The Jawbone of an Ass

Resisting Coercion and Reclaiming Christ in Christian Higher Education

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Abstract

Christian higher education uniquely marries neoplantation academia with the practice of religious jawboning, using persuasion rather than the exertion of vehement enforcement, to engage Black faculty of faith in upholding white supremacy ideology. These institutions can and do use faith as a tool of oppression through their policies and practice, reinforcing the domination of whites and the subordination of people of Color as the divine order of God. This was the reality and experience of two Black women faculty during their time at one of these institutions. Using Black Liberation Theology as a framework, duoethnographies detail how a racialized hierarchy was embedded into the fabric of a faith-based university and describe the institutional expectation for Black faculty to subscribe to a system that supported their own physical and mental demise in exchange for spiritual redemption. More than just a cautionary tale of religious academic spaces, implications include the need for faith-based institutions to come to terms with and reconceptualize their commitment to racial diversity and the authors' ability to reclaim their faith as an act of resistance, despite the attempted lure to participate in their own spiritual murder.

Keywords: Christian higher education, higher education, Black faculty, spirit murder, duoethnography, Black Liberation Theology

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Introduction

When considering spirit murder, the term coined by scholars to describe the painful experience of Black people in educational insitutions that results in deep-rooted, permanent damage to one's soul (Love, 2016; Williams, 1987), the last place that might register for such a violent atrocity to take place is a faith-based institution. After all, academically, these institutions typically pride themselves in offering a liberal arts curriculum that fosters critical thinking and social responsibility. Religiously, many of the universities that claim Christian higher education as their collegiate designation only hire those that are able to clearly articulate their spiritual values. The pedagogical devotion to intellect, coupled with requisite spiritual gatekeeping, sends the message that nothing less than goodwill abounds in these environments. For many Black scholars who also identify as followers of Christ, this atmosphere can be attractive and seemingly offers the best of both worlds, especially when the alternative is being part of a traditional higher education institution, where racial hostility is well documented.

This was certainly the case for us. Yet, despite the promise held conceptually, we, the authors, find ourselves here—writing about survivorship of two attempted spirit murders that took place at one Midwest faith-based institution. If it were not by chance, or what we like to call 'divine intervention,' we would have assumed that each of these attempted spirit murders were isolated events. This is because one event occurred in the mid-1990s and the other experience occurred some 20 years later. A mutual acquaintance introduced us and, although our relationship began as mentor-mentee, our relationship soon became a friendship. Part of our bond is because of this shared experience that only we can understand. Through talks over the last three years, we freely swapped stories about life in academia and our conversational wagon always circled back to the alarming reality we faced in both of our first tenure-track faculty positions that took place at the same Christian university. We often grappled with how an institution with so much promise fell so gravely short in realizing its potential.

Methodology and Theoretical Framing

As we attempted to make meaning of our experiences, the methodology for this manuscript came about organically. Duoethnographic reflections (Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012), where each of our voices are explicit, and co-constructed narratives (Ellis, 2004), instances where we tie our stories together, are both utilized, and we consistently relied heavily on cultural

and spiritual intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Rocha, 2016; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). We were struck by the commonality in our stories; they spanned space and time, yet, they often possessed similar elements, and unfortunately, almost always shared trauma. We formalized our self-interrogation into the broad research questions of 'What are the experiences of Black women faculty at faith-based institutions?' and, applicable to this particular writing, 'How did two Black women faculty survive attempted spirit-murder at a faith-based institution?' Truthfully, as we began to process our stories through a historical, racialized, and theoretical lens, we were left to wonder, '*could* Black women faculty survive at a faith-based institution and remain whole?' as we realized just how deeply our experiences impacted our mental, physical, and, most critically, our spiritual well-being.

We met several times. Often, one of us narrated and the other took dictation in a shared document. Through this process, themes emerged that encapsulated our experiences comprehensively. Our writing had multiple purposes. First, we needed to process our pain, and documenting our experiences served as a healing process for us and, if our story was going to be told, we wanted to be the ones who told it. Second, we believed our perspective is important not only to ourselves, but to others. It is especially valuable to Black faculty members in faith-based institutions, as well as Black academics that are considering faith-based institutions as their place of employment. Lastly, we wanted to address an under-researched and under-analyzed type of institution in critical race scholarship.

