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# The Tie that Binds: Trusteeship, Values, and the Presidential Selection Process at AME Affiliated HBCUs

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# The Tie that Binds: Trusteeship, Values, and the Presidential Selection Process at AME Affiliated HBCUs

## **Abstract**

Trust is necessary to legitimize good relationships and good relationships are necessary for good governance (Kezar, 2004). Literature also suggests that social capital and networks create and establish trust (Fukuyama, 1995, Leana & Van Buren III, 1999; Orr, 1999; Beaudoin, 2011). In short, trust comes from relationships, networks, and shared connections that create comfort or familiarity with a person. This study aims to discover how trust is established during the decision making processes of boards of trustees at HBCUs. This study also aims to understand more about the role and effect of individual board members on the work of the board. The question central to my inquiry is, how does the composition and value system of board members at private church affiliated HBCUs, particularly AME affiliated HBCUs, affect the decision-making process?

Using a multi-site case study approach, board members of three AME church affiliated HBCUs were interviewed regarding their paths to board service, their experiences as board members, their individual and collective roles as board members, what they consider important concerning their roles as board members, and the presidential selection process. Major findings from this study are that personality and character traits of presidential candidates may have a heavier influence on the perception of candidates' suitability than their resume or past performance. Furthermore, there is a direct reflection of board members' values in the personality and network traits found desirable and non-desirable in presidential candidates. These shared values create a sense of trust between board members and candidates. This indicates that board composition is important, not merely due to the access to networks members possess, but also due to members' individual value systems. Values and value systems find themselves intertwined in the evaluation of presidential candidates and the work of the board. Recommendations are made for board of trustees at similar institutions to ensure boards are high performing, effective and efficient in the decision making process. Though this data is not generalizable to all private church affiliated HBCUs it lays a foundation for future researchers to explore the role of the boards and board composition at similar institutions. This research begins the conversation of how board composition can play an important role in strategic planning and the selection of presidents.

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THE TIE THAT BINDS: TRUSTEESHIP, VALUES, AND THE PRESIDENTIAL  
SELECTION PROCESS AT AME AFFILIATED HBCUS

Felecia Commodore

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### **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandparents, Queenie and the Rev. Dr. Ellsworth Coleman, Sr. and Shirley and Franklin Commodore, Sr. Each one of you played a role in who I am, and though you have all transitioned, I pray I am the manifestation of your dreams.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE TIE THAT BINDS: TRUSTEESHIP, VALUES, AND THE PRESIDENTIAL SELECTION PROCESS AT AME AFFILIATED HBCUS**

Felecia Commodore

Marybeth Gasman

Trust is necessary to legitimize good relationships and good relationships are necessary for good governance (Kezar, 2004). Literature also suggests that social capital and networks create and establish trust (Fukuyama, 1995, Leana & Van Buren III, 1999; Orr, 1999; Beaudoin, 2011). In short, trust comes from relationships, networks, and shared connections that create comfort or familiarity with a person. This study aims to discover how trust is established during the decision making processes of boards of trustees at HBCUs. This study also aims to understand more about the role and effect of individual board members on the work of the board. The question central to my inquiry is, how does the composition and value system of board members at private church affiliated HBCUs, particularly AME affiliated HBCUs, affect the decision-making process?

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

*Blest be the tie that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love;  
The fellowship of kindred minds  
Is like to that above. ~ John Fawcett*

Recent commentary on internet news sites, in higher education periodicals, and other news sources has focused on the number of Historically Black College and University (HBCU) presidents retiring or leaving their posts (Gasman, April 12, 2012; Hayes, October 29, 2013). Over the last five to ten years various HBCU presidents have resigned or been removed from the positions. The question is raised, who will fill these vacancies.

Often the focus of HBCU leadership research lies solely on the president. In looking at the backgrounds and social networks of many HBCU presidents, however, institutional leadership is not simply embodied in the president—there are other players at hand. Vacancies at many HBCUs across the country implied that there would be numerous presidential searches taking place. The presidential search process is one that can occur very quickly or stretch out over a period of time. Basic processes must occur. These processes include: establishing the machinery of search and selection; organizing the committee; formulating the criteria; selecting the pool of candidates; screening candidates; interviewing candidates; selecting top candidates; appointing the president; and final tasks (Nason & Axelrod, 1980). Though these basic practices may occur, how they occur and who is involved can vary from campus to campus. But one thing does not vary; members of the board of trustees are always involved.

The president serves at the pleasure of the board of trustees. Therefore, when analyzing HBCU leadership, the board of trustees cannot be ignored. Since the board plays a major role in the selection of a president, should not we understand more about HBCU boards? The question burned in my mind. Board members are rarely discussed in overall leadership, and were virtually invisible in HBCU literature. Yet, how could we understand how certain people access the presidential pipeline and ascend to the presidency with ease, but others do not? Were board members serving as gatekeepers to said pipeline(s) and if so, what was the decision-making process in deciding to whom the gate opened? Of the small amount of research regarding HBCU leadership, much of it questioned and explored what traits future HBCU presidents would need to possess to attain the presidency. This process of successfully reaching the presidency cannot be properly assessed or understood if we do not first understand what traits board members desire of candidates during the presidential selection process.

Current discussions of traits desired for HBCU presidents to possess overwhelmingly focused on hard skills. Traits such as having strong fundraising skills, having financial savvy, having an understanding of institutional workings, and things of the like were at the center of much literature in this area. However, there is a large gap in understanding the role that having a high aptitude in soft skills and one's social capital played in not only ascending to the HBCU presidency but being a successful HBCU president. To go a step further, more need to be understood concerning the role of social capital in the process of reaching the office of HBCU president? Does social capital important in the presidential selection process? In essence what I would explore would be the connection between networks, relationships, and value systems.

Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources that are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (p.248).” This social capital, these networks, create and establish trust (Fukuyama, 1995, Leana & Van Buren III, 1999; Orr, 1999; Beaudoin, 2011) —whether founded or unfounded. In short, trust of a person comes from relationships, networks, and shared connections that create a comfort or familiarity with a person. This familiarity leads one party to be more apt to trust another. One can imagine that whether purposeful or not, this effect of shared networks and familiarity play a role in the hiring process at many organizations, not to exclude the presidential selection process at HBCUs.

In understanding the influence of social capital and networks it would be unwise to believe that there are not various aspects that intersect—culture plays a role. Culture is a word that can apply to various things in various ways. Culture can be defined as shared norms, practices, and values (Schein, 1996). Organizational culture affects decision-making within organizations. What is understood and accepted about how people are to operate within certain processes, not merely how processes are structured, affects what decisions are reached by an organization. Another layer to organizational culture and decision making that is not often explored is the effect of racial/ethnic culture. A part of my study looks at how race/ethnicity intersect with organizational culture and organizational practice? Current literature approaches organizational leadership and culture studies in a colorblind manner. There is an assumption that there is a belief that structures are not people and therefore structures cannot have cultures or practices that are racial or ethnic, as structures do not have racial or ethnic identities. Though it is true

that structures are not people, people create structures. Therefore, when examining governing structures, a conversation must take place concerning the people who create said structures and operate within. More must be known about how individuals affect governing structures. People are an intersection of many identities. Consciously or unconsciously all of these identities play a role in their perspectives, their understandings, and their approaches to tasks. Due to this, one could argue that structures can indeed be racially or ethnically influenced. This may not be intentional, but can occur.

HBCUs are unique institutions. Due to their name and understanding within the higher education landscape and beyond, they are racialized. Much like Black churches and Black Greek Lettered Organizations (BGLOs), these institutions have a racial identity. Though Black students are not the only racial demographic to attend HBCUs this is the assumption. Often the official moniker of “HBCU” is easily substituted with “Black College.” HBCUs have a racial identity. Since HBCUs possess a racial identity, it would be a disservice to approach understanding the ways in which HBCUs operate absent of a cultural lens. This assertion is not meant to imply that all organizational behavior across the HBCU community is affected by race. But, rather that race may play a role in the organizational behavior of HBCUs, and more must be understood concerning the role of race.

Much like the HBCU community is not monolithic, neither are Black people. Therefore to suggest that there is a way and manner of thinking that applies to all Black persons and therefore all decision making at HBCUs would not only be a suggestion full of fallacy, but also irresponsible. There are many different Black communities. These communities have a range of belief systems, values, practices and norms. These various



belief systems, values, practices and norms can be attributed to how a particular community's racial experience intersects with class, gender, sexuality, religion, and regionality among other factors. Yet, there are some practices and values that seem to span across the majority of Black culture. In an institution where the leadership, the board and the president, overwhelmingly identify as Black and work within an institution that has a racialized identity, it is fair to assume these values find themselves nestled in decisions being made. Or is it? Are these values shared across the dynamics of an HBCU board of trustees or is there a sub group whose values take precedent? In the case of private HBCU boards, the board in essence selects and votes upon new board members they think will fit well. Does this practice create a perpetuation of culture within a board? Does this practice create a barrier to change that may be necessary? Do these boards encourage diversity of thought or do they desire to reproduce that which they have already become accustomed? These are the questions that led me to this study.

