

THE WHITE EVANGELICAL CHURCH: WHITE EVANGELICALISM AS A
RACIAL SOCIAL MOVEMENT

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

White evangelical Christianity is widely recognized as a powerful force in US culture and politics. Most observers consider white evangelicalism to be a religious phenomenon that successfully mobilized to dominate Republican and national politics in the mid-twentieth century. I argue that such a characterization is incomplete and misleading. White evangelicalism, or the white evangelical church (WEC), is better understood as a white supremacist social movement that organizes itself through religious institutions and uses Christian discourse to promote white interests. To be sure, many WEC members participate because they truly believe in the religious purpose and benefits of evangelical Christianity. However, the WEC's demographics, doctrines, and political mobilizations are consistent with a social movement centered on whiteness more than conservative politics or Christianity.

My reading of race critical theories (e.g. systemic racism theory), social movement theories (e.g. political process theory), and theories of religion (e.g. civil religion) suggests that white evangelicalism is an ideal social institution for sustaining a white supremacist social movement. Unfortunately, most scholars have not explored this possibility. Using an enhanced version of extended case method, I expose tacit white supremacy at the heart of the WEC movement by examining its internal norms and social impact. My ethnographic research in evangelical churches in the South and Midwest reveals a pattern in which white evangelicals use what I call "race tests" to limit people of color's access and participation in evangelical churches. I also argue that

WEC growth strategies, popular literature, and collective behaviors evince a preoccupation with reaching white individuals who are failing to embody 18th century white virtue. Finally, I examine sermons and Bible studies to show how whiteness shapes the theological substance of the WEC and how white evangelicals place the Bible and God Himself in the service of whiteness. I conclude that the WEC operates as a white supremacist social movement by excluding people of color, mobilizing whites, and elevating whiteness to a sacred status.

DEDICATION

To the family: Stephanie H. Newkirk, Glenn Bracey, Tiffany George, and Aaron O'Neil Bracey.

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NOMENCLATURE

DTS – Dallas Theological Seminary

ECM – Extended Case Method

MBI – Moody Bible Institute

NASB – New American Standard Bible

NKJV – New King James Version

NIV – New International Version

PPT – Political Process Theory

SRT – Systemic Racism Theory

WEC – White Evangelical Church

WRF – White Racial Frame

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

I Should Have Known When...

The first person I ever invited to church was my college crush, a beautiful black woman named Celina.¹ We had become friends during the University of Florida's orientation for incoming black and Latino students and remained friends throughout the year. At some point, I decided to invite her to a small, student-centered nondenominational church that I was considering joining. She accepted the invitation, and we made plans for the coming Sunday. At that time, there were only about 80 people in the church; fewer than five of them were visibly African American. I had been several times already, so I recognized most faces, even if I did not know all the names.

Celina and I arrived just as church was starting. The worship leader was still speaking to the seated audience when we opened the back doors and took our first steps down the aisle to a pair of open seats. Those first steps would also be Celina's last in that church. Barely ten feet inside, she grabbed my arm and whispered, "there's not enough black people here." Then she turned around and walked out.

Introduction: White Supremacy in Disguise

How does Christianity, a religion that worships a person dark-skinned enough to be hidden in Africa, become dominant in a nation that is firmly committed to white supremacy? And given its worship of a nonwhite man from Asia, why do American Christianity's most committed members consistently demonstrate higher levels of racism

¹ All names are pseudonyms, unless otherwise noted.

than non-Christians (Altemeyer 2003; Brown 2011)? Finally, given conservative Protestant Christianity's numerical and institutional dominance throughout the United States, why do white evangelicals call themselves a movement and engage in dangerous, extra-institutional actions to advance their causes? In short, who are these people and why are they here? More importantly, what do they want?

I did not follow Celina out of church that morning. She saw the church for what it was instantly. I learned slowly but thoroughly, and I eventually left with initial answers to the above questions. Over several years of zealous service, I rose from member to lay leader to occasional Sunday morning speaker. I taught membership classes, trained evangelism teams, and disciplined² several men who went on to various forms of professional ministry. I abandoned my family during my parents' divorce, forsook nearly all of my black friends, silenced my liberal politics, and shunned all forms of dating and romantic relationships for years. The losses hurt, but I counted them nothing next to the honor of serving Jesus Christ, in evangelical fashion. I was part of a self-conscious movement, one of millions all working in various evangelical ways to "reach the world for Christ." The challenge was tremendous and the costs extremely high, but any costs were meaningless next to the joy of saving souls from hell and delivering them to God in heaven.

But those costs have all returned with double the pain because I now know that all the work I did and all the sacrifices we made were not really for Jesus Christ. We

² In evangelical circles, discipleship is intense interpersonal mentorship, often designed to develop ministerial skills and Christian behavior in the person being disciplined.

worked in His name, but He did not know us. We were in a movement; that was true. And we certainly preached the name of Jesus Christ. But we were not in service to eternal God. We were servants of whiteness.

None of us would have said it that way, but our actions proved it. As the Bible³ says, you will know a tree by its fruit. In this case, I can confidently say that the fruit of the white evangelical church (WEC)—both the individual church in which I served and the larger (inter)national movement—suggests it is not primarily a religious movement, but a racial movement in support of white supremacy.

By white supremacy, I mean any social system in which valued social resources are disproportionately moved from nonwhites to whites. Social resources include tangible (e.g. money, land) and intangible goods (e.g. considered intelligent). In a white supremacist society such as the US, whites hoard valued social resources through the everyday, impersonal working of social institutions (e.g. school districting), diffuse norms (e.g. beauty myths, pro-white prejudices), and interpersonal interactions (e.g. job discrimination). Despite explicitly claiming exclusively religious goals (e.g. popularizing Christian doctrines), white evangelicalism is a social movement that promotes white supremacy.

Were I not a black man who served long and passionately in the movement, I might have made the same mistake most observers do and mischaracterized white

³ Unless otherwise specified, “Bible” refers to the canonical “Protestant Bible,” which contains 66 books that were all once oral traditions and were written down later in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. In this dissertation, “the Bible” refers to translations of the Protestant Bible into English, which are used in US white evangelical churches. “Scripture” refers to portions of the canonical Protestant Bible.

evangelicalism as simply a religious movement with conservative political implications. That is certainly how evangelicalism is covered in popular media (Feeney 2012; Goldberg 2006; Wallis 2007). During election seasons, there is no shortage of media coverage concerning the mobilization activities and potential electoral impact of evangelical Christians, often estimated as “one-third of the Republican base” (Greenberg and Carville 2014). Academia largely follows suit, studying the voting power and effect of Christian conservative voters in strictly political terms (Johnson, Tamney, and Burton 1989; Rothenberg 1984; Suarez 2006; Williams 2012). And while many note evangelicalism’s demographic whiteness, that observation has not disturbed the assumption that the evangelical movement is fundamentally a religious one (Emerson and Smith 2000; Lee and Sinitiere 2009; Shelton and Emerson 2012; Wallis 1997).

This dissertation is different. By dint of scholarly study and painful reflection, I conclude that the white evangelical Christian movement in the United States is a white supremacist movement in religious guise. As such, white evangelicalism is like other conservative white movements that deny racist goals but have tacit pro-white ideologies and agendas (Blee and Yates 2015). Americans easily recognize movements like the Ku Klux Klan and Skin Heads as white supremacist, despite adherents’ religious claims and rhetoric. [Ironically, avowed white supremacists and scholars of white supremacist groups note that white supremacist meetings often feel much like church socials (Blee 2002).] However, “mainstream” white evangelicalism is no less dedicated to white

supremacy, despite its more muted presentation and greater reluctance to use violent tactics.⁴

Many evangelicals may not even realize they are part of a racial movement. Like other churchgoers, white evangelicals attend churches for many reasons. Many are genuinely devout, and others prioritize utilitarian social purposes (Feagin 1964; Luhrmann 2012). That does not mean the white evangelical movement is not a white supremacist project. Social movements often consist of participants with multiple motives, many only tangential to the larger movement (Gahr and Young 2014). Conversely, committed movement participants may strategically deny membership (Overdyke 1950). The nature and purpose of the white evangelical movement are best determined by observing its internal norms and social impact.

This dissertation, then, is for multiple audiences. First and foremost, I am writing for young people of color who, like my younger self, are looking to join communities that are serious about Christianity and spiritual health but do not know where to turn. For many of them, the white evangelical church—armed with media empires, organizations on every large college campus, and churches in most localities—will be the most visible option as they start adult lives away from home. Sadly, the evangelical church is not what it appears to be. I hope this dissertation will be a much-shared resource that will save them the pain of trying to enter and participate fully in a movement that is

⁴ Mainstream white evangelicalism is no stranger to political violence. Anti-abortion militants and sex education antagonists regularly use lethal force against innocents and educators (Irvine 2002). Evangelicals' also lobby for making homosexuality a capital offense in African countries (Gentleman 2010).

guaranteed to do them psychological, if not physical, racial harm. Secondly, I write to fellow academics, especially those who study race and social movements. The size, power, and character of the white evangelical movement have much to teach about the perduring nature of white racism and the relationship between power and social movements' form. White evangelicalism challenges us to recognize ways in which everyday whites are as racially motivated and organized as ever.

Evangelical Christianity: White by Any Measure

Having exited the evangelical movement and become a professional sociologist, I am consistently struck by the paradox of how staggeringly large the literature on evangelical Christianity is while so little of it seems to capture fully the essence of the movement. Despite volumes of associated studies, scholars have not so much as settled on a definition of an “evangelical Christian.” Broadly speaking, scholars are divided between relying on respondents’ denominations and self-reported identifications (Dougherty, Johnson, and Polson 2007; Smith and Johnson 2010) and a stricter test of adherence to traditional evangelical beliefs (Emerson and Smith 2000; Smith et al. 1998; Smith 1990). A third option to define evangelicals according to their identification with evangelicalism as a “religious movement” suffers from participants’ occasional unfamiliarity with and/or strategic rejection of the term (Woodberry, Park, Kellstedt, Regnerus, and Steensland 2012; Woodberry and Smith 1998).

Consequently, studies of the evangelical movement are inconsistent and often contradictory. For example, when scholars identify evangelicals by adherence to the doctrinal claim of biblical literalism, they appear less educated than self-identified

evangelicals as a whole (Woodberry et al. 2012). Indeed, evangelicals who adhere to the most common doctrinal markers of evangelicalism (Noll 2001; Smith 1990; Woodberry et al. 2012)—belief in Jesus Christ as the way to salvation and eternal life; the Bible as the literal and inerrant word of God; the necessity of being “born again” via conversion; and commitment to converting others via evangelism⁵—are more politically and morally conservative than their less doctrinally orthodox⁶ counterparts (Hackett and Lindsay 2008). For the purposes of this dissertation, I focus on doctrinally conservative evangelicals because they are the largest and most active standard-bearers for evangelicalism.

Regardless of definition, scholars agree that much of contemporary evangelical Christianity is a racially white phenomenon. Despite high cross-racial agreement on traditional doctrinal measures, scholars generally reserve the term “evangelical” for conservative white Protestants. The division stems from 19th century moves by white Christians, who previously forcibly converted enslaved Africans and African Americans to Christianity, to racially segregate their denominations and congregations. Physical separation on Sunday mornings mirrored legal segregation the rest of the week. Consequently, whites and African Americans developed divergent traditions, complete with distinctive worship styles, separate denominations, and conflicting politics (Edwards 2008; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). When academics turned their attention to evangelicalism in the late 1970s and 1980s, they often based their classification systems

⁵ Throughout this dissertation, I refer to these four beliefs as the doctrinal markers of evangelicalism.

⁶ Doctrine is the set of beliefs taught and/or held by a religious group.

on denominations' histories (Smith 1990), leaving race as the first point of division for categorization and subsequent analysis.

There is some recent effort among scholars to reconsider the standing division between black and white Protestants. Since the late 1960s, a racial reconciliation movement of multiracial antiracist evangelicals has pushed white churches to meaningfully integrate their congregations and pulpits (Gilbreath 2006; Perkins 1976; Skinner 1970; Wadsworth 1997). Despite high profile successes in a few parachurches⁷ (Williams 2000) and megachurches⁸ (Van Biema 2010), the movement has met with much resistance and left activists feeling “the blues” (Gilbreath 2006). Although many white evangelical denominations have spoken out against racial segregation within the church (Newman 2001), nonwhite populations entering the United States in the post-civil rights era have found it necessary to form their own evangelical churches, in part because of hostility from established white evangelicals (Alumkal 2003; Ecklund 2006; Kim 2006).

A surge in ethnographic research on multiracial congregations suggests some methods for integrating conservative Protestants (Becker 1999; DeYoung et al. 2003; Emerson 2006; Ganiel 2008; Marti 2005; Marti 2008), but the great majority of evangelical churches remains monoracial and retains the distinctions that justified separate consideration in previous eras (Edwards 2008; Emerson and Kim 2003). Indeed, identifying evangelicals by still *de facto* segregated denomination affiliations remains

⁷ Parachurches are Christian faith-based organizations that work across churches and denominations with little or no oversight from churches.

⁸ Churches with 2,000 or more members and/or Sunday service attendees.

the dominant and most accurate method in survey research (Steensland et al. 2000; Woodberry et al. 2012). In this way, statistical findings mirror the larger reality in which race is a primary shaper of one's church experience. It remains the case that nearly 90 percent of churches remain more than 90 percent of one race (Emerson and Kim 2003). Among self-identified evangelicals in the US, 76 percent are white, 11 percent Latino, 6 percent black, and 2 percent Asian (Pew Research Center 2014). Nevertheless, congregational and organizational segregation among US evangelicals suggests white and nonwhite evangelicals are pursuing different projects that deserve to be studied separately. Even in relatively rare multiracial churches, race differently contextualizes conversations, testimonies, politics and preferences, such that members continue having racially defined experiences (Edwards 2008; Marti 2010a; Marti 2010b; Marti 2012).

Therefore, I make explicit the heretofore-implicit convention of scholarship on race and religion by clearly defining the white evangelical movement in racial terms. Throughout this dissertation, I refer to American evangelicalism and its associated churches, parachurches, ministries, and movements as "the white evangelical church" (WEC). Likewise, I define white evangelical organizations as churches, parachurches, and assorted groups that claim the evangelical moniker and/or have official statements of faith affirming all of the doctrinal statements associated with evangelicalism. Finally, I identify white evangelical individuals by their self-identification as racially white, active

membership in a white evangelical organization, and personal affirmation of evangelical doctrines.⁹

Ultimately, my claim is that the contemporary WEC is not a racially-troubled religious movement, as much scholarship presumes, but centrally a racial one. Table 1 illustrates my argument. A religious movement would have an integrated, multiracial population that defines itself as a community with shared beliefs. Such a movement would prescribe a worldview that provides metaphysical answers to questions about the nature of humanity by using symbols and rituals to convey messages that have an internally consistent spiritual/theological logic. On the contrary, the WEC is demographically white, segregated throughout its major institutions, and produces internally inconsistent doctrines and exegeses of authoritative texts. Consequently, the overriding prescriptive worldview for adherents is consistent with 18th century definitions of whiteness despite being tightly wrapped in religious framing. I find that American evangelicalism is white in every meaningful way—demographically, doctrinally, ideologically, and politically. My contribution to scholarship is not only to demonstrate the myriad ways that whiteness infiltrates evangelicalism, but to show that the movement itself is a racial movement with race-based means and ends. Its demographics and history form a racially white foundation upon which its ideology,

⁹ Doctrine is a set of beliefs. Throughout this dissertation, I refer to doctrines in terms of a set of articulated beliefs, often in evangelical small groups. I do so because evangelical churches do not share a single denomination or creed. Doctrine is primarily taught and learned in small groups and individual Bible studies.

politics, and practices build. The WEC is a white supremacist movement with religious language and institutions. It is old white racist wine in new post-racial wineskins.

Table 1 Religious Movements versus White Racist Movement in Religious Guise

Type	Membership	Internal Logic, Message	Prescriptive Worldview
Religious Movements	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mobilized population is faith/belief adherence 2. Pan- racial/ethnic membership 3. Integrated at macro and meso levels 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Articulation of worldview that depends upon symbols and assumptions beyond the natural/visible world 2. Internal media productions feature internally consistent religious/spiritual logic 3. Definition of movement and purpose endure; shifts based on debates about religious/spiritual questions (e.g. nature of life) 4. Emphasis on religious practice for intrinsic, rather than extrinsic reasons 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Uses religious tradition to provide metaphysical answers about the nature of humanity 2. Strengthens contemporary adherents' connection to past adherents and/or deity

Table 1 Continued

Type	Membership	Internal Logic, Message	Prescriptive Worldview
White Racist Movement in Religious Guise	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mobilized population characterized by high levels of religious devotion and pro-white prejudices 2. Overwhelmingly white membership 3. Racially segregated at macro and meso levels 4. Not explicitly organized around race 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Low correlation between self-identification as group member (i.e. self-identified evangelicals) and doctrinally defined evangelicals (i.e. 5 tenets of evangelicalism) 2. Internal media productions feature religious/spiritual logic internally inconsistent 3. Media accent white virtuousness 4. Definition of movement and purpose change relatively quickly; contemporaneous with whites' racial interests 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Worldview based on an idealized view of whiteness 2. Strengthens adherents' commitment to the white racial frame 3. Deifies whiteness

Chapter Summaries

Obviously, this dissertation is making a large claim. Not only is it difficult to demonstrate academically, it is extremely difficult to admit personally. What black

person wants to admit he was once a zealous activist in a white supremacist movement! Difficulty does not imply inaccuracy, however. And no one knows oppressors' secrets better than "outsiders within" (Collins 1986). More importantly, white evangelicalism is such an impactful part of US politics and society that investigating it is an inescapable task for social science. My biography as an African American, former deeply-embedded evangelical leader turned qualitatively trained, race critical sociologist uniquely positions me to engage such a study.

The literatures I bring to bear to this study are as massive and sprawling as the evangelical movement itself. In Chapter II, "Conceptualizing a White Racist Movement in the Post-Racial Era," I set the stage for examining the white evangelical church by considering how three major areas of sociology—race, social movements, and religion—speak to contemporary white evangelicalism in the United States. I ground my analysis in Feagin's (2006) systemic racism theory (SRT) because its key features—attention to the interplay of US racial and religious history, particularly during colonization (see especially Feagin 2012); analysis of racial power as materially based, institutionally ensured, and ideologically rehearsed; development of the white racial frame as an intellectual tool for examining everyday whites' interpretation of social phenomena; and recognition of whites *en masse* as a unified force in defense of white supremacy—speak directly to the white evangelical church as a long-standing, segregated, powerful, and decentralized American phenomenon. I then put my race critical framework of American racism in conversation with political process theory (PPT), the leading framework for conceptualizing social movements. PPT exposes evangelicalism as a social movement,

but white evangelicalism's structure and means of operation do not mesh easily with the assumptions of PPT. By reconsidering the assumptions of PPT in light of systemic racism, I adjust the theory to make it more applicable to a white racist movement in the contemporary US. Finally, I introduce insights from sociology of religion to the conversation between race and social movements literatures. Religion scholarship emphasizes the social functions of religion, including the potential for racial and ethnic groups to use religion for racial purposes. I conclude that systemic racism, contemporary whiteness, and the logistical demands of social movements expose the white evangelical church as an ideal social location from which to launch a white supremacist social movement.

Chapter III details the methods I employed for examining white evangelicalism. I define extended case method (Burawoy 1998) and explain how I extended the method to facilitate data collection in the context of a geographically sprawling, institutionally diverse social movement. My methodology discussion concludes with a description of the various data sources I utilized and why I selected each type of data. Because the WEC is not explicitly organized around race, assessing its purposes and effects requires a mix of institutional and interpersonal data sources. I also briefly discuss how I navigated the difficulties associated with being a black man doing ethnographic research in a whiteness social movement. As we see in Chapter IV, gaining access to white evangelical spaces was frequently a contentious, often dangerous, exercise.

Chapters IV through VII lay out my argument for why the WEC should be considered primarily a whiteness movement rather than a political or religious one. My

argument rests on my conclusion that the WEC is a social movement of white evangelicals designed to save white individuals and whiteness itself from corruption by promoting zealous devotion to a colonial era form of whiteness. Chapters IV (“Race Tests”) and V (“Saving Whiteness”) show the WEC’s exclusive focus on white people. In “Race Tests,” I expose the methods white evangelicals use to maintain a demographically white church. White evangelicals consistently employ *race tests*—performances by white individuals and groups, in the presence of newly incoming people of color, that play on persistent racist stereotypes and/or histories of racial violence to preclude or precondition people of color’s participation in predominantly white social spaces, such as evangelical churches—that establish the WEC as white institutional space (Moore 2008). A white institutional space (Moore 2008) is one in which a history of racial exclusion conditions an institutional structure built on white logic that empowers institutionalized and interpersonal white racism against people of color. “Saving Whiteness” (Chapter V) shows the WEC’s preoccupation with reaching a certain kind of white person, specifically those whites who evangelicals construct as failed performers of whiteness. Chapter V includes analysis of a popular evangelical guide for leading small groups in racially diverse settings, revealing the movement’s implicit white audience and institutionalization of old racist stereotypes.

Having established the white evangelical church as a movement designed to save racially white people unto idealized whiteness, Chapters VI and VII, “Whiteness as Doctrine” and “Whiteness Becomes God,” examine how whiteness impacts white evangelicals’ personal and institutional relationships with Christianity. In “Whiteness as

Doctrine,” I show how the white racial frame (WRF) (Feagin 2013; Feagin 2006), the dominant racial worldview that legitimates white supremacy, significantly limits and steers evangelicals’ interpretation of the Bible. Ultimately, white demographics, whiteness ideology, and white racially framed doctrine culminate in a movement in which whiteness is God. As I show in Chapter VII, for evangelicals, whiteness defines the form and substance of God Himself, as revealed in individuals’ consciousness of God and institutions’ definitions of God.

This dissertation concludes with Chapter VIII, which entertains the implications of conceptualizing white evangelicalism as a whiteness movement for scholars and everyday Americans. For scholars, what does the emergence and trajectory of the WEC mean for existing theories about post-racialism, social movements and power, and religious secularization? For Christians of color, I echo the Israelites’ question to King Rehoboam three millennia ago, “What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse’s son?” (I Kings 12:16, NIV). What should nonwhites’ relationship be to the WEC? Should we try to save Jesus from his white followers or follow Israel’s example and “look after our own houses” in open rebellion?

CHAPTER II
CONCEPTUALIZING A WHITE RACIST MOVEMENT IN THE POST-RACIAL
ERA

I Should Have Known When...

Aside from formal introductions, the first words I ever spoke in an evangelical Bible study were, “We don’t convert people, do we?” The notion of evangelicalism and religious conversion conjured up images of the Inquisition and Crusades that I learned in high school. As the Bible study leader spoke of “reaching the world for Christ,” the later chapters of Chinua Achebe’s (2013) *Things Fall Apart* sprang to mind, making the connection between Christian evangelicalism and racism crystal clear.

But I was young. Desire to belong trumped my visceral, but poorly rooted, ethics. Little did I know that in a few short years, I would not only be evangelizing strangers; I would be training others to do the same.

Introduction

There is a sad paradox throughout this dissertation. Upon reflection, there were many moments when I should have recognized white evangelical Christianity for what it is: a whiteness social movement in religious guise. I did not make that connection, however, until years later when I was out of the church and deep into graduate school. Throughout this text, I offer “I Should Have Known When” vignettes, like the one above, that draw on my experiences in the white evangelical church (WEC) to illustrate moments that could have radically altered my history in the church.

Most readers would probably find any one of the stories reason enough to abandon a church. Maybe I am a slow learner. I could admit that. And that might be explanation enough for my experiences if they were mine alone, but they are not. Many people of color, some of whom made careers within white evangelicalism, report similar racist experiences within the WEC movement (see e.g. Gilbreath 2006). The sheer multitude of racist experiences people of color have within the WEC suggest the church has a fundamental racial problem. Many others before me have offered diagnoses, but I go a step further to conclude that the WEC's race problem is that it is centrally a whiteness movement, not a religious or political movement.

That is not to say that white evangelicals are overtly committed to white supremacy as consciously as the White Aryan Resistance or other recognizable supremacist groups. Many are committed to the explicit religious mission, namely increasing Christian belief and practice throughout the world. However, more than religious commitment is at play. I argue that two largely overlooked aspects of the WEC account for its development and success. First, as I stated above, the WEC is a whiteness movement cloaked in religious form. Of course, whites have long used Christianity as a tool for racial oppression. That part of the story is not new. What is different, however, is that the link between Christianity and white supremacy is more distant and blurred than in years past. Colonial Christian missionaries were quite clear about the connection between Christianity and white cultural and economic supremacy (Feagin 2012). Contemporary white evangelicals, however, are harder pressed to see such a connection (see e.g. Joyce 2013) in large part because the existence of Black Christianity and the

dominance of colorblindness as a discursive frame preclude defining Christian evangelicalism as white supremacy. Secondly, the concealing language of power and normality of whiteness create little space to imagine the need for, much less observe the realization of, a mass whiteness movement. Aside from explicit racist movements, changes in white life and politics appear as changes in time rather than concerted mobilizations of whites around racial issues. Histories of social movements have focused almost exclusively on movements of the weak against the powerful. Consequently, movements appear to be exclusively oppressed peoples' actions. In racial terms the assumption is that racial movements are done by people of color but not whites. Scholars have not developed and popularized a lens for seriously investigating movements of, by, and for dominant groups. This combination of factors—presumed separation between contemporary evangelicalism and its racist past and academics' failure to conceptualize social movements by everyday members of dominant groups—has obscured the WEC's status as a whiteness movement.

By grounding my analysis in Feagin's (2006; 2014) systemic racism theory (SRT), I move beyond assumptions that limit dominant understandings of the evangelical movement. Systemic racism argues that racism is a foundational and fundamental aspect of US culture. The theory consciously rejects colorblind assumptions that mask connections between evangelicalism and white supremacy, permitting investigation of racialized aspects of the evangelical movement. Similarly, systemic racism theory encourages scholars to consider everyday whites as a population capable of racially motivated social movement mobilization. Ultimately, systemic racism theory

offers the possibility of examining white evangelicalism as a racialized social movement.

Systemic Racism

Feagin's (2006; 2014) systemic racism theory clearly articulates how racism operates in the United States. Unlike rival theories that discuss racism primarily in interpersonal terms and search for "prejudiced" or "bigoted" actors to label "racists," systemic racism theory approaches racism from a structural perspective. Feagin (2006) and several critical race theorists (Bell 2008; Crenshaw et al. 1995; Haney-López 2006; Williams 1991) show how whites grounded the nation's founding documents and social institutions in racism. Among western nations, the United States is unique in that it is the only one *founded* in racism, namely the theft of Native Americans' land and Africans' labor (Feagin 2014). Whites designed major social institutions to constantly reproduce their collective domination of the material and social resources of the United States. For example, the US Constitution has at least ten provisions recognizing and protecting a property right in slaves (Bell 1992:1040). Consequently, from the beginning of colonization to the present, the life chances of every person within US borders have been substantially determined by their assigned racial group (Feagin 2014). Despite claims that the civil rights acts of the 1960s ushered in a new era of formal equality, American institutions continue to use white logic and policies that perpetuate inequality (Moore 2013; Mueller 2013). Indeed, contemporary whites' have ten times the wealth of black Americans because of government policies that promoted white wealth development and

inheritance at the expense of people of color (Katznelson 2005; Mueller 2013; Oliver and Shapiro 2006).

To ease their collective conscience, whites developed an extensive ideology to justify oppressing nonwhites. The ideology initially leaned heavily on claims that Christianity made Europeans superior to Natives and Africans (Feagin 2013; Feagin 2006). Indeed, European colonists initially distinguished themselves from Natives by calling themselves “Christians” and Natives “barbarians” (Haney-López 2006). Colonists viewed themselves as biologically and culturally superior to nonwhites, and they convinced themselves they had a God-given burden to civilize and Christianize the nonwhite “New World” (Takaki 2000).

Over time, European colonists transitioned from religion-based to color-based terminology, in part to avoid possible restrictions on levels of material and corporal exploitation when Natives and enslaved Africans [often forcibly] converted to Christianity. Whites invented the still-dominant language of race, with whites and blacks as permanent racial opposites and other groups (e.g. Asians) invented and placed in hierarchy according to whites’ historically contingent interests (Feagin 2014; Omi and Winant 2014). By the end of the 18th century, whites codified race into law as an ascribed, biologically inherited trait that determined a person’s legal rights (Haney-López 2006). Among other things, being white was a prerequisite for citizenship, property rights (including the right to own black people), immigration eligibility, jury participation, and access to state protection of one’s life (Harris 1993).

So then, systemic racism is foundational to the US in multiple ways. White racism, via stolen Native American land, is the physical foundation of the US. Racism, via stolen African labor, is the material basis for the nation's economy. It is also the foundation for the US as a political entity and its war capabilities because the founders financed the Revolutionary War with slave-produced goods. Racism, via whites' codification of slave trade and racialization of all peoples, is foundational to US law. Together, these features evince how white racism is foundational to the material realities of the US—its physical, legal, financial, and military existence.

Of course, access to those material resources was not distributed equally among people living in the Americas. Whites took those material benefits, unjustly enriching themselves as individual citizens and as a race at the expense of people of color, whom they unjustly impoverished (Feagin 2014). That unjust enrichment and unjust impoverishment have only been exacerbated by 150 years of post-civil war formal policies that continue to enrich whites and unjustly impoverish people of color. Key historical examples include a century of Black Codes and Jim Crow legislation, redlining policies, and homestead acts that benefited whites and excluded nonwhites. That history is perpetuated by contemporary actions, such as the gutting of affirmative action, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and other remedial policies (Bracey 2014; Moore and Bell 2011). These contemporary actions ensure that despite the current era of “formal legal equality” post 1969, whites retain economic domination derived from the long history of explicit racial exploitation. Consequently, the experience of everyday white Americans—living in majority white neighborhoods, enjoying police protection, access

to elite education and employment—is likewise grounded in the material exploitation of people of color.

Few white Americans acknowledge the ways that racial oppression enables their lives (Frankenberg 1993). The cause of whites’ ignorance—whether lack of exposure to racial knowledge (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006; Gallagher 2003) or aggressive resistance to the same (Mills 1997; Mueller 2014; Steinberg 2007)—is a matter of debate. What is clear is that whites’ colorblind rhetorical strategies (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Hill 2008), claims about themselves (Vera, Feagin, and Gordon 1995), and inaccurate descriptions of contemporary racial dynamics (Burley 2005; Norton and Norton 2011) reflect heavy reliance on what Feagin (2013; 2006) calls the white racial frame (WRF). The WRF is “an organized set of racialized ideas, emotions, and inclinations as well as recurring or habitual discriminatory actions, that are consciously or unconsciously expressed in institutions [in] U.S. society” (Feagin 2006:23).

At the heart of the WRF is “white virtuousness” (Feagin 2014), an unequivocal belief that white Americans are objectively morally good. Individual whites may exhibit deviant behavior, but the heart of all white people is good. Believers in white virtuousness read criticisms of white culture, history, and racial practice as fundamental challenges to their individual and collective sense of self. Therefore, criticism of white people or culture is inevitably an existential crisis for believers in white virtue because “white” is synonymous with good (Cone 1997; Fanon 2004; Freire 2000). If the white essence is not good, then white virtue is not real and white people lose their definition of self. The close relationship between white virtuousness and white self-identity generates

the secondary layers of the white racial frame. Those secondary layers include belief in the virtue of white traditions, norms, and institutions. The assumption is that virtuous whites produce virtuous institutions and correct any unforeseen institutional injustices. An additional layer of the WRF is that only whites possess such essential virtue. Nonwhites are not innately virtuous, and their cultures are deeply flawed by design and/or indifference.

The WRF is an essential feature of systemic racism theory because it connects structural racism to micro-level aspects of racism, such as attitudes and emotions. These microsociological phenomena are critical to structural racism because they inform the myriad interpersonal decisions and actions that sustain the racial structure. For example, residential segregation is maintained by the interplay of structural elements (e.g. racial wealth gap) and micro-level actions (e.g. a realtor steering whites toward white neighborhoods). These types of behaviors are born of a white racial frame that activates racialized ideas (e.g. classifying people by race and attaching stereotypes accordingly), emotions (e.g. fear of people of color), and inclinations to act (e.g. distancing oneself from people of color) that result in recurring discriminatory actions (e.g. steering people of color away from white neighborhoods).

Like all frames, the WRF's principal function is to convert a world of ambiguous data into an interpretable set of relationships and narratives. The frame identifies relevant information (e.g. racial identity and diction), uses an emotion-inflected narrative to connect the relevant information (e.g. Latina with a Mexican-Spanish accent may not be a citizen), and suggests behaviors in light of the selected narrative (e.g. a good citizen

should be suspicious of the Latina rather than treating her as a member of the in-group). At each step, the frame eliminates alternative (i.e. presumed irrelevant) data and stories, such that one who uses the WRF not only has inclinations to act in particular ways, he also precludes emotions, thoughts, and actions that do not conform to the WRF-friendly narrative.