In crafting this document, we relied on the theoretical lens of Black Liberation Theology. The brainchild of Cone (1969, 1997, 2011), it is a framework that grapples with how individuals can "be both Black and Christian" (Cone, 2011, p. xvii) and attempts to "reconcile the gospel of liberation with the reality of Black oppression" (Cone 2011, pp. xiv-xvi). Ultimately, Cone (1969, 1997, 2011) concluded that God identifies with those that are suffering, Jesus is radical, and that Christianity and Black Power are synonymous. Since its inception, several other theologians and scholars have continued in the vein of exploring the tension between faith and race, and this body of work was a general source for making meaning of our experiences in both spiritual and practical ways (Douglas, 2015; Dyson, 2017; Gutierrez, 1988; Harper, 2016; Jun, et al, 2018; Romero, 2013; Salley & Behm, 1988; Thurman, 1976; Tisby, 2020; West, 1982; Wilson-Hartgrove, 2018).

Race and Religion

We both realized fairly quickly in our career that the racial violence we experienced at this particular university was not wholly tied to

academia or faith. Rather, we recognized the combination of the two created a unique breeding ground of two powerful forces that, if not done mindfully, could bring out the worst in each other. In religious terms, we believe that God had "[made] a way of escape for us" (I Corinthians 10:13, KJV), and our time at the institution was pretty short-lived. In practical terminology, we had the good sense God gave us to know that 'all [spiritual] skin folks ain't [spiritual] kin folks—and just because we shared the same religion did not mean that we shared the same God.

To give personal context, we both grew up in church and attended multiple times a week. We both lived in mostly white suburbs, so not only was church a huge part of our lives, it was also our central connection to the Black community and our only regular venture into 'the 'hood.' Our faith experience is interwoven into our Black identity and vice-versa. Many of our most fond memories, family experiences and closest friendships are tied to our place of worship and our spirituality has been our source of strength in overcoming natural tribulations.

We are not unique in our experience. Indeed, the Black church is an icon and typifies the close association of Christianity with Black culture. Nary a Black movie can be made, from comedy to tragedy, without the traditional Black church scene that often features a soul-stirring solo, an uplifting message, and a pivotal moment of redemption. While modern roots are found in the civil rights movement, the connection between race and faith in the Black community dates much further back. During a time period when unprecedented, overt cruelty towards Black bodies was widely accepted and the law of the land, Bell (1996, p. 1), writes how slaves were "able to transcend the awful oppression that defined their lives" through the sounds of the Black church, spirituals. He continues,

> Embracing religion that was undergirded by this music helped slaves to be free in their own minds. It gave their imagination nourishment for creating a world of freedom where they could be whoever they felt they truly were-not just someone's chattel who was worked, beaten, raped, maimed, sold, and killed for profit or sport. The music, encompassing all of this despair, empowers the singers with a faith and determination that thrills the heart and nurtures the soul. (pp. 1-2)

Despite the redemptive power that Bell describes, we cannot forget the original intention of acquainting the slave population with Christianity. Not only was the religion encouraged as a means to desecrate African spirituality, but it was also used as a tool to promote willing submission. Douglass (1845, pp. 117-118), describes early American Christianity as "corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical" and highlights the contradiction of how "the slave auctioneer's" and "the church-going" bells chimed simultaneously.

Christianity framed the domination of whites and the subordination of Blacks as the divine order of God, allowing the enslaved to subscribe to a racialized hierarchy that supported their own physical and mental demise, towards the promise of spiritual redemption (Douglas, 2015; Wallis, 2015).

Themes

In the next section we tell our stories. For readability, when it is an individual voice, we have included the author's name with its accompanying story. When it is a shared narrative, 'we' is used. The themes are categorical and our experiences are woven together to tell a singular story of Black life at a faith-based institution. The themes are as follows: (1) social construction of Jesus, (2) spiritual manipulation, (3) a community in isolation, (4) Christ or capitalism?, and (5) knowing our place.

Social Construction of Jesus

We were drawn to this institution because it was Christ-centered. It did not take us long to realize that, often, we were not referencing the same God as the majority culture of the campus. Ours is a God of overcoming, a God that identifies with the down-trodden, and a God that empowers. The other is a god that is so embedded in white supremacy that when the legal terror of slavery ended, the ideology transferred to the "afterlife of slavery", where the expectations are still for Black people to be "imperiled and devalued" in contemporary settings (Hartman, 2007, p. 6). It was hard to distinguish which 'God' was at play (big G or little g), because there was always a reference to the same scriptures and symbols. Most often, we had to wait until the manifestation of the ideology behind the religious references to emerge and we could tell the difference because one was accessible to us and the other was not.