The question posing itself as central to my inquiry is how does the composition and value system of private HBCU board members affect the decision-making process? Due to my specific interest of the influence of culture on the decision making process of the board, I chose to focus specifically on church-affiliated HBCUs. I picked my central question apart until I found what secondary questions were within it. There seemed to be numerous moving parts within my central question. These moving parts became the second level of inquiry for my research. Questions such as, how do private, church-affiliated HBCU boards operate? Do private, church-affiliated HBCU boards approach decision making with a cultural lens? Are there various value systems existing and at play on a private church-affiliated HBCU board? If so, how do these value systems

affect the presidential search and selection process? Does intra-racial xenophobia exist and if so how does it manifest itself on the board? How does social capital come into play in the work of the board? And, does certain social capital rank higher than others, based on various value systems at play on the board? If so, why is that the case and how does it affect access to the presidential pipeline at HBCUs?

Through this study a deeper understanding was gained concerning board selection and socialization. The culture and values held in high esteem in the particular institutional context was highlighted in particular. Understanding the role that culture and values played in this group of institutions provided insight into how boards perpetuate culture. This information aids to better understand HBCU leadership and governance. My study gives glimpses into a particular group of institutions within the HBCU sector. Through this study an increased insight is gained and understanding into the way in which these three AME affiliated HBCU boards are constructed, the way in which these boards operate, and the way in which these boards make their decisions. Understanding board construction, operation, and decision-making aids in evaluating the board's role in the life and health of an institution.

The qualitative approach served my study best. Taking a qualitative approach to brought out the true complexity behind board member selection processes, board member socialization processes, and presidential selection processes. It also allowed for participants to speak their values and describe their board operations in their own terms. Participants having the ability to define these matters in their own words was important to understanding what people considered efficient or necessary for the work of the board changed from institution to institution or remained constant across institutional contexts.

After I decided the approach I would take, I thought about, what specific method would work best for my study and exactly who would participate.

There are various constituencies in the HBCU community. The board of trustee members were the most promising group to interview. A multi-site case study was the best approach as it allowed for a deeper understanding of phenomena but allowed me to look at how this phenomena both similar and different across institutions of the same institutional type. . Using a qualitative approach, I began down the path to finding out who served on these boards, how they got there, what they did, and how they identified the next great leader of their institution.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

HBCUs have proven to be important vehicles to the upward mobility of African American, first generation, and low-income students. The services HBCUs provide to student populations who are often a secondary thought in the competitive market that has become higher education is undeniable and indeed necessary. Moving forward and making an effort to be successful in the Obama administration's college attainment goal for the US, HBCUs will play a critical role. Therefore, being that many HBCU presidents will be resigning or retiring in the immediate future, understanding how persons find themselves included or excluded from the pipeline(s) to the presidency for these institutions proves important. The HBCU presidential pipeline(s) play a major role in whether or not HBCUs continue to majorly contribute in creating an educated, globally competitive, diverse workforce and pool of leadership in the US.

The necessity to learn more about the presidential selection process leads to the question, "How does the composition of private church affiliated HBCU boards of trustees affect the presidential selection process?" I will focus on private church affiliated HBCU boards as these board members are invited and courted by the board, board chairperson, and in some cases the president of the institution. The board itself must elect a nominated board member. This provides much more control and deliberate decision making of the board in the construction of the board as opposed to the board member selection process of many public institutions that often have governor-appointed trustees leaving sitting trustees at these institutions little to no input. For the purpose of this inquiry, focusing on private boards is more suitable. For a foundation and

framework for my study, I explore literature focusing on governance, including structures, practices, and boards of trustees. I also discuss literature surrounding the unique context of HBCU boards, HBCU culture and leadership, and the influence and role of values surround leadership and organizational culture within various Black communities to decipher how these areas build a foundation for the aforementioned questions to be investigated.

## **Governance**

### **Overview**

Governance is the way policies and macro level decision making occur within higher education. It is a broad way to refer to the structures and processes that an institution uses to make decisions, assign rights and responsibilities, understand relationships, and make clear authority patterns (Birnbaum, 1988; Kezar, 2004). In reference to institutions of higher education, governance speaks to how a school runs and makes decisions. The way governance looks varies from institution to institution based on history, political structure, and institutional traditions (Legon, 2013). Though this is true, there are often three components to higher education governance structures that are consistent across institutions. These three components are the board of trustees, the senior administration, and the president. The governance structures and the ways and culture in which decisions are made greatly affect the life and culture of an institution. In particular, the decisions of the board of trustees is important in that they are responsible for the mission and the long term health of the institution. In other words, governance and institutional purpose are related (Birnbaum, 2003). For the most part, governance can be embodied as three major entities working interdependently at institutions to ensure

the effective functioning of the school (Birnbaum, 2003). Birnbaum (2003) discusses the importance of governance in the life of an institution. The effectiveness of a governance system is not only measured in the decisions it outputs but also the timeliness of said decisions. Birnbaum (2003) finds that the greatest danger to higher education may not be that decisions are made too slowly because of the drag of consultation, but that they are made too swiftly and without regard for institutional core value. “The effectiveness of normative institutions is not based on efficiency and speed but on reliability and trust, and any process that makes it possible to make good decisions more quickly also makes it possible to make bad decisions more quickly.”(Birnbaum, 2003, p.5)

In order for governance to work effectively there must be certain elements in place. Effectiveness occurs when synergy exists between constituents’ expectations, the process, and the outcome. In order for cooperative group behavior to abound there must be a perception of “fairness” of procedure (Birnbaum, 1991; 2003). An agreement on the perception of “fairness” develops from the processes of socialization through which group members come to share values and beliefs; new members of the group learn these values from the older members. (Tyler, 1990, p. 176) If this agreement does not occur then decision-making is put on hold. Therefore, if an agreement must be reached through the socialization process of an organization, the socialization of board members plays a major role in creating an environment prime for cooperative behavior being created. But do the ends justify the means? Are all socialization processes healthy for an organization and the individuals within? It is established that an agreement of “fairness” must be reached (Taylor, 1990), but how “fairness” is measured is not established. Kezar (2004) goes a step further past the importance of socialization and group agreement by pointing

out the importance of institutional context. Structures and processes tend to influence relationships, leadership, and trust (Kezar, 2004). One must wonder if the inverse is also true. Can relationships, leadership, and trust influence structures and processes? Overall the goal is to create an efficient, effective governance system. Good governance systems create environments where good decisions can be made and decisions are seen as legitimate (Birnbaum, 2003). This being true, Birnbaum (2003) points out that constructing this environment is not always a task of ease; “organizations are political, relational and anarchical.” (Kezar, 2004, p.39) If organizations are indeed “political and relational”, as Kezar suggests, then the question becomes, what roles do relationships and trust play in good governance?

### **Theories of Trust**

Trust is a strong component to a high functioning governance structure. Legitimacy in relationships relates to trust (Kezar, 2004). “Relationships and trust are hard to separate; good relationships lead to trust and trust develops good relationships.” (Kezar, 2004, p.44) Birnbaum (2003) explains this concept in deeper detail stating, “Trust strengthens the legitimacy of leaders, and creates mutually-reinforcing bonds of identity, confidence and support between them (p.18).” Trust being an important part of good governance it is important to understand how members of organizations establish trust, and how mistrust occurs. Trust does not simply appear; it is built, created even. It is the antecedent and the result of collective work (Leana & Van Buren III, 1999). The building of trust occurs in various ways.

Social capital is one of the vehicles through which trust is built, High levels of social capital lead to increased trust and cooperation within an organization (Birnbaum,

2003). Social capital is also defined as the ability to work together to achieve social ends based on past and shared experiences, and also as an asset that is produced via networks, and intangible social resources that connect people (Fukuyama, 1995, Leana & Van Buren III, 1999; Orr, 1999; Beaudoin, 2011). When an organization is using social capital as a manner of building trust, trust between the member and the organization for the tie being created must be at a certain level in order to be a conduit of information and resources. When looking at HBCUs, organizations with which organizational cultures overlap with racial, ethnic, and cultural identities, the presence of this trust becomes especially important.