The interaction of foundational, structural racism and a ubiquitous WRF is the basis for Feagin's and his colleagues' (Bolton and Feagin 2004; Evans and Feagin 2015; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Feagin, Vera, and Imani 1996; Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001) claims that racism impacts "every nook and cranny" of American society, including every macro- (e.g. economy, education system, political system), meso- (e.g. law firms, churches), and microsociological (e.g. marriages, friendships) phenomenon. The white evangelical church, which is a large religious social institution organized in collective churches built on interpersonal relationships, is no exception to Feagin's rule. Scholars who have examined how race functions in white churches have documented the influence of white racism at multiple levels of church organizations (Edwards 2008; Kelsey 1965; Rah 2009). They have not, however, questioned the assumption that the white evangelical church is a religious movement with race problems. This dissertation entertains that possibility.

Intersectionality of Race and Religion

Since Emperor Constantine's conversion in the 4th century C.E., Europe and Christianity have been culturally linked. Although peoples ranging from the eastern Steppe in present day China to central Africa identified as Christians at various times

during the first millennium C.E., the religion became associated with Europe via the Roman Empire, Roman Catholic Church, and subsequent crusades (Malek and Hofrichter 2006). In the process, the imagery and symbols of Christianity were westernized centuries before Europe's colonization of the Western hemisphere in the 15th and 16th centuries. That history constitutes the first western-whitening of Christianity and was the backdrop for European colonization of the Americas. Indeed, Pilgrims and other early European colonists used religious language (i.e. Christians versus Barbarians) to distinguish themselves from Native Americans and Africans, in proto-racial fashion.

A second historical whitening of Christianity occurred as whites developed the language of racism to justify exploiting Native Americans and Africans. Religious assumptions substantially undergirded whites' claims to being "civilized" and "disciplined" (Takaki 2000). In the 17th and 18th centuries whites further developed racist discourses and legal structures in part by importing the character assumptions of Christianity into the definition of whiteness (Haney-López 2006; Smedley 1993). To be white was to be civilized, and vice versa. Over the twentieth century, whites decreased the prominence of religious identity in racial definitions. After the 1940s, religio-racial categories (e.g. Hindu, Catholic) fell from the US Census as whites expanded the definition of "white" to include Jews, Irish Catholics, and other European ethnics previously excluded for not being Protestant Christians (Brodkin 1998; Ignatiev 2008). Consequently, race scholars decreased their attention to religion as a pronounced feature of race.

Unfortunately, following the events of September 11, 2001, whites redoubled efforts to racialize religion, especially Islam (Joseph, D'Harlingue, and Wong 2008; Peek 2005). Vociferous white evangelical Christians have been on the forefront of that charge. For example, Bryan Fischer, formerly host of “Focal Point,” a very popular program on leading syndicated evangelical radio station, American Family Radio, called for a moratorium on immigration from majority Muslim countries because “Islam is a contagion that must be quarantined” (Fischer 2014). The rapidity and intensity of evangelicals’ racialization of Islam indicates that the connection between race and religion remains strong in white evangelical circles. US Muslims’ reactions to post-9/11 racialization garners much scholarly attention, but the fact that whites are resurrecting the practice of overtly racializing religion suggests scholars should give at least as much attention to how religion functions in contemporary whites’ racial politics. In the current political atmosphere, reconsidering the intersection of race, religion, and social movements through a race critical lens is timely.

Examining Whiteness

Reconsidering the intersection of race, religion, and social movements requires a general theory of white racism in the US context (i.e. systemic racism) and a nuanced theorizing of the particular racial group(s) under study (Bracey 2016). Therefore, I draw on insights from whiteness studies to contextualize the white evangelical movement. Whiteness studies is a large literature that turns the racial gaze away from its usual targets (people of color) to critically analyze whiteness as a social phenomenon. Whiteness studies builds on Du Bois’s prescient analyses of whites as a group with a

constructed, shared identity, but fractured, even oppositional material interests (Du Bois 1935; Du Bois 2003; Twine and Gallagher 2007). Du Bois famously observed that although white capitalists and laborers had contrary economic interests, white elites successfully sold a “public and psychological wage of whiteness” to working class whites (Du Bois 1935). Economically and socially marginalized whites traded the possibility to pursue class interests, which they shared with nonwhites, for white racial identity and preferential access to symbolic and material resources over nonwhites. Du Bois’ insights exposed whiteness as a socially constructed identity that conformed to elite whites’ historically contingent interests rather than biological reality. In so doing, he demonstrated that whiteness and white people are not identical concepts. Whiteness is a social location that grants power, privilege, and prestige to individuals who are classified as “white.” As Hartigan (1997:496) explains, “whiteness specifies the cultural construction of what Ruth Frankenberg (1993) characterizes as a structural position of social privilege and power.” The racial identity of a group as white or otherwise may change over time and location, depending on the historical moment. However, whiteness as a social location consistently represents a position of power, including entitlement to all valued social resources.

The distinction between whiteness as a social location and “white” as a personal racial identity animates much discussion among scholars. Early whiteness scholarship uncovered whites’ collective efforts to maintain exclusive access to social resources and analyzed the effects of white identity on white people’s understanding of social phenomena (Bobo 1999; Frankenberg 1993; Haney-López 1996; Harris 1993).

Subsequent scholars questioned the universality of the white experience, noting that white individuals have never enjoyed uniform access to the spoils of whiteness. They argued that by dint of class status, ascribed identity, and/or chosen lifestyle, white people had such highly varied experiences that analyzing whites collectively was extremely fraught with problems (Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003; Hartmann, Gerteis, and Croll 2009; McDermott and Samson 2005). Ultimately, whiteness studies absorbed these critiques through a variety of nuanced arguments (Feagin 2013; Feagin and O'Brien 2003; Hughey 2010; Hughey 2012a; Lavelle 2012; Lewis 2004) and concluded that “whiteness as a site of privilege is not absolute but rather crosscut by a range of other axes of relative advantage and subordination; these do not erase or render irrelevant race privilege, but rather inflect or modify it” (Frankenberg 2001:76). The synthesis of whiteness studies is that the existence of various white social identities impacts individual whites’ access to privileges, but the variety of identities does not preclude analyzing the uniform effects of whiteness on white people or the possibility of whites acting collectively to exploit people of color.

To flesh the point out further, "whiteness as a concept" is distinct from what an individual white person may think, feel, or perceive. Whiteness is a racial project designed to connect material and psychological privilege to a presumed meritocracy based on racial status. A racial project is the articulation by social actors of a position that necessarily includes a definition of race and prescriptions for resource allocation (Omi and Winant 1994). To be "white" is to be an individual formally and/or informally ascribed the racial status, "white." White supremacy is the entire system that ensures

people designated "white" enjoy controlling access to society's major material, symbolic, and psychological resources. Whiteness includes the set of philosophies, nonmaterial culture, and habits that is presumed to distinguish white people from nonwhite people as a result of historical and/or contemporary dissimilar structural relations to major social institutions. In this way, whiteness stands apart from what any individual white person may feel, think, and perceive. In fact, one does not need to be white to be preoccupied with whiteness. To be committed to the cultural patterns, philosophies, and habits associated with white racial status is to be committed to whiteness. It is this commitment that animates (and occasionally eventually legitimated) European ethnics' claim to and transition from nonwhite to white status (Brodkin 1998; Ignatiev 2008). It is the commitment to whiteness that constitutes internalized oppression among nonwhite peoples and nonwhite individuals' collusion with racist (i.e. white supremacy-enabling) politics (Feagin and Cobas 2008; Pyke 2010). My argument in this dissertation is that for white evangelicals, being "committed to Christ" is synonymous with being committed to whiteness (Chapters VI and VII), and perceived commitment to whiteness/Christ is the central determinant of whether whites include or reject people of color from the church (Chapter IV).

The full arc of whiteness studies is important for this dissertation because my argument is that white evangelicals, as individuals and as a group, are engaged in a racial project to rescue and achieve a particular form of whiteness. I recognize the importance of identity differences among whites. Indeed, I argue that the evangelical subculture seeks to save whiteness from "fallen" white subcultures (Chapter V). White

evangelicals' preoccupation with "saving" marginalized white subcultures is key to understanding the WEC as a racial movement. However, I view white evangelicals' actions as part of whites' collective racial project of dominating people of color. All the actions of white evangelicals—evangelism, doctrine construction, political mobilization, aggressive childrearing and international adoption (Joyce 2013; Joyce 2009)—are efforts to universalize their definition of whiteness and realize the complete control of social resources their definition of whiteness/Christianity prescribes. The singular direction of these evangelicals' actions toward white supremacy as a racial project exists, even if few white evangelicals are conscious of it.

In addition to examining the case of white evangelicalism, my intervention in whiteness studies is extending work that highlights similarities among whites to the question of white mobilization. Much recent whiteness scholarship connects white subgroups to universal whiteness (Bonilla-Silva 2011; Hughey 2012b; Lavelle 2014), but the emphasis is on whites' cognition rather than the possibility of racially regressive mobilization. Indeed, the central substantive claim of much whiteness literature is that whites' perspectives result in their failure to recognize, much less consciously act upon, racial inequity (Mueller 2014). I read scholars' connection of white subcultures to a general whiteness project as an opening to consider whether subcultures of "ordinary whites" (Lavelle 2014) may be mobilized in support of white supremacy.

Social Movement Theory

My argument throughout this dissertation is that white evangelicals are engaged in a social movement that uses the language and organization of religion to advance a particular form of whiteness. The idea that white evangelicals would create a modern social movement may strike some as surprising given that white Protestants are twice privileged. White Protestants have enjoyed unbroken racial and religious dominance in the United States since its colonial inception. In the popular imagination, social movements are efforts by subordinate groups to resist the abuses of dominant groups. As a group consisting of the intersection of two dominant groups, white Protestants seem an unlikely group for social movement mobilization. Nevertheless, I contend that contemporary white evangelicalism is a social movement.

In academic terms, social movements are “those organized efforts, on the part of excluded groups, to promote or resist changes in the structure of society that involve recourse to noninstitutional forms of political participation” (McAdam 1999:25). Social movements are distinguished from other forms of collective behavior by their political nature, sustained activism, and use of noninstitutional tactics. The emergence, trajectories, and outcomes of movements depend upon three central factors: 1) political opportunities and constraints confronting a given challenger; 2) procurement and utilization of necessary resources; and 3) the collective processes of interpretation, attribution, and social construction that mediate between opportunity and action (McAdam 1999:viii). Although traditional movements (e.g. labor unionization, civil rights movement) involve large organizations seeking material redistribution through

changes in state policies, “new social movements” (Buechler 1995) target cultural norms and value systems.

White evangelicalism is a strange hybrid between traditional social movements and new social movements. White evangelicalism reflects traditional movements in that the WEC is a very large population, organized in several large organizations (e.g. churches, denominations, and political interest groups), that marshals resources and uses a mixture of institutional and noninstitutional tactics to effect state policies. However, the WEC differs from traditional movements because: its mobilized population is defined by religious identity rather than its structural relationship to the state or capital; evangelical leaders and members prioritize cultural and religious goals over institutional politics; most evangelical activists do not consider themselves part of a political social movement; and, historically, white evangelicals are relatively powerful members of mainstream America. White evangelicals’ religion-based identity and values-centered purpose make it similar to new social movements. However, the WEC’s sizable political influence, strong representation among elites in a host of institutions (Lindsay 2008), and mobilization *of* the powerful *for* the powerful distinguish it from archetypal new social movements.

Existing theories of social movements are ill equipped for analyzing the WEC. White evangelicalism’s hybrid form violates core assumptions of existing social movement theory. Political process theory (PPT) (McAdam 1999) enjoys paradigmatic status in social movement scholarship (Almeida 2003). However, its neo-Marxist theory of power does not map onto movements centered on diffuse status characteristics, such

as race and gender (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Bracey 2016; Buechler 1995). Consequently, the power relationship between activists and targets presumed in political process theory does not apply to white evangelical mobilization. Given that white evangelical rhetoric frequently characterizes evangelicals as defending traditions against liberal activists, studies of countermovements may seem more applicable to WEC mobilization. However, work on countermovements—movements concerned with the same issues as an existing movement but with contrary aims to the original movement—retains the assumptions and analytical concepts of political process theory (Dyke and Cress 2006; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996). Therefore, the theory of power in countermovement literature is as problematic for studying evangelical mobilization as political process theory. New social movement theories and other critiques of political process theory abandon the power assumptions of political process theory, but they do not offer an alternative theory of power that might better explain the relationship between cultural movements and their targets (Bracey 2016). Consequently, despite the conspicuity of evangelical activism, no body of theory is easily applicable to white evangelical activism.

I argue that the contemporary WEC is best understood as a whiteness-based social movement. Because the movement is centered on white people committed to whiteness, scholars must combine a theory of social movements with a theory of racism. This synthesized theory must account for the formation and nature of social movements while attending to how the logic of racism impacts movement formation and development. I have elsewhere critiqued political process theory and new social

movement theories for embedding white sincere fictions in studies of black mobilization (Bracey 2016). There I argue that social movement theory must be built on race critical theory if scholars hope to accurately interpret black mobilization.

The same is true for understanding white mobilization. In practical terms, one must consider how whiteness informs central concepts in social movement theory. Core concepts—political opportunities, resource mobilization, and cognitive framing—take on new meaning when read in light of the advantages of structural whiteness. For example, for most of US history, white racial status functioned as a formal political opportunity for white individuals and groups because whiteness was the central criterion for rights such as citizenship and property ownership. Indeed, whiteness continues to be a political opportunity because it confers legitimacy, state protection, and a host of other privileges on white individuals and groups (Powell 2000).

Likewise, whiteness functions as a resource because whiteness movements can take advantage of the material resources available to whites through a history of unjust enrichment. To the extent that whiteness is property (Harris 1993) in which white people have a possessive investment (Lipsitz 2006), it confers on white people property rights whiteness activists can use to discipline and/or mobilize other whites. Fear of being cut off from community is a powerful tool for mobilizing people in any movement (McAdam 1999); all the more in a movement for the advancement of a racial status defined only by its right to materially dominate others (Roediger 1994). Most concretely, the organizational structure of white evangelicalism depends upon mobilization of disproportionately white resources. For example, white evangelicals employ small

groups that meet in members' homes as the primary means for integrating newcomers into churches (Dougherty and Huyser 2008). The small group strategy depends upon members having large homes, capable of entertaining 5-40 people weekly, in safe neighborhoods where visitors would be comfortable attending. Widespread homeownership in safe neighborhoods is a white phenomenon because whites have much more wealth than people of color (Oliver and Shapiro 2006) and nonwhite areas are stereotyped as "unsafe" (Christian 2013; Johnson and Shapiro 2003).

Finally, the white racial frame does much of the cognitive framing work necessary for launching a whiteness movement. Diagnostic tasks (Snow and Benford 1988), such as defining whiteness as imperiled, are much easier in whiteness movements because the assumption that whiteness is under threat is embedded in the WRF. Indeed, the WRF is so deeply embedded in white Americans' minds that white antiracist and white supremacist groups share a positive definition of whiteness (Hughey 2012).

Throughout this dissertation, I focus on the role whiteness plays in the WEC. I make this choice because contemporary white evangelicalism is often discussed but rarely as a race-based phenomenon. Scholars, media, and some evangelicals define the movement in political (Brint and Abrutyn 2010; Goldberg 2006; Hopson and Smith 1999; Martin 2005) or religious (Finke and Stark 2005; Smith and Denton 2005) terms. In my view, that characterization is a strategic framing decision by evangelicals and a mischaracterization among academics. Evangelicals' indirect framing is similar to the black mobilization of the 1960s, which frequently framed black nationalism as "civil rights" reformism (Jalata 2012). Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence that white

evangelicalism constitutes a social movement. White evangelicalism satisfies accepted definitions of a social movement. The WEC is a sustained effort, having begun in 1942 at the latest (Carpenter 1980; Smith et al. 1998), that uses noninstitutional, even terrorist means with regard issues of women's health (Balmer 2014; Joyce 2013; Juergensmeyer 2003; Williams 2011), to effect policy change. White evangelicalism creates and utilizes political opportunities (Balmer 2014; Goldberg 2006; Lindsay 2008; Williams 2012), mobilizes resources (Lee and Sinitiere 2009; Lindsay 2007; Lindsay 2008) and aggressively frames its interests (Aho 2013; Balmer 2014; Thomas and Olson 2012) at least as much as any recognized social movement. Importantly, evangelicals define the WEC as a social movement (Joyce 2009; Lindsay 2007; Munson 2008; Rah 2009). Therefore, white evangelicalism's status as a social movement is beyond question. The only question is around the nature of the white evangelicalism movement. Is it religious, political, or racial? While acknowledging the religious and political aspects of the WEC, I argue white evangelicalism is fundamentally a racial movement.

Religion and White Evangelicalism

Durkheim defines religion as: "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim [1912] 1965:62). From a sociological view, religion is a universal and functional aspect of societies. Religion's primary function is to unify society. Societies tend toward universalism—seeing all in the group as part of the moral community. However, increasing social complexity leads to a tendency to emphasize individuals'

experiences, such as salvation or experiential consciousness, and narrow the moral community to something smaller than society as a whole.

Contemporary debates in sociology of religion often stem from assumptions in Durkheim's definition. A long-standing debate, for instance, questions the relationship between religion and structural power. Is religion an "opiate of the masses," as Marx famously claimed, that serves to justify oppression and sate would-be activists (e.g. Kowalewski and Greil 1990; Marx 1967)? Or is religion a tool that enables resistance by providing the material, organizational, leadership, language, and moral economy resources activists need (Cone 1991; Harris 1994; Morris 1984)? A second debate examines the relationship between social complexity and religious commitment. Do large societies retain religious identity and commitment as they grow and develop (Berger 1967; Stark 1999) or does secularization take hold as globalization challenges societies to accommodate religiously diverse populations (Finke and Stark 1989; Smith 2003)? These questions are further complicated by the advancement of civil religion (Friedland 2001), in which the sacred and profane are defined by their relation to social identities and states, rather than their relationships to the supernatural. Scholars have conducted religious studies in racialized contexts, such as social movements (Morris 1984), immigration (Brint and Abrutyn 2010; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000), and politics (Hall, Matz, and Wood 2010; Wadsworth 2008) to address these questions. Nevertheless, debates continue without resolutely clarifying the relationship between religion and systemic racism in the United States.

Many other scholars have directly taken up the issue of race and Christianity with less of an eye toward debates in classical sociology of religion theory. However, most of this secondary literature conceptualizes race and religion as distinct social phenomena that partially intersect. The resulting studies examine levels and causes of racial segregation within Christian churches and organizations (Brown 2011; Dougherty 2003; Finke and Stark 2005; Lee and Sinitiere 2009); the relationship between religious practices, beliefs, and expressions of racism (Mayrl and Saperstein 2013); why nominally non-bigoted white Christians persist in racism (Perry 2012; Porter and Emerson 2012; Tranby and Hartmann 2008); how and why congregations form multiracial churches (Dougherty and Huyser 2008; Emerson 2006; Marti 2010); and how people of color fit into the religious landscape (Alumkal 2004; Lee 2005; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Consequently, although this scholarship details various ways that race informs Christian practice, the tendency to conceptualize race and religion as easily distinguishable limits the literature's applicability to an inextricably raced phenomenon, such as the white evangelical church.

Analysis of religion among immigrant communities offers greater utility than most work on race and religion because it is less susceptible to the presumption that race and religion are easily disentangled. For non-Christian immigrants from majority non-Christian countries, religious identity and practice are often integral to basic aspects of their lives, such as racial-ethnic identity formation and maintenance, economic access, education acquisition, coping with racism, and meeting emotional and psychological needs (Alumkal 2003; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; McGregor 2012; Williams 1988; Yang

and Ebaugh 2001). Indeed, religion is so central to many immigrant communities' racial-ethnic identity construction that "it is difficult to establish the exact relation between the two—whether religious affiliation is essential to the ethnic community or if religion is ancillary to ethnic identity" (Peek 2005:218; see also Williams 1988:12-13). That some immigrant religious communities define themselves primarily in racial-ethnic terms and others primarily in religious terms (Yang and Ebaugh 2001:367) exemplifies the tight relationship between racial-ethnic identity and religious affiliation.

Given the historical relationship between Christian identity, white racial status, and contemporary white evangelicals' vociferous assertions that the US is a Christian nation, it is appropriate to extend insights about the interrelationship between religion and ethnic identity among religious immigrants to the case of white evangelicals. Majority status does not preclude whites connecting race and religion in ways similar to religious immigrants. Despite their dominant status, white evangelicals view themselves as racially and religiously "embattled" (Smith et al. 1998) and develop innumerable "parallel institutions" (e.g. youth camps, law schools; see Goldberg 2006) to meet basic needs, just as religious immigrant communities do.

Acknowledging this relationship between white evangelicals' religious and racial identities facilitates connecting sociology of religion to the earlier discussions of systemic racism and social movements. The presumption in mainstream sociology of religion that religious movements exist for religion's sake is disrupted by religious immigrant communities' utilization of religion and religious organizations for race-ethnic purposes, especially identity production and protection. I argue that white

evangelicals intertwine race and religion like religious immigrants do. In such a case, white evangelical Christianity serves race interests at least as much as religious ones.

Conclusion

I opened this dissertation with a series of questions that pointed out the seeming absurdity of the US producing a contemporary white supremacist movement composed of white evangelicals. In light of the discussion in this chapter (Chapter II), the development of the contemporary white evangelical church as a white supremacist movement in the US appears less mysterious. The systemic racism that characterizes the founding and contemporary reality of the US laid the groundwork for a white supremacist religious movement in that it co-defined race and religion from the beginning and attached enormous material benefits to that definition. Having claimed most good things—legal rights to all lands, labor, and nonwhite bodies; moral and intellectual superiority; authority over every social institution; perpetual claim to all future material benefits the nation might accrue; indeed, human existence itself—exclusively for themselves, whites put themselves in a position that necessitated perpetual racist mobilization. By attaching so many material benefits to white racial status, whites effectively issued themselves a blank check that they are constantly trying to make good. Gaining access to *all* the wealth and benefits of a nation is a tremendous potential trophy, but it requires an equally tremendous amount of work—not the least of which is perpetually subduing nonwhite peoples who innately want control of their bodies and labor and therefore periodically revolt individually and collectively. Ultimately, whites created for themselves an enormous carrot (e.g. material domination)

and terrifying stick (i.e. perpetually resistant people of color) that compel them to mobilize around white supremacy.

Their forms of mobilization are partially proscribed, however, by supplementary aspects of the definition of whiteness. While it is true that whites sometimes employ extremely brutal methods, the contemporary definition of whiteness makes impersonal means of control preferable to direct ones. For example, whites' Enlightenment-inspired belief in an ever-improving humanity [read white race], particularly in terms of morality, makes an impersonal Jim Crow (Goldstone 2011) and "New Jim Crow" (Alexander 2010) preferable to "primitive" hand-to-hand slavery. Similarly, whites' forms of mobilization are partially restricted by their adherence to "epistemologies of [willful] ignorance" (Mills 1997) that compel them to believe that racial inequality is natural and inevitable (Lavelle 2014; Mueller 2014). Preferred forms of mobilization do not trouble whites' ignorance or the beliefs built upon it. Finally, whites' tend to view themselves as racially endangered, especially in times of much overt resistance by people of color, and employ the language of victimhood to voice their assumed status (Lacy 2010; Lavelle 2014; Moore and Pierce 2007). Therefore, whites' ideal movement would emphasize their presumed victimhood rather than making naked claims for consolidating overt racial power. Taken together, whites' systemic racism brings much resistance and necessitates perpetual action to oppress people of color. The particulars of contemporary whiteness ideology channel whites toward forms of mobilization that minimize racial discussion, emphasize white victimhood, promote physical distance from people of color, and advance assumptions of whites' innate moral superiority.

If systemic racism theory suggests whites are perpetually mobilized oppressors who currently prefer movements that are racist in effect but muted in tone, social movements literature identifies the shape such a movement might take. Like all social movements, whiteness movements are characterized by a sustained mix of institutional and noninstitutional collective actions that target an institution and/or promote major cultural change. A whiteness movement must marshal various resources to take advantage of relevant political opportunities. The movement will also need a well-developed means of recognizing shifting cultural landscapes, articulating collective interpretations of issues, and diffusing targeted entities' counter-interpretations. The timing of such a movement's most visible and disruptive actions will depend upon when participants perceive a cultural change as significantly threatening to its core identity and goals. Finally, social movements scholarship assumes that all aspects of the movement—timing, tactics, financial resources, rhetoric, network of allies, degree of physical concentration—will depend on the relative power, that is structural position, of the mobilized population.

Because we are examining a whiteness movement that desires cultural change more than the state institutional adjustment, we should expect the movement to enjoy much elite support and have enormous access to institutional power, including holding leadership positions in most major social institutions. We should expect the movement to be physically diffuse and rely primarily on institutional, rather than non-institutional, tactics. That disproportionate reliance on institutional tactics should reflect a clear abundance of relatively stable political opportunities. Drawing on whiteness literature,

we should also expect the movement's racial framing and rhetoric to minimize explicit racial discussion while emphasizing its members' "cultural" vulnerability.

In light of those predictions from race and social movements theories, sociology of religion scholarship suggests a whiteness movement with the goals and preferences specified above is likely to manifest as a movement of highly engaged white conservative Protestants. The experiences of religious immigrant communities to the US reveals that the tie between racial and religious identity is often so close as to be indistinguishable, leading religious communities to create social institutions that promote racial-religious solidarity. White conservative Protestants, particularly evangelical Christians, consistently assert the synonymy of Christian and national identity. They also consistently evince high levels of racial prejudice, indicating they are likely to support and participate in a white supremacist movement. In that way, white evangelicals appear as the most likely population to generate a whiteness social movement of the type prescribed by systemic racism theory.

White evangelicals are not only a likely population for a whiteness movement; they also have all the necessary resources to launch and maintain an effective movement. The historical and contemporary dominance of US Christianity in terms of demographics and linguistic relevance offers movement activists stable, visible, and potent political opportunities. Clergy are among the most sought-after allies in all types of social movements, largely because they bring so many essential resources: pre-organized populations of potential activists, significant financial resources, professional prestige, and religious rhetoric that can easily frame issues. Because Christianity is the largest

religion in the US, framing issues in Christian terms is particularly powerful because it motivates committed Christians while being easily accessible to non-Christian publics. Most importantly, the combination of Christian framing and pre-existent organizational structures (e.g. physical church buildings) provides the ideal cover for whites to sustain a white supremacist social movement that promotes white moral superiority without openly discussing race. Indeed, given my analysis of race, social movements, and sociology of religion, the white evangelical church's existence as a contemporary race-based social movement is more likely than not.

Critically connecting systemic racism theory, whiteness literature, social movement theory and sociology of religion reveals the possibility that the WEC is a whiteness social movement. However, theoretical possibility does not guarantee empirical manifestation. Determining the nature of the white evangelical movement requires extensive empirical investigation. In Chapter III, I explain how I empirically studied the WEC. Because white evangelicalism is a geographically diffuse movement composed of millions of members with various levels of commitment, I conducted an extensive, multi-year investigation of the movement in a wide variety of circumstances. As we will see, undertaking this task required me to make difficult methodological choices and constantly reflect on my status as a participant researcher.

CHAPTER III

DATA AND METHODS

I Should Have Known When...

During my final year as a member of the white evangelical church (WEC), I lived in a house with six white male housemates (seven of us total). All of us were friends, and we chose to live there for the express purpose of making the living areas of the house available for church use. In a standard week, we would host between 125-150 people, mostly on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings.

On one such midweek evening, a housemate and I were playing video games before the Bible study group for that day arrived. As he was putting away one game, a news story came on television. He and I watched in disbelief as reporters announced that the Christian Coalition in Alabama was leading the opposition against a referendum to remove language in the state constitution that required racial segregation in public schools. We later learned that the Christian Coalition in Alabama eventually defeated the referendum (Roig-Franzia 2004).

The Alabama Christian Coalition's racist mobilization infuriated me. From that moment on, I was unwilling to remain silent about the politicization of our church. As the state ramped up the coming election year, political rhetoric peppered many church gatherings. As one of very few open Democrats, congregants regularly asked me why I voted Democratic. More than once, peers asked how I could vote with gays, atheists and other undesirables. In one case, a staffer's preschool-aged child overheard a political

discussion between a senior minister and me. Hearing I would be voting Democratic, the child shouted in disbelief, “You’re voting for a baby killer?!”

Introduction

The news story about the Christian Coalition in Alabama marked the beginning of the end for me in white evangelical churches. I became increasingly vocal about my politics, especially on issues of white racism. The subsequent mixture of dismissal, direct confrontation, and proxy arguments I experienced with fellow congregants resulted in me voluntarily leaving the church approximately six months later.

As my racial consciousness and voice grew, the myriad forms of racial discipline within the evangelical church became more apparent. At an institutional level, all the upper leadership found my racial and political views odd, if not anathema. That was evident when I participated in a closed prayer meeting of movement leaders at our church affiliation’s national headquarters immediately following the 2000 election. As the nation struggled to decide the election, all the affiliation’s national leaders met and prayed that then-Governor Bush would win. The prayer stunned me because my local church leadership made political silence and neutrality preconditions for my participation. I assumed the other ministers were under similar constraints. Clearly I was mistaken. To the leadership, my racial and electoral politics were “areas where I needed to grow.” Interpersonally, extremely close friendships—often punctuated with invitations into family photographs—became tense and fraught. Increasingly, it seemed the cost for racial consciousness might be the loss of all my professional and personal relationships.

Compounding the social pressures were the deep, internal conflicts race consciousness raised. If racial justice threatened my relationship to the Church and fellow Christians, did that mean I had to choose between God and justice? Could I be a *black* man and a *good* Christian? Why did race clearly represent an existential threat to my Christianity and ministry when other differences did not? The multilateral sites of discord—institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal—presented a daunting challenge and magnified my vulnerability. Those difficulties were multiplied by critics’ use of scriptures, doctrines, hermeneutic traditions, collective prayers, manipulation of political opportunities and friendships to discourage my racial critiques. At the time, the dimensions and scope of fellow evangelicals’ reactions to my racial critiques were overwhelming. However, the experience made me aware of the relevance of race at all levels of the contemporary evangelical movement.

Extended Case Method

My experiences in the WEC informed the methodological choices I made for this project. I chose to do an ethnography of white evangelicalism utilizing extended case method (ECM) (Burawoy 1998) because it allowed me to connect the microsociological behaviors that my experiences indicated inform the quotidian operation of the WEC to macrosociological patterns (e.g. racial segregation) that characterize the evangelical movement. ECM typically employs participant observation to examine microsociological phenomena and connect them to larger social structures by addressing silences in extant theories and/or extending theories to previously understudied phenomena (Burawoy 1998).

Therefore, ECM suited my study in several ways. First, my biography gave me a unique opportunity to entertain sociological questions about race in the white evangelical movement. Although conservative evangelicalism is an oft-studied phenomenon, most observers are either Christian practitioners primarily concerned with the health of the church (Crouch 2008; DiCello 2005; Gibbs and Bolger 2005) or sociologists of religion focused primarily on theoretical debates. Those studying race and religion (Brown 2011; Shelton and Emerson 2012) frequently rely on positivist methods (e.g. survey) that can show the presence of racial divides within the church, but cannot speak to the processes that create those divides (Zuberi 2001; Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008). Leading academics who publicly identify as Christians with ties to conservative Protestantism are disproportionately white men [e.g. Samuel Perry (2012); Michael Emerson (2006); Mark Regnerus (2007); Christian Smith (2007)] whose religious and racial identities may afford easy access to potential research participants, but whose presence does not disturb—and thus potentially expose (Garfinkel 1967)—white normativity in evangelical circles. My status as an African American man who is both a trained sociologist and former evangelical Christian allowed me to explore questions about race in white evangelical churches that few other people can investigate (see Chapter IV).

A second advantage of ECM is that it lends itself to the data collection techniques necessary for this project. Examining the contemporary white evangelical movement required gathering a wide variety of data from multiple sites. All social movements, including the WEC, necessarily occur in multiple social settings. Because I was interested in white evangelicalism as a whole, rather than its manifestation in a

particular religious setting (Becker 1999; Marti 2005; Sandler 2006) or political context (Calfano and Paolino 2010; Carpenter 1988; Evans 2009; Williams 2012), I purposely collected data in many settings. For example, I conducted participant observations in eight white evangelical churches across four states (Florida, Texas, Illinois, and Indiana). Social movement scholars have long employed participant observation to place social movements in the context of broad social conditions, including structural racism (Bracey 2010; Burawoy 1998; Johnston 1994). As a participant observer, I was able to see the processes by which white evangelicals created community among themselves, while excluding most people of color. I was also able to observe the formal and informal processes that embed white normativity and values in these churches' doctrines and institutional cultures.

Finally, I chose ECM so that I could address gaps in race, social movement, and religion theories. In terms of race theory, Feagin's (2006; 2014) systemic racism theory (SRT) grounds this project. The white racial frame (WRF) represents Feagin's (2008; 2012; 2013) most significant development of SRT since its inception. In his most extensive theoretical discussions of the WRF, Feagin (2006; 2014; Feagin and Elias 2012) argues diffuse multiple primary creators (e.g. Thomas Jefferson) and mass acceptance of the WRF occur in a type of *racial punctuated equilibrium*. Just as biological evolution occurs unevenly, with short periods of rapid evolution interspersed between long periods of relative stability (Eldredge and Gould 1972), Feagin suggests the WRF oscillates between long periods of stability interrupted by occasional periods of rapid frame reconstruction. Major transitions in racial structure (e.g. mass immigration

of new racial and ethnic groups, intense activism by racial minorities, or massive white peril) generate periods of rapid frame development and amplification by white elites (e.g. Republican presidential candidates, see Feagin 2012) followed by long periods of relative stability in the frame (e.g. slavery era, Jim Crow, colorblind era). Despite Feagin's development of the WRF as theory in these terms, many scholars, including Feagin himself, have mostly applied the concept in narrower contexts. Scholars have used the WRF concept most frequently in the context of specific institutions (Leonard 2014; Mueller 2013; Wingfield 2008) and to analyze the conduct and perception of high profile individuals (Leonard and King 2011; Wingfield and Feagin 2012; Wingfield and Feagin 2013). I employ the WRF in its original formulation as a tool primarily developed by diffuse white elites and adopted by masses of ordinary whites as they address perceived racial peril. Applying Feagin's original formulation of the WRF to a contemporary religious context, I find that the WEC currently perceives white people and white normativity to be under assault, and they turn to the WRF in defense of idealized whiteness.