One incident that clearly informed me (Larissa) that between "the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ" was, as Douglass (1845, p. 117) stated, "the widest possible difference," happened a year into my employment. A sculpture was erected in the middle of campus and it was a beautiful oversized stone table flanked by benches. In Christianity, the table is a symbol of connection and togetherness, and I was warmed by the sight, especially at night, when the landscape lighting made the scene appear like a heavenly place to commune. During the day, I would sometimes see a class around it and I always kept the idea tucked in the back of my head that one day I would surprise my own students and have class out there too. Every time I walked across

campus and saw the structure I smiled – while there was some indication already that things were not as they seemed, I was hopeful that such a profound symbol of hospitality that invited 'whosoever will' to come and 'break bread together', indicated that there was a place for me at the institution.

Quite a while after the initial installation, my optimism was thwarted. One afternoon I walked through the center of campus and there, permanently perched at the head of the table was an oversized stone Jesus who was far from ambiguous. Rather, it was the Jesus that the 'White Man's religion' dreamed up—a tall, thin, middle aged American man with White phenotype nose and lips and long shoulder-length straight hair. He resembled the Americanized depiction that was a result of imperialism, a physical conglomeration of whiteness (Jun, et al., 2018) that looked nothing like the historically accurate representation of a Jewish man from the Middle East. This manufactured version of Jesus is so pervasive that its likeness is even prevalent in many Black and Brown church communities, although there has been movement to disrupt this inaccurate imagery. This whole time that I interpreted the empty table as a visual representation of an expansive religion that would bring all walks of life together and would include me, White Jesus was just backordered! I was crushed. The structure instantly became a reminder that I would never be a part of this institution's vision. Further, they had denigrated a Christian symbol that represented inclusion. Historically, the Ku Klux Klan's signature burning cross took the cherished symbol of Christianity and used it as a way to send the message that Black folks were not welcomed, and in this way, "the cross can heal and hurt; it can be empowering and liberating but also enslaving and oppressive" (Cone, 2011, p. xix). Likewise, the fixture of White Jesus on campus transformed the Christian symbol of a table that always had an open seat for me into an idol of white supremacy. It was a clear indication that I was not part of this institution's Christian imagination and therefore could not be part of the social, cultural, or spiritual fabric of this institution. Further, it let me know that their conceptualization had nothing to do with God's message but was aligned with the Christianity that Douglass (1845) described.

Spiritual Manipulation

Yet, there was always a coaxing towards faith as a commonality. But it was quite clear there would be no intent on reckoning the parts of the religion that had an egregious past. Instead, we experienced quite the opposite—constant attempts to persuade us to accept oppression as a part of God's plan. Similar to how the enslaved were religiously jawboned, that is, influenced to submit by spiritual coercion rather than by exertion

of vehement force, we realized that the university attempted to cloak the bondage of Black bodies through the proselytization of our souls.

I (Venessa) saw acts of Christianity were used in an attempt to preclude true justice. At the very end of a semester after all the grades were calculated, a legacy student received a grade lower than they desired. At the time, I did not really understand the high priority placed on legacies at this institution nor the interconnectedness between certain students and certain employees. The student complained to me about the grade they received. They persistently asked if I would change it, but I informed them I could not give them a grade they did not legitimately earn. After the grades were submitted, I later learned the registrar's office changed the grade without my knowledge or my permission. I was livid. When I approached the provost and the president about this practice and how it flew in the face of fairness, justice and academic integrity, their solution was to "pray with them about it." I did not—for what is there to pray about? I stood firm that if there is an injustice we should correct it when it is within our power to do so. I felt dehumanized and powerless, and I was left to wonder if my race contributed to my grievance being overlooked. I have come to realize that as much as my race was used to invalid my status as faculty, the student's race automatically confirmed her belonging (Harris, 1993). Moreover, faith used as a means to manipulate made an unethical situation all the more egregious.

I (Larissa) experienced spiritual manipulation after several students knelt during the national anthem. Immediately, the campus atmosphere became contentious, and the students provoked the ire of those who did not agree with the act. I was invited to a small all-day meeting that was a mixture of faculty, student leaders, members of the leadership team (who doubled as alumni—that story will come later), and board members. It is important to state that the only two Black faculty members were among the three faculty members invited and one of the two students invited was widely considered the most vocal Black protest leader.