There are various forms of trust that exists. Leana and Van Burren III (1999) explore these various forms. The authors categorize trust into two groups: Fragile versus resilient trust and Dyadic versus generalized trust. Organizations strong in social capital will exhibit resilient trust. There is also communal trust, which depends on identification with the group and perceived agreement on common norms. Social trust finds itself in existing groups that already have social bonds in place with internalized group values (Tyler, 1998). Organizations weak in social capital exhibit fragile trust. Racial and ethnic ties or similarities can often create spaces where intragroup trust is highly possible (Orr, 1999). Though Orr (1999) looks at a business organization, the findings can be applicable to many types of organizations, including higher education. Oh et al. (2004) briefly discuss this intragroup trust motivated by racial and ethnic ties in regards to their study being conducted in Korea. The role that Korean culture had on practices and values within the company was identified as a limitation of applying these findings



outside of Korea. Applying theories of group and organizational social capital is complicated when the context, culture, and history of the organization is overlooked.

Trust in authority can be based on the ability to predict those in authority's behavior because of shared norms and shared social identity (Birnbaum, 2003). This being the case, the question is raised, what is the basis of these shared norms and shared social identity? Is this trust in leadership being based on an assumption of shared values that derive from a mutually understood institutional culture? Or are these assumptions being based on shared values and practices via certain social capital? Are there certain social capital, networks, etc. that communicate trust or allow board members to feel assured in predicting future behaviors of the presidential candidate? If it is the latter this could prove problematic for presidents from non-traditional backgrounds or backgrounds that do not reflect those of members of the board of trustees. This also may limit innovation at institutions and create newer presidents who are duplicates of ineffective past presidents. Trust plays a role in good governance. However, does the impact or effect that trust has in achieving good governance vary depending on the type of governance that an institution practices? This question leads to the necessity to understand various types of governance and the way in which trust and relationships play out in those governance structures.

### **Types of Governance**

Board culture and social capital can play a role in the ways in which boards engage in their work. Therefore, understanding the various ways boards engage in governance can aid in insight into the role of scope of influence of social capital and board culture. Birnbaum (2003) discusses two major forms of governance—"hard"

governance and “soft” governance. “Hard” or “rational” governance refers to the structures, systems, and regulations of an organization and encouraged compliance with policies and procedures. “Soft” or interactional governance relates to the systems of social connections and interactions in an organization that help to develop and maintain individual and group norms (Birnbaum, 2003). Though Birnbaum (2003) explains both theories, the theories are presented as though an institution either operates in one or the other at any given time. One wonders if there are instances where each type of governance may be necessary or beneficial at a singular institution. Can a board or institution use both governance styles simultaneously or is that detrimental to progressive decision-making?

Birnbaum (2003) points out that hard governance can channel and to some extent harness the power of soft governance making them mutually reinforcing. Yet, hard governance still appears to have minimal influence on an organization when solely employed (Birnbaum, 2003). When hard governance conflicts with soft governance it inevitably fails—soft governance rules (Birnbaum, 2003). Trying to change an organization’s governance system from one to another can be difficult, if not highly impossible. Changes in social systems are more likely to be accepted when they do not challenge the social status of those in the system. When they do challenge this social status, they are less likely to be accepted (Birnbaum, 2003, p. 19). Rational processes or hard governance are less likely to be more effective than soft governance or the normative processes that are consistent with social norms and principles adopted by the community (Birnbaum, 2003).

By using governance systems that “look backward,” institutions may find ways to justify their decisions and decision-making processes (Birnbaum, 2003). This could prove dangerous if past decisions led the institution to an endangered existence. “Regulations can be amended; tradition cannot, for it is not made, but grows, and can be altered only by a gradual change in general opinion, not by a majority vote. In short it cannot be amended, but only outgrown.” (Birnbaum, 2003, p.23) However, as true as academic institutions may be to their traditions they will eventually be responsive to societal and outside pressures for economic or political “relevance”. They have done so in the past and will in the future (Birnbaum, 2003). Boards of trustees must find the delicate balance between cherishing tradition and responding to both internal and external pressures and demands of campus constituencies, policy makers, and often legislatures. Governing practices must be in concert with institutional purpose to ensure that the practices embolden and buttress the work of the institution. Being that the decisions of boards of trustees are key to the sustainability of an institution, boards of trustees and how boards engage, both formally and informally, with their institutions’ governance structures must be explored.

### **Board of Trustees**

In order for governance systems to operate at the peak of efficiency, there must be an understanding of from whence an institution has come and where an institution needs to go. Within the governance structure there is a group where much of this knowledge and responsibility lies—the board of trustees. The board of trustees must figure out the balance between the allegiance to tradition and the necessity of relevance of which Birnbaum speaks. The board of trustees is an important piece of the governance structure

at institutions. Much of literature focuses on the role of faculty in institutional governance—boards are grossly neglected. Yet the board, particularly at private institutions, plays a role in major decisions that affect the life of an institution. One of the most important of those major decisions is the selection of the president. In selecting the president the board also sets the stage for a relationship that can either build and progress an institution or cause it turmoil and stagnation. The board of trustees, especially at private institutions, also set the president's salary, compensation, and tenure (Ehrenberg, Cheslock, & Epifantseva, 2001). At institutions that are financially strapped, like many HBCUs, this increases the scrutiny of the board's presidential selection process and also affects what candidates they will be able to attract. The aforementioned power dynamic between the board and the president often leads the president to avoid pushing the board too hard or too far. The president is at the whim of the criticism of the board (Blanchard, 1967).

### **Role of the board**

Too often the role of the board is understood in the limited view of solely securing new funds (Blanchard, 1967). Blanchard goes on to argue that boards are seldom tapped for their opinions outside of financial matters, problematically so. This actually conflicts with much of the literature on HBCU boards; it is argued that the opposite occurs more frequently (Phillips, 2002). Though fund raising is a large responsibility of the board, there is much more that they do. They can influence everything from leadership to, in some cases, campus culture and practices. Though often overlooked in higher education leadership literature, trustees play a large role in the decision making process at institutions. More now than ever, trustees are taking more of

a vocal and prominent role in the administrative decisions (Alderson, 1997). Lazerson (1997) points out that historically trustee involvement begins to increase from just applications of children of alumni during the McCarthy era and the 1960s with increased fears of abetting communists and student radicals. Some would argue however, that this large trustee presence in administrative decisions has been a part of the HBCU governance culture for quite some time.

As the higher education landscape becomes more market driven and begins to reflect more of the private business sector, the ways in which boards should operate have been up for debate. Some have pushed that boards need to be speedier and more flexible in their academic decision-making, but opponents push back that there are fundamental differences between higher education institutions and for profit corporations (Gerber, 1997). Though there are aspects of higher education that are similar to the for profit world, Gerber (1997) asserts that the demands of the market, colleges and universities must never become solely responsive to market demand. There are many other implications aside from the bottom line that institutions must consider when making decisions. Howard University just recently experienced this instance when leadership announced plans to close the Philosophy and African American studies departments at the school (Berrett, 2010). Though fiscally, closing the departments appeared to be a responsible, wise decision the cultural implications of closing a philosophy department and the only African American studies department in the country located at an HBCU were far reaching. The announcement of these proposed changes caused quite a firestorm with the various university constituents and academia as a whole. This example showcases the unique context for decision making that higher education institutions face

and the even more unique context that face HBCUs. The complexity of decisions that institutional leadership must make, points to the importance of who sits on boards of trustees. In the example of Howard University, having board members such as faculty or academicians would ensure that varying viewpoints were included in the discussions, not just those of businessmen and women.

The Association of Governing Boards (AGB) has published reports giving recommendations for decision-making processes at colleges (AGB, 1997; 2011; 2013)

One thing that cannot be denied is the role of the board in decision making at an institution, regardless of the context. However, for institutions like HBCUs that are often criticized for their governance issues, a benefit exists in understanding how the AGB models fit or do not fit into their unique institutional context

There have been discussions about if the work of non-profit boards, such as boards of trustees at colleges, is changing. “A board’s contribution is meant to be strategic, the joint product of talented people brought together to apply their knowledge and experience to the major challenges facing the institution.”(Taylor et al., 1996, p.36) If a board’s work is to be an effective and valuable contribution they must engage their tasks in a manner that is conducive to the fruition of said effectiveness. Taylor et al., (1996) call this the “new work” of the board. The “new work of the board”, or work that matters, is essential to improved performance (Taylor et al., 1996). “New work” has four basic characteristics: concerns itself with issues crucial to the success of the institution, driven by results to define timetables, and it requires the engagement of the organization’s internal and external constituencies. This “new work” generates high levels of interest, demands broad support, and inspires widespread support (Taylor et al.,

1996). The “new work” of the board differs from the old work of the board in that it is more unorthodox in approach and offers new rules of engagement. Taylor et al. (1996) suggest that boards engaging in the new work should make the CEO paint the big picture, consult experts, decide what needs to be measured, act on what matters, and organize around what matters.