ECM also facilitates my contributions to social movements and sociology of religion literatures. This dissertation adds to a growing literature (Bell 2014; Bracey 2016) that calls for developing a theory of racialized social movements that is grounded in an explicit, structural theory of racism. Class-based theories (e.g. political process theory) and new social movements theories cannot account for how race operates differently from (and intertwines with) other systems of inequality (Bracey 2016). Because extant social movement theories assume mobilized populations have little

relative power (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008), they are ill-suited for social movements like white evangelicalism, in which white identity (not to mention economic, political, and organizational structures) grants mobilized whites a great deal of power. My work extends social movement theories by making use of their strengths (e.g. attention to political environment and identity construction) while putting systemic racism at the heart of my analysis.

Similarly, I extend sociology of religion theories by addressing a substantial silence in the literature. Most contemporary studies of race and religion assume that religious organizations are primarily religious projects, and that the presence of nonreligious social strata (e.g. racism, sexism) informs, but does not rival or supplant, the fundamental religious project (Emerson and Smith 2000; Shelton and Emerson 2012; Wadsworth 2008). These studies also assume that racial animus is declining and, in any event, not a primary motivation for religious participation. Contemporary racial inequality in the WEC appears as an incidental feature and/or unintended consequence of an exclusively religious project. Utilizing ECM's emphasis on reflexivity (Emirbayer and Desmond 2012; Moore 2012), I realized that my presence in white evangelical spaces offered opportunities to extend extant theory by examining the importance of microsociological interactions between established white members and potential members of color on racial dynamics within the WEC. My ethnographic data, especially the participant observations, also allowed me to question whether nominally religious social movements are always in fact only religious movements. In turn, that question

lead to considering the role of religion as a potential “master frame,” concealing primary goals (Bracey 2010).

Data

To make these contributions, I had to extend the extended case method. Although ECM aims to address macro level theories, researchers usually base their critiques on case studies conducted in one or two institutions (Burawoy 1991). Because the WEC is a large movement with diffuse leadership and I wanted to use the WRF concept in a way that is faithful to Feagin’s original formulation, I had to conduct a ranging ethnography that encompassed multiple settings and levels of social organization. Consequently, I selected multiple data sources that could collectively speak to the nature of the WEC as a whole.

ECM requires persistent reflexivity and recursive theorizing during the data collection and analysis process. I began by critically reflecting on my own experiences in the WEC, questioning the degree to which the phenomena I observed and experienced reflected general trends within white evangelicalism. Gilbreath’s (2006) *Reconciliation Blues* was extremely helpful in that process, as it was another black “outsider within” (Collins 1986) offering numerous stories he gathered over several years from other evangelicals of color as he worked at *Christianity Today*, the leading evangelical periodical. Similarities between my experiences and Gilbreath’s accounts suggested my experiences were consistent with those of other evangelicals of color across the movement.

I then questioned whether the local church in which I served was typical of the contemporary white evangelical movement. Located in the South, that church was nondenominational, but allied with an international affiliation of evangelical churches that managed financial issues but exercised little control of local churches. At the local level, the church had one elder (senior pastor), several paid staff (junior pastors and deacons), and a host of lay leaders who managed the home Bible studies that formed the basis of church membership. During my service, staff transitioned traditional Sunday services to a “seeker sensitive” model, designed to attract young adults who were unfamiliar with or disliked traditional church services. In my time there, the church grew from 80 to 350+ attendees at Sunday services. Politically, clergy and congregants were very conservative. When I entered the church, I was one of only three known Democrats. Racially, the church was always more than 90 percent white, despite adding Bible studies to attract international students. In terms of organizational structure, size, political orientation and racial composition, the church was typical of white evangelical churches.

In other respects, however, my church was unusual. Although it was technically a community church, the great majority (more than 95 percent) of members were young adults between 18 and 25 years of age, most of whom attended local universities and colleges. Because it was initially very small, church teachings and members’ affirmed beliefs were more uniformly conservative and orthodox than many large evangelical churches. In addition to Calvinist-based beliefs (e.g. salvation by grace through faith, not works), church practices such as forbidding women to teach men and prohibitions on

premarital cohabitation evince the general conservative orientation of the church. These features—youth, rapid growth, and uniform doctrinal orthodoxy—suggested my church was at the cutting edge of WEC recruitment tactics, yet emblematic of its doctrinal ideals.

Having reflected on the context and substance of my history with white evangelicalism, I secured approval from my university's institutional review board and began formal data collection by selecting potential sites for ethnographic field research. To avoid regional bias, I selected four churches in the South and four in the Midwest that reflected broad trends in the evangelical movement. The churches ranged in size from less than 200 to more than 10,000 members, and all used some combination of visitor-welcoming Sunday service with independent home fellowships to organize congregants. I chose churches based on their national reputations as leaders in the WEC (e.g. a megachurch in the Midwest) and/or reputations as local leaders in their cities. My experience in evangelical circles, reading of evangelical periodicals, and familiarity with churches' cities informed my choices. I also asked several seminarians and staff of leading parachurches (e.g. Cru) to recommend churches they considered most influential in selected geographical locations.

After selecting churches, I attended a Sunday service to evaluate whether the church fit the criteria for a white evangelical church. I observed that church attendees were more than 80 percent white (usually well over 90 percent); in one case, the church published its racial demographics in a study and confirmed it was 85 percent white. Using church bulletins, physical materials from welcome desks, and information on their

websites, I determined that each of the churches: 1) affirmed the four doctrinal tenets of evangelism (see p7:5); and 2) considered themselves a single church community, even if most contact between members occurred at off-campus Bible studies. Satisfied that the churches I selected were indeed evangelical, I presented myself as any other visitor. When invited, I agreed to attend subsequent Bible studies or welcoming activities. At that point, I informed group leaders that I was an evangelical (which I was at the time) and an academic researcher. I asked them if they would allow me to conduct participant observations at public events, provided I did not record or take note of any intimate behaviors (e.g. prayers) that people would presume were private. Having established some level of rapport, based largely on my status as a biblically-informed evangelical Christian, leaders granted me access.

In all of the churches, with one exception (i.e. “Confederacy Church,” see Chapter IV), I engaged in participant observation of worship services, Bible studies, administrative meetings, evangelism, and/or fellowship activities from one to 18 months. These meso level data gave me insight into how the WEC operates at the local church level, which is its primary point of contact with members and targets for evangelism. These data, particularly printed Bible studies and informal conversations among participants, spoke to the WEC as demographically, intellectually, and doctrinally white. Throughout the process, I reflected on how my status as a black, Christian, sociologist impacted events. However, my fieldnotes revealed that my observations of members’ interactions with one another were similar in doctrinal and political content, if not always interpersonal warmth, as conversations members had with me.

After two or more weeks integrating into sites, I solicited interviews from group leaders, active white members, and committed members of color. Despite their reputation for being doctrinaire, self-identified evangelicals exhibit a diverse range of orthodox and unorthodox religious beliefs (Smith et al. 1998). I conducted in-depth interviews with 21 evangelicals to assess the degree to which the doctrines and white racial framing I observed in collective spaces and official church media also characterized individual members' understandings. I conducted interviews in Texas, Illinois, and Indiana from 2008 – 2011 (I excluded Florida for financial reasons). As shown in Chapters V and VI, respondents' narratives were consistent with my meso-level observations. To be sure my analysis spoke to the effectiveness of white evangelical techniques rather than just the local churches I visited, I also solicited interviews with evangelicals who were not members of churches in which I had conducted observations. Interviews ranged from 60 to 180 minutes and occurred in private settings determined by respondents. Respondents were 18 to 62 years of age, although only three (all of whom were clergy) were over 30 years old. Eighteen respondents were white; two were African Americans and one was multiracial. My respondents were disproportionately male (14 of 21), largely because most WEC small groups are sex segregated, which made rapport building much easier between me and other men. Seven respondents were active in the South; 14 in the Midwest. The sample was also highly educated. Eighteen respondents had college degrees or were active college students, including three seminarians.

Substantively, interviews focused on respondents' conversion stories, motives for evangelicalism, definition of a "good Christian", expectations of God, beliefs about non-Christians and the secular world, and spiritual practices. These topics outlined respondents' views about the definition, boundaries, and obligations of evangelicalism. I paired these interviews with spiritual journals from a separate set of five white evangelicals. These five evangelicals had done 30 days of spiritual reflection journals as an extra credit assignment for an undergraduate sociology course. After the semester, they were kind enough to submit their journals for inclusion in my dissertation data. In their journals, these respondents included a broad range of data—conversations, prayers, poems, reflections on formal discipleship, intimate thoughts about sexuality and politics—that gave tremendous insight into their conceptualizations of Christianity and the world. While the same themes emerged from interviews and journals, the journals represented a uniquely intimate look at evangelicalism's effects on participants.

To complete my analysis of the WEC as a broad movement, I gathered data that spoke to white evangelicalism at the macro level. Specifically, I performed a content analysis of the student codes of conduct at three leading evangelical institutions of higher learning—Moody Bible Institute (MBI), Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS), and Liberty University. These schools' outsized historical and contemporary influence on the evangelical movement is evinced by MBI's dominance as a sender of missionaries, DTS's training of leading pastors (e.g. Chuck Swindoll), and Senator Ted Cruz announcing his 2016 Republican candidacy for president of the United States at Liberty University. Their codes of conduct are intensely negotiated crystallizations of their

standards for ideal evangelical Christianity. They also indicate the deep socialization their thousands of alumni receive during training, which certainly impacts their subsequent missionary and pastoral careers. In addition to seminary codes, I analyzed the content of popular evangelical Bible studies and instructional materials. Specifically, I analyzed the “Small Group Leader Diversity Guide,” (InterVarsity Multiethnic Ministries n.d.) which Cru (formerly Crusade for Christ) had used in 2008 to prepare evangelical missionaries from at least 16 universities for a summer of evangelism in major metropolitan centers. Published by the leading evangelical press, InterVarsity Press, and disseminated by the largest student parachurch (Cru), the Small Group Leader Diversity Guide is highly influential among white evangelicals and reflects teachings about race and Christianity from the highest levels.

Conclusion

This dissertation is an investigation of contemporary white evangelicalism as a social movement. Because social movements are often geographically diffuse, embedded in interlocking social structures, and involve much construction of subjective frames, I needed to choose a method and gather data that could speak to the WEC at the macro, meso, and micro levels. Conventional survey approaches to studying racial matters in religious settings are too limited to get at the larger interpretive and conceptual (e.g. white racial framing) issues with which I was concerned. Table 2 summarizes the relationship between the central questions of this project, the levels of analysis necessary for answering those questions, and the data sources I selected to answer those questions. To speak to the demographics of contemporary evangelicalism, I reviewed quantitative

studies of the national movement to get a broad perspective and made observations in local institutions to see how those demographics manifest in physical spaces. I drew conclusions about the substantive character of the WEC at the micro level from individual evangelicals’ interview responses and journal entries, and at the meso level from content analyses of sermons and local churches’ print materials. Finally, I based conclusions about the ultimate, if often latent, project of the contemporary evangelical movement by analyzing its effects on individual evangelicals via interviews and journal entries at the micro level. Those conclusions are buttressed by similar findings based on content analyses of mass Christian media and educational institutions’ codes of conduct and the fact that my observations were consistent across four states in two regions of the US.

Table 2 Substantive Question by Level of Analysis

	WEC as demographically white	WEC as intellectually/substantively white	WEC as white political and cultural project
Micro		in-depth interviews; journals; reflexivity	in-depth interviews; journals; reflexivity

Table 2 Continued

	WEC as demographically white	WEC as intellectually/substantively white	WEC as white political and cultural project
Meso	participant observation in para/churches	content analysis of sermons, church materials	
Macro	quantitative studies		content analysis of mass Christian media and evangelizing materials; content analysis of leading seminaries' student codes of conduct; multiregional ethnographic sites

Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, I constantly reflected on the data and used them to inform my subsequent choices and conclusions. As a result,

this dissertation is a broad, but thorough, examination of the white evangelical church as a social movement. I find that despite using religious rhetoric and organizations, the white evangelical church as a whole is actually a racial, rather than religious or political, social movement.

The chapters that follow marshal all of the data discussed above to make my case about the nature of the WEC. As a whiteness movement, the WEC must be demographically white, substantively white, and seek whiteness as goal. The following chapters examine each of these characteristics of the WEC in turn, starting with how the WEC manages to remain demographically white. As we will see, the WEC does more than rely on impersonal social structures to ensure overwhelmingly white congregations. White evangelicals act interpersonally to maintain racial segregation in WEC institutions.

CHAPTER IV
RACE TESTS: RACIAL BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE IN
WHITE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

A man who has friends, must himself be friendly.... Prov. 18:24 (NKJV)

If someone asks him, “What are these wounds on your body?” he will answer, ‘The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.’ Zech. 13:6 (NIV)

I Should Have Known When...

A few years into my evangelical religious service, Peter, a senior minister, asked me to move into the church’s house. The church rented a three-story house from one of the members and used it for church activities. On the first floor was the church office and space for Bible study; the third floor attic was for band practices and more Bible studies. To supplement costs, five male ministers lived on the second floor. Three had their own rooms; Peter and I shared the largest room.

One day several months into our living situation, I was in our room getting dressed for the day. I had just taken a shower and was putting lotion on my legs. Suddenly, Peter bursts into the room and begins screaming, “There’s a black man in my house! There’s a black man in my house!”

Peter blocked the doorway and prepared for a fight, as the other ministers began running to the second floor.

I cried out, “Peter! Peter! It’s me, Glenn!”

As the other ministers arrived at his back, a slightly calmer Peter said, “Oh! Whew! Glenn. It’s you...I thought there was a black man in the house.”

Introduction: No Such Thing as Integration

I remember the sheer panic in Peter's face as he looked at me and screamed for help. I remember him standing in the doorway, arms gripping either side of the opening to ensure "the black man" had no escape. I remember thinking that I needed to calm him down immediately to avoid a scene—I was, after all, undressed and slightly embarrassed to have my door slung open so inconsiderately. I remember Peter's relief when he realized that there was no "black man" in the house, only me.

That incident with Peter was my own personal *Invisible Man* (Ellison 1952) moment. Even in apparent fear for his life, Peter defined the threat *racially*. There was not a man in the house; there was a *black* man. In fact, the threat was not the presence of a stranger at all. In evangelical circles, hosting strangers is the organizations' *raison d'être*. Peter was horrified by the presence of a black person in the church's house. Equally telling, by screaming out "there's a black man in my house," Peter communicated that there was a general understanding among the ministers that black men (if not black people in general) did not belong in the house. They all came to expel the dangerous, out of place black man. Despite years of co-laboring with them and literally living with them for several months, I, as "Glenn," was a stranger to them. In the church, I was alternately a nameless, dangerous black man, or a "Glenn" who achieved humanity by shedding blackness.

After calming Peter and potentially saving my own life, I spent a few days just dealing with the personal offense of it all. Every night I hopped up onto the top bunk while Peter lay below me. In such close quarters, I wondered why he had not expected

me. Why did he not recognize me? In time, my mind shifted to a larger question: what did Peter's shock reveal about the racial character of our church?

My *Invisible Man* moment clued me into a reality within my church. Although few of the members were Americans of color, I had conceived of the church as a racially integrated, majority white church. Learning that I was an invisible man—that my blackness did not fully register with my colleagues—eventually opened my eyes to the possibility that perceived integration may not be universal. In other words, as a black person, my race and person are always connected in my self-identity. Consequently, my presence, and that of other people of color, in the church defined the church as racially integrated in my mind. However, hearing Peter define me as something other than a black man exposed the possibility that for him and other white members, the presence of acceptable black people in the church did not mean the church was racially integrated. In fact, *exclusively* allowing only acceptable people of color potentially defined the church as effectively monoracially white in my white colleagues' minds. Acknowledging the possibility that to my colleagues the church may be all white for all intents and purposes made me question whether physically integrated spaces are in fact racially integrated. It also made me question how and why churches admit some people of color and reject so many others. For the first time, I questioned whether evangelicals' "open doors" are actually open for everyone.

A Movement of Whites, by Whites

Despite nominally being voluntary associations, where people are free to join or not, without any forms of official coercion (Warner 1993),¹⁰ the membership of nearly 90 percent of American congregations is at least 90 percent of the same race (Emerson and Kim 2003). Given the evangelical movement's commitment to "reaching the world for Christ," such high rates of racial segregation seem out of step with the movement's supposed goals. The white evangelical church (WEC) constantly strives to reach a wide range of subcultures—children (Vigilant, Trefethren, and Anderson 2013), hipsters (McCracken 2010), business people (Lindsay 2007). The WEC's failure to reach Americans of color is stark, and suggests informal features of the movement cause racial segregation to persist.

Nevertheless there is a trend among prominent evangelicals and scholars claiming significant advancement in racial dynamics within the evangelical community. A rash of organizational commitments to racial reconciliation in the 1990s—led by The Promise Keepers, followed by white and black evangelical Pentecostals' 1994 "Racial Reconciliation Manifesto" (aka "The Memphis Miracle") and the Southern Baptists Convention's condemnation of racism as a "deplorable sin" in 1995 (Gilbreath 2006)—has produced an assumption of widespread commitment to diversity in the evangelical movement. Bishop Harry Jackson and Family Research Council President Tony Perkins

¹⁰ The assumption of voluntary association persists despite much evidence that social contexts influence public and "private" religious decisions, often making religion a "semi-involuntary institution." (see Nelsen, Yokley, and Nelsen 1971; Ellison and Sherkat 1995).

(2008) claim racial reconciliation as a “core value” of the religious right. Evangelical favorites, such as lay historian, David Barton (2004), go so far as to claim white evangelicalism as the stalwart defender of racial equality against supposed overtly racist organizations, such as the Democratic Party.

Professionally trained academics stop well short of Barton-esque claims, but generally affirm the same underlying assumption that the white evangelical church is no longer overtly hostile to people of color. Scholars largely adopt the view that white evangelicals are “well-intentioned people” (Emerson and Smith 2000:1) and dismiss out of hand the notion that significant percentages of white evangelicals harbor and act on racially bigoted sentiments and other major elements of a broad white racial frame (WRF) (e.g. Emerson and Smith 2000:ix; Wilkens and Thorsen 2010). Through a range of methods and analyses, scholars attribute continued segregation among evangelicals to sweeping social phenomena—such as historically divergent praise and worship styles (DeYoung et al. 2003), unintended consequences of doctrinal differences (Emerson and Smith 2000), the separation of church and state and subsequent creation of a “religious marketplace” (Finke and Stark 2005; Lee and Sinitiere 2009), residential segregation (Blanchard 2007), “natural” tendency toward racial segregation in voluntary groups (Blau 1977; Blau and Schwartz 1984; Wagner 1979), minorities’ preference for identity-affirming spaces they control (Herberg 1960; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990), and the global dispersion of religious traditions (e.g. concentration of Hindus in India; Emerson and Kim 2003:219). Despite the immense range of explanations offered, they all conclude that contemporary white evangelicals remain racially segregated, despite their best

efforts (or at least lack of bigotry), because of forces far beyond individual whites' control. Although scholars have deeply explored the role white actors (i.e. clergy and congregants) play in integration efforts (Becker 1998; Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005; Emerson and Kim 2003; Marti 2005; Stanczak 2006), the segregation process is assumed to be a function of impersonal social inertia. One would conclude from leading scholarship that white actors are not major factors in the continuation of evangelical segregation. One would also conclude that people of color entering white evangelical churches would rather easily find church homes there, provided they are willing to embrace their, that is whites', worship traditions and customs.

My data suggest current explanations of racial segregation in the church are incomplete. I argue that human actors in white evangelical churches play a central role in continuing racial segregation by executing what I term "race tests" on incoming Christians of color. *Race tests* are performances by white individuals and groups, in the presence of newly incoming people of color, that play on persistent racist stereotypes and/or histories of racial violence to preclude or precondition people of color's participation in predominantly white social spaces, such as these evangelical churches. While I acknowledge the role macrosociological forces play in maintaining segregation, I contend that structural relations require institutions *and* human actors. Just as residential segregation results from discriminatory institutional policies carried out by individual realtors and lending agents, so persistent segregation in these contemporary evangelical churches involves white privileging institutional policies (e.g. tailoring

services to attract white congregants) in concert with actions by congregants to exclude people of color or precondition their participation.

Churches as White Institutional Space

The descriptor “white” in the phrase “white evangelical church” is more than a demographic marker. It implies a religious social space in which the demographics *and* religio-cultural norms of operation privilege whites. “That is, the style of preaching, music, length of services, structure of services, dress codes, political and community activities, missionary interests, and theological emphases” (Edwards 2008:8) are consistent with white religious traditions or tailored to reach “unchurched” whites (Edwards 2008; Rah 2009). Thus, the racial affect in white evangelical churches is totalizing, as whiteness informs every aspect of these churches’ culture and practice.

In this way, white evangelical churches exemplify what Moore (2008) calls “white institutional space.” Much more than a mere geographical designation, the concept “white institutional space” elucidates how institutions, in this case churches, become normatively white in policy and practice by explicitly accounting for the intersecting mechanisms—structure, culture, ideology, and discourse—that justify and reproduce white privilege in institutions (Moore 2008).

Simply put, white institutional space is created through a process that begins with whites excluding people of color from positions of power during a formative period in the history of an organization. During this period, whites populate all influential posts within the institution and create institutional logics—norms of operation, organizational structures, curricula, criteria for membership and leadership—which imbed white norms

into the fabric of the institution's structure and culture. And although the norms are white, they are rarely marked as such. Consequently, racially biased institutional norms are wrongly defined as race neutral and merely characteristic of the institution itself (e.g. "the *appropriate* way to act in church"), masking inherent institutional racism. Upon this tacitly racist foundation, institutional inertia and actors build a robust culture that privileges whites by vesting power in white leaders' hands, populating the organization with white membership, orienting activities toward serving and comforting whites, and negatively sanctioning non-white norms.

The consequences of white institutional space for churches are legion, but a couple require exposition for the purposes of this discussion. First, white institutional space creates the norms that produce many of the macrosociological factors (e.g. racialized worship styles) emphasized by previous scholars. Second, the hegemonic racial worldview common to whites is generally unchecked and frequently amplified in homogeneously white spaces (Bonilla-Silva et al. 2006; Feagin 2010; Hill 2008; Picca and Feagin 2007). This worldview, which Feagin (2006; 2010b) calls the "white racial frame," is "an organized set of racialized ideas, emotions, and inclinations as well as recurring or habitual discriminatory actions, that are consciously or unconsciously expressed [by individuals and] ...institutions [in] U.S. society" (Feagin 2006:23). The white racial frame includes positive attitudes about whites and negative views of people of color, discursive techniques for justifying racial inequality, and priorities that favor whites' material and emotional interests, among other organizing principles.

While the attitudinal aspects of the white racial frame—i.e. prejudice and bigotry—garner the most attention, the emotional component of the WRF is critical to the operation of white space. Fear of the “Other”—a foundational feature of the white racial frame—is fundamental to whiteness (Feagin 2010; Takaki 2000). Indeed, whites evince discomfort when merely discussing race (Bonilla-Silva 2010), not to mention in the physical presence of people of color (Becker 1999:238; Massey and Denton 1993). In multiple studies, whites claim segregation is “natural” due to “everyone’s comfort with their own group” (Bonilla-Silva 2010), an obvious projection of whites’ own feelings. Clearly racial homogeneity, like that in the great majority of white evangelical churches, is a valued commodity among whites generally (Massey and Denton 1993; Oliver and Shapiro 2006), largely for emotional reasons.

In this way, white institutional spaces, such as churches, meet a great many of whites’ needs. The historical and ideological foundations ensure that white interests are paramount to institutions. Organizational structure guarantees whites make important decisions, arbitrate disagreements, and have the power to sanction “inappropriate” behaviors. And demographics and institutional inertia make white space emotionally comfortable for whites. Ultimately, white space provides both the institutional infrastructure for whites to mobilize *and* a powerful emotional incentive for white actors to “protect” white space from perceived threats.

Historically, whites protected white institutional spaces by formally excluding people of color. In the post-Civil Rights (i.e. “colorblind”) era, however, formally excluding people of color is problematic because it exposes whites to accusations of

racism and public ridicule. Even in the absence of an official policy of exclusion, an all-white congregation can give the impression of Jim Crow racism and blatant hypocrisy, especially in evangelical churches nominally committed to “reaching the world for Christ.” Consequently, white evangelical churches are incentivized to demonstrate at least token integration, if only to ensure social acceptability.¹¹ In the colorblind era, whites must negotiate a delicate balance between ensuring the continuation of white spaces and having enough visible minorities to defend against charges of racism. I argue that evangelical whites achieve that balance through race tests.

One might expect religious contexts to mitigate white evangelicals’ interest in white space, as religiosity has been shown to sometimes improve social relations between groups (Pichon, Boccato, and Saroglou 2007). Unfortunately, adherence to Christianity does not always mollify whites’ racial prejudices, and may even amplify them. The mix of white evangelicals’ strong religious identity, sense of collective “embattlement” (Smith et al. 1998), and doctrinal emphasis on salvation exclusively through belief in Jesus Christ produces a strong group-identification effect, which can result in discrimination against perceived out-groups, including racialized “others” (Altemeyer 2003; Hall et al. 2010). Religious identification, membership in evangelical and other doctrinaire traditions, and intensity of religious practice are all positively correlated with racial prejudice and anti-black policy recommendations among white

¹¹ Of course, some churches go beyond tokenism and pursue significant racial integration for spiritual and other reasons (Alumkal 2008; Ecklund 2006; Edgell 1998; Jackson and Perkins 2008). However, this chapter is concerned with the 90 percent of white churches, which are racially stable and not aggressively pursuing integration.

Christians (Altemeyer 2003; Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis 1993; Edgell and Tranby 2007; Wulff 1997). To the point, the more frequently whites attend church, the higher their support for racial segregation (Brown 2011). These correlations are partially due to how closely Christianity, whiteness, and anti-black sentiment are associated in white American minds. Indeed, subliminally priming white Americans with Christian words (e.g. Bible, Jesus, church) increases their scores of overt and covert prejudice against African Americans (Johnson, Rowatt, and LaBouff 2010; see also Katz and Hass 1988; Uhlmann et al. 2011).

Returning, then, to this critique of extant literature on racial segregation among evangelicals, the lack of emphasis on the role of white actors in maintaining segregation in the church is a bit surprising. The features of white evangelical churches I discuss above—churches' status as white institutional space in which the white racial frame is largely unchecked; evangelicals' emotional ties to whiteness, fellowship groups, and Christian identity; and correlations between Christian practice and racial prejudice—suggest white evangelicals are highly likely to racially discriminate, especially if an incoming person of color threatens their religious white space. Given the divergence between proclamations of racial progress in evangelical churches and research linking prejudice and conservative Protestantism, an investigation of segregation processes in white evangelical churches is overdue.

Race Tests and Semipermeable Racial Boundaries

In the current racial era, often referred to as “colorblind,” white evangelicals are incentivized to create a semipermeable racial boundary around their churches. Extending

the medical definition of semipermeable, meaning an entity “allow[s] passage of certain, especially small, molecules or ions but act[s] as a barrier to others” (Stedman's Medical Dictionary 2002), I use “semipermeable racial boundary” to imply that white evangelicals create social boundaries that only admit people of color on the condition that newcomers conform fully and are small in number and small in effect. In other words, white evangelicals work to be sure only a few people of color enter their churches and that those few are the “right kind of people,” so that white churchgoers can continue to enjoy the white institutional space that is the evangelical church.

Exclusionary Race Tests

To that end, white evangelicals employ a series of race tests designed to exclude unwanted people of color and conditionally admit only a small number of people of color who can be used to accomplish whites’ racial goals. The type of race test administered depends upon whether established white members view incoming people of color as threats or potential assets. Potentially useful newcomers are admitted based on their racial utility. Threatening or otherwise unwanted people of color, however, meet with exclusionary race tests. Established members employ exclusionary race tests to identify and repel people of color whose racial identity, non-white customs, and/or racial politics disrupt the norms of religious white space. Drawing on deeply held stereotypes, whites execute exclusionary tests by performing clearly racist behaviors, without naming them as such, that rely on histories of overt racial exclusion and white violence to evoke negative emotions in people of color. Exclusionary tests are strong enough to cause most people of color to “choose” not to join the church, ensuring white members that the few

people of color who persist will not disrupt religious white space by raising issues of racial conflict.

Of the eight churches investigated for this study, *all* performed some sort of race test. More than half (5 of 8) performed exclusionary tests, which I initially confused as random acts of bigotry. However, after witnessing and personally experiencing such harsh race tests so frequently, I came to understand through ethnographic investigations that these exclusions and tests were patterned and were thus a feature of religious white space. An early example occurred at a large, wealthy evangelical church's Bible study group.

“China Gun”

After making my way up to a working class part of town, I arrived at the house where Bible study was held. The house was in a majority white, working class neighborhood, complete with small yards and old shade trees. Several cars and trucks lined the street.

As I waited about 15 minutes for the study to start, a couple of white women introduced themselves, and I settled quietly into a chair on the back wall of the living room—a good place to observe the room and figure out “who’s who” as the usual participants arrived. Soon the room became a bit crowded as some 20 regulars piled in. Michael and Krystal, the church-appointed group leaders, decided to send the eight men in attendance outside to facilitate better discussion as we “shared and got to know one another.”

Outside, we circled up and Michael encouraged everyone to “Introduce yourself. Just say your name and something interesting about you.” One regular participant, a white college graduate in his late 20s hesitantly started, “Well, my name is Tony. Um...I guess, I don’t know. I guess I’ll just say what my favorite gun is. It’s a Winchester hunting rifle. I just went hunting last week.” As they made their way around the circle, each of the regulars—all college-educated, 27-44 year old white men—followed Tony’s impromptu precedent. As they worked their way around and it became clear that each of the white members not only had a favorite gun, but had shot it within the last six months, I wondered, “What do guns have to do with Jesus? Why did *guns* come to mind as the interesting thing about you? And what is the polite way to say, ‘I don’t know why you assume everyone here has a positive association with guns, but I certainly don’t. My dad always told me, ‘Don’t you ever go in the woods with white people with guns!’” And it scares me that I might be violating that axiom as we speak.”

My nascent thought was abruptly interrupted when the owner of the Bible study house interjected, “My name is Andrew, and I don’t know what the real name of my favorite gun is...”—Andrew cocked an imaginary gun and pointed it at me and the Latino first-timer next to me—“I call it my ‘China Gun’ because when I shoot it, it just goes ‘Chink! Chink! Chink! Chink!’” With each “Chink,” Andrew drew back with mock recoil and aimed at us again.

Amid the others’ laughter, Emanuel (the Latino visitor) and I sat quietly. The already frightening mental image of all the strangers surrounding me holding their favorite guns was more than amplified by our host figuratively shooting the only two

people of color in the group while overtly using a racist slur. Images of historical racial violence instantly flooded my head—whites smiling under lynching trees like the ones in Andrew’s backyard while some poor black man like myself swung in the breeze (Allen 2000).

I cannot be sure which violent images went through Emanuel’s mind at that moment. His were likely more Latino-specific than mine, centered perhaps on the history of whites murdering countless Mexicans on both sides of the border (Archibold 2007; Gonzalez 2001). Either way, the event had a clear effect. Emanuel never returned. He later told Michael he did not think the group was really “his thing” (Interview with Michael).

Personally, I was instantly horrified. I felt like crying out “Jesus!” but I knew that would be an inappropriate response in this prayer circle. The whites’ laughter clearly demonstrated that they did not perceive how traumatic being figuratively shot by a strange white man yelling racist epithets might be for the two minorities in the circle. To the white members, my screams would appear without clear context. After all, Andrew did not have a *real* gun and he said “Chink,” not “Nigger” or “Spic.”

And how exactly would Emanuel and I follow up a fearful reaction to our figurative murder? Should we hijack the Bible study with a history of white violence against Chinese, Mexican, and African Americans? Could we safely assume that people who clearly love guns and just figuratively shot the only people of color present would happily hear us out and apologize? Or might they react with the usual hostility to this kind of discussion?

I decided not to take the risk. Instead, I instantly gathered myself, explained that I have never owned or fired a gun, and quickly passed the floor to Emanuel, who added a “ditto” to my statement.

Oblivious to the significance of the moment, Brandon (the final white regular member) added, “I’m Brandon. I’ve shot my favorite gun a lot lately. It’s an AK. I’ve been shooting a lot because after Obama was elected, my brother-in-law and I bought about \$4000 of guns and bullets before he [Obama] could take them all.” A couple of members nodded quiet agreement. As Michael began the study, I thought, “Better take that ‘Obama 2008’ magnet off my car as soon as this is over!”