The meeting began with the board member facilitator disseminating the norms of the meeting that was a list of bible verses All of the scriptures emphasized harmony such as, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35) and "let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). Ironically, we were meeting about a social injustice and there were several scriptures that were apropos for this time such as "learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, and please the widow's cause" (Isaiah 1:17) and to "open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Proverb 31:9). The cherry-picked scriptures served as a dog-whistle that the purpose was not to have a

critical conversation about equity and inclusion, but rather to avoid conflict and suppress the protest. We proceeded to make a chart that listed all the wrongs that arose from kneeling, with 'an acknowledgement of Black people murdered by state sanctioned policing' on equal footing with 'losing potential donor money.' It was a clear attempt to coerce key members of the Black community to stay quiet about our oppression, for the greater good of the institution, all under the guise of our shared faith.

A Community of Isolation

As we both spent time on campus, Venessa's previous narrative regarding prioritizing a student's desire for a certain grade over the protection of academic freedom is not at all surprising. Indeed, in this small, tight-knit, faith-based institution, the term 'legacy' did not even begin to capture the interlocking web between board members, faculty, staff and even community stakeholders. Just around half of the faculty were alumni and it was not uncommon for siblings, spouses, and children of faculty to be employed at the institution. These communal ties sometimes went back generations. Many had never left the area or, if they did, it was only for a short period of time to a sister university that was of similar size, belief, and composition, with the eventual intent to return to a better position at this same institution.

Many would reminisce at faculty meetings about their time together as undergraduate roommates. Most were in the same socio-economic circles and talked casually about their vacation homes and their trips abroad. Legacy operated in much of the same way as the theoretical concept of whiteness as property (Harris, 1993)—it was something that we could never possess, but they would casually wield it, and often use it to their advantage. While at most higher education institutions it is custom to not hire graduates to make sure there is diversity of thought amongst the faculty, the exact opposite occurred at this institution, and there was more than one hiring process where a graduate was given preferential treatment and it was openly acknowledged and accepted. Further, sometimes searches were not even conducted and individuals were just appointed instead.

This reproduction created a 'norm' and it spilled over to religion. There was a clear expectation for us to assimilate our spiritual practices. They defined what worship looked like. They defined what prayer sounded like. At church services, which occurred multiple times during a week, speakers that reaffirmed their beliefs were carefully chosen. The rare time someone made it the larger platform that had a 'progressive' message, it was typically followed up with some sort of reprimand or warning to not invite someone who was not a 'good fit.' Most times, guests from the outside were regulated to colloquiums or

student talks that were scheduled at obscure hours and only minimally promoted.

This notion of qualifying what was right or wrong, Christian or un-Christian, was arbitrary, interpretive, and dictated by institutional representation that had never really experienced life outside of the bubble they had created for them and others like them. As two Black Christian women not created in this bubble, naturally or spiritually, our views were seen as radical. From time to time, we would initiate conversations that questioned traditions and practices and, most times, it was met with uncomfortableness, fear, and it was seen as a threat to their normality. It was clear that there was never an intent to include the diversity of God's creation in their bubble, or at least that is how we felt given our lived experience.

This is not to say that we did not make friends, experience glimmers of hope, or that there were no allyship in our experiences. Rather, it just means that there were systemic-isms that individual good deeds could not counter. And it was a rare soul that was willing to be a co-conspirator, that is someone who would use their whiteness, privilege, and positionality, to further a cause by any means necessary and risk their own membership in the inner circle of sanctity (Love, 2019). In short, we did not belong.

Christ or Capitalism?

But, why would anyone risk their own standing for us? We were a rarity. Although our employment at the institution was twenty years apart, one of us was the first tenure-track Black woman faculty member and the other was the second. They were only interested in our Blackness to window dress their missional philosophy. What is more, we were exploited to benefit their financial bottom line through common religious rhetoric. We were compelled to 'do God's work' and were chosen to 'answer His call,' which often resulted in arduous conditions, such as large course loads, less than average compensation, and service on multiple committees.