Taylor et al. emphasize that in order for this “new work” to be effective there has to be a sense of teamwork present. “A spirit of teamwork must exist internal to the board. The board must work together and agree on the priorities and strategic direction of the institution.” (Taylor et al., 1996, p. 37). Teamwork must also exist between the CEO and the board, or in the case of colleges, the president and the trustees. “The CEO must be willing to share responsibility, and the board must be willing to follow the CEO’s lead—and ask questions.” (Taylor et al., 1996, p. 37) This “new work” of the board points to the desire and increased concern surrounding board effectiveness.

### **Board effectiveness**

The ultimate goal is to have an effective board and efficient governance practices. An effective board respects and guards the integrity of the governance process (Taylor, Chait, & Holland, 1991). “Constructive relationships, equitable distribution of power, and minimization of destructive conflict” are goals to help achieve this task (Taylor et al., 1991, p. 210). Taylor et al. (1991) found that effective boards come to discuss disagreements with a mutual respect for all constituencies involved whereas ineffective boards saw faculty and students as adversaries to outwit and outmaneuver. One has to wonder how this “Us vs. Them” mindset affects decision making, specifically in selecting a president. Legon (2013) begs the point that higher education cannot afford any more

governance failures whether it deals with levels of engagement, decision-making process errors, or conflicts of interest. Recent cases such as the University of Virginia (UVA) and the Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) board missteps show the mishaps that can occur with board decisions when goals and contexts are not clear.

Too focused on trying to keep up with prestigious institutions as opposed to carving out a distinctive space for UVA, and Penn State being overly concerned with short-term image issues, clouded the boards' judgment (Legon, 2013). This led to decisions that were frowned upon publicly ironically bringing about the public relations issues the boards were actually trying to avoid. Such ill garners negative attention and decreases public trust (Legon, 2013; Stuart, 2009). In the case of HBCUs, whatever challenges are detrimental across the higher education landscape become more intense in the HBCU sector due to the already unfair and often racist perspective, lens, and approach when scrutinizing these institutions. HBCUs already must battle a stereotype of questionable, incapable leadership and administrative practices by the sheer virtue of being an HBCU. Any failure in the governance structure at one of these institutions adds fuel to the fire in the criticisms of all HBCUs.

Intraboard dynamics can also pose challenges. With boards having members that sometimes hold seats for multiple decades, the decisions of boards can actually begin to resemble the thoughts or decisions of one or two dominant voices as opposed to a consensus. This can result in unhealthy governance practices. Legon (2013) suggests that board members should be assisted in understanding that their authority rests with the full board and individual members have limited formal authority. Having multiple opinions voiced is a part of a healthy board. "Because good governance does not stem



from conformist, team-playing, “organization people” who are unwilling to debate, offer different ideas, or dissent.” (Legon, 2013, p. 32) This may be easier than suggested, particularly if newer board members are selected because of their connections, networks, or social capital, which overlaps with that of the stronger members of the board. Janis (1972) speaks to this through the theory of groupthink syndrome. Janis (1972) argues that there are eight symptoms, of three types, of groupthink, which include group products and processes that reinforce each other. Those three types are: Overestimations of the group’s power and morality, closed-mindedness, and pressures toward uniformity. Within the overestimations of the group’s power and morality a group will exhibit an illusion of invulnerability and an unquestioned belief in the group’s morality. These traits often create excessive optimism, extreme risk taking, and an inclination to ignore the ethical and moral consequences of a decision. In the second type of symptom, closed-mindedness, groups will exhibit collective efforts to rationalize in order to discount warnings or information that may sway a decision. Groups will also create stereotype views of enemy leaders as too evil to negotiate or too weak to counter their risky decision. Symptoms of pressures toward uniformity are group members’ self-censorship and inclination to minimize personal doubts or counterarguments, a shared illusion of unanimity, direct pressure on members who strongly argue against decisions in an effort to communicate that they are disloyal, and the emergence of self-appointed mind guards.

### **Intragroup Xenophobia**

Related to the idea of group think is the idea of intragroup xenophobia, particularly in Black communities (Piper, 1997). Adrien Piper (1997) speaks to the philosophical idea of xenophobia in relationship with the African American culture.

Piper presents the idea that “as unwelcome intruders in white America we are the objects of xenophobia on a daily basis. This pervasive fact of our experience conditions all of our social relations, and may itself engender a reciprocal form of xenophobia in self-defense. (p.189)” Xenophobia is a cognitive phenomenon that is used to help persons preserve self. Xenophobia is not a general fear of strangers as often proposed, but a fear of a certain type of stranger, a fear of individuals who look or behave differently than those one is accustomed to (Piper, 1997). These strangers are usually persons who do not conform to how the xenophobic believes the stranger ought to look or behave. In rejecting and not embracing the stranger, who exhibits characteristics or behaviors that are not in line with the xenophobic’s behaviors, the xenophobic wards off the threat to their defined self. The xenophobic wards off that which makes them question their own identity. In relation with the Kantian conception of self, Piper (1997) explores how this xenophobia plays out and the reasons why. Xenophobia involves “withholding recognition of personhood from those perceived as empirically different or anomalous (p. 199).”

Piper (1997) uses the concept of personhood to define how persons delineate between a “good” person and a “bad” person. Piper (1997) asserts that when someone is called a “bad” person they actually communicate a cluster of evaluations. These evaluations include assessing motives as corrupt or untrustworthy and assessing if the qualities of the person are pleasing or displeasing. Xenophobia is an alarm reaction, a means of protection of self (Piper, 1997). The practice of xenophobia creates a pseudo rationality in an attempt to make sense of information under duress. As this information pushes one to question the conception of self, if one is not ready to revise this conception,

they use the psuedorationality to secure self-preservation (Piper, 1997). Yet with pseudo rationality, one only manages to appear to have achieved rationality but not have actually reached rational coherence. In order to understand pseudo rationality you must understand all of the thought processes that play a part: rationalization, dissociation, and denial. “In rationalization, we misapply a concept to a particular by distorting its scope, magnifying the properties of the thing that instantiates the concept, and minimizing those that fail to do so (Piper, 1997, p.210).” In dissociation a person identifies something that aids in defining a person or people in a way that justifies stripping away their personhood (i.e.-Jewish people are subhuman). In denial, we suppress the recognition of the characteristic or quality that we find to be foreign (Piper, 1997). In this practice it is as if one is not aware, then the “other” does not exist and therefore cannot force the question of conception of self. An example of this would be overlooking a Black person’s academic achievements, or forgetting to make provisions for a Jewish person at a Christmas celebration (Piper, 1997). All of these components come together to strengthen the practice of xenophobia through psuedorationality.

Xenophobia engenders stereotyping that supports the practice of classism, sexism, racism, homophobia, etc. Through psuedorationality the xenophobe justifies their practice of the aforementioned and creates their own self-conception and conception of the world that excludes the persons who hold the characteristics and behaviors that they consider foreign or unacceptable (Piper, 1997). Piper explains that a person can be quite cosmopolitan and still exhibit xenophobic activity due to their limited conception of people. Simply being exposed to various types of persons does not in itself quell xenophobia from occurring. “How easily one’s empirical conception of people is

violated is one index of the scope of one's xenophobia; how central and pervasive it is in one's personality is another."(Piper, 1997, p.212) Piper (1997) uses examples that showcase intragroup xenophobia (i.e.- a White Anglo Saxon Protestant (WASP) family not acknowledging a child with wooly hair and a broad nose). Yet, she does not go into detail of how intragroup xenophobia occurs and how it can affect various parts of a community. What effects of this xenophobia are entrenched in organizations and hiring processes?

Understanding that Black communities are not monolithic, a deeper understanding of the relationship between the various subcultures present can provide insight to how these subcultures may interact in spaces where they meet. HBCU boards are places where this could very well occur. HBCU boards can also be places where diversity of thoughts, views, and values may not exist due to an effort to compose a board of similar persons and mindsets. If there is a xenophobic approach to how a board is composed, it is not a far stretch of imagination to believe that xenophobic practices can find their way into other decision making practices, particularly the selecting of leadership. The assumption of the board's primary concern, when selecting leadership, are the needs of the institution, overshadow and hide other factors that may be in play.

