a Quaker. She always impressed me so much. She was extraordinary, always working on something. She had a crippling form of arthritis that had fused her spine. She was always shaped like this [demonstrates a severely bent-over posture]. She was in constant pain, but always smiling, energetic, and engaged. Just an amazing woman. I was reading Michener's *Chesapeake* which has a thread of a Quaker family he follows through the book. I was reading about that and it was interesting. I was already engaged in some peace work and Quakers show up there a lot. And then there's this amazing woman. I said to Mom,
'What is this? I don't know anything about it. I'm really curious and it keeps showing up.'
'Go ask Dottie, she will tell you about it.'
Mom didn't prep Dottie for the fact that I was going to ask about Quakers. Dottie didn't want to be seen as recruiting me away from Presbyterianism. But her example was so deeply inspiring to me. I started to look more and more into it, and the more I dug in, the more I thought, 'Wow this is what I've always believed and I didn't know there was a group of people who believed this. This is my tribe. These are the people I'm supposed to be with.'

Now my membership is a Quaker Meeting and has been for many years. I'm a pretty devoted Quaker. But when people ask me about my tradition, I tell them 'I'm a Quaker-terian.' I've got a foot planted firmly in each of those traditions, the Quakers and Presbyterians. I still do a whole lot of work in Presbyterian circles. My grandfather was a

Presbyterian pastor, and obviously my father as well. One of my sisters is a Presbyterian pastor. My other sister and I are Quakers.

I had these examples in my life. I don't know if either parent would have identified themselves as activists. It wasn't all the time; there weren't political meetings at the house. But they believed in living out their compassion. They took the Scriptures really seriously. They talked a lot about how we love each other tangibly, not just love as a warm fuzzy feeling. And sometimes loving each other involves standing in the way of people who hurt folks. Those were my early examples.

My parents talked to me about things; they took me seriously and didn't hide the world from me. And this was in the 70s. We weren't too far out of the 60s. And 60s actually happened in the late 60s and early 70s (laughing). It was actually on the backside of that era; that was happening around me to some degree. I was aware of the 60s and demonstrations. But I can't think of a demonstration ever happening where I grew up. I can't recall attending one as a child. But I knew they existed. I was very interested in the Civil Rights Movement and stories like that of Rosa Parks. Just growing up in a preacher's house — it is something that I think I have noticed over the years, just from an anecdotal standpoint, not from a research standpoint — I think preacher's kids are forced to confront questions of morality earlier than other kids. We start thinking about that stuff a lot younger, because it's around us. We're hearing about it all the time. So, I did care about what was right. I wanted to be faithful as a young Christian and I wanted to stand up for people who were being beaten down. I didn't know how to do that. But I wanted to do it.

I watched my parents try to care for their family and also try to care for the world around them. I have such a deep respect for my dad. He's a fine man. All of us cope the best we can in the context we have. I think, to some degree, Dad's work was his sanctuary from the pain of his life. So he worked a lot. As a child, I said, 'I will never be a preacher because I don't want to spend that much time away from my family.' That is, of course, extremely ironic now. (Laughter)

Oh yeah, let me tell you a formative story that goes back a generation. This is a powerful story for me though it informs my story only in esoteric, not in direct, ways. My maternal grandfather died when Mom was four. She had two brothers. Her mom raised the three of them in real poverty. Having later understood what poverty is, what real poverty is, I can say they were raised in real deep South poverty. And I am possession of my maternal grandfather's Klan membership card. He was an illiterate farmer and he owned a gas station for a while, the kind of guy that desperately needed a sense of being better than somebody.

My grandmother attended the local Baptist church and was a stalwart. She opened the doors and closed them. I think she literally had a key. She taught Sunday School for years and years and years. She gave money to the church, of the 'no money' that she had. And, she never joined that church. She considered herself a Presbyterian all of her days because she had family who were not Southern Baptists and therefore could not

have communion in that church. That looked like crappy theology to her. Never joined. It's one thing to walk away because you find a teaching to be reprehensible. It's another thing to say 'Ok, I'll just join in and see if I can change it from the inside out.' It's another thing, it is a third thing, to stay for decades, give your life to the church, and pass that communion plate by, every time it comes. Never took it. Never once. That's a story. There's where my momma came from.

My grandmother, flat broke, took care of everybody in that community. And also, interestingly, she was taken care of by the African American community after my grandfather died. My uncles and my mom had food to eat some nights because people brought it. They knew her family didn't have any. The fact that my grandfather was a Klansman did not keep them from loving my mom and her brothers and my grandmother through that time. That's what the gospel looks like man! That's what the gospel looks like. That's what the gospel looks like.

Childhood

As a child, I had a several radicalizing experiences.

I went to Haiti and Mexico on church group trips when I was 14 and 15 and those were pretty radicalizing experiences for me in terms of extreme poverty not being an abstract issue. There were people whose eyes I looked in and had to face my own privilege. Again, I grew across the street from this church with plenty of wealthy people in a retirement community in the South. Because we spent time in the homes of people who were very very wealthy, I thought I was poor. I had no concept of what poverty was, right? I actually thought I was pretty poor and I went to a school where a lot my friends were pretty wealthy. I went to a school for the gifted. The kids were advantaged, a lot of them. So, I actually thought I was poor growing up, which is an amazing thing. I lived in a big old house; we didn't own it. We lived in the manse and had no shortage of food. There was never a time when we weren't going to make it. We wore hand-me-down clothes, but we weren't poor.

I have a memory of Haiti, that to be perfectly honest, I'm not sure how much of it is manufactured and how much of it actually happened. Whether it was a dream or whether it was real, it is very vivid to me. I think it's true; I don't know whether it is factual. I remember being in the market with my youth group in Port-au-Prince and getting away from the group. And there was a person lying across the alley, obviously starving. And, to get to the group, I had to step over that person. It must have been a dream; I can't imagine that it happened. But it so vivid to me. Haiti will make you dream. It goes deep. It goes deep.

The Mexico trip was also very moving and radicalizing for me. My cardinal rule on about being alive, and doing the work we're trying to do these days, is, 'That which humanizes is good. And that which dehumanizes is not good.' Those trips humanized issues for me in ways, expanding my concept of 'us' and breaking out of 'us vs. them' way of thinking. At least that's how I perceive it now. I don't know how much of that has been in reflection since and how much of it was in that time.

Also, when I was about 13, I also got to go on a work camp at Immokalee which is ground zero for the Farm Workers Movement. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers, CIW, is the flagship organization. I went there and spent a week working on houses, climbing on roofs, very excited to be given a hammer to swing. That was great. I was working side-by-side with those who were going to live in this house and was beginning to understand a little bit about their stories.

When I was about 12, before any of those trips, there was talk by the school system of moving our little school to another location. We all loved the location of our school. It was a school made out of portable buildings on a big grassy lot with pine trees everywhere. Part of a radical social experiment. They gave us a lot of freedom; they trusted us a lot, even at very young ages. Our lunch hour was an hour and we had free reign of the campus. We would play Frisbee and hangout under the trees to eat our lunches. The older kids could drive off campus. The younger kids could be anywhere on the campus they wanted to be. That was a really beautiful thing. We liked having an outside experience as our school. But there was talk about moving our school out of town and building a better building that would actually accommodate the school. And eventually they did that after I left. But, at the time, this talk was just in the air. So, my friends and I said, 'Let's have a demonstration. Let's just let people know we're the students and we want to stay here like it is.' We took magic markers and made t-shirt about keeping our school where it was. I called the newspaper and said, 'We're going to have a demonstration on our lunch hour. We'll meet you over by this fence if you want to come cover it.' It was maybe eight or nine of us. My organizing skills were very nascent at the point! So, a very small group of kids lined up behind the fence and they took pictures of us in our t-shirts. We let them know. And they ran a story in the paper.

But I want to be clear; I don't want to paint a Norman Rockwell picture of my childhood. I mostly was a pretty low maintenance kid, but my older siblings were doing their teenage years, two out of three of them were doing those years with great drama and flare. It was quite challenging in terms of things my siblings were going through. But I don't want to tell their stories. I don't think that's appropriate. But some of their anxiety was aimed directly at me. Some of my deepest wounds and my deepest insecurities I trace pretty clearly to a relationship with one of my siblings. It was hard; it was really rough on me. Mean. I have a very clear memory of being about 7 or 8 and the challenge I had with people discussing 'sibling love' positively. To this day, I have a sibling that kind of flip-flops back and forth as to whether I am a complete charlatan and hypocrite or whether I'm a saint. That's another a really big piece of my childhood experience. In order to paint the picture, you have to understand that.

But, my parents were good about debriefing when things came up that were at crisis level. They had a lot to think about and deal with at the time. And mostly I was just kind of there. They loved me and cared for me beautifully. I have a really clear memory of my sister, who was going through some very difficult stuff. And she came home from somewhere and she and Dad went to out to sit on the front stoop of our house and have a conversation. There was that quiet tension in the house. You knew they were having a big conversation out there, but you didn't know what it is. But I really wanted was that

much attention from my dad as a little kid. So, when they came in and my sister went on to do her thing, I said, 'Dad, I have something I really need to talk to you about. Could we go sit on the front porch?' And he totally went and sat on the front porch with me. And I had nothing - I couldn't think of anything to talk about. But I wanted him to sit on the front porch with me. To listen, to talk with. And he did. Gosh, I'm grateful for that.

In the middle of my 10th grade year, my family moved to a church in the mid-Atlantic. Dad was there for seven years before they eventually ran him off. (He actually moved into one of the sweetest periods of his ministry after that!) We moved from this little school I had been in since 4th grade with tiny classes, an open campus, lunch in the pine trees, and really smart teachers. My parents actually involved me in the conversation about moving because, at that point, I was the only one left at home. They said, 'If you don't want to do this, we won't. But this possibility exists.' I actually felt at the time that I needed to shape my life up a little bit. I didn't know what was next, but I was ready for a change. So, I was all for it.

We moved and I went to a large county high school with1500 students instead of my little tiny school. I came in during the middle of the year, so relationships were already formed. I just practiced my invisibility skills for a while. But I had a wonderful guidance counselor at that school, a sweet, sweet country woman. I just loved her dearly. She knew that I had been in a visual performing arts school in Florida. I had studied TV and radio production, which I found really interesting. I never like being in front, but I like being behind the camera. I had done that for a year and a half before we moved. So, she scored me an internship at a local TV station and I worked at that station for a short period of time. Then she also scored me a paying job helping out at the top 40 radio station in town, the #1 station in town, tracking sports scores at first and later I ended up as a late-night disk jockey on weekends. It was pretty wild. I was, like, 17, and pulling the 2am-5am shift on weekends. My parents let me do that, which was pretty amazing. That was pretty amazing. Now this was the 80s, those guys were partying hard. They were cutting out lines on the counter. There was a lot going on and my eyes were opened to a lot of that stuff which I think has been valuable. I came through it ok. I never hit any of those lines – thankfully. And they were offered to me often.

Once I became the disc jockey at the radio station, then I would hear people in the hallways at school,
'Yeah, that guy, that guy right there, no really he's a disc jockey at Q95.'
'No way.' (laughing)
'I swear, that guy right there.'
I would overhear that. I started to make a few friends, but really never deep friendships at that school.

University and discerning a call

Then I graduated and went to college, a university in the state with a good telecommunications program. I thought it would be interesting to do TV and radio. But I took a freshman class with this guy who used Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock.* He was looking at his own career, a deep thinking philosopher teaching telecommunications and

wanting us to think. It was really important to me. I began to become aware in that class of the television and radio industry as a really manipulative and pretty horrible thing. And then there was public TV and radio. I got a little internship and did a little of public radio work in a nearby town. I was so discouraged to find, except at the national level — this is a very cynical thing to say and I'm not a cynical dude — but my experience has been, except at the national level, public radio folks are the folks with the morals and the ethics that keep them from working in commercial radio. And they're the ones who can't get those jobs. They're good kind of folks. But they are not the 'A list.' All the gear is hand-me-down and the salaries are not very livable. And I thought, 'I don't know, I can't ethically do this commercial TV thing because you're selling people things they don't need, selling their own inadequacy to make a living. And that's not right. I can't do that.' On the other hand, I loved the art of video production. I liked the aesthetics of it. It was a cool thing to do. I really liked it. But, I couldn't envision a way that I could sustainably and ethically have a living.

And, at the same time in college, I discovered mediation. I discovered conflict resolution processes. I think this came out of my Mom's tutelage around the arms race and that whole era. The Cold War was so ridiculous to me, the dehumanization of Soviets and the Russians was just stupid to me and I wasn't buying it. I remember a friend in high school not seeing the irony in Sting's song that asked 'if the Russians loved their children too.' He thought that Sting was actually wondering if Russians loved their children! (Laughs) But, mostly from my Mom's example and education, I had developed a passion early on about peace issues. So, I discovered mediation so I got very involved with that. I did an internship with the Mediation Center and I helped put on trainings.

I had switched over to the Psychology department and stepped away from Communications. There was a mediation class in the Psych department. The town was heavily Mennonite. There was this beautiful, community mediation center that wasn't attached to the college. I should have been going to the Mennonite university in town, but I didn't know that at the time. Those folks were doing really good work in the community with families and businesses that were having conflicts. They were available to the community at a sliding scale. Just good people, all these lovely Mennonite folks doing work and showing me what that looks like. It was extraordinary. Getting to know them was really powerful. I developed a real passion and a sense of call about mediation. I learned to look at the world and think, 'We have all of this conflict and we handle it so badly and there are better ways that empirically work.' People are happier who do mediation processes through divorce, for instance, than people who win in litigation. By huge margins. You win in court and you still lose. We can do better. This works. I was so really passionate about mediation. I thought, 'Why is English required and math required and this is not required.'

A life in music?

By this stage of life, I had these two strong senses of call — to music and to peace work or mediation.

I got a guitar when I was 15 from my folks for Christmas. I played it in my room mostly without anybody ever hearing me through first year or two of college. Music meant a lot to me, but I didn't imagine my music would mean anything to anybody else. Then I had some experiences that convinced me otherwise. I saw that my little songs could move people and mean something. So, I started doing some café gigs and some $2 a night coffee shop kind of things. A friend of mine's girlfriend, who went to a neighboring school, sang good harmony and she started joining in on my gigs. We started gigging out together a little bit and people were liking it. I found that I was actually developing some shows. That was really exciting.

In my college summers, I worked at the Blue Ridge Christian Conference center. They would hire a hundred and twenty college students to come help run the conference center every summer. I ran the AV crew. I had a crew of four people who worked for me and we did everything from making sure there were fresh bulbs in the filmstrip projectors back in the day to running the sound systems for the big production events they did in the 3000-seat auditorium. It was the first time I had been given real responsibility. I had actually a crew of people working for me, and we had to deal with whatever problem popped up. I didn't really have a boss. We just had to get the job done. I loved that. I worked like 90 hours a week — really intense, busted my butt.

That final summer after I graduated, I came back to Blue Ridge to work one more summer. I bargained with them that I would get a private apartment in town to have a little solitude. I had some real thinking to do. I actually hit that summer with the intention of discerning my path. Music and mediation are not compatible. Mediation requires that you be in town and be a dependable steady presence. Music requires that you be on the road and live in a different section of the clock face. I spent that summer really wrestling with that question.

In the end, I decided to give myself two years to see if could make a living playing music. I decided that I would work at music as my day job; not just the writing, singing, and playing, but also promotion, keeping track of my mailing list, and booking the gigs. I did the left half of the brain stuff every day. And I intentionally didn't get a job that I cared about, that would require me to think about it outside of work hours. I worked at the hotel at near the conference center moving tables and chairs around. I gave myself two years of having side jobs to support my music habit. Four months later I quit my last side job. This January it will be 25 years since then.

I'm really grateful. I'm so thankful for this privilege. I'm keenly aware that there are so many extremely talented musicians who can't make a living at it. My mom heard a story on NPR a few years back that said someone had done an academic study to see of how many people who choose to try to making a living playing music actually get to make a living playing music. The number they came up with was one in 500.

I get to make a living at because I have both halves of my head engaged. Not because I'm a brilliant artist, but because I can do the business part too to keep it sustainable. From a business perspective, I'm a plumber, consultant, or something like that. I'm an independent contractor; I work directly for different people who call me and ask me to come in and play and that's an incredibly erratic thing. But I'm just fortunate. I'm so grateful. Most people don't know that blue-collar musicians exist. That's a thing. You're either famous or you're playing in your bedroom. It's a beautiful group of people, actually, the people whose values lead them to do this work. It's a simple life. It's a small house, but I like a simple life. I would choose that anyway.

In those early days, I was playing cheesy cover songs to the backs of heads in bars, smoky bars while they're watching the baseball game at the other end of the room. But I was so blissed out that this was my job. This is what I do for a living! I play songs for people. I made them up and sang them. That was very exciting. I did that for 18 years. I was on the road constantly. I worked in concentric circles that expanded and expanded so eventually I ended playing in 48 of the 50 states and on five continents. I was all over. I began to play in Australia and New Zealand with a little bit of regularity and Europe with pretty solid regularity. And I traveled a lot in the U.S. It was a good life.

I've always lived in that tension — even when I was a full-time musician I was mostly playing secular venues but also playing church venues — and I really bridled against being called a Christian musician. I still do. I'm a Christian. I'm a musician. I'm not a Christian musician. And it's interesting that this tension has an echo in activism. I'm a musician and I'm an activist. But I'm not an activist musician either. What happens is, when you embrace those labels, everybody else stops listening. That's not so much an economic concern for me, but it's a concern. In fact, the economics would work a lot better if I would embrace those labels and just go with it. You know, just fly your flag and let them pay. People are really happy to invite you into that, but others stop listening.

The only time I was ever offered a really serious record contract — I was offered a multi-record contract was for a Christian label that was owned by a friend of mine that I love and deeply respect. He sat down his whole team down, his publicity people, all of them – and I brought my sister (who was working for me at the time). We sat down around the conference table and hashed some stuff out. And this is what they were offering. He said, 'I know you have discomfort with this label, but it's what we do. So, here's what we could do. You could do a Christian album and then a secular album.' As though that which is not labeled as Christian is not Christian. 'No! (pause) No. No. No. No. No.' (accelerating). I had to walk.

I'm also not an activist musician. I'm just trying to write songs that are true — which is not to say factual — but songs that capture a particular emotion or that speak to how things look to me in my own struggles. And making songs, the art and the craft of doing that, is doing it in such a way that there is space and room for other people's lives. So that it's not about me. It's just, it's speaking to a larger thing through my own lens, the specificity of my own personal experiences. I like to call that the generality and specificity principle. If you can really draw a clear picture, then people are going get

that. And at the times that you think you're being the most specific to your life, you'll find that those are the songs people can relate to most, that is if you can paint the picture vividly. They bring their own lives and see if they fit in the container of the song. And they often do. We all have different experiences; we all have different thoughts. We have different frameworks for how we live our lives. But we're all painting off the same palate of emotions. Everybody knows what it feels like to be humiliated. Everybody knows what it's like to have your hopes crushed – to be rejected. Everybody knows what it feels like to be joyful and blissed out. And everybody knows what it feels like to see injustice, feel powerless, and push back. So, I'm just trying to rehumanize. Again, it's a much more indirect way to do it through the art of music, but it's the same thing.

Marriage

If I'm telling a life story, having left my wife largely out of the story is a wild inaccuracy. She's pretty awesome.

She had lived for two years in a little tiny fishing village in the middle of nowhere in rural Japan teaching English right out of college and then came back and got a Masters in ESL. This little blonde girl in Japan! She got a black belt in Tai Kwon Do and toured in a band playing Japanese taiko drums. She taught in a university in Korea and moved back to Atlanta where I met her. A friend of mine, a mutual friend who will having our undying gratitude, took her to a concert of mine and said we had to meet each other. She was right.

Like mediation and music, music vs. getting married, that's a really big one just in terms of being devoted to my work and being devoted to marriage. My schedule was that I got up about 10:30am and I was up until 2-4am. You are really disconnected from the rest of the world if you do that. And I work on weekends; everybody else works during the week and has time off on the weekends. Where is your community? Certainly not getting up on Sunday morning after being out to 4am or being halfway across the country! Getting married was the biggest shift in that way, and having our son was even bigger. I hate say it, but it's a massive life shift. It's a good bargain. I have no regrets. But, the cost is high. The cost is high. Even now, I'm sleeping less and I'm not able to engage with the music community much. I try really hard to be here between 5pm and 8:30pm and not working.

We got married in 2004 and we earned our lifetime nerd credentials by going to Guatemala to go to language immersion school for our honeymoon. That was pretty awesome – isn't that great! We did that because we both had a foreign language, but not the same one. While there, I realized, well I had been realizing for some time, that there is power in the platform of a musician. There are lots of ways that I do not want to emulate Bono, but I really appreciate the ways he has taken his massive platform and tried to point it toward things that are good and matter. So, on a much, much, much smaller scale, I was becoming aware that I had capacity to do that with my little following.

I visited a public school while we were in Guatemala and became aware of the needs that they had. I became aware that public schools are basically unfunded in Guatemala except for teachers' salaries. So, you have to gather up the money to have a building, to have electricity, and to have books — which is why most Guatemalan schools don't have books — from the parents of the students. About 75% of people in Guatemala are living in extreme poverty. So how do you have a school? I also became aware of how far U.S. dollars go in that economy. I wanted to help, but I had spent enough time in developing countries to know that writing checks is not what they always need. But I listened, mused, pondered, prayed, and thought — we need to help with this! When we came back, I told folks in the U.S. in my first three shows back in the States after my honeymoon about this little school and its needs which included running water to its bathrooms from its well. Literally 218 kids in the school and no running water in the bathrooms. They had a well. The principal told me it would cost about thousand quetzals, about $125.

I just thought, you know, you read the news and feel so powerless in the face of such large problems so often that you say 'I can help with that.' I didn't say that out loud, but that's what I was thinking. It's a beautifully empowering thing to think that you can make a difference, to be stripped of the illusion that 'you can't' is a powerful thing. After that trip, we founded this non-profit that I continue to serve as the President. We hired a director last year after I ran it on the side for 10 years with no salary. Things are growing with the organization; we've done like 13 or 14 projects around Guatemala, different in every town depending on local needs but focusing on literacy, critical thought, and artistic expression.

And it's had a pretty massive impact, outside of us, on Guatemalan children. It has also stripped me of my cynicism about believing that I can't make a difference. No one can tell me I can't make a difference. I can go and introduce them to children I know. If you would like to meet Christina and Pablo. Ask them if I've made a difference. I'm not saying that from an ego perspective. It's such a dangerous illusion and an immobilizing conceptualization to believe that the problems are too big and I'm too small to have an effect. In recent years, that is where my energy is going. I'm trying to challenge that narrative. I started writing this book while we were in India that came out a year ago, *World Changing 101* which is subtitled *Challenging the Myth of Powerlessness.* And so now I'm doing a lot of speaking and workshops. That is about half of my career. The other half being music.

Rotary peace fellowship

Just to complete a broad arc, eighteen years in music, it was really working. Things were going very well, better than ever before with my career. And then I heard about this fellowship from Rotary International to go do a Masters in Peace and Conflict.

When I heard about the fellowship, it snapped my head around. It really was a mystical kind of thing. I felt strongly, 'Oh that's what I need to do next.' In the latter years of my music career, I had been getting restless. I had been feeling like the world needs a little more love than I'm giving it and that I needed to be a little more tangible in the work I'm

doing. Oh, I believe that singing songs for people matters. I believe that when you give people the language of their own heart, that's a holy thing and it matters. I don't want to denigrate that for a moment for all my wonderful friends who do music. But for me, I needed to get in the trenches. I needed to be – I was getting tugged on by this other call that I had stepped away from.

When this happened, I just said, 'I've got to go do that.' Now, of course, the odds were really long. But I got the fellowship. So, we moved to Australia, my wife and son, and we lived there for a year and half minus three months in the middle while we were doing field work in India. My son was born ten weeks before we went. He was a year old when we went to India and two when we came back to the States. It was quite an adventure. It was great. It was so good to dig back into that work.

Current work

When I came back from Australia from the fellowship, I worked for a year for the NC Council of Churches as their peace & justice guy. I did a little bit of preaching around here, a Mennonite church and Black churches which was a joy — although they were still waiting for me to get started when I finished!

Right now, I'm doing a lot of speaking, a lot of workshops, trying to encourage people to show up and do what they care about, engage in small ways, and to deconstruct the hero narrative that is so immobilizing for most of us because we can't see ourselves as heroes. If we believe heroes are the ones to make a difference, then it's clearly not my job to make a difference. Right? I've been doing a lot of work around methodically walking people through things they believe that they don't think they believe. I should say, things *we* believe that we don't think we believe. Because I still believe this stuff as hard as I'm working on deconstructing it. It's deep in me. I make decisions out of these narratives that are so deep in the culture that, even though I'm actively fighting against them, they're still in me. It's just like racism. I'm actively fighting against racism inside myself and outside of myself; it's still in me. I don't claim to not be a racist. I can't claim that honestly. The first step in that, I think, is holding up the stories and taking a hard look at them.

The *Worldchanging 101* book came out just a year and week ago and that's really taken a lot of my time and energy. In terms of other things that I'm doing, I'm continuing to work with my non-profit in Guatemala. I'm working with the Nobel Peace Prize Nominating Task Group; I'm the Clerk of that.

And then I get involved with local issues from time to time. I take one on for a while and work it. Publix is expanding into North Carolina and they have been really terrible on farmworker issues in Florida. In other ways, they're a great company. Again, we're all complicated. They do a lot of great stuff. But they're holdouts refusing to sign these agreements that McDonald's and Taco Bell are signing. They're the holdouts. They won't even meet with the people who would like to make a pitch after six years of asking. It involves direct physical abuse of people. It's not ok. So, I've been working on that a little bit. I can speak to that because I'm known in Western NC more than anywhere else

and because I have history with Imokalee. I know these farmworkers' issues pretty well. I trained up on this stuff. That one was mine.

In contrast, there has been a big local, ongoing controversy around misuse of funds basically and a huge new town hall. It's kinda ridiculous; it's in a terrible location, etc. and etc. I have dear activist friends who are at the forefront of that who live in that town. I invited two town council members to come and sit here in the living room. I thought that if I had a role in that conflict, it was going to be as a back-door negotiator — listen to people, hear them, and make them feel heard until they could maybe hear the other. Getting back to the mediation principles, I thought I could maybe help in that way. So, I made a couple efforts in that regard. I had two town council members sit here on different nights, not knowing that the other one had come. Tried to help shape some ideas, but mostly listened, mostly just let them blow out some of their steam.

That had a limited effect. They couldn't get that far. They were too angry. At any rate, after that, I kinda said, 'Yeah, this is not mine. I'm not going to put my energy into this.' I was real clear with my friends, 'I've got your back. I believe in what you're doing. Keep up the good work. I'm not going to be part of it. I'm just overcommitted and this one doesn't feel like it's mine.' And that was ok. That whole discernment process is an ongoing question for me.

I was at the World Parliament of Religions the weekend before last in Salt Lake City playing with the Desert Faith Jam. This is an interfaith trio that I have with a Muslim songwriter and a Jewish songwriter. We were following the lunch talk of the headliner, Karen Armstrong, who writes a lot on Abrahamic faith and wrote *The History of God.* I introduced us saying 'Desert Faith Jam is a band with a Muslim, a Christian, and a Jew. As a musician, a person of faith, and an activist, I'm finding that I'm much more interested these days in the concept of harmony than the concept of unity. We use both as synonyms for peace. But unity for a musician means that we're all singing the same note. Harmony means we're singing different notes and they sound beautiful together. That's what we're trying to do here.' And Karen Armstrong gestured from the stage giving us the thumbs up. That was fun. One of the things I want to do next is to focus more on Desert Faith Jam. I think that is very exciting. And I think it's the right time in history for that project. It deserves my attention.

Three or four weeks ago, we did an event here in town, 'Stand Against Racism.' I knew the organizer, so I dropped her note and said, 'If there is anything I can do to help out with this, please let me know. I'll be happy to if you want to put me of the poster and I'll come out and sing a song or two. If that would help draw a few people out, I would love to support what you are doing.' And before I knew it, I was on a panel discussion on stage. And then I realized, the panel discussion included an African American woman, a powerful musician here in town, a Latin American priest trained as a Catholic serving in the Episcopal Church, and me — straight, White guy. The panel discussion was moderated by another White guy, our local Register of Deeds in the nearby city which one would not normally think of as a particularly political position. But he and [Attorney General, now Governor] Roy Cooper engineered some push on gay marriage. This very

young, very cool, solid Register of Deeds registered six gay couples to be married while dozens of us stood in a silent vigil. Holy and beautiful. He sent them all to Roy Cooper and Roy Cooper had to deny them, but he was able to make it a public thing. At any rate, a wonderful guy was moderating and I was in this role of 'White guy in this conversation about racism.' That was a holy and vulnerable place to be invited. I was anxious and I had the anxiety that I've come to recognize in stepping into situations like that - like getting arrested at Moral Monday events. There's a feeling in your body that's there, that's present, and it is not exactly fear, and it is not exactly…certainly excitement doesn't cover it. But there's an agitation, there's a wiggly-ness, that spiritual wiggly-ness even if your body is perfectly still. And it was a beautiful thing to be invited into; I was so glad. I went last on the panel. I started by saying, 'You know, I'm here because I really think that straight White men need to be listened to more. I need more platform.' And everybody laughed. I got that out of the way. I added, 'Let me be abundantly clear, what I have learned so far about White privilege leads me to be here as a person who is wrestling with my own racism and wrestling with my own place in the world around me. I'm aware that I'm unaware in some ways. And I want to learn more. That it's fundamental to the nature of privilege, that you can't see your privilege. So, if you're going to learn about it, you have to learn about it by intentionally engaging to learn more from people who can teach you about it. That's why I'm here. Activist friends of color have told me that it's important that more than people of color need to be saying some of these things. People I love are damaged by this. I'm damaged by this too, although not to the same degree and in the same ways. We all are. And we need to address it; we need to engage. So that is why I'm here.'

Very interestingly, toward the end, when we had some Q&A, an older Black man standing in the back said, 'When I was a young man, I was involved with the Black Panthers. I'm just curious as to how you perceive the role violence in the struggle?' Whoa! Hello! This was a very hard question to be asked to me. I said, 'I'm a student of King and Gandhi and I've become convinced by them that, and by my own experience and other studies, that non-violence is really the most productive way to engage in the struggle. That said, I'm keenly aware that I have no standing to speak to other people making other choices. Regarding violence and non-violence, I have the right to make that decision for myself and that is as far as I have that right. I can't condemn people making other choices. But I believe that the best way forward is through non-violence.'

Later, while people were dispersing and chatting, he was walking across the hall toward me. He pulled me in for a hug and thanked me for addressing his question. I said, 'Well I really wanted to talk to you and see how that sat with you. I would like to learn more from you.' He said, 'Yeah, I totally agree. I think you really nailed it. We tried violence. It didn't work.' That was really powerful to me.

"Forward together" moral movement

When I was working for the NC Council of Churches, it was my job to interface with folks in the community who were working on justice issues. I got involved with the 'Forward Together' Moral Monday Movement. As I got a hold of this movement, and I don't even know what word I want, I was blown away by Rev. Barber, as so many have

been over time. Also by the people surrounding him, Rev. Nancy Petty and Yara Allen [the official artist/musician of the movement] who has become a dear friend. The more I learned about this, the more I wanted to get involved. They provide you opportunities to get involved.

Arrests

I was with Rev. Barber, Rob Stephens [a field organizer], Curtis Gatewood [leader of the HKonJ Annual March] Kojo Nantambu [Pastoral organizer in Charlotte], and Rev. Spearman [now the President of the NC Council of Churches], that whole crowd. We went to jail together. This was being with them in a precursor arrest to the Moral Monday Movement, before the Moral Monday Movement was launched.

There was a previous prep meeting where folks were speaking and getting folks riled up; the word that had gone around before it among leadership. I was representing the Council so they included me on some of those things. I don't want to overstate my involvement, because I am certainly not a leader in any way, shape, or form of that movement. But I've had a chance to be in the room. I've been the Forest Gump of Moral Monday Movement; I've been in the room when a lot of amazing things have happened. In the back room as well as on the dais. It's been an extraordinary privilege.

There was a day, you may have been there, remember, where we had a meeting at the People's Assembly in the Legislature. It was somewhere around 2011. The legislature was in session and Speaker [Thom] Tillis was at the front. Rev. Barber had asked him several times to have a meeting with him and Tillis had rebuffed his requests. On that day, Rev. Barber, with a lot of Moral Monday people around him, called out from the balcony, do you remember this?
'Speaker Tillis! Speaker Tillis! I have a question for you and you refuse to meet with me.'
Tillis, down there, shouts back,
'There will be order in the chamber! There will be order in the chamber! Come to order.'
'Speaker Tillis, I have a question for you. This is what I need to ask you. What does the Lord require of you? Speaker Tillis, what does the Lord require of you?'

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!!

'The Gentleman will be removed if he cannot come to order….blah, blah, blah, blah.'

The Capitol Police moved in. The people around Rev. Barber started chanting,
'Do Justice, love kindness, walk humbly, with God' (imitating gavel banging).
'Do Justice, love kindness, walk humbly, with God' (imitating gavel banging).

I never really realized that verse has that cadence to it. It's awesome. Curtis Gatewood got that chant started and off it went. And so, they started arresting people and pulling them out. Well, I was over on the other side of the balcony shooting video, because I

thought we needed some video. I was not chanting because I know if you're chanting that's all you hear on the video. So, I shoot the video.

The Capitol Police haul half a dozen people into the next room. They don't resist. I went to see if I get in there to talk with them. To the Sergeant of Arms at the doors, I said, 'Can I go through and talk to them.'

Because they hadn't arrested them yet. He said,
'If you want to join them.'
'Yes, I would like to, thank you.'

He opened the door and I went in. They gave me a chance not to be arrested. I decided to stay. Seven of us were arrested that day. That was not like the Moral Monday arrests, later on, that were more administrative, where they were expecting us and they kind of pushed you on through. This was a full-on arrest — manacles and strip search, take away your wedding ring, orange stripes, and general population.

I'm a White male, straight, middle class, educated, with a U.S. passport. I was dealt the entire hand of privilege. Right? That was not a common experience for me to be there. The dehumanizing of it — 'bend over and spread your cheeks,' the whole thing, it's pretty powerful. Being there as the father of a two year-old and knowing I couldn't go to him if I wanted to was poignant. There was a couple of times that I started to panic when I thought about my son. I just consciously decided not to panic; I pushed that down. I was there and I chose to be there. And I'll be there until I'm not.

We were making decisions together on the fly about what we needed to do. That experience revolutionized forever my understanding of the word 'solidarity' because being with those men in that jail cell, I couldn't help imagine what it would be like to be there without them. The solidarity of being there together, making this choice together, making this small sacrifice together, was extremely powerful, extremely powerful, for me.

I was pretty traumatized by it. I don't mean to make a bigger deal out of it than it is. It was a very minor thing. We were there 'til four in the morning, or something. On the history of civil disobedience scale, it was not even a punctuation mark. But in my own personal experience of it, it was traumatizing and I didn't sleep for about three days. Every time I started to drift off, I would have just a little panic and wake up. I couldn't think. I realized that I was really far away from myself when I was in my kitchen at home. I took a glass out of the cabinet, filled it up with water, and then put it on the table. And then I went to the cabinet, got a glass, filled it up with water, and it was already there. 'I'm not even here at all; I'm just not here.' But after about three days, I started to get better. And later I went back and I was arrested again at a Moral Monday. That was much more administrative, a lot less traumatic. But I was willing to do it again had it been the same thing. In that next experience, I was pretty strategic about it. I wrote two blogs for NC Council of Churches website and left instructions with a colleague to publish one or the other of them, depending on which one was relevant late

that night. One of them was titled 'Why I'm Spending the Night at the Legislature' because one of the possibilities was that we were just going to occupy it. We were going to refuse to leave. And then the other was 'Why I'm in jail.' Late that night, I texted him immediately when we got arrested and said, 'Ok, go ahead and publish the jail one.' So as soon as the word got out to the media, they would look online to see if there's anything there. Everybody went to my blog. I was quoted in every article about that arrest for that first day or two because they had some quotes. And in the blog, I laid out the theological reasons why I was making this decision. My blog post, to this day, is the most read page on the NC Council of Churches website, ever.

I was strategic about it in that regard. But I also was aware, especially at that point, people hadn't yet realized what was going on in the Legislature. They were doing terrible things and keeping their heads down. Not doing press releases about it. People are busy, people are understandably clueless about was is going in the State Legislature. And yet, I knew that if people knew what was going on, they wouldn't stand for it. So, I felt like, I have an opportunity as a musician with this platform, 'never been to jail, never done any of this kind of thing,' to get the word out. People will be surprised that I'm in jail and they will want to know why I'm in jail. I have an opportunity to really amplify, to draw people's attention to this thing that they need to be paying attention to. And that was the goal. And we did it very effectively.

The other thing I was conscious of later, Rev. Barber mentioned it, was that it was really important that Rob Stephens and I were there at that first arrest as the only White men among 7 people — five Black men and two White men. He said, 'You know, we need for people to understand that this is not a Black issue, this is a justice issue. It's important that you bring that.' And I think that it was. It mattered. So that is how I first got deep into the movement. And then after that first arrest, of course, we had press releases and we different things going on and I was in some different meetings. I was in the meeting in the basement of Pullen with a dozen people, when they announced the 'Forward together, not one step back' chant that was going to be the signature chant.

While I was working for the Council, the Moral Mondays was one of three areas I was focusing on at the time. And then when I moved away from Raleigh, I felt like there were people here who cared and wanted to be involved, but it was hard to get to Raleigh. At any rate, when I got back here, I put together a local event. We had an overflow crowd and projected a live feed into the Presbyterian church next door. We had a hundred-person overflow. So that was pretty awesome; I was happy to make that contribution of waking people up here. No — 'waking people up' is not my job or capacity. I was just making connections, trying to be catalytic. Now I continue to play at rallies and things like that. I drive around and do things like that. What was really moving to me was that the Sunday after the second arrest was Father's Day. And when I got back from Raleigh, I was talking with Mom and Dad. Dad said, 'I'm thinking about going over and getting arrested' — my 82 year-old retired Presbyterian Pastor Dad who had never done anything like that in his life! 'Wow, OK, Dad, well let's talk about that.' And, so, we talked about it for a while. My Dad reads his Bible every morning in Greek. He is that kind of guy. He's not a celebrated scholar, but he's a serious scholar. He said, 'I can't just look at

what you're saying here and look at this text and not see the clear intersection. I'm not serving a church anymore; I don't have political concerns to weigh here. I think I would like to come.' I wrote a blog called, 'Driving my father to jail for Father's Day.' My mom and dad went over and he got arrested. There's some beautiful pictures of my dad walking in. Rev. Barber walked into the legislature holding my dad's hand and the hand of Susan Denny, a local pastor. They were in stoles, doing the whole thing. There's some gorgeous pictures of my dad being arrested that are just so beautiful. There's a picture of the police officer walking him by the arm and his stole is just kind of flapping in the breeze. He had this look of clear moral determination. You know, my Dad's determination was a kind of purity. He was abundantly clear. He was just abundantly clear. It was clarity that he was doing the right thing.

He grew up in a house where his father was a Southern Presbyterian pastor who had basically asked and answered his theological questions by the time he was 22. His dad spent the rest of his life sharing the answers (laughing). He was an 'avoid even the appearance of evil' kind of guy, right? So Dad's own parents would have been deeply scandalized, just deeeeeply disappointed by this. For him to claim this work, in his early 80s, that's a radical. You want to talk about identity formation — through a movement — yeah, there's a picture.

Dad's never been a 'march in the street' guy. And he's never been a 'get arrested' kind of guy. Those things are socially frowned upon. That's not ok. You marginalize yourself when you do that. And for him to take that intentional stand, I don't think I had a whole lot — I guess I had something to do with it because we were having lots of conversations. I didn't ask him about going and getting arrested. He came to me. Such courage. He had a sextuple heart bypass in the late 80s and has had several other procedures since then. He was taking serious risks to put himself under that stress and to put himself out of the reach of good medical care. Mom was… I think in some ways it was harder on Mom waiting outside of the jail for my dad. I've got a beautiful picture of Rev. Barber out there waiting too. I've got a beautiful picture of Rev. Barber hugging Mom. She was 80 at the time. I've been proud of my dad every day in my life, but I've never been prouder than that moment right there. It was an incredible thing — Dad altering his own identity in the context of the movement. Because I think he would have identified as a rule follower up until them. He probably still would. But he saw the need to break the rules. Yeah, so – that's really powerful (said almost under his breath).

Reflections

Future

I'm in the midst of so much work. But the question of my future is hanging right here. As soon as I get done with some of these projects, the future is going to be my question. Just from a more pedestrian sort of career perspective, my work has shifted so much toward speaking, workshops, and writing. Although I don't do a whole lot of writing, I get a lot of credit for the little bit of writing I do. It has shifted so much in that direction in the last couple years because the *Worldchanging* book.

But, I am interested to see how much my career shifts back to music. Much of it leans with the new record coming out. I really think the record is going to have some impact. I don't think it's going to fundamentally shift my career or anything. But I think this record is really different from anything I've ever done. It's better. It's just really high quality music with extraordinarily talented musicians. There are a couple songs on the record that I don't play anything on the song. I'm just singing. But I'm working with such amazing musicians and their hearts have been in it as well as their craft — not just their skill, but also their art. There so many different flavors. I feel like I've gotten to work in a professional kitchen with these spice racks of the entire world laid on the wall in front of me (phone chimes). Oh look, $300 just popped into the kickstarter! Awesome. But, I think, project-wise, Desert Faith Jam is going to be one of the next things. I've got several things lined up, that are awaiting my attention. I've yet to complete the study guide for the *Worldchanging* book, a church study guide. But those are just projects.