The Centrality of Emotions

Ironically, the “China Gun” introduction was nominally organized for Emanuel’s and my benefit. The expressed purpose was to help Emanuel and me “share and get to know” the established white members. However, the white members’ hostile racialized emotions, stereotypes, and deep interest in maintaining comfortable white space motivated them to perform an exclusionary race test by conjuring up violent images and performances that established the prayer group as white normative (e.g. gun-friendly, Republican, laughing at epithets and racial violence). Despite Emanuel’s and my rather flat introductions, the white members clearly believed we had a very successful sharing time, which they reported to the larger group at the end of the study.

For my part, I thought seriously about how and whether to continue with the study. Given the introduction, I could only assume that the white normative behavior would not only continue but would become more frequent as members became

accustomed to performing “backstage racist behavior” (Picca and Feagin 2007) in my presence. Continuing in the group would mean further exposure to racist jokes and aggressive conservative politics, if not symbolic and physical violence. That sort of thing is not good for my body, much less my soul. Any seeds of spiritual profit would be quickly devoured by concerns about my safety and guilt about not standing up for my racial group or myself in those moments.

How could I, or any other race conscious person of color, sit there week after week without correcting that kind of behavior? How could I give silent approval to their racism? Am I willing to be “the black friend” they all reference? Would they call on me, as whites often did when I was younger, to vouch for them as anti-racists if another person of color challenged them?

Reading my immediate internal dialogue and subsequent reflections may give readers the misimpression that race tests function by causing intellectual or political crises for people of color. While such crises do contribute, I share my thoughts here to show that race tests are primarily about racialized emotions—those of whites and people of color. White evangelicals’ race tests derive from their emotional reactions to perceived threats from people of color based on stereotypes and fear that integration will destroy their white space (for discussion of how conscious and subconscious stereotypes generate racist actions see Steele 2010). These emotions give birth to racialized performances that cause emotional crises for people of color. People of color naturally react to whites’ hostile performances with fear, anger, confusion, disappointment, and a host of other negative emotions that discourage them from remaining in evangelicals’

white space. Ultimately, race tests resolve whites' emotional discomfort by excluding ordinary people of color and confirming that those who remain do not threaten the benefits whites derive from religious white space. Unfortunately, no such positive resolution exists for people of color, who must choose between abandoning the benefits of white evangelical churches (after all, they visited for some reason) and continuing at their emotional, psychic, and spiritual peril.

With regard to the "China Gun" group, out of concern for my physical, mental, and spiritual health, I originally chose not to continue as a member of the study. Both Emanuel and I were effectively excluded from the group. Under normal circumstances, the white members would have been free to continue with their white institutional space intact and unchallenged. Only after befriending Michael separately and being assured there was another black man who attended the group regularly but had been absent my first night did I return to the Bible study group.

Confederacy Church

This pattern of racist performance, visitor exclusion, and white space restoration repeated in a southern church. In a separate exclusionary race test, I was invited to a "home church" Bible study just outside a southern, college town. The members and I had never met. They received my name from an information card I submitted at church that week and dutifully called with a warm invitation. Being terrible with directions, I asked the caller, Dianne, how to get to her home. She said, "Be sure you get all of this because we live in the woods and your cell phone probably won't work out here. If you

have questions, go back to the highway and try to call because you won't be able to get through otherwise.”

Needless to say, I got lost and ended up calling again from the highway, which was less than ten minutes from the house. Clearly expecting my call, Dianne repeated her directions and I arrived about five minutes before the study was to begin.

The study was relatively small, only nine people—all white (excluding me), partnered, 35-50 years old. Dianne met me at the door, “Who are you?” “I’m Glenn, the guy you were just talking to on the phone. I’m pretty sure you gave me directions.” Dianne’s face squinted with confusion. Because of my diction, people occasionally assume I am white on the telephone. Dianne’s face instantly told me this was another one of those times. Given my phone voice and the church’s demographics, Dianne clearly expected a white man in her doorway, not the 20-something Black man before her. Dianne’s eyes still clearly saying, “We weren’t expecting *you*,” she eked out, “Oh. Okay.” Dianne then turned and introduced me to her husband, David.

Although I was the only newcomer, Dianne and David decided to delay the Bible study and give everyone a tour of their home. Dianne led everyone straight to the master bedroom, where an entire wall was covered in old, faded pictures and memorabilia. Puzzled, I approached the wall to get a closer look. I assumed these were long-yellowed pictures of passed relatives and maybe relics from their children’s childhoods. I drifted a bit closer to the wall, thinking this would be a good way to learn more about my hosts. As I surveyed the wall, it slowly dawned on me that each picture depicted a war theme; most were images of 19th century soldiers.

By this time, David had made his way from the back of the group to stand over my shoulder. Nervously, I asked, “Are these from the Civil War?” David answered with a quiet pride, “Yes. Yes, they are.” Looking at Civil War images is never a comfortable thing for an African American. People can debate its causes all they want, but in most black people’s minds, any mention of the war immediately conjures up images and narratives of whites’ vicious enslavement of Africans and African Americans—tattered clothes, sweaty bodies, scars on freshly beaten backs. Viewing pictures from that time alone is hard enough; it is impossibly difficult as the lone black man, surrounded by white strangers in a house you have never been in—where you have already been told your cellular phone will not work.

Hoping desperately to salvage the situation and assuage my growing fears, I proffered a follow-up question, “Are these Union or Confederate soldiers?” David took a fresh glance at the wall. His split-second hesitation told me all salvaging efforts had failed. I had hoped he sensed my apprehension and was eagerly awaiting an opportunity to assure me that these were Union soldiers, and his sympathies were firmly on the antiracist side of history. Instead, David calmly countered, “No. We have some Union stuff because we had people on both sides, but we only put up the Confederate stuff.”

Now completely horrified, I knew I could not afford the petrification that gripped my body. I had to get out immediately! There was no mistaking the implicit hostility in David’s response. David and Dianne making a point of showing the group (read: me) their Civil War memorabilia was bad enough. That they chose to display only the Confederate pieces made their hostility abundantly clear. Neither the display nor the tour

was about their heritage, which straddled the Mason-Dixon. They were clearly Confederate sympathizers, and they wanted me to know it. Evangelical Christian or not, I was not welcome in this home.

Once David finished a story about the heroism and hardships of his Confederate ancestors, I faked an emergency phone call and fled the house. Like many people of color who have tried unsuccessfully to worship in white congregations, I decided this was not a battle worth fighting. The physical risks, not to mention the emotional and spiritual ones, were *far* too great.

White Institutional Space as a Necessary Condition

Now afforded the physical and temporal distance to analyze the incident, it is clear that David and Dianne's actions constituted a exclusionary race test designed to prevent me, or any other racially conscious African American, from participating in their "home church." Their performance had all the hallmarks of exclusionary race tests—established white space, allusions to racial violence, evocations of disturbing images and emotions.

The performance also illustrates another critical feature of race tests—one that sheds much light on how whiteness functions in evangelical churches and other white spaces. In these and other examples from our fieldwork, white evangelicals never showed obvious signs of anger or frustration with our presence. There was no screaming, no yelling, no use of "Nigger" or "Spic," no physical assault. Given the deep emotional investments evangelicals have in white virtuousness and their religious institutions, one might expect more exaggerated outbursts when religious white space is threatened.

Instead, Andrew and the men's study laughed their way through the "China Gun" episode. Dianne emoted only confusion when she met me at the door, and David was remarkably calm when assertively showing his Confederate memorabilia.

Nevertheless, each exclusionary race test was devastatingly effective because the perpetrators' situatedness as *white actors* in *white institutional space* granted them power vis-à-vis people of color. Their performances alluded to historical moments of racial exclusion, thus reinforcing whites' ownership of the space and reminding nonwhites of their marginal status. Because whites perform exclusionary race tests in white institutional space, they can be sure that other white congregants share their negative emotions concerning people of color—most importantly a sense of threat—and positive emotional attachments to religious white space. Although whites vary in their reactions to racist performances, those who issue race tests can rest assured that white observers are far more likely to join, cheer, or remain silent during and after race tests than offer even a mild form of resistance.¹² If other whites do sanction performers, the larger group and church leadership will enforce white institutional norms of maintaining colorblind rhetoric and avoiding explicit racial confrontations (Moore 2008; Perry 2012). Conversely, people of color lack the demographic, organizational, and emotional support necessary to effectively challenge exclusionary race tests. In short, white space provides both the incentives for exclusionary race tests and necessary protections for executors of those tests.

¹² Picca and Feagin (2007) found that white observers of blatantly racist events offered resistance (e.g. verbal disagreement, walking out) in only one to two percent of more than 7,500 incidents reported in students' journals.

It is this combination of features—demographics, histories of racial exclusion, institutional structures that reinforce white norms—that enables obvious exclusionary race tests like those above and the subtler tests we observed in other locations. Again, members of five of the eight churches in this study executed exclusionary race tests within my first or second visit. That frequency suggests race tests are a common feature of white evangelical churches, although the details of individual race tests are often unique. In a more typical example, white members’ collective performance of ignoring an obvious newcomer functionally denied black visitors meaningful entrée to the church and established the church as white institutional space.

“Visitors’ Church”

Of the eight churches in this study, “Visitors’ Church” is the most like the one where I served. Located in the South and close to a large university, Visitors’ Church is a community church with a large college-aged contingent. Depending on the occasion, Visitors’ Church sometimes offers separate Sunday services for college students. The church also features bible studies and fellowship groups for singles, youth, elders, and people at various other stages in life.

My first visit to Visitors’ Church occurred early in the fall, and the church was eager to draw as many college visitors as possible. Church staff kept all of the doors to the main sanctuary closed before the service, which is a technique churches often use to encourage interaction between members and visitors. In the center of the foyer, just in front of the main doors, staff had a “welcome table” for newcomers. On the table were Bibles, bookmarks, information about weekday Bible studies, and other information.

Although no staff attended the table, hundreds of people mingled around the table and several perused materials.

I decided to take advantage of the welcome table as a means for making my visitor status known. Visitors' Church was one of the last churches in my study, and I wanted to give members a chance to approach me. In the other instances, I had entered members' spaces, mostly via Bible study invitations. In this case, I wanted to see if and how white evangelicals might invite me into their fellowship.

For 15 minutes before service and 45 minutes after, I stood by the welcome table. I occasionally handled materials, but mostly I meandered around the table and observed the crowd. In both instances, I assumed someone would approach me with information about the church.

No one did.

After an hour total of standing around without any interaction, I decided to press the point a bit. I walked into the sanctuary and found a junior pastor cleaning up. I gave my name and said I was visiting churches. He politely responded with his name and a welcome (literally the word, "welcome;" not an extended introduction). I then asked how many people were at church that day. He said, "conservatively, about 1,000."

Collectively Performed Exclusionary Tests

Visitors' Church is a very large white evangelical church with a tight connection to evangelical seminaries and a long tradition of training missionaries. Much of that training starts with teaching members to lead "missional lives," (Stetzer and Nation 2012) in which they make a point of evangelizing everyone close to them. In my

subsequent observations at Visitors' Church, members constantly spoke of evangelism. Bible study materials and group activities were often built around developing assertive evangelism skills. On a day when the church is expecting dozens, if not hundreds, of visitors, one would expect the church would greet all newcomers.

Instead, church members and staff simply ignored me. I did observe many white visitors being greeted, and there were several people of color in attendance who clearly already knew other church members. However, no one made any efforts to integrate me into the church. Being summarily ignored by 1,000 people communicated to me that the church was not looking to evangelize or integrate visitors like me.

Incidents in which visitors of color are isolated or ignored are exclusionary race tests that rely on group performances to exclude people of color. Collectively ignoring visitors of color over a rather long period of time is as much a racial performance as displaying Confederate memorabilia. Because of the long history of whites excluding people of color from white institutional spaces, whites have collective power—through word and deed—to demonstrate whether a space is open or closed to integration. When whites collectively ignore, avoid, or otherwise fail to welcome people of color, they evoke a centuries-long US history of explicit racial exclusion and create an unreceptive atmosphere for newcomers of color. Such collective, if silent, forms of exclusionary race tests are a critical part of the segregation process.

Utility-Based Race Tests

White churchgoers' race tests are not limited to exclusionary purposes. White evangelicals maintain a semipermeable racial boundary designed to promote whites'

racial interests in religious white space. When established members perceive a need to diversify white institutional spaces and they encounter potentially assimilable persons of color, they execute utility-based race tests to determine whether and how to integrate newcomers. Unlike exclusionary race tests, which rely on hostile performances to prevent people of color from participating, utility-based tests start with ostensible welcoming of potential new members of color. The catch, however, is that the welcome is based on newcomers' racial status and their willingness to use that status to serve the church's perceived racial needs. A brief example from a megachurch exemplifies the relationship between white members' racial interests and the receptions Christians of color receive.

“Megachurch”

After a week of email communication, I met Martha, a middle-aged white woman who is director of guest ministries for a megachurch in the Midwest. It was a very crowded Sunday morning, so I waited until after service to connect with her at the welcome desk. After brief small talk and a warm welcome, she introduced me to several assistant pastors and other ministers. As I thanked her and made my way toward the exit, Martha redirected me, “Now there's someone else I *really* want you to meet. I've been praying that God would send a bla— a man, that could step in and be a father figure to this child.” As she walked me to the other side of the foyer, Martha explained that a young boy's father had abandoned him and his mother. She then marched up to a biracial toddler and introduced the two of us. The understandably frightened child ran and stood behind a black woman in her late twenties, whom I took to be his mother.

With a face that said, “Who are you, and why are you talking to my child?” the mother stared as Martha introduced me—without explaining why she was introducing this stranger to her or her son.

Components of Utility-Based Race Tests

This awkward encounter illustrates the central features of utility-based race tests. Martha went above and beyond to make me feel welcome, even introducing me to major leaders in the megachurch. But her excitement was generated by her hope that I could meet her perceived need for a black man to replace an absent father. The irony, of course, is that the biracial child’s father is probably white, not black. But working from the white racial frame, Martha could not picture recreating a multiracial family. Instead she prayed for a “bla— a man” to complete her image of an appropriate partner for this black woman and her son. The warm welcome was contingent upon Martha’s belief that the church needed a new racial “other.”

Not all white evangelical churches’ racial needs are as idiosyncratic as the one at Megachurch. Other utility-based race tests I observed derived from more universal interests among white evangelical churches, namely a desire to appear socially current and increase membership. In the following example, a pastor recruited me based on his assumption of racially stereotypical talents.

Singing Church

The smallest church in this study is “Singing Church.” Most Sundays, the congregation hovered around 100 people, and I observed only five visitors in my month of observations. The membership is a bit older than most churches, ranging from

teenagers to a majority of middle-aged people and seniors. Nevertheless, the sanctuary featured traditional pews, a slightly raised pulpit, and a sound system that could clearly produce more decibels than the room could handle.

On my first visit, I arrived about 15 minutes before service. When I entered the foyer that ran along the outside of the sanctuary, a middle-aged white man and woman instantly greeted me and told me about the church. In short time, the pastor, Kenan, made his way over and introduced himself. Kenan asked what I did for a living and whether I had grown up in church. I answered that I had grown up in church and been very involved. When Kenan asked about my past involvement, I told him I had led Bible studies, preached, and organized evangelism teams. Nodding, Kenan waited for me to finish and asked, “But do you sing? We just need someone who can get on stage and sing out.”

Preconditioned Entry

The welcomes I received at Megachurch and Singing Church were by far the warmest I experienced during this study. Those greetings, however, came with a catch. In each case, my warm welcome was preconditioned by white evangelicals’ perceived need for a new person of color. At Singing Church, Pastor Kenan saw me as a potential new singer for the church. Like all race tests, Pastor Kenan’s test built on a long history of racial exclusion and stereotyping. The stereotype that all black people can (and like to) sing is historically connected to the “happy slave” narrative that whites used to justify slavery (Collins 2008). Pastor Kenan’s question, “But do you sing?” simultaneously dismissed me as an individual and recast me as just another black person.

By ignoring my list of previous and extensive church activities, Kenan revealed that he was not interested in my unique talents or how the church could benefit me. Instead, he reduced me to a faceless black person and employed typical stereotypes prescribed by the white racial frame.

By invoking the stereotype of a singing happy black person, Pastor Kenan revealed his expectations for me as a potential member of the church. He communicated both the service that he expected of me—i.e. singing—and the attitude with which he hoped I would give the service—i.e. happy. As we saw with exclusionary race tests, white evangelicals demand that the church remain white institutional space. White evangelicals expect churches to be white institutional spaces that meet their racialized emotional needs as much as their spiritual ones. By invoking the happy singing black person stereotype, Pastor Kenan simultaneously ascertained my ability to meet his racialized needs and willingness to do so without disturbing the church as white institutional space.

As the black recipient of Pastor Kenan's race test, I had to confront a host of questions and possibilities. First, I had to decide how to handle the insulting nature of the question. It was insulting enough to dismiss my personal history out of hand; doubly so to be hit with an insulting stereotype. As with "China Gun," I had to decide whether it was possible or wise to educate Pastor Kenan on the stereotype he was using and why that would probably drive away visitors of color. In this case, I again decided against educating my evangelical hosts. Second, I had to work through the mix of insult and flattery implied in the question. For some, the opportunity to sing before a crowd each

Sunday is quite appealing. However, because Pastor Kenan based his question on stereotypes rather than my biography, the question functioned solely as a distasteful utility-based race test that would have discouraged me and many other people of color from joining the church.

Conclusion

The American church has been racially segregated for so long that segregation appears a natural feature of the church. Investigating the processes producing segregation seems for most scholars to be a historical question rather than a contemporary one (e.g. Emerson and Yancey 2008). However, the great majority of American churches remain racially segregated, and that reality deserves sociological attention. Through ethnographic data from eight white evangelical churches, I demonstrate that persisting segregation in white churches is due to more than social inertia. Racial segregation in churches results from a continual process—a process that involves institutional norms and white actors working to maintain semipermeable racial boundaries that serve white evangelicals' racial interests. The role of white actors is painfully obvious to people of color integrating white churches, but underplayed in extant literature. As a Christian African American with a considerable history in white churches, I inhabit an “outsider within” social location that makes many aspects of the segregation process clearer than they may be to white colleagues and people unfamiliar with evangelicalism. It is from this unique perspective that I draw conclusions addressing the nature of white evangelical culture from an insider's perspective and the difficulties of integrating white churches as a racial outsider.

I affirm Collins' (1986) conclusion that marginalized insiders have a rare opportunity to demonstrate white society's unacknowledged dependency on and participation in racism. Having served in church leadership, I know that pressure to increase membership and fear of losing regulars are inherent to the evangelical charge. To the extent that white evangelical churches are voluntary associations competing for congregants in a religious marketplace, ensuring members' emotional comfort is an existential concern for every fellowship. It is doubly so for leaders, whose leadership status and finances hinge on the survival of the fellowship. That might explain why clergy and laity with varying levels of recognized authority executed the majority of race tests I observed (including participation in collective performances of ostracism). As a former leader of color in a white church, I have also seen how key aspects of white institutional space, such as implicitly racialized agreement among white leadership about what constitutes "appropriate" behavior, preclude the kinds of structural adjustments scholars of multicultural churches identify as essential to creating diverse churches (Edwards 2008; Emerson 2006; Emerson and Smith 2000; Perry 2012). Those same features provide cover for executors of race tests when people of color or sympathetic whites resist. White leaders generally share the white racial frame and structural interests that animate race tests in the first place. Consequently, in the rare instance when such incidents are brought to their attention, officials are inclined to question the legitimacy of people of color's perspectives and minimize the significance of race tests (Moore 2008; Perry 2012).

While I share an emotional connection to Christian fellowship that helps me empathize with white congregants who care deeply about their churches, I also share the pain and perspectives of Christians of color subjected to race tests. Where whites are inclined to emphasize the number of positive greetings an incoming person of color may receive, one must recognize the disproportionate effect race tests have on people of color's impressions. That effect is due to both the content and unpredictability of race tests. Race tests occur in every imaginable context. Some are one on one, others are public; some occur during official activities, others are informal. The randomness of race tests—being unpredictable in content, timing, and location—puts a great burden on people of color because it enhances the emotional shock of race tests for the unsuspecting and demands perpetual vigilance from the aware. Because race tests are sudden, and often implicitly threatening, their impact effectively dwarfs any number of casual positive encounters. For a new member of color, integrating a white church and meeting one's spiritual needs are extremely difficult when one cannot be sure if the next moment will be one of welcome or testing.

From people of color's perspective, the paradigmatic assertion that American churches are "voluntary associations" (Warner 1993) needs revision. One's ability to join a white church is not a free choice. It is contingent upon racial dynamics, specifically whether whites recognize newcomers as useful or threatening. The nullification of formal rules does not inhibit whites from restricting membership.¹³ To

¹³ Indeed, the right to racially discriminate with respect to offering religious affiliation is arguably constitutionally protected under the First Amendment (Gotanda 1991:8, 11).

true insiders (i.e. white members), whether visitors stay or go appears to be a matter of choice, but excluded people of color know there is a compulsory aspect to “choosing” to leave. And outsiders within know that staying exacts the heavy costs of racial service, including potentially sublimating one’s racial identity to ease racial tensions (Marti 2005; Marti 2010).

This chapter explains how and why the WEC remains racially segregated. Such segregation allows the WEC to function as white institutional space and pursue white interests while appearing to be a voluntary association. Therefore, segregation is key to the WEC project for several reasons. First, segregated churches collect whites into institutions where they are more easily politically mobilized. Second, because the WEC is white institutional space, it provides organizational and emotional attachments that unite whites and discourage internal challenges from people of color. Finally, a segregated WEC is an ideal vehicle for a whiteness movement in the colorblind era because its nominal ecumenicalism protects white members from charges of racism even as the movement remains segregated and pursues racist interests.

In the next chapter, I turn from the internal operations of the WEC to its evangelical goals. The WEC distinguishes itself as a movement in part by its efforts to reach publics beyond its current boundaries. I have shown that the WEC is demographically and institutionally white space designed to include only a few, racially passive people of color. In the next chapter, I show that despite claims to want to “reach the whole world,” the WEC is actually designed to evangelize white people and restore them to white virtuousness.

CHAPTER V

SAVING WHITENESS: RESCUING WHITENESS

BY SAVING BROKEN WHITE PEOPLE

I Should Have Known When...

Shortly after I left the white evangelical church (WEC), I had lunch with a senior minister, James, who was still a staff member at the time. After a short lunch, James took me on a walk to discuss recent happenings in the church. Toward the end of the talk, he mentioned that the leadership was discussing a book on church growth and asked my thoughts on a debate among the ministers. The final chapter of the book closed with a call for social justice within the church, with an emphatic call for racial integration. James said most of the leadership supported the call. Then he asked, “But don’t you think we could reach the world for Christ faster if we let each group reach their own?”

Introduction

For those active in the white evangelical church movement in the first decade of the 2000s, certain buzzwords are forever etched in the mind. Innumerable books and conferences on “church growth” were essentially ultimatums urging members to live “missional” lives, become “seeker sensitive” and adopt “emerging church” techniques to reach the “unchurched,” or suffer death by cultural irrelevance. Undergirding these threats was an intellectual vice grip of evangelical commonsense. On the one hand, globalization and increasing social visibility convinced many people that the existing generation had a unique opportunity to “reach the world for Christ in our generation.” Evangelical leaders of all stripes argued that every Christian has a spiritual duty to help

accomplish the task of evangelizing the entire globe. Armed with enormous media empires, hordes of mission-ready youths, and the power of the presidency of the United States, evangelizing all of humanity seemed little more than a matter of will. On the other hand, evangelical social scientists warned that American Christianity was “in crisis” (Olson and Groeschel 2009). In addition to ubiquitous signs of cultural debauchery—everything from the Super Bowl’s “nipple-gate” to the sudden emergence of internet pornography addiction—researchers documented church membership declines “in every region of the United States and every major Christian group (Catholic, mainline, evangelical)...between 1990 and 2005” (Rah 2009:17). On the whole, the number of self-identified Christians fell from 86 percent in 1990 to 76 percent in 2008 (Kosmin and Keysar 2008:2). Despite claims that the United States is a “Christian nation” (Goldberg 2006), evangelicals worried the US was following the path of Western Europe, its “spiritually dead” cultural mother (Jenkins 2007). The possibility of a “post-Christian” United States seemed every bit as real as the possibility of a Christianized planet. Living between perceived unfettered opportunity and looming death generated much anxiety in the WEC.

In truth, American Christianity was never as imperiled as evangelical literature made it out to be. Seventy-six percent Christian identification was more than enough to sustain cultural dominance, and disproportionate representation of evangelicals among the nation’s most powerful elites (Lindsay 2007) ensured continued access to society’s most valued resources. Despite declines in Christian affiliation nationwide from 1990 to 2008, “[f]rom 2000 to 2005, the evangelical church grew in 28 states” (Olson and

Groeschel 2009:38). Beyond church walls, evangelicals enjoyed unprecedented success. During the early 21st century, the WEC demonstrated ability to turn otherwise unremarkable feature films (e.g. *The Passion of the Christ*, *Prince of Egypt*), books (e.g. *Purpose Driven Life*, the *Left Behind Series*) and music (Gormly 2003) into economic juggernauts. Given such high profile political, economic, and cultural successes, evangelicals' sense of social "embattlement" (Smith et al. 1998) and general decline appears unfounded.

So then, why all the angst? The answer lies in the racial dynamics of American evangelicalism. Although white evangelicals drove much of the economic and political success, evangelical regional numerical growth was due mostly to increasing numbers of nonwhite evangelicals in nonwhite spaces. For example, of the churches planted in Boston between 2001 and 2006 (98 total, 76 reporting data), nearly half conducted services in a language other than English or held bilingual services (Corcoran 2007:11). During my fieldwork, one southern church began a Spanish-language service to reach the city's growing Latino population, and another southern church began a ministry for international college students. In both cases, the church's primary means for meeting and incorporating newcomers (small groups) remained *racially segregated*, even as the church's official membership showed increased racial diversity. Across the country, many nonwhite evangelicals bypassed historically white churches in favor of building their own institutions (Alumkal 2008; Ecklund 2006; Kim 2006). Indeed, nonwhite immigration buttressed American Christian majorities. Responding to white evangelicals' fear of losing cultural dominance because of immigration, prominent

sociologist of religion R. Stephen Warner (2004:20) wrote a cover story for a popular Christian periodical to explain that “[w]hat many people have not heard...and need to hear, is that the great majority of the newcomers are Christian....This means that the new immigrants represent not the de-Christianization of American society but the de-Europeanization of American Christianity”.

The problem for white evangelicals is not that evangelicalism is dying as a phenomenon or that souls are not being saved. The problem is that *white* souls are not being saved in sufficient numbers. Particularly troubling for the WEC is that Americans are not leaving Christianity for other religious traditions. Instead they are shunning religious identities altogether, indicating pointed rejection of their experiences in Christian churches (Kosmin and Keysar 2008). With respect to white America, the evangelical commonsense was accurate. The WEC had the tools to reach its target audience, but doing so would require making massive, structural changes. Despite decades of rebuffing evangelicals of color’s calls to remake the church into an ecumenical space, citing fear of the degree of change required (Bray 1992; Edwards 2008; Gilbreath 2006), the WEC movement proved more than willing to make major adjustments to save white souls.

This chapter is about how changes in the WEC in the late 20th and early 21st centuries evince a movement dedicated to saving whiteness by saving “broken” white subcultures. As an evangelical friend and fulltime missionary told me, “what you save them from is what you save them to.” By that he meant there is an inextricable link between how evangelists conceptualize the problems in potential converts’ lives and the

nature of the salvation they offer. If the problem is failure to assent to accurate doctrine, the offer of salvation is introduction to accurate doctrine. If the problem is poverty, the offer of salvation is a promise of wealth. Through analysis of evangelical church growth literature and practices, I conclude that the WEC movement constructed unbelievers as suffering from a broken and fractured form of whiteness. The evidence of that construction is that the evangelical movement's innovations were designed to reach white, middle class people who had lost faith in historically white metanarratives. White evangelical churches and umbrella ministries defined postmodernity as an existential threat to the movement and created a range of tactics to recover white "postmoderns." Those tactics implied a target audience suffering from stereotypically white pathologies, such as cutting and suburban exile, and offered a return to the larger white community through adherence to hegemonic whiteness. In the process, white evangelicalism reveals itself as a movement *for* whites and whiteness, just as race tests (Chapter IV) reveal the movement to be *of* whites *by* whites.

Constructing the Desired Other: The Specter of Postmodernism

History of the Church Growth Movement

In popular culture, religion and science appear as enemy combatants in a slow fight to the death. Every decade or so, someone announces "God is dead" only to watch religion resurrect itself in new guise. Therefore, it may come as a surprise to learn that the organizational structure and tactics of the evangelical church growth movement were born from missionaries' application of social science methodologies to missiology (Rah 2009).

Although he had several intellectual precursors, evangelicals regard Donald McGavran as the undisputed father of the church growth movement. A third-generation missionary, McGavran observed that his decades of evangelism in India produced only small churches that grew at about one percent annually while whole communities were converting to Christianity in other parts of India (McIntosh 2010). In time, McGavran narrowed his inquiry to four central questions:

- What are the causes of church growth?
- What are the barriers to church growth?
- What are the factors that can make the Christian faith a movement among some populations?
- What principles of church growth are reproducible? (Rah 2009:94)

McGavran drew three core, reproducible principles from his studies that became the central themes of the church growth movement: 1) churches should focus on verbally sharing the gospel; 2) churches should use social science techniques to research the causes and barriers to church growth; 3) churches need explicit plans for making church growth happen (McIntosh 2010:15-16). These principles represented a break from leading liberal religious traditions that emphasized good works and God's diffuse influence over explicit verbal interactions as the primary means of evangelism (McGavran 1990). In 1965, McGavran became founding dean of the School of World Mission at Fuller Seminary (Rah 2009:94), giving him institutional resources with which to advance his brand of missiology and influence generations of future ministers. Indeed, Fuller seminarians have used McGavran's principles to become superstars in the WEC movement. Rick Warren, for example, went on to found Saddleback Church, one of the largest evangelical megachurches in the US, and author *Purpose Driven Life* (2002),

which sold more than 32 million copies and was translated into more than 50 languages (A. Larry Ross Communications 2012). Fellow Fuller alumnus, John Maxwell authored *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (1998), making him a *New York Times* #1 bestseller.

Adapting to Postmodernity

As modernity gave way to postmodernity in the second half of the 20th century, evangelicals continued to apply McGavran's second principle by scientifically studying their target audience. They found that Americans were transitioning from modernity-based to postmodern-based thinking. Modernity is characterized by universalizing metanarratives, objective and universal truths, ethnocentrism, consumerism, and aspirations to move from cities to suburbs. Postmodernity rejects universal metanarratives in favor of situated knowledge, recognition of multiple truths, multiculturalism, and attachment to local community. Generation X, or "postmoderns" or "pomos," as evangelicals sometimes called them, were younger than modernists. Having grown up in relative economic prosperity, evangelical leaders surmised that pomos require churches that cater to them, much like clothing retail stores.

Most evangelicals reacted to postmodernity with much consternation. The notion of multiple truths, situational knowledge, and cultural relativism struck the evangelical community as nonsensical and extremely threatening developments. Books with frightening titles like "Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism" (Groothuis 2000) and "Dangerous Blessing: The Emergence of a Postmodern Faith" (DiCello 2005) flooded a Christian market desperate to explain, and

cut off if possible, the postmodern threat. Leading evangelical periodical *Christianity Today* ran a story asking “What Exactly Is Postmodernism?” before concluding “[w]hatever [modernists] are most afraid of, that’s what postmodernism is” (Crouch 2000:76).

While modernist evangelicals fretted, some innovative evangelicals embraced postmodernism and looked for ways to reach the postmodern generation. Their collective efforts came to be known as the “emergent church” (Sweet and Crouch 2003). Emergent evangelical churches were “seeker sensitive” (Sargeant 2000), meaning they avoided any semblance of traditional church features (e.g. alters, centralized crosses, suits and ties) because their research suggested postmoderns “like Jesus but not the church” (Kimball 2007). “Emergent church” leaders, such as Dan Kimball, tried to make Jesus cool by integrating secular culture and evangelical culture as much as possible.

Seeker sensitive and other postmodern sensitive churches broached innumerable evangelical taboos. A major innovation was deemphasizing Sunday service in favor of a small group model. Rather than designing Sunday service for committed Christians, postmodern evangelicals used Sunday service to attract newcomers and shifted doctrine and spiritual development to small group Bible studies that met separate from major church functions. Megachurches limited the depth of Sunday sermons in favor of entertaining, illustration-filled short sermonets that engaged nonbelievers more easily.

More daring emergent leaders began holding services in traditionally secular places, such as dance clubs, bars, and coffee shops. Pastors dyed their hair, threw on fashion accessories, gave “talks” instead of sermons, and “preached” in shorts and

sandals instead of suits. Megachurches, such as Willow Creek in Chicago and Northland in Orlando, converted traditional worship services with hymns into virtual weekly rock concerts, complete with light shows and maxed out speakers. Some evangelicals even encouraged members to smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol if it would enable them to convert more people to the faith (McCracken 2010).