To fully understand how persons are able or unable to access the HBCU presidential pipeline, the complete intricacies of the HBCU board decision making process is important. How board members are selected, the criteria which is desired, the culture of the institution, and the desired perceived image of the institution can all create an environment that make it possible for xenophobic practice, consciously or otherwise, to exist. If these xenophobic practices do exist, it may be restricting the HBCU

presidential pipeline(s). At a time when HBCUs need to be able to tap into as much talented leadership as possible, anything that is creating a barrier of qualified, exceptional leadership being able to access or pursue interest in leading these institutions needs to be explored, understood, and assessed.

When symptoms of groupthink are displayed within a decision making body, Janis proposes that, “the members perform their collective tasks ineffectively and are likely to fail to attain their collective objectives as a result of concurrence-seeking (p.175).” Janis (1972) also argues that there can sometimes be positive effects of groupthink, but mostly these are outweighed by the group’s poor quality of decision-making. Technically you may have individuals on a board, but these individuals operate with groupthink instead of individual, independent thought due to a self- perpetuating value system and perspective as a result of the way in which board members are selected to serve. Groupthink is not always the culprit for poor decisions (Janis, 1972). “Often, the groupthink syndrome is likely to be only a contributing cause that augments the influence of other sources of error, (p.197).” Overall, when looking at decision-making bodies the groupthink syndrome must be a theory that is kept in mind, though it may or may not be occurring.

### **Board member selection**

Much like the corporate sector, boards of trustees exist to protect the college, support the administration, and hold a fiduciary duty to the organization and in this case the institution (Lazerson, 1997). Trustees are selected in various ways but largely come from outside of the institution they serve (Legon, 2013). Though this is true, it is important to note that just because board members come from outside of the institution it

does not necessarily mean that these board members come from outside of a familiar social network, community, or culture. There are three basic ways that trustees are selected: appointment, election, and service by virtue of position (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). Legon (2013) proposes that the way in which we choose boards as well as their “citizen membership” are a metaphor for America’s democratic values. One could argue that as much as the board selection process and make up represents democratic values, they also represent an elitist or mandarin culture in believing that a person deserves to make decisions regarding an institution due to their education level, social status, net worth, or influence. Basically board members of institutions are appointed by a governor or legislature if public or the board itself if private. Known as self-perpetuation, most private institutions boards choose their own members though this practice does occur at a select number of public institutions (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). Private colleges are more likely to “grow their own” trustees; they will seek those that have interest in the institution, nurture that interest, and then recruit said individual (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). Kohn and Mortimer (1983) express that the most important factor or characteristic of a desired board member for private institutions would be the access or ability to fundraise monies. Though there may be many available to serve a board, only a number of persons can be effective at fundraising (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). Though this may be true, Kohn and Mortimer (1983) appear to exclude instances where institutions’ boards may actually value other traits of potential board members higher than the potential members’ ability to raise funds. Depending on an institution’s culture, financial wherewithal may be a secondary thought when courting or confirming board members.

Taylor et al. (1991) found that regardless of a board's effectiveness or ineffectiveness, board members are motivated more by the opportunity to support the institutional goals than the desire for personal gain; they are motivated by ideological returns. However, Taylor et al. (1991) does not make clear if there are instances where personal gain and institutional goals overlap. Is this a desired trait or precursor to a possible conflict of interest? And in either instance is this overlapping trait one that can be readily identified in the board member recruitment process? Though the motivation for members did not vary by the effectiveness of the board there were some differences. Members of effective boards tended to join due to a strong and intrinsic loyalty and love for the institution. Those that were members of ineffective boards expressed an interest or respect for the institution but the level of emotional connection was not the same as their counterparts (Taylor et al., 1991). Members of ineffective boards also were more likely to have joined boards due to pressure from others, proving that relationships outside of the school can affect persons joining a private institution's board (Taylor et al., 1991). More must be understood regarding the influence organizational culture has on governance, and in particular board selection.

**Board diversity.**

With the selection of board members comes the question of diversity. Diversity within a board provides the opportunity for a variety of perspectives and expertise to be involved during the decision-making process. Furthermore, as the higher education community becomes diverse, in particularly student bodies, more attention must be paid to how and if institutional leadership reflects this trend. Though evidence has not been found to determine that achieving board diversity is associated with the method of

selection, a careful screening process can be an effective mechanism for matching the right persons with board and institutional needs (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). Diversity is essential for an effective board and therefore should characterize the composition of boards (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983; Taylor et al., 1991). Unfortunately most boards are not diverse and majorly consist of White males (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). Often when diversity is discussed it is limited to the sphere of race or ethnicity, particularly minority races. But with HBCU boards achieving diversity cannot be limited to race due to the usual critical mass of Black persons on the board. Yet, there are other factors of diversity that need to be considered and seated around the table. An example of this would be how many church-related institutions with boards dominated by clergy began to expand to add lay members (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). Given the unique mission of HBCUs it is presumable that most board members will be Black. However, racial diversity is important and something for which HBCU boards should strive. The authors argue that there is a difference between representativeness and diversity, and that most boards have the former and not the latter. Representativeness is characterized by having members of different interest groups and political constituencies on a board, whereas diversity has many more nuances. A diverse board has members of different sexes, creeds, races, ethnicities, ages, occupations, and backgrounds (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). Some would even push that there should be persons from all of the institution's constituencies. It is presumed that trustees chosen for their affiliation with a particular group will be defending that group's interest (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983).

There have been debates regarding ideal board size. Though there are positives and negatives of having either a large or small board, Kohn and Mortimer (1983) argue



that board size should be related to board purposes and functions. No matter the board size, potential conflicts of interest will always be present (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). Many boards have adopted financial disclosure policies to minimize conflicts of interest (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983) but this only addresses financial interests. What about other conflicts of interests, such as political and otherwise? How will with whom and with what network board members are affiliated play a role in a board member's relationship with the president and presidential candidates? More must be understood about the intricacies in the relationship between board members, the board selection process, and presidential candidates. Boards, particularly private boards, often draft policies to attempt to ensure that as many problems or issues that may arise are dealt with on the front end of business (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). But, having policies in place is different from knowing and enforcing them. What happens when a policy is not practice, and practice becomes unofficial policy? The reasons behind persons' participation in organizations affect the way in which they participate on their respective boards (Taylor et al., 1991). Kohn and Mortimer (1983) surmise that not enough is understood about the selection of board members. I would extend this assertion by saying that because not enough is known about the selection of board members even less is known about the relationship between the composition of the board of trustees and the presidential selection process of an institution. Broadly, little is known about the selection of board members and the presidential selection process. Consequently, even less is known about these matters within the HBCU context. Institutional context is important to consider when attempting to understand governance practices (Minor, 2005). Therefore, to

properly frame my study I needed to understand what was known, more specifically, about HBCU boards and governance.

### **HBCU Boards and Governance**

The way in which a school is governed, both in theory and in practice, is important when it comes to understanding leadership—a part of which is the board of trustees. The board of trustees has a responsibility to the long and short-term goals, strategic planning, and fiduciary needs of their respective institution. Though this is true, leadership is affected by context; to understand leadership you must understand where and whom one leads. Yet, in an attempt to understand boards of trustees at various institutions we find that little appears in the literature regarding HBCU boards. “Most printed literature about governance at HBCUs is based on isolated incidents; anecdotes rule the discourse.” (Minor, 2005, p. 35) HBCU leadership find themselves navigating a myriad of challenges concerning their respective institutions.

There has been criticism concerning the leadership style of those at the helm of HBCUs. The general stereotype of HBCU leadership is that it is often autocratic in nature (Minor, 2005; Gasman, 2011). Though there are instances where the stereotype holds true, it does not hold true across the entire sector. HBCU leadership are often monolithically criticized and labeled and often in a negative manner (Gasman, 2011). However, HBCU leadership, similarly to the wider landscape of higher education, is diverse in practice and exercise and should be discussed as such. Often discussed are issues concerning shared governance and challenges regarding fiscal management (Pope & Miller, 1998; Phillips, 2002; Nichols, 2004; AAUP, 2010). Budgeting, fundraising and strategic planning emerge as the top concerns for HBCU presidents, with fundraising

leading the pack for many years (Jones & Weathersby, 1978; Willie et. al., 2006; Gasman et. al., 2007; Gasman, 2008; Pelletier, 2008). AGB (2014), understanding the unique context of the HBCU sector, highlighted the top areas of concern for HBCU boards. These concerns include enrollment management and the value proposition, educational quality and degree offerings, student success and completion, finances and affordability, infrastructure, federal and state policy, and governance and leadership. Though HBCU leadership has its challenges, making sure it is studied within its proper context proves important to productive analysis (Minor, 2005; 2008). Contextual differences between HBCUs' and PWIs' decision-making and leadership practices are important when assessing institutional effectiveness (Minor, 2004). Minor (2005) brought to light that shared governance was considered important to a majority of faculty and administration at HBCUs. Also, that there were sufficient levels of trust between the president and the faculty to move forward with campus initiatives (Minor, 2005). This finding contradicts with Pope and Miller's (1998) finding on trust. Positions within the governance structure affect perception. Also, in regards to social capital, the trust that exists within an HBCU structure can be highly affected by the ties that exist or do not exist between the president, administrators, and faculty.