In terms of self-definition, in terms of mission…(pauses)…it's time for me to zoom the lens out again, as soon as I get through this kickstarter campaign, and re-examine that question: What are you here to do? What's your job? My initial mission statement, the answer that pops into my head, is that I want to love people and help them to love themselves in the thick sense of the word 'love.' How that informs the rest of this work remains to be seen. If you love people, you need to stand in the way when they're being oppressed. If you love them, you need to help them to laugh, to be nourished, to be intentional in their lives, and to be aware. How I do those things, I'm not sure. But I'm excited to be playing some more music though. I'm really excited about that. If I can get this kickstarter funded — it's a challenge.

Music

Technology taketh, technology giveth. It's pretty amazing. The last time I put out a CD, 10 years ago, I fronted all the money, $30,000 or so. This one is a little more than that. I'm working with some serious folks, taking the time to dial everything in. If I don't make kickstarter, I'll be paying it off for years. But, pretty much, every record I've made payed itself off within a year or two. In the past, I would front all the money, putting the album on my credit card like this one. It's sitting on a high interest card. The difference is, in those days, people bought albums. Now, people don't buy records, but there's kickstarter. You can hit the ground at black, at zero.

The truth is, I'm not scared about it once we get past the next 8 days.

You don't know until you put it out there. But I think this record really matters. And that is exciting to me. The great thing about a record is, once you've done it, you've done it. It's there. It's there forever; people can come back to it as long as they want to. I don't know what's going to happen. It depends on how the world reacts. And again, I don't expect any major shifts in my life, but I'm hoping people will be moved by this record. If they are, it will be interesting to see what goes after that.

What I do for a living is so damned self-centered. Right? I'm selling stuff that I'm making up. (Laughs) It's just about me. 'I made up this song. Here you go. Hey, I had

some ideas and I wrote them down. Want that? I can talk to you about the ideas; you can pay me for that.' That's what I do for a living, right? There's lots of moving wheels, but that's the middle of it. To do this work and not be completely self-absorbed, not be sickly twisted in upon myself and self-aggrandizing and feeling like I matter more than somebody else, you know, that takes a certain degree of awareness. In that challenge, I point to a quote by the band 'America.' You know, they've been on tour the whole time, since the 70s! They're still on tour. The gigs are smaller; they're at some Holiday Inn right now. The gigs are smaller but they're still awesome. They're doing a great job; they're playing to 250 people a night and it's great. I saw this awesome interview with them years ago. They were signing CD's after the show. People were talking to them and asking them about their career. Dewey Bunnell looked up and said, 'Yeah, we've been really blessed by our own mediocrity. We've been able to make to make a living doing this and staying on the road. We're having a lot of fun. It's a good life. We're not having to deal with all the paparazzi and all that stuff. It's great.'

I was like, 'Awesome, great thing to say on a TV with a camera pointed at your face.' I relate very much to that. I'm blessed by my own mediocrity. By the way, I did a couple nights of shows opening for them. They were such a joy. I'll tell you that story at some point. Cause it's a pretty good story.

The sick and twisted narrative of rugged individualism in our country does us so much damage. I'm an introvert and I'm an artist. But I make no pretense that I'm not keenly aware of the importance of attractionality in music. And I do a lot of it. Self-promotion is the water we swim in. As an independent songwriter, who doesn't have a team doing that work for me, I do a fair amount of it myself in order to be able to do what I do (which I hope matters). I try to do all of it with integrity and not manipulate people. But, yeah, 'means to an end thinking' is dangerous. It's tricky.

You can't live into people's expectations. And at the same time, you are able to matter a great deal to people, to have the gift of being able to have an outsized positive impact if you're conscious and engaged. What I find is that the kindnesses that matter very often aren't the hard ones. I mean, the hard ones can sure matter too. One of the things about having this little tiny bit of celebrity…(pauses) I don't know what remarkably famous people you've met in your life, but, the funny thing about meeting somebody who is really famous is that you remember everything about that meeting. If we hold a person in esteem, for whatever reason, it matters that they excuse themselves to go to the restroom. You just remember the stupid little stuff. And that is I think part of the burden that makes people who are actually famous so often ready to implode because everything they do…they have to be so hyperaware of everything. They have no privacy and no anonymity. Those moments that are 'recharge - brain dead moments' for us, grocery shopping and whatever, they don't have those. They can't be in idle. They have to be on, the entire time. It's no wonder that it makes people entirely crazy.

But the flipside of that — and I'm not — I don't have any delusions of grandeur —I'm not that guy, but I have this little tiny piece of celebrity. The flipside is that when you give somebody your attention, your full awareness and compassion for a few minutes, it

means the world. It just matters so much to people. Ministry is the same way, I think. If you are having a really bad day and you're rude to somebody, it carries a lot of weight. And the reverse, kindness, counts; it matters. I have a little ritual to engage people, to catch their eye, and simply ask, 'How is your day going?' Very often, you see their eyes soften and they're like, 'Thanks for asking.' There have been in moments in my own life where I was about ready to 'not keep it in the road' because that bridge looked pretty appealing. And the tiniest kindness can just restore your heart enough to keep moving. All moments are holy. I really do believe that. I'm really careful not to dumb that down to the popularized version of 'every kindness matters.' I have no evidence that these kindnesses have had any productive value except maybe working out my kindness muscles. I do believe that big changes are made up of millions of small ones. But I don't believe small changes necessarily lead to big ones.

Heroes

My perspective on my celebrity is connected to how I'm trying to problematize, as I mentioned earlier, what we do in terms of heroes, how we define them and not.

To some degree, I kind of deconstruct my own story. You'll find in the book a story about the founding of my non-profit. I told you a little bit, but the book then goes on to tell how our first project went completely sideways through my own errors. Thankfully, other good things happened out of that.

Our cultural narrative is that heroes address big problems and fix them. That's not what heroes do. They never ever do that, in the absence of a movement. What heroes do effectively is inspire people around them to get in the game. But when the movement shows up, that's when you actually get the work done. It's the movement that matters, it's not the hero. You can find examples of movements without heroic charismatic figures at the front of them. The Arab Spring, for instance, in Egypt and Syria. The Nobel Peace Prize folks looked at those movements a couple a years ago. You got to have somebody to give the award to, right? It was a wonderful problem to say, 'I don't know who we could give the award to if we want to honor this movement.' You can have a movement without charismatic leaders. But, a leader without a movement is a crazy dude dancing in the field. That's nothing.

I really break down the Rosa Parks story. I spent a lot of time on that story when I do these workshops. And I deconstruct all the lies we are told about Rosa Parks. There are many; they are multitudinous. It is shocking how far we've twisted that story. Was what she did heroic? Absolutely. But, of course, you probably know about Claudette Colvin who was arrested 9 months previous doing the exact same thing Rosa Parks did. But the movement decided to not hold her up as an emblem, as a test case. I shouldn't say 'test case' because Claudette Colvin was one of the plaintiffs in the Supreme Court case that did decide that question. But they didn't hold her up as the emblem of the movement because she was 15, pregnant, and unmarried. They knew that it would not serve the movement particularly well and it also would destroy her.

But when you compare what Claudette Colvin did and what Rosa Parks did, there are a few other differences. Claudette Colvin was not trained in non-violence. She was screaming 'bloody murder' and kicking while they pulled her off the bus. When the bus driver said to Rosa Parks, 'I going to have to call the police,' her exact words were, according to her own autobiography, 'You may do that.' That is a powerfully non-violent, rooted statement. I'm making decisions. You're making decisions. You have freedom to make a different decision or make this one. And the consequences will be yours. I'm making this decision and the consequences are mine. She was trained in that stuff. She was heroic, because there was a movement behind her.

If somebody wants to heroify me, if it's inspiring for them such that they say, 'He lived in all his brokenness and had some positive effect, maybe I can too!' Awesome! I'll take that and be happy. But that is not what we usually do with heroes. We usually separate them from the rest of us and we consider it the hero's job to fix the problem and rest of our jobs is to clap. Right?

One time a newspaper guy came up to interview Dorothy Day. He was a young guy and said, 'Sister Day, I'm so excited to interview you. I've never interviewed a saint before.' Her answer was, 'Don't call me a saint, I don't want to be dismissed that easily.' Which is the problem in a nutshell — right? If there are saints who do good stuff…and the rest of us aren't saints, so then we don't do stuff. It would have been the worst possible outcome for the work that she was doing. She wanted to invite people into a movement.

One of my friends, Chuck Broadstein or maybe David Wilcox, said years ago, 'The difference between a rock star and a folk singer is that a rock star wants to convince you that he's different than you and a folk singer wants to convince you that we're all the same!' I'm uncomfortable being anybody's hero because of the hero games that we play, which has two possibilities. One possibility is that we strip away all their faults and hold them up. They are different from us. As I said earlier, we define hero as a fundamental nature, not as 'you did this heroic thing.' Once we do that, we get ourselves off the hook. Because we know we're not heroes by that definition.

But what's amazing is the other half of the hero game. When we discover their faults, then we just switch our logic. If we discover that Dr. King had these affairs or whatever, then we shred them and at that point we say, 'See they were just charlatans, these damn do-gooders. They're all full of it. We shouldn't listen to them. Because obviously, they're not really heroes.' In my logic, when we find their faults, we should say, 'Hey, look, they have faults like me. And still they've done all this amazing work. What's my work to do?' Instead, they're 'charlatans' and they're 'hypocrites.' As though there's anybody on the planet who is not a hypocrite. Find somebody whose beliefs match their actions perfectly. No way. So, the question for us isn't, 'How do I not be a hypocrite?' The question for me is, 'How do I be a hypocrite who is working for good, who is trying to love the people around me?'

Definitions of social justice activism

This leads to a definition of social justice activism. In that conversation on heroes, I'm seeking to broaden the definition of activism. That definition is a funny conversation because, and you're not giving me any of this at all, in the culture there is a bit of 'activist cred'. When people ask you what you are doing sometimes they're asking 'What are you doing (said with lots of attitude)?' Which is a different question. So much of the work I'm doing right now is the meta-conversation, trying to invite people into the work they feel called to without telling them what they should be working on. I think that's extremely important and I think I'm uniquely positioned to do it. I love the classic Howard Thurman quotation: 'Don't just ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.' That insight is so important because we stop just looking at all the problems in the world and thinking 'I've got to do something' or wanting to do what everybody else has always done. If we inform those questions by also asking, 'What makes me come alive?' and 'What I am good at?' then activism changes. Those perspectives give you a different way in. What do I care about? What do I bring? And, where is the intersection between the two? It's a new way or an unusual way into the conversation.

I think most of our conceptualization of activism involves self-sacrifice. And I think that's problematic. There are times for self-sacrifice. But I love the concept of personal sustainability. That phrase is so powerful to me. If you believe, as I make the argument in my book, that the most effective way to address big problems is through the accumulation of lots of small efforts rather than from big dramatic ones, then what you need to do is make a lot of small efforts — and that goes across time. If you can keep yourself healthy, alive, and in the game, you're going to be more effective in the long-term than if you burn yourself out now and self-destruct. I use the tagline: 'The world needs a few martyrs, but very few.' Self-destruction is not a very good strategy for social change.

So, with that in mind, I have to look at where I do I bring a particular gift. That thought breaks into two questions. One, what am I good at? And, two, what do I love? What nurtures me? Because if I bring what I love in the service of the world, I'm going to get to do a lot more done. And I'm going to last a lot longer doing that work. And I think that was what Thurman was getting at.

But it's not just what you love, it's also what are you good at. I love to go to a Hugh Hollowell[19] story on that one. Because, a guy apparently showed up at his non-profit one time and said 'I've got a day for you and I want to volunteer.' Hugh said, 'great, awesome.' He said, 'What do you want to do?' This guy replied, 'I don't know. I figured you'd give me something to do.' Hugh said, 'What are you good at? What's your day job?' And the guy said, 'I do IT, I'm a computer guy.' Hugh said, 'Thank-you Jesus, because we've got two computers that really need some love. It would be such a help if you would take a look at them.' The guy said, 'You know, I do that all day at

[19] Pastor/Executive Director of "Love Wins" in Raleigh, NC, a ministry directed prominently to homeless and marginalized persons in the city.

work. Could I do something else?' Hugh said he almost renounced his commitment to non-violence. 'You brought in the very thing we need. You just said you want to help. You just said you want to help and now you're not going to offer the thing we need. What is that?'

Five days ago, I was in a small university in Texas, talking with college students. I was asking them questions about needs and gifts. I said, 'You may not think that what you're good at can be useful in the service of the world. I want to challenge you on that. If you're good at playing video games, awesome! Because there's a Boys and Girls Club in town that desperately needs people your age to hang out with younger people who need a good, sane mentor and play video games with them and talk about life. Awesome. Bring that. If you're good at whatever, anything in the world, right?' I push back on false modesty here. 'You're good at some stuff. What are you good at? Are you good at making people feel comfortable, making them laugh? Are you good at coding? Are you good at history? Are you good at math?' My friend Katelyn Chamberlain, who lives three miles from here, has been the CPA and Treasurer of my non-profit for eleven years now. If I were keeping the books, we would not have a non-profit. She has served these children in Guatemala in such a beautiful way that only she could bring. She's not the only person on the planet, but nobody else in our organization has that gift. So how do you bring what you are good at and what you love to the service of the world? What's pulling on your heart? What engages your passion? Because, again, it's going to be more sustainable. And I break that into two questions: What really frustrates you? What do you see in the world that you think is wrong? And then conversely, what really inspires you? What makes you think, 'That is awesome!' I'm trying to encourage people to show up and do what they care about.

I also think we define 'activist' problematically as a culture. We tend to think of activists in particular as people who are directly involved in political questions. And we define 'political' problematically. We define that as working within our governmental system. We also define 'activist' as people who are oppositional, people who are against something. And I think both of those definitions are problematic.

Backing up a couple steps, politics, politics with a small 'p,' is, to me, the processes we have evolved in order to make group decisions. That applies to lots of things besides government. There is church politics and also family politics. These are not necessarily bad things. It's how we make decisions together. We tend to say the word 'politics' with a sneering derision most of the time these days. But there's a lot of beauty in how we make decisions. Sometimes we do take steps forward together in ways where the process itself is beautiful and not just the outcome.

So, I feel like an activist is someone who believes in being active in the face of a problem, rather than being passive. I think that should be all of us. If you've ever addressed a problem, if you've ever seen something that you didn't think was right or fair on any scale, whether it's your sister picking on your brother or whatever, and you stepped into that, then you're an activist. You've chosen to be active in the face of a

problem. I find it really problematic that we separate activists from the rest of society. I want to demythologize that.

I talk to people about how I want to re-spell the word, putting a hyphen before the 'i'. I actually of often think of the 'ism' on 'activism' which means 'belief in' something. But technically it means doing. So activ-ism, meaning 'doing doing.' It just means are you going to show up and do something. So much of the work I'm doing these days is speaking to people who care but don't see a way to engage. I'm on that edge, between those slices of the pie, between people who care, who want to do the right thing, and people who are active on issues. How do we bridge that gap? And I think there are lots of things stopping us from bridging that gap.

And 'social justice,' for me, basically comes down to fairness. Fairness and compassion. The etymology of 'compassion' is very important. It means 'suffer with.' Right, so we suffer together. We don't outsource our suffering and let some people do the suffering for the rest of us. So that's how I conceive of social justice.

And my tagline in the talks I'm doing these days is, 'You're changing the world whether you like it or not.' It is unbelievable. People are so complicated, every damn one of us. We're so complicated. We can be so noble at the same moment that we are participating in things so reprehensible. It's not one or the other and we don't swing back and forth. We do it all at the same time. We can't divide people neatly into categories, which is a pretty radical stand to take among some activists. Because we want to break it down to 'us' and 'them' and the way we solve the problem is for 'us' to win and 'them' to lose.

I recently wrote an email, unsubscribing to a national organization that is working on a very important issue. They're on the right side of history. But their emails are becoming increasingly emotionally manipulative. 'We've been keeping track and we haven't seen your donation.' When I unsubscribed, they said, 'Any comments?' I said, 'Yeah, absolutely, I have some comments for you. What you're doing is wrong. The means to an end thinking is not going to serve you well. I've been to social media workshops and I know that you're doing this because it works, statistically. But the greatest danger in a moral conflict is not to lose to your enemy, it is to become your enemy. And if you're going to do this, you're no better than the people you're fighting and I can't stand with you.' I hope somebody reads it. I don't know. But I took the time to write them a couple paragraphs. 'I just need to be abundantly clear here. If you stand for justice and for love, you can't do this shit!' The way forward is to rehumanize. It comes back to humanizing vs. dehumanizing. And rehumanizing is the work we're called to do.

Another delusion we have about peacemaking is that it has to do with avoiding conflict, stepping away from conflict. The work of peacemaking fundamentally involves stepping directly toward conflict. I am conflict-averse. I don't love conflict. I know people who do love it, for them the push and pull is fun. I'm not that guy. But I see the necessity of it. I'm willing to do it, if it's going to be productive. My shorthand for peacemaking is engaging conflict in ways that are constructive rather than destructive. Of course, you know, the verb in there is 'engaging.' It is engaging, and that's fundamental. You've got

to step toward conflict in order to address it. But that work is really costly for me; it's really costly. I feel it in my soul. I take on the weight. And yet I choose it. You look at race, for instance. It is pretty easy to be a White person and avoid questions of race. Right? We can do that, but we do it at our own spiritual peril. We suffer for that in ways that are dangerous. It's like denying your alcoholism. It may be easier to keep drinking in the short term. But, in fact, in the long term, probably not. And I think that's the way it is with White privilege. It's hard. It's costly to engage it. And yet it's actually costlier not to do so. Conflict is the hardest work, and it's the holiest work.

Despair & hope

I look at the current conversations about race in our country and, on the one hand, I'm just depressed beyond measure. Honestly, I spent about three months this summer quite literally depressed. I really was in that dark hole where it's hard to move. It wasn't bad as sometimes I've had that. It was with me for about three months.

I've struggled with depression some over the years in a more clinical sense where I'm very immobile for a few days. And sometimes there are stretches of months where I'm not immobile. I'm functional and getting things done, but I am just weighted. It's a questioning of things I hold true. And, (pauses) and a shakiness in my confidence.

I think my whole thing is just a struggle against despair. I think everything I'm doing is because despair is self-defeating. Despair is surrender, it's self-defeating and defeating of the world. I'm so careful to delineate between hope and optimism. Hope is a choice. Optimism is an observation, a prognostication. I'm so careful to delineate between being nice and being kind. Very different things. I'm very careful to delineate between peace and placidity. Between justice and retribution. On and on and on. Because, you can dumb down any big idea and then dismiss the small version of it. Because the small version of it isn't true, right? So, when I talk about peace work, I have to be abundantly clear with anybody who is willing to listen long enough for that clarity. I'm not just talking about standing in a circle and singing kumbaya. I'm talking about doing the hard work of relationship and being vulnerable and taking risks and being strategic and methodical in our approaches to conflict. That's a really different thing from the cultural perception of it that we have. And if you don't nuance hope, then it's a lie. And if it's a lie, then there's nothing but despair.

I think our cultural narrative around hope is not grounded in reality. Idealism means living in a dream world. Right? Hope is delusional; it's not realistic. And, on my worst days, when things are so damned discouraging, I think, 'Yeah maybe they're right.' But I've spent so much time on this stuff. I've spent so much time thinking about this it. I don't really believe that. I think hope is grounded in reality. When I get really blue (pauses), when I get to a place of feeling so…. What I'm saying is that there's a truth to hope, and there's a shadow side of it.

And I'm hopeful most days. In order to be hopeful, I have to remember hope has nothing to do with optimism.

My favorite thought on hope is from Václav Havel who said, 'Hope is not prognostication. It's an orientation of the spirit.' I think that's right. Hope is what keeps you working even when there is no way you're going to win. The phrase from what we call the Civil Rights Movement is 'making a way out of no way.' 'All the avenues are closed. We can't call the police. None of this is going to work. We have a long clear history to show us that this is not going to work. There is no way we're going to win this.' And, so, they made a way. And that's our job. I'm hopeful in the sense that I choose to continue to be hopeful.

I'm also hopeful in a couple of other senses. I'm moved by Steven Pinker's work around the steady decline of violence in the world over the last few millennia, centuries, and decades. Any way you want to measure it, violence has been on a steady decline for a really long time and continues to be. Violent crime rates in the U.S. right now are half of what they were in 1979. Worldwide, violent conflict deaths are down. There's never been a time in history when there was less violence than right now. I think we're maturing as a human race. Of course, we may well destroy ourselves entirely before we have the opportunity to mature all the way. If we ever do mature all the way. I'm hopeful this is not in a Polyanna sense. But I'm careful about how I make that point about violence because I don't want to trivialize the very real cost and sacrifices of what's happening now in terms of race, violence, police brutality, and so forth. That said, this all looks like adolescence to me. It looks like, as a culture, we are growing through a really painful and contentious period that is part of our maturing. And we're doing better; I think we are. This is what growth looks like. We can't have growth and have it not be costly. And again, I'm not at all trivializing the cost of people who have been murdered. There is nothing that is OK about that.

I'm speaking often to college students. Their literacy around gender issues and race issues, in particular, is just staggering. They are so aware and tuned in. And I'm talking about rural Texas, not New York City. They're in a very different place and it's a better place we're moving toward. I'm sure. I think that maturity and progress, I mean real progress, moves forward like the tides. The tide is coming in even though the waves fall back. The wave falls back; the tide comes in. I believed that there's really painful waves falling back right now. And I also believe the tide is coming in. That makes me hopeful. Pinker is a neuropsychologist. He's talking about why we think the world is more violent than ever before while it's actually less violent than ever before and how that perception impacts our decision-making.

Theology

One last thought about hope — and this is where my theology comes in. It sounds kind of hopelessly abstract in some ways, but it isn't. Where I'm really not hopeful is about climate change. I think we're way past any tipping point of doing any better with this. I think we're just way past it. Again, I live in hope and therefore I'm still working on it. And I might be surprised. I've been surprised many times. I did not think Mandela would end up President of South Africa and not wipe out a bunch of White people. I've been surprised by history in positive ways and that may happen again with climate change.

But how it looks to me now, I think we've really wrecked it. I think if we start doing everything right at this moment it would still be too late.

I think hope depends on how tightly or widely you zoom the lens. When I zoom it in tight, things are good right here in this living room. We're fine. You know, we're alright. It's a little chilly, I notice, but other than that, we're in good shape. We have water and food and shelter and family and people who love us. We have community and meaningful work and so much that we're grateful for.

We zoom out a little wider, and people are really upset with each other here in this town. I'm hating this split in the community.

Zoom out a little wider and we've got the state of North Carolina. The legislature is doing so much damage, according to the stats I hear, killing seven people every day on average just in the Medicaid expansion question. So very serious.

Zoom out a little wider and you've got the nation. Gun control…anything you want to talk about. We've got lots of issues.

Zoom out to the world and you've got war in Syria. You've got lots and lots of issues including lots we don't talk about…Burundi…the persecution of Muslims in Myanmar. On and on and on. There are a lot things that are really hard. And then there's the climate change thing which I think will probably get us.

But while we're being this candid, everything that lives, dies. That's part of the bargain. Life is beautiful, in spite of, and because of death. Death is not the enemy. And if we all die at once, or if we all die one by one, what difference does it really make. I also believe that lives are tenuous, but life is tenacious. We're not going to wipe out life on the earth. We're going to wipe out our own lives, quite possibly. But it's going to be somebody else's turn. Life will continue to go on and amazing things will happen. And we'll adapt and adjust and there's billions of years more of life on this planet. And then in some point it will fall into the sun and that's OK too.

When we zoom out widest, you get to God. When we get there, I'm extremely hopeful. God gives us this miraculous thing, life. And it comes as a contract and death is included in the contract with life. But there's beauty in it that's unspeakable and unimaginable. And, I think, for life to end doesn't mean that life doesn't have value. And think that applies to the geological time scale as much as it applies to my own life. So, the question for me, as an individual with my own little bitty life here, is how do I make these days count. How do I make them matter? If love is the big answer to everything, as Jesus says it was, the great commandment, how do I live out love today? What does that look like? How do we love each other better? That's where I'm at. So, I'm really, really hopeful.

I also had a near death experience where I had some tangible experience of spirit that was very moving to me and informs this conversation. That's also part of it.

I won't tell you the whole story. But I basically and gradually lost consciousness. My arms kept coming down. I had a period of aphasia where I was pulling out completely and using unassociated words for things I was trying to say. Later my friend said that I pointed to a chair and said 'wedding.' I've been around elderly people coping with aphasia and it's wild to know how that feels. In the final stages of this thing, I thought I was just a leaving. I didn't realize it was a bell curve and that it was all going to reverse and I was going to come back. But, I lost consciousness, and in that losing of consciousness — it's funny, it's kind of a literal understanding of the phrase 'losing consciousness' because I felt like my consciousness was moving away from me and it looked like a ball with little blue lights flicking around it. But it was a ball without any real substance. The ball was kind of moving away from me and I was aware that it was my intellect, my brain, and my mind that I was watching recede. I felt fairly peaceful, but I was kind of odd to watch it. And it wasn't until later, reflecting on it, I realized, 'Wait a minute, I wasn't in that ball.' I was here watching it recede. Spirit is what's left when you take all that away. There's a deeper me that has nothing to do with my thoughts. Logic has no bearing whatsoever on your spirit. It's a different thing. It's deeper and it's not languaged. I've always been fairly at peace with death actually. I have never been as intimidated with death as a lot of folks are. But more so, since then, now that I have a son. That's a different conversation. I want to be there for him as long as I can and as effectively as I can.

I think, as a general perspective on the world, that we have responsibility to each other and that we share our struggles and our joys. If that's your assumption, then that impacts everything, your politics and your faith. If you believe that we are 'we,' *mbuntu*, then your concept of 'us' is a really broad circle that teaches you everything you need to know about justice. The only way there can be injustice is for there to be a 'them' that isn't part of 'us.' Hugh Hollowell [mentioned earlier] threw up a thing up on Facebook that resonated with me. He said, 'Anytime you use religion to draw a line between yourself and someone else, Jesus will be on the other side of that line.' Yeah. Yeah. Uh-huh. Right. I probably said this to you before, but I fundamentally believe the really big message of the New Testament is there is no such thing as 'them.' It's just 'us.' If you're dealing with different parts of 'us,' there can be conflict but it's an internal conflict, something we've got to work out because we are an 'us.' But if it's all 'us,' you have a fundamentally different approach. It's an internal conflict. And it's something we've got to work out because we're 'us.' And I think that's what Jesus was trying to tell us. There's just no 'them.' And that really changes everything.

If I'm with a church group, I often will throw up a slide of Jesus and say, 'Ok, is this a hero story or a movement story?' And, bottom line, we tell it both ways. The hero story is, 'Yeah, Jesus died for me. And now we're good. And my job is to praise him. Right? My job is to clap.' And the movement story is, 'Jesus is showing me how he wants me to live and inviting me into that movement.'

It's interesting with Christian activists. Remember Rev. Barber calling down from the balcony into that active legislative session? 'Speaker Tillis, what does the Lord require of you?' and the people around him started chanting. Micah wrote a great chant: 'Do

justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God.'. I find generally when activists quote that verse, we tend to say, 'Do justice, love kindness …. What's the rest of this?' We go all Rick Perry there, 'What's that third thing?' It's interesting. I think that's one of the fundamental struggles in doing work for justice. You perceive a better way and you have a firm opinion and you want to stand for it. But how do you do that in tandem with humility? I think that overlays profoundly with a theology of imperfection, that grace is free. You don't have to earn it. You bring your best, but you're flawed and you're going to get it wrong somedays. We've got to bring our brokenness and acknowledge it, be willing to not only to speak but also to listen. I think sitting with all that at the same time, bringing real humility to conversations where you're trying to do justice and advocate for kindness is a challenge and is not something that you ever figure out. Like anything else, if we rigidify our theology or our politics or whatever, we're not doing the real work. We're not doing it well.

Stories of resistance — my story

I like stories. I like stories; that's the bottom line. I like stories. And I like to listen to them. And I like to tell them. I like to curate and collect them. And like to fit them together into metanarratives. And build the pieces of the argument together. You can always apply different narratives to the same set of facts.

Stories that are foundational to non-violent resistance, which is active, not passive. I like stories that point to the need for creativity in this work. Walter Wink said that we biologically are deeply programmed to respond to aggression with a 'fight or flight' response, but it's almost never our best option. The story, my favorite story to illustrate that, I recently published by the title, *White Flour*.

It is a pretty amazing story and a true story of creativity that defused and transformed a Klan rally. People in good faith want to shout them down or to stay home. They also might say, 'Look, all they want is attention. Let's not give it to them; let's just stay home.' The problem with that is that the people that they're attacking feel like they're being abandoned — because they are being abandoned! Right! So that's not good enough. It's not alright.

Now that's different from a freeze out. There have been beautifully organized freeze-outs. In '86, the Klan announced a little rally in the town square in Davidson. So, the town organized this huge event across town with free popcorn and movies and games. Free to the whole community. Advertised it heavily, invited everybody, and made it clear why they were doing it. Every shop owner on the square agreed with all of them to close for the day and not open their stores. So, the entirety of the downtown was a ghost town. There was nobody there. Nobody there. The Klan showed up and formed up into their ranks. They look around and there's nobody there. They didn't even get all the way across the square. Beautiful.

There also another way besides fighting. *White Flour* describes the formation of a facetious clown rally in response to a Klan rally. When the Klan shouted, 'White Power!' the people responded 'White Flour!' or 'White Flowers!'. And they brought all

the necessary props. They started crazy, fun white flour fights or passed out white flowers to everybody. The Klan's was basically ignored. The Klan had the town square for 4 hours and went home after one and a half hours. I think that story is really powerful. The importance of creativity or collective imagination and art in the work of social justice cannot be overstated.

This reality captures the narrative of my life. You could say, 'Wow, this was radical. He was a professional musician for all these years and then he quit for a couple of years and went and did this Masters degree and wrote a book about peace and activism. Wow, what a crazy U-turn.' Or, you could tell the story with all of these things flowing together, that what I have longed for as a human being on the planet is to find better ways to love people — to invite myself and the people around me into a fuller life — to make space for the kingdom. This is all different language for the same thing and that keeps evolving for me.

One of my deepest joys would be for somebody to tell my son that I loved him and I loved to laugh. I think laughter is holy. That's what I would want, if they would say that I had a laugh and I was kind. One of my favorite movies is 'Harvey.' It's wonderful. There's this lovely line that Jimmy Stewart drops at one point; I won't get it exactly right. But, he says, 'My mother used to say to me, 'You can either be very clever or very kind.' I was clever for some time. I recommend kind.' Something like that (laughing)! But, also, I would be really content for people not to tell stories about me too long after I'm gone.

CHAPTER 10: DOUG SCANDRETTE
"THINK"

Prologue

Doug is a White male in his mid-40s. He is an accomplished networker that I've known for more than a decade in progressive Christian circles. Unrelated to this project, I contacted him a couple years ago to discuss community organizing with the hope of using his social media acumen to bring more people into organizing environments. I knew that he was actively networking to connect creative and socially active faith communities nationwide. But, over BBQ and ice tea, I was excited to hear that his network had already made a shift to justice organizing. He looks so much like the young guy I knew in his 20s hanging at the edges and ultimately moving toward center of the progressive networks I was helping lead. During those early days, he was one of SO many evangelicals who was interested in our project to land the critical, interpretive turn in the heart of traditional Christianity. His life journey has had so many reorientations and changes. I know that he has taken some painful blows in that pathway of leaving evangelical orthodoxy and working for justice. Both his passion and his woundedness was evident to me during our interviews.

Doug lives in an old mill town, West of one of NC's largest cities, a town I had not traveled to since my childhood. Our first interview was in a neighboring mill town at an old country store that had been converted into a gourmet foods market that sold lunch from a farm-to-table menu. We sat in one of a couple tables in the market's large wine section filled with choice vintages from all over the world. Our second interview was in a vegan café in Doug's town that had public access bulletin boards covered in opportunities for social action. Even in

the quiet afternoon with just a handful of customers as I waited for our meeting, I could hear patrons discussing the "FT"MM and their desire to join in the next action. Doug and I would be discussing our shared desires to "change the world" while ironically sitting in two locations that marked at least some substantive social change in this part of state. Our final interview was in Doug's living room and work area. In that space, Doug's multi-vocationalism was clearly revealed with the residues of several projects on most of the surface areas.

By the time we completed our interviews, Doug and I had participated in civil disobedience together as a part of the third anniversary of Moral Mondays (described in chapter one) and had spent a long day and night together going through the machinations of arrest and processing. Given his enthusiasm for the "FT"MM, it was no surprise to me that he landed a job less than a year after our final interview using his network skills for Rev. Barber.

Doug's Story

> I just grew up in it, in conservative evangelicalism. A White, suburban kid in an evangelical home in a small town outside of a large Midwestern city. Private Christian school, grades K-12.
>
> I remember as a little, little kid in Sunday School 'praying the prayer' and how excited my parents were that I had prayed the prayer and 'become a Christian', you know. The Sunday School teacher had told them. And, as good evangelical parents, they were like, 'Yes!' (hands extended!) That was big! I did it!
>
> I have a brother who is older than me. He got baptized with other kids from our youth group when he was in high school. But I remember being very serious about that, baptism, and wanted to wait. When I got high school, I got involved in the local chapter of an organization called Steiger International. It's an off-shoot of Youth with a Mission started by a guy who was a local legend in youth ministry. I knew a guy in his ministry who was starting what they called the 'Hard-Core Bible Study.' It was for punks and grunge kids. I was kind of a grunge kid. At first, they were meeting in a funeral home in my town. I just thought that was the coolest thing, so I started going.
>
> I ended up being baptized by the leader of that group — in a coffin — in a city lake. Well, it was a fake coffin. We had built this coffin out of wood and painted it black. We actually did a march through uptown, in the Arts District, and basically tried to get a crowd of people to follow us down to the shores of the lake. We filled it up with water

from the Lake and I got baptized in that coffin. There were 3 or 4 of us who got baptized that day. I was seventeen or eighteen at the time.

Activism roots

Jumping way ahead, and surprisingly, maybe, one of the things that may have started to turn me on to activism was the Billy Graham Crusades, seeing them on television with those big stadium gatherings. I don't know if I've ever made that connection in my mind before with activism, but I think I saw that same kind of energy and work in creating those kinds of events. It was the idea of mobilization and movement and energy and all of these different groups coming together. Later on, when I was a young adult going to Promise Keepers, there was this same feeling of movement in these large stadium gatherings, the mobilization of churches and groups of people coming together for a particular cause.

Similarly, in my high school days on a smaller scale, I was a part of youth rallies in our city. Essentially all of these evangelical churches would bus in their kids to the local Christian college. They would host it in their gymnasium. I came from a pretty small Baptist church; our youth group was maybe five or ten kids. It was pretty small, but we came together for these youth rallies. There was this sense of excitement, energy, mobilization, and movement coming together for a cause. I love those experiences that made me feel I was connected to something bigger than myself, bigger than my little church experience. I think back on those.

The summer between my high school graduation and my first year of college, I got an internship, an unpaid internship, at the local Christian newspaper. I was drawn to writing; I was drawn to journalism. I was planning to study it and had been publishing an underground magazine which convinced the editor of the Christian newspaper to offer me an internship. During that summer, a lot of the anti-abortion, Operation Rescue kind of stuff was really exploding. I was on the ground, on the street, seeing what was going on, interviewing the people who were involved in those kinds of protests and rallies. In a way, it began to expose me to a Christian activism that I don't know if I had ever been exposed to it before. I wasn't necessarily drawn to the tactics. While at the time I would have to say that I was as pro-life as you could be, even then I had some compassion and sensitivity. 'Are you really helping these young women, or are you demonizing and punishing them?' I had some real personal reservations. I saw people putting their faith in action there, but also wondered if this was really the best way, the right way, to be going about it.

The 'Zine

During those years, my late high school years, I was publishing my magazine. There was at the time, a 'zine' culture, a cultural phenomenon in the early 90s. I read a ton of them. I started reading the 'zines after going to the Cornerstone Festival and picking up a bunch of them up there. The had names like 'Fig Tree' and 'Thieves and Prostitutes.' There was just a ton of them. I eventually went back and had a booth at the Cornerstone Festival trying to sell my magazine there. The other 'zine people thought I was a sell-out

because I was trying to sell my magazine when they pretty much did it for free. I was trying to sell advertising and I was trying to sell some subscriptions – trying to make it work financially as a model, which it never did.

I considered the magazine a pre-evangelistic tool to try to get people who are not interested in Christianity to maybe think, 'Oh maybe there is something in Christianity worth taking a look at.' I was trying very intentionally to represent this intellectually rigorous form of evangelical Christianity.

I started reading like the sermons of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Thomas Merton — getting exposed to some different ideas outside of the conservative evangelical world. I started getting contacted by book publishers — ironically since I now work for a book publisher — wanting to get their books reviewed in the magazine. I wanted to publish book reviews and get free books. I think they may have contacted me about the Merton book. I wrote the review. I just remember being exposed to something really beautiful, this contemplative spirituality that I had never heard of before and yet was deeply Christian. It didn't feel heretical or scary to me at that time; I was just really excited to be exposed to it.

I remember reading *Postmodern Pilgrims* and *Soul Tsunami* by Leonard Sweet. Even before that, I have to give credit to Francis Schaefer, *How Should We Then Live.* The world and popular culture weren't something evil and scary to me. There could be a lot of truth and beauty to be embraced in a Christianity that could be intellectual.

When I shut down the magazine, the city newspaper did a profile piece of me. The magazine had grown to such a point, that I had a profile in the city. I've got a picture on the wall in my house from the article. There was a famous mural downtown on the west bank near the state university, a painting of Jesus. The picture is me standing in front of Jesus with my arms folded like this. I've got both my ears are pierced. I'm like nineteen years old, twenty years old, and my shirt says, 'Think.'

Steiger International

I was already engaged when I was nineteen. We had met at a very conservative Christian college in the Midwest that I attended. (We had considered some of the other local Christian colleges to be too liberal!)

I had interviewed a guy named David Pierce, the founder of Steiger International, who had started to read my magazine. He had come to the city to set up a meeting with me. He basically said, 'I think what you are doing is not strong enough. You're wasting your time. You need to be a lot more bold and direct.' So, he not only offered me a job; he offered to help pay for me to basically travel around the world for six months and write a book about it. It appealed to the writer in me and my world traveler impulse. I decided to drop out, get married, quit publishing the magazine, and go to work for the organization.

We got married at 20 and became missionaries at that point. We raised half of the needed funds to do this trip. We went to churches and we went to my family members and friends. Then we went overseas for six months with Steiger, touring with a band that was doing a rock opera mostly in clubs and bars. After the presentation, David, the lead singer would come out and give this very in-your-face, evangelistic message: 'You know you need hope. You want hope? This is the answer: give your heart to Jesus.' That kind of message.

Six months in Europe and Asia and then we worked for that organization for another year and a half in Massachusetts. We did street ministry in front of Jonathan Edward's church in Northampton, Massachusetts, in the triangle of 'little Ivy's, very liberal progressive schools like Smith, you know, 'where women go to turn into lesbians' (said with smirking sarcasm).

We would go out on Friday nights and serve hot cider and coffee, mostly to the drunks who were coming in for the AA meeting at the church, but also to other people. We eventually got the nickname, the 'Christian Do-gooders,' because we were serving cider and having friendly, non-judgmental conversations trying to build relationships with people there. But it was street evangelism, essentially.

We were mostly running the office. One of the Board members from this international ministry based in New Zealand lived there because they wanted us – my wife at the time and me to have some closer oversight. I was doing communications, marketing type of stuff for them. But we also tried to have a kind of a small group Bible Study in our little studio/loft apartment and did the street evangelism on Friday nights.

Campus ministry

I had a falling out with this woman who was overseeing our work with Steiger. While my wife and I were at the Christian college, we had been involved in a campus ministry at the state university. The campus minister and his wife had become mentors and close friends with both of us. They invited us to come back from Massachusetts and do campus ministry work with them. So, we brought our support, our church support, most of it, some of it had dropped off, but quite a bit of it came with us and we did campus ministry work for a couple of years. I transferred in as a student thinking that I wanted to do an actual journalism program.

I had a little office in the campus house of the campus ministry to publish a magazine while I was a student there. It was called Christian Student Fellowship – very generic, affiliated with the independent Christian churches, which by the way, was my first exposure to the Stone Campbell Movement, the Restoration Movement, the conservative side of the independent Christian Church. They had never told me about the Disciples of Christ, my current denomination, the liberal side!

Billy Graham Association

Then a person who had read my magazine who worked for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in the internet division contacted me, 'Hey we're hiring this position. It might be perfect for you. Would you consider it?' And I did. I applied and they offered me the position. So, I went to work for Billy from 2000-2006. I saw the organization go through a lot of change and had the opportunity to go to a number of Billy's last crusades. In 2003, we relocated to the South with his son Franklin having uprooted the organization.

The first crusade I went to was Nashville. We were doing one of the first live webcasts of a Billy Graham Crusade and I was there as support staff of the webcast. We didn't call it 'social media' back then, but you could say that I was essentially doing social media back then. I was posting updates on the web. Other crusades that I was a part of, I would also go and write stories for the web. I would also come back and write a recap for Decision Magazine.

Back to '97 and '98, I was building my first webpages, getting online, and seeing the potential there. But when I went to work for Billy Graham, having a message board on a website was still a pretty big deal. I remember the website that we did, passageway.org. The first job I had for Billy Graham was to edit fulltime a youth-oriented website. My background in youth evangelism and publishing is what got me the job. It was a content job. They wanted to build a website as a discipleship follow-up for the Crusades and they needed someone to develop content. I remember when we added a commenting feature on our articles. This was unheard of! This was all pre-blogging; blogs didn't really exist yet.

I'd have to go back and see when I put up my first personal website. It was a while ago, but it was pretty static, you know, so it wasn't like the regular blogging thing that it evolved into.