In time, previously hesitant evangelicals oriented themselves to postmodern, “spiritual but not religious” potential converts. Established churches increasingly offered separate “traditional” and “contemporary” services. Evangelical publishing houses aggressively pushed literature promoting the emergent church movement. Although the number of churches that self-identified exclusively with the “emerging church” label was small—Bolger and Gibbs (2005) estimate only 200 worldwide in 2005—there were at least 50 books with an emergent church theme (Rah 2009:111). The emergent church featured heavily in *Christianity Today* and evangelical radio. No tradition was so precious, no change so difficult for the WEC. Evangelicals moved heaven and Earth to reach as many postmoderns as possible.

Racism and Church Growth Movement Theology

At every turn, the 20th century church growth movement and its 20th and 21st century descendents have been racist white projects. McGavran’s work in India is part of a long history of ethnocentric white Christians using imperial state power to convert nonwhite peoples from indigenous religions to Christianity. Indeed, after researching evangelicalism in India, McGavran rearranged an international trip so that he could study white tactics of evangelicalism in Africa (McGavran 2005). The result of his

studies is *Bridges to God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (McGavran 2005), which is taught so extensively in seminaries that it is sometimes called “the Magna Carta of the Church Growth Movement” (McIntosh 2010). Consequently, the Church Growth Movement is essentially a study in how whites can most effectively convert Africans and Asian Indians to European Christianity. Although McGavran encouraged US theologians and missiologists to apply Church Growth principles in domestic contexts, such application was always an extrapolation. Indeed, much of the critique of the Church Growth Movement centers on limitations of church growth techniques due to McGavran’s inattention to how African and Indian cultures conditioned their religious practices, including communal conversion to Christianity (Bishop 2009:159; Rah 2009). Given McGavran’s explicit use of anthropological and sociological research methods, such inattention to the importance of Asian and African cultures is simultaneously extraordinary—how can one use anthropological methods and fail to appreciate the significance of culture?—and typical of early 20th century scientific racism.

More directly, McGavran’s push for direct, vocal evangelism was a theologically conservative reaction to liberal theologians’ definition of evangelism and mature Christianity. McGavran studied under the legendary theologian, H. Richard Niebuhr, at Yale Divinity School. In McGavran’s words, Niebuhr “used to say that mission was everything the church does outside its four walls. It was philanthropy, education, medicine, famine relief, evangelism, and world friendship” (quoted in McIntosh 2010:13). During his missions in India in the 1930s, McGavran began moving toward prioritizing verbal evangelism over “world friendship” evangelism. By 1965, McGavran

defined “good works” as ancillary to the Church’s essential mission of individual conversion.

The location and timing of McGavran’s theological shift are suspicious. The liberal tradition from which McGavran broke increasingly advocated the social gospel and other socially engaged forms of Christianity (Ford, Higton, and Zahl 2012). These liberal traditions’ social justice oriented theology paralleled intensifying social movements (e.g. black civil rights movement). Liberal theologians, especially Niebuhr, added intellectual support to Christian activists’ efforts to employ the organization and language of the church in social justice efforts (Cone 1969). Breaking with the liberal tradition in favor of an individualist, materially detached form of evangelism paralleled political conservatism’s rejection of identity politics, communal justice, and moralistic mobilization. It also paralleled whites’ increasing discomfort with blacks’ civil rights mobilizations.

During the 1930s and 40s, African Americans generated major challenges to racial segregation and won significant civil rights gains. Supreme Court rulings, such as *Smith v Allwright* (1944) and *Sweatt v Painter* (1950), struck down the all-white primary and forbade segregated public law schools. Jackie Robinson’s integration of Major League Baseball (1947) and Hattie McDaniel’s (1940) academy award victory signaled black ascendance in mainstream popular culture. President Truman’s 1948 order desegregating the armed services suggested the federal government was prepared to substantially abandon Jim Crow as well. Whites reacted to these and similar advancements with counter-mobilizations of their own. Southern politicians split from

the Democratic Party and formed the pro-segregation Dixiecrats; Governor Johnston (D-SC) avoided *Smith's* (1944) mandatory integration of primary voting by declaring the Democratic Party a "private club" (White 2006:15). In this climate of black resistance and white obstinacy, white church participation grew to its highest levels in US history (Dillon 2003:91-2). In 1942, the same year that James Farmer formed the Congress on Racial Equality, doctrinally conservative preachers building on McGavran's scholarship formed the modern evangelical movement out of concern that [white] Christians needed to "engage" US social and political culture (Smith et al. 1998). Despite their intention to be politically engaged, white evangelicals were keen to avoid speaking on black civil rights. For example, Billy Graham held segregated crusades and distanced himself from integrationist efforts for fear activists had communist sympathies (Emerson and Smith 2000:46-7). Adopting theological positions, such as McGavran's, that focused on direct evangelism and deemed racial progress a futile distraction better left until Jesus' return,¹⁴ facilitated the growth of white evangelicalism, especially in the South (Emerson and Smith 2000:47).

The exact degree to which McGavran's theological transition or evangelical institutions' transitions from opposing to energetically embracing McGavran's new position is directly attributable to social unrest in the mid 20th century is unclear. What is certain is that evangelical individuals and institutions recognized the relationship

¹⁴ Some Christians, including most evangelicals, believe that Jesus Christ will return to Earth from heaven at some unknown date. Jesus will then create and rule a perfectly moral earthly kingdom.

between doctrine and social activism. Disengaging from social justice activism represented a concerted demobilization action on the part of the WEC.

Racism and Adaptations to Postmodernism

In addition to the racially problematic aspects of the church growth movement's origins and theology, evangelical practitioners' evince racism in their contemporary utilization of church growth models. It bears repeating that the WEC has been unwilling to make structural changes to advance *domestic* racial reconciliation (Gilbreath 2006). Instead, white evangelicals practice what I have elsewhere termed "integration by segregation" (Bracey 2010), that is racially diversifying an organization by forming an umbrella organization in which racially segregated member groups cooperate with minimal direct or coequal collaboration. Forming separate small groups and native language services has a veneer of racial sensitivity, but it actually facilitates whites' interest in appearing racially progressive without forcing whites to face the historical or contemporary realities of systemic racism.

An exemplary case of the WEC's refusal to accommodate native-born people of color is that of Dr. Denise Isom. Calvin College hired Isom, a black Christian professor, on tenure track. All professors at Calvin College are required to attend churches that are "in ecclesiastical fellowship" with Christian Reformed Church denomination, which is evangelical and historically white. After prolonged searching, Isom requested a waiver from the requirement because she:

need[s] a place of worship that is already consistent with [her] culture and able to grapple with issues of race in ways that make it a respite, a re-charging and

growing place for [her], as opposed to another location where I must ‘work’ and where I am ‘other’” (Zylstra 2008:20).

Calvin College’s board denied her request and threatened to remove her from tenure track if she did not comply. In a written statement, the board chair said, “Nearly all Christian colleges and universities that distanced themselves from their founding denominations and theological traditions eventually also drifted away from being Christian in any meaningful way” (Zylstra 2008:20). Accommodating this one black professor’s request rose to an existential threat, a slippery slope toward ceasing to be “Christian in any meaningful way” for Calvin’s board. Notably, Calvin College has no dress code and permits students to drink alcohol on campus (Calvin College 2013/2014)—policies that are considerably more liberal and pomo-friendly than those at peer evangelical Christian institutions.

The WEC’s inflexibility for Americans of color is in stark contrast to its extreme willingness to accommodate whites cultural preferences. As evangelical professor of church growth and evangelism Soong Chan Rah (2009:109) argues, “...like much of what has transpired among evangelicals, Christian postmodernity tends to be defined by, geared toward and biased to middle-class, suburban, white America—it reflects the Western, white captivity of the church”. That white bias is clear in the practical definition of a seeker sensitive service. Seeker sensitive services modeled themselves on white rock, country music, and even heavy-metal music and rarely incorporated Christian hip hop or other traditionally black musical genres (Luhr 2009). The emergent church held services in racially white bars and coffee shops in white neighborhoods,

rarely venturing into majority minority inner-cities. Indeed, Bill Hybels admits that he built and maintained his megachurch for a decade before ever researching what nonwhite potential converts may want in a church (Van Biema 2010).

Ministries targeting postmodern, problematic whites such as teenage cutters (Alcorn 2007), “homeless chic” skaters (Gill 2005), and hipsters (McCracken 2010) were ubiquitous from the start of the emergent church boom. James Dobson, founder of media juggernaut Focus on the Family in the now evangelical hub, Colorado Springs, is a lion in the WEC movement. His son, Ryan Dobson, uses the family name to organize Christian fight clubs to attract young men interested in mixed martial arts and extreme sports (Schneiderman 2010). An estimated 700 evangelical churches now have fighting ministries designed to mold young white males into prototypical white men. Ryan Dobson justifies fighting ministries with appeals to traditional, biblical masculinity, “The man should be the overall leader of the household. We’ve raised a generation of little boys” (Schneiderman 2010). The emergent church movement’s targeting of white people for salvation is clear because all of its tactics move resources toward disproportionately white populations. Imagine the national outrage if 700 mosques were training black, Latino, and Arab teens in hand to hand combat!

It is important here to remember my missionary friend’s idiom: what you save them from is what you save them to. The emergent evangelical church is not just reaching out to white souls. It is offering them a plan of comprehensive salvation, which means it is implying white postmoderns have a problem in need of fixing. In my field research I have found that church growth movements of the late 20th century and early

21st century define their white target populations as “broken whites,” by which I mean white people whose connection to whiteness manifests primarily in postmodern subcultures rather than the orthodox white virtuousness that traces to the 18th century (Feagin 2012; Takaki 2000). Emergent churches do not simply inject the gospel into a white subculture and assume that alternative forms of whiteness and evangelical Christianity can co-develop. The idea is that conversion to Christianity will produce a cultural change in converts that restores them to orthodox whiteness with its traditional virtuousness and normativity.

Consider, for example, an evangelical pastor’s argument for why Christian fight clubs are a necessary ministry: “You have a lot of troubled young men who grew up without fathers, and they’re wandering and they’re hopeless and they’re lousy dads themselves and they’re just lost” (Schneiderman 2010). The pastor is clearly defining these [white] young men as broken because they “grew up without fathers,” and lack the discipline and guidance a well-adjusted man would have instilled in their lives. By immersing them in a hyper masculine, hyper violent, hyper Christian atmosphere, the evangelicals believe they will change the young men from “wandering...hopeless...lost” lousy fathers to men who are capable of “being the overall leader of the household.”

The same logic—fixing broken whites with evangelical Christianity—is evident in evangelical media. For example, between 1990 and 2012, the Christian book market exploded with books designed to satiate unsatisfied men and placate overly energetic women. Titles such as *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Passionate Soul of a Man*

(Eldredge 2001) claimed men had a natural urge to explore and conquer nature that was hampered in overdeveloped [read postmodern] Western nations. The solution was to use the accompanying “field manual” to rediscover one’s “masculine soul” (Eldredge 2002). For women, evangelical literature offered a return to the cult of femininity. Best sellers *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* (Harris 1997), *Boy Meets Girl: Say Hello to Courtship* (Harris 2000), and *Captivating: Unveiling the Mystery of a Woman’s Soul* (Eldredge and Eldredge 2005) assured white women that the modernist prescription of learning supportive skills (e.g. sewing, cooking) and being sexually chaste would eventually result in a mature man coming to “court” and eventually marry. With respect to sexuality and gender, evangelicals tried to put the postmodern genie back into the modern bottle. In an interview with CBN.com (n.d.), a branch of the Christian Broadcasting Network, author Melody Carlson, argues gender deviant behaviors (e.g. cutting) resulted from [white] girls mistakenly thinking “that little temporary pain (from cutting) will take away their deeper emotional pain that really only Jesus can take away”. Jesus functions as a man who can heal the “deep emotional pain” that animates white girls’ self-destructive behaviors.

The conceit of the emergent logic is that missionaries have to somehow manage to perform postmodern sensibilities while maintaining modern ethics and doctrines. Emergent missionaries walk the tightrope by claiming they are living “missional” lives, in which they picture themselves as domestic missionaries immersing themselves in alien, though proximate, cultures to reach lost souls (Kimball 2003). They consciously reject the postmodern life and its intellectual critiques of universals, singular truths, and

ethnocentrism. Despite postmodernity's requirement that everyone be "authentic" (McCracken 2010), evangelicals try to walk the line between other-directed social acceptability and strict inner convictions (Doornenbal 2012; Gibbs and Bolger 2005; Webber et al. 2007). In this way, evangelical missionaries can reach broken whites without breaking themselves.

Constructing the Undesired Other: WEC and Christians of Color

Considering that one of postmodernism's major critiques of modernity is that it privileges white perspectives over those of people of color, one would expect evangelicals' response to postmodernism to be fundamentally antiracist. As we have seen, evangelicals' theological and practical reactions to postmodernism only perpetuate the privileges middle-class whites enjoyed in modernity. The racist nature of white evangelicalism is even clearer in evangelicals' construction of nonwhite evangelicals and potential converts.

During my fieldwork in the Midwest, I conducted participant observations of several parachurches' evangelism efforts. One Cru group had recently completed an extended evangelism effort in which college-aged evangelicals traveled to large American cities to evangelize inner-city communities. In preparation for the mission trip, Cru provided missionaries with individual binders full of worksheets with instructions for everything from interpreting scripture to approaching strangers with a gospel presentation. Midway in the binder, Cru included photocopies of a "Small Group Leader Diversity Guide," (InterVarsity Multiethnic Ministries n.d.) copyrighted by InterVarsity Press. The guide, published by a leading Christian publisher and used by a parachurch

that boasts 25,000 missionaries in 191 countries (Goodstein 2011), contains recommendations for “building bridges to” Asian American, Black, Latino, Roman Catholic, and fraternity and sorority students. The diversity guide indicates the way leading evangelical institutions construct targeted student groups. Knowing my status as a researcher, a young Cru missionary offered me copies of the entire binder and directed me to the diversity guide as evidence of the movement’s racial progressiveness.

From the start, the diversity guide is racially problematic. The authors’ implicit audience is white evangelicals, who are reaching out to racially marked “others.” Leaving the assumed audience racially unmarked indicates the authors define evangelicals as racially white and define whiteness as normative. From there, the guide attempts to raise white evangelicals’ consciousness about racial differences. Each page identifies a target group (e.g. Asian American students) and provides a brief ethnographic sketch of the group, complete with bolded recommendations for how to successfully engage them followed by bolded suggestions for engaging each group. The ethnographic sketches touch on common white misconceptions about each group. For example, the authors remind white missionaries that “language barriers are not at issue when relating to Asian Americans” and inform them:

Blacks are a diverse community in our society. Some are African-Americans with a long history of slavery and oppression going back over 10 generations....However the Black [sic] community also includes Caribbean-Americans and more recent African immigrants such as Nigerians. (InterVarsity Multiethnic Ministries n.d.)

Subtle cues, such as defining blacks with histories going back 10 generations as a community “in *our* society,” belies authors’ belief that the church and the US itself are

white spaces. Asian Americans, African Americans, Latinos, and Catholics are all perpetual foreigners and interlopers in the white evangelical imagination.

The guide is obviously an effort by white evangelical leaders to prevent missionaries behaving like bigots around nonwhites. However, the authors rely on and reify many highly offensive stereotypes in their advice for white missionaries. For example, their first directive regarding Asian Americans (abbreviated AA) is to “[r]ecognize Asian cultural relational values,” which they define as hierarchy, harmony, and humility. Authors warn missionaries that most:

AA students...are not very aware of [competing Western and Asian] cultural realities. They will be quiet, unassuming, and very compliant while not knowing why they are that way and how deep-seated Asian values engender those kinds of relational characteristics. That is why a lot of these explanations are stated in terms of how the AA is ‘feeling’ rather than what they are thinking. Most of the dynamics that AA students exhibit operate at a preconscious level that is deep-seated and, for most students, preverbal: that is, they can’t even articulate themselves why they are feeling and acting the way that they do. (InterVarsity Multiethnic Ministries n.d.)

Defining most Asian Americans as passive and docile fits whites’ long history of stereotyping Asian Americans as hyposexual, docile, geisha-type figures (Tu 2003; Fung 1991).

The guide’s authors also perpetuate old stereotypes of African Americans and Latinos. Speaking of African Americans, authors name “expression” as a central “cultural relational value” before adding, “African-American culture is exuberant, which can be seen in music, dance, conversation, and physical interaction” (InterVarsity Multiethnic Ministries n.d.). In that one brief description, the authors reproduced centuries-old stereotypes of black people as loud, animalistic (i.e. physical over

intellectual), happy slaves. Similarly, the authors also define Latinos as valuing “expression” and instruct white missionaries “don’t be surprised by anything [Latinos] say” because “Latino students tend to be unpredictable in the way they will respond to questions or comments. But if they have an opinion it will probably come with some energy behind it. Try to stay neutral...” (InterVarsity Multiethnic Ministries n.d.). Again, the authors rely on old stereotypes of Latinos as loud, confrontational, and emotionally unstable (e.g. fiery Latinas) (Berg 2009).

Based on their stereotypical portrayals, authors go on to offer racist recommendations for how to treat African Americans and Latinos. Speaking of black people, authors tell whites to “expect that communication will be complex” because “blacks, as a discriminated against minority, have learned to be careful about letting outsiders in” (InterVarsity Multiethnic Ministries n.d.). Several suggestions not so subtly discourage white evangelicals from investing in black students. Authors claim that in short-term missions “there is not a lot of time to build trust to overcome [blacks’ learned] reticence” to trust whites. Not only are interpersonal relationships fraught, but authors claim “[f]or Blacks exhortation and preaching are more natural so they may find it hard to hear from God. It may be difficult for black students to connect spiritually during musical worship as InterVarsity’s style is different from their home church” (InterVarsity Multiethnic Ministries n.d.). With little hope of establishing meaningful interpersonal or spiritual connections, there is little reason for white missionaries to invest in black students. Similarly, authors’ construction of Latinos as unpredictable and argumentative makes Latinos unattractive potential group members. Indeed, the authors

picture conversation between white missionaries and Latinos as so fraught that they encourage discussion only “*if* you feel like you understood where they are coming from” (emphasis in original; InterVarsity Multiethnic Ministries n.d.).

The authors’ negative stereotyping of Asian Americans, blacks, and Latinos stands in stark contrast to the positive stereotyping of white students in fraternities and sororities. Authors open the discussion by defining Greek students as part of “the majority culture” who “are not usually ethnic minorities” (InterVarsity Multiethnic Ministries n.d.). Having defined them as racially white, authors aggressively beat back stereotypes that might discourage missionaries from reaching out to Greeks. The authors admit that InterVarsity has historically “poorly represented” Greek students as a “culture that is unreachable” (InterVarsity Multiethnic Ministries n.d.). To combat the negative framing, the authors redefine Greeks as culturally similar to most white evangelicals, “Coming from predominantly middle-class America, 70% of undergraduate Greek students have a church background of some type” but have neglected Christian fellowship because of “negative past religious experiences” (InterVarsity Multiethnic Ministries n.d.). Where authors discouraged missionaries from investing in black and Latino students, they present white Greeks as extremely valuable targets because “they are natural leaders” with a list of eleven “positive qualities.” Again, authors offer no such counterweights to encourage including nonwhite students.

Comparing evangelicals’ descriptions of white and nonwhite groups further illustrates the central point in this chapter: the WEC movement is a movement *for* whites. White evangelicals imagine the WEC as a fundamentally white movement,

populated by whites and designed to reach more whites. The concrete example of white evangelicals' preparations for doing *inner-city* short-term missions further exposes the white-centeredness of the movement. Whites' strategies for reaching nonwhites are based on racist stereotypes. Consequently, evangelical leaders' recommendations for reaching nonwhites recreate racist relations by prescribing either white domination of nonwhites or discouraging any missional investment.

Conclusion: What's So Threatening about Postmodernism?

Of modern evangelicals' fears, postmodernism's rejection of singular Truth arguably ranks at the very top. At its core, evangelical Christianity is an attempt to universalize a singular metanarrative—Jesus is “*the truth, the way, and the life*” (Gospel of John 14:6; emphasis added). A basic doctrine of evangelicalism is that Jesus is the one and only way humans can attain eternal salvation. Any challenge to the universality of the Gospel is a fundamental threat to conservative Christian doctrine.

Modernity is characterized by precisely those kinds of universals. Modern theory assumes one truth exists that humans can access through appropriate methods, independent of their social identities. Modernism also invests much trust in authority figures, assuming that authority is a function of merit and that authority figures are the surest source of accurate knowledge. In contrast, postmodernism is skeptical that universal truth exists. Postmodernists argue that all knowledge is identity and standpoint dependent. People with different relationships to social structures are privy to different types of knowledge. From a postmodern perspective, modernity has not discovered universal truth; modernity has only one truth because its systems of power silence all

voices except those of the most powerful. Postmodernism acknowledges the effects of power on knowledge production and compensates by advocating forms of cultural relativism that grant equal legitimacy to multiple, knowledges (i.e. truths). Some of postmodernism's strongest examples of power's effect on knowledge are whites' historical silencing of people of color's knowledge (Collins 1986; Denzin 2008).

Race-based postmodern critiques of modernity's ontological assumptions and metanarratives are especially threatening to the WEC because modernity's trust in authorities and silencing of counter narratives facilitates a *de facto* assumption that whites enjoyed privileged, if not exclusive, access to biblical truth. That presumption conditions several derivative projects that are essential to the white evangelical social movement. First, having presumed exclusive access to truth is a very powerful position. In religious contexts, it implies superior proximity to and favor with God, relative to other racial groups. Historically, whites have made these claims explicitly to justify imperial projects. The arguments' current tacit form only makes the imperial project more insidious. Secondly, having access to what is construed as the one unadulterated word of God further positions whites as *de facto* judges of what Christianity is and is not. Whites historically and continually discredit Christianities that are unfriendly to whites as marginal, biased (e.g. racialized), and/or heretical.

This is why white evangelicals have collectively panicked over the growth of postmodernism as an intellectual project (Crouch 2000) while completely embracing its flexibility with forms. As we saw, postmodern form allows white evangelical leaders to tailor efforts to reach the various forms of lost white sheep—e.g. cutters, skaters,

hipsters, mixed martial artists, frustrated housewives and husbands. However, the philosophical underpinning of postmodernism, namely its rejection of a singular universal truth that transcends social standpoints, threatens to place marginalized Christianities on equal footing with the white evangelicalism. In other words, because it is interested in legitimating multiple perspectives without dismissing any, postmodernism poses no threat to evangelicalism's substantive claims, but it draws volumes of criticism because it threatens white evangelicals' race-based authority to define the faith. Philosophically, postmodernism not only raises people of color's interpretations to equal status with whites' views, it also exposes the positionality embedded in white evangelicals' dogma. White evangelicals' paradoxical embrace of postmodern forms while demonizing its philosophy is indicative of their collective investment in maintaining control over the production and legitimacy of American Christianity. White evangelicalism's intellectual leaders recognize that the stakes of these epistemological debates are high.

The stakes are so high that evangelical authors often treat postmodernism as an existential threat. To some extent, they are correct because postmodern racialized critiques threaten to expose the true relationship between race, doctrine, rhetoric, and mobilization in the contemporary evangelical movement. That is, if racial critiques of white evangelicalism are taken seriously, they suggest that at the heart of white evangelicalism is nothing more than white racial interests. The doctrines, dogmas, and rhetoric function as social movement frames—diagnosing issues, prognosticating odds of success, and motivating congregants to action—each based on and reinforcing the

general white racial frame (WRF). Much of the substance of the contemporary white evangelical church—its doctrines, practices, mobilization efforts, etc—conceals traditional whiteness with a religious veneer. White evangelicalism is not a religious movement that racial interests sometimes mildly steer one way or another. Today’s white evangelicalism involves much white supremacy, albeit with substantial Christian framing and ritual. The substance of much doctrine is racially defined. The question is not one of elective affinities or discovery. As we see in the next chapter, whites are frequently converting the WRF into religious doctrine. They are doing the equivalent of finding doctrinal Easter eggs they hid themselves.

CHAPTER VI

WHITENESS AS DOCTRINE

The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!
Matt. 6:22-23 (NASB)

I Definitely Knew When...: Black Midwestern Girl Interrupts Bible Study

Once a week, I joined a group of college-aged white evangelicals on their weekly afterschool Bible study program in a working class part of a Midwestern black community. The afterschool program consisted of an hour of personalized tutoring, followed by forty-five minutes of group play and fifteen minutes of Bible study. Each week, one of the young evangelicals would lead the children's Bible study, usually employing a popular biblical story to illustrate a singular point. One week, Isaac decided to use the story of Daniel to teach about faithfulness. In the course of telling the story, Isaac named Nebuchadnezzar as king of the Babylonian Empire. Being only elementary school aged, many of the children did not know what "empire" meant.

Isaac explained, "Empires are like kingdoms. Do you know what kings are? Basically, kings rule over countries and tell everyone what to do. But empires are bad kingdoms because they take over other countries and make them do bad things." Isaac continued, "Nebuchadnezzar was really bad because he worshiped fake gods and was really mean to the people. And whenever a king and an empire are bad, God says he will destroy it..."

Immediately, an eight year-old, black girl blurted out, "Does that mean God is gonna destroy the United States?!"

Missing the hopeful undertone in her voice, Isaac turned blood red and insisted, “No! No! The United States is good! God only destroys bad kingdoms!”

Introduction

The following two chapters disrupt the silence around whites’ doctrine construction by showing how white evangelicals *create* doctrines based on, and in service of, their racial interests. Drawing on ethnographic data, the present chapter examines white evangelicals’ discussion of the Babylonian Captivity. Evangelicals’ studies of the Captivity, one of the central events in the Hebrew Bible (i.e. Old Testament), evince how whites’ racial interests determine their interpretations of even the most doctrinally consequential portions of the Bible. Examining white evangelicals’ collective doctrinal discussion is critical to understanding the character of the white evangelical church (WEC). The church growth philosophy and subsequent seeker-sensitive innovations that fueled the growth of white evangelicalism in the second half of the 20th century (see Chapter V) depended upon using loosely connected small group Bible studies as the primary sites for fellowship and doctrinal instruction. Therefore, these small group Bible studies are key sites for understanding white evangelical doctrine construction and gaining a meso level view of the substance of white evangelical teaching.

In many ways, white evangelicals’ creation of a racialized curriculum is inevitable given the level of racial segregation in evangelical churches. Left to themselves—residentially or institutionally—white people invent narratives that inflate their sense of self and degrade racial others (Feagin 2013; Vera et al. 1995). This pattern

is so consistent that it has been termed “white’s character structure” (Feagin 2013:15) and alternately “white habitus,” or the standard and predictable behavior of white people given the various means of segregation and socialization dominant in the United States (Bonilla-Silva et al. 2006). Despite claims of ignorance and neutrality (Frankenberg 1993; Mills 1997), whites actually demonstrate highly consistent shared racial framing, including pro-white ideologies (e.g. colorblindness), which they aggressively promote via various forms of social sanctioning (Hughey 2012; Mueller 2013; Picca and Feagin 2007). These white-created ideologies date to the founding of the American colonies and are constantly elaborated on in popular media (Collins 2004; Vera and Gordon 2003). Therefore, it is no surprise that monoracially white churches preach white doctrine (Ruether 2012).

Nevertheless, creating a racist curriculum in the contemporary church would appear to be a daunting challenge. Whites do not have the luxury of creating racist biblical narratives out of whole cloth. Christian tradition goes back nearly 2,000 years. The canonized Bible is only a few centuries younger, and it has an unimaginably large exegetical literature attached. With so much spilled ink, attaching new meaning to scripture and winning popular authority for that new meaning would seem an impossible task.

That task is made all the more difficult in the wake of white evangelical churches’ recent statements apologizing for conflating racism and doctrine in the recent past. The largest evangelical denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, has issued numerous statements disavowing the racist doctrines it promoted during the Jim Crow

era (Newman 2001; Padilla 2000). These apologies were preceded by volumes of book-length exegeses criticizing white Protestants' racism and reappropriating the faith for Christians of color (e.g. Cone 1969; Deloria 1973; Salley and Behm 1970). So recently chastised for subjugating biblical doctrine to their racial politics, white evangelical institutions and leaders redoubled efforts to ensure racism never again obscures Christians' view of the "objective" Word of God (Noll 1994; Trueman 2011). To that end, evangelicals have developed a nearly universal devotion to biblical hermeneutics, a specific set of principles for interpreting the Bible. Unsurprisingly, every church and parachurch included in this study explicitly teaches biblical hermeneutics as part of the membership and discipleship processes.

Despite such gallant efforts, white evangelicals fail to separate their racial interests from their interpretations of scripture. Theologians of color (Cone 1997; Deloria 2003) and various secular academics (Shelton and Emerson 2012) document strong relationships between race and doctrine. These scholars generally conclude that Christians of color recreate and interpret scripture according to their racial needs and interests (e.g. Alumkal 2004; Emerson and Smith 2000). For example, Karkkainen (2004:12) defines African, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American traditions as "contextual theologies" separate from the "classical theism" of Europe and North America. Rather than investigating the racial foundations of white theology, scholars use more passive language suggesting that whites merely adopt or happen to emphasize doctrines that tacitly support their racial interests. Whites appear as "well-intentioned" people caught in a "paradox" in which their social principles work against purported

anti-racist values (Emerson and Smith 2000) or victims of an “unconscious” racial habitus that governs their church behavior (Emerson 2006; Perry 2012). The literature suggests people of color actively manipulate the scripture and inevitably read it through racial eyes, but whites passively discover “elective affinities” (Weber 1930) between their racial interests and biblical doctrine.

The basic assumption that biblical doctrines exist independent from readers’ selection is a problematic presumption. However, the presumption that whites’ doctrinal beliefs exist apart from whites’ racial interests is rampant in Christian circles and implicitly informs sociological studies of religion. While the language of “elective affinities” has faded, contemporary scholars opt for new language that draws on the same assumptions. Even critical scholars of race and religion maintain the affinities assumption, asking how whites “wring such [racist views] from the Bible” (Goldenberg 2009). Other scholars are more explicit about the agentic aspects of biblical interpretation, noting ministers’ efforts to popularize new rationales, if not whole doctrines, to facilitate multiracial collaborations (Becker 1998; Wadsworth 2000; Wadsworth 2010), but these studies do not challenge the fundamental assumption that newly emphasized doctrines have been waiting for recognition all along. Whether in the language of “elective affinities,” “paradoxes,” or “biblical mandates” (Wadsworth 2010), the study of white evangelicalism retains the tacit assumption that whites can engage a pre/unraced text.

This assumption of exclusive white access to biblical truth (remember, nonwhite access is presumed racially biased) conditions several derivative projects that are

essential to the white evangelical social movement. First, the obvious—presumed [exclusive] access to truth is a very powerful position. In religious contexts, it implies superior proximity to and favor with God, relative to other racial groups. Historically, whites have made these claims explicitly to justify imperial projects. The arguments' current tacit form only makes the imperial project more insidious. Secondly, having access to what is construed as the one unadulterated word of God further positions whites as *de facto* judges of what Christianity is and is not (West 2012). Whites historically and continually discredit Christianities that are unfriendly to whites as marginal, biased (e.g. racialized) and/or heretical (Goldenberg 2003).

Far from supposed objectivity, whites read the Bible through the white racial frame (WRF) (Feagin 2006). The WRF includes positive attitudes about whites and negative views of people of color, discursive techniques for justifying racial inequality, and priorities that favor whites' material and emotional interests, among other organizing principles. Ultimately, it is the white racial frame, not unbiased hermeneutical study, which determines the lessons whites derive from scripture and the doctrines they subsequently develop. By screening texts through the WRF, whites are able to reinforce white-friendly ideologies, blind themselves to teachings critical of whiteness, and invent pro-white doctrines. Whites can—and do—manipulate the Bible via the white racial frame to the point that the Bible does not speak for itself. For white evangelicals, the Bible—cast as the unadulterated Word of God—merely reflects whiteness and the WRF back to them.

Using data drawn from ethnographic fieldnotes, in-depth interviews, autoethnographic reflection, and content analysis of authoritative evangelical literature, I illustrate how white evangelicals encode their racial views into doctrine. The examples in this chapter show how white evangelicals create doctrine by drawing on the WRF and then coding WRF-based interpretations as unraced biblical truth. The examples from this chapter examine evangelicals' direct studies of the Bible. I find that whites' dependence on the WRF facilitates ignorance and subsequent dismissal of nonwhite interpretations of scripture. Christians' reliance on the WRF becomes even more problematic when they read the contemporary politics of whiteness into the text. In those cases, the distance between whites' historical reality as the dominant group and their victimhood narratives prevents appropriately contextualized readings of biblical history. Without historical context, the texts have virtually no meaning. White evangelicals fill in that void with aspects of the WRF that reinforce narratives of their own racial superiority.

A Note on Selection of Examples

A central point of this chapter is that white evangelicals convert whiteness into doctrine subtly, but thoroughly. No doctrine is so basic or so essential to the biblical story that it is beyond refraction through the white racial frame. To illustrate this point, I have chosen examples from passages that speak to central themes in the Bible. Without relying on any particular theology, one could effectively describe the Hebrew Bible as having three thematic/historical contexts: (1) the creation of humanity and the Jewish people, (2) the establishment and rise of the Jewish state, and (3) the decline, conquering, and eventual restoration of the Jewish state. Understanding the Bible

requires at least a rudimentary knowledge of these contexts. However, historically and contemporarily, white evangelicals' adherence to the WRF has so distorted their vision that even these basic contexts are beyond their view.