An attempt to steamroll by using a personal belief system as bait parallels the exploitative nature of plantation life, as the bottom line was not truly for a 'greater good,' but that of capitalism. This is why it was easy to equate the losing of black life to the loss of potential alumni dollars, as aforementioned in Larissa's narrative. And in the same way the South engaged in a civil war so that their financial life would not be disrupted for a moral imperative, we found ourselves as part of a racialized battle on our campus, the academic neoplantation (Matias, 2015) we found ourselves willingly a part of. At times, we felt like we were treated like props, used for our Blackness when it served a need as

part of a capitalist agenda, and ignored or disregarded when our bodies were not useful for this purpose. For the short time we were there, we stayed because Christianity and capitalism were so intertwined that "we [had] deluded ourselves into believing the myth that capitalism grew and prospered out of the Protestant ethic of hard work and sacrifice" when, in actuality, "capitalism was built on the exploitation and suffering of Black slave and continues to thrive on the exploitation of the poor - both black and white, both here and abroad" (King, 1967, para. 12).

We could both recall incidents when this theme was readily made evident. I (Larissa) was asked, in my first year, to be a key part of the graduation ceremony, something typically reserved for seasoned faculty. Although suspicious that I was chosen to do so to put my Blackness on display, I reluctantly agreed. I was pre-tenure and in no position to decline without knowing how it would affect my future. I was placed on the stage next to the keynote speaker, a prominent recording artist. As the processional line formed, we were the last two and had quite a long time before we had to walk into the ceremony. We introduced ourselves, found we had life events in common, and quickly became engaged in meaningful conversation. Our bodies closely faced each other, as we talked and joked. In the midst of our chat, the board president came from out of nowhere and placed his body between ours, with his back towards me, to talk to the speaker, a potential big donor if not already, I presumed, as if we were not in conversation. The keynote awkwardly responded to him, and when the board president left, the keynote speaker profusely apologized for what had just happened. I was only there for my Blackness to begin with, but then to completely treat me as invisible because I was not of use at that particular moment filled me with humiliation.

I (Venessa) made the decision to leave and did so without consulting anyone from the institution and I did not request any recommendation letters. I knew I had to leave or else I was not going to survive the professorship as a whole if I stayed. I was broken and felt betrayed by an institution I wanted to consider my family. When I announced my resignation, they were stunned and several comments made me feel like I should just be grateful to work in Christian higher education no matter how I was treated. Beyond this, those I reported to openly peppered me with questions such as, "how did you get that job without a recommendation from here?" and "Who told you that you could leave?" It was as if it was expected for me to have 'traveling papers' to pursue another opportunity in the academy and it was beyond their comprehension that I had lucrative options outside of them and others could find value in me.

Knowing Our Place

We soon realized that being part of the system only worked when we knew our place within it and stayed there. Likened to slavery, we were like "the conversion of human beings into currency, into machines who existed solely for the profit of their owners" (Wilkerson, 2020, p. 44). While there, we certainly felt the expectation to prioritize Christianity in all that we do. This in itself is not a foreign concept, as it is a commonly held virtue in our faith, however, their version of Christianity was so intertwined with contradictory ideologies, we found ourselves in an existential crisis. The God we knew created us "in His image" (Genesis 1:27, KJV), which meant that we embraced all of ourselves, including our race. Their God, and thusly, their mission, embraced diversity, but somehow it required us to disingenuously transcend race, giving the community the ability to set aside dealing with racism altogether (Decuir & Dixson, 2004).

However, race did not disappear, it just went unacknowledged—no race meant Whiteness. In an attempt to seduce us into this schema where they remained whole and we were to exist without our racial identity, we became subservient. We felt as if we were nothing more than tools to be used for an agenda that did not include us, or even worse, erased us altogether. It is in this way, Christian higher education uniquely marries neoplantation academia with the continued practice of religious jawboning, and in a way, goes beyond spirit murder and toys with spiritual suicide. For the goal was for us to be complicit to their mishmash of indoctrination housed under the umbrella of Christianity, which would surely lead to our spiritual demise.

How did we fit into the vision of campus? It seemed to us that the expectation was to "share what [we] have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Hebrews 13:16, ESV) and to "rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings" (1 Peter 4:12, ESV). After all, we were in good company—it was Jesus himself that bore the cross for our sins and, as his followers, we were also called to "deny [ourselves] and take up [our] course and follow [Him]." (Matthew 16:24, ESV). The emphasis seemed to be on Jesus' burial (death) and not his resurrection (life and power). In the natural, the goal was never for us to actually be equal, but just to *convince* us that we were equal through a commonality of our faith, so that we would be a willing participant in remaining in our social stratum.