I mean, those years were a real evolution for me. Those years that I was with Billy Graham were the years I began reading Brian McLaren's stuff, reading more and more of these things that exposed me to a lot of different ideas. Moving South in 2003, we went from going to a famous fundamentalist megachurch to intentionally seeking out a 'quote unquote emergent church' (adding a knowing glance about the terror that provoked among evangelicals during that time) in our new city.

I would say, in the first year in the megachurch, I was really being challenged. The pastor, John Piper, a famous Calvinist with a large media platform, was a great preacher. A lot of my Billy Graham colleagues went to church there. So, culturally, it just fit. Then it was probably the second year, he launched into a 37-week series on Calvinism and why you have to believe in Calvinism. I'm exaggerating on that, but, you know, you get the idea. I went in the other direction, seeking out everything I could find on alternatives to Calvinism. Ironically, the book that helped me the most was this book by Norm Geisler, *Chosen But Free*. That book basically gave me the answer I was seeking, that I didn't have to be a Calvinist. I remember the pastor saying specifically one Sunday morning,

‘You don’t have to believe in Calvinism, but when you die and go to heaven, you’ll find out I was right.’ And I just remember thinking, ‘Well, how stupid is that then. If it doesn’t really matter, if it doesn’t really matter then why is it so important to you that you’re right about this!’

We made a pretty clean break there, moving South and getting involved with an emerging church. And I continued to read. In those three years, 2003-2006, the culture of the organization shifted far more to the right under Franklin Graham’s leadership and I was going in the opposite direction theologically.

It was really Billy’s old guard leadership up until 2003. And then after 2003, that shake-up happened it was all Franklin Graham. Franklin brought in his people and the culture of the organization just got so fundamentalist. I still have friends who work for the organization. I can’t believe that they still do because — I mean, it was crazy(!) — he put Putin on the cover of Decision Magazine — on the cover of Decision Magazine. It was this glowing article about how Putin is the champion of conservative values in Russia and was basically this hit piece on Obama. (Paraphrasing) ‘Obama is such a liberal. He’s taking our country in the wrong direction. We should be doing what Putin is doing in Russia.’ This is the kind of crazy stuff Franklin Graham has done in the last few years!

African Inland Mission (AIM), EmergentVillage, & “The Gay Issue”

So, I left The Billy Graham Association in 2006 and went work at the African Inland Mission (AIM) I got to travel internationally quite a bit again. It was during that time, I became very public with my affiliation with EmergentVillage. you know, curating the blog space from 2006-2009.

So, let me connect a couple of dots.

Tony Jones, one of the founding leaders of EmergentVillage, was one of the readers of my magazine from way back. He was leading a youth ministry organization back then and he was reading my magazine. We had a little bit of contact around that and then a few years went by. I was working for the campus ministry and I heard about the Midwest Regional Gathering of the Young Leaders Network. I met Doug Pagitt [another founding leader of the emergent movement] and Andrew Jones and other Emergent leaders.

After I had attended that gathering, I was on the email list so I started getting updates. Doug was ready to leave the Young Leaders Network to start Solomon’s Porch. I started getting these email updates from the Young Leaders Network and then it was the TerraNova Project and finally it became EmergentVillage.

It wasn’t until a few years later that I pieced it together. Seeing these announcements from EmergentVillage from Tony and Doug, I was like, ‘Hey it’s all the same people that were at that conference.’ So, I got back in touch with Tony in 2006. When I worked for Billy Graham, there wasn’t a whole lot that I could do. But when I left Billy Graham, I had a lot more freedom and flexibility. I wasn’t working crazy stressful hours. That’s

when I started doing more of the behind the scenes work with EmergentVillage. Tony was taking on the National Coordinator role. He asked me to help with the blog, the email updates, and all those kinds of media pieces. I was helping behind the scenes with all of that.

In late 2008, I had a co-worker who was figuring out that I was this dangerous postmodern, emergent guy. He started making a case of it with AIM's leadership, that I was theologically too liberal for AIM. I was not evangelical enough for this historic evangelical mission organization, which led to a period of theological accountability.

In addition to my association with EmergentVillage, in 2008 I had come out in support of Barak Obama as President. I was interviewed by the Washington Times as an evangelical who supported Obama. How could I do that given the issue of abortion? This interview was on the front page of the Washington Times. And that created some controversy within AIM.

But they were particularly interested in Brian McLaren [the EmergentVillage founder with the highest profile].[20] Their logic was 'Brian McLaren is this bad guy and you're associated with Brian and we need to investigate.' Ironically, Brian had just come through our city. We had just done his book tour for *Everything Must Change.* I had told my AIM colleagues that he was coming and that I was helping organize the event. They knew all this because the top leaders within AIM had a monthly group that I had been invited to participate in to talk about missiology. Gary Corwin who was the editor of Evangelical Missions Quarterly (EMQ) at the time was also part of that group. The President of AIMUSA, the international Director AIM, other senior members of AIM were all part of this group.

They invited me in to talk about the emergent church, so I gave a whole presentation to these guys on this. This guy in the group, I going to forget his name right now, who is considered the leading thinker on Muslim evangelism in the evangelical world, said 'I would really like to meet Brian McLaren. Could you set up a meeting for us?' He had written many books on the whole scale of contextualization, setting the standard on when you're going into a Muslim context, where to draw that line, where you cross over from being contextual to being assimilated basically, where you're no longer Christian and you're actually becoming Muslim.

So, Brian had breakfast with me and all of these AIM leaders. They peppered him with questions for two hours over pancakes at a Cracker Barrel. After they had met Brian in person, they had no problems with him. The consensus was, 'We disagree with him on things, but what a sweet person. His heart is so right. We don't have any problems with Brian McLaren. That was February of 2009.

[20] At that time Brian had been recently named by *Time,* as one of America's 25 most influential evangelicals under the moniker as a "paradigm changer." He also had a prominent interview on Larry King Live (CNN) about his theological positions during this same time frame.

But they still required me to meet on a regular basis with a senior member of the organization to talk about what I really believed on different things.

I'll just say another thing 'cause I think it's funny — one of the things that AIM had me do was to write essays. They had these questions and they wanted me to write essay answers. There were only like three or four questions. One of the questions was literally, 'Name one thing that Brian McLaren believes that you disagree with him about.' By that time, Brian had become this boogie man of bad theology even though a few months earlier, they had met him in person, face-to-face, asked him questions for hours, and left having no problem with him. You know what I'm saying? It's just amazing how quickly that turned.

There is so much more I could say about the AIM years, but ultimately it came down to a comment I made on the very first blogpost on the queer emergent website that Adele Sakler had started. My comment was this: 'I'm so glad there's a place on the internet for gay Christians to connect and support each other in following Jesus.' And that comment lead to a homosexuality conversation. Because of me, AIM, as an organization, decided to rewrite their entire employee manual to make what had been a very grey sexuality policy very black and white and clear! It sent me studying everything I could, biblically, on the issue of homosexuality.

And at the end, I landed in the wrong place, you know, on the other side of the invisible line in the sand. I remember them telling me, 'Doug, it would be ok if you wanted to go and march for gay rights, as long as you believed that being gay is a sin.' It was the *belief* that was primary. I was like, 'Really, like that wouldn't reflect poorly on AIM as an organization, my marching in a gay rights parade, a gay pride parade? You'd be fine with that as long as I could turn around to the gay person next to me in the parade and say, 'You're actually sinning?''

That didn't make any sense to me.

I was told, 'Yeah, we would be ok with that.'

I just thought that was, from an organizational standpoint, a really bizarre position to hold. If you're really concerned about how this looks, marching at a pride parade would be the most publically damaging thing I would think. But, yeah, it was the belief. Because it wasn't about homosexuality. It was about Scripture. It was always about biblical interpretation and if I got this wrong, if I got it wrong on this, then I was wrong and I couldn't be trusted. I was a mouthpiece of the organization, so it added complexity to my role. I got that. They couldn't have complete confidence in me.

So that led to me resigning from the organization.

The irony was I was on the phone with Brian asking for his advice. Brian was one of the first people who said, 'I think you're going to have to resign from this organization and just trust that it's going to be ok.' There's more to that story, but that's what I ended up

doing. I resigned and they actually gave me three months severance for the three years I had been with them. They didn't have to do it. It was very generous of them.

Leaving AIM — they forced me to land on that issue — and by landing on that issue and by coming out as a straight ally for equality and then leaving that organization — I felt kicked out of evangelicalism. That's when I eventually found my way into the mainline. But, at that point, I was free to say exactly what I thought about things. You know, it really gave me the freedom. Coming out as a straight ally, that was in some ways maybe the first issue where I would really be taking a stand and become vocal and use my voice and platform for a particular issue and for a particular cause.

MissioFORM

There was an interesting overlap to those events in the spring of 2009. EmergentVillage had a meeting in DC and I essentially announced that I would be stepping away from Emergent Village. I told everyone at EmergentVillage, 'You know the communication stuff that I've been doing for Emergent, I'm not going to be able to do it anymore. I'm going to have to hand that off to somebody else and I'm going to be pursuing this idea of trying to form a new network to be focused around communities, new experimental forms of church.

Inspired by Rich McCullen doing Mission Gathering in San Diego, Kathy Escobar doing the Refuge in Denver, Danielle Shroyer with Journey in Dallas, and obviously Doug Pagitt at Solomon's Porch — I was like, 'How do we be a catalyst for more people doing more things like this, whether it's in a denominational structure or outside the denominational structure? That's where the name MissioFORM came from. Brian was talking about emergent growth on the outside of the giant trees in the forest. So, you had emergent Lutherans who were closer to emergent Methodists, than the oldtime folks who were at the center of those denominations. We wanted to be a network that could help those people within those denominations. My sense was that they weren't getting that kind of support or encouragement within their denomination, so maybe we could be this kind of para-denominational or trans-denominational organization.

To pay the bills, Rich McCullen and Mission Gathering bought me a laptop computer so that I could build a website and we could launch MissioFORM in the Fall of '09. MissioFORM became a project under the umbrella of Mission Gathering, San Diego which had, by the way, been the incubator for Invisible Children, which went on to be this huge, multimillion dollar organization. We were really confident in coming under them and grateful for their willingness to do that.

Over the summer of 2009, we convened folks to help shape the vision, mission, and purpose of MissioFORM. We launched in the Fall of 2009 right when I was leaving AIM, launched the website and announced that we would be doing the first MissioFORM conference in Spring of 2010 at Wesley Seminary in DC. It all happening kind of at the same time.

Brian was still in DC at that time. And Pete Rollins [a philosopher and leader among Atheist Christians] was in the Northeast. So, he was a train ride away at that time. And Doug Pagitt came in. We did it as a free event. We had a couple different sign-ups and it wasn't until we were driving up to DC that I was reconciling the spreadsheets of all the different names of people. I was like, 'Oh my gosh! We've got like 200 people coming to this thing.' We didn't realize how big it was going to be.

Pete was doing the Ikon Project in Northern Ireland and I just wanted him to blow away people's boxes, to kind of just blow people's minds and get people questioning and wondering and dreaming a little bit about what the possibilities could be.

The thing that a lot of people didn't know, but I know you were in that loop as a speaker, is that we had actually had a guy threatening, who had been making death threats to Brian and other leaders. We had to have security.

Some of our leaders noted, 'We need to take up an offering and try to raise funds to do a west coast gathering.' We connected with the Seattle School of Theology & Psychology and the Parish Collective folks and partnered with them on the first Inhabit Conference. And the year after that we partnered with Brite Divinity School in Ft. Worth to do another to do a conference there.

Divorce, Rachel, and a change to an activist vision

We took a year off from MissioFORM somewhere in there; I ended up going through a separation and divorce. I got separated in 2012. The divorce was finalized by the end of 2013.

I had really been the driving force of MissioFORM. We had a leadership team and had some conference calls on a very infrequent basis. They weren't regularly scheduled. Whenever I wanted or needed to schedule a call, I would try to wrangle everybody. The leadership team was more of an advisory committee. I bounced questions off them, 'What do you guys think of this? What do you guys think of that?' But I was pretty much the sole decision maker and I was just kind of just chugging along making decisions in a very emergent, White guy kind of way, to be honest. And when I went through that separation and divorce, I just did not have the energy or the capacity to keep pushing MissioFORM forward in that same way.

And that's when I met Rachel. I had met her before that at the last Emergent Gathering in Glorietta. I had been separated for about six months or so. I was at the Wild Goose Festival in Oregon, the one time they did it on the West Coast and Rachel was there. And we just hit it off. A few months later we started dating long distance.

Her story was that she grew up in a very conservative United Methodist home, but her mother was really more of a mystic without ever knowing that language or that tradition existed. It wasn't until after her mom died that Rachel really went searching. What brought her back to faith was a Rob Bell book, a Shane Claiborne book, and then Brian

McLaren's stuff. It was emergent, this emergent expression of Christianity, that she discovered and she was like, 'I could be this kind of Christian.'

She had been the first paid organizer for Art in Revolution, the group that really popularized the use of giant puppets in protest. Rachel was going all around the country teaching activist groups how to design and build these giant protest puppets. She was part of the Battle in Seattle in '99 [the WTO Protests].

Because of our relationship, I just really trusted Rachel. She brought with her years of experience and activism to MissioFORM. And I was just ready to hand off the leadership of it to someone who was not a male or not white.

She had all these connections within the world of secular social justice work — amazing people. So, when she came into MissioFORM, she saw the couple thousand people on our database from all over the country, all these people doing new church development and missional community formation stuff. She was like, 'Man, this is, this is great. This is a great opportunity for organizing.' So, we began to make that transition and shift. The language we came up with was 'connecting people of faith and communities of faith with brother movements for social change.'

Then we recruited leaders to bring a contemplative, spiritual piece into the center of MissioFORM's work — enneagram conversations and folks from Richard Rohr's 'living school.' In a real logical way, that made sense because the work we were talking about people doing, whether it was the hard work of developing new forms of church or social justice activism, these are two things that can quickly burn you out unless you have a spirituality at your core that really renews you. To invite people to explore a more contemplative spiritual practice made a lot of sense.

When we launched MissioFORM out of the EmergentVillage, Emergent Village had been doing annual theological conferences that stopped right around 2009 or 2010. So we sort of wanted to pick it back up and fill in that gap with an Theologian-in-Residence at our conferences. In 2015, we were back in DC at Wesley Seminary again. We had Reverend Barber as our Theologian-in-Residence so that was a connection point with the Moral Movement.

By the time we did the San Diego event the next year, we had missional communities, contemplative activism, public theology, and the fourth thing we were just calling 'Justice Church' in the center. It's easy for people of faith, churches and denominations, to just do their good justice work in silos. With MissioFORM being trans-denominational, we were trying to be an organization that cuts across these denominational divides and break people out of those silos. In a few places, you might see a little bit of collaboration. But, you know what I mean, it's pretty rare to see even the denominations that are in full communion with each other actually doing much together. And then, even if they are in partnership with another church, it's disconnected from the world. It's disconnected. That for me was the lightbulb moment, that's actually the missional piece of this. It's looking around and asking, 'What is God doing in the

world?' God might actually be using the Greenpeace organizer who's not a person of faith at all to accomplish God's purposes around environmental work. How can we get people of faith to connect with that Greenpeace organizer to mobilize people of faith to do that justice work in partnership with that person?

This is where Rachel played such an important role; she knew these activists/organizers —these people working for justice, outside of any kind of faith context, but people who had some kind of faith background and were absolutely ecstatic to discover that there are progressive people of faith who care about these same justice issues that they care about. You just realize, wow, that there really is a missing link between the great justice work that people of faith are trying to do with the justice work that's already happening in the world by secular activists and organizers. How do we bring those worlds together? They both need each other. And that's where MissioFORM has gone. In the DC conference, Liz Butler said, 'Communities, communities are the building blocks of social justice. If we don't have these communities of people organized, we can't accomplish the bigger goals that we have for social justice.' It just reinforced again that original impulse for why we started MissioFORM – to help people organize into these communities that could then be mobilized.

To bring it up to date, in the last couple of years we have focused on partnership. There were folks in New York City doing a big public religion research study on the rise of the religious left and they launched a conference in the city. Their conference was progressive Christians doing social justice, exactly where we had ended up. They were doing their conference the same weekend last year of ours in DC. We had people going back and forth speaking at both conferences. We were like, 'Ok, could we partner?' So, we had a meeting with them, and well, here's what happened real quickly.

We were all together in DC at the Sojourners Summit meeting with them to talk about this potential partnership and the church shooting in Charleston happens. We went from sort of courting each other to using that the language, 'I'm interested in you; you seem interested in me. Are we going to start going steady?' to 'No — we're together. We're in this together!' due to the whole Charleston experience. Basically, a bunch of our leaders from both groups hopped in a car and drove down to Charleston. I stayed behind with other folks to basically mobilize a social media campaign. We organized around the hashtag #prophetic grief. Do you remember that? We basically organized and invited churches around the country to speak on the theme of prophetic grief. You had Otis Moss III in Chicago preaching on prophetic grief. It was Father's Day, but prophetic grief was the #2 trending topic on Twitter after Father's Day on that Sunday. We had thousands of thousands of people participating through social media — amazing stories and it got mobilized really quickly.

Another story that connects us to the Moral Movement happened during the big voting rights rally in Winston Salem ['This is Our Selma, the beginning of the NAACP court case that was eventually won regarding voter suppression in NC.] Our leaders and the leaders from New York met up to march. Melissa Harris-Perry was there with MSNBC

and ended up having us all over for dinner. Our shared conference eventually ended up having three hundred people there, a huge success.

Then things have happened, things did not go as any of us hoped or expected. Two of our key leaders went through divorces. Rachel and I broke up. Some personal relationships among us dissolved and has shaken us to our core. Rachel's really in discernment about what her role should be and I'm stepping up more. She defers to me in a lot of things as the founder, but technically we still have an executive board in place. Her leadership is essential; I mean, she has been really leading and driving things. Although she and I are still friends, I would say close friends and partners in MissioFORM, it's not the same as it was when we were in a relationship together and living together. That's created new questions about the future. We're still in a place of trying to figure all of that out.

Thinking more positively, one of the things we've said with MissioFORM is that we don't necessarily want to do our own campaign work as much as we want to come alongside and support the campaign work that other folks are already doing, to see if we can help mobilize the progressive Christian movement around those things, like partnering with the Moral Movement.

Moral Mondays

I had gotten connected with the Disciples of Christ in this region around 2010 through Rich McCullen and our work together for MissioFORM. He is Disciples of Christ and introduced me to the denomination when I ended up leaving AIM. I felt like I had gotten kicked out of the evangelical world and I needed a place to land when we were launching MissioFORM.

Funny Story. The Disciples at the national level had a church planting goal of a thousand churches and revitalizing a thousand churches by the year 2020. They ended up flying me out to Indianapolis for a meeting. We went out for dinner Friday night. After dinner, we went to a cigar bar. We were basically in this downtown Indianapolis cigar bar, smoking cigars and drinking whisky for hours. I had never inhaled that much cigar smoke and I had never consumed that much alcohol probably before in my life. These Disciples can really drink. They've got game. They can give the Episcopalians a run for their money. But this was new for me. The next morning I woke up feeling fine. I might have still been trashed, but I'm actually feeling ok. So I go to the morning meeting and we broke for lunch and walked over to a restaurant. I turned to these guys and said, 'Guys, I think what you should do is hire me to work with you on this church planting stuff. I think you guys need to find the money and hire me to full-time to come work with you as a consultant.' And literally everything starts spinning and I practically fall off my chair. Because you're basically stoned…because the alcohol and the cigar smoke hit me all at once…and the Holy Spirit probably had something to do with it too, but I was literally laid out just the minute the words came out of my mouth. I was like, 'I…I need to go back to my hotel…' The President of the organization had to drive me back to my hotel. I missed the whole rest of the meeting that they had flown me out there for. I was basically like, 'Well I screwed that up. That's never going to happen.' I thought it

wasn't going to happen, but they got back in touch with me a few weeks later and said, 'Yeah, we want to hire you as a consultant.'

That's probably how I started hearing about this guy, Reverend Barber, and hearing about the HKonJ annual march in Raleigh. But it really wasn't until the State Legislature had gotten taken over by these right-winged extremists and the first Moral Mondays began that it really got my attention. It was sort of like, what is going to happen? What are we going to do about this? And I started hearing about the Moral Mondays and recognized that this was being led by Reverend Barber. I wanted to participate right away, but I didn't feel like I was able to risk arrest or any of that. And I wasn't able to go and participate in a lot of rallies. But I did know that I could participate in it without risking arrest. I'd been up on stage behind Reverend Barber at one or two rallies in Shelby and in Lincolnton.

I worked for the Disciples for two years until the transitional President moved on. I had gotten just honestly frustrated with them at the national level around the new church plants. I just wanted to fire them as a client. They were basically going around and finding Black and Hispanic storefront, pentecostal type churches who were unaffiliated, taking these pastors out to lunch, and saying, 'Hey, how would you like to be part of the denomination, and we'll give you some money?' I'm being very cynical right now, but they were basically buying off these independent church planters and recruiting them to join the Disciples.

In December of 2013, I went to work for Chalice Press [the Disciples denominational press] as a Director of Marketing and Sales after that year of trying to cobble together income. Chalice was in conversation with Reverend Barber about doing a book. I thought, 'We need to publish that book. We need to pursue that. We really need to pursue that and light a fire under him to publish a book.' Through the process of working together with him and his people on the book, I got closely connected to Reverend Barber. I ended up going to a number of events to help market the book. This led to my inviting him to be our closing speaker at the MissioFORM Conference in DC last year which was phenomenal. It was just amazing.

Arrest

Since the Moral Mondays began, I had wanted to participate and to be able to participate in the way of being able to risk arrest. I had been frustrated that I haven't been able to do that for a couple of years. I've been feeling the draw to it because it just felt like this is our modern day Civil Rights Movement. People in the past were willing to do this; I should be willing to do this too.

After HB2 was passed and they started to gear up for the re-launch of the 3rd year of Moral Mondays, I felt pretty determined. I had to try to figure out a way to do this. I felt like I was in a place where I could do it and would have the support I needed. And so, for me, it was kind of a fulfillment or culmination of something I'd wanted to do for a while. I had heard from folks about the long tedious process. When we were there, in

the midst of it, I got hopeful that it would be a little more expeditious than it ended up being. It was a big group, 54 people.

The Chalice Board earlier this year passed a new policy called 'Community Involvement Leave.' It basically granted each employee up to forty hours of paid time off to do community, involvement work. This can be anything related to church or social justice work in the community – any kind of work of that sort. We have to get it approved a week or two in advance. That first Moral Monday of the year was approaching. So, I sent them an email, 'This is kind of what I want to do. Can I get community leave time off to do this? I can take a vacation day, but would you allow me to do this as community leave? And, by the way, I probably will get arrested.' That was in there; I was pretty clear and up front.

I came up with another Disciples Pastor who was also going to risk arrest. If you weren't there and other people weren't going to be there, I'd at least have at least this friend to kind of 'be in this together.' We had a third guy with us. I gave him the keys to my car so he could be the getaway driver (smiles). We felt like we had a pretty good plan. But I, uh, you know, was nervous. I wasn't sure after the fact what all the ramifications would be. There was still uncertainty about that. Like I said, even with my employer who had given me the time off to go and do this knowing that I would be risking arrest, I still was not sure how cool they were going to be about it. There was just a lot of uncertainty about the whole thing. You know you're going to have to have a court appearance. Who am I going to find to represent me? In the past, the North Carolina NAACP organized that for folks, but this time they weren't promising that. I had been talking to Rodney Sadler who is with the NAACP in Charlotte. He was somewhat reassuring. He was like, 'Yeah we're trying to get, we're trying to get some lawyers.' But they just didn't have anything solid yet that they could promise people. I had a little bit of sense that maybe something would still come through.

Ultimately, there was a lot of sitting and waiting and waiting and waiting and waiting. The process was about the tedious as it had been described to me. Somebody asked the question, 'Should we take our phones with us?' They basically said, 'If you don't want to lose it, don't take it with you.' I thought, 'I can't afford to lose my phone, so I'm definitely going to hand that off to our 'getaway guy' before I got arrested.' But, wow, that feeling of disconnection for hours and hours…

By the time I had gotten back from my arrest, news reports were coming out that people had been arrested. My boss left a comment on my Facebook wall, 'Were you one of the people who got arrested?' I was like, 'Oh no, you know!' Was he going to be upset about this? So, I let him know, 'Yeah I was one of the fifty-four people who got arrested.' And, his response back was celebratory. He said, 'You should post that.' So, I posted our little video of the arrest.

Once it was back live again, there were all kinds of text messages, updates, and questions. I posted the picture of me in the plastic zip ties getting arrested and I can't tell you how many places I've been since then where the first thing out of people's mouths is,

‘Oh you’re out of jail now.’
‘Huh, yeah, I was out of jail, like, that night.’

The biggest factor for me being arrested was my parents. My parents are very much unsupportive and conservative. They were both so very proud when I had gone to work for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Being a missionary, it’s like one of the best things you can do! And now —

My parents actually moved down here, eight years ago, and live next door to me in that house over there. I got back around five in the morning after I was arrested having driven back all night from Raleigh. My house was locked. I had asked my dad to come over here and feed my dog and he had locked up everything in the house. I had to wake him up at 5am to come over here and let me into my own house. That led to a huge argument. ‘You went to Raleigh didn’t you?’I figured, we’re already having an argument here so I told him at that point. I might as well drop the big bomb on him and he was furious! I have a copy here of HB2 that my father printed out with things highlighted on it because he was pretty sure I hadn’t read it. He wanted to make sure I had read it. We have exchanged some emails and gone back and forth; he was defending everything that was in here.

But the whole thing reminded me of what level of privilege I had lived with because of the fact that I could make a choice to be arrested as opposed to making some major mistake in my life — seeing the other people that were arrested that night and just recognizing if I were there under different circumstances this would be a major, major life-changing, devastating event for me — you know, to end up in this place. Or like the woman we saw who had all the signs of a meth addict. She was in prison before she even got there.

And think of the privilege to be at that training before the protest and have Bob Zellner there. This guy has gotten arrested thirty plus times with Dr. King and Rosa Parks and he’s there! And he’s the one training us on non-violent civil disobedience! Wow — amazing.

Reflections

I think the biggest thing for me about the movement has been just recognizing that it’s possible for there to be a faith-rooted, faith-based, faith-lead fusion movement that is an inclusive, broad coalition. This is a movement that comes from a place of real sincere faith and conviction and yet is inclusive of people all across the spectrum. As Reverend Barbour says, it includes ‘people who believe in a moral universe.’ You don’t have to believe in God. You don’t have to believe in Jesus. But if you believe in right and wrong and that what these legislators are doing is morally wrong, then we can be in this together. We can stand together. I have just been inspired by what he has been able to do without changing who he is. He’s still up there wearing the vestments. He’s wearing the stoll. He’s not, as you know, in this business suit up there. He’s a minister as much as he is an historian and a teacher of the history of the state’s politics. He’s also teaching

from the Bible consistently and what the Bible says about 'woe to those who legislate evil.' I'm just so encouraged.

Having worked for the Graham organization, I still follow what Franklin Graham is doing, and, more often than not, I'm just depressed to see the kind of crowds that he is still gathering, 4000-5000 people. He's doing this 'Decision America Tour,' going around to the state capitals. They've got a great system — they've got the networks with the conservative churches — and it's a prayer rally playing on the evangelical celebrity of Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham and playing on the message, 'Our country's going to hell in a handbasket. We've got to do something!' It's a fear-based swirling thing that gets those crowds to come out to his events.

But it's encouraging to me to see the kind of crowds that are coming out for these marches, protests, and rallies in the Moral Movement and how big HKonJ got. It has been really inspiring and encouraging that it's not just the far right that is able to mobilize people, but that we here on the progressive side of things can mobilize people too.

The Monday we got arrested, when my group first got to Raleigh, we weren't sure where the Moral Monday rally was going to be. We started out on the other side of the mall where the conservatives were rallying. They had a huge crowd of people. It didn't take long for us to figure that out based on their signs and what we were hearing coming from that stage.
'Ok that's not us. That's not our group!'
Part of me was still surprised and really disappointed.
'My gosh. Look at all the people that they've been able to organize and get here.'
They bussed in Christian schools. They had bussed in kids to go to this huge rally.

But on the other side, there was a large number of people who were there to rally with us — yeah! And it was far more diverse, which isn't to say there weren't Black church folks who were ultra-conservative who were rallying on the conservative side. There certainly were, but, otherwise, it was a very White group. And the Moral Movement is very diverse, transgender, LGBT folks, people of all different faiths — multi-faith, multi-racial, multi-generational. It's clear to me that this movement is more in touch with what the kingdom of God is supposed to look like than the homogenous, conservative expression.

And the Moral Movement has started to grow in other states beyond North Carolina. I think it really is a model in the way it brings so many people together of what activism and organizing could look like as a fusion of politics. Reverend Barber has built this coalition of people who are willing to say, 'Hey we disagree about a lot of things. We've got Catholics in there alongside atheists and environmentalists and we all agree HB2 is bad. We're all going to come out together and say, 'Repeal HB2. Not just part of it. All of it.' We can agree on this much and as long as we can agree on that, we can stand together, rally together, and march together.

I do believe Reverend Barber is the Martin Luther King of our generation and it's an incredible honor to know him and to be able to work with him in the ways that I have been able to work with him. That's something I'm proud to be able to someday tell my grandkids.

As for me, the word that comes to my mind is a 'do-er.' I think there's been plenty of conversations around Emergent and I have participated in my fair share of conversations. Conversation is great, but I've also been somebody who has been able to create and do some things that I'm pretty proud of — from starting the magazine and doing that for five years and growing it into what it became to my work in MissioFORM. I've been a doer.

CHAPTER 11: NELL BALDWIN
"LOVE IS ACTION. LOVE IS RELATIONSHIP."

Prologue

Nell was recommended to me by a doctoral colleague in UNC's School of Education. She responded very quickly (to someone she had never met) regarding my request to do life narrative work with her. After meeting her, I realized she is not a person who "must tell her story and seeks opportunities to do so". (As an aside, interestingly, none of my interlocutors would have even remotely fit that category.) Though she teaches in the realm of words and literature, both great loves for her, personally Nell is a person of action rather than narration about her emotions and experiences along the way. I felt very privileged that she was pausing to tell me these intimate stories about growth, joy, disappointment, struggle, and hope for the world. I hoped, after our three interviews, that she fully understood how much I admired the life she contests in her story to this point.

I say "to this point", because Nell is young, being her early 30s. She is a White woman with short blonde hair and a tall frame that made it easy to imagine her as the cross-country team captain in high school when she gets to that point in her story. She describes her sexual orientation as "queer." Nell has been a high school educator for a decade now.

For some reason, I had imagined that she lived in the downtown of a nearby city so I chose a location for our first interview that I thought would be convenient for her. I selected a popular café near a university with outdoor seating in a small constellation of restaurants, pubs, and shops selling trendy urban loft style furnishings housed in stylishly renovated tobacco warehouses. The cafe has wide aged hardwood floors, old brick walls, and extremely high

ceilings with exposed joists. This is the kind of place where the excruciating labors and the stark horrors of a classist, racial Southern past disappear in the hip hopefulness of a liberal, Southern college enclave. True to form, the café was filled with professionals in expensive casual, business attire; groups of women in athletic wear after completing a nearby, popular running trail; and some students enjoyed their summer break. So much for my poorly conceived effort at convenience! After a friendly greeting and introduction with Nell at the coffee counter, her first sentence was, "Wow, this place is White!" That reaction entirely befits the story she was about to tell.

Nell's Story

> 'I will get a job where God wants me to get a job.' I really looked at it that way. From my last two years of high school and through college, actually since the time I recommitted my life to God, I've known that I wanted to be a teacher. When I found out I was going to Frederick Douglas High, I said, 'This is going to be a challenge, but if this is what God wants for me…' I was going into it from out of state, so it wasn't that I knew about its reputation. But I knew the demographics. And I came into it excited to see what that was going to look like.
>
> I was never the type of Christian who would say, 'Well we must bring prayer back into school because the problem is that people are godless,' or something like that. I've just always viewed it as 'the way you show Jesus is through love.' But when I got that job, I did have a traditional evangelical view that the most important thing anybody, any student, could need is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I also came from a background that said, 'If people are doing good in the world, it's because they are Christians.'
>
> I actually did not grow up in an evangelical family. It's a little more complicated because I actually grew up Lutheran. My mother is Catholic; my dad is Missouri Synod Lutheran, so conservative, but not necessarily evangelical. When I was born, my dad said to my mom, 'We're going to raise her Lutheran.' And my mom said, 'Ok.' So, every week, my mom went to mass and my dad and I went to church. I went to a K-8 Lutheran School, so I had a lot of biblical background.
>
> I'll tell you a story. I had a chance to live out the importance of relationships from early on. I mean, that plays out in all parts of my story. I was cross country captain in high school and I was valedictorian of both my grade school and my high school. It's just that I try to do things the best that I can do them and that's just always been my way of things.

But in middle school, you know, the most horrible time of everyone's life, I got picked on a lot by the friends, the people that I thought were my friends and who I called my friends. Looking back on it, they were just horrible to me. And there were a lot of moments where I also was horrible to people who were picked on even worse than me. Or, at the least, I didn't stand up for them in moments that I should have. When I moved from grade school to high school, there were only a few students coming with me to the high school, so I felt like I could reinvent myself a little bit. And I had this realization in between those two schools — and I think this realization is very much connected to my faith — I wasn't going to be a jerk to anybody.

That ended up happening really naturally on the cross country team that I captained my junior and senior years. I say this very lovingly, our school cross country team was kind of collecting place for weirdos. I had a lot of practice over those two years fostering community among the group of girls that I was captaining, a group of girls who wouldn't have naturally coalesced otherwise. This was really important to me. I didn't want the slowest girl on the team or the weirdest girl on the team to feel like they weren't a part of the team. That was my job as I saw it. Our high school had three or four dances per year and the homecoming dance always fell during the cross country season. For both years that I was captain, my best friend, who was my co-captain, and I basically arranged a giant team date where like people paired off but everybody went out to dinner together. Everybody hung out at my house beforehand. It was like, 'Ok we're going to make sure that Katelyn Grandy has — I don't know if she had a date — but she's going to wear this and we're going to go shopping with her and she's going to be there with us.'

I was also very involved in my church youth group musically from probably fourth grade through high school. I was sort of one of the 'darlings,' if you will, of the church in terms of young leadership. I felt very connected to God really my whole life. I can remember particularly spiritual moments as early as 6th, 7th, or 8th grade where I really felt God both in church and in me. When I got to high school, I was still doing all the traditional church stuff and mostly trying to avoid the 'sin stuff.'

I'll admit that I've had to reconcile with a lot of my past since I've changed in all of these ways (said slowly and thoughtfully).

But one of the things that has just stayed really sort of beautiful and precious is happened when I was a sophomore. Several of my friends at my public high school were in similar places where we had come from religious backgrounds, but felt we wanted to know more about God on our own terms, meaning not on terms that were dictated for us by the churches we attended. So, a group of friends, probably between six and fifteen depending on the week, gathered for a thing we called the 'God Meeting.' One of my friend's dad was a United Methodist pastor so we met in their church on Thursday nights. NO adults. Completely student led. NO agenda. No leaders within the group even. It was just high school kids coming together and talking about their spiritual experiences in an attempt to grow deeper. Because of those parameters, sometimes it was amazing. People would have really felt growth and would have been studying Scripture and stuff during the week so there would be a lot happening in God Meeting. In other weeks, it

would be awful, you know. No one would be on top of it. We would just kind of sit in silence for a long time. But I think struggling through that stuff together was really a precious time.

At the time, I didn't realize how rare and how mature of a space that was. It really wasn't until I got to college, a Christian college I picked on purpose hoping to find the next step, that I realized that what I experienced in high school was probably the most spiritually mature place I've ever been in even since — well, outside of activist spaces.

My future husband's father was a United Methodist pastor but actually came from a non-denominational background. The youth group that he led had a very non-denominational feel to it, very open to the Spirit, very altar call'ish. That led me to start to attend that youth group in addition to my own church. In addition to the God Meeting, it was another incredibly mature space. I still don't doubt the way that God was moving in that space — one hundred kids in the room, a really amazing band made up of so many of my good friends, just a place where the Spirit was really, really moving. That's where I connected with the evangelical side of things in terms of hearing people speak in tongues. A very different list of Christian priorities if you will! I mean, Lutherans don't necessarily emphasize spiritual disciplines particularly much. This was the first time I had been in a worship space with that emphasis. I didn't feel like I needed to be born again because I believed I was already a Christian. But I did have a moment where I felt like I sort of recommitted my life to God.

My friends are amazed by this fact now, but I spent most of my weekend nights during high school at prayer meetings with other youth. I lived very differently in my junior and senior year of high school. I carried a Bible with me everywhere; I was reading it every day. I was committed to remaining 'pure' in my relationship with my boyfriend and future husband — all of that stuff.

I didn't know any Christians who lived that way, who lived with a strong spiritual discipline, who weren't Republicans. Both my parents are Democrats born in 1950 and raised around labor. They're not terribly socially progressive, even at this point I would say. But I got to a point where I didn't really count their sort of form of faith as good enough. Everybody I knew was focused on, you know, 'Abortion is wrong. Being Gay is wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong.' I keep this story as a fun story to pull out at cocktail parties and then everyone is amazed.

But family-wise, it's challenging and it remains challenging. Now this is kind of funny now, but the first challenge with my parents was my switch to a more sort of fundamentalist form of Christianity. It was not really ok with them. I think they viewed me as sort of a fanatic. And looking back, I'm like, 'Oh yeah, yep, you were correct about that.'

I was immature and I suspect that I wasn't very kind to their beliefs along the way. Because in my head, at least, and I don't know how much I articulated this, but in my head, I thought they weren't good Christians. That actually led to clashes sometimes.

My choice to do something based on praying about it did so as well. My parents did not instill in me good communication skills overall. My extended family does not communicate well and so a lot of this just festered under the surface and went unsaid.

When I got engaged at eighteen, they were — uh— very against it. This was hard, that whole time. As an adult now, if I could advise my parents, I think the problem was that they didn't approach it trying to understand and accept me and then maybe putting in some of their own ideas. There wasn't a way to hear their side of things because of the way they brought it to me. Now granted I'm a hard-headed stubborn teenager! Who knows what in the world it would have taken to get me to hear them? But, when my fiancé and I told my parents that we were engaged, about a week before we were headed off to college, the first thing my mom said was, 'I don't need this right now.'

There was no way for me to hear their objection in a way that allowed me to feel both loved and safe in that relationship. My parents love me very much and there's no doubt about that in my head — ever. But, I think most of the time that I'm always slightly ahead. I feel like they're always trying to catch up to where I'm at and I think that it scares them. They're scared for my well-being and my safety. When I got arrested at Moral Monday, I skyped with them. They live in the upper Midwest, so we don't get to interact super regularly. So, when something changes, they're just like 'What?' and it feels to them like it comes out of left field. But I skyped with them ahead of time to tell them that I was going to get arrested because that didn't seem like a thing they should find out about on Facebook. Now if you ask them about that, they would just be so 'blah blah blah how proud of me they are.' But the first moment of response to that was, 'Why are you doing that?' You know, I've learned. I didn't know this as a teenager, but that's a manifestation of their love for me. They were scared. When I came out to them, it went poorly and continues to be a source of stress when it comes up. But again, I think a lot of that is just a kind of fear and they're just a little bit behind.

Luther University

I knew I wanted to be in a career that helped people and I loved English. I'm one of those lucky people who was right about their future. I have never had to waiver from that at all. So, even though by the end of high school I didn't strongly identify as Lutheran anymore, I ended up going to a Missouri Synod Lutheran College in the upper Midwest.

I went there like I said to hopefully find a next layer of maturity and because the Lutheran Church paid for a lot of my education. I initially went in as a Lutheran education major, which basically is an education major who minors in theology. Luther never felt like home for me for whatever reason. I felt frustrated by the spiritual dynamics there. I was actually looking for other people who were leaders and who could help me in my spiritual walk. But I found out immediately that I had a pretty mature faith compared to most of the people there. I did end up leading a ministry for the time that I was in college called 'Sanctuary'. If you know anything about the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, there's a whole faction of them who don't even believe in contemporary worship music and women do not so anything whatsoever!

But ‘Sanctuary’ was not a worship service, so we occasionally had female professors speak at the meeting. It was a contemporary alternative on Sunday nights to church, a spiritual space. I loved being involved in that leadership, but for whatever reason I just never found kindred spirits at that school. I got the degree that I wanted and which was fine and kept moving. I think, part of it was that I was engaged by the time college started. In three years, we got married so I think much of college was just sort of like getting through it to get to the next phase of real life. I do think the last couple of years of college were a bit hard on my faith just because I expected Luther to be one thing and it wasn’t.

There were a lot of things I struggled with throughout high school and college where I just thought, ‘Stay on the right path. If I keep on this path, these things will resolve.’ They never resolved. Probably the primary thing was that I’ve always been a very sexual person. I didn’t identify as queer until much later in my life. But, according to the church, I was going to — well, there was very sort of strict rules around those sorts of things. What I always say about the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod is that sexual orientation is not even on the table yet. We’re still talking about women in ministry, you know (said sardonically). I came into the South homophobic because I thought that’s what I was supposed to be. At Luther, I was still getting crap because we played contemporary worship music or because there was a female speaking at Sanctuary.

Marriage and divorce

I got married before my senior year of undergrad. I’m no longer married now. But my husband at the time was planning to be a pastor so he applied to divinity school. That’s why we moved South. Despite those stories about Luther College, this is a grave detail. At 21, when I got married, I wanted to use the traditional terminology of ‘submit’ [in the wedding]. I was my husband who wouldn’t let me. Yes — I voted for Bush officially in 2004.

My husband was very theory oriented. He’s the type to agree to activism without ever being a participant. He is very much a contemplative and held some conservative views, but not in an obnoxious way at all.

And strangely he doesn’t play into this story very much and nor does this story actually connect very directly to why our marriage ended. He’s just sort of on the sidelines for most of this, which I understand is strange but remains true.