### **Context**

Minor (2005) takes a look at HBCU governance and brings to life the importance that context brings. Social science researchers note that there are numerous differences between Blacks and Whites (Minor, 2005). This makes it reasonable to assume that Blacks at HBCUs would operate differently than Whites at PWIs (Minor, 2005). It also seems reasonable to believe that these cultural differences play a role in decision making

such as board member selection and presidential selection. A historical perspective gives view to how these differences affect governance at HBCUs and how they are perceived (Minor, 2005). Not only have HBCUs been controversial since their founding, but they have been underfunded by government, and often painted as subpar educational institutions with the paintbrush of racist ideals and views. Though this piece brings to light the importance of context, history, and further study it also focuses, as most pieces do on HBCU governance, on the faculty-president/administrative relationship and does not speak to the role of the board of trustees in decision-making. Nonetheless, it does point to a need for further understanding of HBCU boards, the characteristics of their members, and the various elements and thoughts that go into the HBCU presidential selection process. Furthermore the forthcoming mass exodus of HBCU presidents, as many will soon reach retirement, raises the question of who will fill these vacancies, as well as who is currently or will be training this upcoming leadership.

How will these new leaders be identified? Will leadership need to come from pipelines not typical for HBCU leadership and how will this leadership take these institutions into the next phase of their life span in higher education? The body of work in the area of HBCU leadership is small in amount, and more historical than contemporary. Attempts have been made to study Black college leadership, but they have not been comprehensive in nature (Gasman et. al, 2010). An in-depth look at the various practices of different constituencies of HBCU leadership, the characteristics of HBCU boards of trustees, the ways in which HBCU presidents are selected, and the shared and different soft skills and social capital that is desired will assist and inform the development and identification of future HBCU leadership.

## **Characteristics of HBCU boards**

Phillips (2002) brings into discussion the characteristics of HBCU boards of trustees in his analysis of the “recycling” of HBCU presidents. Finding that HBCU presidents tend to be shuffled among the institutions, regardless of having or not having positive track records at previous institutions, Phillips (2002) asserts the practice is connected to the make-up of the institutions’ boards. Boards of trustees at both private and public HBCUs continue to exercise a much tighter reign over their institutions than do their counterparts at PWIs (Phillips, 2002). This statement may be overreaching, not acknowledging the various governance practices across the HBCU landscape. Phillips’ view is that boards “seem to have little regard for the historical mission or development of black college.” (Phillips, 2002, pp.51)

HBCU trustees are getting older, and tend to be retirees, which some argue leads to their desire to micromanage a campus (Seymour, Jr., 2008). However, HBCU presidents share that they suffer from over engaged boards as much as they suffer from under engaged boards (AGB, 2014). Board members are also increasingly hailing from private industry. This raises concern of a shift of focus to pleasing wealthy benefactors from what is best fitted for the institution. Phillips’ (2002) point is well made, but does not address the need for strong ties to industry and community, crucial to fundraising, that members of these boards provide. Particularly in the area of fundraising and philanthropic efforts, having a board with the expertise and access to generate funds for their respective institutions can prove critically beneficial. The juxtaposition of these arguments presents a challenge to HBCUs leadership relationships with boards of trustees. The components of leadership and unique history and mission of HBCUs create

a unique context for HBCU leadership to operate. It is due to this unique context, the ways in which board members are selected to serve as well as the skills they possess are important.

### **Skills and board selection**

In the small amount of literature concerning HBCU boards some common themes arise. One of those themes is the lack of skill sets apparent on some HBCU boards. Many of these boards lack the oversight skills and fundraising capacity necessary for their schools' survival (Stuart, 2009). Though this is not an issue that is native and exclusive to the HBCU sector, it is one that is prevalent. Being that on average HBCUs have much lower endowments and tend to be more financially strapped than their PWI counterparts, a board lacking these skills proves much more detrimental to the institution. Stuart (2009) finds that a combination of factors (i.e.,- frequent turnover of presidents, increased government and accrediting requirements, economic landscape) over the past decade or so that forces HBCU trustees into a greater level of engagement and accountability. Critics feel that HBCU trustees take very seriously, maybe too seriously, the task of hiring and firing but do not have the same fervor and involvement when it comes to fundraising and fiscal management (Stuart, 2009). However HBCUs will need to increase their diligence and attention concerning board performance, as many government legislatures and policy makers are turning an eye to this issue (Stuart, 2009).

As more scrutiny lands on HBCU boards, HBCU board member selection processes have also garnered increased attention. Taylor (2012) asserts that with the issues and threats HBCUs face, recruiting dynamic, multi skilled, multitalented board members is imperative. "Nearly every major study of nonprofit boards over the past two

decades identified board recruitment as one of the most significant challenges.” (Taylor, 2012, p.31) Taylor (2012) gives an analysis of the challenges of HBCU boards and gives strong suggestions as to what should be expected of board members. HBCU board members have many things with which to be concerned. There are three areas that are of grave importance—the president, organizational performance and fiduciary duties, and fundraising (Taylor, 2012). Board members should be expected to ensure and secure talented and exceptional leadership. These members should also take seriously their fiduciary responsibilities, not only maintaining the stability of the institution but also taking steps to make sure of its continued existence.

And lastly board members are expected to personally invest in the financial development of their institution. Board members should be doing more than leveraging networks for donations, but leading the way from their own pockets. Once these expectations are considered standard, non-negotiable, and at the forefront of the minds of members, then HBCU boards are in a proper position and mindset to court and select new members to join their ranks. Likewise, boards that have prioritized their focus in this manner can establish a sound and effective process to search for and select a president, when presented with this awesome task.

### **Presidential selection process**

Various cultural and symbolic leadership theories point to the need of leaders to create and maintain institutional sagas, to preserve an academic culture, to pay close attention to social integration and symbolic events, and to understand the influence of institutional mission on decision-making, processes of socialization, and constituents’ expectations of leaders (Bensimon et al., 1989). HBCUs are institutions where race and institutional

culture are often deeply intertwined. When looking at HBCUs, cultural and symbolic perspectives prove beneficial lenses to understanding leadership and how leadership is selected.. .

The selection of the president is one of the most, if not the most important task for an HBCU board (Taylor, 2012). The future success and sustainability of HBCUs lies in the hands of their boards (Taylor, 2012) and therefore HBCU boards should be trying to employ the best presidents for their institutions. Though Taylor brings up very solid arguments, there are some contextual challenges that he neglects to acknowledge that make the HBCU boards' tasks daunting. With the financial hardships and various other issues at HBCUs, both public and private, potential candidates who may be highly qualified shy away from the HBCU presidency. These contextual challenges cause the question to arise, "Are the best persons and best fits for the job actually in the presidential pipeline from inception?" This causes the pool of persons from which boards have to pick to be already limited. Yet, Taylor (2012) still makes a valid point in how important the presidential selection process is for HBCUs. This being the case, not only must more be known about the process HBCU boards use to select presidents but also the intricacies and components of that process.

The role that board composition and board members' value systems play in the decision-making process give a more dynamic, nuanced, deeper understanding of how persons end up or do not end up in the HBCU president's seat. Keeping in mind the racial identity of HBCUs mentioned earlier, it must be understood that the selection of an HBCU president is simultaneously an addition to the ranks of those to be considered leaders of African American communities. Therefore to gain a complete view and



understanding of how leadership is viewed during the HBCU presidential selection process one must push past the narrow scope of higher education and institutional type. Understanding the how the unique racial context of HBCUs, their historical significance, and contemporary racial challenges is necessary to have a deeper, fuller perspective of the HBCU presidency, HBCU governance and the HBCU presidential process.

### **Race, Class, Value Systems, and Board Work**

Sociological constructs and identities such as race, and class play a role in the way in which persons view the world. HBCUs as institutions with racial identities, there needs to be an understanding of how these constructs and identities play a role in the work of the board of institutions which largely identify with the Black community and culture. African-Americans are not monolithic. African-Americans are a dynamic array of cultures and traditions. Therefore it would be difficult to label or generalize any particular practice as being unique or characteristic of all African Americans. Yet, there are practices or trends that have been found to thread throughout various Black communities.