I begin this chapter with examples of whites addressing passages that are the foundations for understanding the emergence of the Jewish state (i.e. The Curse of Ham) and the context of Israel's political decline and reemergence (i.e. Daniel in Babylon; Habakkuk's prophecy; Ezra's prophecy) to show just how thoroughly the WRF informs evangelical doctrine. The contemporary examples (i.e. Daniel in Babylon, Habakkuk, and Ezra) are from a church group's discussion of the fall of Judah to the conquering Babylonians in 586 BCE. At the time, Judah was the only surviving half of the Jewish kingdom God had promised to Hebrew patriarchs centuries earlier. According to Jewish tradition, God punished Judah by allowing King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians to conquer and emigrate Jews to Babylon. However, God restored a repentant Jewish people to their homeland when the Persians conquered Babylon circa 538 BCE. This period of exile, known as the Babylonian Captivity, is so critical to Christian theology that it is the subject of much recent white evangelical literature (McComiskey 2009; Sweeney 2011; Swindoll 1997). I examine evangelicals' discussion of the Babylonian Captivity because it is indicative of and influential upon their interpretation of the Bible in general. If whiteness has become evangelicals' basis for understanding the establishment and decline of the Jewish state, then it is effectively their basis for understanding the entire Hebrew Bible—and the New Testament by extension.

I am doing more than just showing how the WRF circumscribes whites' understanding of these essential themes and contexts. In this chapter and the next, I detail how whites not only read the Bible through the WRF, but also how they raise the white racial frame itself to the level of biblical doctrine. Ultimately, I am making a "root and branch" argument. Whites' adherence to the WRF distorts their reading of scripture at the root, and it constitutes their doctrine at the branches. Thus I am extending my arguments from Chapters IV and V. Previously, I showed that the WEC is substantially a movement of whites to save white people and whiteness. In this chapter and the one that follows, I argue that although the WEC appears to be just a religious movement, it is in fact a racial movement wrapped up in religious symbols and ritual.

The Curse of Ham: Pro-white Doctrines and Interpretations

Innumerable common evangelical interpretations of biblical scripture evince whites' conflation of their racial interests with biblical teachings. Among the most prominent and racially significant examples historically is the "Curse of Ham" (Haynes 2007; Wiggins 2005). The Curse is based on a passage of blessings and curses delivered by the biblical figure Noah to his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Genesis 9:18-27). The story is relatively brief: because of his disappointment with human immorality, God sends a flood that destroys all life except Noah, his family, and animals taken onto the ark for protection. After the flood, God charges Noah and his family with repopulating the Earth. In time, Noah plants a vineyard, gets drunk, and ends up naked in his tent during his stupor. Ham "saw the nakedness of his father," and told his brothers, who

carefully cover Noah without viewing his nakedness. When he awakens from his stupor, Noah is angry about Ham's behavior and says:

Cursed be Canaan; servant of servants shall he be to his brothers...Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant. (Gen 9:25-27)

Although the Bible itself contains no explicit modern ideas of color or race, whites have used this passage to justify their enslavement and other oppression of Africans for centuries (Goldenberg 2009; Haynes 2007). The most popular variant of the argument suggests that because Ham was the offending brother, Noah's curse is directed at him. As a generational curse, all of Ham's descendants are therefore under the curse. Tracing the three sons' lines, tradition holds that Japheth's descendants populated Europe, Shem's descendants became the Semitic peoples of Asia Minor, and Ham's descendants populated Canaan (modern day Israel, Lebanon, Palestinian territories, parts of Jordan and Syria) and Africa. Therefore, Noah's declaration that Ham's descendants will serve their cousins is a perpetual curse that justifies Japheth's (Europe) and Shem's (Palestine) descendants enslavement of Ham's descendants. Given the geographical locations of each brothers' descendants, people use skin color as an indicator of whether modern humans descend from Ham, and are thus cursed to serve the light-skinned [i.e. "white"] peoples of the world. In this way, the Curse justifies both the existence and consequences of skin-color based racial designations.

A rival—and much more robust—interpretation of the Bible to explain skin color variation goes virtually unknown. In much of the Bible, *white* skin signals divine condemnation. One is on much firmer textual ground arguing that black and brown skins

are biblically normal and that white skin is evidence of God's displeasure. A few examples: God gives Moses leprosy, making his hand "as white as snow" (Exodus 4:6); a person found to have blonde, light-colored hair was deemed leprous and excluded from the Jewish community (Leviticus 13:30); God punishes Moses' sister Miriam with white skin for criticizing his marriage to a Cushite (descendant of Ham) woman (Numbers 12); the prophet Elisha strikes his servant, Gehazi, and all Gehazi's descendants leprous with white skin when Gehazi lies about extorting a gentile (2 Kings 5:27); all of the lepers Jesus and his apostles heal were defined as lepers according to Levitical law (e.g. white skin or blonde hair).

The notoriety of "The Curse of Ham" and relative anonymity of "The Curse of Whiteness" illustrate the twin sides of the proverbial "whiteness as doctrine" coin. The white supremacy-supporting interpretation relies on a rather short and otherwise unrehearsed passage (Noah is known for the ark, not his drunkenness). It also requires subsequent study to trace the lineage of Noah up to modern geopolitics. Not to mention, "The Curse of Ham" is not only a misnomer (Noah does not curse Ham, but Ham's son, Canaan), it is substantively misleading. Noah's cursing of Canaan is the Bible's moral justification for Jews' subsequent militaristic conquer of Canaan (i.e. Palestine). As such, the Curse of Canaan could not be more essential to the Bible story. Literally, every word of the Bible after Genesis 9 depends upon recognizing Noah's curse as a curse on Canaan and his descendants who settle in Palestine. Failing to recognize that point robs the Hebrew Bible of its context and moral authority. Nevertheless, the misnamed, misleading, and difficult to construct "Curse of Ham" is well known. Only whites'

promotion of the curse as justification for slavery accounts for the story's notoriety (Goldenberg 2009).

The history of "The Curse of Ham" illustrates the truth of Jesus' words in this chapter's epigraph: "if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness." As The Curse of Canaan illustrates historically, and my data demonstrate contemporarily, no biblical principle is so essential that whiteness cannot and will not bypass it and replace it with constructions from the white racial frame. Indeed, the WRF destroys the eyes of white evangelical Christians and makes them metaphorically blind. Whiteness occludes even the most basic and essential aspects of the Bible, leaving proverbial darkness in place of the biblical corpus. Rather than acknowledge that darkness and their blindness, white evangelicals confuse the substance of the WRF for biblical doctrine and conflate whiteness with Christianity itself.

How Whiteness Becomes Doctrine

As I stated above, white evangelicals generally acknowledge that racism greatly influenced popular Christian doctrines in the past. Contemporary evangelicals rely on biblical hermeneutics in an intensive effort to avoid the errors of previous generations. Despite these efforts, white evangelicals continue to conflate whiteness and biblical teaching by interpreting the Bible through the WRF. The conflation is not a simple substitution, however. Whiteness becomes doctrine through two distinct pathways: (1) erasure and suppression of nonwhite interpretations and experiences, and (2) equating ideal whiteness with ideal Christianity. These pathways are by no means mutually

exclusive. This chapter, however, describes the first pathway and Chapter VII covers the second.

White evangelicals fail to perceive some biblical teachings because they are incongruent with the WRF. Like all frames, the WRF prioritizes some data as significant and other data as insignificant. It then arranges the significant data according to preexisting analytical schema, giving the data useable meaning. Whites take the white racially framed meanings as confirmations of preexistent schema from the WRF. Some biblical passages and potential interpretations, however, fall outside what the WRF considers “significant data.” In this case, whites miss the lessons because they do not have an alternative theoretical frame capable of organizing the information. Historically, the obscurity of “The Curse of Whiteness” as a doctrine is a case in point. At the heart of the WRF is belief that whiteness and goodness are synonymous (Feagin and Vera 1995; Feagin 2013). Texts assuming whiteness as a curse contradict that assumption and are thus unperceivable through the WRF. Consequently, white evangelicals are ignorant of “the curse of whiteness” as a robust potential doctrine. Below, I offer examples from fieldnotes documenting contemporary WRF-induced blindness in white evangelical congregations. This contemporary racial myopia is essential to creating white doctrines that conform to historically contingent politics.

Inattentional Blindness and the Negation of Nonwhite Biblical Interpretations

Perhaps the easiest way to explain how the white racial frame prevents white evangelicals from noticing otherwise obvious doctrines is by analogy to the phenomenon of *inattentional blindness*. Inattentional blindness is the cognitive psychological

phenomenon by which observers fail to notice otherwise obvious objects because they are focused on other things and not giving their attention to the unexpected object. In other words, observers see what they expect to see *and do not see what they do not expect to see*.

In a famous example, observers were instructed to watch a film and count the number of times players passed a basketball. During the video, a woman in a full-body gorilla suit walked across the screen. Despite her conspicuous costume and prolonged camera time, the majority of observers never noticed the woman (Simons and Chabris 1999). Interestingly, in a follow up study, observers who were primed with stereotypically African American names (e.g. Tyrone, Ebony) were far more likely to notice the “gorilla” than were observers primed with stereotypically white names (e.g. Adam, Megan) because racist connections between Black people and ape imagery gave the gorilla social meaning (Rattan and Eberhardt 2010). In other words, observers who read stereotypically African American names before viewing the video noticed the “gorilla” because they were expecting to see things associated with Black people. Taken together, research on inattention blindness demonstrates that “a fundamental fact of human cognition is [that] without attention we are functionally blind” (Mack et al. 2002:489). However, humans are more likely to see unexpected things when those unexpected things are imbued with relevant social meaning (e.g. racial relevance).

My fieldwork in evangelical churches suggests a process very similar to inattention blindness is at play in the white evangelical church. Because white evangelicals are implicitly focused on whiteness and thus expect to see only those things

that the WRF deems significant, they are functionally blind to textual data that the WRF does not anticipate. One can infer a general inattentional blindness among white evangelicals for multiple reasons. Not only do all white Americans operate from the WRF (Feagin 2013), but whites primed with Christian religious symbols (e.g. Bible, cross) demonstrate higher levels of racial prejudice than people primed with neutral terms (Johnson et al. 2010). The connection between whites' racial prejudice and Christian symbols suggests that pro-white racial meaning is attached to Christian symbols, triggering whites to "see" pro-white phenomena when they do Christian practices. Whites are likely to read pro-white racial meaning into the Bible, just as observers were more likely to see the gorilla when primed with stereotypically Black names. If merely subconsciously priming whites with Christian symbols increased their racial prejudice scores, how much more when they are explicitly engaged in Christian practices! Add to this amplification of an already hegemonic WRF and the high level of racial segregation in the white evangelical church and you have a perfect storm for the kind of pro-white inattentional blindness I found in all of the white evangelical churches and respondents in this study.

Inattentional Blindness – Is God Gonna Destroy the US?

To illustrate how the WRF produces doctrinal inattentional blindness in practice, I offer two examples of how a frequent manifestation of the WRF—whites' belief that white virtuousness, divine blessing, and manifest destiny are embodied in the US state—blinded white evangelicals in my study from obvious interpretations and applications of scripture. As Feagin (2013; Feagin and O'Brien 2003; Vera et al. 1995) and others (Lacy

2010; Lavelle 2012; Ross 1990; Takaki 2000; Zinn 1999) document, whites' faith in their essential goodness and innocence are heavily emphasized in their narratives about the racial and military histories of the United States. White evangelicals have been particularly committed to the idea that the United States is a Christian nation whose history and institutions derive from God's favor (Aho 2013; Goldberg 2006). This particular narrative is especially useful to the white evangelical project because it implies white evangelicals are true/original Americans who enjoy a perpetual divine right to dominate the land, institutions, and material and psychological resources of the United States. It also reasserts whites' collective innocence and patterns of collective forgetting by claiming God himself not only approved, but also predestined and aided in whites' conquering of the people and land of North America.

White evangelicals in my study repeatedly raised the WRF to the level of doctrine by reading the Bible through the WRF premise that the United States is blessed and favored by God. In the example at the start of this chapter, white evangelicals' WRF-induced inattentional blindness remained tacit until the black little girl asked her gleeful—almost rhetorical—question. At that point, Isaac not only exposed his racialized blindness, he simultaneously raised his white racially framed interpretation to the level of doctrine. Recall that Isaac was actively teaching a Bible study about Daniel and the Babylonian Captivity to a group of African American children. In that role, Isaac is consciously and intentionally teaching children what the Bible means. His intention is not to teach vocabulary; it is to teach doctrine. In the course of teaching about faithfulness, Isaac was forced to define “empire” as a practical matter. However, he

inadvertently taught deeper lessons about what God defines as good (and bad), what God is faithful to, and ultimately what and who the children should interpret as “good” and worthy of their faithful devotion. By insisting that “the United States is good” and that “God only destroys bad kingdoms,” Isaac explicitly defined the United States itself as good, despite its racist character. Further, Isaac insisted that God Himself views the United States in the same way he does. Isaac offers the United States’ continued presence as evidence of God’s blessing, given that the larger lesson is that “God...destroys bad kingdoms.”

In the process, Isaac raised the WRF to the level of doctrine in two fundamental ways. First, he defined the words of the Bible via the WRF. Isaac offered a practical definition of empire that went beyond its Webster’s definition. He redefined the words “good,” “bad,” “kingdom,” and “empire” according to a white-specific framing in which good and bad are moral judgments that exclude sins and crimes done by whites against people of color. He then imported those moral judgments into the definitions of kingdom and empire. Consequently, for the children he was teaching (and teaches every week), Isaac has woven the WRF into the very words of the Bible. By defining the words themselves through the WRF, Isaac has made the Bible inseparable from the WRF. Unless the children *unlearn* the *vocabulary* Isaac taught them—not just the doctrinal teaching itself—every time the children read the Bible, they will swallow the WRF with it. The text itself, with or without subsequent hermeneutics, now carries the WRF with it.

So then, embedding the WRF in the biblical text itself via racially inflected definitions of words is one way that white evangelicals turn whiteness into doctrine. A

second way is by projecting the WRF onto God by asserting that God sees the world through the WRF. In many ways, projecting the WRF onto God is inevitable given white evangelicals' commitment to the WRF and belief that the Bible is the word of God. Once whites define biblical terms via the WRF—or interpret the Bible via the WRF—any representations they make of “God’s word” are necessarily projections of the WRF onto God.

Isaac’s comments are merely a more explicit version of that projection. In the course of indoctrinating the children, Isaac is emphatic that God will not destroy the United States because the US is “good” and “God only destroys bad kingdoms.” The child’s question reflects a racial critique of the United States. She infers that God will destroy the US because of its racist history and character. Isaac’s insistence that the United States is good, therefore, reflects his morality judgment that racism is at most an insignificant form of sin. Isaac’s assertion that racism is an insignificant sin shifts from a representation of his own views to a representation of *God’s* views when Isaac invokes God’s actions as supporting evidence for his interpretation. Isaac’s closing assertion that God only destroys bad kingdoms simultaneously functions as a refutation of the girl’s inference and evidence that God shares Isaac’s white racially framed evaluation of racial history. The fact that the United States still exists serves as evidence that *God* does not consider whites’ racism something worthy of condemnation.

Inattentional Blindness – Contextualizing the Babylonian Captivity

The immediate backdrop for the story of Daniel, told by Isaac here, is Judah’s forced migration into Babylon at the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar. Judah was the

southern remnant of the divided Jewish state following the northern kingdom's captivity by Assyria. The story's content had racial implications that were obvious to the black children, but invisible to their white teachers. The white evangelicals' adherence to the WRF rendered them inattentionally blind to potential implications their teachings might have for Americans. That blindness, however, was only revealed when the little girl's question forced Isaac to reveal his framing of the United States as a good country in God's eyes.

I observed a similar example of WRF-induced inattentional blindness in a Bible study in a large, urban, southern evangelical church. This group consisted of seven men (excluding myself), six white, one African American (again excluding myself); all professionals with college degrees. As they progressed through a chronological survey of the Old Testament prophets, they studied three books in near succession—Habakkuk, Ezra, Haggai—that related to the Babylonian captivity. Habakkuk predicts the captivity; Ezra and Haggai describe the circumstances Jews faced as they returned to Palestine after decades in exile. Each study was based on a church-approved study guide that required participants to summarize the main points of the text and consider any applications the text might have for contemporary Christians as individuals, church communities, and a nation. Reviewing white evangelicals' discussions of these texts reveals the power of the WRF to obscure nonwhite perspectives, even over long periods of study. These examples also buttress the larger point that all doctrines, no matter how central to the Bible story, are subject to the WRF in white evangelical churches.

Habakkuk

Habakkuk has long been my favorite book of the Bible. Habakkuk is unique because he is the only prophet whose entire recorded ministry was a dialogue with God, rather than liaison services between God and people. Although it is only three chapters, Habakkuk contains *memorable* phrases—“write the vision”; “make my feet like hinds feet”; “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea”—that have inspired popular songs and numerous sermons. Habakkuk is also notable for repeatedly asking “how long” injustice will reign in a call-and-response form that may have inspired Martin Luther King, Jr.’s famous “How long? Not Long!” refrain in his famous “Our God is Marking On!” speech. On a personal note, as someone who struggled with depression for many years, Habakkuk’s final encouragement to praise God when even He only offers the certainty of more suffering (Hab. 3:16-19) often spoke to my circumstance more than any other passage.

Substantively, Habakkuk is a brief and straightforward book. Chapter one opens with Habakkuk’s complaint to God, in which he expresses frustration that corruption, injustice, and immorality have become the rule in Judah. Habakkuk pleads with God to intervene and reestablish law and justice. God agrees to intervene and punish Judah’s wickedness, but says He will do so in a shocking and unusual way. Rather than immediately restore justice, God says He will discipline Judah by raising the Chaldeans (i.e. Babylonians) into a powerful empire that will conquer and brutally rule Judah. God’s method of discipline surprises Habakkuk, primarily because God announces plans to empower a people who exceed Judah in all the forms of immorality and injustice God

and Habakkuk want to correct. In the second chapter, God promises to eventually punish the Babylonians for their brutality, and chapter three contains Habakkuk's closing prayer of praise.

Although Habakkuk is a Jewish prophet concerned with Judah's spiritual and political condition, nearly half of his book (Hab. 1:6-11, 15-17; 2:4-20) centers on Babylon's political and moral character. In the course of admonishing Judah and proclaiming God's ultimate righteousness, God and Habakkuk offer a long description of Babylon. According to God and Habakkuk, Babylonians merit God's condemnation because they are idolaters and colonizers. Babylonians "march through the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs....gather[ing] to [themselves] all nations and collect[ing] to [themselves] all peoples" (Hab. 1:6; 2:5). Drunk on power, Babylonian civilization centers on its military—"strength is their god" (Hab 1:11)—unchecked by any sense of fairness because "their justice and authority originate with themselves" (Hab. 1:7). The empire's wealth derives from their conquests:

Why have You made men like fish of the sea, like creeping things without a ruler over them? The Chaldeans [i.e. Babylonians] bring all of them up with a hook, drag them away with their net, and gather them together in their fishing net....Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net and burn incense to their fishing net; because through these things their catch is large, and their food plentiful. Will they therefore empty their net and continually slay nations without sparing? (Hab. 1:14-17)

Indeed, God makes a point of saying His wrath will eventually fall on Babylon because of how they treated other people groups: "because you have looted many nations, all the remainder of the peoples will loot you—because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land, to the town and all its inhabitants" (Hab. 2:8). Ultimately, readers are left

with a picture of Babylon as a brutally oppressive colonizer, organized around a massive military industrial complex through which it conquers innumerable nations. God is unambiguous about His disapproval of Babylon's spiritual and political character, specifically its rapacious colonizing and building its nation by conquering others (Hab. 2:12).

Even the most rudimentary understanding of Habakkuk depends upon recognizing Babylonia as condemnable for its imperial behavior. Habakkuk's central questions—how can a righteous God allow immoral people to flourish? How can God allow people to profit from dishonesty and oppression? (Hab. 1:12-13)—have no context or meaningful answer unless readers clearly understand Babylonia's imperialism as problematic in and of itself.

Despite the centrality of Babylonia's imperialism to the text, the white evangelicals in the Bible study demonstrated remarkable inattentive blindness with respect to Habakkuk's critique of Babylonian imperialism. Over the course of the study, members readily identified with Habakkuk, casting themselves as longsuffering Christians in a perverse nation. They also identified themselves and the United States with Habakkuk's description of Judah. However, no one made connections between themselves or the United States and corrupt and imperialistic Babylonia.

For example, Stephen opened the study by constructing white evangelical Christians as an oppressed class in the United States:

My first thought when I read this was, 'yeah!' I look around and see all this immorality and the government going down the tubes, and gay marriage and everything. It's just really hard to be a Christian right now. People think you are backward and stuff just because you want to keep it a Christian nation.

Stephen's sentiments were quickly seconded throughout the group. Tony added, "Yeah. You can't even turn on the TV without a bunch of sexual temptation and half-naked women everywhere!" Several other members echoed the notion that American popular culture is hostile to Christians.

As the study progressed from Habakkuk's complaint to his description of the coming Babylonian Empire, study participants imagined the US as analogous to wayward Judah. Again, Stephen took the lead, "Maybe God will do with America like He did with Israel. Maybe God will let us be taken over by China or Iran or something to punish us for getting away from His law as a country." Following the study guide instructions, the group proceeded section by section through Habakkuk, listing adjectives used to describe the Babylonians. After highlighting several negative adjectives, the group was content to simply label the Babylonians "evil" and move on to Habakkuk's closing prayer.

At that point, I stopped the group and posed a question, "What do you all think we can learn from the Babylonians? Do you all think we have some similarities to them?" No one answered. A couple of participants scanned the text, like students searching for answers after being unexpectedly called on in class. Michael, the study leader, broke the silence, "What do you mean?" I answered:

Look at the text. God is saying that the Babylonians are a military empire. They create their country by taking over other racial groups. They kill most of them and loot the rest. They rule by having a bigger military than everyone else. It kind of reminds me of how the United States was formed. We conquered and killed the Native Americans and stole their land. Whites enslaved Africans, and built the country on stolen land and labor. God seems to have something to say about that.

A deafening silence fell on the group. Cyrus, the only other African American mumbled, “that’s kinda true.” After several seconds of silence, Brandon jerked his head up and exclaimed, “Are you saying the United States is headed for a fall?!”

Sensing a sudden spike of tension, I couched my response in as conservative a posture as I could muster:

I’m just saying to look at the text. The text is very clear that the Chaldeans are building up their nation by taking the land and labor of the nations around them. Since we’re thinking about how this speaks to American society, we should consider how that also compares to us [the United States]. It reminds me of something Thomas Jefferson said—and I’m paraphrasing, but it will be a pretty close paraphrase—‘I tremble for my country when I think that God’s justice cannot sleep forever. That by a turn of fate, the slaves we oppress could be rulers over us.’

Again, the group sat in [stunned] silence. Eventually, Michael added:

Well, that’s an interesting point. I was talking to a guy from China or another Asian country and he said he was a missionary. And I was like, ‘that’s cool. Where are you going?’ And the guy was like, ‘Here!’ And it just hit me that we think we’re such a Christian country, but other people are looking at us and how we live and sending loads of missionaries to save us.

From there the group returned to talking about how unchristian the United States is and how difficult it is to live a God-fearing life.

Conclusion to Habakkuk

The Habakkuk study in a predominantly white southern group proceeded much like the Daniel study in the Midwest. White evangelicals presented texts that easily lent themselves to interpretations that are counter to the white racial frame. In both situations, an African American group member offered a plausible reading of the text based on the counter-frames people of color often employ. White evangelicals’ initial omission of the

counter-frame interpretation and shocked reactions when people of color offered additional interpretations indicate that white evangelicals were functionally blind to non white-centered interpretations of the texts. Their inattentional blindness to implications of the text outside the WRF resulted in each of the white evangelicals producing exclusively pro-white interpretations of the scripture—thus raising the WRF to the level of doctrine. In the first example, Isaac not only interpreted the text via the WRF, he also redefined the words of the text according to the WRF. Although Michael and the southern Bible study members did not explicitly redefine the text, their failure to entertain an alternative reading and subsequent collective reframing of the text in terms of white Christians' victimization effectively rendered the white interpretation authoritative and pushed nonwhite perspectives beyond the realm of consideration.

Ezra, Haggai, and Nehemiah

As the southern group progressed through their study of Old Testament prophets, their WRF-induced inattentional blindness continuously manifested in ways that generated culturally white doctrine and obscured potential textual interpretations. Ironically, the southern group's inattentional blindness occurred in mirror-image fashion to its blindness concerning Habakkuk. In the first instance, white evangelicals interpreted Habakkuk through a victimology that led them to identify with Judah and the prophet and see themselves as threatened by immoral secular Americans. The evangelicals' self-construction precluded identifying with the ascendant Babylonian Empire, despite the Babylonians' description closely matching the evangelicals' own circumstance. Paradoxically, when the evangelicals read post-Babylonian Captivity

prophets—Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, and Nehemiah—they failed to consider how Judah’s political weakness (i.e. their status as actual victims of colonization) contextualized the choices they made upon returning to Canaan. Because the white evangelicals are not from a racial group that has experienced racialized political oppression in recent memory, they could not understand the context for Jews’ decisions or the related significance of God’s response. Instead, they simply rehearsed the same victimhood narratives they used to interpret Habakkuk. However, the evangelicals’ lack of actual experience as racialized victims rendered their analysis empty, exposing the source of their victimology to be something other than biblical interpretation or lived experience.

Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, and Nehemiah cover the same historical period. Ezra details the conditions that ended the Babylonian Captivity, returning Jews’ attempts to build the Second Temple, and political rivalries that frustrated their efforts. The brief book of Haggai encourages Judah to continue rebuilding the Second Temple after they stopped for several years due to the political threats Ezra describes (Ezra 5:1). Nehemiah provides additional context to the rebuilding of the Jewish state, including Judah’s preparations for war against neighboring potential invaders who opposed Jews rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls.

To make a long story short, according to biblical accounts, after the fall of Babylon to the Persians, Cyrus King of Persia allowed as many Jews as wished to do so to return to Jerusalem. Filled with religious zeal, Zerubbabel led more than 42,000 Jews back to Judah to rebuild the Temple, resume traditional worship, and restore Jerusalem. During the rebuilding process, neighboring nations, which were also former Babylonian

colonies and newly Persian colonies, tried to stop the Jews from rebuilding by disparaging them to the Persians. The neighboring nations told the Persians that if the Jews were allowed to complete the Temple and the city walls, they would stop paying tribute to the Persian Empire. Fearful of Persia's potential response, the Jews stopped rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple for several years, focusing instead on their own homes. At the prophetic behest of Haggai and Zechariah, the Jews resumed rebuilding the Temple and completed it some 20 years after returning from exile. According to Jewish tradition, Nehemiah, who returned to Jerusalem nearly a century after the first wave of returning exiles, also contended with disparagements from rival neighbors. However, he would not allow the Jews to stop rebuilding the city walls. Instead, he sent letters to Persia reminding them of previous political agreements, and he prepared the people for armed defense of Jerusalem. Ultimately, the Jews rebuilt Jerusalem's walls in only 52 days.

As with Habakkuk, the most basic understanding of the story contained in Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, and Nehemiah requires readers to recognize Judah's political context. All of the events of these books—Jews' desire to rebuild and fortify Jerusalem, stops and starts in the rebuilding of the temple, political dissention among Jewish nobles, eventual restoration of Jerusalem—are conditioned by the Jews' status as a politically weak minority in a powerful empire. Failing to recognize the context robs the prophecies (e.g. Hag. 2:21-23; Zech. 2:7-9, 12-13) of all power and represents the Jewish people as feckless, nonsensical actors. Nevertheless, these evangelicals offered exactly the kind of reflections a decontextualized reading would produce.

During the group discussion of the collection of post-captivity books, members criticized the Jews' decisions and presented them as lacking spiritual discipline. The criticism began with their reactions to Ezra 4:

LUKE: I don't understand these people. They came back just to build the Temple, and then they just stop! And they'd had permission in the first place!

MICHAEL: But that's kind of how the Bible goes. God does cool stuff, and then the Jews fall away.

LUKE: That's true. I just don't know why after they had just returned from punishment they couldn't just build the Temple back.

The group continued in a similar theme during discussion of Haggai:

STEPHEN: This is just like today. People should be dedicating their lives to Christ, and instead they are spending their money on themselves. You see these preachers on TV acting just like that, too.

LUKE: Even in our church. Look at us. It's a pretty comfortable church...

MICHAEL: Yeah, the [church] report says we have more money than most...

LUKE: Yeah. But we're not doing a whole lot with it.

STEPHEN: Good point. But look at the chapter. They are living in their houses for like 10 years while God's house is right there and they're not bothering to do anything about it.

GEORGE: It's like Jesus said, "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." People don't feel like they have to worry about God unless they are in trouble.

After several weeks in which the only explanatory theme was that the Jews were callous in their relationship with God, I offered an alternate perspective during a study of

Nehemiah:

STEPHEN: It's the same thing again. They have a revival for a little while, and then they go back to sin and forget about God. It's like the study [guide] says, we need more leaders like Nehemiah who will keep people focused.

GLENN: Okay, but think about it, guys. They were just taken over by a huge empire, and they've got all the nations around them tattling, basically, and trying to get them in trouble. We're talking about a pretty small group of people, and again, they were just in exile. They're not in position to just do what they want and rebuild everything. I mean, think about the United States. We're the most powerful nation in the world, and

we still haven't rebuilt the twin towers. And we have lots of money and no enemies that can stop us. Israel had none of that.

STEPHEN: But they had God. That's the point. If they had stayed committed to God, He would have protected them.

Throughout the group's study of the post-exile return to Jerusalem, these white evangelicals easily identified with victimized characters (e.g. Habakkuk, Nehemiah, God) and casted themselves as contemporary victims of secularism. They were quick to condemn people who perverted justice (e.g. opening of Habakkuk), and quickly linked them to contemporary secular leaders they perceive as equally immoral. In the process, the white evangelicals easily constructed themselves as relatively powerless victims.

However, their construction of themselves as an oppressed group did not meaningfully inform the evangelicals' textual interpretations. Despite the white evangelicals' eagerness to construct themselves as victims and draw lessons from the text to apply in their contemporary victimized status, they failed to perceive how Jews' status as an oppressed people following the Babylonian Captivity contextualized and constrained their choices. Consequently, they interpreted the scripture as an indictment of the Jews' character, but they never took into account the structural barriers involved in the greater imperial context. In other words, the white evangelicals interpreted the text from their imagined position as political victims but failed to imagine the context that such victimhood would necessarily entail. The evangelicals' analysis emphasized choice and moral character, without considering structural constraints. Consequently, over several weeks, the group developed a strong doctrinal consensus that the central lesson to draw from the scriptures was to avoid the Jews' mistakes by exercising personal spiritual discipline.

The contours of these evangelicals' interpretations—construction of self as victim rather than oppressor, emphasis on choice and character, blindness to structural restraints—suggest they are reading the text through the WRF and constructing doctrine accordingly. Their insights and *oversights* closely parallel central aspects of the WRF in the post-racial era. White Americans construct themselves as endangered victims (Gallagher 2003), despite their collective domination of every major social institution. Indeed, white Americans now perceive anti-white racism as bigger social problem than anti-black racism (Norton and Norton 2011). Whites are especially prone to constructing themselves as victims in racialized scenarios (Delgado 1994; Lavelle 2012; Russell-Brown 1998). Interestingly, southern white evangelicals, like the group in this example, are more likely than any other group of whites to perceive themselves as victims of racial discrimination (Mayrl and Saperstein 2013). Constructing themselves as victims stems directly from whites' adherence to the WRF. Recall that the center of the WRF is whites' belief in white virtuousness, the idea that white people and whiteness are innately good. Having constructed themselves as virtuous, whites view anything other than obsequious treatment as unjust. Consequently, whites' self-construction positions them to only be either neutral recipients of good things or imperiled victims of negative things.

Because whites are the dominant racial group in the United States and Christianity is the dominant religious group, white evangelicals may view themselves as “embattled” (Smith et al. 1998), but they lack the lived experience to justify that claim. More to the point, white evangelicals' doctrine reflects inattentional blindness to the

structural realities that give meaning to victim/oppressed status. The WRF is built from a position of dominance and is designed to justify and reproduce white domination.

Consequently, it is ill-equipped for—indeed specifically designed to prevent—analyses of structural oppression. In the absence of lived experience as an oppressed group, white evangelicals lacked an analytical frame that would reveal the structural restraints that inform the texts they studied. Consequently, the doctrine they produced was culturally white in that it reinforced narratives associated with post-racialism while completely obscuring insights that are obvious from oppressed peoples' standpoints.

Conclusion

The running claim throughout this dissertation is that the white evangelical church is more a racial than a religious movement. This chapter demonstrates that whiteness, in the form of the white racial frame, lies at the heart of the evangelical movement's interpretation of influential biblical texts. As we will see in the next chapter, when asked directly, white evangelicals claim complete devotion to God and argue that the Bible is the primary means by which they can know God's will and develop doctrines. In short, the Bible is the ultimate authority in their lives. I do not question that devotion. What this chapter makes clear, however, is that the white racial frame largely determines numerous doctrines white evangelicals develop. The WRF simultaneously obscures nonwhite doctrines and facilitates pro-white doctrines. As the examples above show, no biblical teaching or subject is too substantial to escape subjugation to the WRF. If observers accept white evangelicals' assertions that they base their beliefs and actions

around the Bible, then we must conclude that the evangelical movement is centered on whiteness as articulated in the white racial frame.