My husband and I were in counseling for about a year before we divorced, from 2010 to 2011. Before he moved out, he ended up switching from the United Methodist Church to the Anglican Church. He became ordained as a deacon in this church that was very wealthy, entirely White, and very conservative. I just felt less and less at home there in the last year of my marriage. We were on some retreat with the head pastor and I heard him tell a homophobic joke. I wasn’t even fully clear on that area yet, but I just knew the hate in that and it just felt really unfortunate. I used to read Scripture in the worship services. After one particular Sunday of standing up and reading Scripture, my husband came home from a meeting with the pastor and informed me that the pastor had told him

to tell me that the skirt that I had worn to read Scripture in was too short. I was furious on so many levels! — one, that he had not talked to me directly — two, that my husband had even conveyed that message — and three, that this was a thing in the first place! I just felt more and more alienated to the point that I essentially would show up once a month to save face with my husband having being ordained there. It didn't feel right to go to a church that wasn't the church where my husband was working. But I just didn't feel at home at that church.

But when my husband and I divorced, I went through a pretty long period, probably about a year, of probably the greatest amount of doubt I've felt in my life. A lot of that was really angry doubt because I just felt like I had spent the last ten or eleven years of my life believing that everything I was doing was what God wanted me to do. Even though I had done that imperfectly many times, I felt like I had been trying to be on this path really strongly and this path had led me toward the end of something that I thought was going to be the rest of my life. That was very confusing because what did that mean for all of those moments I had along the way where I felt God was speaking and telling me something. It had led to a dead-end and that was really scary.

But after my husband moved out, a couple things happened in pretty rapid succession. One was — are you familiar with Jimmy Creech? I went to his book talk at the library about his book *Adam's Gift,* which was pretty instrumental for me. I'd been taught that I'm supposed to wait to hear God. And for years, I had struggled with this concept of hearing God, because I felt like most of the time I did not, in fact, hear God. This meant a lot of waiting and frustration. But his story in the book was somehow about the inclinations in our own heart *being* God, which was totally foreign to me. This was very much opposed to much of the theology that I'd been raised with. You know, Lutherans, we're horrible, terrible sinners and it's only grace that…(stops wistfully). So, anything that my mind is thinking must be wrong. But this new idea really resonated with me particularly because I was only my trusting myself for my first time, that first time in my life allowing me to end my marriage as well. So, the idea that that God could speak within us…(stops again)

Then shortly thereafter, I read Frederick Douglas, in a book my husband recommended to me, state, 'I prayed for twenty years and received no answer until I prayed with my legs.' That resonated with me because, around this time, I was confused about my spiritual place in the world. I have no idea what this book was called, but it was about the four streams of Christianity — the contemplative tradition, the social justice tradition, one about spiritual discipline, and I don't remember the fourth one. But that reading made it very, very clear to me that a social justice tradition was where I identified now. I did a lot of reading of Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, and a lot of the Old Testament prophets who were speaking about oppression. I read those now in a new way. After my husband left, I started attending a Methodist church right up the street from where I used to live that was the first LGBT affirming church in my town and had been so for about eighteen or nineteen years at that point. It felt absolutely right for about a year until the Methodist Church made a pastor change that essentially killed the church. I wasn't in a spiritual place where I felt like I could help lead a renaissance. So, in a sense, I've felt a little bit

homeless. I still identify as Christian, although I would say pretty much none of my spiritual beliefs are explicitly Christian any more. What I believe is that there are a lot of ways to God and that Jesus was my way. What is fundamental through this whole story is love. I came to God because of God's love and I believe that my whole vocation in the world is centered around love. I'm looking for a church home that feels like home now. There are a couple of non-negotiables. One, they have to be openly LGBT-affirming because I believe that the hurt that the Christian church has caused gay people is just phenomenally large. So that's non-negotiable. And I also need the church to be socially active. So, that's an unfinished story. But, that's where I land now and I think many of my spiritual practices these days are not explicitly Christian in that I find a lot of spiritual comfort in what I would call prophets from other traditions like the poetry of Nikki Giovanni, for example. My spiritual practice has certain points of resolution and then there are things that are still resolving for sure.

Teaching and the roots of an activist life

I would identify the starting point of my activism as actually not very long ago. I didn't grow up in an activist family or anything like that. It wasn't until I started teaching at Frederick Douglas that I started to have those proclivities very strongly. Now there are small things that I can go back to and point to earlier in my life that I think indicate that I was headed in that direction, but it really, honestly, all relates to my kids. It all relates to my school. Once that I came to Frederick Douglas, I saw the deal about injustice. I saw the racism that my kids were experiencing and I understood the White supremacist system. I can shorten it down into a thirty second story. Essentially after starting my teaching career at Frederick Douglas, I went from identifying as a Republican to the left of Democrat Socialist in about two years. Um, yeah…

My political views had already started to slowly edge. By the time Obama was running, I was onboard with that, but not really much further that. I mean, at that point, I didn't have an analysis that went past 'Democrat.' But between my students' excitement about the potential of the first Black president and particularly views on education and also poverty, which are obviously linked, I had moved that at least that far. It had helped that through my husband's friends in divinity school, I was suddenly encountering Christians who were Democrats.

About that same time, about three or four years into my teaching career, I started to really gain understanding from my students. I teach at a historically Black high school with almost entirely students of color. The students come mostly from low-income backgrounds and attend a school that has been much maligned in a public narrative, but has a rich history and tradition in the Black community in our town. I came into that school as a 22 year old who had very little knowledge of race or privilege in the world and that had just immediately started to change when I started teaching.

I had done my student teaching at a Lutheran high school of 150 students total. I don't remember any kids of color. We had very, very few discipline problems or anything and it was a great experience. I loved working with kids one-on-one. When the school troublemaker pierced his lip, I was the one who could reason with him, 'This is why you

should stop breaking dress code and go back to class…blah, blah, blah.' That was the extent of most problems. I loved it and I was good at what I was doing.

When I still was in the Midwest before we moved, I started applying for every teaching job I could think of and could find. I knew it was going to be rough, because I was a brand new teacher, not from the state, with no local connections whatsoever. I probably sent out thirty resumes and cover letters. I was applying to all sorts of districts around here and got two interviews — one at Frederick Douglas and one at Spaulding High, a school with similar demographics. This is now my tenth year at Frederick Douglas. In my early years at Frederick Douglas, the kids would always ask me, 'Did you choose to come to Douglas?' And I'd always say, 'No, but I chose to stay.'

There's a million things I can say about my first year of teaching. Essentially, I felt like I got picked up by the ankles and just dangled upside down and shaken for a whole year — and that was good for me. I have not historically been a risk taker at any point in my life, where I had to step outside my comfort zone. This was way out my comfort zone. I learned very quickly. I first started to see educational injustice in terms of the way the media portrayed our school. At the church I went to at the time, there was a lot of, 'You teach where? Oh, bless your heart.' Frederick Douglas teachers joke regularly about that sort of sympathy coming from the community which seemed really unfair to the great teenagers that I was working with on a day-to-day basis.

And there were two fundamental things that knocked me off my rocker immediately. One, I was surrounded by amazing teachers doing incredible work in the classroom who did not come from a Christian background, doing more good than many of the Christians I had known my whole life. Two, as I looked at my students, I thought, 'Well that's not right. Why does this student need breakfast, this student needs clothes? This student needs to get past a fifth-grade reading level by the time they're eighteen.'

They are a group of kids that society sees as totally different than who they are. I mean, once I met the kids of Frederick Douglas, they weren't Black kids. They weren't poor kids. They were just kids. There seems to be this continuing idea, even in a lot of progressive communities, that there's something inherently different or innately different about the kids that I teach from the kids that go to school in Hope Ridge [an affluent liberal, White community]. And that's just not true — it's just not at all true. My kids exhibit the same emotions, interests, lack of interests, bad decision-making, good decision-making, and all of that stuff that any group of teenagers would. I think it's some combination of just seeing that my kids were kids and then also seeing that that's not how the world views them. In some cases, unfortunately, it's not how teachers view them.

All of those things felt much more real than the vision and the view that I had come in with.

For me, activism began with racial justice. LGBTQ justice and then feminism actually came in that order for me. I think the shifts around my views about 'homosexuality', as I called it at the time, also came in relationship to my kids. When I looked at other ways

that kids were being oppressed and hurt at school, well Frederick Douglas was incredibly homophobic, especially when I started teaching. The students who were brave enough to be out were very ridiculed. 'Gay' was used as a slur all of the time.

I remember one story in particular about a kid I had in an English. I don't know to this day what his orientation is, but another teacher had told me that there was a credible rumor about him and another boy. That made me start to think about what was being said in my class, how it would affect him if the rumor was true. Also, I had a friend through my husband when he was at divinity school doing chaplaincy work at the hospital who was gay. Honestly, he was the first person that I met in my life who was gay. That wasn't like the only identifier that mattered. It's cliché, right? — but getting to know him as a person was significant. I had always been someone who could read the Scriptures and respond rationally to them. But I'm clearly, via this whole story, a very emotionally moved person. That is what sways me. And I didn't understand. I looked at my friend and it was like, 'God didn't screw him up.' That idea didn't make any sense to me.

But I did have a lot to learn in terms of how to identify and connect with a population of students who were in many ways different from me. I used to do a lot of listening and through that listening came to identify the oppression and injustice my students were facing in their daily lives every day both in school and outside of school. I did feel troubled. What I do when I feel troubled by such things is that I start to study and read and try to understand. So, I started reading. I started reading books about educational injustice, about race, racism, and privilege. I started to understand those things more clearly. That began to happen in my first few years of teaching. I read Wendell Berry's *The Hidden Wound*. I read a bunch of Jonathan Kozol on race and White privilege. I also enrolled in a class through the North Carolina Humanity Center. They gave us access to Tim Tyson's class, 'The South in Black and White' at Duke. That really helped me understand the history of racism.

Pedagogy

My desire is to be primarily relational in the classroom. That is part of who I am. It wasn't a choice that I made. Well, I guess it is a choice, but it felt very natural to me. One thing that experienced teachers struggle with is that sometimes new teachers don't have those traits innately. And, then, to what extent are they teachable, right? So, if someone comes into the classroom and just doesn't like kids right off the bat, how much of that is actually teachable and how much isn't.

But I feel that my vocation is love. That is an ideal that I've always held, that humans deserve respect. Put into action, it just means that I don't want a situation where I come in every day and I just give you all of this stuff. That doesn't make for a very good day on my part. Teaching needs to be a reciprocal relationship and the only way it's going to be that way is if I view you as a human who has gained my respect, deserves my respect, and gets my respect on a daily basis. It's so cliché, but it's also a cliché because it's true. I have learned so much from my students. My students were teaching me and once that happens, you can't be so prideful that you don't acknowledge it.

You know, we were talking at Harvard last week at this seminar that I was at about Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation and this sort of narrative that Lincoln freed the slaves. There is a memorial of Lincoln that has this like ridiculous paternalistic vibe where Lincoln is standing up and the slaves are on his knees thanking Lincoln. It is such an unequal relationship and I think naturally in terms of how I interact with people. The key to having a relationship with any of my students is to know that they deserve respect, especially this particular population and community. And I've come to believe — I've come to change my belief that teachers deserve respect just because they're teachers. I have to come believe that teachers deserve respect when they respect their students and in other ways earn their respect. I think part of that shift has come from just watching the problematic behavior from other educators who are just missing a chance to connect.

"Rainy Days are Here" coalition and first actions

So my first step into action was because a student asked me. She had been working with the 'Rainy Days are Here' Coalition and she came to me and said, 'Will you emcee this rally we're going to have?' And I said, 'Sure.' I was planning to go to the rally anyway.

In 2010, the state started budget cutting in schools pretty heavily. I was connected to the coalition through another Frederick Douglas teacher and friendships with a teacher who had a long history of political activism in the area. The group that he worked with developed into the Rainy Days Coalition to fight at the local level for the county commissioners to fund the gaps that the state wasn't funding. Our district was scheduled to lose like two hundred teachers as a result of the state budget cuts. We were the Rainy Days Coalition because we were asking them to use the city's rainy day fund.

So, for a while, it was just gathering information. But on April 30, 2010, we marched — about three hundred students, parents, teachers — three miles from Frederick Douglas all the way to the County Commissioners Building. It was amazing. Beautiful! I stood up on the steps, introduced speakers, and just felt really empowered by that whole experience. That was my first step. In the months following, I, and others from the Coalition, started talking at school board meetings to get them to even ask for the money and then at the county commissioners meetings to get them to approve the money. Eventually we won and saved one hundred eighty-seven teaching jobs. It was a big deal and that was my first step into things.

I think I definitely have natural proclivities toward speaking out and leading in a lot of different circumstances.

I think that actually started my love for local politics in particular, because I feel that so much can be done pretty easily at the local level. In the next few years with a similar group of people, we did some other campaigns mostly around budget cuts stuff, but also democratizing the school system. You know, they would make a big announcement about a big change that was set to happen and then wouldn't have enough public hearings. We would push for more transparency and we did candidate forums to open up communication lines around local government to students and local activists.

Moral Mondays

And that was when Moral Mondays started happening. I heard about them pretty immediately. I had been on board a couple of years before Moral Mondays when Reverend Barber and Tim Tyson and several other people got arrested over the school resegregation stuff in Wake County.

Since being at Frederick Douglas, even before I identified as an activist, I had been around activists pretty much the whole time. There had been this backdrop of activism even before I knew how to jump in. In terms of Moral Monday, that meant it was on my radar pretty quickly. It was something I wanted to go do because I already knew people who were going. I was also familiar with Rev. Barber and the work that the NAACP was doing before Moral Mondays existed because I had been to HKonJ for probably two or three Februarys beforehand. That was the first place I had seen Rev. Barber in action.

So, Moral Mondays was going to be a thing on my radar. Regardless. Then I went for a couple of weeks to kind of watch how it all went down. Hearing him speak the first couple of weeks at Moral Mondays was meaningful. I was still feeling fairly new to hear social justice actually preached. It's so different from what I grew up with. That moved me; it moved my conscience and I felt really strong.

Even before I went to some Moral Mondays, I would turn on NPR every morning as I was getting ready and just hear the news. Literally, it felt like every day that I turned on the news, I was hearing something horrible, something that struck me as horrible and hurtful for my kids, whether it was related to education or not. Horrible — daily, like really truly daily. It felt like an assault on my kids, and 'assault' doesn't feel like an exaggeratory word. It was an assault. I think I got in a little bit of like 'protective mama bear mode', you know, this stuff is hurting my kids and there are people out there doing something about it and I want to do it too!

Arrest

At the first Moral Monday, [seventeen] people had gotten arrested and I was intrigued. A couple of weeks later, I took a whole bunch of Frederick Douglas teachers down there to attend the rally and watch the arrests happen —to watch the protesters enter the building and then wait for the buses to leave and cheer them on and all of that.

I did that for one or two weeks. Then I was just really feeling that I wanted to do more and my conscience was saying, 'This would be a great time to step up.' I asked around with some other teachers. At least for a minute, there was an idea that maybe a group of teachers would do it together, but there wasn't really the capacity or interest at that time for that. And I knew if I was going to be arrested, I knew that I wanted to do it fairly publicly — not just be one of eighty-five people, but to be publicly identified for you for the reasons I was doing it.

So, between one week and another, I don't remember exactly when, I just made the decision that this was going to happen. My partner at the time, Alan, who had a lot more

activist and organizing experience than I did, suggested that if I was going to do it, I needed to do it loudly. It was actually his suggestion to make the shirts and all of that. Because I'm connected to other activists, it took one phone call to figure out how I could get to speak and to learn the reality that public actions are not really super thought out ahead of time. So, I could show up with a speech, talk to the right person, and make it happen basically, yeah!

I made a shirt that said 'public school teacher' and wrote up a statement. On June 17, 2013, I showed up at the church early and then ended up getting to speak my statement at the rally. Then I participated in civil disobedience that day. I knew what time to show up at the church. I was wearing my shirt. I knew who to talk to and then I sat down and listened to all the rules about civil disobedience —about how to do it. It was so far out of my comfort zone, but all of that part felt very comforting. I met all the wonderful 70 year-old people that I was going to spend four hours in jail with. Then they called up everybody who was going to get arrested to the front of the church. Rev. Barber spoke and a couple of other people spoke. Then he asked me to come up and I literally had like thirty seconds to share some of my speech in the church. Then he was like, 'Oh we're putting you on stage at the rally,' which I hadn't really expected. My kids are always asking me, 'Was going to jail scary?' And I always say, 'Speaking to a thousand people before going to jail was actually way scarier than getting arrested!'

It ended up being up being a bigger deal than I expected it to be. I actually was trying to go on vacation the next day, but there were all these media requests. There was a lot of follow up that I didn't expect. So, my vacation was a little curtailed which is totally fine. I hadn't expected that necessarily, but I got arrested with eighty-five people and my statement went a little bit viral. That was good because I heard from a lot of teachers who said, 'I would be scared to do something like this and I'm glad that you did.' That was what I had been hoping to hear, that people were inspired to take action in a new way.

I think based on my experiences with Moral Mondays since then, they really gave me a lot of space that first time to get up and speak. I guess they just must have felt, 'This is going to be a big thing.' Because, since then, you get like smacked on the back if you go longer than fifty-five seconds. I must have, on that first speech — I didn't know how long it was supposed to be — but I must have been speaking four or five minutes which in 'Moral Monday time' is like 'Whoa, unless you're Barber; then you can't speak for however long you want.'

I say that lovingly of course. It was really scary for a second and then it was like 'Oh, like I'm really doing this now.' I mean it wasn't like I hadn't spoken before. I had some experience with school board Meetings, talking to the press at school board meetings, and county commission meetings. But this felt like the next big step.

I think one of the understandings that has come out of this situation that is helpful to add to this overall picture is that I feel very, very lucky and blessed to have been able to have all these conversions here at Frederick Douglas High School because there are so many

schools, districts, and places across the country or even the world where I could not have fully developed the understanding and the morality that I did here. There would have been too many boxes that I couldn't get out of without much bigger repercussions — right? There's tons of places in North Carolina where teachers also arrested at Moral Monday and faced a lot more backlash than I did. I know some of those teachers.

I called into Human Resources and they're like, 'Cool, we're good.' Then I came back to school in the fall and our principal said, 'Thank you to all of those of you who were involved in Moral Monday. Stand up. Let's clap for you.' I tell my students about it and they say, 'We get it.'
There's not true in a lot of places like that.

I think there are positives and negatives associated with this. The positives — which I didn't ever really think about until the negatives sprang up — is that it allowed me to become radical in a way and to practice my ethic in radical ways. There are a ton of places where that could never have happened. The negative is that, by not facing much backlash or push-back in most situations, I wasn't prepared for the backlash. I don't often think about where backlash lies because I haven't had to. I think one of the lessons, not in the like 'shut me down sort of way,' but one of the lessons here, is just to look for where the backlash might be. Don't necessarily change what I want to do, but for there to be a little bit more strategy in how I play these things out.

Moral movement

So, I have become the 'white lady teacher' speaker when they need that. I've spoken at probably five or six other Moral Mondays and I've spoken at HKonJ the last two years. I've really enjoyed that relationship even when the request is last minute. Like HKonJ this year, I got asked on Thursday night with the event on Saturday. I've come to understand the lack of organization may be in the nature of such movements. It's not the kind of setting for initiative-taking to suggest like a teacher of color when I'm not able to speak. The general response to that sort of initiative-taking is 'No' or 'Oh, you can't speak, well we'll find somebody else' and not in a hateful way. They have their rhythms and they're not really open to other people suggesting ideas. That has been a frustration to me and I've also accepted it. Sometimes I go ahead and speak because I do have something I should be saying.

The overall church feel of the movement really spoke to me. I mean this is true of any church that I've ever been to. Like, the first week that you go to a new church, you see all the things that you like and the things that speak to you and that lasts for maybe a month, maybe four Sundays. But then, at some point, the things that irk you a little bit start to creep in and suddenly those things that felt really affirming, life-giving, and spiritual feel a little bit tainted. I think that's true for me any time I'm looking for a church and I think it has been true at Moral Mondays as well. I was very moved by that spiritual message and I still believe in that spiritual message. But I think I'm tired of it being the message every single time and I'm tired of it being shared the way it's shared every time.

I mean it's very hierarchical and that's a great way to think about it. I think the people who are making decisions in the NAACP are a very limited group. I think they are generally uninterested in being swayed by other people's ways of doing it. I've seen that in action several times, not just through my interaction directly. For example, Rev. Barber really was quite upset when the teachers actually ended up sitting down with Speaker Berger. I think it ended up being a really effective message, but it wasn't the plan. So, I feel like my place in the Moral Monday Movement is, and I know this sounds more grandiose than I mean it for me personally, but I feel like I'm a symbol and a face. But I'm one hundred percent clear that I don't have interest in actually trying to move that organization or like engage in their form of organizing because I don't think that's how organizing should work. But, I say this with all respect, I think they're the most effective thing happening in North Carolina. But I still don't like the way it's happening in an organizing capacity.

I've been frustrated in the summers of 2014 and 2015 where the model has stayed essentially the same with a few tweaks and became less effective. This summer, in May, I had a student with me who had never been before and he thought it was great because he'd never been to that many rallies. I was like, 'Dang, well you should have seen it...' It was nice to see it through his eyes, but I'm not sure why we're, they're continuing this same method with little variation when it is getting smaller and less effective.

Now I know there has been some summer organizing. And there's been the march in Winston Salem which was great. But I'm not interested in going to the weekly ones anymore because I don't see what effect they're having and that wasn't true during the first summer. During the first summer, they picked up momentum and grew and they increasingly got attention. Now I feel like it's kind of the same group of stalwarts there every week and I don't think we're reaching a new audience. In terms of how I think organizing should work, I think it should respond to the conditions better than that and they should be looking at the effect. You should build on what you've already done rather than keep doing the same thing because it worked before. In addition to that, I just think there needs to be more democracy than I've seen in that organization; they should be developing new leaders all of the time. There should be a lot of intentionality about who those leaders are and what groups they're representing. When I work more closely with organizing groups, I actually do take leadership positions. But it needs to be in a place where I feel like my voice matters on a variety of levels and where I have the opportunity to grow. I, this is not probably the right word, but I feel a little bit tokenized in Moral Mondays. Because of the racial connotation of that word, I don't want to misuse it. But I think that I'm the right pretty face sometimes. I'm glad they trust me to do what I do well. But, I also do some other things well that they're not ever going to know. I just see that happen with a lot of different people involved.

I offer those thoughts only because of the importance of the mission. Like I said, it remains the most effective organizing happening at least on the public level in North Carolina. Yes, yes, and yes. One of the benefits of my involvement in Moral Monday is that what I do as an activist is an extension of my capacity, such as speaking, developed at Moral Mondays.

Current activism

In my history of activism, I'm still growing into the type of activist that I am and I actually feel like it's been in the last six months that I've been able to put concrete words and also action around those parts of organizing that I just hate. I know people who organize because it's what they love. It's what comes naturally. It's what they feel like they should be doing in their life. That's not true for me. I organize because there are problems in the world and I believe that something needs to be done to change those problems. But a lot of the work of organizing is not something I feel I have natural strengths at and is also not fun for me. Not that it's always about fun, but just in terms of having a vocation that I enjoy, you know, I'm a teacher. I'm a teacher who turned activist by need. I'm not an activist who's also a teacher. The slowness of effective organizing is very hard for me. It just makes me crazy. I don't have great interpersonal strengths when it comes to talking to people off the cuff — like knocking on doors, phone calls, and all that kind of meeting sort of stuff. All of that is very hard. I can push myself to it, but it's not like a fun push. It's more like a 'this is what needs to be done.'

This organization didn't exist when I started organizing, but it has grown into the thing that I really believe in, Organize 2020, which is the Social Justice Caucus of the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE). That caucus developed out of the organizing work of again my former partner who came to the school district with the intent to organize teachers and students in communities of color.

They actually did a Moral Monday that first summer; that was how a lot of them met each other. Alan was going around with a clipboard that said, 'Are you a teacher? Talk to me!' He found a lot of people who were ready to take action. And the problem with NCAE is that they don't really take action very often. We're a right to work state. The NCAE is kind of laughable in terms of its advocacy historically. I was particularly and incredibly frustrated that they didn't engage with Moral Mondays until a month and a half after I got arrested. They were staying out of it entirely because they were under the belief that they were lobbying and what they had said at the table was going to matter, and then when the budget came out and it basically decimated everything. Actually, when I got arrested, I talked with some NCAE people and they were like, 'You know you could get in trouble for that.' And I was like 'Yes, I know. Thank you for your support.' (wincing) I found that frustrating and just ridiculous.

Then Moral Mondays had the giant education rally at the end of that summer. That's when the President and Vice President of NCAE got arrested. It was about six or seven weeks after I had gotten arrested. It turns out that a lot of teachers were frustrated with NCAE's lack of action. So, Organize 2020 was started as a way to kind of change that from the inside out. It is grassroots and activist–oriented and also just really concerned about the intersectionality of issues of justice — that you just can't talk about education if you're not talking about affordable housing, Medicare, jobs, and all that stuff. Organize 2020 got off the ground all across the state about three years ago with people who wanted to do something.

I was involved in the early years trying to organize teachers and students. Here, I started to develop some of my skills and my knowledge. For example — some of this got claimed by NCAE — but the heart of it came from 2020. In the fall of 2013, there was some talk in the state of teachers who were going to walk out, walk off the job, in view of the current conditions of the State of North Carolina that still make no sense. Because we can't strike —eventually, you get enough teachers on board and it doesn't matter who says you can strike or not, you can strike anyway — but we're not there yet. So, Organize 2020 said, 'Why don't we do a 'walk-in?' The idea was one day teachers would wear red, gather outside and hand out pamphlets to parents who are dropping off kids, and then rally for public education by walking into the school building and teach and that happened at twenty or thirty locations all over the state. It got a lot of good press coverage.

And then the other big action was the 'Decline to Sign' campaign [a refusal to accept a marginal, inequitably distributed raise that focused on new hires in exchange for losing job protections and due process rights]. We even got a couple of school boards to say, 'We decline this' in addition to teachers all over the State saying, 'I personally decline to sign.'

We feel it's really important in our organization to be developing new leaders and particularly leaders of color since we're a social justice caucus. So, we partnered with some folks who are already in local organizing circles to do dismantling racism training with about thirty teachers from across the state. We were working with two experienced dismantling racism trainers. The idea is that Organize 2020 will do one or two of these sets of sessions every year. Eventually, I will take over as one of the trainers in this program, which is totally where my heart is. It's an opportunity for me to teach in the midst of organizing. This is what I do, what I am.

One of the leaders of Organize 2020 just got elected as the President of our local association of educators. He's trying to develop trainings, discussion groups, and professional development around issues of race, class, and orientation which is again already really where my heart is. I feel like I'm finally reaching my activist and organizing home or center after like five years of messing around trying to find my place in it!

I also work with the Gay-Straight Alliance at Frederick Douglas. We actually started it five or six years ago. I wasn't even out to myself at the time, but I just saw the need. There was a teacher that was out. She had the connections with students and I had the organizational skills. So we started it. That was under a former principal. We encountered some resistance from our administration at first, but we had the type of administration that knew the law even if they didn't like the law. After a little bit of pushing, with our showing that 'we actually know that we can do this,' the pushing stopped. I've been leading that club and also developing safe space and anti-bullying trainings for the teachers at my school. I have also been speaking at social justice classes at a local university school of education.

The first time we did safe space training at Frederick Douglas, it was me and the other GSA advisor at the time who was a gay male. At the end of the training, a teacher from within the school stood up and said, 'You are bullying me with this training. You're calling me names. You're calling me heterosexist. I have a wife that I love, a beautiful, blah blah blah'…a whole tirade.

We just kept going. We tried to talk to him, but that wasn't working. His tirade was at the end of the training, so I told folks, 'The training is officially over. You can go if you like or you can stay and discuss.' I think half of the room left out of horror and the other half stayed out of fascination, which I don't blame them, because he wouldn't stop. Somebody, thankfully, went and got the principal and brought him in. It was not resolved in a good way. I mean, essentially, our principal stopped it in that moment, but then didn't really take sides in the ensuing discussion. That actually really pushed me harder to just think about how teachers need access to this training and this language.

Local politics

Eventually I asked Organize 2020, 'Get me out of all these meetings.' So now I'm a member and I work on the professional development side of things, but I don't have a title. Union politics is never going to be my gig, though I understand the importance of the union. I will be in the union. And I will try to change the union for good, but that whole parliamentary procedures thing, that's not my gig.

But I really believe in the importance of local politics and local elections. Think about the way the school board changed last year! I was the social media coordinator of one new board member's campaign. I threw myself very heavily into that, very heavily, and it was one of the most rewarding things I've done in my life for a variety of reasons. One being that we won! Another new board member is a friend of mine and we taught together at Frederick Douglas. Just seeing the way the board switched so easily! We need to do the same thing with the county commissioners, especially given the budget that went down this spring. I feel very strongly about local campaigns and that's something I want to continue to be involved in. Currently, I'm just volunteering with a friend's campaign for city council. She is a community organizer who understands affordable housing and anti-gentrification in a way that the City Council needs very badly.

This stuff really matters. I mean, as much as I think things should change at the state level, that feels way more out of my control than being able to speak at a county commissioners meeting and actually have it mean something to us.

Social justice pedagogy in the classroom & beyond: acts of love and justice

Most days are much less interesting than that really. I'm primarily teaching English to 11th and 12th graders in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. On most days, my activism comes not in the form of putting explicitly social justice oriented stuff into my students' brains. I mean, some days are super explicit and I try to lay the foundation.

But most days we're just talking about how to analyze literature and write a commentary, taking reading quizzes on books, and stuff like that.

Now my books are very intentionally chosen. And, actually, for each book that I teach, even Hamlet, I have a social justice tenet that I want to put out there. Some of them build really naturally on each other. Some of them don't.

My senior year fall curriculum is amazing because we start off talking about confinement in terms of slavery, prison, and black activism as it relates to the new Jim Crow. Then we go straight into *The Awakening* [by Kate Chopin] which is essentially the confinement of a woman who doesn't want to be in a normal family life in the 1890s. Then we do the poetry of Niki Giovani, a Black feminist. That's my most explicit — we're just talking about justice all the time. But then I teach, *Their Eyes were Watching God* which has an African American protagonist but is a story about love. It's like *A Chronicle of a Death Foretold* by Garcia Marquez which is essentially a murder story, but has like a whole thing about purity culture in certain settings. So, we end up talking about consent and slut shaming and all sorts of those related topics. I pull it in in various ways, but every day doesn't look like that. Most days look like, you know, 'Here's how to construct a paragraph that tells me what I need to know about your literary analysis.' Then we're talking about tone or whatever.

The way I exhibit activism on a daily basis in my classroom is very, very small. It's things like …if you say 'gay' in a derogatory way in my classroom, you're kicked out in the hall and we have the conversation immediately. Or I check in with the kid who is usually quite jovial who is, in fact, not that day with a simple, 'Are you ok? 'Cause you are just not yourself.' I view all of that as acts of love and justice. In a lot of other people's definitions, that's just teaching. I know many, many teachers who do the same stuff for very different reasons. One of the things I teach when I teach safe space training is the idea of microaffirmations. For example, you can write a heterosexist vocab' sentence like, 'Johnny and Suzy went on a date.' You can also write a vocab' sentence that says, 'Johnny and Jason went on a date.' It feels like a mundane tiny thing and yet it is those little inclusions of humanity that I think are really significant. And I think that it carries over to how I learned to interact with my students. I learned very quickly that just noticing something about a student every day —'Oh you changed your hair. Oh, are those glasses new?' 'I haven't seen that outfit before.' — is just one of the best ways to connect with kids. It seems so much like nothing, but it matters so much.

The first day of school last year, we talked about Ferguson. In some capacity, it's just the acknowledgement, sadly, I mean in many cases, all it takes is the acknowledgement of something that's not getting acknowledged in very many places in their lives for students to kind of perk up and understand that something's different in my classroom. Even in my classroom décor, there's a rainbow flag, an anti-deportation poster, and a poster of Trayvon.

I think that, just in the way I introduce the course and myself and with students that I haven't taught before, I think pretty quickly, within a month at the most I would say,

students understand where I'm at. The other thing about staying in a place where a lot of people don't stay for very long is that I have a reputation that precedes me — 'Ms. B's good. She gets it.' Race isn't explicitly stated, but it is implicitly understood.

Identity

Eventually with most of my classes, I get to the point where there are frequently jokes about my Whiteness at least with me and maybe one student in the room where there can be more of a sort of back-and-forth joking. If something comes up where race is a factor, I'll say, 'I don't know if you guys noticed, but I'm White.' But in general, I don't want it to become about me. It's really much more about just allowing other people space to put their stuff out there. And then eventually, there does come a place where it's time for me to model how other students might choose to respond or whatever that might be when I bring in my identity more clearly.

I mean, I never enter a room without noticing the demographic. It's what my brain does now. I can't come into [this café] right now without thinking, 'Oh, it's very white in here.' It's constant. I use this metaphor all the time, but in the Matrix, when Morpheus offers the blue pill and the red pill — You know, you can either live in the dream world and everything is chill or you can take the red pill and you're going to know everything. I mean, I feel like there's a point in an activist life where you take that red pill and it all changes.

Going into this school year, my tenth year, I just really started thinking about the strengths I have developed over these ten years. Some of them were on purpose and some of them like my teaching practice have just kind of panned out because of where I'm at and because of my response to the things I see every day. The things that stand out to me are the skills that I've developed, things that I can professionally pursue — anti-racist work, LGBT advocacy, and work with the International Baccalaureate program. Those are the major areas where I've gained skills. I decided this summer that I really wanted to be strategic about developing my professional identity in those areas. I see a lot of teachers around me who teach for a while and then they move on to do something else, you know, climb the ladder or whatever. I'm not a ladder climber. There's very little interesting I see in terms of administration. I could maybe see myself teaching teachers one day, but, for the most part, I want to be in a high school classroom. That's just what I want to do, but I'm also someone committed to growth and I want to be sure that I am gaining professional skills. I just went through volunteer training at the LGBT Center and I've made some new connections with teachers who I think need this kind of support or who are interested in learning how to be the person to provide that sort of support. It's been really positive.

Justice work 'in the building' — a reason to persevere

But, I will say strongly, pretty much like everything in the universe, justice work is much easier with children than it is with adults, um (groans).

I guess the Douglas staff is probably about 50/50 Black and White. The new people who come in might be more generally White, but it's pretty split. Our leadership is all people of color. It's very 'old school hierarchical,' with a little bit of a NAACP vibe going on (Though that's not a fair comparison to Reverend Barber. He deserves better than that.) But there is a lot of pretty backwards behavior, from some, a lot of the leadership, a lot of people with kind of an 'old school vibe' and that's not necessarily from people who've been there for a long time. I mean, to be perfectly honest, I feel increasingly uncomfortable with my relationship to adults in the building, I think. And, increasingly, because there continues to be so much turnover and a lot of people, who were safe havens, keep leaving.

There's also a lot of inherit distrust among our kids, and rightfully so, for the freshly scrubbed White kids coming in. But there is also a distrust by the administration of radical methods, of teaching whole humans rather than students who are going to fit a particular narrative and hence make the school look good in a particular way.

I've seen teachers, like Alan when he worked at Douglas — I mean, he's a White man and he has like a personal extraversion that allowed him to easily cross some of those boundaries despite everyone's initial worry about him. I am not charismatic in that same way. I am charismatic around my kids and around people I know and feel safe with, but I think I already mentioned, I'm not a mingler. I'm not good at small talk.

I lose a lot of my personality in the building and that has made it really hard for me to make connections with a lot of those people. Some of it is just like, 'We're fine, but it's awkward' and some of it's like, 'They're on some pretty wrong stuff in my opinion and I don't feel like there is space for me to like call them out or to make changes.

For example, sometime this past spring, a group of students wanted to do a Black Lives Matter protest at the school. They met in Alan's room. There were a couple of other teachers who were providing space and answering questions, but it was truly, truly student run, like truly. There was an assistant principal who was fighting it tooth and nail — 'Why are you saying Black Lives Matter when you know Black people kill more Black people than blah blah blah. Why aren't you protesting about that?'

When I look at my sort of analysis of the world through the lens of White supremacy, these are the folks who have made their way through the system as it exists and it's working for them. So why change it? That understanding has been helpful in figuring out what the hell is going on sometimes. Because sometimes I'm just like, 'You were a teacher. You're interacting with the same kids I am. Why are we so disparate here?' It has been helpful to understand the way other people have succeeded in the system that I'm trying to abolish.

I struggle with activism among other teachers in my building. Time-wise, it's such a difficult thing. There are many teachers in our building who need to be heard on a variety of subjects, who need someone to confirm the struggles that they're having whether it's with administration or students. I actually find that task very important and I

also find it incredibly draining, something that I find hard to prioritize because it's very time-consuming and when I'm in this school building, my focus is on my kids. My focus has to be really two things: things that make my kids' knowledge better and then it's the stuff I have to do or I'll get fired!

There's always a lot of bullshit in the middle that you have to navigate. 'Do I really have to go to this training for technology that I already know how to use or is that one I can slide under the radar?' There's a lot of just negotiating even like where to spend my energy.

I think about my time, I mean I think hourly about it. One thing that's incredibly frustrating about being an educator is how much of that time is usurped in ways that I wouldn't choose and that are not the best use of my time. Some of my time gets stripped away by forces beyond my control. So, then, the next step is to actually figure out what to do with what's left. What's the best way to spend that remaining time and honestly work. In that way, life balance is not a separate conversation than the activism. I know myself well enough to know that I have to find an effective balance there and I have to not burn out or I'm not useful for anyone including myself and my kids.

I do think there's a lot to be done at the collegial level in the school building too and that one just feels hard for me. It does - because there's so much turnover. The last day of workdays last June, the principal was announcing to us, 'you know, this person is going to this place next year, and this person…' — just an exhausting list of people who aren't going to be here which means there's new people who need to be taught all the ins and outs and the struggles related to teaching here. On the other hand, the kids are just kids. They're not Black kids and they're not gay kids; they're just kids to me. I have the knowledge of those lessons that I've spent nine years teaching them. It's hard to look at somebody new and remember it's a marathon for them to learn this too. It just feels overwhelming and I feel like I can't do as much with that as I want to.

My first years of teaching feel like eight lifetimes ago. That first year at Douglas almost destroyed me and there might have been some martyr in my brain. There's a definite push for teachers to be martyrs and I think that's wrong. That's very wrong because it does not look at our humanity. It became clear very quickly that if I didn't take care of myself, it was not going to go — well it already went pretty bad. I really try to counsel newer teachers — you have to take care of yourself. You have to balance your life.

An absolute first step in any kind of work for me has to be self-care. I always try to model that when I talk to my students about these sorts of things. And this is the thing that I've been bad at for most of my life. I'm trying to get better at because I realize it's my only chance to do anything else well. So, first I have to find some emotional balance or respite or whatever's needed in that moment, because no useful reflection will come until I am in that place. That's just true again and again and again. I have to reflect and let it take whatever time it — don't force that kind of reflection because in my experience with myself, I might say that something means something and then a month and a half later and realize that wasn't quite it so. I always hate these periods of reflection, but I

also find them fruitful in the end, that I go through periods where I don't know and don't have an articulation for it yet.

I always have to find the right balance between introversion and extroversion, because I am an 'extraverted introvert' (smiles). I use a lot of social energy at school which is why I need time alone to recharge. But I've also found recently that I really need people. I need people to talk to. I need social engagements, because if I get too much in my head and too much on my own, it backfires on me. It's like finding that right balance between embracing a day of watching Netflix and eating ice cream, but also saying 'at 4pm I'm going to go and have a drink with a friend.' I've learned that self-care is about listening to myself, and trusting myself and being nice to myself in relation to whatever my head is saying. After my break-up this Spring, I taught class and there were a million other things I 'should' have done that day, but that was the thing that I could do. I'm learning to be gentle with myself; it is a practice that I'm very good with everyone else and not with myself. I'm really trying to learn to be better about accepting 'me as I am now.'

What I would love to do professionally is to rotate out of the classroom for a few years and be a new teacher mentor (our school district used to have a program that would have made this possible, but doesn't currently because of budget). My new teacher mentor my first three years at Frederick Douglas was 100% crucial to my success. I would not have made it through my first year of teaching without her. She was amazing, just so necessary for me, and I would love that job. I think it would help me to reconnect with what it's like to be that person. I think that new teachers are very intimidated by teachers who have been around for a while. I hear it quite frequently from people who I go to happy hour with. A new teacher who I have known for four months will get a little bit tipsy and start to get open and will tell me, 'I don't know how to talk to you because you're so intimidating.' I wish that I had more energy to break down that initial barrier.

It's overwhelming, on one hand, to see the teachers I think who could become me or not me, but like me, you know, and have that same sort of transformation. And, on the other hand, you hear stories about teachers who are doing clear harm in a variety of ways, whether it's through curriculum or by calling administration when the transgender student goes into the girls' bathroom.

Though, I should just put it out there is that I do feel incredibly lucky to do this work where I do it. Because I think I would encounter much, much, much more resistance in a variety of other settings. Again, the district was like super chill about me getting arrested. I teach students where I don't have half the class loudly saying, 'Well All Lives Matter!' instead of 'Black Lives Matter' or something like that. I don't encounter that push-back and I don't deal with kids whose parents feel that way as well, which actually to me is the most dangerous stream of things.

I think the most push-back I've encountered earlier in my activist career was when I said things publicly about the state that Douglas was in and the administration felt threatened. But that was even before I knew what I was doing. I was twenty-four and was like, 'Well….' I trained myself early on not to be scared. But the reality is that I don't like

conflict and I don't like knowing that someone is judging me in a particular way. I think, in general, I actually encounter less obvious push-back than I think a lot of people would. I just think that I'm in a fairly insulated society in some ways, partially because I've chosen to defriend certain people and just avoid particular people in the hallways, but also partially because I'm blessed to be in this place. I mean, I think about this and talk about this a lot with people. If I wanted to be an activist/teacher and I taught White kids, I feel like I would be starting from ground zero in terms of how to do it effectively. It's totally different. I know I say kids are kids. But when you're encountering different prejudices, it's very different.