### **Race and social capital**

Though it is common practice for boards of trustees, across institutional type, to evaluate a presidential candidate on the hard skills they possess of which the institution is in need, these hard skills are not the sole decision maker. Soft skills and social capital play a role as well. Knowing how race influences the perspective and value of soft skills and capital can help bring understanding to certain presidential candidates being viewed as better than others. It can also provide HBCU presidential aspirants with insight as to

soft skills and social capital they may need to acquire in order to be successful on the road to the HBCU presidency.

Beaudoin (2011) points out that it is important to note that social capital levels vary by ethnicity. In particular, Beaudoin (2011) proposes that homophily—people being drawn to others who have similar characteristics—can be used as a lens to understand some of the differences between ethnicities. Members of ethnic groups “generally have an in-depth exposure to other members of their own ethnic group.” (Beaudoin, 2011, p.162) This in-depth exposure makes members privy to a deeper understanding of attitudes, social ties, and social behaviors within their respective ethnic group. This could also be true in the area of HBCU organizational culture. HBCUs are institutions that are intertwined with a racial history. Though institutions themselves do not have ethnic identities, when a particular ethnicity and the practices unique to that ethnicity’s communities are found in the tapestry of the institution, institutional culture is undoubtedly affected. Little study has been conducted to see if this theory or assertion appropriately applies.

Marian Orr (1999) takes a cultural lens to look at social capital in her book “Black Social Capital.” Orr (1999) focuses on the school reform movement in Baltimore, MD between the years of 1986-1999 and attempts to show the power and uniqueness of social capital in the Black community. She discusses the uniqueness of Black social capital in that it can aid African-American leaders in the ability to mobilize and cooperate, in order to gain social gains, yet may keep African Americans from participating in much larger groups (Orr, 1999). Orr devises a model of social capital that shows the differences between White social capital and Black social capital. The model displays the various

types of intragroup social capital and how this capital relates to the possible intergroup social capital. There are limitations to this model because it is designed in the context of school reform of Baltimore, but there are elements that can be applicable in other arenas. Orr's model provides examples of conduits of social capital that serve particularly well in the Black community. These conduits of Black social capital are: Black churches, Black newspapers, civil rights organizations, fraternities and sororities, Black colleges, Black neighborhoods, Black public officials, and the Black middle class. The model also shows how these examples differ from White social capital. The examples of conduits for the White community given are: Business organizations, foundations, state elected officials, university researchers, good government leagues, children's advocacy group, daily newspaper, state education officials (Orr, 1999).

Orr does her best to show that Black communities do not necessarily lack social capital, but rather it is different than the social capital found in White communities. This claim begins the conversation of social capital being defined within a cultural context. Furthermore, it alludes to the idea of the value and benefit of social capital being measured through a cultural lens. In using the cultural lens, a more nuanced understanding of social capital cannot only be attained, but also applied to organizations with strong cultural components or identities. Orr is able to show the various differences in social capital through a racial lens. But, Orr's model (1999) fails to show the commonalities in social capital between races. Also, because Orr (1999) discusses social capital in the perspective of community organizing, public school reform, and a political movement there is no understanding of how this "Black social capital" plays a role in hiring, career success, and organizational culture. Building on Orr's (1999) work by

looking at Black social capital in the specific framework of organizational culture would prove beneficial.

Different types of social ties can produce different types of outcomes (Yancy et al., 2009). Race, ethnicity, and class can affect the returns to social capital resources (Lin, 2001; Yancy et al., 2009). Some would also say that when the two intersect—race and class—this intersection greatly affects the social capital return. The resources and returns to social capital differ between middle class Black people and middle class White people (Yancy et al., 2009). Not only are they different between Black people and White people, but they are also different between the various class levels of Black people. Regardless, the strength of strong and weak ties depends not only on access to resources but the usefulness of what is shared and the willingness to share (Yancy et al., 2009). The variety of Black experiences and diversity of ideologies in Black communities can lend insight to how certain ties are viewed, valued, and established.

### **Black leadership relations**

Cureton (2009) explores the complex relationship between Black Americans and appointed Black leadership. “Black Americans who exist outside of the American Dream have historically had a direct relationship with street revolutionaries and ghetto superstars more than the appointed Black leadership (p. 347).” Cureton (2009) argues that Black leadership that emerges from the Black middle class tends to criticize and question the authenticity of Black leaders that emerge from the Black underclass. It is suggested that these Black leaders who emerge from the Black underclass will not have universal appeal, that they are undesirable and unfit to be deemed leadership for the black community. Cureton (2009) sheds light that this practice is indicative of the social

distance between the majority of Black leaders who emerge from the middle class and the Black underclass. Black leadership, particularly leadership emerging from the middle class, has risen to leadership status in an integrated society. Cureton (2009) argues that this process compromises the very Black authenticity questioned of Black underclass leaders. In fact, Cureton points out that Black leadership, barring a few exceptions, did not find it necessary to understand certain aspects of the Black community, particularly the poor urban Black male.

This is a very strong statement Cureton makes, and he may find himself overreaching. In addition to overreaching, Cureton (2009) neglects to address how Black leadership does or does not address the needs and issues of Black women. Cureton's assertions would lead one to believe that Black women are either invisible or in no need of attention or concern. Furthermore, it insinuates that Black women are neither leaders in the Black community nor poor and urban—the assumption that if Black male issues are addressed, the issues of Black women will simultaneously be addressed. In order to fully understand the intricate dynamics of Black leadership we must broaden the spectrum and perspective of Black leadership and that must include Black women.

The Civil Rights Movement, considered to be the gold standard of Black leadership, is also questioned for whom its benefits were intended. Cureton (2009) argues that though beneficial for the Black community, the civil rights movement was far more beneficial to a select group of Blacks—better educated, professionally trained, and vocationally skilled. It is an interesting argument, and though may overshoot in its assertions it brings up the necessity to take a more nuanced view of Black leadership. Cureton also brings to light the varying views on Black leadership, and who is considered

“good” and “bad” Black leadership. Cureton echoes a growing sentiment, that Black leadership is far too detached and alienated from certain sectors of the Black community, particularly the poor, urban sector. “If the goals are to provide a better life for Black people regardless of class and to be more representative of the masses, then instead of being enamored with integration and interracial coalitions, Black leadership should work to establish intraracial coalitions with gangsters and prisoners (Cureton, 2009, p.359).” The author goes on to express that Black leadership should have sincere desire, compassion, understanding, and respect for the improvement of the Black community in its totality. Cureton takes the issue of Black leadership and brings into play class issues.

Cole and Guy-Sheftall (2003) also take a critical eye to the celebrated Civil Rights Movement. Cole and Guy-Sheftall point out that although one can look to this movement to see strong representation of Black male leadership, the women who were pivotal in the movement were all but erased. Gary Lemons gives insight into the relationship between Black men and Black women in the fight against racism. He states, “Many of us have become so obsessed with fighting racism as a battle for the right to be patriarchal men that we have been willing to deploy the same strategies to disempower black women as white supremacists have employed to institutionalize racism.” Though Black women were battling sexism within their own communities, being critical of Black leadership as early as the nineteenth century they often found their voices silenced or unwelcomed. The Big 6, representing the male leadership of the movement, are always mentioned during the recounts of the Civil Rights Movement; A. Phillip Randolph, Martin Luther King, Jr., Roy Wilkins, John Lewis or James Forman, James Farmer, and

Whitney Young. But Black women are rarely if ever mentioned, though it can be argued they were the backbone of the Civil Rights movement (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003).

The most visible example of this silencing and lack of acknowledgement of Black women leadership can be seen in recounts of the dais set up of the historic March on Washington. Not only were no women leaders allowed to sit on the dais but the only women voices that were widely heard were those of Mahalia Jackson and Marian Anderson, both vocalists (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003). Women leaders were seated off to the side, invisible to the public. Though Cureton, Cole, and Guy-Sheftall take critical looks at the full spectrum of Black leadership through the lenses of both class and gender, their views can be used to take a closer look at the ways in which leadership is approached within the HBCU sector. Are there similar issues of social distance, class, and gender between board members and presidential candidates? And if so, how does this affect the HBCU presidential pipeline(s)?

### **Black women leadership**

The relationship between Black women and leadership roles in African- American communities is of a complex nature. Anna Julia Cooper asked the question, “What would a vision of Black community transformation look like if gender were more central to our analytic frameworks? (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003).” I raise the same question regarding leadership and our historically Black organizations and institutions, in particular HBCUs. Black women, due to racist stereotypes and a patriarchal society tinged with White supremacist values, often found themselves in US history being viewed as not quite women but not quite men—invisible. In an effort to combat the controlling images created around Black womanhood (Collins, 2000), the creation of

images contrary to the “mammie”, “Jezebel”, “welfare mother” images that were commonly associated with Black women. An example of this would be the “Black lady” caricature (Collins, 2000). The Black lady refers to the middle-class professional Black woman who represents a modern version of the politics of respectability (Shaw, 1996). “These are the women who stayed in school, worked hard, and have achieved much” (Collins, 2000, p.80). Though this image has its positive qualities, embedded within the “Black lady” caricature is the assumption of heterosexuality and Christianity (Collins, 2000). Furthermore, the “Black lady” caricature’s respectability does not solely lie in her traditional accomplishments but also her asexuality (Collins, 2000).