White evangelicals are inattentive to the way that contemporary structures of oppression impact peoples' choices because the WRF presumes that white institutions are generally benevolent, unless corrupted by nonwhites and fallen whites. Evangelicals' inattention to structural limitations frequently distorts their reading of the Bible because they cannot conceive the ways that oppressive structures inform biblical narratives. Consequently, whites end up with doctrines that reflect the WRF, not the biblical narrative. Their WRF-based doctrines are doubly problematic because whites often picture themselves as virtuous victims, but do not have lived experience as racially oppressed peoples. Therefore, they pair their distorted judgments and interpretations of oppressed biblical peoples' (e.g. Jews') actions with a strong sense of moral condemnation.

This chapter challenges the evangelical claim that their doctrine is the objective, universal doctrine any honest reader must gather from scripture. The following chapter extends the argument that whiteness is at the heart of white evangelicalism by showing that more than the Bible informs white doctrine making. In Bible study, whites' interpretations revolve around text. However, as important as Bible study is, it is not the only way that evangelicals develop doctrine. In the next chapter, I examine evangelical official literature (e.g. books, institutional documents) and participants' personal journals. These materials shed light on how evangelicals' whiteness impacts how they

think about God and the extent to which evangelicalism is in service to whiteness rather than God.

CHAPTER VII

WHITENESS BECOMES GOD

I Should Have Known When...: “That’s Why We Don’t Let Blacks Make Doctrine!”

During my last month of evangelical ministry, several members of a Bible study I led approached me with a series of criticisms. One of the subordinate leaders in the study called to schedule a meeting in the church house for the next day. I assumed he wanted to talk about plans for the next study or some doctrinal issue. When he arrived with three other male members and asked if there was a private place available, I knew the meeting was going to be serious.

For several months before the meeting, I had begun studying racism more seriously at the graduate level. My studies necessarily led to me recognizing the racism around me and being more vocal about addressing it. Predictably, many white members were disturbed by my more critical stance. I learned just how “disturbed” they were during that meeting.

Saul took the lead, “Glenn, we have come to reprove you for some of the things you have been saying lately.” Affirmative action had recently been in the news, and I had publicly supported the policy during conversations with members. Referencing those conversations, Saul said, “Think about affirmative action. You only support it because you’re black. It’s obviously wrong, but you support it because you’re black. Glenn, what you’re doing is Satanic! You are putting your race above your God!”

Whiteness: The Way, the Truth, and the Life

The previous chapter demonstrated how white evangelicals' adherence to the white racial frame (WRF) frequently produces white doctrine by limiting and channeling their readings of the Bible. This chapter builds on that argument by addressing the additive aspects of evangelicals' biblical doctrine construction. The project of creating this white-framed doctrine is multifaceted. It requires the negative aspects covered in the previous chapter, namely exclusion of nonwhite interpretations and exegeses devoid of structural context. But a full doctrine has positive aspects as well. For evangelicals, it is not enough to eliminate challenging views; they must add whiteness-affirming ones as well.

This chapter develops the argument of whiteness as evangelical doctrine by highlighting the ways whites construct whiteness as basic Christian belief. Where the previous chapter documented WRF-induced elisions to textual readings, this chapter examines extra biblical means by which evangelicals make whiteness into doctrine. Using fieldnotes, in-depth interviews, and content analysis, this chapter shows whites constructing WRF-based doctrine in several contexts. At times, that construction happens by reading whiteness politics into texts, sometimes completely reversing the meaning of the text. Most insidious is white evangelicals' reconstruction of Christianity—to the point of redefining God—as a religion in service to whiteness. Together, the obfuscation of nonwhite doctrines, importation of whiteness politics, and conscription of the Bible to white politics creates a complete white doctrine in which

whiteness is the reason for Christian belief, the measure of Christian growth, and ultimately God Itself.

Colorblind Good Samaritan

The story of The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) is among the most familiar of Jesus' parables. The story is so well known, its title has become a common metaphor, encouraging people to show kindness to strangers. Jesus told the parable while responding to a series of questions from a self-righteous lawyer. Asked to define who counts as one's neighbor for the purpose of fulfilling the commandments, Jesus responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

In the story, a [presumably] Jewish man is robbed and beaten while walking a notoriously dangerous road from Jerusalem to Jericho. By chance, a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan each see the injured man on the highway. The priest and Levite pass by on the other side of the road. However, the Samaritan has compassion for the man, tends to his wounds, and provides him with shelter and care. Jesus says the Samaritan is the definition of a "neighbor" and instructs the lawyer to behave like the Samaritan.

As with the stories of the Babylonian captivity, the parable of the Good Samaritan depends upon understanding the racial/ethnic and political history of Canaan. In Jesus's day, Jews reviled Samaritans as interracial/interethnic¹⁵ and interreligious heretics. Without adjudicating divergent traditions, Samaritans are an ethnoracial people

¹⁵ According to the biblical account, the Assyrians conquered Israel and scattered most of the remaining population throughout the Assyrian Empire. They repopulated the land with people from Arabia, mostly from Kuthim in modern day Iraq. Samaritans are the descendants of the Arab expatriates and Jewish remnant.

birthed from the Assyrian Empire's conquering and subsequent exile of the 10 northern tribes that constituted Israel (after King Solomon's death, Israel split into two nations; Israel in the North and Judah in the South). Assyrian policy was to move conquered ethnic groups to various parts of the empire. Consequently, Assyria resettled Israel with gentiles who intermarried with the remnant of Jews left in Israel. In time, ethnic Samaritans developed a religious tradition that is related to Judaism but differs on several key fronts (e.g. proper location for temple worship). Mainstream Jews viewed Samaritans as heretical threats to Judaism, so much so that Jesus' contemporaries would cross the Jordan River twice to avoid walking through Samaritan land (Gisbey 2015:49).

It is against this backdrop that Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan. The priest and Levite were both mainstream Jews. Not only so, but both were members of classes competing for religious leadership. The priest was likely a Pharisee, a class of priests that was extremely devout and lived among everyday Jews. That is in contrast to Levites, the priestly class by birth in charge of maintaining the temple and executing temple worship. Both classes claimed to be the embodiment of correct Jewish worship. Thus, Jesus' use of a despised Samaritan as the example of godliness was a challenge to the both groups of Jewish religious leadership. That challenge was based on religious and *ethnoracial* grounds. The parable uses an ethnically oppressed and morally impugned group to criticize and reform mainstream Jews.

I am not alone in recognizing the Good Samaritan as a racial/ethnic story. Black ministers have long made the connection and preached on its racial implications (Gilkes 2012). No less than Martin Luther King, Jr. described the Samaritan as "a man of

another race” in his famous “I’ve Been to the Mountain Top” speech. Reverend Jeremiah Wright, once President Barack Obama’s pastor, put it bluntly

...Jesus had a faith that did not avoid the reality of race. He kept bringing up the Samaritan issue, because race does matter. Every time Jesus said the word ‘Samaritan,’ while talking to Jewish lawyers, it was just like saying the word ‘nigger’ to some Klansmen in America. (Wright and Birchett 1995:144)

During my field research, however, I found white evangelicals turning these racial implications on their head. Instead of noting that Jesus *accents* the ethnic differences between Jews and Samaritans and that the ethnic politics of the era are essential to his point, white evangelicals taught “The Good Samaritan” as an instruction on colorblindness. I observed this phenomenon as a white evangelical woman (Deborah) from a large, southern church disciplined an Iranian woman (Ester):

DEBORAH: [after reading The Good Samaritan collectively] Imagine the love it takes to help someone in that situation! That’s the love God wants from us.

ESTER: Ok. I see.

DEBORAH: Hospitality is really important to God; it’s even a spiritual gift we can get after salvation. God wants us to show that kind of hospitality all the time.

[Deborah concludes the study session with a prayer.]

GLENN: Can I ask a question? I found it interesting that you taught this as a story about hospitality. I’ve heard it covered as a story about race. Why couldn’t it be taught as a race story?

DEBORAH: It absolutely can!

GLENN: Really? How?

DEBORAH: It’s a story about being colorblind. Jesus is showing us that race doesn’t matter.

The white evangelical’s response indicates that she read the story through the white racial frame. Deborah initially does not see the racial/ethnic dimensions of the Good Samaritan story. In that way, she evinces the same inattentional blindness to nonwhite interpretations that other white evangelicals displayed in Chapter VI. Once the issue of

racial implications is raised, Deborah draws on the WRF to produce a colorblind reading of the story. Although the Good Samaritan story can be read as an encouragement to cross racial boundaries, the language suggesting that Jesus advocates “being colorblind” and that “race doesn’t matter” is an insertion of contemporary language from the current colorblind version of the WRF (Wingfield and Feagin 2013). Indeed, the entire parable hangs on Jesus and his audience being ethnoracially-conscious and explicitly accounting for the history and tensions between Jews and Samaritans.

By effectively removing race from the story and interpreting it as a colorblind narrative in which “race doesn’t matter,” the evangelical discipler stripped the parable of its central meaning. Jesus offers the narrative in response to the lawyer’s question about who is one’s neighbor. As such, the priest and Levite represent religious leaders *and* unquestionably ethnically pure Jews. Their mistreatment of the brutalized victim simultaneously functions as a critique of religiosity and ethnocentrism. In this canonical story, Jesus’ use of an ethnically Samaritan, instead of an everyday Jew, is necessary to address the lawyer’s question about who to consider one’s “neighbor,” a morally significant part of one’s community. By using the Samaritan as a positive example, Jesus instructs the lawyer to extend his definition of “neighbor” beyond religious and racial/ethnic lines. That lesson is only conveyed if one recognizes the centrality of race and ethnicity to the story. Ultimately, the parable only functions if one is color-conscious, not colorblind.

Deborah’s view that “Jesus is showing us that race doesn’t matter” is problematic because she follows well-worn patterns of white supremacist linguistics. Just as the

teacher in the previous chapter (Isaac) did when teaching about Nebuchadnezzar, Deborah elevates the white racial frame to the level of religious doctrine by placing the white interpretation in Jesus' mouth. Again, in evangelical contexts, the common white strategy of depersonalizing and universalizing the white perspective (Powell 2000; Williams 1991) manifests as claims that white views are Jesus's views. Whites often universalize their racialized views through the same method Deborah deployed, namely insisting that narratives are "not about race," even when race or ethnicity is not only relevant but essential to the narrative's meaning (Williams 1991:47-8). In any case, the discrepancy between the black tradition and the white evangelical's interpretation indicates the significance of the WRF to the evangelical's reading. Moreover, evangelicals' efforts to convert and instruct nonwhites in Christianity make their deployment of white supremacist framing particularly consequential.

God, the Salvation of Whiteness

Perhaps the ultimate expression of white evangelicals raising whiteness to the level of doctrine is when whiteness itself functions as the definition of "good" or realized Christianity. In the US, idealized whiteness, which Takaki (2000:7) calls "virtuous republicanism," grew out of elite white male founders' attempts to ensure a citizenry that could responsibly govern itself:

As the Revolutionary leaders labored to define precisely who Americans were or should be as virtuous people and as republicans, they were establishing a national identity which had significant implications for race in America...they had to determine what the relationship should be between nationality and race.

Drawing on slave economy-based ideology (Feagin 2014), the founders constructed whiteness in relation to nonwhites, projecting onto racial "others" (especially blacks) the

parts of humanity they feared might threaten the national project (Takaki 2000). Consequently, “American citizen” meant white, and “white” meant people [read: white men] who are: rational, morally ascetic, self-governing individuals, fearful of spontaneity, resistant to serendipity, and in control of their emotions (Takaki 2000:ix). Ideal whiteness required “white men [to] repress or ‘mutilate’ themselves, become ‘less’ than they ‘were,’ and produce a culture of ‘self-renunciation’ and ‘alienation’” (Takaki 2000:ix). Whites used the reciprocal aspects of humanity—emotional expression, play, joy, collectivism, sexual expression and enjoyment, and lack of self-control—to label nonwhiteness and define nonwhites as incapable of self-government. Writing just before the American Revolution, Virginia’s Author Lee made clear that virtuous republicanism was impossible for nonwhites:

Aristotle...declared that slaves could not have virtue, but he knew not any who were so utterly devoid of any semblance of virtue as are the Africans; whose understandings are generally shallow, and their hearts cruel, vindictive, stubborn, base, and wicked. (Takaki 2000:8)

From the very start of the US, whites conflated race, virtue, civilization, and rights. The First Congress passed the Naturalization Law of 1790, requiring people eligible for citizenship to be white and demonstrate “proper and decent behavior” (Takaki 2000:10). In the words of Samuel Adams, “proper and decent” behavior meant avoiding “vicious and luxurious and effeminate Appetites, Passions and Habits [sic]” (Takaki 2000:6). In turn, luxury meant “fascinating pleasures, idle dissipation and expensive amusements” (Takaki 2000:6). The white founders of the US aimed to create an all white country that generally prohibited fun, sexuality, and desires for pleasures at all times.

In the process, early US whites ironically created their own prison. Whiteness became an “iron cage” (Takaki 2000), an impossible standard of virtue that whites required for access to social resources but could not live up to themselves. Subsequent 19th century amplifications of the founders’ construction of whiteness ultimately produced a hegemonic whiteness that added “work ethic” (Roediger 2007) and middle class aesthetics (Carter 2007) to the already unlivable definition of hegemonic whiteness.

Although some white subcultures challenge the boundaries of acceptable whiteness (Hartmann, Gerteis, and Croll 2009; Hughey 2010; McDermott and Samson 2005), the white evangelical church largely embraces prototypical hegemonic whiteness (i.e. virtuous republicanism) as the definition of a “good” Christian. Equating whiteness and realized Christianity occurs in varied and subtle ways. As we have seen, evangelicals’ reliance on the white racial frame manifests when they exclude nonwhite histories and interpretations—often through inattentional blindness—and read white racial projects into texts. The difference in the following examples is that instead of interpreting the Bible through the WRF, here white evangelicals use idealized white individuals and circumstances outside the Bible to define Christianity.

Christianity as Whiteness: The Ideal

I became aware of this phenomenon while reading *Elijah: A Man of Heroism and Humility* by Charles Swindoll (2000). The book is part of a series Swindoll produced in the late 1990s and 2000s on major biblical figures. The series was immediately influential, in large part because Swindoll is a towering figure in evangelical

Christianity. When he published *Elijah*, Swindoll was president of the very prestigious Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS), where he currently serves as chancellor, and he hosted a radio show that was syndicated on more than 2000 stations. The leading Christian periodical, *Christianity Today*, named Swindoll one of the 25 most influential preachers from 1956-2006, and *Preaching Magazine* ranked him second most influential preacher of the last 25 years, behind only Billy Graham. His power reaches through seminaries and mass media to hordes of missionaries, clergy, and congregants.

Despite his prominence, I found Swindoll's framing of *Elijah* frighteningly ignorant and racially offensive. In his introduction, Swindoll describes his fascination with "the War Between the States" (itself a white southern phrase to describe a war empirically demonstrable to be a war over slavery) before invoking Confederate General Robert E. Lee as a model of Christianity and the standard through whom readers can understand Elijah (the book and the prophet). Swindoll (2000:xi-xii) opens his text by highlighting Lee's example:

Among the many I have studied...no soldier stands taller than Robert E. Lee, a *marvel of unimpeachable character* and, to this day, of *universal admiration*. The mere mention of his name brings the term "gentleman" to mind... While he never ran from the call to fight for *what he truly believed to be the right*, he was never one to call attention to himself, to enjoy the pomp and prestige of his rank or position, or to seek the applause of his admirers.

As I scan the dawn of this twenty-first century, I find myself asking, "Where is that kind of leader today?" Uncompromisingly strong, yet self-controlled. Disciplined, yet forgiving. Audaciously courageous, yet kind. Heroic in the heat of battle, yet humble in the aftermath. There are a few such men and women, admittedly, but therein lies the disappointment: The list is tragically short. One of my great hopes in my later years of life is to encourage more people to join the thin ranks of Lee-like leaders.

That, as much as anything, has prompted me to pick up my pen and return to another biblical character in the Great Lives from God's Word biographical

series. I can think of few others who model these two invaluable traits more obviously than the prophet Elijah.... (emphases mine)

Swindoll's description of Lee reveals his white-framed approach to the Bible and his assumption that US Christendom consists exclusively of similar white supremacists. Indeed, the "mind" for which "the mere mention of [Lee's] name brings the term 'gentleman' to mind" is obviously a racist white mind. Lee conjures those images because he was a major and powerful slaveholder, who held dozens of African Americans in brutal slavery. The notion that Lee—who warred against the United States because Virginia and other southern states feared the US would end slavery—is now "universally admired" presumes a white racist universe in which people of color have no part.

Beyond obvious racial myopia, this passage reveals the white racist project at the heart of Swindoll's massively influential brand of evangelicalism. His mental and narrated exclusion of Christians of color is paired with a construction of Christianity as white and an exhortation for white Christians to "join the thin ranks of Lee-like leaders." Note that it is his deep desire to multiply the number of people with Lee's character that "prompted [Swindoll] to pick up [his] pen" and write a book about Elijah. In other words, Swindoll marshals the biblical figure, Elijah, as a means for leading readers to pattern themselves after Lee. Swindoll highlights Elijah because he exemplifies Lee's character. Thus, Lee is not in service to Elijah; Elijah is in service to Lee. The biblical figure, and thus the Bible itself, is here in service to ideal whiteness, as embodied by Lee.

Thus, Lee's status as a man famous exclusively for his status as a Confederate general takes on even greater import. As leader of the Confederate army, Lee exemplifies white masculinity at the end of the "golden age" of white supremacy. His reputation as a "gentleman" who is "strong, self-controlled, disciplined, and courageous" while leading other men in war maps perfectly onto the definition of ideal whiteness (including its gendered aspects) (Carter 2007). Swindoll's offering of Elijah as a type of Lee is thus an offering of Elijah/Christianity as a type of idealized white masculinity. This point is exemplified by Swindoll equating General Lee (and Reformation poet John Knox) with great biblical figures—Elijah, David, Esther, Moses, and Joseph—as people with "not a mediocre bone in their bodies" (Swindoll 2000:14). Swindoll (2000:34) even equates Lee with Jesus himself in a late vignette:

A short time before Robert E. Lee passed into his Lord's presence, a young mother brought her tiny infant to him. With tenderness, Lee took the child and held him in his arms, looking deeply into the baby's eyes. He then looked up at the mother and said, "Teach him he must deny himself."

The seasoned veteran knew whereof he spoke. As Douglas Southall Freeman writes, "Had his [Lee's] life been epitomized in one sentence of the Book [sic] he read so often, it would have been in the words, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

That final quotation, taken from Matthew 16 and Luke 9, was spoken by Jesus when he defined discipleship (i.e. the Christian life and daily practice) for the original twelve disciples. Swindoll's corroboration of Freeman's assertion is an unmistakable equalization of Lee and ideal Christianity. In this way, Swindoll's work exemplifies a dangerous pattern in white evangelicalism: co-defining Christianity and ideal whiteness.

Christianity as Whiteness: Institutional Practice

Swindoll is by no means alone. Indeed, leading white evangelical seminaries and universities also often equate whiteness and Christianity. The co-construction is clear in schools' handbooks and codes of conduct. Recall Takaki's description of virtuous white republicanism in the country's first two centuries and its emphasis on rationality, self-denial, and sexual and emotional restraint (Takaki 2000:ix). Virtue-based whiteness is almost completely negative. It is a form of whiteness full of proscriptions borne from a basic fear of human nature. That form of whiteness is about repression and self-renunciation.

Similarly, in their effort to mold students into model Christians, predominantly white evangelical institutions of higher education offer relatively extensive discussions of "acceptable" Christian behavior. It is striking how closely their discussions follow the outlines of Takaki's virtuous republicanism. For example, the preamble to Liberty University's "Personal Code of Honor" begins, "a chaste, honorable, and virtuous life encompasses many principles, including, but not limited to, respect for authority...respect for all institutional policies and standards of dress...as well as personal self-control" (Liberty 2014:1).

Liberty's preamble is fairly unusual, however, in its prescriptive tone. Most evangelical institutions' literature takes a prohibitive (rather than proactive) tack and is preoccupied with precisely the same aspects of human nature that characterize virtuous whiteness. For example, at DTS, the "Standards on Moral Conduct" (Section 4.1.3) section of the 2014-2016 handbook is dedicated *exclusively* to sexual prohibitions,

including forbidding “homosexual, premarital, and extramarital conduct” and requiring students to report any likelihood of marital separation or divorce to the dean of students or face official discipline (DTS 2014).

These institutions’ codes of conduct reveal a definition of Christianity based on the virtue-based definition of whiteness in that they are simultaneously prohibitive (i.e. preoccupied with self-denial) and extra biblical (i.e. the restrictions extend beyond that which is required in the Bible). Consider a portion of Moody Bible Institute’s (MBI) “Community Values and Expectations”:

[S]tudents must refrain from tobacco in any form [and] alcoholic beverages...for the duration of their time as enrolled students. In addition, students are to refrain from...patronizing night clubs [sic], comedy clubs, and similar establishments. There will be no on- or off-campus dances sponsored or organized by Moody Bible Institute students or personnel. (MBI 2013:7)

MBI’s restrictions on alcohol, comedy clubs, and dances parallel virtuous republican’s hostility toward frivolity, serendipity, and sexual expression. Importantly, each of these prohibitions goes well beyond any prohibitions in the Bible. In fact, given that Jesus’ first miracle was turning water into [very good] wine at a wedding reception and Apostle Paul’s pastoral instruction to drink alcohol for health, the most impeccable exemplars of Christian-living likely violated MBI’s standard of conduct. Obviously, MBI’s standards reflect something other than adherence to scriptural requirements.

DTS’s code is more explicit about adopting standards that exceed biblical requirements. Its handbook “recognizes the freedom of each student to develop personal standards under the Holy Spirit” before prohibiting all alcohol and tobacco use because

“people in the community recognize students at the Seminary [sic] as Christian leaders” (DTS 2014:53). Predictably, DTS is concerned with the white community’s standards and also forces students to conform to middle class white norms via its Student Dress Standard. Accordingly, “Dallas Seminary has established a dress standard that is generally known as professional/business casual” (DTS 2012:1). The standard is not only sexually conservative—including minimum inches skirts can be above the knee—it is also highly classed and white-framed. Bans on shirts “with printed writing, slogans, or numbers,” sweatpants, and “[j]eans with Rips [sic], holes and/or tears, Fraying [sic] or distressed” define black hip-hop, hipster, and working class fashions as inappropriate violations of “a disciplined Christian lifestyle as defined by Dallas Seminary...” (DTS 2012:1). As recently as 2009, the evangelical media juggernaut, Focus on the Family, required men to wear ties and women to wear skirts and pantyhose while on campus (Bailey 2013). These types of prohibitions in the name of exhibiting “Christ-like” discipline make clear the long-standing co-construction of virtuous whiteness and Christianity within the white evangelical movement.

Christianity as Whiteness: Internalized

Like the movement’s leaders and institutions, individual white evangelicals that I interviewed, both lay and clergy, similarly equated Christianity with white virtuousness. Asked to describe their “relationship with God” and the “kind of Christian you want to be,” respondents usually focused on sexual and emotional prohibitions and being disciplined with their time. Respondents emphasized being responsible with time primarily to create opportunities to have “quiet times” (individual prayer and Bible

study) and evangelize friends and family. Beyond a strong desire to spend time with God and do explicit evangelism, most respondents did not identify proactive “this-worldly” activities as part of mature Christianity. Again, the prohibitive stance on emotional and sexual expression and relative dearth of proactive steps reflects the co-definition of whiteness and Christianity at the heart of white evangelicalism.

Consistent with white virtuousness, my white evangelical respondents demonstrated a very strong preoccupation with sexual restraint across genders. Mary, a 20 year-old white student at a large southern university, expressed a desire to grow spiritually through her commitment to premarital chastity:

About a week ago, Mommy gave me my purity ring. I chose this ring because the meaning of the flower on it is purity. I wanted to write down what I meant by making this commitment of purity to God.

[She reads]: God, here is what I pledge to You: I pledge to strive for “Lily Whiteness.” I pledge to learn the meaning of true purity and to try to be completely set apart for You. Teach me what it means to be completely in love with You. C.S. Lewis said You find our desires too weak and that we settle for mediocrity. I don’t want to settle, Lord. Not in my relationship with you, not in my goals in this life, not in any of my relationships with others, and not in my purity. I can’t do it without Your help. I need Your help to live with abandon for You. That’s how weak I am, but You know that. And when or if that guy comes along, I pray You would help us to keep our eyes ever on You so that we don’t lose sight of our purpose and our King. Purify my heart and my thoughts and consume me from my very inner being.

This ring will serve as a reminder of the one I serve and the pure life I will strive for for Him.

For Mary, successful Christianity includes sustained victory over her “inner being” and eventually achieving “Lily Whiteness.” Like the country’s early whites who popularized the notion of white virtuousness, Mary is concerned that innate human “weakness” will cause her to “settle for mediocrity” and be unfit for a full relationship with God and a future husband. She asks God to “[p]urify my heart and my thoughts and consume me

from my very inner being” because it is her own nature that Mary views as the true enemy.

Similarly, Simon, a 22 year-old white evangelical, expressed frustration with sexual temptation in his religion journal. The journals, in which five evangelicals recorded their religious experiences for 30 days, gave evangelicals an opportunity to reflect on the central struggles of their spiritual lives over time. Simon’s frustration with sexual temptation evinces his struggle to embody white virtuousness:

This morning at prayer, Eli asked me to pray for continued victory in his fight against sexual immorality. I felt as though I should have asked for prayer for the recent attacks of lust, but I didn’t. I don’t know why. Well, I see that it was an attack of the enemy. If I think I don’t to need to tell anyone, and then it will just go away is the thought. But I know that it will just grow. So I was going to tell Max when we met for discipleship. But I didn’t. I had the opportunity, but refused to take it. . . . After we finished, I was praying before class and realized how much sexual thoughts had been taking over my mind. And I prayed that God would come in and help like He has before. I felt better after that. I caught myself more and was able to stop it. But I know the longer I hold it in, the bigger it gets. Maybe Dan will be the guy to tell.

Simon is not concerned with actualized sexual activity; he is concerned that “attacks of lust” and “sexual thoughts” are “taking over [his] mind.” Like Mary, Simon’s “enemy” is his own nature, which he describes as both secretive and sexual. The only hope is “that God would come in and help like He has before.” Apparently Simon’s prayers were answered to some degree because he was “able to catch myself more and was able to stop it.” Over the course of the day, Simon was able to discipline and repress his sexuality. Mary and Simon’s requests for God to “come in” and “consume my inner being” reflect the evangelical view that God is a “Trinity” consisting of three equal Persons [parts and/or personalities]—God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Trinity is considered one God, even as each of the three personalities is separately considered fully God (Larsen and Treier 2007). The Holy Spirit is distinct from God the Father and Jesus the Son in that after Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to teach and guide Christians (John 14:16-17) and dwell within them until the day of their carnal death and eternal redemption (Eph. 1:13-14; 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Tim. 1:14). Indwelling with the Holy Spirit is supposed to produce in Christians the "fruit of the Spirit," which is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). However, the co-construction of whiteness and Christianity has produced by dint of emphasis a functional definition of the "fruit of the Spirit" that is heavy on self-control and light on joy.¹⁶ Consequently, the Holy Spirit functions as an internal discipliner for white evangelicals. The Spirit is simultaneously the demander of virtuous republicanism and the power to achieve it.

Indeed, at a very basic level, white evangelicals effectively redefine God Himself as *the means* to virtuous republican whiteness. Having adopted virtuous white republicanism as the implicit or *de facto* definition of Christian maturity, respondents' definitions of the Holy Spirit as that which gives one the power to live the Christian ideal effectively means that God—the Holy Spirit—is the power to *realize* virtuous whiteness. Bill Bright (n.d.), co-founder of the fiercely evangelical Campus Crusade for Christ, explains Christians' relationship to the Holy Spirit this way:

¹⁶ Respondents regularly expressed "joy" in terms of gratitude that God saved them and blesses them in various ways. I mean "joy" here in the Merriam-Webster's definition "a feeling of great happiness...delight...gaiety."

I am controlled by Christ because the word “filling” [i.e. “filled with the Holy Spirit”] means to be controlled. And if I am controlled—not as a robot but as one who is led and empowered by the Spirit—the Lord Jesus will walk around in my body and live His resurrection life in and through me.

This amazing fact that Christ lives in you and expresses His Love through you is one of the most important truths in the Word of God. The standards of the Christian life are so high and so impossible to achieve, according to the Word of God, that only one person has been able to succeed. That person is Jesus Christ. Now, through His indwelling presence, He wants to enable all who place their trust in Him to live this same supernatural life.

As Bright, and other evangelicals explain, living a Christ-like life means being “filled with the Holy Spirit” and having the capability to live up to extremely high perceived biblical standards. Evangelicals’ co-construction of Christianity and virtuous republican whiteness means the standard that is “so impossible to achieve” is not solely “according to the Word of God,” but also according to whiteness.

Stanley, a thirty-year minister in a large parachurch in the Midwest, shared Bright’s assessment of ideal Christian life. In fact, Stanley rejected the Christian/non-Christian language in favor of calling people “Christ-followers” or “non-Christian-followers.” The linguistic change reflected his view that his job as a professional evangelical was not to create more self-identified Christians, but to create more behavioral “Christ-followers.” Stanley grounded the difference in a view of the Holy Spirit similar to Bright’s:

GLENN: What about things you do for people who are in your fellowship?

STANLEY: Those are people we can give a Bible study. Help them raise the bar in their life. Help them understand what being an authentic Christ-follower is. We have so many students who come who say they are already Christians who might not be yet.

GLENN: So what does it mean to be an authentic Christian?

STANLEY: Well, someone who understands that it’s really the Spirit of God at work in them; that I don’t have to perform to be a believer. I don’t have to hop through the religious hoops. I don’t have to be a “nice guy.” ... It’s

not about *trying* to be a good Christian. It's about connecting with the One who created us and knowing Him and allowing His Spirit to permeate your life. So you change from the inside out; you don't change from the outside in. Religion—they want to change you from the outside in. Being a Christ-follower, He changes us from the inside out.

Continuing, Stanley offered an illustrative hypothetical example:

Therefore, when I'm around people who may be doing some stupid stuff, I just kinda go, "So, are you benefiting from your life choices you're making?" 'No.' "So what are some of the life choices you think are hurting you the most?" In other words, isn't it better to have a person who pauses and says, 'Wow! I lied on my test. I lied on my exam. I lied to my girlfriend. I lied to my parents.' And I say, "So, how's that working for you?" 'You know, the consequence I'm getting is that people don't think I'm trustworthy. Or, even if I do win, I feel like I lied to get there so there's no satisfaction in it.' "Oh, so there's no satisfaction in ill-gotten gain? Interesting! And there's no satisfaction in people not trusting you? Interesting. Well, would you be interested in hearing how you could actually move towards living a life where you're honest with yourself and with others?" And they say, 'Well, how does a person do that?' And I say, "Well, you can't do it yourself." Like, you can't just say tomorrow, "Okay, I'm going to stop lying." They'll be lying by noon. So, it's a matter of saying, "I'm going to trust God to make my speech have integrity. I'm going to invite Him in daily to have integrity in my speech. Because it's not something I can do myself."

After Stanley concluded his example, I sought clarity:

GLENN: So you start addressing the problems they see in their own lives?
STANLEY: Correct. Without judgment; without condemnation; without guilt; without shame. And that's for people inside and outside the church.

For Stanley, being a Christian is about growing into behaviors characteristic of a "Christ-follower." Stanley insists that evangelical Christianity is separate from *religion*, which is based on external pressures. Instead, true Christianity results from changing "from the inside out" and "mov[ing] towards living a life where you're honest." Stanley defines an "authentic Christian" as someone who "understands that it's really the Spirit of God at work in them; that I don't have to perform to be a believer." Indeed, Stanley shares Bright's assessment that the Holy Spirit allows people to live more disciplined

lives than they might otherwise. Although Stanley says living the Christian life is not a “performance,” his examples of corrections the Holy Spirit makes in people’s lives follows the historical virtuous whiteness model. The Holy Spirit helps Stanley’s hypothetical convert “have integrity in his speech” and make better “life choices” so that he can enjoy a better reputation and greater sense of satisfaction. In other words, the Holy Spirit enables people to show the personal discipline prescribed by virtuous whiteness and the WRF. Indeed, over the course of the interview, Stanley credited the Holy Spirit with enabling successful business careers, generating prolife values, and refusing premarital sex. Each of these behaviors reflects virtuous republican whiteness. Stanley’s prescriptions are in keeping with Samuel Adams’ 1776 desire that the US become “the Christian Sparta” (Takaki 2000:6). Tellingly, Stanley did not discuss the Holy Spirit enabling joy, gentleness, or any other expressive element of the fruit of the Spirit.

Crucially, Stanley emphasizes that his vision is the same “for people inside and outside the church.” For self-proclaimed Christians, Stanley’s goal is to “help them raise the bar in their life. Help them understand what being an authentic Christ-follower is.” Given his subsequent discussion, an authentic Christ-follower is someone who exemplifies virtuous republican whiteness. Because Stanley’s assessment revolves around individuals’ ability to affect whiteness, his approach can be the same for those “inside and outside the church.” Virtuous whiteness is impossible for any human to live. Stanley offers Christianity as a means for Christians and non-Christians alike to live the impossible white life.