In terms of how I deal on a day-to-day basis — again this is going to sound cliché — but it's always easier if I think about why I'm doing it — and that's my kids. When I hear some ridiculous thing that a teacher said, or get push-back of some sort, I go into my classroom with my students and know that the reason I heard that comment is because they feel safe in telling me that comment. And that means my classroom is something different. I just feel like there's so much hope for the kids that I spend most of my time with that that hope allows me to not get knocked off my game by all of the frustrating things that I encounter. I look at these fucking awesome kids, I mean honestly, that's really what it is!

Suspension

The other thing that has happened this fall — this maybe feels like a little bit of a tangent, but it actually feels very significant for my work — I had a parent complaint against me this fall ostensibly around the text messages I sent their son. But in the end, what it really was about was that their son came out to me via text this summer. He's never come out to anyone else. He's never come out to anyone.

His parents took his phone and saw all the text messages. They felt that the level of closeness that I had with this student was inappropriate. I was suspended for thirteen days while they investigated. This has been one of the hardest things I've ever endured in my whole life actually.

It was shocking in a lot of ways and eye opening in a lot of ways. I'm incredibly thankful that eventually the parents could be talked down, because, you know, a lot of the ways these things go down for the teacher sadly depends on how the parents are feeling. If they are going to make a big stink to the media, you know, then maybe I end up not working at Frederick Douglas High School any more. That was a real concern for a while…

I'm really still working through this; it just ended at the end of September. It ended with a letter of reprimand in my file for crossing boundaries in terms of counseling a student inappropriately. I had to sit in a session with my NCAE lawyer who was fantastic. I was so thankful for her. She has actually been involved in Moral Mondays and is a county commissioner in a nearby city. I had to sit with her on my side and talk to the school district's lawyer and say things like,
'No, I crossed a boundary. I should not have told this student that when his mom said 'if

she had a gay son, she wouldn't let him around little children, little boys.' I should not have said that his mom was wrong and I should not have gone and bought a copy of *Go Tell it on the Mountain* by James Baldwin and gifted it to this child. That was crossing a boundary.'
I had to say those things in order to keep my job and I'm still processing all of that.

But I will tell you what I know for sure and have known since the first day I came back — I'm doing the right work. When I saw that student again, I wasn't really sure how he was going to respond, 'cause you know, he had been outed to his parents in essentially the worst way possible. He had been dragged through all this. He had to do a deposition. I'm not sure who knows all the things his parents said to him about me. But I came back to the love and the care and the concern for me that this kid showed for me. He said, 'I missed you so much.' All of that was coming from other students as well. In the couple of weeks following that — just having so many heavy, serious conversations with kids who needed someone — those kind of issues —you know, 'How do I talk to my boyfriend about consent?' Those kinds of conversations keep happening and I know firmly and strongly that this is the right place for me and that the work that I'm doing matters. This has been the most resonant point of my school year, I think.

I think that this situation is like a microcosm. It's all there, right? One of the things that the district chastised me for was not using professional language when I'm talking with a student and not maintaining professional boundaries. Ok. I don't deny that. But I do deny its importance to a certain extent. You know? When a student comes to me with an issue, the first thing in my head is not, 'Ok, well, how do I say this in a way that, you know, if there is a sound byte of me later, I don't get screwed over.' The first thing I think is 'this is a human and I'm a human and I'm going to deal with this human like a human should.' And that comes down to love for me and in the end that often causes bold action. I'm not concerned about the societal confinements that relate to some of these matters.

I have learned to just sit with that and wait for the articulation to come, because it always does. This just happened yesterday around some of the stuff with this parent situation. A friend of mine teaches middle school and he posted about teaching a Kendrick Lamar song in class. He had posted separately about his thinking about whether it would be appropriate to teach Kendrick Lamar to his Middle School students because the language is often quite profane. And what he said in the post was, 'You know I teach Columbus. I teach about rape and genocide, but I'm worried about the 'F word.' That made me think of my situation. Look at the big picture here. In my opinion, this kid's mother emotionally abused him with some of the things she said and we're concerned about whether I used the 'F word' in a text to him? That just really helped clarify some of the anger that I was feeling, but didn't have the words for. That's anger at the system. That's not something I can go to the school board and complain about how it went down because they're not going to follow that argument. But this was a moment that I needed to have for that to finally come clear.

The reason I tell this whole story is because it all just comes down to me being in this damn classroom and doing what I do and having those relationships with kids. Because during those thirteen days, I learned a lot about my own emotions and worked hard to find a way to remain somewhat emotionally stable. Nothing else mattered to me other than getting back here and doing this work. So many other things just paled and it just taught me more than I've ever known before — even though I've really, really known it before — that everything stems from being in this classroom, knowing kids, listening to them, and learning from them. None of this would exist without that. I don't want any of that other stuff, if I don't get to have this.

Reflections

In a world that puts profit or personal gain above the needs and humanity of people, social justice to me is about creating a world where everyone's humanity is totally affirmed. As activists, we are trying to do something about that, to fight the dehumanization. People don't even know what's happening to them. There was a time in my life when I feel like, to some extent, that was happening to me. I didn't realize the effect of it at the time either. Action comes from seeing the ways in which the world treats humans as subhuman, mostly for the purpose to benefit one person or a group.

As I think about social justice, I would say look at history and look at today and see what has changed. What hasn't changed and why? Find the thing we need to care about next. It's easy to give the throwaway line: 'What's the thing that you care about? Care about that. You might care about the thing I care about.' But, I think you know this about me by now, I'm not actually someone who thinks that everything in the world is something to care about. I tend to be much more biased in my messaging than that! I might say it as, 'Ok, yeah, sure, so find the thing you care about — but make sure it's rooted in reality. Let's have some documentation to back up our concerns, right? Let's have some evidence.' That's what I teach every day when I teach writing, know the history of your point.

I would also make a case for the idea that social justice at a local level is the best level, because it's rooted in relationship — and, because you can win! When you look at what is happening in this state, police brutality across the country and more, it gets overwhelming and really depressing really quickly. It's not that local politics is like always super fun. But you know if you eventually act with enough protests outside the police department, prisoners are going to get justice. That actually happens. If you have ten bus drivers at a county commission meeting talking about their need for a raise, it works. It's one person story that makes the difference at the local level. It happens occasionally, but it's not too often that one person's story makes the difference at a state or national level.

Finding hope

To be honest, on a big picture level, I really struggle with hope. I really do. I don't like the phrase, 'fight the good fight,' because I'm not just fighting the good fight. I'm fighting to win because I think we need to win. I have communist friends who legit

believe that a revolution can be achieved where social change happens in an organized way. I don't know if I believe all of that. I don't know — I don't know if I have that hope. It feels overwhelming and confusing to me.

I've got to reference Baldwin here, *Notes of a Native Son,* which I read this summer. The thing that stood out for me in that essay was when, at the end, Baldwin talks about the line between living and surviving in the world while also not ignoring all of its problems. Basically, how do you live in such a fucked-up world without just being totally ok with it if you're also going to live and not hate life. That's a terrible paraphrase, but that really stood out to me as a constant struggle that I have. Back to the Matrix, once you taken the red pill, once you see, you can't 'unsee', right? If you're going to live happily, it's easier to just not to know. It's easier to not to think about the racial demographics of every room you ever walk into forever. But once you know — well that's me. It is a struggle of mine to not become jaded in a world that is pretty consistently up and down with a lot of issues.

This response is based on kind of a cheesy experience that I had this summer, but it was a good lesson for me. This summer I was driving to the mountains before the Fourth of July weekend and about 20 minutes out of town I got a flat tire. I was alone. Earlier in the year, I ended a relationship with a long-term partner so I don't have a long-term partner — or a short-term partner — and this is one of the fears of ending a relationship, right? Who becomes the person who helps me? Now, I realize that I have tons of people who I could call and who would come help me in that situation. But more importantly I realize a thing that I often times forget: even if I didn't have a friend I could call, I'm so certain that someone would have come and helped me. A state trooper stopped and I had to go through all the stuff in my head about how lucky I am to even be someone for whom that feels safe. But getting past all of that — because I can't just enjoy things — I was able to tell myself, 'You know what, someone would have helped me.' In this world, I believe in humans on an individual level. You get me to start talking about the system and that's when everything seems so overwhelming that I don't know what to do. But I believe that somebody else would have stopped and helped me with my flat tire. The absolute million percent blessing of working with teenagers is just optimism, optimism, optimism, optimism everywhere. And that is why I need to teach. I just believe in these humans.

If you ask me what that big picture looks like and how we get from here to a more just world or is there a revolution involved, I don't know any of that. But I do know that every day I have a room full of people who I one hundred percent believe are going to grow up to be amazing humans, who are creating a lot of good, love, and some form of change. Whether that is just them being more personally liberated or whether they actually being activists themselves, that doesn't even matter. I just see humans that I believe in everyday and that is what keeps me sane. And every day, I ask did I just have a conversation that made a person better, made them think about something new? Yeah — and, I think one other thing I would add to that is that kids are learning from failure and from mistakes. The kids I know are learning about themselves and are really pushing

themselves to be better humans. And they don't have cushy lives where everything was already good. I just need those little things.

Activism. Love. Faith.

I guess the key thing I would say about the activism I do as a teacher is that it's really about allowing students to see themselves in other people's stories. That creates growth for them. I want students to be able to seize the texts that are put in front of them, know the historical situations that connect these texts to today's situations, connect to the emotions in all of that, help them envision the world in a way that resonates with them, and understand their place more firmly within this world. I'm encouraging parents to participate in that activism because it is something that can be modeled and discussed. It's so important to take their students responses seriously and to leave space for them to grow.

When I think of my future as an activist, a teacher, and a human — this feels sort of backwards — it is learning from wounds and growing from them. This moors me, because I have yet to encounter a situation where I didn't learn something important about myself that made me better than I was before. I often talk about my first year at Frederick Douglas as the very first time I was ever outside my comfort zone. Once I got through it, made it through, and was able to look back, I realized that there was absolutely nothing more important than getting outside that comfort zone. That first experience outside my comfort zone was so fundamentally important to the person that I am. I mean, I don't exactly love these experiences, but I embrace them as things that I'm going to learn from and be better after. I can already see that happening with this thing that just went down, the suspension, and the other wound that I am carrying still, the break-up earlier this year. I am better because that happened; I just really firmly see that way. It's not to say that those things don't get me down for a while, but I don't see any point of going on if I don't recover and make something of it.

It may or may not be irrelevant to this discussion, but I've learned what I'm professionally good at. I don't know if I'll still be here, at Douglas and in this town in ten years. But a real answer or hope to my future includes having found a life partner where I can practice successfully the kind of love that I talk about in my activism.

Regarding faith and church in particular, I might be making these connections just now, in this moment, for the first time. I'm going to go old school; I'm going to go back to what I would say to the church where I grew up or even the conservative Anglican church where I was married. And, remember, I didn't grow up in some 'crazy weird hate church' — a church where the pastor preached against Brittany Spears as being a horrible sinner. I've been to 'that church,' but I didn't attend that church. And I honestly didn't go to churches where pastors preached about homosexuality being wrong.

But to my churches, I would say, 'You've got it wrong!'
Maybe the biggest thing I would say is that 'silence is consent.' Love is an active thing. I feel like most of the action that churches take is negative and I feel like action needs to be positive. Love needs to be based, like Jesus was based, in relationship. I do think

about the positive actions that churches do take, like backpack drives, feeding the homeless, or other missions. I'm not saying those things are bad, but they're also not based on real relationships with people. These are not places where conflict comes up so that there can actually be growth and development, like in actual relationships with people. You can say, 'Well, you know I love gay people, I just hate their sin.' But, if you don't actually have someone in your life where you're working that out, what does that mean? What are you really practicing?

This is a very common principle. Love is action. Love is relationship. The ways that churches say they're practicing love are just often so passive. And — the things that churches are active about are not love — a lot of the time. If God is love, which is a thing that I believe, then love looks a particular way. You know, before I noticed what love effectively looks like, I first noticed what the lack of love both looks like and what it does.

CHAPTER 12: REGGIE MCPHERSON
"GOD, YOUR HAND IS REALLY, REALLY ON ME."

Prologue

Reggie is a young, mid-30s, Black man. Like many pastors in the Black church, he is bi-vocational, and, by this, I mean that he has really two fulltime jobs rather than two jobs that put together to equal one. He drives 90 miles both ways on Wednesday nights and on the weekends to pastor a church in another city. In his home city, he works directing an organization that works to apply a sense of biblical generosity and social justice to every aspect of the prison system including the education of those who are incarcerated and support for their transitions as returning citizens. It was not hard to guess that he was a former football player; he is short with a powerful muscular frame. But it is not his strength that first strikes you about Reggie, it is his effusive kindness and quick engagement when greeted. I had met him years ago at an IAF statewide organizing action. When I reconnected with him in the "FT"MM, he was quick to remember that brief encounter. We were often together at "FT"MM events always quick to catch up about our professional lives.

But my interviews with Reggie were by far the most difficult to schedule and continue.[21] Certainly, he is a very busy man. After a couple months of favorably discussing the possibility of doing this work, I bumped into him in a Whole Foods and we scheduled a first appointment perhaps out of his kindness of not wanting to seem rude. That first interview was brief. Reggie was late and he had scheduled another appointment at what would have been the one hour mark.

[21] This account repeats and extends a narrative on Reggie that falls in the interpretations of chapter 13.

It was three months (which included a couple no-shows) before we could successfully schedule our second time to sit down. The second appointment was on a unique and visceral day, the morning immediately after Donald Trump's surprise election as President. As we met that morning, Reggie mentioned that he only had a short amount of time before another appointment and his wife had come along to sit in (changing the dynamic). I engaged her honestly about this project, my work in local organizing, and my profound despair at the election results. She (and Reggie) almost visibly exhaled and were very vulnerable in return about their concern for the politics of the nation, what this would mean for people of color, and for the prison system. After 30 minutes of conversation, she hopped up from the table with a warm clasp on my shoulder and went to shop for groceries. She didn't return for well over 90 minutes; Reggie and I had plenty of time to jump back into his story. I left that interview with a strong feeling of having surprisingly passed a test.

I have wondered much about these interviews with Reggie. Reggie is an incredibly humble and even a shy person. He has absolutely no need for his story to be "out there." But the process of this life story instructed me (by intuition) about the extreme privilege I have had in hearing and writing these stories. I believe this intersubjective encounter had many of the cautions and concerns of a White, middle-aged, male ethnographer "studying" a young Black man and "mapping" what Reggie would certainly consider to be a Black church social movement for justice with all the potential and historical dangers of such encounters. With time, I think we moved past these very appropriate fears (if they were indeed present). If the encounter on the day after the election somehow gave me permission to continue the process, my engaging Reggie over his sports background and dialogically taking some time to share my own athletic history was the moment that really nuanced our positionalities from two pastors of entirely different

social contexts and generations to a shared communion of former competitors. I am very thankful that Reggie and forged ahead and he gifted me with the trust of his story.

Reggie's Story

> First off, I want to thank you once again for just letting me tell my story.
>
> I was born in California. I'm still learning about that time. My family was split up in many ways. I grew up around gang violence and a lot of fighting. My dad wasn't there. I saw my older sister — she's four years older than me — go through those different challenges. She ran away from home at thirteen. She ended up going to prison for sixteen years. I had a stepdad come into our lives.
>
> We all battled gang violence from a young age. I had friends in the Bloods and other friends in the Crips. I was challenged every day going to elementary and middle school with what gang I would be in. Yeah, yeah, yeah, it, it, it was challenging, seeing young men and young women under the age of thirteen have these challenges. You don't even know the whole world yet, but you're just dealing with all these obstacles.
>
> I don't know if my mom and stepdad knew the extent of the gang violence that I was facing. I don't think they knew the extent, because the same people that were in gangs would come to the house and my mom would cook them dinner. Some of the them that I talk to today, they say, 'You know, your mom really helped me out. I didn't have no food. When I didn't have food, your mom was there.' Yeah, so I was able to see somebody care and show love, to see that this is what love looks like. It means something and it can keep certain people off the streets. I never joined a gang.
>
> When I was nine or ten, it was the first time that I got to play football, in a league, with helmets on. We ended up going to the league championship and winning it over several years. I forgot about that but remembered the experience when this news reporter from back there reached out to me. He said, 'We're doing a story on all the young kids in that neighborhood and wondering where they are today. Because in that neighborhood there was a lot of gang violence and gun violence; many people died.' They reached out to me. They said I was the only one that was in school as a minister and was pressing forward in that way. There were some other ones that were in coaching. And then, of course, some were dead. That was just twenty years ago.
>
> I go back to that article that was in the city newspaper and I just thank God. I say, 'Man, God, your hand is really, really on me — man.'
>
> At the same time, I was having peace in the home with my mom and seeing some stability in some kind of way. When I was twelve or thirteen, we picked up and moved from California to the deep South, just me, my mom, and my stepdad. We left everybody back there, my stepbrother and my other sibling on my dad's side. My sister decided to stay. We moved for better opportunities. We were closer to family; I had a number of cousins and aunties there. So, we were just really enjoying the Southern life. It was quite

different —quite different. I really enjoyed it and started to see different things that I think that really shaped where I'm at now.

In the South, there were some challenges, but not as much. I faced different challenges, challenges with racism. I was like, 'Well what's all this about?' I was very inquisitive about these things. I battled with looking at the Confederate Flag in schools, on jobs, and other symbols in certain places. And knowing that 'I can't go here or there', like some areas on the country road. I remember getting on my bike, rolling around the corner, and trying to just explore the area. There was this one place; it looked like they put two trailer homes together in a big area. I loved to play pool and I remember looking at that place and I was like, 'I'm going to go up in there.' And then I saw the flag. When I went in there, um, everybody just kind of looked at me different. I felt, I knew, 'I'd better get out of here. I better get out of here.' That was kind of an awakening in some ways coming to the South. There was racism in high school, on the football field, in sports, and later going through the military.

I loved high school. I definitely felt some racism though from some coaches and in school. My high school is now, I think, majority Black. But, back then, it was majority White. I was a football player, a wrestler, and ran track.

College, military, college, and a call to ministry

After high school, I went to college for about six months. It wasn't working out; I was partying too hard.

So, I went into the Air Force. The Air Force brought me to Goldsboro.

I faced lots of racism in the Air Force. I'll tell you this one story. When I was in basic training in San Antonio, I remember being in charge of leading a group. I had to get them to do clean-up While I was leading, this one guy didn't want to do nothing. I called him by his name on this tag and he didn't listen. I had heard one of his friends call him a nickname. So, I called him by this nickname. It wasn't a derogatory term; it was just a nickname. But I guess he didn't like me saying it, so then he went and told the head guy. This guy brought me together in front of everybody else and brought another Black guy up there…He said, 'Yeah, I heard you called him…[this].'. I said, 'Yeah, 'cause he wasn't listening. That was his name. He wasn't listening, so I called him by that.' The leader said, 'Well what if I call you the 'N' word? Does that offend you?' I thought, 'Oh man…' That was very challenging because I knew they were trying to get people kicked out. I remember distinctly that he asked the other Black guy that was right there just watching the whole thing, 'Does that offend you?' He was like, 'No, it don't offend me.' So, I never said nothing. That was basic training, the very beginning of your career. It can make or destroy your whole career.

I remember talking to my head guy about that guy and he was like, 'You just be alright. You just be alright.' But, I had to wrestle with racism often, little incidents that rose up as I progressed in my career. Now that name, 'the N word' was not directly said, but you saw it in many other ways. That is what I experienced in the Air Force.

But God truly blessed it, blessed me and my family through all that. I was in for six years. It was one enlistment, just a big enlistment instead of the usual four years. I almost re-enlisted, but I said 'no' and decided I'll go back to school. That's how I stayed in North Carolina.

I went to an in-state HBCU majored in physics with a math minor. I just faith-walked there. It was intense, so intense…

Somewhere in the military, God started really speaking to me because I always went to church. I wasn't thinking about ministry. I was just starting to learn more of the Word.

But I had a good time still in there though. Yeah, yeah, yeah… I'll tell you this real quick. In the Air Force, we played flag football and they also had a semi-pro league. We played against all the different squadrons on the base. Every year my team ended up going to the championship. I was playing outside linebacker and they called me 'Ray Lewis.' I also played running back. Every year we went to the championship and lost every time. Then my last year, right before I got out, I said, 'Man, I ain't joining no team.' Then they said, 'Come on Reg, let's get them together.' And, so I became the coach. I rallied the team. I created the plays. I was the coach and I had them on my arm; I was the coach and I ended up filling in at running back, lineman, QB, strong safety, whatever they needed. And how bout this … we had a few good players, but our team wasn't that good. I kept encouraging them throughout the whole time they were practicing, playing, and dropping balls. I said, 'Come on. You can do it!' After all that, at the end, we made it to the championship and — how about it? — we won! — with a weaker team.

So, I tell that story in part because of my calling. I sat there with all of these trophies, big ole trophies up to here (puts his hand at waist height), and I said, 'Lord how in the world did you let me win now? Our team wasn't great. Why now as a sole coach?' And then he said, 'Because I want you to be coaches of men.' And that was my calling. I said, 'No, I'm not ready for this,' and I shut my Bible, because I was studying the Bible, and I went to sleep. I had a dream come to me and I woke up. The dream gave me some Scriptures. I went to them and I said, 'Oh Lord.' Then after all that, I said, 'Alright Lord, I'm yours.'

I definitely hear God clearly in dreams sometimes. You know, people wrestle with that, 'How do you know that's not your subconscious?' But when he confirms some things, then I know it's clearly him.

Faith background and coming to Greenleaf

I was river-baptized as a kid in the Presbyterian tradition, like all those pictures that you see on the wall with people walking down to the rocks and then the river. That was me. We always went to church. Maybe not [midweek] Bible study all the time, but we were always there on Sunday. So, I had that religious background throughout my life. No matter the challenges or all the things that I got into, I still got to go to church. Even in high school, there was some distinct moments in that church that really spoke to me and

changed my life in some ways. By that time, we had actually joined a United Methodist Church. That was a blessing. It was right around the corner from us and they had a number of activities and things that we could get involved in.

When I had gotten off that greyhound bus the first time I came up into Goldsboro, downtown Goldsboro, I got off that bus and said, 'Man where am I? I don't have no clue where I am.' So, I had started going to church on base. Then I started exploring different congregations outside. I joined a Holiness Church, then a Baptist church, finally another Methodist Church. I was just exploring and really being fed in different ways. I had been deployed in Afghanistan and Kuwait for about six months. God was speaking to me over there. So, once I came back, I started being more committed, exploring more churches. And God brought me around to Reverend Barber's church. God just set it up.

After coming back, I had heard about the church. I met a friend on base and we were washing our cars together. Every time I'd wash my car, he would be there. By like the third time, I said, 'Man what's your name?' And so, we started talking, and then he said, 'Yeah, I'm looking for a church too.' We exchanged numbers and then he told me, 'You ought to come check this church out.' So, I went and checked it out; it was Reverend Barber's church, Greenleaf Disciples of Christ.

Rev. Barber

I checked it out, and was like, 'This is pretty good.' What ended up sticking with me, after three or four visits, Reverend Barber called me. He called me on the phone and just welcomed me and I didn't join the church at first. But he just welcomed me and we started talking. The next thing I know, I started going with him to different places. He'd say, 'Hey you want a ride here?' I would say, 'I've got some time. I've got some time.' So, then, I got more involved. I started learning. On the religious side, there was nobody that I met in all those other churches that could really break down the Word of God the way that I needed and the way he did.

As a preacher, Rev. Barber really spoke to me because I was able to hear it broken down and in a way that I could really hear it. He would incorporate everything going on in the world to his preaching. He was bringing all that in and really taking the time to apply the Word of God to those contexts, inequalities and the racist South. He would just open it up and say, 'This is why we have to do what we do.' And throughout the years, as long as I've known him, since 2002 all the way to now, he's been consistent, nothing ever changing. It's always been about justice, incorporating the Word of God and being able to live it out fully. That really spoke to me.

I was like, 'Yeah, I'm in. I'm in.' I tried to fill in whatever he needed, wherever the church needed it. Once I got out in 2005, I was wondering, 'Okay God. Where am I going to go?' That's when I decided to stay here.

So, I mean, with me having my step-dad, it seemed like I was missing a piece. I was missing a man of God, a father figure that would really open up the Word of God and just say, 'Hey, let's sit down and talk about this.' That really spoke to me. I look at him, not

just as a pastor, but as a spiritual father. It was just a blessing to be able to be right there with him throughout that whole time. We would go on rides [Rev. Barber's physical limitations precludes his ability to regularly drive]. I'd pretty much became his armor bearer.

I have been right there with him, helping him out, driving, for a good deal of time. He wasn't in the NAACP at that moment, but he was involved in a number of things in the state. We would go to Raleigh, Durham, different states.

I had thought, 'I don't understand where I am at.' But God placed me right under Reverend Barber (and later to become an Associate Minister under him) for him to take me under his wing and show me things and teach me. He would just say, 'Hey, just pay attention to this,' and we had some deep personal talks. It was so life-giving — life-giving! It calls you not to just keep it to yourself but to give back.

People had counted me out a number of times. I remember one of his quotes on an application of mine for something: 'This is a young man that people counted out and said he wasn't college material or wasn't able to do this and that. He has persevered through all that…' He saw some things in me and he still does. He still calls me to do certain things. I love him dearly.

Well, and let me tell you this — coming up and watching Reverend Barber push hard at preaching the message, teaching the message, getting the congregation to be on board, working inside of Goldsboro and outside during a number of marches, even if ten people or five people show up, wow!

Ministry at Greenleaf

At first, I was working with the youth at Greenleaf. Then I was working with the men. Then I became Associate Minister. My direct role was community relations — going to the rest home, and ministering there (a community that was right directly behind the church) and gathering youth in the projects. There was a time that I led the choir. I love singing and that's how I met my wife, in the choir. I used to help with the praise team and then the men's choir. Anywhere they needed me. Sometimes it would be gathering a march together or praying somewhere else. But community relations was really my direct role.

I couldn't look at somebody differently because they were incarcerated because I have family members that were incarcerated. Now if my sister wasn't incarcerated, maybe some things might have been different. In Goldsboro, certain people would come up to me that were homeless or people that had been incarcerated. These people kept coming to me, and at first, I was like, 'Well, I'm not a minister. I'm not. You might want to go to somebody else.' But they would send them to me.

University & Divinity School

That congregation really showed me some things. They welcomed me as family because I didn't have no family here. And then God opened up the door to go to an HBCU a little over an hour away. At first, I was still living in Goldsboro and would drive all the way to school, going back and forth. To make a long story short, I was still taking that hour drive, back and forth, until God finally said, 'Okay, time to turn somewhere else.'

When I went to that college, I said, 'I'm going to try out for this football team. I talked with the coach and worked out with him. I was like, 'Yeah I got this.' And God said, 'Don't you do it.' And, I said, 'I don't know. Don't make me choose, you know man, don't make me choose between this.' The first days at school, I had my cleats in the car for a try-out. I know I could have did it, but God said 'don't do it.' After the first day was over, I drove to the field and then I had to drive past the field. I circled around. I drove past it again. I circled around. I did it about three times.

I'll never forget it. These are the type of stories you don't ever forget. Later on, near the end of the school year or early the next year, God revealed to me that I wouldn't have been focused on the degree, my study wouldn't have had the attention it needed. I wouldn't have been focused, trying to do football. Plus, with my knee injury, I'd have just wrapped it up, put the bandage on there, and maybe could have injured it more.

Oh man, it was hard. That was a new sense of trust in God, a new sense of trust. He said, 'Just trust me.' And I said, 'Alright, I trust you.' From there, schooling and divinity school, and everything was really just building from that point. Football for me goes all the way back to childhood. You can learn a lot of things in sports. But, it all, my future path goes back to football a little bit, back to football, and this decision not to play. I do think coaching could be in my future again sometime.

After college, I matriculated in divinity school. God really just opened up my mind there even more. I was part of the first group to get a degree in Prison Studies, and I was the only Black student to receive it. Yeah, the first one, the first Black student to receive it. I never — it probably won't be plastered somewhere and it's ok if it isn't, but that reality settles in my heart. You can see now the Holy Spirit's works in all this. I took a number of courses with Rev. Barber's previous teacher. I was like, 'Man this, this is, this is so great!' I'm taking courses dealing with restorative justice with Bishop Kenneth Carter. I'm not a Methodist, but that's my Bishop! I'll tell anybody, that's my Bishop, right there. That's my Bishop. Love that man. Love that man! He really introduced me to the theology of prison ministry and restorative justice. Talking to him and taking some of his courses, prison and urban internships started to open up for me. I did prison internships at C. A. Dillon and at the Butner Facility. That's what my mindset was right before I got out.

When I first graduated from divinity school, I saw that my passion was even more in chaplaincy work. I wrestled with it. I didn't want to be a pastor 'cause I had seen how hard it is with Reverend Barber. But I also said, 'No, but I can't be a chaplain.' And then God said to me, 'Well that's the same thing as pastoring. The only difference is that you

can't get an offering or raise a tithe. But it's the same thing.' I realized that, I said, 'Ok.' There was a position that came open at the federal prison. I applied for it. I thought, you know, this is going to be me but I was turned down. God put me down a different path to that calling.

History of social action, current ministry

Stop the funeral

So, by 2002-2004, I began to be immersed inside the social justice and the movement for social justice like justice for Smithfield workers. Here's just one piece of that work; this is when I really start seeing it. This young man, James Johnson, was wrongly accused and locked up. We really pushed back on that and I got to visit him back in 2007.

Then the 'Stop the Funeral' initiative happened back in 2008, right when I graduated from college. Prior to that, we were leading marches, gatherings, and rallies in Goldsboro, to bring awareness about violence. At the funeral of one young man, there was a shooting that took place — at the funeral. Rev. Barber preached on it for a long time and called for 60 days of fasting and prayer. He got other ministers to join in and preach, 'We just have to stop the funerals!' He used Luke's gospel where Jesus went and touched the coffin and he actually stopped the funeral, stopped the procession. I remember that had really spoke to me. There was even another shooting at a funeral. Even more, I was committed, 'We do. We do need to stop the funerals.' I was up in college, but coming back and trying to be involved as I could.

Armor bearer no longer, HKonJ and the birth of the moral movement

Then the development of HKonJ was happening. We had started a prison ministry inside Greenleaf and that's how I had gotten my first prison ministry experience. There were injustices at different levels happening everywhere. Rev. Barber was saying, 'We've got to go over to Raleigh and speak. We've got to go over there and just listen, go over there and teach, and we've got to go over there and march.' We had to have an agenda like HKonJ. By now my role was not just an armor bearer no more; it was more security, marshalling, and helping this person or that person. I was asking, 'How else can I get involved in helping people?' It was great to be immersed in it and say, 'Okay, it's all around me. I want to be a part of it even more.'

I wasn't just down in Goldsboro. I was telling people and bringing people to these protests and saying, 'Hey, y'all need to pay attention to what's going on!' I was raising awareness, letting people know that this or that march was happening, and saying 'this is why we're doing it.' They were starting to understand it more and I was starting to understand it more. Yeah.

New Visions Character and Leadership School

I tried on to go back in as a chaplain in the military but my timeframe was off. So I said, 'Well Lord, what do you want me to do now?' I was stuck in that place. How do I go

forward when it seems like my dreams were shut down? At that point, my dream was really to be a chaplain. I learned to keep doing what God showed me. God said, 'Trust me.' And I went back to another dream that I had, which was using my physics degree — to go back into the community and teach.

At that time, I was asked to teach science and math at the New Visions Character and Leadership School. They needed a GED instructor inside this new program. They said to me, 'We've got like twenty-three teens that have been kicked out of school, some awaiting trial, going back and forth, without any education. With some of them, it wasn't their first time in with the law and so they missed lots of school. I was not able to give them the GED, but I was able to give them practice tests. Not only was I teaching the GED, but I was ministering to them in some ways. I was doing that for some time. I loved it – loved it. And then, from there, an Executive Director position came up to lead the school into a new era.

But then an opportunity at Project Citizen Return came up. I really wrestled with that decision because there was so much work being done right here in the community jail. If any church wants to go and do prison ministry, one of the most impactful ways is to go to that county jail or go right here to the state prison because of the way they cycle out and they come right back. So I was coming out of that tension and trying to figure out, 'Do I stay here or do I go to Project Citizen Return?'

God showed me that this is one area that you can help impact change and now have several prisons to bring other people on board and impact change, do some transformation, and bring the gospel. I think back to that decision. If I could go to even more areas, more churches, and gather more people together to see this vision, to see the gospel in a new way, then I'm all for it. I believe that's where God is calling me to go — to impact more. I'm not thinking like some people say, 'Oh, is that like a top position or some regional something where you are sitting in an office, and you've got all these churches…' Some people might look at it like that. But I'm thinking of just being able to engage with more, to help more, to gather more and just listen to more, but also to be on the ground. I still know that wherever God is calling me is always going to still be on the ground.

And when I say 'on the ground,' I'm talking about being inside the prisons, inside the community, inside the marches, doing all that, and never leaving that to the side. I want to be able to make sure other people are aware of those that are on the margins. I want to be able to show and to tell the stories of the brothers and sisters that I've met inside prison and how those 'criminals' are still children of God. I think that's the ultimate thing. How can I show that? And if that's going cross state, if that's going to another county, if that's going to two or three or four churches gathered together at once, then I'm willing to go that route.

Project Citizen Return

Now my primary work is as the Director of Project Citizen Return (PCR). The project is doing a lot of powerful things. I started with them around 2009. Yeah, God just opened this up for me.

PCR is part of a larger organization, Converting Communities, that has the main focus of creating a space where social change can happen, where people can learn together. It connects churches with the needs of the community.

I would couch PCR in Romans 12:2, 'Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.' That's our foundation to Project Citizen Return, we're rooted in the vision of turning, unlocking, transforming, and renewing. When I think about Romans 12:2, the transformation I'm thinking about takes place not where you're going into prison just to transform some things, but a transformation that takes place on both ends, both people. My job has a number of different assignments. One is going into the prison and building relationships with the chaplains and the staff in order to bring divinity students and divinity faculty inside the prison into a classroom setting. We are able to create a dialogue about different subject matters and to have a classroom where mutual relationships can be built and mutual learning can take place. Some of them will accept Christ on the inside. Others will be able to grow closer in their relation to God.

I also go to churches and speak to churches about having a different mindset regarding incarceration, how to see things differently. I teach how to approach prison ministry or approach those marginalized by incarceration by believing that transformation is not just one-sided. It's both-sided; we can never go into a place like prison without being transformed ourselves. This is true with any ministry I do, whether it's dealing with a prison ministry or other forms of social justice; transformation that takes place on both ends.

With the incarceration rate being as high as it is in this country, at some point, we're all going to know somebody that came out of prison. At some point, we're going to know somebody who's been incarcerated in our own family and in our churches. How do we receive that reality? How do we prepare? There's a couple of areas that we have to be truthful with. One, everybody is not going to go into prison to minister. And everybody might not be able to receive those who come out. But can you help build a welcoming team? Where can you really answer the call in Matthew 25 [that teaches that Jesus identifies with the vulnerable like those who have been imprisoned] or even in Matthew 28 that says, 'Go and make disciples.' How do you answer that call?

I sat down with several churches the other day and talked about this. I gave them three or four different Scriptures. Any time we do prison ministry, we always just think about Matthew 25. But I gave them Luke 4, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me.' What does that look like when the anointing is on someone else other than people who come straight from the church or those that we deem as holy? Is there a Spirit of the Lord upon the criminal as well? How do we wrestle with that? I just to challenge them to really think differently in those areas.

I see a lot of hope in those men in the prison. There's so many stories, so many stories that God is inside of. I'm thinking about one. There was a brother in Central prison. The first day, I noticed that he was a little down and kind of quiet. So, I talked with him and he got engaged a little bit more. But then, the next class, he came to us and opened up. He shared that his mother died. She was the one that supported him before he was incarcerated. And after he was incarcerated, every Sunday, she would come to visit him. We had class on Thursday. She had visited him on that past Sunday. The he heard the news that she died. The next time we had class, he had just come back from the funeral. He was struggling. But when he got to the end of the semester, he was like, 'Man, I am so thankful that y'all were there for me. When I shared with my mom that I was in this class, she was excited. She said, 'Keep on. Don't you give up on the class.' And he said, 'There were many times I wanted to drop out, but I could hear her voice.'

That's just one story. There was a fire that built up in him. He said, 'I'm going to keep on running, keep on getting education. I'm going to keep on going because I saw the light in my mom's eyes and I remember the last words she said to me.' He was able to see the hope and not just hear the teaching of the class. His final project was almost like a sermon, or a eulogy to his mom.

I just told one of my interns the other day when we were just coming out of the prison that this is not just a class for the incarcerated. We are teaching spiritual autobiography, right now, inside Butner Federal Prison. I said, 'This is not just a class. They're earnestly seeking to grow in their spiritual walk.' Inside, there are Hebrew Israelites, Christians, Muslims, Native Americans. All that are in there are able to have a conversation about the spiritual, about growing in the spirit.

It is an amazing thing to be able to provide hope to them, to be able to see them grab hold of that hope. It is tremendous to be able to see them grow. A lot of them say, and you can see it in some of their writings, 'That for just the hour or two that I was in class, I felt like a human being. I was able to see things clearly. I was able to hear things clearly.' When the hour or two hours is up, they have to go back to their reality. Even in the classroom, we hear reminders of that reality: radios, keys dangling, and doors slamming. It is amazing that they zone all that out in the classroom and they hold onto that hope.

I remember the last time we had a class in Central Prison, a New Testament class on Philippians. It ended up being all Christians; that was one of the first times we had all Christians in the class.

At the last class, we like to have some type of celebration. They said, 'How about we have communion?' Man — that was just a blessing to have communion in that place of being bound. of uh, uh, you know, incarceration, a place of uh trying to be bound. That was an oasis, which is a good image of our communion. When I step outside those walls, there are many people that are still in prison and they might not be inside. But they're bound by something in society. They might not have a criminal record, but they are bound — maybe by email, by bills, or a whole bunch of stuff. And inside, say you have a

felony. People will say, 'You always going to be a felon.' They have to deal with all that. But we are able to bring that oasis to them, not being bound where they are bound.

Because God is already present in the prison. No one is expected to bring God into the prison. Once you get in there, God is already there and has been waiting for you to just come in. That really touched me in some ways. We have been digging deeper with [the Apostle] Paul's incarceration experience. We wrestle with how can we live it out and see the incarcerated as beloved children of God and made in the images of God. How can we still see them this way? We wrestle with that.

I think that's where this vision has really spoken to me. That's right. That's right. Yeah, definitely. It challenges me big time, because know what do I do especially when I see family members who are incarcerated. My dad was locked up too and other family members were locked up too.

I'm now wrestling with this in new ways, because my sister who was in prison and my niece they live with me now. Some of this stuff I didn't grasp in the past, you know, during the sixteen years she was incarcerated in California. She just got out probably about four or five years ago. It's a new time right now, a new journey for all of us. I'm really enjoying it.

But, I never did see this point; this is interesting. But I see it once my sister pulled it out. She said, 'People that are in the military kind of run parallel with people that are incarcerated, because you have some authority that tells you that you have to do this at a certain time — all that. In the military, there are certain boundaries, certain things you have to do at a certain time, and this is similar to the prison. Some of the treatment is the same. Of course, you've got more benefits in the military, especially afterwards, than prison. But there's a parallel that runs between the two and she pulled out that even more.

I try to not see her as different, but to see her still working and still pressing to get an education and doing well with her time. With the jobs that I have and the visitations I've done with all those brothers and sisters in prison, I need to still be able to see worth in them, to learn from them, and to see God speaking to me from them. I'm learning something from them. They are preaching to me. It's life-changing and empowering to be able to keep going out to the prison.

Pastoring a local church

When I was teaching at the alternative school, New Visions, a church in another city came to visit me. That was attractive to them, you know, my taking the ministry, taking the gospel into other realms, my concern about the youth, my concern about the dropout rate and the school to prison pipeline.

Now I've just celebrated my third year of pastoring there last Sunday! I drive over to church [which is about 90 minutes away] two or three days a week, on the weekends. I

preach on Sundays and sometimes do my Wednesday night Bible study on the phone.
It's an older congregation so they have trouble coming out at night.
If it's real cold, 'I ain't coming out preacher.'
Or if it's starting to get dark early, 'I ain't driving. I can't see – my cataracts.'
(said with an endearing impersonation of aging churchgoers.
When, I started doing my Bible study on the phone, attendance tripled (smiles).

Having come under Reverend Barber, I have been gifted to be able to preach a blended message, holding a newspaper in one hand and a Bible. Some people say, 'Well, that's politics and we need to keep that away from inside the church. We don't need to deal with none of that!' But I believe that if you're going to move in the things of God, when there's injustice — anywhere —you have to be able to name it and stand up. We need to read and preach all of Jesus, not just certain portions of Jesus.

So, I've learned to incorporate a lot of history — like the history of voting — because even though my congregation is older, that doesn't mean they know the history of certain things like racism and injustice. And, as a young man, I need to know that history too. They can see the state of history or the news in the message. I love to go into the history of the holidays so that they can understand what they are really about and what they're missing — why is it important now, why should we pay attention to some things and not pay attention to others. I preach on the Civil Rights Movement and Black History Month. Throughout the year, I always incorporate some Black history because Black history is history. I love to do that no matter what church I go to. I don't just limit it to February. I try to bring in messages of Frederick Douglas, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X. How do they help us see things in a different way? I try to make preaching relevant. I like to say, 'Let me come down your street and my street' so they can apply this gospel to their lives and the things going on right now. I often preach like this: 'I see what's going on and I may not understand all of it, but this is what God says to this situation right now.'