Discussion

We both made the decision to leave this institution early on, neither one of us lasting to our tenure clock. When I resigned (Larissa) there was not much fanfare, and my leaving was not even an entire sentence in the weekly employee communication. Ironically, the last couple of years of my time at the institution, I had been working on a research project that blended my criticality and my spirituality and it was so incredibly difficult for it to come together. Miraculously, after my departure, I was able to complete it, and I now believe it is partially due to no longer being under a canopy of faith that was never meant for people who looked like me.

It never occurred to them that when I (Venessa) departed, that it was divine intervention and that God knew I was going to truly live out my purpose and be successful in the academy. The decision to leave opened up doors and gave me the ability to be a change agent that only God could have imagined for me. The aforementioned questions they had the audacity to ask me when I resigned were confirmation that I was not 'free' in their environment. For the sake of my Christianity, I could not remain in a place where the God I knew wasn't—and if God wasn't there, why would I consider staying anyway?

It is this spirit that we were able to turn being jawboned, that is lured into the trenches of Christian higher education through our faith, into a testimony of survival. Like so many before us in the Black community, we took something meant for our harm and transformed it into something good. When we were given scraps from the table during slavery, we invented soul food. When a religion was put upon us, we made it a source of strength. And when we were jawboned, we took that jawbone and emancipated ourselves. We draw the inspiration of our title from an Old Testament story. Whereas Samson, part of God's chosen people, was bound and weaponless, he was delivered to the Philistines, who were poised to kill him. Upon his arrival to his enemy's camp, the ropes that held him captive were supernaturally loosened. Scrambling for something to defend himself with, he found the remains of a donkey, grabbed the jawbone, and was able to escape, proclaiming, "with the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of an ass have I slain a thousand men" (Judges 15:16, NAS).

After our experience we would have been justified to leave higher education. Equally so, we would have been justified in leaving our faith. Who would want to be part of a faith that believes everyone is made in the image of God, but you? Our survival in the academy necessitated leaving this faith-based institution. Ironically, we both ended up at secular institutions, and while there is a separation between church and state,

we feel like we operate 'by the spirit' more than ever. We realized God had never left us, but just had made provisions for us elsewhere. And we also realized that, chances are, if we stayed, we would have looked up at not recognized God at all.

Conclusion

Is there a successful pathway for Black faculty in Christian higher education, where both spiritual and racialized identities stay intact? Our lived experiences tell us no. While there is a need for further research on faith-based institutions and the hiring and retention of Black faculty, we seriously question the commitment of these institutions to their well-being and success. Therefore, we worry about whether Black faculty entering into this type of academic space is more detrimental than beneficial, as we do not want other Black faculty to experience the oppressive and murderous atmosphere that we did. Instead, we make a call to action that requires faith-based institutions to engage in honest dialogue with themselves and and fully come to terms with their readiness to commit to a racially equitable academic environment. The religious past must be reconciled with our present and atonement must be made. Moreover, although "civil rights activists did much to rescue the gospel from the heresy of white churches by demonstrating its life-giving power in the black freedom movement, they did not liberate Christianity from its cultural bondage to white, Euro-American values" (Cone, 1969, p. vii). This must be acknowledged and reckoned with.

Our intent is not to disparage faith-based institutions and certainly not our institution where our experiences took place. Rather, we feel it is incumbent on us to speak the truth for our own therapeutic recovery and to make sense of our experiences. We believe our stories can be a catalyst for change. It is also a roadmap to other Black scholars to avoid the pitfalls we had, if they choose to take this path in academia. Finally, it is a lifeline to Christian higher education, for, if they are serious about diversity, equity, and inclusion, as the gospel calls us to, serious changes must be made. It is important to recognize that true reconciliation and transformation comes when we seek forgiveness and live in truth. Until then, like Malcolm X, "[we] believe in a religion that believes in freedom. Any time [we] have to accept a religion that won't let [us] fight a battle for [our] people, [we] say to hell with that religion."

We are living witnesses that our ancestor's prayers were put into action and this gave us the ability to survive our attempted spirit murders. We both believe that any tribulation can make you bitter or better. We chose to be better. We both feel that our experience not only strengthened our scholarship, but also strengthened our faith. It reaffirmed that we

can identify with, have access to, and have relationship with God and that is something that no form of white supremacy can take away. We challenge all faith-based institutions to grapple with this paradoxical reality of two of their former Black women faculty members.

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