Elizabeth, a 20 year-old in the South, did not participate in the same parachurch organization as Stanley, but her evangelical church emphasized the same form of whiteness. She recounted an event that encouraged her to “raise the bar” in her life:

This morning as we woke up from a great night at women’s overnighter, after a wonderful breakfast and small chitchat we got to our lesson for the morning, “Testing the soils of our hearts.” It was a small survey asking questions about everyday life, if you ever lied, or gossiped, nagged, bragged, failed to listen and other kinds of questions. To my surprise this survey was very convicting. The night before we talked about how all the things you do in your life that aren’t like Christ aren’t noticed as much until you put them into the light and this survey did exactly that. Even if you didn’t do these certain things a lot in your life, the certain verses that were suggested to look at with each question made you automatically think of a time when you did that certain thing. It wasn’t convicting in a way that the staff members were trying to point you out and judge you, they were simply making you put your problems in the light so that you can start fixing them.

Elizabeth felt “convicted” by a series of questions designed to “put your problems in the light.” The prohibitive, disciplining tone of the questions and absence of encouragement toward expressiveness reflects the group’s virtuous whiteness-based definition of Christianity. Again, the Holy Spirit’s influence appears only in the negative, as a means to avoid prohibited actions. Potential positive actions (e.g. charity, joy) outside the virtuous whiteness script are functionally excluded from the work of God the Spirit.

Because virtuous whiteness is so focused on restricting expressive parts of human nature, my white evangelical respondents frequently judged their Christian maturity through self-denial and limitations. They also had great difficulty articulating affirmative expressions of their Christianity beyond evangelizing. Simon reflected on the lack of proactive direction in his understanding of Christian living:

I had breakfast with Dan and we talked about Micah 6:8 and how it says “to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly.” We are supposed to be thinking and

praying of ways to practically live that out. But I can't think of anything, they are all kind of abstract. And I am finding out that the Christian walk isn't events or specific actions, but feelings and thought put into action. That is what you are looking for. So all I can pray is that you instill in me a desire to perform Micah 6:8.

Simon was among the most diligent and mindful Christians I met in the course of this study. His Bible study habits and dedication to his faith were second to none. However, internalization of evangelical doctrine left him without any suggestions for how to obey Micah 6:8, which ironically reads: "He has told you, O man, what is good;/And what does the Lord require of you/But to do justice, to love kindness,/And to walk humbly with your God?". For Simon, evangelical Christianity "isn't events or specific actions, but *feelings and thought* put into action." Simon struggles to put Micah 6:8 into practice because he understands evangelical Christianity through virtuous whiteness, which prioritizes disciplined internal processes (e.g. feelings and thoughts) over benevolent actions. Simon is unable to locate Christianity without starting from a place of internal discipline rather than external social justice actions. Consequently, when challenged "to do justice," Simon could not "think of anything" and was forced to pray for a "desire to perform" appropriately.

Predictably, Simon and many other respondents experienced a great deal of frustration and failure in their most earnest attempts to live Christian lives defined as virtuous whiteness. In the absence of proactive suggestions, contemporary evangelicals were ever vigilant and looked for any weaknesses in their discipline. Consequently, evangelicals expressed deep frustration with themselves. To cope with their failure,

evangelicals turned to the Holy Spirit to help them regulate the expressive and emotional aspects of their natures, as Simon articulates:

It isn't that you weren't on my mind, God, just not always at the top of my mind. Why do I continuously feel guilty? This is the attack of the enemy and my flesh (which is allied with the enemy) to bring me down. To take me out of your grace mentally. If I believe that I have to work to please you, and to be with you, then I will not longer need your grace, mercy and love. But that is not true. Your love is all that can sustain me. Help me in continuing to be more fervent in my prayers. "Pray in the Spirit," as Paul says in Ephesians. Spirit! Pray through me. LORD, it is by your strength that I can continue to pray and work. Please don't let me forget that.

Simon feels guilty that he did not focus on God throughout the entire day. He feels he is insufficiently disciplined mentally. Trying to live up to virtuous whiteness, Simon turned to "the Spirit" hoping that God himself would affect the discipline Simon could not achieve on his own.

Whiteness Deified

White evangelicals have made their own "god" to solve their uniquely white problem. In the white evangelical church, in practice, the Holy Spirit is the power to restrain one's nature and subvert those aspects of human nature that once threatened whites' virtuousness project. Evangelicals have redefined God in a way that settles the fundamental contradiction of whiteness. The flawless white virtue at the heart of the WRF is an impossible, unlivable standard. White people are not innately different—neither better nor worse, morally or otherwise—from nonwhites. However, from the beginning the project of materially exploiting racial others required institutions to control the oppressed *and* justifications of that control to serve as psychological comforts for oppressors.

The tension between wanting to feel good about themselves while oppressing millions of people was complicated by the novelty and general skepticism of the democratic/republican project (Takaki 2000). Early white Americans were desperate to disprove a skeptical Europe, which viewed strong social hierarchies (e.g. monarchy and/or extremely strong class lines) as the most effective means of government. However, at a basic level, the white founders shared elite Europe's skepticism about democracy (Martin and Ambrose 2006; Takaki 2000). They reasoned that popular democracy would, indeed, fail if citizens gave into their basest instincts for greed, frivolity, and licentiousness. Therefore, they tried to restrict citizenship to only those who demonstrated an ability and practice of subjugating "dangerous" parts of human nature to the "better" parts. To do so, the founders used proxies for character (e.g. only property-holders could vote). They projected the parts of human nature they feared would threaten democracy away from whites and onto nonwhites, rendering nonwhites unfit for citizenship and self-rule by definition. For example, Thomas Jefferson argued that black people were so physically and morally inferior to whites that all emancipated black people were unfit for citizenship and should be deported (Peden 1955).

Thus were borne the fundamental crises of whiteness: (1) whiteness was defined as a mark of natural superiority; although whiteness did not guarantee "virtuous" living, it was the *sine qua non* for such living, (2) whiteness, in terms of character, was defined as rare; nonwhite peoples were presumed incapable of living up to whiteness standards, (3) this virtuous whiteness was necessary to possess *and demonstrate* in order to access basic rights, including citizenship and legal possession of one's body. Ultimately, whites

(then and now) found themselves in an impossible position. Their lives—material circumstances and self-identities—revolved around materially exploiting nonwhites (Mueller 2013; Oliver and Shapiro 1995).

To justify material domination and ease the psychic pain of oppressing other people, whites created a racial hierarchy (co-defined through gender and class) to justify their oppressive activities. For political reasons, that justification necessarily included claims of moral virtue and superiority *based on supposed ability to deny and subjugate the expressive parts of human nature*. Needing both the material profits of exploitation and the psychological comforts of their racist justification, whites forced themselves to try to live the impossible. They tried to prove their lie true by being in fact the virtuous republicans their political theory assumed was the only form of humanity capable of self-governance. However, whites were unable to live up to the conditions of their justifying ideology. They failed on two fronts. First, as whole human beings, whites were unable to completely hide and subjugate the expressive, sexual, and frivolous aspects of their character. Secondly, because nonwhites are also whole human beings who are not in fact worse than whites, whites were unable to demonstrate sufficient difference between whites' and nonwhites' morality. In the absence of empirical evidence, racial ideologies failed to justify whites' brutality or soothe their psyches. In short, white people were unable to live up to whiteness, and at some level, they knew it. Although whiteness has changed over the two and half centuries of US existence, the fundamental crises of whiteness remain. Virtuous whiteness is still an unlivable standard to which enormous social resources attach.

The genius of white evangelicalism is that it solves the contradiction of whiteness by redefining God Himself as the means to realize virtuous whiteness. White evangelicals define the achieved Christian life as virtuous whiteness. However, they admit that they fall short of living such a life. They claim that God, in the Person of the Holy Spirit (the third Person in the divine Trinity), gives them the power to live what they define as the Christian life. As I have shown, however, they co-define the Christian life and whiteness. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is functionally a means to achieve virtuous whiteness. For white evangelicals, God the Holy Spirit is a means to deny the sexual and expressive aspects of humanity that threaten republican governance. As such, whites are able to maintain whiteness as an impossible standard for accessing social rewards without excluding themselves from that access.

Ultimately, the racialized religious narrative goes something like this: People have the natural right to self-rule, but the nature and character of most people disqualifies them for self-government. Only religious people who are highly disciplined emotionally, sexually, and in their work ethic are capable of self-governance. For various reasons—articulated alternately as biological inferiority, intellectual inability, cultural depravity, and reasons unknown—nonwhites are obviously unfit to govern themselves, much less co-govern with whites. Nonwhites simply do not display the necessary self-control and discipline. With notable exceptions, they do not collectively demonstrate an ability to control and govern themselves. Even when they do admirable things, most notably African Americans' clear devotion to Christianity, they do so incorrectly. Nonwhite churches display the same problems nonwhites do in secular

situations—their worship is far too emotional, their interpretations are much too racially biased, and even their most persuasive ministers cannot manage to control members' behavior Monday to Saturday.

On the other hand, whites have the potential to govern themselves effectively, but only if they are vigilant Christians. Vigilant Christians are people who believe that Jesus is God and, by God's grace, are indwelled with the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who enables Christians to overcome temptations to not live a Christ-like life. The Holy Spirit enables white evangelical Christians to be chaste, disciplined, respectful, and industrious. By maintaining daily rituals, such as quiet times and regular Bible study, Christians can keep a strong connection with the Holy Spirit, Who will enable them to live virtuously and resist temptations. Without the Holy Spirit, even white evangelicals would be sexually active, involved in popular culture, unserious, lazy, and financially lacking. Because of the Holy Spirit, white evangelicals can be chaste, dutiful, and have respectful [i.e. white middle class] tastes.

In other words, just as Swindoll employed the biblical figure Elijah in his larger project of creating more Robert E. Lee-like leaders, white evangelicalism *writ large* redefines God, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, as the means to *be* white in spirit and in deed. God, as the enabler of white living, completes the loop. The Holy Spirit of Whiteness allows whites to materially exploit and oppress nonwhites while maintaining the ideological justification that because they are white *Christians*, they are *deserving*. Thus the crisis of virtuous whiteness is solved. White evangelicals achieve material domination, intellectual justification, *and* emotional solace through the spiritual work of

the Holy Spirit, whose sanctifying work makes them fit to rule themselves and reap the rewards of oppression.

Whiteness as Christian Maturity

The whiteness of the evangelical God, in character and purpose, is clearest when compared to black-centered theology. Black theology (Cone 1997; Cone 1999; Hopkins 1999; Williams 1993) takes African Americans' experience in the United States as its starting point, noting that in the most populous and influential white traditions, "there has been no sharp confrontation of the gospel with white racism" (Cone 1997:31). Indeed, whites created and changed Jesus's supposed physical appearance throughout US history to avoid a confrontation between Christianity and white racism (Blum and Harvey 2012). However, black life, shaped as it is in white racism, necessitates just such a confrontation. Thus black theology puts the very elements—political context, significance of emotion, cultural specificity of teachings, proactive mandates beyond evangelism, Holy Spirit God as more than internal discipliner—that are missing from the white evangelicals' teachings and interpretations I observed at the center of Jesus' story and Christian maturation.

Contrary to white evangelicals' assertions that the Bible has only one meaning, which they have discovered through disinterested biblical hermeneutics, black theologians demonstrate that rigorous biblical study does not necessarily produce white Christianity. In fact, they claim just the opposite. Drawing on Jesus' characterization of ministry in the Gospel of Luke—"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor.... To set at liberty those who are

oppressed” (4:18-19)—leading black theologian, James Cone, concludes: “Jesus’ work is essentially one of liberation” (Cone 1997:35). Indeed, for Cone, the Christian story “is a message about the ghetto, and all other injustices done in the name of democracy and religion to further the social, political, and economic interests of the oppressor” (1997:36). Furthermore, any “gospel” that is not oppression centered is no gospel at all:

If [Jesus] is not in the ghetto...but is, rather, in the easy life of the suburbs, then the gospel is a lie. The opposite, however, is the case. Christianity is not alien to Black Power; it is Black Power. (Cone 1997:38)

Whether or not one agrees with Cone, the black theological tradition he represents clearly contradicts white evangelical assertions that honest Bible study generates only their form of Christianity.

Where white evangelicals construct God as whiteness achieved—Jesus as whiteness lived, Holy Spirit as Christians’ ability to live whiteness—black theology views the gospel as the ability to survive and a mandate to oppose oppression, including white racism. Without judging the merits of either tradition, the mere existence of black theology proves that the patterns of co-defining Christianity and whiteness I observed among white evangelicals result from more than culturally detached religiosity. Simply put: it does not have to be their way.

Recognizing the roots of the contradiction between white evangelicalism and black theology sets the stage for examining a final way that white evangelicals make whiteness into doctrine. Having occluded nonwhite exegeses via the white racial frame and redefined God and Christianity via virtuous republican whiteness, white evangelicals then assumed access to systemic racism-based privileges to interpret the Bible and

evaluate themselves. In effect, the measure of Christian maturity is how well one uses white privilege. Access to white privilege functions as a measure of maturity in evangelical teaching and organizational logic.

During my research, I had a serendipitous Sunday on which the black pastor at the black church I attended for my own edification and the white pastor at a white evangelical church I observed during this study preached from the same Bible passage. Both focused on I Corinthians 10:13, which reads:

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

Their divergent exegeses and recommendations reflect the tacit influence of whites' and blacks' relationship to racist structures. The black pastor read through the passage, expanding on various words and phrases as he went. Notably, he repeated the final phrase "able to bear it" (NKJV) three times before launching into the body of the sermon. After expanding on living with burdens even while God is doing positive things in one's life, the pastor emphasized the ever-present nature of burdens in life.

Intentionally misquoting the scripture for effect, he said:

...God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to run from it. No? That you may be able to escape it. No? That you may be able [whole congregation] to *bear* it.

Through several examples—being a single mother, running a business with past-due bills, various "storms" of life, raising physically challenged children, caretaking sick parents, caring for unappreciative people, poverty—the pastor defined "temptation" in

terms of exogenous pressures (i.e. “burdens”) a mature Christian “bears.” The presumption is that the “temptations” Christians face result from common external causes rather than perpetual failures of discipline. Likewise, God appears as One who can overcome these external challenges or allow Christians to continuously struggle as a means of revealing their strength and maturity to themselves. Again, the struggle is against external pressures, all of which are common and many structurally overrepresented in black communities (e.g. single motherhood, economic insecurity and poverty, paid and unpaid caretaking). In any case, the black pastor insisted that long-term struggle is a sign of Christian maturity.

On the other hand, the white pastor interpreted the passage in the opposite way for his white evangelical congregation. Where the black pastor viewed temptation as primarily externally caused and struggle as a sign of maturity, the white pastor interpreted temptation and struggle in ways consistent with virtuous whiteness. Consequently, he defined temptations as short-term crises of character, and he defined long-term struggle as a sign of spiritual immaturity. Like the black pastor, the white evangelical minister offered examples to define “temptation,” but his examples—lust, pornography, lying, initiating physical violence—suggested temptation is located *within* Christians. His definition of temptation (i.e. sin) reflects a whiteness-based religious doctrine, fitting neatly within the WRF. The white pastor’s examples of temptation all fit the virtuous whiteness prohibition on expression, especially non-procreative sexuality. His examples also evince the same inattention to oppressive social structures that the southern Bible study showed in Chapter VI.

The white minister's definition of temptation led perfectly into his interpretation of the remainder of the passage. Where the black pastor emphasized bearing burdens, the white pastor emphasized *escape*:

If you are struggling with temptation, you can be sure that God has already provided a way of escape....Turn off the TV. Get a different job. Leave the bad girlfriend. Whatever you have to do, do it....Jesus said it's better to lose an eye than to let it cause you to stumble!"

In each case, temptation can be completely eliminated by exercising enough discipline to put oneself in a new circumstance. Therefore sustained temptation indicates a spiritual (i.e. morality and self-discipline) problem. However, the emphasis on discipline necessarily assumes that one always has the earthly *means* to escape. Instructions like, "get a different job," imply a job market in which one's labor is welcome. The assumption that one can simply change personal circumstances and create new livable ones is more fitting of whites' experiences than those of people of color (Collins 1993; Oliver and Shapiro 2006; Shapiro 2004). The white pastor's assumptions about measurements of Christian maturity presume access to disproportionately *white social and economic resources*.

In the white evangelical view, escaping temptation is evidence of spiritual maturity. Implicitly, however, the reverse is also true, perpetual struggle with a trial evinces spiritual immaturity—namely lack of discipline to take the God-assured way of escape. The assumption is that one must deeply desire the object of temptation, otherwise one would avail oneself of the means of escape. Where failure to escape could evince a lack of resources for escaping burdens (e.g. poverty) in black church, lack of escape represents spiritual failure in the white church. If one were properly disciplined,

one would have both the desire and *means* of escape. After all, systemic racism—misunderstood as meritocracy—has created a social structure that rewards traditional whiteness. If one is consistently dealing with a temptation, he either lacks the discipline to choose to escape, or he lacks the discipline that would provide the social and material resources for escape. In either construction, it is failure to properly execute virtuous whiteness that results in perpetual engagement with temptation. Consequently, adherence to virtuous whiteness and access to privilege (e.g. accessible job market) function as *de facto* measures of Christian maturity in white evangelicalism.

Beyond this fortuitous natural experiment, white evangelicals' conflation of whiteness and Christian maturity is evinced in their literature on spiritual maturity and "elder" (i.e. pastor) qualifications. All of the churches I studied had written materials describing the qualifications for pastors and some type of "spiritual maturity test" against which any applicants were measured. The materials emphasized the same elements of virtuous whiteness—expressive restraint, heavy discipline, Holy Spirit as means to white living—that I described earlier in this chapter. The presence of these elements in spiritual maturity tests—worksheets with multiple choice questions and Likert scales designed to identify a person's spiritual strengths—cement my point that co-definition of whiteness and Christianity are doctrinally, ideologically, and organizationally at the heart of white evangelicalism.

Each of the spiritual maturity rubrics claimed to be grounded on God's explicit specifications for biblical leaders. Authors of the spiritual maturity tests gathered relevant Bible passages and then translated them into observable characteristics by

which to measure potential leaders. For example, I Timothy 3:2 says a pastor must be “above reproach.” The spiritual maturity test converts that command into an assessment question: “Is it true that no one has an unresolved justifiable complaint against him?” All of the spiritual maturity tests cited passages from leading pastoral texts, I Timothy and Titus, to make their claims. However, uneven use of other passages (e.g. I Peter 5, Acts 6, Romans 14) indicates that churches are selecting characteristics to emphasize and minimizing potential others. The characteristics churches selected and the language they used to operationalize those characteristics reveal a whiteness-based measurement of Christianity that assumes access to white privilege, resources, and hierarchical status in society.

Whiteness as a measurement of Christian maturity is clear in the operationalization of Christian concepts. White evangelicals’ tests stretch biblical terms to fit their virtuous republicanism whiteness ideal. For example, one church identified “not addicted to wine” (1 Tim. 3:3) as a biblical standard and operationalized it as “is he sober emotionally” on their test. Similarly, “temperate,” which is translated “sober, clear-thinking, mentally alert...” is partially operationalized as “does he control his weight?”

Most tellingly, tests make heavy use of financial discipline and acuity to operationalize pastoral standards. In one such test, five of the 23 standards (22 percent) are partially or entirely operationalized in financial terms. The textual standard, “prudent or sensible,” for example, is literally defined as “discreet, reasonable...sound mind,” but it is operationalized in part as “Does he generally display good common

sense, particularly in financial areas?” Financial acuity is also included in the operationalization of “temperate,” asking “Is he free from significant and uncontrolled financial debts (not including a house, car, or school loan)?”

Tests’ concern with financial discipline parallels virtuous republicanism’s similar fixation. As in the white pastor’s interpretation of 1 Corinthians 10:13, spiritual maturity tests presume one has access to white privilege and resources. The measure of spiritual maturity is largely a measure of how well one utilizes racial privilege. Consider that “temperate” is not only partially financially defined, but that the definition lists loans for “a house, car, or school” as reasonable exceptions. The exceptions function as a loophole to prevent penalizing whites’ usual modes of achieving [e.g. school, “inheritance pathways” (Mueller 2013)] and displaying (e.g. car, house) middle class status. They make no exception for disproportionately black and brown causes of debt [e.g. intra-family business and emergency loans (Bowser 2007; Pattillo 1999; Valdez 2011), healthcare costs (Kirby and Kaneda 2010)]. To operationalize a variety of biblical standards, white evangelicals develop subsequent items that presume white middle class resources (e.g. “Is his house clean?”, “Is his appearance neat and orderly?”) and tastes (“Does his external appearance measure up to what is considered proper both biblically and culturally?” “Are his children well-behaved in public?”). Although white evangelicals regularly expand these requirements of “orderliness” and “proper” presentation to include pastors preaching in shorts, sandals, and t-shirts (Rah 2009), I have yet to see “sagging” or other stereotypically black styles accepted as

“proper...culturally.” Exhibiting white norms, which requires white resources, is thus a central aspect of evangelical measurements of spiritual maturity.

Indeed, the presumption of white privilege is so thoroughly taken for granted that one item measures applicants’ *attitude* while holding privilege over others: “Is he kind and respectful toward those who are lowly or poor?” The possibility of the applicant *himself* being “lowly or poor”—especially because of racial oppression—is precluded by white evangelicals’ tacit doctrinal assumption that mature Christianity and low social class are mutually exclusive.

That assumption stems from white evangelicals’ racial position. Through systemic racism, whites have created a social structure that will reward them financially and socially if they merely exercise discipline and “emotional sobriety.” Social institutions may be competitive, but they are open. A mature Christian, therefore, needs only ask God for the discipline to climb the social ladder laid out for him in advance. White evangelicals then define the spoils of racial privilege (economic access, social respectability) as blessings and signs of God’s favor. Ultimately, much of white evangelicals’ measurement of spiritual maturity is a measure of one’s access to and manipulation of racial privilege.

Given their encouragement for all evangelicals to exhibit spiritual maturity, white evangelical churches effectively compel members to equate whiteness with Christianity and view white privileges as God’s gifts. White evangelicals’ conflation of white privilege and blessings may help explain positive correlations (Blanchard 2007) between white conservative protestant values, geographical church density, and increased levels

of racial residential segregation. Indeed, white evangelicals are more likely than white non-churchgoers to oppose policies to decrease segregation (Brown 2011). These attitudes may reflect more than defense of racial position (Bobo 1999); they may be a defense of perceived spiritual standing.

Conclusion

Recall the “I Should Have Known When” story from the beginning of this chapter, in which Saul and company reproved me for supporting affirmative action. Before writing this dissertation, I believed that confrontation had been only about racial politics. I took Saul at his word that the question was solely about how *I* valued race relative to God. I knew his criticism was unjustified, but I never moved beyond self-defense. Having conducted this study and analyzed participants’ responses, I can now make sense of my own experience. I used to wonder how God had gotten into the conversation and why Saul and his company called my politics Satanic. Now I understand. For many members of the evangelical church I served—including Saul, his companions, senior ministers who asked me never to speak about politics, and the general membership that “could not respect a Democrat”—my black politics really were against their true god, Whiteness.

The white evangelical church I served in was all too typical. Viewing the world and the Word through the white racial frame, white evangelicals oscillate between inattentive blindness and an epistemological commitment to ignorance of racism (Steinberg 2007) that precludes nonwhite interpretations of the Bible. This exclusion simultaneously enables and results from evangelicals co-defining a very particular

concept of whiteness—virtuous republicanism—and Christianity itself. Through that co-definition, whites not only equate ideal whiteness with ideal Christianity, they ultimately redefine God Himself, making the Holy Spirit the means to live an otherwise unachievable form of whiteness. White evangelicals build on their whiteness-based definition of Christianity by setting standards for leadership based on one's commitment to virtuous republicanism and access to white privilege. As a result, white evangelical doctrine is essentially whiteness deified.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS

Now That I Know...

People often say ignorance is bliss. With respect to discovering the character of the white evangelical church (WEC), it is hard to disagree. There are many days I miss the comfort of an uncomplicated faith. For a time, I found much comfort in a faith that seamlessly blended my Eurocentric secular education with a white Christianity that guaranteed white ways of knowing (e.g. structurally detached hermeneutics) would reap eternal rewards. Despite the “I Should Have Known When” moments in this dissertation and many more on the proverbial cutting room floor, leaving the WEC and making it an object for analysis was a difficult task. Ironically, it was faith in Christianity’s ability to withstand an honest pursuit of truth that led me to ask the hard questions that eventually enabled my exit. Those questions were enough to free me from the WEC, but it was not until I completed this study that I fully understood the WEC as a white supremacist movement tightly cloaked in religiosity.

Despite my reticence, my data were consistent on the point. At the start of my research, I had no expectation that I would experience or observe a pattern of race tests. Academic literature explained segregation in the WEC as a result of macrosociological processes such as residential segregation. That literature offered little indication of the prevalence or character of white evangelicals’ exclusionary race tests. The evangelical church in which I had served utilized my race at will. For example, at a recruitment event, staff members marked the information cards of black visitors with a “B” to

specify that I follow up with them. At the time, I thought that practice was odd, but prudent. Only after observing utility tests in a variety of churches did I recognize them as a feature of the WEC movement. My research data exposed the relationship between micro level race tests and the high levels of racial segregation in individual churches and the WEC as a whole.

Likewise, researching the history of the WEC movement was vital to recognizing the WEC's interest in saving white people. Historical shifts in the contemporary white evangelical movement's practices followed closely US whites' political interests. The formation of the WEC in the 1940s had the explicit intent of increasing doctrinally conservative Christians' political activism just as the black civil rights movement was gaining momentum. Subsequent changes in church structure, such as the church growth and emerging church models, also paralleled changes in whites' lives and tastes. As evinced by Bill Hybel's formation of one of the first evangelical megachurches, the WEC decentralized church activities, shortened services, liberalized dress codes, and deemphasized sermons in response to survey research with exclusively white populations. Unsurprisingly, the changes in WEC practice catered to changes in whites' material experience. As white flight moved white families from cities to suburbs, the WEC accommodated by deemphasizing Sunday worship and moving services to "home churches" that were more convenient for suburban whites. Similarly, the WEC eagerly spoke to suburban whites' perceived problems (e.g. lost masculinity, hipster children) through its media juggernauts. Only after establishing the WEC as white institutional space did evangelicals consider asking what people of color may want out of church.

The combination of informal social boundaries through race tests and a history of serving white needs made clear that the WEC was a movement by whites for whites.

Closely examining the substance of the teaching in the WEC and the processes by which white evangelicals formed doctrine exposed the WEC as a movement built around the exultation of whiteness. White evangelicals' commitment to the white racial frame (WRF) causes them to interpret the Bible as a constant affirmation of the tenets of the WRF. The white evangelicals in this dissertation interpreted passages in ways that erased nonwhite implications, leaving only white-affirming interpretations of biblical accounts. Conversely, their lack of experience as racially oppressed peoples and commitment to white victimology left these whites unable to contextualize the choices biblical characters made. Consequently, they produced doctrine that was white racially framed through affirmation of racially white positionality and negation of nonwhite interpretations.

The white evangelicals in this dissertation not only interpreted the Bible through the WRF, they effectively deified whiteness. For these white evangelicals, white virtuous republicanism is synonymous with perfected Christian living. Indeed, they redefine God Himself as a means to realize an otherwise unrealistic version of whiteness. Like the founders of the US, my evangelical respondents viewed themselves—their basic human natures—as the ultimate enemy, as an ever-present force they needed to constrain. These white evangelicals constructed ideal selves and an ideal Christianity that is based on an 18th and 19th century version of whiteness. The conflation of whiteness and ideal Christian living was reflected in WEC materials, such as spiritual

maturity tests, that measure how close a potential church leader is to living up to church standards. The standards assume potential leaders are racially white and have access to the material advantages whites disproportionately enjoy because of systemic racism. Similarly, the standards also assume an absence of structural limitations that disproportionately affect nonwhites. By redefining Christianity as the realization of idealized whiteness and redefining Holy Spirit God as the means to achieve idealized whiteness, these white evangelical Christians deified whiteness and turned the WRF into doctrine.

In the end, my examination of the WEC reveals a social movement that is demographically white, strategically pursuing white people, and converting whites to believers in Whiteness as God as perceived through the white racial frame. In light of these revelations, I conclude that the WEC is best understood as a white supremacy movement that uses the organizational structure and discursive frames of Christianity. My conclusion relies on data from multiple levels of the WEC movement, ranging from in-depth interviews to participant observation in Bible studies and reviews of influential literature. My findings are as much an indictment on my own biography as they are of the current WEC.

Decolonization after the WEC

Fortunately, participation in the WEC is not the end of my story. At the start of this dissertation, I expressed hope that this text would save young Christians of color from seeking spiritual homes in white evangelical churches. The WEC is so ubiquitous and aggressive in its defining of Christianity that many people of color are forced to

confront it in one way or another. For many Christians of color, WEC radio and television are the only explicitly Christian media available. Others encounter the WEC in afterschool programs (e.g. YoungLife), on college campuses, and social media. My hope is that exposing the WEC as a white supremacist social movement will save Christians of color the pain of the rejection, [discursive] violence, and misguidance that accompany building one's spiritual house on such unsteady ground. In this way, young nonwhite people have been one of the audiences at the forefront of my mind while writing this dissertation.

Because this text is decidedly race conscious and has an implicit nonwhite audience, I am obliged to do more than warn readers of this particular danger. I would like to lay out an affirmative vision, a suggestion for what to do in light of the findings in this dissertation. Of course, I cannot solve the ontological questions at the heart of religious practice—is there a God and if so, what does God require of humanity? What I can offer is reflection on my own choices in light of discovering the nature of the WEC. Like many African Americans, I was raised in a small black church. Christianity was essential to my identity and family connections. I wanted to find a spiritual practice, preferably Christianity, that enhanced my relationship with God without damning my racial identity.

The structure of the WEC gives some hints for how to resist its influence. After securing physical safety, the first task for people of color living in white supremacist societies is decolonizing our own minds. Decolonizing oneself involves learning about one's nonwhite culture, embracing that culture, and loving those who share it with you.

Such decolonization includes psychological efforts to replace the WRF with a critical frame that uses nonwhite communities' collective memories to recognize, reject, and replace white-privileging logics and patterns of behavior. As Brown (2010) explains in her coda, mentally decolonizing oneself is important for those who would lead oppressed peoples toward healthier realities. Uprooting the WRF and other white supremacist projects in one's life is essential to creating work that moves oppressed peoples toward freedom.

Relative to the WEC, decolonization includes rooting out the WEC's myriad influences on one's faith and reconstructing those beliefs. One prominent aspect of the WEC's colonization of Christianity is its emphasis on the canonical Protestant Bible as the center of Christian practice. As we saw in Chapters VI and VII, the WEC uses hermeneutics to claim white racially framed doctrines are objective and universal. We saw the implications of such a narrow view of spirituality in Simon's inability to imagine how to "do good and walk humbly with God," per Micah 6:8. Such devotion to the written word is consistent with western culture, but is inconsistent with Christian history. The New Testament was not compiled in its current canonical form for nearly 400 years after Jesus died (McDonald 2012). Indeed, most Christian followers were illiterate for the first millennium of Church history. In the US, many, if not most, African American Christians, including many ministers, had limited or no literacy through the 19th and well into the 20th centuries (Duster 2009; NAAL 2010). Given this history, the WEC's hyper-emphasis on their [contested] cannon (McDonald 2012) is clearly not essential to the practice of Christianity. For the vast majority of Christian history, most

practitioners have utilized nontextual means of worship more than daily, individual engagement with written texts. Placing other forms of authority and spiritual practice—e.g. prayer, mysticism, song—on more equal standing with textual analysis can help Christians detach their beliefs from the white racially framed doctrines advocated in the WEC.

Reemphasizing Christian practices beyond Bible study also advances the decolonization process by reestablishing the connection between social location and interaction with the divine. Although all cultural reproductions are imbued with particularities of the cultures of their origins, written texts appear especially vulnerable to misinterpretation as objective and culturally detached. In many cases, songs, dances, and other common spiritual practices have proven equally enduring and powerful for practitioners while resisting tendencies to appear socially detached (Arweck and Keenan 2006; Chwe 2013). Identity-relevant practices can help Christians, especially Christians of color, maintain close connection with God in ways that are empowering in both this world and the next (Cone 1997; Cone 2010). Personally, after leaving the WEC, I added more traditional gospel music from 1950-2000 to my collection and bought an old Baptist hymnal to revive my private worship sessions. When I was in the WEC, I did not consider myself to have had a daily “quiet time” with God unless I had read at least one Bible chapter. Now, I meditate daily, sing, pray, and sometimes just “have church” to sustain my connection with God.

My final recommendation for those looking to break from the WEC is to pray and ask God to take the whiteness out of your faith. A practical measure of progress

toward removing whiteness from your faith is to conscientiously remove images of white Jesus from your imagination and physical environment. The image of white Jesus, whether physical or mental, perpetually reinforces a tight connection between whiteness and God. In the WEC, that connection is so tight as to become a substitution of whiteness for God. Ridding oneself of the deep influences of the WEC is partially accomplished and measured by the degree to which one separates whiteness and God in one's mind. Eliminating white Jesus in one's imagination of God requires a prolonged, intensive process because of the proliferation of "American Jesus" in churches and popular culture (Blum and Harvey 2012). If my own experience is any indication, reimagining Jesus will indicate how pervasive whiteness is in one's faith and be excellent preparation for the equally extensive work of rooting out whiteness in one's doctrines.

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