You see that the church the Christian Church is very divided. Some people say 'I'm for this, but I'm not for that. This is what the Bible says and this is what the Bible doesn't say.' But then other people will say, 'Well it does say that.' So, where do we really put our hat in? It is so frustrating to see the church divided, especially when we see that Christianity in America is dropping significantly and people are going to other faiths or creating their own faith in some way by blending different faiths together. People are turning away from the church because of that division. It is very frustrating. And the youth coming up are saying, 'Well, if the church is all messed up and the people don't even understand what they are doing, then why should I even come to church? Why should I be there?' I'm going to teach and preach history and issues with Scripture. If we never talk about the issues at hand and never address the state of America, the state of the world, the state of the community, and the state of the church, then we're missing the mark. We're missing it. The young folks are calling for that and listening for that and hungering for that. They say, 'Just keep it real. Keep it real. Just be real with me.' And, at some point, we have to be real with them and be real with ourselves. I think the church has a lot of work to do.

Any work I do outside the church, I come back to tell them, 'This is what I've been doing. So you were there with me when I spoke here or talked to these churches. I definitely talk about the stories of certain brothers and sisters that are incarcerated and those that have come out of prison. I share with them about the pain that some of them have and the transformation that is happening. A number of brothers have told me, 'When I come out, I'm going to find your church.' So, if I just keep everything I am doing here in this place and never prepare my own congregation, then I have missed it.

And they're very supportive and excited about my work here. They're excited about it. They're pushing me, they're pushing me to go out there. Yeah, now there's always a thin line of battle or tension within the pastor himself. 'Am I being there enough with the congregation? Am I supporting them enough?' And that's a tension of mine. Am I being there enough. Should I be there more than when I am right now? But every time I battle with that, I get a word from them saying, 'Keep on doing what you doing.' And they love it. I share my interns from the divinity school working at PCR or Converting Communities with them. I always say to my interns, 'You are welcome to come to the congregation' and I bring them to the congregation. So, they're almost given a church placement at the same time of getting a non-profit placement. The church loves it. They love to see what's happening with the next generation, how we're encouraging them, how are we supporting them, and how we are preparing them to minister.

Repairers of the breach

I'm also on the Board with Reverend Barber with Repairers of the Breach, crisscrossing the country, pushing voting rights, telling about social justice, training clergy to think differently and have a different mindset. But I'm really behind the scenes, spreading the word with my contacts in congregations and thinking about the finances, just helping anywhere I can. When you're working for justice and transformation, you don't need to be at the top all the time, at the front and seen. Sometimes the most important work is behind the scenes.

Denominational work

One of the other things I do, on top of everything else, is that I'm part of the Commission of Ministry in the Disciples of Christ. So, for anybody coming in wanting to be a minister — get licensed or ordained — I'm on that Board. Some might say, 'What are you doing?' Of course, there's always some more things that try to come into your bucket. But I don't think a pastor should just stay limited to inside the church walls of the congregation if you're very serious about the gospel and you're going to be concerned about justice. I like to look at it like how we think about prison ministry: If we just look at one person who is incarcerated, then you have to look at the grandmother or the mother that's connected. And if you look there, then you have to look at the children. And then if you look at the children, then you have to look at the environment, the supplies in the school system, and everything that they have to deal with.

I want to be able to show my congregation that you have to go beyond the church walls. The church is really as wide as God can make it and sometimes that will stretch you.

Isn't that what being a disciple is about? Being stretched — being aware that God has called you into those uncomfortable zones, being able to go to uncomfortable zones where people are in need and are marginalized, going to the forgotten, and being concerned not just about the moment. Helping everyone is an impossible task. I don't have to do and lead everything, but if I can just be a part of something, I think that's important. I think that's important. Now, trying to balance it all is a growing process. I might have to talk with you a little bit later about how you balance all that, but I'm growing in that. I am learning how to incorporate my family and also to take time for my family and to just say 'this is too much right now.' There are some things I just had to turn down the other day. I said, 'Maybe later on. Let me focus right now.'

Reflections on ministry, theology, following God, and social justice

Listening to God, blessing during storms

I always put my future is whatever God reveals to me. Now God has given me certain qualities and gifts. And there are things that God has shown me. I can't just sit back and say, 'Oh when it comes across, then I'll step into it.' There's a time and a season when you have to press into some areas. So, my first stance is to always just say, 'Ok, God, what area do you want me to press into now.' And then the next step is to say to others, 'Hey, these are some things that I need to press into.'

Now sometimes our dreams are shut down or appear to be shut down. Then you have to go back to some of the other dreams that God has already shown you and has already equipped you for. It might not be the season right now for that first dream like my chaplaincy dream at first. When one door is shut, you have to listen to God and push forward harder in another way or another direction. This reminds you that you're not in control. God's in control. I think about Dr. King when all kinds of opposition were coming his way, shutting him down, and that late night meeting where he was drinking some coffee and he was like, 'What do I do now God? I'm at the end of my rope.' I think we all get there sometime. And God said, 'Just trust me.' I always go back to that moment. And I know that moment. Facing that opposition, he said, 'I'm all in, even more now.'

You've got to have a higher power than just your own strength when doors are shutting. I've seeing it with Reverend Barber. A number of communities have closed their doors and said, 'Well I'm not, I'm not going that way. I don't know what you're doing. You're not a Christian. You're not this. You're not that.' So, how do you really push forward? Sometimes you go back to your own dreams. But then, you'd better go back to what God has already shown you.

I go back to one Scripture: 'I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise will always in my mouth.' And because of that commitment, sometimes we have to find blessing in the storm. No matter how ugly it looks, how can I still bless God in it all and through it all. Even when there's dark days, I can still say, 'God I thank you.' You might not be able to see it right then, but we are able to say, 'Well I know something's better on the horizon.' I always try to say, 'God I know you're going out.' And sometimes it might not come

right then, but it will come shortly after. During hard times, I just try to say, 'Ok God, I don't know how you're going to work this out. I don't know how things are going to reveal itself, but I'm going to trust you. I'm going to trust you.'

Thinking about the Trump Presidency, I tell you, my grandmother on my dad's side, she would say the one thing that a lot of seasoned black folk in the 60's used to say, 'This too shall pass. This too shall pass.' And for a while, I remember telling her, 'I don't know what that means sometimes. I don't know.' But now I have grown to learn that what that means is that whatever is going to happen right now, we're going to see it. But this too shall pass. It's going to go on. But it's going to pass on. And then you look back, we made it into the Obama time. But you know, but that's not it. That's not final. There's a whole lot more we have to do. The Black churches I have been in have been always separate from what was happening and still be able to go into the margins.

Yeah, that's right. We walk by faith and not by sight. So sometimes the sight can blind us and blur our vision to really what God is calling us to do. And the more that opposition is coming against you, the more that you know you're on the right path. In the Bible, it says you're going to have tribulation. Things are going to come. And then we're not supposed to say, 'Oh I'm scared' and shrink back. We're supposed to press ahead.

So, what is the next step? How can you get involved**?** How do you apply your passion and love for justice to move forward? Number one is to study and listen to his Word and listen to God. Quite often we can say, 'Well I believe God is leading me here,' and just go and do it without pausing to listen to Him. You know, we can go off track sometimes. We need to listen to God, to be able to be concerned and open your eyes to the wider scale of what's outside of culture, outside of race, outside of your own city, or that's outside your own desires in some ways and be concerned about what God is concerned about. It takes work to listen to God and the Holy Spirit. I always tell people to make sure they get with a good mentor to help them in listening to God so you're not just doing it all on your own.

Gospel and social justice

To know the gospel, look at Jesus. Just look at Jesus. Everything that he did was about pointing it back up to God. I believe that's what the gospel is in a nutshell. How can everything I do reflect the kingdom? How can everything be kingdom building? How can it give God glory? How can it honor him? When we read the gospels, we see Jesus moving through communities, moving through people, and moving through challenges. Through all of that, the consistent thing is pointing people back up to God, to have a relationship with Him. That's my most important agenda — that people have true relationship with God. But — you can love Jesus, and do all that, but I think at some point, Jesus is going to call you to march!

Right, He's not going to leave you alone, but at some point, he's going to call you to step out, to push forward and to go into some new areas.

Jesus asks us a simple question, 'Do you believe in me? Do you believe in our God?' That's it. He didn't say, 'Do you go out there to the margins? Do you go out there to do social justice? Do you do all that?' To be a Christian, number one you accept Him. We have to see the kingdom of God in ourselves before we can advance it. But then you do believe in Him. Accepting and believing means that you can believe that He will tell you to move out to those uncomfortable areas, to go into those zones, into those communities and places that people call dark, where unholy people are. You can go into those areas and believe that He'll be there and that He'll meet you. And I think that's honestly where he's at.

What does the kingdom of God look like? Some people say, 'Well, the kingdom of God is where everybody, White, Black, everybody is coming together and fellowshipping. That's a piece of it, for sure. But people can gather for a whole lot of reasons, a whole lot of reasons. And some of those could be wrong reasons as we can see now in the recent election. Everyone together is just a small piece of the kingdom of God. It's a glimpse. I think the kingdom of God is really where God is magnified in all aspects of life. Look at the book of Acts where everybody shared all that they had. God was magnified in all aspects of life. There's two areas to the kingdom of God. There's a 'later.' And some people say, 'We can't never see the kingdom of heaven, because it's all up in there.' You know, the streets of gold and all that. But I believe there's a kingdom of God that's here, 'now', and we have to fight to try to make it happen. The kingdom of God that's 'later' might be beyond our imagination, but God does give us glimpses throughout Scripture. I believe we should try to mirror those glimpses here and now.

And I truly am hopeful, where we are at now. Of course, there's a lot of things that are troubling to see, to hear, and to deal with. But I am very hopeful. God didn't give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of love. I've got to be hopeful.

There is story of hope that I share with congregations who struggle about get involved in social justice. Jesus crosses the waters and as soon as He touched ground, there came a man running out of the tombs. He came running at him out of the tombs! No one can contain this man. He broke the chains that people used to bind him. They tried to forget about him. They pushed him into the tombs and he was left there with nobody around, totally forgotten about and no one wants to deal with him — out of sight, out of mind, in the tombs, in a dark place. But somehow, out in the darkness and the tombs, he saw Jesus coming on the horizon. The Scripture says 'that as soon as Jesus got out of the boat touched his foot on the ground'. That means he saw him in some way or heard about him before he got there. I don't know, but something told him to shoot out of the tomb. Something compelled him to run with urgency. If we say that Jesus is in us, then most people that are incarcerated, our brothers and sisters that are bound, will be able to see Christ in us and come running to us. And Jesus came directly to him. I think that's the message at hand that we can't ever forget. He went over there directly for that brother, for the one that was bound. And, it wasn't just him that was set free. I believe that the disciples who saw were set free in a way. That's one of the messages that I have preached before and will continue to share and expound on —that we can see those that

are bound, we are able to go to them, even if it means crossing waters and dealing with storms, with the possibility of setting them free.

I love to take both sides of this story. You might be the one that is found. Yeah, yeah! Everybody likes to think, 'Well I'm coming to help set this man free.' But you might be the one that is bound and that's goes back to the transformation of my work that I spoke about earlier. You might be the one that is bound.

Identity and emerging legacy

I want to thank you for taking the time to allow me to open up and share some deep things about myself. You know, it has all flowed right into ministry for, being able to talk from the heart when it comes to social justice and to dig deeper on 'why I do what I do.'

I'll tell you a story. When I was wrestling in high school, I was quick and strong. If I couldn't do a finesse move on them, then I would just overpower them in some way. But there were times when I would think 'this is going to be hard and I don't know if I really want to go all out.' One time, I was battling and beating a guy and I let him come back. They ended up declaring him the winner and I just was kind of numb with it. I always look back at it. Later in the hallway me and him talked and he like, 'I know you could have beat me man. You could have won. But I won.' That really hit me. Years later, I always look back at that and I say, 'I should never draw back on certain things when I know that I can give it my all. I should give my all, even if the future may be hard. I always look back at that particular story and think as long as I give my all, then I'm ok with it. There might be some regrets where I can say, 'I could have done this better or done that better.' But, at the end of the day, if I tried my all in everything I've done, then I'm ok with it. If the outcome could have turned out a little bit better, but if I give my all, really my all for Christ, then I'm content with that.

I'll tell you another story. Somebody that I have never met from up on Bainbridge Island, Washington —I had to look it up, it's way in the corner right next to Seattle — and I don't know how he saw some of the stuff I was doing — contacted me. He wrote, 'My father was in prison ministry and social justice work for fifty plus years. He died last year in December. I pass his legacy on to you. Continue your prison ministry and everything else. I'm encouraging you because he would be proud of your work.' I was just totally moved by that. I opened up his card to me and at the bottom it said, 'I'm in the world to change the world,'

Yeah, yeah, that just pushed me. I am in the world to change the world. So, when we see all the stuff going on, the injustices, we see we're here for a reason, to help change things. When opposition rises up, we see that we're not just here to look at the world, but to change some things.

So, wherever I can fit in that change, I'm grateful. I don't always need to be the up-front person. People may say, 'Hey, hey, look, he's doing this or that.' But, I don't need all that. If there's a movement going, I want to assist wherever I can. Even if it's handing

out papers, that's a blessing to me. I never need to get acknowledged or have my name up there. I love just being behind the scenes and helping where I can because I see the work is so important.

And when people come together, it can make a stronger impact than just one person working. Rev. Barber is showing us this truth. He is moving, doing things, and calling people saying, 'Come together. It's time.' It is time.

PART III: INTERPRETATIONS

CHAPTER 13: WRITING LIVES AND WRITING A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Another Cold Saturday — The Movement Grows

February 11, 2017 was another cold day in Raleigh for the annual HKonJ event, not the bitter cold of 2016 that shortened the pre-march rally to get the estimated 15,000 demonstrators marching and away from convening point at the grand colonnade of Raleigh's Memorial Auditorium blocking the morning sun during that notable arctic blast. But, on this day, the wind is whipping and gusting and once again requiring the gathered crowd to dress in many layers and move constantly to stay warm. When a cowboy hatted and heavily bundled Pierce Mullins stepped onto the stage to kick-off yet another pre-march rally, one could instantly sense that this day would stand out among the decade of HKonJ marches that preceded it — for many reasons. Already the crowd had already visibly swelled far beyond that of previous marches. It would be later estimated that over 70,000 had gathered. It was entirely unclear whether the march had ever truly ended. When Rev. Barber completed his sermonic oration as the final speaker of a lengthy program at the march's destination on Fayetteville St. at the State Capitol, the crowd seemed to be still moving forward (field notes). Just weeks earlier, President Donald J. Trump had been sworn in as the 45th President of the United States. Conversations about an already controversial and tumultuous presidency dominated the early waiting; expectedly, many of the speakers spoke strong words of defiance to an administration clearly committed to a nativist, nationalist, racist, regressive agenda (field notes). Mullins opened with a Eucharist-themed anthem from his recently released album that portrayed a hopeful, inclusive, celebratory communion that joyfully transgressed every human difference. Drumming emphatically a

rhythm indigenous to East Africa, his voice echoed across the plaza invoking us to "drink deeply when the wine is poured, pass around the drinking gourd" and then "may your spirit be restored (field notes)."

It seemed clear that the spirits of the now tens of thousands that engaged this inertial movement desperately needed to be restored. The momentum of a compelling theo-political movement of protest and resistance was spilling into a dramatically new and perceived to be desperate political moment. On this day, the might of that movement would be indomitably displayed.

Writing Lives: Nine Paths to Activist Identities

Before considering the impact of the movement on the identities of these interlocutors, I want to consider the range and diversity of the stories told in this project. Simple summaries are inherently reductive. Nevertheless, even brief summations provide a meaningful glimpse into the divergent paths these individuals have taken toward activism.

Cameron Jennings: "God has something to say about the way people live in this world"

Currently an Old Testament professor in a White mainline seminary, Cameron's story is first and foremost that of a biblical exegetical scholar. He is perpetually confronted by the biblical text and conceptualizes his activism in the frame of biblical revelation. Cameron assiduously believes that God has spoken in the text with an unassailable word about a just society. Racially and religiously, he identifies as a Black man with childhood roots in a traditional Black church tradition (National Baptist). But he has formative educational experiences in the peace church (Quakers), significant training in a White evangelical campus ministry (Campus Crusade for Christ, though located at an HBCU), scholarly training in Black liberation theology in the divinity school of an HBCU, and learned Black critical theology while

completing his doctorate in a leading post-liberal institution. His journey traces through the streets of a gang-laden and impoverished community in the northeast, a city he calls the "worst…in the nation." As a Black man, he has taken great pride in being one of very few in his neighborhood who hasn't faced incarceration. Hence, he describes his arrest in the early days of Moral Mondays vividly, dramatically, and with great emotion. He is aware of his position. With a relationship to Rev. Barber that preceded the movement, he has served as a de facto "scholar in residence" in the "FT"MM from its onset. Significantly, with the intensity of his arrest and the expansive pastoral network of the movement as a site for theological education on biblical concepts of justice, the movement has provided him with a crucible of entry into a perceived and lived identity as a justice activist, an identity that he had never considered until this point in his life.

Gene Chitwood: "How do you pay that back?"

Gene is a White man from a small town in the Midwest. Raised in the Methodist church, as a high schooler he was drawn to theological voices like Reinhold Niebuhr and Martin Buber, who were significant contributors to the liberal mainline church in the 20th century. Deeply involved socially and as a leader in liberal, non-creedal churches for most of his academic and retirement life, he now resides as "an outsider" in the church claiming a secular, "ethical Christianity" and admittedly doesn't "believe in the magic." The painful circumstances of illness, neglect, and abuse in Gene's childhood were met with many dramatic interventions by educators, coaches, and mentors. After a lengthy and successful career in academics teaching Marxism and critical theories as a sociology professor, in retirement Gene was poised with both the opportunity and motivation to pay back those kindnesses that came at "every cut point" of his vulnerable life. An activist life primarily now expressed as a tutor, caretaker, and mentor to vulnerable, "undocumented" children comes as a complete surprise to Gene. The "FT"MM, and

particularly the opportunity to be arrested and serve as a signature test case for trial in the movement's civil disobedience campaign, offered to Gene a unique space of opportunity to inhabit the activist space that he (and his wife) were intentionally seeking and a locality where he, like so many others in this project, was able to re-author his identity.

Micah Turner: "Learning to read"

Unlike Gene and to some degree Cameron, Micah did not construct an identity of an activist in the "FT"MM. He has been involved in a local chapter of the IAF doing a more locality and issue-based form of power organizing (and hence holds some reservations of social movement style organizing) for well over a decade. In fact, Micah is one of several interlocutors in the study that balances a deep appreciation of the "FT"MM with some substantive critiques. He grew up the son of a successful Southern Baptist pastor who was forced to confront the segregationist impulses of key congregational leaders during the Civil Rights Movement era in the 60s. Later in life as a PhD student in the South, he encounters the same segregationist racism in his church and his painful negotiations for racial reconciliation become a dramatic provocation in his journey to lead a life fighting White supremacy. Micah is a White man who does not claim in any way to be Black, but his journey of racial awareness echoes Cross' (2001) work on Nigrescence that theorizes a progressive identity development of racial awareness that ultimately results in an internalization-commitment to form of politicized Blackness (Price, 2009). In alignment with this identity of critical Whiteness and political Blackness, Micah serves as an associate pastor in a historically Black church and teaches theology at the divinity school of an HBCU. He has been a regular presence at "FT"MM events as a clergy representative, school representative, speaker on the main stage, and theological consultant in a political dialogue with the then Attorney General of NC. True to his vocation as a theological ethicist, Micah's primary resonance with the movement is its rich theo-political framework and its successes in the legal

system. Micah's names his own path to racial justice activism as a "learning to read," a hermeneutical transformation of reading the biblical text while in a Black congregation and an HBCU. In this manner, Micah and Cameron have much in common. As a pastor, he sees the "FT"MM's strong possibility to activate congregations in justice work but wonders if the movement is organizing effectively on the ground in congregations.

Bishop Suzan Robinson: "Multiple worlds was my normal"

The daughter and granddaughter of two remarkable women, Bishop Robinson's personal agency as a Black woman, denominational leader, pastor, and executive director of a civil rights and justice non-profit in her city is contested and authored in powerful heritage experiences in her childhood and moments of crisis during her undergraduate days in an elite, primarily White university in the South. In resonance with many of the other interlocutors and literature on activist identities (Warren, 2010), these key moments of crisis are significant in her activist identity formation. Told vividly in her coming out story and her call to ministry as a queer black woman, Bishop Robinson's positionality is essential to her activism and her embrace of both call and queerness is narrated as a faithful and jubilant response to the speech/revelation of God. God speaks to her that she was a beautiful act of intentional creation and as such will be used in the emancipatory work of God. Foremost in these stories, Bishop Robinson tells a theocentric story of responding to God. Her Blackness his central to this story. Like so many of the nine, her faith community commitments change significantly from a traditional, patriarchal Black denomination to now serving as a pastor and a bishop in a denomination formed for especially gay Black people in the wake of the 80s AIDS/HIV pandemic. She names her primary connection to the "FT"MM because of her Blackness and the historical work of the NAACP for Black persons in our society. A theme of politicized Blackness (Cross 2001, Price, 2009) runs throughout her story with now much of her work traversing the wide political spectrum of the

Black church. The "FT"MM, given her well established "street cred" in justice work, provided an opportunity for immediate leadership and a deeply intersectional space of organizing across the politics of race, gender, poverty, and sexual orientation.

Molly McLean: "I can be a little rebellious…because I was just fed up"

Molly is a young White woman in her early 30s raised in a socially, politically, and theologically conservative homeschooling family. She, too, has profound experiences in her childhood that turn her gaze toward a social justice orientation in vocation and faith. The story she tells is partly one of intra-faith conversion; she pushed hard against her fundamentalist heritage and after decade of contention particularly related to her feminist critique against patriarchal evangelicalism has landed as the lay leader in a progressive, activist Christian church. Molly, in the schism of Protestant Christianity that pits the social justice stream of theology and practice against an evangelistic conservative stream, has literally changed teams. She aspired to be a social worker from her teen years and now enthusiastically works as a social worker in an agency that supports and advocates for an economically impoverished population in her city. Unlike several of the other stories that chronicle older leaders with larger public platforms in justice work (Cameron, Micah, Bishop Robinson, Pierce, and Doug) she is a vocational activist worshipping and leading in an activist church and has had a lower profile in the "FT"MM. She is not a theological teacher/strategist (Cameron, Micah, and Bishop Robinson), an arrestee (Cameron, Gene, Nell, Doug, and Pierce), a movement insider/leader (Cameron, Bishop Robinson, Doug, Pierce, and Reggie), or a primary stage speaker/performer (Cameron, Bishop Robinson, Nell, Pierce, and Micah). Instead, Molly has been an attuned observer and an attendee/marcher in several rallies. In other words, she has been in the crowd. Nevertheless, the movement has had a profound impact on her. She has been significantly encouraged in a season of state politics that has driven her to anger. As she said to me referring to our state's majority

party legislators passing a relentless agenda of regressive, racist legislation, "You just call them out on their shit and I love it." She has found hope on a larger scale due to the movement that she compares to the King-era Civil Rights Movement.

Pierce Mullins: "I had these examples in my life"

Pierce grew up in a pastor's home where he witnessed countless examples of hospitality, courageous leadership, and peace work from both of his parents. The nightly dinner table had an abundance of provisions and guests. He follows in the trajectory of so many in the study where a childhood heritage — be it impoverishment, empowerment, activism, or resistance toward activism — must be contended or negotiated with in order to construct an activist identity. In Pierce's case, his heritage is deeply formative to childhood/teen acts of organizing and burgeoning peace work. It is no surprise that he ends up as a key ally to the "FT"MM while working for the NC Council of Churches and becomes an arrestee and regular stage performer. Pierce's vocational life as a prominent musician, mediator, non-profit founder, writer, seminar instructor, peace worker, and organizer is saturated with and dominated by a commitment to justice activism. He does not initially author this identity in the movement. But, similar to Cameron with the telling of his dramatic first arrest which he calls a "full-on arrest — manacles and strip search, take away your wedding ring, orange stripes, and general population," he also finds a crucible opportunity to put his body on the line for his moral vision in the "FT"MM in a manner that further defines, galvanizes, and elevates his identity as a justice activist. Notably, Pierce tells of his first arrest from the perspective of a White man. His awareness of racial positionality and the challenges of racism from that space of privilege punctuates his story and his work. Along the way, Pierce, like Cameron again, encounters key mentors in the peace church (Quakers) and the radical reformation (Mennonites) in his early life formation. But he also retains his affection for and connections to the mainline Presbyterianism of his childhood

along with his current membership in a Friends Meeting (Quakers). Unlike Molly, he doesn't experience an intra-faith conversion. His Christian faith journey might be better named as an intra-faith inclusion. He laughingly now identifies religiously as a "Quaker-terian."

Doug Scandrette: "Think"

Doug not only grew up in a White, conservative, evangelical home in the Upper Midwest, he (very unlike Molly) first embraced this heritage with a creative, missionary gusto. As a teen, he founded and wrote a pre-evangelistic magazine to promote an "intellectually rigorous form of evangelical Christianity" in that era's youthful 'zine culture. His vocational path then led to evangelistic work in an international mission, evangelical campus ministry, and eventually media leadership in what some would consider the revered center of the evangelical movement — the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. By the time he settled into a similar role at a historic evangelical mission with deep colonial roots, he was, in his own terms "kicked out of evangelicalism" largely for his association with a progressive form of emergent Christianity and his vocal identity as LGBTQ ally. His story reflects the previously named intra-faith conversion strongly represented in Molly's story (who also landed in a congregation associated with the emergent movement) and echoes a shift in tradition within Christianity found in Cameron's, Bishop Robinson's, and Micah's stories. Eventually, Doug becomes the founder of a network that connects missional faith communities. This network, MissioFORM, experiences a transition in vision that parallels a portion of Doug's story; it begins with the goal of connecting creative communities in this emergent, progressive Christianity and ultimately shifts its focus decidedly toward justice organizing across denominational traditions. This change of vision brings Doug squarely into the arms of the "FT"MM and a collaborative friendship with Rev. Barber. In addition to becoming a supporter and an arrestee, Doug becomes an active broker between two social movements, an increasingly activist emergent Christianity

and the “FT”MM. And indeed, in the months after our interviews concluded, Doug was hired by the “FT”MM as a network builder and operational director.

Nell Baldwin: “Love is action. Love is relationship.”

Nell, an early 30s, white, queer-identified educator teaching in a predominantly and historically Black high school, jested accurately that her “thirty second story” is that she “went from identifying as a Republican to the left of democrat socialist in about two years” during the onset of her teaching career. Her transitions in a relatively young life story are enormous by almost any measure: conservative to leftist politics; a married straight wife of a seminarian to an out queer woman still grieving from the loss of a recent partnership; and a highly engaged mainline Christian who found her way into youthful leadership of various evangelical worshipping communities who now holds an extra-biblical, political, ethical faith that presently includes no association to a specific tradition or congregation. Formal faith commitment remains an open question for Nell. It was so often clear to me that Nell was telling me a faith narrative of growth, evolving change, deconstruction, and new development. This story includes both the intra-faith conversions of previous stories and that of a more classical departure from a form of faith — though she remains a woman of faith anchored in a relational and political expression of love inextricably connected to the “fucking awesome kids” she is privileged to teach. Gene’s secular faith and Doug’s progressive Christianity offer parallels to Nell, but they both remain practitioners as a lay leader and a pastor respectively in liberal denominations. Perhaps remarkably, Nell experiences these significant life changes in perspective and practice without a moment of personal crisis (those come later). For her, her moment of challenge comes in the vocational context of being introduced to a high school classroom with students far outside her previous experiences and comfort zone. Her amazing and often marginalized students are the foremost agents in the seismic shift of her life. Using the entrepreneurial leadership and courage

that she honed as an evangelical Christian and her growing relationships with educator activists, Nell finds the "FT"MM at the onset of its dramatic Moral Mondays expression. Both her articulate passion and strategic preparation shapes her role in the movement as an arrestee with a prominent speaking platform, their "White lady teacher." The "FT"MM serves as a remarkably productive space for Nell as she develops her skills of activism and develops a thoroughly practiced identity as a justice activist. Nell had her "Oh, like I'm really doing this now" moment in the movement. She will use those skills, confidence, and awareness in many other settings, particularly in education and local politics. But, there is little doubt the "FT"MM served as an inertial and galvanizing space for her.

Reggie McPherson: "God, your hand is really, really on me"

Reggie, a young Black man and pastor in a Black church, builds an activist identity focused on racial justice deep within the embrace of the Black church. His life trajectory begins in a community torn by gang violence on the West coast. His mother and stepfather moved the family to the Southeast to flee these threats. A successful high school athlete, Reggie begins his vocational adult life in the Air Force where he continues a life shaped significantly by athletics. In all of these settings, Reggie experiences a pervasive racism ranging from subtle micro-aggressions to overt actions. Stationed in NC after a deployment in Afghanistan and Kuwait, a church-seeking Reggie wanders into Greenleaf Christian Church pastored by Rev. Barber. There he is mentored personally by Rev. Barber, trained, and exposed to a wide-ranging faith-based activist agenda that includes support to workers, criminal justice reform, and campaigns to end violence. Most importantly, Reggie begins to be pastorally nurtured in a biblical, theological, historical logic that connects the structural racism and inequity of our society with a powerful preaching of the kingdom of God sourced in the biblical ministry of Jesus. Describing his church background as a present but marginal actor in his childhood and youth, the genesis of

Reggie's faith journey and ministry is in the prophetic, evangelical (a term that Rev. Barber consistently claims – field notes), activist Black church tradition that is the present ministry home of Bishop Robinson and Micah.

Comparatively, he did not experience the intra-faith and extra-Christian conversions present in Nell's, Molly's, Doug's, and Micah's stories. In contrast, Reggie's social ministry was formed as a lay leader and armor bearer in the denomination that ultimately ordained him — hence no change of tradition whatsoever. Most notably, Reggie's transition from ministry at Greenleaf to the "FT"MM is nearly seamless. Certainly, Rev. Barber is an unmistakable point of continuity. Nevertheless, Rev. Barber suggests quite naturally that they needed to take their local ministry agenda to Raleigh, the state capital, to speak and march. One can make an argument that church and the "FT"MM are nearly the same for Reggie with their only difference being in scale and locality. He certainly sees his current role as a pastor as constantly reporting his work outside the walls of his local church back to that local church so that they can continue their joy in this work. Reggie knows they are listening because he knows that he is listening. His story of activism is a story of listening to the words of God in text, sermon, and guidance. He believes he is led.

Collecting the Stories Thematically

These nine activist lives, these nine distinct trajectories of identity construction toward lives of justice work, have numerous commonalities and several contradictions. This exercise of compressed summary reveals some of those thematic commonalities.

Contesting heritage

It is clear that heritages matter greatly. This includes familial heritages (including the immediate and extended family defined generously); the wider social relations of community; specific social contexts such as neighborhood and schools; and social milieus or moments in

extended time that ensconce these experiences of heritage (like the "Civil Rights Era" for Bishop Robinson and Micah or the gathering steam of the "Moral Majority" and Christian right for Molly). Acknowledging the common significance of heritage, the narrations diverge dramatically from that point. Molly and Nell push adamantly against familial norms and commitments to faith. Molly rejects a fundamentalist faith that marginalizes social justice under the banner of evangelism and Nell supplants her parents' tepid faith first with evangelical fervor and ultimately with a radical politic that challenges the heteronormativity of her origins. Bishop Robinson, Pierce, Micah, and Cameron all find powerfully resonant examples of identity, agency, and expressions of activism in this widely-defined heritage space. They learn that they can act and also are given some moral contexts for that action. Heritage can also mean powerful obstacles to growth, agency, and simply the safety of a continued life. These obstacles are most clearly present in the lives of Reggie, Gene, and Cameron which included many threats to their safety. Bishop Robinson also faces institutional racism constantly and specifically in her education. In almost every story, interventions from educators, mentors, pastors, and those outside of formal family relationships matter in their journey to social activism.

Moral shocks and "moral outrage"

Warren (2010) illustrated the importance of moral shocks, crises, and racial disruptions as often early steps in forming degrees of an initial moral shock and outrage among White persons who become committed to racial justice activism. Daloz (1996) noted that single moments may not entirely change one's life trajectory, but that they do become a part of memory, a resource and element of a whole life structure pointed toward social engagement. In my diverse sample including multiple racial and sexual orientation positionalities, one also sees the marks of these dramatic moments in many of the same categories that Warren's (2010) study notes including early life formative experiences (Gene), the significance that a college education can play in

encouraging a new worldview (Molly) or incubating significant racial/moral shocks (Bishop Robinson), the impact of international travel (Molly), and the possibility that these dramatic encounters can happen in life stages beyond late adolescence or emerging adulthood (Micah, Doug). Nell may represent a nuanced, yet highly significant category for future research, that of a vocational shock that may be very common and salient for persons in helping professions. I will add more texture to the shocks of teaching in a historically Black high school for Nell in a subsequent paragraph on conversions. Recalling Warren's (2010) conclusions, these "seminal experiences" (p. 52) that can occur before or even during a commitment to activism do not forge that commitment. The moral impulse from these "triggering events" (p.53) must be fashioned into a greater moral vision lest those who experience these shocks remain in the posture of altruism rather than constructing an activist identity. I concur with Warren (2010) on this point. Returning to the narratives, none of these interlocutors name a moment, dramatic or otherwise, when they became an activist though these types of fulcrum moments (cf. the arrest narratives for several) abound in their stories. I will turn to the concept of moral vision more directly in the discussion of the "FT"MM.

Race, outrage, and communities of support

An examination of dramatic moments is very helpful in unearthing some aspects of the racial narratives that run through these stories. The three Black interlocutors, unsurprisingly given the deep social entrenchment of structural racism in our society, tell somewhat divergent narratives in their journeys to activist identities. The differences of their stories will appear throughout my interpretive analysis. But, in the context of a discussion on moral shocks, I suggest that the concept of moral outrage needs an expansive definition.

Cameron and Reggie both grew up in impoverished, dangerous, and under resourced communities. Though this is not necessarily the case with Bishop Robinson, all three are

intimately aware of structural racism. They are born into communities that are misshapen by the mass incarceration of persons of color and inequities in policing. The restrictive, oppressive, hegemonic regime of Whiteness surrounds them like the dead presidents that watched over Bishop Robinson's search for solace in her tumultuous fostering in the belly of an elite White university. The microaggressions (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2001) they report are not surprises to them. The evangelical ministry that Cameron considers joining is ignorant of the hypocrisy of their logic of investment policy based on personal moralities with its accompanying investments in South Africa during apartheid. Reggie experiences perpetual racism in his southern life context and in the military. Bishop Robinson's first year counselor suggests that she consider a transfer to an HBCU rather than resiliently engaging her academic struggles at Southeastern. Their lives in a historically entrenched and seemingly invulnerable racial world necessitates a perpetual moral outrage as a state of being.

This observation aligns with the enduring struggles that Holland and Lave (2001) named as a critical component of a history-in-person which can result in durable, intimate identities. I will argue that all three of these persons have been highly agentic in their path toward meaningful activism, authoring agentic identities by answering to the challenges of the life-and-death struggles of racism, poverty, and dehumanization. Nevertheless, in their three stories, the role of mentoring communities (also a mentoring family in the case of Bishop Robinson) and communities of support are highly significant in the journey toward activism. Though this support is not limited to the ecclesial realm, the strength of and confidence in the Black church looms large here. Reggie's story, in many ways an outlier to my sample, is the most obvious in this regard. He is found, recruited, and trained in the vision of a prophetic, activist Black church. It is a source of strength that he does not question. Cameron receives new vision in the

Thurgood Marshall Divinity School where he encounters liberation theology in the Black tradition and then works to network black churches. Bishop Robinson first finds this support in the International Black Traders & Entrepreneurs Association. Then, in the escalating HIV/AIDS crisis on the West Coast, she embraces an emerging Black denomination that embraces her sexual orientation and passion for social change.

In the following section on the "FT"MM, I will make the same assertion about the importance of teaching and supporting spaces for my White interlocutors. But, they narrate much of their stories quite differently with many more references to individual encounters and choices of will leaving their stories to echo as more agentic. The Quakers and the mediation community have a profound impact on Pierce. But in telling his story, he emphasizes his making a connection to these groups by seeing their potential value and intentionally seeking them out. Gene is perhaps the strongest example of this point. He is personally determined to pay back others in the manner that specific individuals stepped into the "cut points" of his life. Molly tells a powerful story of personal determination. She pushes back relentlessly against the fundamentalist homeschooling community and evangelical social structures. Doug describes some of the same resistance, in his case against some the most historic organizational edifices of evangelicalism. But, throughout, he crafts an engaging and admirable story of personal entrepreneurialism. He is certainly as likely to found a new organization or revitalize an existing organization as to find a source of support. Nell is a woman of remarkable strength. There is little doubt that the local political and educational activist communities she encounters first via personal relationships are deeply formative to her as she is contesting a new identity. But her storyline is filled with the spirit of a fighter and a generous entrepreneur throughout. Those final three stories are perpetually marked by themes of resistance.

Micah's racially hybrid journey from White spaces to ministry in a Black church and teaching in a HBCU affirms this point on racial identity and perceptions of agency. In the White portion of his story, he describes a family that is a powerful support in moral identity formation and a ministry calling. But race in particular is barely discussed; he only learns of his dad's courage long after he has committed to a life of racial justice activism. After an experience of moral outrage in his reconciliation work at Hometown Baptist, he is invited into the Black church first as recipient of a gracious hospitality that binds his wounds and then as a leader. Critical to this story is his evolution from a White identity to a politicized Blackness (Cross, 2001; Helms, 1990; Price, 2009) where he can respectfully claim to be "the only Black person in the room" at an academic conference. His story not only affirms the breadth and might of the Black church as a support to activism, a close read of his narration reveals a demonstrable shift from stories of personal agency to descriptions of agency as a result of the thick support he receives from a local Black church and the Black church collectively. This shift not only offers perspective of the racial differences in these life narratives, it also sets the stage for understanding the culturally productive nature of the "FT"MM.

Making sense of conversion

In a major work on religious conversion, Rambo (1993) rejected reductive definitions of conversions such as mystical descriptions that nullify the importance of lengthy transitions and social practice in conversion. Rambo (1993) intentionally chose a descriptor of "process" over "event" because "contrary to popular mythology, conversion is very rarely an overnight, all-in-an-instant, wholesale transformation that is now and forever" (p. 1). My previous comparison of the individual stories reflects Rambo's (1993) expansion of the definition of religious conversion with rich examples of often gradual change over significant time periods. These examples include intra-faith conversions from one Christian tradition to another, extra-faith conversions to

a new religious or ethical traditions (which from a Christian apologist perspective might be named as "losing faith" in Gene's and Nell's stories), or an intra-faith inclusion of adding a tradition to a remaining faith commitment or association (Pierce's Quaker-terianism). The previous paragraph on Micah adds even greater complexity to the forms of conversion present in this study with his narration of a transition in racial identity. Though not stated as overtly, I believe that Nell exhibits some of this same type of conversion in her fierce familial connection with her students that puts her in a "protective mama mode" in the wake of the regressive politics of the state in regards to education and the impact of "the white supremacist system on [her] kids." This form of conversion to such a strong familial identity with her students is possibly enhanced by her own shift in sexual identity which occurs during this same time frame.

All of these examples of conversion are fascinating and I suspect highly explanatory in the journey of persons in the Christian tradition toward identities of justice activism. In the scope and questions of this study, I want to bring clear attention to the practiced nature of these conversions. These transitions, all I would assert to be quite profound, are not something *done to* each interlocutor in the classic "Damascus Road experience"[22] of biblical Christianity. I would also carefully nuance Bishop Robinson story's, which most approximates the Damascus Road as a highly mystical experience, yet is still personally agentic. In coming out and straining against a patriarchal denomination, she describes a clear discernment of the approval of God in sexual orientation and calling to ministry. This conversion of direction and identity is not passive. Her

[22] In the biblical tradition recorded in Acts 9:1-19, Saul, a violent and murderous defender of traditional Judaism against an insurgent Christianity hence accumulating ardent followers within Judaism, travels on the road to Damascus to persecute devotees of this heretical faith and encounters the Christ in a state of post-resurrection glory. So intense is the encounter that he is temporarily blinded. His conversion is powerful, mystical, and irresistible. And so great is his turning that he becomes the new faith's greatest evangelist and becomes the missionary to the Gentiles who up to that point were deemed unworthy of faith. This moment of change has been inscribed as the model of conversion within biblical Christianity and serves as foundational pattern for the revivalist stream of Christianity.

prayer, even in that dramatic moment, is an agentic act of answering to experiences in her social world and authoring of an intimate identity. It is also grounded in an unshakable defiance to remain as a "sacrificial lamb" in the face of the dissonance she feels in the patriarchy and heteronormativity of her denomination. In other examples, one sees agency in Pierce's pursuit of connections with the Quakers and a peace education, Molly's determined questioning, Micah's lament and his acceptance to embrace the invitation of an entirely different ecclesial tradition, and Gene's determination to payback the many moments of grace in the early struggles of his life among many other possible examples.

The conversions in these lives are not only agentic, they are deeply enmeshed in social spaces. Rambo (1993) explained that religious conversion is "contextual and…influenced by a matrix of relationships, expectations, and situations" (p. 5). Recalling Holland and Lave's (2001) exposition of history-in-person, they strongly affirmed that historical struggles, such as those named by these interlocutors, are mediated into intimate identities in local spaces of practice. Ultimately agency is grounded in the dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981), improvisation (Bourdieu, 1977a; Bourdieu, 1977b) contestation, self-authoring, and world-making that occurs in these complex and productive spaces (Holland et al., 1998). Context is clearly significant in the stories of these interlocutors. Perhaps there is no more dramatic example than the significance of the classroom space and Nell's relationship with her awesome kids in her development of a highly-practiced activist identity and the religious shifts that accompanied this change. Doug's and Molly's present activism was strongly related to the shift in faith locations from highly conservative congregations and Christian social movements to progressive faith communities. Musical performance, media, mediation, peace education, and ecumenical communities (the NC Council of Churches) are all culturally significant in Pierce's activism.

Academic spaces like Thurgood Marshall Divinity School shaped by a Black racial lens to liberation theology and critical race theology at Southeastern University are dynamic to the construction of Cameron's practiced theology of social justice and righteousness.

Discerning this significance of local space in the lives of these interlocutors points to a natural pivot in the interpretative analysis of this study, a shift to the collective space held in common for this strategic sample. Though they represent a variety of roles and positionalities, they do share a social movement in common. In the next section, I will describe the "FT"MM as a collective, movement space that is productively significant in each of their identity constructions as justice activists with the goal of accentuating the possible potency of movement spaces in the generation of activist identities.

"Forward Together" — The Stories Collide in a Movement

My presentation of the "FT"MM as a culturally productive space begins in perhaps an unexpected location, with critique. Revealed in several stories, some of these narrators have significant critique about the movement's strategy, organization, and leadership. Highlighting the observed and experienced critiques from these interlocutors who have engaged every level of the movement from rally/march participation to the highest levels of strategic leadership offers a contrast that provides even greater authenticity to their narrated impact of the movement on their formation of activist identities and activist agency.

"If I think about the moral movement, it's in its infancy" — honest critique

This quote comes from the observations of Bishop Robinson, the executive director of a partnered organization and a movement strategist "invited into the…upper circle." She acknowledges the "brilliant" Rev. Barber "takes up a lot of space," a critique that has been voiced by the leaders of other partner organizations on several occasions (field notes). She

understands there is much mobilization and organizational work needed before the movement becomes truly durable over time.

Micah, to a great extent, and Cameron, to a lesser extent, have been trained in an entirely different community organizing logic and strategy. The IAF school of organizing founded in the work of Saul Alinsky generally eschews social movement style organizing for a focus on organizing power at the local, institutional level for specific winnable issues (Alinsky, 1972; Chambers, 2013). In the highly relational, IAF style of organizing that demands careful analyses of power so that action provokes meaningful reaction, the demonstrations and arrests so common to the "FT"MM outside the golden, *closed* doors of NC's General Assembly symbolically and literally challenge the efficacy of the movement. The pageantry and civil disobedience of the "FT"MM is unapologetically and somewhat derisively named as "activity" and contrasted with meaningful organizing in IAF training (field notes). Cameron was trained on "the 30,000 foot level" by Arnie Graf, a legend in the IAF, and Micah currently serves as a key leader in CHANGE, a local IAF organizing community. Micah, asked by his dean to evaluate the movement theologically and for its organizing potential, expressed concern about the singularity of the movement's leadership and at times the absence of the organizing staple of developing leaders at multiple level (another IAF staple):

> You do have some very strong localized leaders. But then you have some others; they're good at standing behind the speaker. I'm not sure they're doing any local organizing. It's more of a patronage system. Tributaries or whatever. And I think they have people who are in charge of organizing or whatever. But if that's their job, I don't see it happening.

As strong evidence of this critique, Micah, a theologian who teaches extensively in a similar theological frame of the movement and a highly-trained organizer with almost decades of experience who has spoken on the main stage of major events and worked as a theologian on a

key movement project, describes a phenomenon of perpetually reintroducing himself to key leaders in the movement. I had a common observation and experience as a pastor-ethnographer with lengthy experience in organizing and leadership of social movements.

Continuing the concern about a singularity of leadership regarding the large presence and unchallenged vision of Rev. Barber, both Cameron and Nell encountered some resistance and chagrin from Rev. Barber when they went off the movement script by arranging auxiliary dialogues with NC legislators. Nell noted that "there needs to be more democracy" and that "It's not the kind of setting for initiative-taking." She also notes that the "FT"MM is very "hierarchical" with a very limited group of decision-makers. As she put it succinctly, "I think they are generally uninterested in being swayed by other people's ways of doing it." Interesting, and not surprisingly given their experiences in conservative Christianity, both Nell and Molly expressed affirmation and concern about the religiosity and biblicism in the movement. Nell was moved by the spirit of the movement but also has wearied of it to the tune of being "irked." The combination of "faith and politics is a hard jump" for Molly. With her social work training that is sensitive to the privileging of Christianity as a societal norm, she is "uncomfortable" at times with the religiosity. On the day of one of our interviews, she exclaimed, "Even today, I saw something — Reverend Barber posted something on Facebook and I was like, 'Man, there's a lot of Bible verses in that.'" Molly, an avowed feminist, was also very quick to note a masculinity of the movement with its iconic male leader. She quipped that "he has great things to say. But it would be great if he were a woman!"

These astute critiques notwithstanding, every narrator expressed great value and a unmistakable social significance of the movement and testified about profound personal impacts at the personal for each of them. Nell, who had some of the strongest challenges in terms of the

religiosity, organization, and leadership of "FT"MM, concluded absolutely with "one hundred percent" clarity that she doesn't have an "interest in actually trying to move that organization or like engage in their form of organizing because I don't think that's how organizing should work." Nevertheless, she added, "I say this with all respect, I think they're the most effective thing happening in North Carolina." With that affirmation, I want to move to an exploration on the movement, with these challenges still in mind, to detail its significance in forming activist identities. As a first step to responding interpretatively to the whole movement, I want to first focus on its impact on the activism of these individuals.

Testimonies

My nine interlocutors all testify to significant and formative experiences in the "FT"MM. This is dramatically true for Reggie. His life as a Christian and as an activist has been formed in the logic and vision of the movement. Beginning his active faith in Rev. Barber's church, he was recruited and trained first as an armor bearer and then as a leader. He has been one of the individuals riding with, driving, and standing behind Rev. Barber on too many occasions to count and clearly benefits from the patronage systems that Micah critiques in terms of its organizing development. Reggie serves on the board for Repairers of the Breach and is a source of support behind the scenes. In a clear sense, the "FT"MM is a dominant author of his activist script. In this sense, he stands as unique among the narrators for this study.

Cameron also made his entry into the movement through a personal relationship with Rev. Barber. A biblical scholar in a seminary setting, the movement offers many opportunities to network pastors and to teach its leaders from his biblical understanding of social justice. Arrested with 29 others on the second Moral Monday gathering, the movement's strategy of civil disobedience produces a dramatic moment in Cameron's activist identity construction. The "affront" of being arrested, although charges were ultimately dropped, resulted in his being

marked in the system. As he says, “It changed much about the way I thought about myself.” Being “a piece of someone else’s property” and “no longer in control” of himself, the “notion of slavery cre[pt] in that moment.” With an incarcerated younger brother and great pride of being one of very few who had not been ever jailed from the neighborhood of his childhood, Cameron’s sense of identity is radically altered in the movement space.

In retirement, Gene was actively seeking an opportunity to give back what he had been given through the intervention others. The “FT”MM provided that opportunity. His arrest was also a significant moment not only in his identity work, but also in the movement’s understanding of the legality of its civil disobedience campaign.

For Molly, the movement represents hope. She says, “I love Moral Mondays. They give me hope for people in this state, which seems so backwards a lot of the time, especially in a political realm.” Recall her gleeful response to me as a representative of the leaders and clergy in the movement, “You just call them out on their shit and I love it!”

Micah, another theologian, is drawn to the “rich theological frame” of the movement. His activist identity is well honed before his engagement with the “FT”MM as a rally attender, speaker, and author of some its theological rationales of action. The movement represents to him a form of advocacy that can be meaningful in engaging Christian congregations who have been historically resistant to justice work. He is both intrigued by the high volume of participation in large “FT”MM rallies and skeptical about the depth of that participation.

Pierce has worked to develop a deep understanding of peace work and justice and is working for peace and justice in a statewide ecumenical role before he connects with Rev. Barber. But, similar to Gene and Cameron, his “full-on” arrest, even before Moral Mondays

began, is a powerful and galvanizing moment that demonstrates the productive power of the "FT"MM. In that moment, he learns about and experiences "solidarity" as never before.

Doug, another arrestee and an eventual employed leader for Repairers of the Breach, has been on a long journey from evangelical evangelistic fervor to understanding the gospel as a vision of justice. When opportunity finally allows him to participate more fully in the movement, he is drawn to the moral and theological logic that is preached so powerfully by Rev. Barber. The movement in its totality and Rev. Barber in the singularity of his giftedness recall the power and the hope of the Civil Rights Movement to him.

Bishop Robinson is a preacher of renown in her own regard. As a leader of a civil rights and justice organization, she enters the movement as a partner and leader at the highest levels. In the "FT"MM, she finds a durable and potent intersectionality that engages her Blackness and her queerness. A sense of oneness traversing issues that have always been targets as political wedges in the South motivates her to lead and strategize with Rev. Barber.

Every conversation I had with Nell revealed her courage, skills, and entrepreneurial creativity as a leader. As her passion for justice is stoked by the inequities that she readily sees in the classroom, many would call her a "natural born activist." Nevertheless, the movement plays and essential role in her development. It provides her with an platform and meaningful preparation to help her envision taking the next steps of activist leadership. Her well planned arrest in the early days of Moral Mondays is a springboard to what comes next in her ardor and leadership for justice.

Each of these activists and leaders testifies to a significantly formative experience in the "FT"MM. The reasons and experiences differ widely, but the formative power of the movement is a constant in each story. In the final portion of this chapter, I want to open further the black

box of the movement itself to examine the generativity of the movement in regards to encouraging, developing, and furthering activist identities. In this turn to the "FT"MM directly, I will begin with a section of the generative agitation of the movement, specific and strategic characteristics of its demographics and discourse that prompts or agitates individuals to construct activist identities. I will then focus on its grasp of the historical, political moment in our nation and particularly in NC as an impetus toward the formation of a revolutionary community. Thirdly, I will address one of the most powerful aspects of the movement, its evocative reality as an imaginative (and theatrical) space that calls for rich practices of activism from those who are authoring identities within this imaginary. And finally, I will examine the historical-theoretical frame of ethnogenesis (Price, 2009) to gently propose that the "FT"MM is actually forming a new people in our theo-political landscape.

The "FT"MM as invitational agitation

The term "agitation" is actually a linguistic co-optation from the power-issue school of organizing pioneered in the U.S. by the IAF and led by Micah in this study. In this stream of organizing, power is applied to individuals or groups to agitate or provoke a reaction. The ability to agitate to the point of reaction is a baseline definition of power (Alinsky, 1972; Chambers, 2013; fieldnotes). Following this definition, there are clear and generative agitations within the "FT"MM. Molly succinctly declared her positive agitation by the movement: She's fired up and hopeful. Much of these four sections on characteristics of the movement will add greater detail on how individuals and groups are agitated, not just political opponents but also those in the movement being called, hailed, or beckoned to activism such that they answer in form of dialogistic self-authoring (Bahktin, 1981, Holland et al., 1998) or identification, the process of belonging or taking on a subject position that determines inclusion in a community (Hall, 1996;

Urrieta, in press). But, there are two aspects of the "FT"MM that I want to emphasize because they are persistently named as generative agitational and highly invitations to action by these narrators: the movement's intersectionality and its deployment of theological-moral arguments as its primary discourse and political logic.

Intersectionality

During the season of protest and intense national exposure/pressure on NC due to the legislature's passage of House Bill 2 (Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act) that, among other provisions, infamously limited public bathroom use to the gendered facility that corresponded to the "biological sex" listed on one's birth certificate.[23] As noted in Chapter 3, HB2 was judged by "FT"MM leaders as another installment of the southern political playbook that had historically wedged poor Whites from poor Blacks despite their common interests by stoking fires of racial prejudice. As several movement leaders noted in protest planning and strategy conversations, "This time they're niggerizing the transgender and gay community" (field notes). Historically LGBTQ rights has been a tremendously divisive issue in especially Black churches and hence a threat to the solidarity of the democratic coalition opposing the Republican dominated state. Bishop Robinson diagnosed this in her colorful idiom:

> When you read past gay and trans, when you get past that first layer, underneath is all the garbage, all the real garbage, all the stank is right under there. This is bad. This is smelly. When you link that in with all the other stuff, that's just stanky. That's what we have to fight… we got to see the same characters every single time, the same players were down there just tossing the stank up and that was another bridge building moment. The same people who are coming for the gays are coming for the poor, are coming for unions, are coming for education, are coming for healthcare; it's the same players.

True to form, the "FT"MM was unyielding in its position to reject all compromises on HB2. Only a full repeal would be accepted (field notes).

[23] See Chapter 3 for more details on the breadth of the legislation, national reactions to the bill, and a timeline of its passage and partial repeal.

Bishop Robinson constantly brought a strong contingent of transgender youth from the LGBTQ civil rights organization she leads to the planning meetings for the major HB2 protest gathering and movement anniversary that was described in the first chapter. As an identified Black queer female preacher, a personal embodiment of the intersectionality of the movement, she gave a resounding affirmation to the agitational power of this diversity:

> Our work with the NAACP is historic in its context because this is the first time, particularly in people of color-lead organizations, where you basically have 2 people-of-color led entities, the Civil Rights and Justice Center and the NAACP saying, we are one…We said, what if we just tear that wall down and then all issues now are LGBTQ issues and the LGBTQ community is saying that all their issues impact people of color and poverty… There is no longer 'this' and 'that.' There is only us… The very act of being together is revolutionary.

This unusual unity is highly prevocational, opening new avenues and partnerships in the work of justice. And it is highly noticed by a state of potential actors. Gene was one of the potential activists who noticed. The integrity of Rev. Barber cleared his finely honed-in-the-academy "bullshit antennae." But even more, it was "his idea of fusion politics, of building alliances with those that normally don't connect" that he is "just totally for." Cameron, already a trusted ally of Rev. Barber, expresses amazement by the religious, age, and racial diversity of the "FT"MM and works hard to lead a pastoral network of many White pastors into the movement. Doug, another Christian network leader, is drawn into the movement and eventually its leadership because of his trust of Rev. Barber and specifically the realized intersectionality of Rev. Barber's vision. After having his career shift so profoundly by his associations in progressive Christianity and his transition to becoming an LGBTQ ally while still in the employ of an evangelical ministry, Doug remarks about the invitational resonance of a truly diverse fusion movement:

> I think the biggest thing for me about the movement has been just recognizing that it's possible for there to be a faith-rooted, faith-based, faith-lead fusion movement that is an inclusive, broad coalition. This is a movement that comes from a place of real sincere faith and conviction and yet is inclusive of people of across the spectrum.

This comment by Doug also alludes to another invitational agitation by the movement, its intersectional commitment and diverse demographics are accompanied by "sincere faith and conviction." The theo-moral logic is compelling and highly invitational to so many.

Theo-moral discourse and logic

Recalling Warren's (2010) study, he named the insufficiency of "moral outrages" and "moral shocks" (p. 52) alone in producing activist identities. These dramatic moments must be supplemented to move beyond a mere altruistic posture. On the foundation of that observation, he bemoaned the paucity of the study of the role of more comprehensive moral visions in the motivation of racial activists (Warren, 2010). Without a great deal of specificity on the nature of moral vision and the delivery of that vision, Warren (2010) had interlocutors who defended the prevalence of moral visions in daily life decisions and his study offered as a noted finding the importance of moral vision in engaging the fight for racial justice. Related to moral vision, he noted the potent emergence of faith-based organizing and then he hinted without example that religious and secular values need not be opposing poles on a false binary which opens the door to broad-based multi-issue initiatives and even social movements (Warren, 2010).

The "FT"MM provides the vivid example in a moral, intersectional social movement that Warren (2010) imagined was possible. Regarding faith-based routes to activism, Warren (2010) described the rejection of the racism within home faith communities by many of his interlocutors and their need to find new faith networks inside or outside of their traditions. That observation set the stage for the rich examples in this study of intra-faith and extra-faith conversions as well as intra-faith inclusions. Warren (2010) also described several commonalities to the moral visions of activists regardless of faith or ethical traditions. In other words, justice activists have a common vision of the world they are trying to form. This important finding is certainly a key to

breaking down the previously noted binary between religious and secular beliefs as motivations to justice work.

This study takes a significant next step to Warren's (2010) conclusions by demonstrating the compatibility of Christianity, or what Rev. Barber often names as an "evangelical Christianity" (field notes) — still a hegemonic faith tradition in the U.S. (Fairchild, 2009) —with not only constructing an *invitational* or *agitational* moral logic for social justice activism, but also the possibility of Christian theology as a contributor to religiously diverse moral collectives working for justice. In the first chapter, I chronicled Christianity's historical entanglement with racism and the common deployment of it theological traditions with the construction of the racial world (Jennings 2010, 2011). I also summarized the historical growth of a divide in missional emphases between the individualistic, evangelistic fervor of conservative Christianity (and its rejection of social justice) and the social gospel common to mainline denominations and liberal expressions of Christianity. Rev. Barber's Black evangelicalism promises a third space subjectivity in the racism of modern Christianity and confronts the pietism-social justice binary by offering an enticing theological space for many Christians to join in order to collaborate in the work of moral political action.

The invitational power of theo-moral politics is evident in the narration of several interlocutors. Micah, as a theologian who writes often about theological justifications to combat racism and poverty, comments that the "FT"MM "keep[s] in wide public vision, a theological frame on some major systemic issues for states and cities." Though he critiqued its "thin layer of leaders" in what appears at times to be a "patronage system," he explains that the movement is a form of "advocacy with a rich theological frame" that can be quite compelling to motivate a wide range of congregations in this work. Cameron, one of the primary authors of the movement's

theological logic, is a primary voice of these moral invitations to the work of justice. His biblical work on both justice and righteousness (often interpreted in the frame of an individual piety) demands that "we narrate both piety *and* justice." For him, "Moral Mondays" are not only a movement, it is a hermeneutic that transforms the allegiance of biblical texts from "supporting… to challenging…oppressive paradigms." The text is undeniable to Cameron; it demands a care for the poor. "That's the theological aspect to the whole Moral Monday movement!" Molly may be nervous about the religiosity of the "FT"MM, but she "loves" that Rev. Barber speaks a theological language that, for her, "redeems" both Christianity and Scripture. The movement crafts a compelling invitation for her attention and her participation and that of so many others in a Bible belt textual mindset, on the dissatisfied margins of Christianity, or possibility others who have never connected the line from faith or morality to justice.

The "FT"MM as historical hermeneutic

The "FT"MM not only creates a new hermeneutical space in historical Christianity and biblical interpretation, it also presents a relentless, if not new, political interpretation of the historical moment that our society is in. The movement's training for leaders and pastors commonly under the "Repairers of the Breach" moniker constantly re-narrates the history of the Southern strategy of wedge politics deployed by the Republican Party after the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 delivered the Bible belt from the Democrats to the Republicans. At the state level, Rev. Barber regularly decries the rise of an "extremist conservativism" in the wake of the Tea Party insurgence of 2010 that delivered all branches of NC's government to a regressive agenda that vilifies the poor and vulnerable. He also reminds his listeners of the non-partisan nature of his critique. Racial gerrymandering and a disdain for the poor were not invented in the recent conservative backlash. At every scale of the movement — a plenary address at the Democratic National Convention (DNC), rallies attended by tens of thousands,

trainings for scores of leaders, planning sessions, and strategic phone calls — there has been a constant interpretation of the political context and its implications for all those who are marginalized or underrepresented (field notes).

The interpretation of the political landscape is rooted in the theological and moral logics noted in the previous section, making relevant a Christianity that so many have deemed to be a repressive faith, an anachronistic faith, or a privatized form of piety. Reggie was wooed and activated by Rev. Barber's preaching of both the newspaper and the Bible. The interlocutors in this study occupy a space marked by both moral commitment and political outrage. As theologians, pastors, social workers, teachers, artists, and organizers, they are deeply aware of the inequities and injustices that dominate the state and their local contexts. Yet several have struggled to connect that political awareness to faith either because of their heritages in faith or current traditions that avoid the political realm. There is a thick historicity of the "FT"MM connecting the current political moment including its long social history with a theo-moral logic of disdain for injustice and a faithfulness that requires action.

This is the type of historical awareness that the Brazilian critical theorist and educator, Paulo Freire (2000) declared as a denial of a humanity that is "abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world" (p. 81). In his teaching on the formation of revolutionary communities, he advocates a "praxis" that is a form of reflection that leads to action. For him, authentic reflection rejects any abstraction of the world or humanity by constantly considering "people in their relations with the world" (p. 81). This social and historical reflection promotes among potential revolutionaries the recognition that their historical reality can be transformed. Freire (2000) contrasted this form of historic hermeneutic that yields revolutionary agency with a

“fatalism in the guise of docility” that is commonly associated with “a distorted view of God” (p. 61).

Freire’s classic teaching on revolutionary communities exposes an aspect of the generative power of the “FT”MM. The movement repetitively and relentlessly connects the present political moment with long, social histories of the oppression of the vulnerable and impoverished. This historical hermeneutic is bulwarked by a theo-moral logic that confronts Christianity and any other ethical faith that would teach passiveness toward the human condition, the separation of spirituality from the reality of embodied lives in a social world, or a divorce of God’s mission from a divine identification with the poor and an ethical demand to construct a just society. These forms of oppressive and anesthetizing faiths are utterly rejected for a dynamic goodness, an active ethical faith, even a biblical faith for Christians that commends and commands the practice of social justice. Considering the possibility of the reception of this kind of faith by any person, Cameron, a theologian who hails partially from both a traditional and often inert manifestation of the Black church and an equally socially passive (White) evangelicalism, exults in the voice of those in the movement, “I could love this God. This God actually loves me and cares about the people I care about and the issues I care about. Wow!”

Cameron’s statement here connects two powerful generative elements of the “FT”MM, its historical analysis and message with the imaginaries of faith and social change that are deeply present in this movement space. The next sub-section addresses the many powerful imaginaries present in the “FT”MM.

The “FT”MM as an imaginary of cultural worlds

In the third chapter, I introduced a portion of the rich work of Holland et al. (1998) on figured worlds and cultural imaginaries. Local spaces, or in this case the local space being a social movement, often have many cultural imaginaries that bump up against each other. Most

importantly, these imaginaries are horizons of meaning activated or made real *in practice.* Practice is the important connotation of this word "figured." Urrieta (in press) explained, "People 'figure' who they are through the activities and in relation to the social types that populate these worlds." This quote from Urrieta (in press) harkens back to the importance of the movement's intersectionality as the social types and types of social relations that inhabit the movement. But most importantly for the argument of this section, Urrieta (in press) draws a firm line between imaginaries and practices (such as addressing the invitation of a figured world) that are productive to collective identity, personal identity, and personal agency.

The "FT"MM is a collective space where many productive figured worlds collide and demand answer in the form of identity development and the formation of agency. Cameron, a scribe and theological narrator of the movement writ large, names this phenomenon eloquently: "The Moral Monday model has been about drama" in the lineage of the many wild, unfettered prophets of ancient Israel who laid on their side for months to approximate divine punishment (Ezekiel), walked around naked for three years (Isaiah), or married a prostitute to invoke the moral infidelity of the people (Hosea). The theatre indeed demands an answer and a response. The dramatic imaginaries "push people" to see injustice, to demand change, to work together, and *"figure out who we are"* according to Cameron. And he testifies to the beckoning and his own answering of these theatrical imaginaries by stating that the "FT"MM "has shifted me in this moment." Many of these interlocutors in their storytelling name both the movement figured worlds as present imaginaries and their answers in authorship or practice. Three pervasive imaginaries in the "FT"MM that I have observed and are named in these stories are figured worlds of the Civil Rights Movement, the Black church, and what I will now call a *reconfigured*

figured world of salvation, an imaginary that demands a reconfiguration of hope and salvation around the political practice of moral goodness.

Figured world of the civil rights movement

The imaginary of the Civil Rights Movement is named outright by many in this study. To Gene who lived during that era, the "FT"MM was "just a rerun of the 60s." Even, to Molly, who was born decades after the Rosa Parks ride at the front of the bus, the courage of the Greensboro sit-ins, and brutality of Bull Connor's fire hoses, the "FT"MM "reminds me of the Civil Rights Movement" with "the very precise way you're doing this non-violent direct action." Comparisons between this movement and the great season of action led by Dr. King are constantly close at hand for Doug. He marched at the head of the large "This is Our Selma" rally just abreast of Rev. Barber with other national leaders in a day specifically crafted as a reenactment of the historic march on Selma. This impact of Rev. Barber and "FT"MM on him personally and his sense of that legacy can hardly be overstated:

> I do believe Reverend Barber is the Martin Luther King of our generation and it's an incredible honor to know him and to be able to work with him in the ways that I have been able to work with him. That's something I'm proud to be able to someday tell my grandkids.

Regarding the afternoon we were trained together for non-violent civil disobedience, Doug commented, "Think of the privilege to be at that training before the protest and have Bob Zellner there! This guy has gotten arrested 30 plus times with Dr. King and Rosa Parks and he's there! Wow — amazing!"

The echoes of Dr. King's movement were often in the stories of these narrators. That past era of victories and advance regularly serves as a teaching focus in regional training events (field notes) and the Repairers of the Breach mobilization events for pastors and key leaders (field notes). The historical hermeneutic of the movement described in the previous section

prominently gives attention to that "second reconstruction" as named by Rev. Barber as not only the firm shoulders upon which the "FT"MM stands, but also as a catalyst by its success to the "Southern strategy" of racial re-entrenchment that fomented the reactive landscape of regressive politics which has given rise to the "FT"MM (field notes).

The impacts of each figured world in this study are difficult to isolate from the others; they are enmeshed and their impact on persons in the movement are equally entangled. The figured world of the Civil Rights Movement conveys many realities: an affirmation of the historical struggle for justice, an anticipation of incremental success and a perpetual forward progress toward equality and justice, and the beauty and value of struggle itself. On that final point, womanist theologian Monica Coleman (2008) appealed to a common idiom in Black communities forged in centuries of struggle, "*making a way out of no way"* to frame a syncretistic theology that honors many traditions and calls for joy and hope in the struggle itself. Pierce, in his story, recalls that same phrase as a beacon of the Civil Rights Movement and then goes on to describe how he embodies "making a way out of no way" despite his own struggle with despair. Molly complained of constant exhaustion and bouts of anger due to the political status quo in NC. But speaking to her own exhaustion and anger, she exults that "I'm encouraged by [the "FT"MM]…it's just so encouraging to know that others are working and protesting." Cameron also spoke of a "buzz in the air", sensing similarly to Molly an invitation to fight and struggle with a new expectation of both meaning in the struggle and a historically tinged expectation of success. Connecting the "FT"MM directly to the Civil Rights Movement in the 50s and 60s, he believes many individuals and "smaller cells" (referring to churches and "smaller organizations") are "inspired to work for change." This imaginary recruits to both movement identity and movement agency with a historical promise of success. I introduced the

concept of "fictive kinship" (Lincoln & Mumiya, 1990; Morris, 2004) earlier in this paper. This is a concept that I will take up again in the final sections of this chapter. But, in the cultural imaginary of the Civil Rights Movement, one certainly begins to see the constitutive elements of the formation of a kinship and peoplehood, a people who are joining others who have historically made a way out of no way. This kinship and peoplehood becomes reading visible in the forthcoming focus on a figured world of the Black church.

Figured world of the black church

As noted in chapter three, the Black church, which is actually a diverse constellation of denominations and traditions, evokes many emotions, responses, and hopes as an imaginary. It is a horizon of meaning made powerful in the deep ecclesial roots of the NAACP and the Black church performative of the "FT"MM that perpetually calls for response (literally), answering, and figuring. As previously explained, the Black church in U.S. history encodes and decodes as a particular cadence and performance of worship. It is a potentate, one aspect being that of a ruling, guiding, and equipping force among some African Americans and another aspect being a source of power and pride (Gregory, 2001). The Black church is also a transgressive, liminal, borderland in the U.S. Christian landscape that embodies a perpetual critique of the modern racial world and its performance particularly in Christianity (Jennings, seminar lecture). This liminality is that space between "survival and liberation" (Lincoln & Mumiya, 1990, p. 241) in which the Black church serves as base of operation for the betterment and liberation of a historically oppressed people. That is the Black church space that Cameron names:

> The Black church starts off as a collection of people who are struggling to find a sense of identity, humanity, and equality in the face of horrible injustice prefaced upon the fact that somehow or another, God still loves us and created us and supports us and gives us all value. That's where the Black church itself starts.

This starting place is so very distinct from the White church in America. Again, turning to Cameron for his theological acumen, to White Christian he says, "Of course you didn't hear it! You've been going to a White church as opposed to going to a church that's prophetically saying "there's something wrong and we have to challenge it!" For him, the Black church in its history, positionality, and spiritual dynamic is literally able to "give birth to this movement and sustain it in so many ways."

The figured world of the Black church beckons, evokes, and recruits to positions of moral, theological, and prophetic rejection of the modern racial world and a (spirit) empowered agency of liberation. The Black church, as an imaginary in this transgressive positionality and potency, should not be underestimated. West (1999) bemoaned the strategic oversight of ideological and faith traditions by "secular progressive intellectuals" (p. 172) in the 20th century.

In the critique of insiders, the Black church has often been body misaligned by traditionalism, patriarchy, and homophobia. Bishop Robinson tells this story all too well. Rev. Barber also noted an inertness steeped in formality and tradition in his initial struggles to mobilize the NAACP (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016). But this figured world of Black church in the "FT"MM is ensconced in a movement that is remarkable, distinct, and even transgressive in its intersectionality. As Cameron explains with a visible glee, it is West's (1999) secular progressive intellectuals that are the ones who are flocking to the "FT"MM precisely for it religiousness rooted in the performance of the Black church:

> There's a part of Moral Mondays, which is very much, for good or for evil, a manifestation of the Black church…channeling the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement was successful in part because it depended so much on the power of the Black church: the people and the witness…But, the odd thing, an interesting thing, is to watch a 60 year-old white couple, former hippies who are atheists and have no real connection with any church or anything anywhere, come out and say, 'Amen!' You have them as though they were standing in a church service. I wonder if it's a catharsis, but there's something that's rejuvenates them on a spiritual level. I've had people come to

> me and say, 'I've been an atheist for years having decided I had nothing in common with the church until I heard you talk about God the way that you do. I could love this God. This God actually loves me and cares about the people I care about and the issues I care about.' Wow, that's a wonderful, evangelical pronouncement there and I think a lot of people are involved in the movement because of that 'church feel.' You get to Moral Monday and hear young White kids who have never been to church in their lives, singing along with 'We shall overcome' and 'God is on our side.' I mean, it's just … it's been transformative in a lot of ways that I could have never imagined. Other people say, 'This is what I've been looking for a long time.'

I present that quote in its fullness because I will return to it at length in the final section on ethnogenesis. Common and imagined (for those who have never been present in a Black church apart from its conveyance in the media and popular idiom) elements of the Black church abound in the "FT"MM. From the spirituals sung at every major gathering to the call-and-response preaching and the posturing of armor bearers like Reggie behind the speaker, the "FT"MM is a performance of the Black church. Its cultural imaginary fills the space of the movement like water or oxygen.

I want to strongly underline the culturally productive power of the Black church configured as an intersectional, moral (and hence multi-faith) social movement. Bishop Robinson's presence in leadership is an affirmation to its intersectionality and its faithfulness to a racial, Black, liberative politic. For Gene, a secular adherent to social justice, the conveyance of the movement as a distinct and non-White church, quite unfamiliar to the church he has theologically rejected, gives opportunity for activism without theological critique or reservation. For Reggie, a Black church preacher, the Black church is the source of his faith that is non-distinguishable from activism. He knows nothing else religiously. Despite his criticisms of the movement, Micah knows better than all but a few the possibilities of the Black church. Molly is in many ways a unique case. She is a millennial from now a progressive White Christianity that rejects the racial history of the White church. For her, the Black church is bereft of the style of

fundamentalism she abhors though it often retains commitments and practices such as patriarchy that offend her or, at minimum, religiosity that make her nervous. It is this aspect of the movement that least effectively beckons her to an activist identity and agency. But for so many others, the Black church is a cultural imaginary that they respond to with activist identity and agency.

A recon-figured world of salvation

A final cultural imaginary in the "FT"MM is that of salvation. I will now rename it a "recon-figured world" because it takes the imaginary of salvation in Christian eschatology and common salvific idioms or images (like "streets paved with gold") and reconfigures them in practice, liturgy, and expectation with a realized vision of a good and just society. As noted in earlier chapters, the history of Christian thought in the Protestant U.S. has a unique history where a vision of moral goodness has been severed from a theology of salvation (Marsden, 1980; Wuthnow, 1988). This severing of the mission of evangelism which yields personal salvation in most conservative and evangelical forms of Christianity from a social gospel of goodness in liberal traditions partially explains the odd encounters that Cameron and his handpicked faith leaders had with a group of state legislators. When asked to offer a moral, theological justification for their legislative agenda, these members of the state assembly were stumped. They could discuss a political agenda (ending the New Deal and Great Society) and could pontificate about their personal stories of meritoriously overcoming poverty. But the could not juxtapose a moral theology or even a secular concept of moral goodness with their political agenda. In their mind, those two concepts were non-intersecting trajectories.

In contrast, consider this vivid scene and oratory from the "FT"MM. During the late summer of 2014 under a scorching sun, Rev. Barber rose up on a stage set at the Parrish Street Plaza that commemorates "Black Wall Street" and a halcyon season (late 1800s to early 1900s)

of Black middle class economic growth in Durham, NC. He spoke solemnly and defiantly of the blood and the tears of Black women and the "mothers of the church" shed during the 1950s and 1960s in the American South in the battle for the franchise and equality: "When Black women weep, they're getting their power on. How dare you trample on the graves of our mothers! Remember the blood; there is power in the blood" (field notes). The oratory and its chosen location invokes much, if not all, of the previous analysis in this chapter. There is a historical hermeneutic of all three reconstructions in Rev. Barber's historical reckoning, the symbols and decaying vestiges of Black Wall Street revealing the promise of the first reconstruction as geographic foreground to his analysis of the partial victories of the second reconstruction and the threats that currently demand a third reconstruction. Invocations to the figured worlds of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black church are also present in allusions to the trampled graves of the mothers of the church who bled and some died for an extension of the franchise and the protection of basic civil rights. But the dominant theme of "power in the blood" is an appeal to the dominant idiom of salvation in Christian thought, the salvation of individuals and the peoplehood of the church being secured in the death of Jesus. To those from Christian backgrounds, even those outside of White evangelical or Black church traditions, the metaphor is unmistakable. What is powerfully distinct, both in that moment and throughout the driving logic of this moral movement, is the unabashed and relentless reconfiguration of salvation as the result of a theo-moral logic derived from many faith traditions and expressed in broad-based political action for a *present* just society. Both of the elements of the final conjunction of the previous sentence are deviations from norms and tend toward the shocking, for some, especially coming from a pastor claiming heritage in the evangelical tradition.

This reconfiguration of salvation into an imaginary of present, realized moral goodness is the essence of the "Moral Monday Movement" for Cameron:

> This is what Dr. Barber is — the exemplar of what a Black preacher can be in liberation mode — introducing that mode of theological engagement to the larger world in a way that says, 'Hey, this Bible is not just about the salvation of souls. It's not just about worship practices and worship rituals. This is about transformation. This is about liberation. This is about freedom and new possibilities of human community. Wow!

In that statement, one sees a clear reconfiguration, a bold social expansion, of the notion of salvation. The expansion of salvation in the "FT"MM not only includes the focus on a moral society, it is also an inclusive society. The movement seeks other faith traditions and prominently displays these expanding alliances on stages, at the head of marches, and in the storytelling of the movement (field notes).

The reconfiguring of salvation has a significant impact on individuals, it beckons powerfully to the work of identity development and agency formation in the movement. The locus of salvation shifts from the personal realm of atomistic human "souls" to a social world and a history of relations marked by power, inequities, the inappropriate domination of others. In that logic, the "FT"MM relocates the salvific embodiment of "the good" from a private (or even a heavenly) space to a public, social space. Critically, the agency of salvation is shifted on a similar magnitude from divine initiative/action received faithfully and perhaps passively by human individuals (depending on tradition) to a co-creation between the human and the divine. In this imaginary, individuals are constituted in practice and activity as co-conspirators and co-laborers in the work of salvation. This shift alone has a dramatic impact on the cultural production of agentic identities. In this figured world performed so persistently in the theo-moral space of the "FT"MM, even the author of salvation and divine expression of goodness is not left untouched. Rather than being the proprietary theological construction of a single

tradition, even in this performance of worship and ritual so very steeped in the Black church tradition, an understanding of the divine is sourced in multiple faiths and sub-traditions. When an Iman stands before the gathered tens of thousands to initiate the HKonJ march after the shocking murders of Deah Barakat, Yusor Abu-Salha, and Razan Abu-Salha in Chapel Hill in a likely religious hate crime, it is an expected moral voice in a time unthinkable tragedy (field notes). The moral discourse and action to reconstitute a goodness is incomplete without that multi-faith presence on that day.

This soteriological shift captures the imagination of Molly. Rev. Barber and the "FT"MM by extension is creating "a cause" she "would absolutely align with." For her, this cause is saturated with new imaginaries of a present moral goodness enacted by an inclusive family of faith: "He's like talking about justice and faith as a politic. He brings in his brothers and sisters who are Muslim or Jewish or have no faith and he is so respectful and welcoming and open to all." Doug, who spent so many years working for the Billy Graham Association, for so many the culturally hegemonic expression of Christian salvation, is positively shaken by this reconfigured salvation. In its intersectionality, "it's clear" to him "that this Movement is more in touch with what the kingdom of God is supposed to look like than the homogenous, conservative expression." Doug is also deeply motivated by the realization that faithfulness extends beyond the bounds of any tradition or religion itself. Rev. Barber is an unabashed leader in the Christian tradition, "he's…up there wearing the vestments. He's wearing the stoll. He's not, as you know, in this business suit up there…teaching from the Bible consistently…and what the Bible says...'to those who legislate evil.'" But the movement is for a "people who believe in a moral universe. You don't have to believe in God. You don't have to believe in Jesus. But if you believe in right and wrong and that what these legislators are doing is morally wrong, then we

can be in this together. We can stand together." All of these rich imaginaries — the Civil Rights Movement, the Black church, and a reconfigured moral salvation — are the evocations of an NAACP-led movement that performs the cadences and liminal positionality of the Black church while also expanding its Christian theological orthodoxy by the welcome reception of other faith traditions and transgressing its social orthodoxy with an intentional intersectionality. What are we to make of these shifts?

Salvation and Black folk religion

As I look at the theo-moral sources of the movement that inspires action and reconfigures salvation, I see the strong echoes of a subversive, liberative Black folk religion drawing strongly from the Black church (Christian) tradition but also drawing from other racial-historical sources. Cameron champions a liberative reading of the Bible that is often missed or misunderstood in White or traditional (either evangelical or mainline) hermeneutics by explaining the unique positionality of Black people in reading the text. This is a similar relocation in the reading of the Bible that Micah describes in his personal journey to "learn to read" that indelibly impacts his theology and identity. Cameron says "a reimagined version of the text which emerges in part from African American engagement with the narrative [has] really has fueled this larger movement." Ordained pastor and iconic civil rights activist, Ruby Sales, described Black folk religion as a public theology that traces its roots to "ordinary folk during enslavement in the fields of America" rather than the legitimating authorities of faith. Expectedly, this hybrid Christian faith energizes a resistance to empire, generates an expanded view of justice, and constructs alternative views of God. Womanist, process theologian Monica Coleman (2008) illustrated the content and utility of Black folk religion in her pursuit of a "postmodern womanist theology" (p. 6). From her vantage point, the goals of womanist theology, which include confrontation of "the triple oppression of racism, sexism, and classism" (p. 7) are best

accomplished by gleaning from a variety of religious sources including "traditional church doctrines, African American fiction and poetry,…poor and working-class Black women in holiness churches, gospel music, spirituals, personal narratives, conjure, syncretic Black religiosity, and the experiences of Black women in slavery" (p. 7). Many of these Black folk religion elements — from indigenous dance, Jim Crow narratives, the stories from low income Blacks and Whites alike affected by current legislation, music from a wide range of religious sources, to multi-faith theology — are regularly present in "FT"MM events (field notes). Sales positions Black folk religion between "liberation and oppression, between justice and injustice, between love and hate" and offers an unmitigated affirmation of its salvific role in union with resistance movements:

> I will go on further to say that black folk religion, the kind of resistance movements that came out of black folk religion, have saved America from tilting over into the abyss of fascism. It has been the salvation of a country. It has been the balance, to talk about that kind of justice and God talk and love and right relations. To talk about that in the heat of empire, to talk about God as a liberating God, has really been an important stopgap to save America from itself. [retrieved from https://onbeing.org/programs/ruby-sales-where-does-it-hurt-aug2017/]

These figured worlds including a reconfigured moral salvation from a platform of an enacted Black folk religion are generative, not only to the identities and agency of individuals, but also to collective identity formation even at the possible level of a formation of a people. Holland, Fox, and Daro (2008) theorized that figured worlds are central to collective identity with the assertion that "collective identity develops within an imagined world" (p. 97). In the final section on this chapter of interpretation, I will continue on this path of collective identity and gesture toward the possibility that a new people is being formed in the discourses, imaginaries, and performances of the "FT"MM.

The "FT"MM as a "bi-locational ethnogenesis"

Price (2009) defined ethnogenesis as the "birth and evolution of a new collectivity" (p. 2). He elaborated on that definition by noting that the exploration of collective identity through ethnogenesis can narrate not only the genesis of new groups, but also an "evolution" or "redefinition of ethnicity over time" (p. 57). Historical struggles and figured worlds are generative resources to collective identity and the formation of a people (Holland et al., 1998, Holland & Lave, 2001; Price, 2009). Price (2009) studied the origins of a Rastafari identity in Jamaica and demonstrated a collective identity shaped in a generative collision of Blackness, histories of oppression, biblical theology, and syncretic Black religion among other factors. Notably, he pointed to an unmistakable integration of race and religion explaining that "blackness and religiosity are not separate domains for many Black peoples of the Western hemisphere" (p. 100). Continuing this description of the sources of collective identity, moral economies are constructed from essential values and hence make collective identities intelligible to those inside and outside the group. In racialized groups like the Rastafari, moral economies are "informed by a racialized set of themes and values [called] 'justice motifs': truth, righteousness, freedom, liberation, autonomy, and self-reliance. These justice motifs are used to articulate grievances and alternative visions of [the] world" (p. 21). As might be expected, justice motifs that drive moral economies are maintained by rich symbols and persistent practices, the material artifacts of cultural production that continue to articulate that particular moral economy (Price, 2009).

The parallels between the "FT"MM and Price's (2009) writing on ethnogenesis are abundant. Though it is now decidedly interracial in NC, the "FT"MM was birthed by a historically Black civil rights organization from its historical/political analysis of racial oppression. The "FT"MM spread as a bold performance of the Black church writ large and is

driven by a racialized theological-moral logic that produces both values statements and a 14-point political agenda that clearly reflects many of the previously stated justice motifs from Price's (2009) ethnography. The dominant discursive and performative idiom of Black church is interrupted by a political intersectionality and a widening of the movement through inclusions of many faith traditions and the traces of Black folk religion. The reconfiguring of salvation that I have described has many implications regarding a new peoplehood; most notably, new practices that construct a new theological and social telos, imagined and real, can naturally imply a new people with evolving values journeying to a new destination.

My ethnographic and narrative data also revealed many evidences of a burgeoning peoplehood being formed in the movement. Doug, who significantly to this point has been a network organizers of progressive faith and social justice advocacy communities, names the movement as people "who believe in a moral universe." He then elaborates that the movement as a "very diverse, transgender, LGBT folks, people of all different faiths — multi-faith, multi-racial, multi-generational" community. One can make a vigorous case that such a diverse, moral community is unique and distinct in a polarized, politicized, and racialized social moment. Returning to the long quote from Cameron (from the previous subsection in this chapter on the figured world of Black church), he describes this "odd", diverse people forming around a spirituality, older hippies, atheists, with the church folk and other faiths in the movement experiencing a "catharsis" and being "rejuvenate[d] on a spiritual level." The descriptions here are of a highly diverse constituency experiencing transformation and spiritual animation together based on a shared ethnic, theo-moral, and political analysis of oppression and based on the shared performances of religious ritual, combining to generate a reconfigured imaginary of

salvation. Taken together, these elements speak strongly to collective identity formation and a shifting peoplehood.

Arrest narratives

Continuing an exposition of a possible new peoplehood, I was often drawn to the arrest narratives for Cameron, Pierce, Nell, Doug, and Gene in the narrative data. Their diverse experiences with civil disobedience is certainly due to many variables including their positionality and when their arrests occurred in the progression of the movement. But, there was one important commonality; I would conclude that these arrests functioned as ritual rites-of-passage into an activist identity or a heightened activist practice and posture (for Pierce and Doug). All of them were not unscathed by what was a momentous decision for them that resulted in a dramatic experience that often required meticulous logistical preparation.

Though he already occupied an identity as a mediator, peacemaker, and justice activist, Pierce's "full on arrest" in the early antecedent of the "FT"MM was existentially jarring to him, to the point that he could speak almost casually about his "administrative" arrest later at a Moral Monday. Despite that difference of perspective, he narrates with an immense reflective pride the arrest of his 82 year-old father, never a "march in the street" or "get arrested kind of guy," during a Moral Mondays walking arm-in-arm with Rev. Barber in his full pastoral regalia. This choice would have scandalized Pierce's paternal grandfather and would have offended his own father's "avoid even the appearance of evil" biblical ethic. But, of this dramatic moment for his father, Pierce recalls

> He had just this look of clear moral determination. You know, my Dad's determination, which is a kind of purity. He was abundantly clear. He was just abundantly clear. It was clarity that he was doing the right thing…For him to claim this work, in his early 80s, that's a radical. *You want to talk about identity formation — through a movement — yeah, there's a picture.*

In that quote, Pierce connects the formation of intimate, individual identities and the importance of social movements as spaces where that happens. The picture here not only is that of his father making (for him) a radical statement and embodied practice with all of the accompanied identity work, he is also joining a people who regularly make that stand from a common moral logic that defends their civil disobedience.

Briefly considering some of the other arrestees in my sample, Doug is also already a practicing activist who fully embraced that identity. But his arrest marked for him an important transition from being an enthusiastic witness to the movement to becoming an active participant, a public voice, and eventually a "FT"MM leader. Gene's sense of activist identity including his future work with children seems to be forged in what the opportunity for arrest afforded to him and his wife by the "FT"MM. The whole arrest process for Nell — the careful and strategic preparation from printing a provocative t-shirt to preparing an inspiring speech to the public platform presented to her as a public educator — became a powerful moment of training and recognition that she was not only a justice-motivated teacher, she was an organizer, leader, and a voice for social justice.

Cameron's arrest story, as the only Black arrest narrative in my sample, is dramatic like Pierce's yet understandably radically divergent given his racial positionality and the mass incarceration of Black males in the current criminal justice system (Alexander, 2010). He experiences a similar humiliation in his arrest with 29 others on the second Moral Monday, long before these weekly acts of civil disobedience developed as Gene says "a choreography" between demonstrators and Capitol Police. As Cameron says

> I remember being very troubled after I was arrested – and disturbed. It may not make any sense to you. But, as an African American man, I sort of wore as a badge of honor that I have never been arrested. Never been in the back of a police car. Never had handcuffs on my hands. Never. So this for me was an affront. It changed much about the way I

> thought about myself…It's a horrible experience — They've actually got you! They take your fingerprints. I haven't given my fingerprints ever in my life. Now they've got them forever. Those experiences were life-changing…You become a piece of someone else's property. You're no longer in control of yourself. That notion of slavery creeps in, in that moment, even as someone who has been oblivious to the system for so long.

I interpreted Cameron's arrest to be extremely significant in his courageous construction of a justice activist identity. To that point, he was a preacher in justice churches; a biblical scholar with expertise on race, justice, and the Old Testament; and a lifetime networker for Black churches. His career was saturated with justice work. But, I don't believe he would have embraced the identity of "activist" freely until after his arrest. As he says, "those experiences," meaning the humiliations and procedures of his arrest, "were life-changing." I believe he contested a new personal identity in this action, one that will impact future agency quite significantly.

Following Holland et al.'s (1998) sociocultural practice theory of identity, these bold practices of civil disobedience and experiences of arrest are identity rich acts of agency recalling the figured worlds of the Civil Rights Movement and embodying a reconfigured, present salvation. They also happen in the legacy of historical struggles in a specific local space of practice, in this case a movement space, with some of the earmarks of ethnogenesis. Returning to Pierce's narrative of arrest, when he chose to join Rev. Barber and six others in a holding room and accepted arrest, "that experience revolutionized forever [his] understanding of the word 'solidarity' because being with those men in that jail cell, [he] couldn't help imagine what it would be like to be there without them." He goes on to state how it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of this solidarity experience. This magnitude of experienced solidarity is another potential indicator of a new peoplehood.

In the context of the "FT"MM, the arrests function as a rite-of-passage, a joining of the highest theological order. I believe they are constructed, and I believe they are figured by participants, as baptismal experiences, an indelible link to figured worlds of salvation and the implication of a new people being formed. In chapter three, I quoted Rev. Barber's explanation that the Moral Monday rallies with civil disobedience were liturgically framed in a revival or camp meeting genre where preaching yielded an altar call of a profession of personal faith, in this case the willingness to come forward and risk arrest in the NC General Assembly (Barber & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016). In most revivalist Christian traditions, those who profess faith are then baptized, a sacramental rite or ordinance that not only symbolizes the spiritual cleansing of personal salvation, but also a *resurrection as entry into a new peoplehood and a new creation* (Yoder, 1992). Baptism is then positioned as the entry into the church, the material and sacramental manifestation of that new peoplehood with a variety of privileges (such as participation in communion, the freedom to marry in the church, and others depending on the tradition).

The figuring of arrests is a key space where one sees the importance of materiality and artifacts in the "FT"MM. In Holland et al.'s (1998) sociocultural theory, artifacts are critical as mediums of self-control and as "switching or mediating devices that transport individuals into the frames of figured worlds" (Brumfiel, 2004, p. 226). In this manner, material artifacts such as art or music that is produced or used, special clothing worn, and symbols expressed materially are potent tools in the cultural production of collective, movement identities (Holland, Fox, & Daro, 2008). Powerful material symbols are constantly used in the movement such as wheeling an ornate casket into the General Assembly with the people marching in dirge-appropriate silence behind it to commemorate the lives lost due to NC's unwillingness to expand Medicaid

(field notes). Also, material artifacts abound in the "FT"MM related to arrest from Gene's "I got arrested with Rev. Barber" t-shirt which are always plentiful to more somber items such as armbands or ribbons for arrestees at larger rallies like HKonJ (field notes). Appreciating the symbolic importance of artifacts such as these, at the 2017 HKonJ, both Pierce and Doug searched me out to bring me the appropriate armband for that day (field notes). With our armbands, we all marched near the front that day which is customary for arrestees, like new converts in a liturgical parade. And at larger regional gatherings such as Charlotte in 2015 where there was adequate space behind the podium, arrestees were invited to stand behind Rev. Barber as he spoke at the podium, a position that is typically reserved for clergy in smaller gatherings or in small pulpits (field notes). And, recall Cameron's "life-changing" arrest story. What is overwhelming to him is the physicality and materiality of arrest. As he says, "They've actually got you!" With the taking of fingerprints and photos at booking, the sense of one's own body is utterly changed: "You become a piece of someone else's property." His body was changed into the status of shared possession and it became a material artifact produced in the movement. He will always be physically marked as an arrestee, someone in the system and someone who has been baptized into a movement identity.

Individuals who are marked by their arrest in the movement are invited into a conjoined space of all three of the figured worlds I have highlighted, the civil disobedience of the Civil Rights Movement, the revivalist, baptimal liturgy of the Black church, and a cultural world of salvation with their baptism resulting in joining "a new creation" (Yoder, 1992). As Brumfiel (2004) explained, the materiality around the arrests enhances the entry into those figured worlds that are productive of not only activist personal identities but also a collective identity as a new people.

The “FT”MM also, at times, embraces this language of a new people. Bishop Robinson, speaking of the intersectionality of the “FT”MM that joined LGBTQ people with the strong Black church representation in the NAACP, groups often positioned as theological adversaries and hence targets of wedge politics, used this strong language of ethnogenesis:

> There is no longer ‘this’ and ‘that.’ There is only us. How do we find out how…we walk together [and] deal together with the real tensions that exist around race, around class, around orientation, and around gender? [But] the very act of being together is revolutionary.

Cautions

These traces of ethnogenesis are plentiful in the data. But there are also some significant distinctions between Price’s (2009) narrative ethnography of Rastafari identity and his detailed theorization of the Rastafarian ethnogenesis. His treatment of this collective identity focuses on Black identity formation drawing upon nigrescence (Cross, 2001) and other highly theorized notions of racial identity development (e.g., Helms, 1990). He draws significantly on the stage of “encounter” in Cross’ (2001) work, highly racialized experiences that “shake” (p. 104) individuals to the point of desiring or pursuing racial identity transformation (Price, 2009). There are strong theoretical resonances of encounter with Warren’s (2010) previously described writing on “moral shocks”, “turning points” and “seminal experiences” (cf. pp. 23-54). Adding to the importance of encounter, Price (2009) summarized that “Rastafari identity is tied to Blackness and demands a transformation, catalyzed by people’s recognition of how miseducation, deracination, and oppression has shaped, if not defined, their worldview and personal identity” (p. 225). At the risk of oversimplification, this detailed and theoretically rich portrait not only chronicled a history of oppression and transformation experienced by a collectivity in formation, it is also a racial theory of ethnogenesis for a diverse, but racially distinct people. Though as Bishop Robinson testified to the Blackness of the NAACP and the

“FT”MM which was powerfully invitational to her and her own justice network, the “FT”MM has drawn a great diversity of leaders and followers. To make a stronger, more decisive case of ethnogenesis would require a rigorous theorization of racial identity development in racially diverse communities with a multiplicity of positions and histories. By observation, the “FT”MM, though integrated in the politics and history of both the NAACP and the Black church, tends to have a slight white majority. To put it simply to the point of bluntness, unlike the Rastafari in Price’s (2009) example, though the “FT”MM displays many characteristics of ethnogenesis in formation or evolution, it does not seem to be comprised of a singular, clearly demarcated people.

Before continuing that point, which I believe in itself points to a key assertion about the “FT”MM and the formation of activist identities, I also believe in important to heed some of the cautions about the movement as a new people in the stories of some of my interlocutors. Nell and Bishop Robinson critique the “FT”MM for its lack of democracy which hints to me about an absent organic quality to the “FT”MM that I would intuitively expect to see in the formation of a new people. Cameron, who has experience in other forms of social justice organizing, also offers a good reminder that the “FT”MM is only “one dimension of a multi-dimensional mode of transformation.” His caution is a brake to any conclusion that overreaches in the direction of a totalizing social change due to the work of this movement and perhaps to offering judgments regarding the formation of personal identities as justice activists that does not adequately leave space for other durable intimate identities, even identities that are contradictory to the work of justice. Finally, Micah, who has been perpetually drawn to the theological frame, speaks to the “thinness” of the movement. He names a “wide public vision” with great “continuity,” but also “a thin layer of leaders and followers” that limits its social and congregational penetration.

These critiques raise the question, if a people is being formed in the "FT"MM, what kind of collectivity is it? Perhaps most importantly, how does one define what qualifies as "a people?" If a singular people, ethnic or otherwise, is not being formed, what is the nature of this ethnogenesis, if it is indeed the formation of a people?

Bi-locational ethnogenesis

Noting these cautions, I would propose that the "FT"MM represents a form of *bi-locational ethnogenesis*. By this term, I am implying the boundaries of this people have a permeable quality that allows individuals to move in and out easily and repetitively. But taking that further, I am suggesting that this evolving people also has a quality that allows individuals to be *in and out at the same time.*

I am convinced that the histories of struggle are being mediated in this movement space and in the "figurings" and contestations that individuals do in the imaginaries of the "FT"MM, activist identities are being developed and activist agency is being formed. But, the artifacts and imaginative texts produced in the movement do not have totalizing claims on individuals or the movement itself as an actor. In their decentered and dialogical approach to the study of social movements, Holland, Fox, and Daro (2008) have named movement identities as dialogues across difference, not unlike Bakhtin's (1981) notion of dialogism, the answering and responding that are central to self-authoring intimate identities in local spaces of practice. And, indeed, ethnographers like Terre Satterfield (2002) have offered strong examples of movement identities, in her case the identities of environmentalists and pro-logging entities in political conflict over the fate of old growth forests, being dynamically shaped in oppositional dialogue. Emphasizing this decentered and dialogic lens, Holland et al. (2008) demonstrated that movements are not "unified actors" (p. 97) and are the locations of many, even competing, cultural discourses.

The individual actors in the "FT"MM are also not unified actors. That assertion at face value is entirely in line with Holland et al.'s (1998) rejection of unitary and static identities. It is to be expected that movement participants are contesting nuanced local and personal identities in the various, significant local spaces of their lives. But I want to take it a step further. Some of the key distinctions of the "FT"MM are the breadth of its focus in terms of issues and its far-ranging intersectional diversity, a big tent diversity that some would claim is unprecedented in Southern organizing. This means that many movement participants are highly involved in other movements, causes, and even forms of organizing that have strong reservations about the theatrical, theological, hierarchical, social movement style of organizing enacted by the "FT"MM (such as Micah and Nell). Others may move in and out the movement from congregations or Christian traditions that have historically opposed the work of social justice. Still others inevitably work in corporate environments with competing interests to the movement's justice agenda, yet still they find the ability to easily step across permeable boundaries. Put simply, there is power and efficacy in the permeability of the movement, the soft boundaries that allow access and egress. The "thinness" of the movement as named by Micah can be an asset. The "FT"MM leadership freely acknowledges this reality and sees its strategic potential. In a recent call with national leaders from partner organizations or Christian denominations being sought for partnership, Rev. Barber described this freedom to join in force at times and yet to also stay focused on work outside of the movement (field notes).

But this movement quality goes beyond partnering with organizations at a national level. In my sample, Gene offers a meaningful example. He is not a vocational activist like the social workers, pastors, and organizers in the group; he has been virtually uninvolved with justice work throughout his professional life. As a professor of Marxist and other social theories, one could

call him a “professional liberal” rather than a “professional activist.” Gene is also a secular humanist who has been a leader in two Christian congregations for most of his vocational life and retirement. These congregations are minimally involved in organizing, if at all, and his current, NC congregation has few, if any, connections to the “FT”MM. Yet, the “FT”MM offers Gene a transformative opportunity to step into social justice activism that he is able to accept immediately. His “baptism” in arrest and trial becomes a highly meaningful moment in the “FT”MM’s development of their civil disobedience strategy. And — after a few more rallies, he is able to slip out of the movement easily. There is little doubt that in his short time of commitment, he has engaged its struggles and cultural imaginaries and departs committed to significant practices of justice, practices he could never have imagined as he transitioned toward retirement.

This invited movement of partners, leaders, and followers in and out of the “FT”MM is an asset of mobilization. But, returning to the original point of bi-locational ethnogenesis, what seems unique to me is the possibility of individuals to be both inside and outside of the movement at the same time. Nell, Micah, and, to some degree, Molly are all examples of this dichotomous reality. Nell’s activist identity has been substantially formed in the risks that she took surrounding her arrest. To use her analogy, that was definitely a “red pill” decision with no going back. She returns to the “FT”MM regularly to speak on educational issues. She values the impact of the “FT”MM in NC. She and colleagues continue to organize for educational causes around the periphery of the movement. But, in another sense, she is definitely *not* in the “FT”MM. She doesn’t appreciate the absence of democracy and bristles some at its Christian patriarchy. She doesn’t sense that it is a community that appreciates suggestions and leadership agency from its ranks and she won’t spend energy trying to change those perceived realities.

Similarly, Micah has brought prodigious skills in organizing, theological reflection, and public speaking to the movement and will continue to do so. But he, too, is primarily located outside the movement and strongly favors a different strategy of organizing.

The peoplehood being formed in the "FT"MM is around a lower threshold of engagement and with far less obvious requirements of being a distinct people than is likely with many other movements. Nell and Micah are examples of the strength of this unique form of peoplehood in terms of rapid mobilization and the quick expansion of the movement when opportunities demand significant mobilization. The movement's powerful performances of the Black church in its prophetically liminal position in a White supremacist society and the movement's equally powerful deployment of various imaginaries appear to maintain an attractional quality of the "FT"MM along with an optic of size that continue to beckon people in or back in.

This type of bi-locationalism in not unheard of in social spaces that surround the movement and in significant developments in the theorization of identity. The Christian church writ large (and potentially other faiths) has functioned and perhaps even thrived with a similar type of bi-locationalism. Recalling the work of Tanner (1997), Healy (2000), and Bretherton (2012) in chapter 3 regarding new understandings of church and culture that challenged a post-liberal orthodoxy, they argued for a notion of the church that is both distinct and entirely intermingled with culture. According to Tanner (1997), some of the most beautiful and transformative practices of "church" are practices and ideas borrowed from other cultures and made "odd" (p. 113). I believe this could be said equally of the "FT"MM.

The sense of bi-locationalism coincides well with some of the latest theorization on identities. Holland et al. (1998) has powerfully theorized identities as always becoming, never unitary, forged in practice, and contested in imaginaries in local spaces. Urrieta and Noblit (in

press) have taken this a step farther by presenting identities as multiple, partial, and fluid. Holland et al. (1998) and Holland & Lachicotte (in press) also made major strides in affirming the retained presence of individual agency in the face of oppressive power at a time when theory was strongly tilted toward structure over and against agency in that time of the ascent of cultural studies project. Urrieta and Noblit (in press) built on this by strongly affirming identities "as agentic and transgressive." But they also have noted that Holland's work strongly relies on a conception of the modern self in agency (Holland & Lachicotte, in press; Urrieta & Noblit, in press). Whereas their theorization of identity mingles personal identities with collective identities as a part of their affirmation of the fluidity of identity (Noblit, personal conversation). The moves that Urrieta and Noblit make pertaining to identity are not inconsistent with the possibility of bi-locationalism.

This lower threshold of engagement may be very important to White people, which now appear to be more than half the movement, who are joining a movement rooted in Blackness and must constantly struggle to construct racially-informed, activist identities (Cross, 2001; Helms, 1990; Price, 2009) given their privilege in society. That evolution is always a work in progress that may involve numerous entries and exits. The process that I'm conjecturing may be especially significant for White Christians. In their journey to contest identities of social justice activism, they not only need to explore their own personal complicity in regimes of racism and injustice, they also need to confront the structurally and theologically racist configurations of White Christianity (Jennings, 2010; Jennings, 2011). That struggle was humorously depicted in Cameron's story about a White Christian legislator who was sure his church and faith tradition did not participate (read: did not need to participate) in this type of activism. The bi-locationalism of the movement's peoplehood seems to allow White people to engage and

experience the formation of peoplehood while (for some) also still residing in or even leading faith communities that resist this work. Recalling the earlier quote by Pierce speaking of his father, "You want to talk about identity formation — through a movement — yeah, there's a picture." This does seem to be a picture.

In a final chapter, I will take us to the end of the "FT"MM as a NC-based movement. Along with that transition in the journey, I will discuss what I learned in this study, how those lessons beckon for future study, and several arenas of research or justice work that I believe to be potentially impacted by this work.

CHAPTER 14: TRANSITIONS

By June 11, 2017, the bitter cold of HKonJ has been long forgotten. On a comfortable summer evening at Mt. Level Missionary Baptist Church in Durham, NC, a chapter in the "FT"MM is coming to a celebrated end. In this modern, heavily wooded sanctuary, Rev. Barber will be ordained as a bishop by his "ministerial father," the Rev. Dr. William Turner. He is also laying down his Presidency of the NC NAACP and the "FT"MM as an expression of the NC NAACP will morph into a National Poor People's Campaign following the sacred pathway of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. A beautiful chapter in the journey is now over.

Many now "old" friends are clearly visible. Rev. Reggie McPherson is back in a familiar role as armor bearer and stage support to Rev. Barber. He will be seated on the pulpit platform just to the right of Rev. Barber, though he will spend most of the evening standing, clapping, and offering responsive words of affirmation. He is proceeding from a large SUV with Rev. Barber into a side entrance as I arrive and I am able to rush up for a quick hug and to tell he still looks like he could play running back in the league with a wink. It was hard work to connect with Reggie, but we now have an understanding, two old athletes redacting our glories and participating in something far more important. Walking into the sanctuary, Pierce, in a dapper fedora and a dark slim suit that would have made Elvis Costello proud, is placing his drum on the stage. I make sure that he knows that; Pierce and I will be friends and collaborators on many future projects. Micah has given me a wave to sit with him in a space he has saved on the second row. Doug is not present. He and Rachel have gotten back together and he's planning a wedding. But I text with him through the evening. The next chapter of the movement will be on

his watch as a leader in the Poor People's Campaign. Cameron and Bishop Robinson also haven't made the journey, but their greetings and remembrances are read and function as a part of the evening's blessing. Throughout the three-hour service, I had the strong sense of thankfulness that I have been intimately connected to the "FT"MM. The service yielded great anticipation for that which would come.

The evening begins to a furious beat of drums and dancers pour down the center aisle as the beginning of a procession that includes Reggie, Dr. Turner, and finally Rev. Barber. The evening takes the shape of a Moral Monday gathering with many testimonies of accomplishments by movement partners and stories of ongoing needs from individuals impacted by the politics of a war against the poor (the theme of the evening). So many of the movement elements that I written about in this study are so visibly present. I am frankly overwhelmed with the privilege of hearing and writing the nine stories of this study. Pierce has now joined Micah and me on the second row. It was a privilege to introduce them as co-laborers in the work of justice. Sitting with them, texting Doug, and looking straight at Reggie, I cannot forget the significance of the intersection of movement space with the formation of these intimate identities of social justice workers.

The three powerfully evocative figured worlds of the "FT"MM that I have written on are all materially, imaginatively, and sensually present; all beckoning us once again to answer to their invitations. Rev. Dr. Turner has been seated quietly and regally, even passively, in his high-backed ornate chair behind the pulpit, a chair he sits in weekly as he presides over the ministry of Mt. Level. It nears 2 hours into the service before Dr. Turner gets up to preach. In the familiar cadences of Black prophetic preaching, he begins quietly, but, before long, he is deep into 2 Kings 2:9-10 and is preaching/pleading for a "double portion" of God's anointing for

Rev. Barber, like that received by MLK and Mother Teresa: "God needs some troublers! That's why you need a double portion." Now in a cascading anger, Dr. Turner's assessment of the political moment is unyielding and spot on:

> Tax credits don't help you when everything in your life is an emergency. The biggest demographic is the poor. The middle class is a myth. Slavery has gone viral. Some say these people aren't poor because they've got 2 pennies and a hole in their pocket. Wage slavery lives in the house of my Master and creates a false claim on connection.

In that space, all three imaginaries — the Civil Rights Movement in this second launching of a poor people's campaign, the liminal prophetic power of the Black church in the face of oppression, and a reconfigured salvation conveyed in the expectation of a falling of God's Spirit in that very moment — were performed.

The gathered on this day in this historical Black church are Black, Brown, and White — gay and straight. Clergy from scores of denominations, Rabbis, and Imans are also in the pews. As Dr. Turner's sharp analysis falls on an extremely diverse congregation, the agitational power of the movement's theo-moral logic and its intersectionality is in full display along with its historical hermeneutic that is helping generate a revolutionary people. And, in clear view, this is yet one more manifestation of a potent collectivity that has been emerging for some time in our society, a progressive religious coalition organized for the work of justice.

Departing from this scene that closed a chapter on the life of the "FT"MM, I want to ask the simplest questions that lie at the conclusion of any study. What did I do? What did I learn? What are important academic and social spaces where this study lands with some insight and how does it nudge the research dialogue along? And finally, what additional research is needed from the vantage point of this project? I'll turn to those questions in order.

Becoming Good: Summative Reflection, Lessons, Arenas of Impact, & Possibilities

A summative reflection

This study began with hopeful disappointment and was threatened by an early temptation. Regarding that hopeful disappointment, as one who had grown up in a fundamentalist church during desegregation in the South and had started a ministry career in culturally sophisticated, but also evangelical, churches, I had been adamantly disappointed in Christianity's opposition of social justice work despite the imperative of justice being saturated in every sacred text. Later, I had a front row seat as a leader and founder of "postmodern" (as we called them then) Christian networks that brought with them a multitude of highly progressive, politically engaged devotees into the public square. Working now as a pastor in a highly progressive congregation and a community organizer in the center of a powerful multi-faith based organizing community, I have seen what faith-based individuals and communities can do in the realm of justice. Initially, my primary interest in this study was so see how Protestant Christians, given their unique history in opposing structural social justice, figured and negotiated their faith to take on identities as justice activists.

That interest produced a temptation. It would have been easy (and still valuable) to look so intently on individual lives and miss the productive significance of the "FT"MM in this identity construction. In other words, the temptation was to use the movement as a hopeful and engaging spectacle and miss its generativity for activist identity and agency construction. But, once the movement had my full attention (with good advice), I was able to dialogically construct, interpretatively write, and ultimately interpretatively read these nine stories with a new sense of perspective. I realized that I was not just researching the development of intimate identities of social justice activism and I was not only examining identity development in local spaces and figured worlds associated with the histories and struggles that each interlocutor brings to local

spaces of practice. In addition to those initial intentions, I was exploring identity development in a specific and unique movement space.

As a result, I studied the lives of nine individuals who have successfully constructed lives and identities as social justice activists (Chase, 2011). As expected, the stories varied greatly. Most have their activist lives shaped around their vocations as social workers, educators, pastors, and organization leaders. But at least one interlocutor, Gene, constructed his activist identity outside of his vocation. All of them have activist identities that extend beyond vocation. There are common themes to their identity work related to interactions with their diverse heritages; impacts due to encounters that provoked moral shocks; and various conversion experiences related to their Christian traditions of birth, their ongoing faith commitments, and intentional shifts in their faith practices. I will add summary detail on these categories in the next section. The study of these fascinating and admirable lives led directly to a detailed examination of the "FT"MM, the space of practice that they all share in common. When the focus turned to the "FT"MM, the significance of social movements and specifically the "FT"MM in the formation of personal identities and agency stood out. Certainly, local spaces of practice are critical to mediate historical struggles and the significant narratives of every life in the construction of personal identity (Holland et al., 1998). But, this study revealed a distinct generative capacity of the "FT"MM in agitating and inviting individuals into social justice practices. The writing of these lives and the movement yielded several lessons that I will summarize in the next section.

Lessons from the study

Intimate activist identities: heritage, encounter, and conversion

As a first lesson, my study yielded observations similar to previous and important work on the personal identity development of justice activists for leaders who hail from the Christian tradition. Moments of encounter — dramatic experiences and moral shocks — are critical on a

path to activism (Cross, 2001; Helms, 1990, Price, 2009; Warren, 2010). These can be childhood experiences like seeing the burned-out ruins of one's own community, the pains of abuse, or a counterintuitive theology in a setting of international poverty; positive experiences like the activist example of a parent or the guidance of a committed mentor; vocational experiences like being saturated with the needs and prejudices experienced by a classroom of amazing kids; or adult experiences like encountering the entrenched racism in a church that you love.

Closely aligned to encounter is the importance of conversion, also affirmed in several significant studies (Price, 2009; Rambo, 1993); moments of shock and outrage are significant in conversion to faith traditions and practices that allow for or encourage justice activism. I demonstrated three types of conversions — intra-faith conversion, extra-faith conversion, and intra-faith inclusion — that were significant in people of faith negotiating activist identities.

The heritages of these nine interlocutors were radically divergent. Nonetheless, this study demonstrated the work of constructing activist identities for persons of faith often includes significant interaction with one's familial heritage and heritage of faith. Conversions are often related to heritage, especially when a familial and/or faith background is oppositional to the work of justice. But, heritages that are supportive still require the work of reflection and integration of new influences.

Sociocultural practice theory

This study was not intended to be a "theoryography" (p. 244) often associated with an extended case methodology (Tavory & Timmermans, 2009). Nevertheless, it was a strong demonstration of the value of sociocultural practice theory in the understanding of how identities are formed and agency unleashed (Holland et al., 1998; Holland & Lave, 2001; Urietta, in press). The theorization of the generativity of colliding cultural imaginaries or figured worlds, the

durability of positionality related to historical struggles, and the mediating significance of local spaces of practice in supporting the translation of these struggles into intimate identities was strongly affirmed throughout the study. I was able to highlight personal identities in local space (that led to meaningful agency) as not static and unified, but constantly being contested and negotiated as is central to this theory. And, this study was able to benefit from some of the continuing developments in sociocultural practice theory that focus on the fluidity, multiplicity, and partiality of identities in a move that brings personal identities and collective identities closer together (Urrieta, in press; Urrieta & Noblit, in press).

Movement space and movement identities

Continuing this commentary on theory, a sustained critique of sociocultural practice theory is that it can be too agentic in regards to personal agency (Urietta, in press)[24] and a growing critique regarding its being potentially too wedded to the construction of the modern self (Noblit, personal conversation). This study offers an example of an additive possibility to sociocultural theory related to the concerns about its dependency on the modern self. I have shown a meaningful exemplar of that affirms the theoretical assertion of collective identity being constructed in figured worlds (Holland et al., 2009) while also showing the unique and significant role of social movements and especially movement identities in reinforcing or supporting the contestation of individual identities as social justice activists. In this case, there was a clear significance of movement geography in that personal transformation that has been occurring in an emerging people group. The bi-locational quality and permeable boundaries of the "FT"MM were very significant in this aspect of personal construction. The movement does

[24] But also see Holland & Lachicotte (in press), *Agency*, where their theorization of "everyday agency" as compared to "transformative agency" resolves some of this critique regarding an overly agentic theory (originating from the concern that some positionalities in local space are still highly enmeshed in historical hence restrictive oppression).

not collect persons in a totalizing fashion. The movement captures a 'certain self' without obtaining the 'whole self.' Belonging can be dichotomous rather than binary; one can simultaneously be in and remain out. One can author identities of activism in concert with movement inertia and a collective movement identity and yet maintain other personal identities, even possibly identities that are in strong tension with their activist identity constructed in the movement. I believe this study significantly contributes to a conversation about agency in space.

The "FTMM" as a specific movement

The "FTMM" as a movement demonstrates several meaningful possibilities for social justice mobilization and support in the formation of commiserate identities. The agitational invitation of the movement illustrates the inertial power of theo-moral logics when accompanied by the mobilization of a big tent, diverse community working an intersectional justice agenda. It also demonstrates the importance of historical analysis, a historical hermeneutic championed by Freire (2000), in understanding the urgency of a moment and mobilizing a people in that time. The "FT"MM illustrates the invitational generativity to three cultural imaginaries: the Civil Rights Movement (Rev. Barber's "second reconstruction"), the performance of Black church, and a reconfigured salvation that is inclusive and realized. The connection of ethnogenesis to social change is intuitive and is demonstrated in research (Price, 2009). But, the "FT"MM may offer clues on the formation of partial, fluid, and multiple identities among individuals and the value of permeable movement boundaries in the mobilization of many for social action.

Theo-moral resources for liberative action

As noted in the previous paragraph, the theo-moral logics of the "FT"MM have been testified to be valuable in mobilization and as provocations for activist agency. In the review of literature, I noted the historical entanglement of Christian theology with the construction and maintenance of a White supremacist, colonial society (Jennings, 2010; Jennings, 2011). These

connections are unmistakable; Christianity has enjoyed a hegemonic ideological role in the justification of inequities and the construction of a racial optic in capitalist societies. But, the "FT"MM demonstrates a liberative political possibility for a moral logic derived largely from Christian theology. To repeat another previous point, this emancipatory possibility has been enhanced by a moral theology derived from the liminal positionality of the Black church informing a broad, diverse coalition working for intersectional social issues.

Implications, arenas of impact

I would assert that these five lessons have meaningful implications in several arenas of research and public action. The following includes an abridged list of impact areas.

Christianity and social justice

In the first chapter I bemoaned the paucity of Christian engagement with social justice and chronicled the long history of this deficit in many streams of the Protestant tradition. The "FT"MM demonstrates a great possibility of social change in the political public square derived from moral theology applied to the realm of politic. Beyond this simple but significant affirmation, the narrative study of these individuals and the ethnography of the movement also offers strategies to mobilize persons of faith into action. Some of those strategies for effective mobilization would include: clear and regular training that exegetes the theo-moral basis of action; the effective integration of multiple faith traditions; broadening the political mission beyond single issues to a wide agenda of intersectional issues that allows for the establishment of a broad and diverse coalition; allowing for many levels of commitment and a permeability of engagement in social action; valuing local organizing while also using the theatrics of vivid metaphors and large scale actions; and the reliance of the leadership of theological sources and traditions that stand outside the White supremacist, heteronormative, patriarchal Christian mainstream. Perhaps the most important implication in the intersection of Christianity and social

justice is to retain a wariness of the threats of faith in opposing justice without scripting streams of Christian theology and worship traditions outside of the struggle for social justice.

Faith-based community organizing

Faith-based community organizing and its varying strategies have garnered significant attention academically and socially in recent years (Bretherton, 2012; Shirley, 2001; Stout, 2010; Warren, 2001; Warren, 2010; Warren, 2011). This study demonstrates the value of a social movement strategy and affirms the efficacy of the cultural imaginaries in social movements and resultant movement identities in motivating the construction of personal identities of activism. There will certainly many logics for organizing going into the future. But, this study is another voice affirming justice outcomes and mobilized individuals in the spectacle and theatre of social movements.

Education

One of the challenges to social justice education for pre-service teachers in schools of education is the political context that positions social justice as antithetical particularly to evangelical Christianity. Besides the meticulous construction of this conflict in political media, I believe this showdown is the product of inadequate understanding of the Christian tradition and thin expositions of the ethical logic in Christian theology. As will be mentioned in the final section, I believe this is a critical area of future research. The face of teachers in America despite shifting demographics remains predominantly White, middle class, and female (Boser, 2014; Ingersoll & May, 2011). Many future educators enter the field with moral, ameliorative, or even salvific goals (Popkewitz, 2009). This study and future projects related to this work can impact both the curriculum and pedagogical dialogue directed toward Christian pre-service teachers to engage them with the issues and urgencies of social justice in education. Many of the previously

mentioned mobilizing strategies in the previous paragraph on Christianity and social justice can also be effective pedagogical strategies for social justice classes in schools of education.

In the face of a conservative extremist agenda for public education, there must be a growing urgency in organizing students, families, and educators. This work demonstrates the value of collaboration with broad-based organizing agendas and social movements for social justice. Looking inside the "FT"MM also provides critical strategies for the formation of organizing spaces in education and how activist identities can be formed.

In the face of that same radical conservative agenda that privatizes public education and the concurrent political philosophies that negate the role of social contexts on educational outcomes, the extension of community partnerships for schools is urgent as well. Faith-based partnerships in public education have been understandably rare except with the example of historic Black church (Conder, 2012; Gaines, 2010; Jett, 2010; Mitchell, 2010; Morris, 2004 Warren, 2011). The "FT"MM offers a contemporary example of this partnership, affirms the possibilities of faith-based community partnerships with public education, and offers some strategic examples of how justice organizations can collaborate with educational organizers.

Theological ethnography

This study is an exemplar in the ascending field of theological ethnography and has several implications regarding methodology. It continues to support a methodological pathway in anthropology, education, and related fields in the study of Christianity that does not automatically recoil to a totalizing post-colonial lens that prevents the study of Christianity in liberative contexts or to see authentic, indigenous expressions of faith (Cannell, 2006). The practice of theological ethnography offers an important opportunity for theoretical growth in the field of postcritical ethnography in educational studies, a lens that can link the critical, performative, and morally constructive elements of the discipline (Noblit, et al., 2004).

Introducing spirituality writ large into the critical dialogue and methodological praxis in qualitative research, anthropology, educational studies, and social justice education offers new realms of exploration and an often-overlooked dialogue partner for all of these fields.

Future Research Directions

This study landed into the productive and social power of a theo-moral social movement from the inside out, from the lives of nine activists in a life narrative study to the exploration of a movement that has been generative in their justice work. The "FT"MM was studied from my eyes as an ethnographer and primarily from their stories as participants. This project prompts much further study from the vantage point of social movements. The bulk of this project was completed before the election of Donald Trump and before the women's march on the day after his inauguration as President of the United States bringing visibly far more participants to Washington, D.C. than the inaugural ceremony that preceded it the day before. In the days of the writing of this final chapter, another social movement has exploded into being, this one led by teenagers passionately advocating for gun reform in the wake of the tragic murders of seventeen students and faculty members at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL. We seem to be living in halcyon days of social movements with many movements advocating for moral causes standing with and on top each other. Even organizing entities like the IAF that have historically eschewed movement styled actions have begun to initiate collective actions between local organizations in the wake of the Trump presidency (field notes).

Clearly care is needed to avoid lumping movements into overly common language and categories. Additional research can begin to more carefully (than I have done) begin to distinguish these movements in rhetoric, styles of leadership, styles of organizing or training, and the sources for the ethical justifications of their cause(s) as a part of comparative studies on social movements. On the heels of my project, discerning whether theo-moral language is used

and what sacred/ethical texts, histories, or faiths are tapped as political justification for action will be important. In this realm of theo-moral justification and public pedagogy, of great interest will be who is excluded and included by the use of these sources and how theo-moral justifications impact the whole shape of movements from cause to strategy, organization, training, and tactics. Comparative studies will not only add great texture to some of the issues I have raised like movement boundaries, ethnogenesis, and theo-moral logics, they will also offer thicker insight in the play between movement/collective identities and personal identities contested within movement spaces.

A second realm of research with several significant trajectories regards White evangelicals and White evangelical organizations who are noticeably absent in this research except on a couple of occasions as counter-protestors. Many interlocutors in this study converted away from evangelical heritages to participate in justice and to construct identities as activists; those moves have drawn needed attention. But given some of the permeable boundaries that I have asserted, it is easy to imagine that some evangelicals are participating in any of a number of the social movements that I have named, constructing "identities-in-movement," while also maintaining personal identities that are relevant to evangelical faith commitments or the practice of faith in evangelical congregations. Many research topics and questions abound in this subject area. Are social movements for justice impacting evangelicals as individuals and their collectivities? Does evangelical participation impact movement language, constituencies, and intersectional causes? The subject area writ large will offer perspective on the cultural resistance to social justice.

Among the *many* other avenues of research in the intersection of faith and religion with social justice, my interest in education naturally advocates for ethnographic and narrative

research with evangelical students who are pre-service teachers in schools of education that incorporate a social justice curriculum. In many ways, the inevitable tension in the collision between evangelical faith commitments (or heritages no longer being practiced) and social justice pedagogy is the tip of the lance in the struggle to form social justice educators. I believe, the deployment of a theological ethnography relying on theo-moral logics and histories will be a useful methodology in this research.

Finally, this study prompts many more studies on educator, student, and family activists. The student movement extending from the tragedy in Parkland, FL is a beacon calling for this research. This is a rich arena for more narrative work using identity theory.

A Benediction

The tradition of benedictions in religious settings is the saying of "good" words, blessings that are meant to be actualized, as words for the journey that remains. Certainly, the good words of a theo-moral movement can be fighting words, for there are many struggles ahead in the study of and work for justice. Passing on the mantle of the NC NAACP and leadership of the "FT"MM, Rev. Barber opted for a fighting benediction on June 11, 2017, the night of his commissioning. Alluding with no subtlety to the success of the movement, he spoke to the national NAACP, "Don't mess this up! This is no time for foolishness!" Pointing to the defeat of the Republican Governor of NC, the only national or gubernatorial Republican incumbent to lose in the 2016 election that many would attribute partly to the staunch, relentless opposition of the "FT"MM, "McCrory didn't like it and you see where he is. This movement must survive (field notes)." I end with the humble hope that the writing of the lives of justice activists and the writing of the movements they join is a small part of that survival.

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