An extension of this respectability is the marriage of being both accomplished yet supportive through submission to the Black man. An example of the way in which marriage can actually trump the respectability of Black women above leadership roles can be seen in photographs of the March on Washington where the male leaders’ wives were allowed to sit on the dais, while the Black women who were active leaders in the march were relegated to a hidden offshoot to sit (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003). The role of a wife supporting her husband visibly made her more acceptable to the Black community than those who chose to stand in leadership and at times challenge their male counterparts. Elaine Brown put it this way, “If a Black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was said to be eroding Black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the Black race. She was an enemy of the Black people. (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003)” Therefore, when Black women were able to attain and assert leadership roles, they were often met with resistance unless their leadership proved beneficial for the entire Black race and not heavily focused on Black women or gender overall.



In general, women did not historically have many leadership roles and opportunities. “Gender stratification is a stable feature in colleges and universities (Waring, 2003, p.32).” Black women are not exempt from this though not normally considered or studied in literature around women and leadership, especially in higher education. Some Black feminists make claims that the submissive, supporting roles that Black women have been subjugated to within Black organizations have stifled Black political empowerment (Collins, 2000). Looking specifically at the Black power movement, much of the movement was geared to empower Black manhood, brushing Black women to the side. This caused a division in Black communities and politics. Some said Black women needed to be submissive to reestablish Black manhood. Others felt Black women could stand next to Black men in the liberation fight (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003). It would be assumed that institutions within the Black community would be spaces where Black women would not have to deal with these controlling images. But we find this is often not the case. Though Black women learn skills of independence and self-reliance within these organizations, these organizations are also places where Black women learn to put the interests of the race above their interests as women (Collins, 2000). HBCUs are an example of this. In attempting to dispel myths about Black women and making them more acceptable to wider society they have also fostered Black women’s subordination (Collins, 2000). Some of these institutions have become places where the cult of womanhood has been perpetuated, not just with students but with administrators as well. Whites as well as Blacks accepted the dominant culture’s stereotypical definitions of Black women; however many were sensitive to the unique fight of Black women (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003).

“Though the number of African-American female presidents is still quite small, their numbers are increasing steadily and have more than doubled in the last decade (Warner, 2003, p.32). However, Black women have had a strong connection with HBCU leadership. Mary Church Terrell, Anna Julia Cooper, Mary McLeod Bethune are just a few influential Black women leaders who had strong connections and relationships with HBCUs. Black women also find more success in reaching the college presidency at HBCUs than at PWIs (Gasman et al., 2013). Yet, there is still little literature on the experiences and journeys of Black women in higher education leadership in general, and Black women leadership at HBCUs in specific. Black women have endured historic challenges pertaining to HBCU leadership. In the 1960s and early 1970s, despite the large majority of female students and faculty at Black colleges, there were almost no female trustees on the colleges’ boards (Brazzell, 1993). Even at an institution such as Bethune-Cookman University where the founder was a Black woman, the trend remained steady. The all-women HBCUs were a bit more progressive than their mixed gendered counterparts. During the same time period, one could find the boards at Bennett and Spelman colleges to indeed have women on their boards, making up about half of the board (Brazzell 1993). However, Black women rarely served in the capacity of president. Spelman College itself, considered the hallmark of Black women’s education, did not have a Black woman president until 1987 (Gasman, 2007). Many would argue that though progress has been made it has been embarrassingly slow and met with a silent resistance. Just this past year, we saw two HBCUs (Alabama State University and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University), both well over 100 years in existence, select their first Black women presidents. Though progress has been made and should be

celebrated, it seems conversely so, that more but be understood about the process behind the progress. Why are Black women having such a challenge getting to the presidential seat at HBCUs? And though they are reaching the seats what is it that they experience on their quest to do so?

It proves challenging to fully grasp and understand the experiences and narratives of African American women HBCU presidents. Much of the literature surrounding African American higher educational leadership focuses on the lack of and experiences of African American leadership at PWIs. This is interesting given most African American college presidents, especially women, receive their opportunity to lead at HBCUs (Waring, 2003). There are a few instances that focus on HBCU leadership and these accounts are mostly historical and individual cases (Evans et al., 2002; Nichols, 2004; Gasman, 2008a; Gasman, 2011). The number of Black male HBCU presidents far outweighs that of Black women. This is interesting when noting, much like what was occurring in the 1960s and 1970s (Brazzell, 1993), that the majority student population at HBCU campuses is Black women. Though Black women are academically successful at HBCUs in large number, they are not reaching the position of president in large numbers. Waring (2003) conducted a study regarding African American women college presidents describing their perceptions regarding leadership. This undoubtedly is a pipeline issue that must be explored. Black women are exceeding their Black male counterparts at alarming rates in degree attainment (Harper, 2012; Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011). As having an advanced degree is traditionally a requirement of the college presidency, this suggests that Black women will outnumber Black males in being viable HBCU presidential candidates in the near future.

In Waring's (2003) study the Black women presidents reported that they were "drafted" into the presidency in one of two ways. One of those ways was that others identified the women's leadership potential and aided in developing said potential. Though this may not be a unique practice due to gender, it highlights the importance of Black women reaching the presidential seat and other top administrative roles at institutions and the role it plays in ensuring other Black women leaders are able to access and identify pipeline(s). Therefore, understanding all of the nuances that play a role in persons having access to the HBCU presidential pipeline(s) is important. Waring (2003) focuses to unearthing the hard and tangible skills needed for the college presidency. For a brief moment the author speaks to the unique social structure of the Black community and how it affects Black women aspiring to the college presidency. Waring (2003) brings to light that the social structure and stratification of the Black community is quite different from that of mainstream American society. These differences are important in understanding the journey of black female leadership (Waring, 2003). Unfortunately most literature does not look at the differences between male and female leaders and the differences that race may play in defining leadership (Warner, 2003). The author does briefly touch on the importance of relationships in the college presidency, yet leaves the reader to question if there are certain contexts in which certain types of relationships prove more important than others.

Cureton (2009) speaks about the ways in which Black leadership has risen through an integrated society. Yet, some would argue that it is because of segregation, positions of Black leadership were not only important in Black communities but coveted. The struggles that Black communities and the prejudice they encountered kept Black

leadership from exercising their talents and abilities in the larger White community (Pease & Pease, 1971). Due to this, many Black leaders channeled their energies not only into race work but also into attaining positions of leadership within Black communities. Though this is the case, you can see issues of class play a role. Pease and Pease (1971) take a look at the tenor of Black leadership historically. It seems even during the peak of open discrimination, agreement between Black leadership was not easy. Some Black leaders felt that the Black experience, the sense of racial identity, should bond Blacks and Black leaders together for the sake of united action (Pease & Pease, 1971). Yet with the issue of class looming, some persons being freed slaves or in a privileged existence found conflict with persons who were at once slaves and those who were of a lesser pedigree (Pease & Pease, 1971).

Historically, class background became an important aspect of Black leadership as the Black bourgeoisie's loyalty had been known to oscillate between the majority and the interests of their own race (Forsythe, 1992). It was often argued that being a part of the upper class of the Negro community almost automatically deemed one a Negro leader (Forsythe, 1992). This not only proves problematic in achieving diversity in Black leadership but also creates tension between leadership that may emerge from the working class Black community and possible resentment for the entitlement that lands upper class Blacks into leadership with ease. Though Pease and Pease's account is a historical one it also confirms that there is nothing new it seems, as their account speaks to aspects of Cureton's (2009) assertions. Class conflict and leadership are not new in the Black community. This being the case, there is good chance that this issue of class, respectability, suitability, and authenticity concerning Black leadership has permeated the

mindset, consciously or subconsciously, of numerous generations of African American leadership. If this is the case, how does this mindset play out in group decision making dynamics, particularly decisions that deal with selecting Black leadership?

### **Elitism, colorism, and competition**

The undercurrent to this issue of class that Cureton grazes across but does not explore in depth is the politics of respectability. Many Black organizations that claimed to be gathering spaces of Black leadership also receive criticisms of being sects of Black elitism. Persons who would be allowed entry or membership in these organizations were more akin to aristocratic traditions, graces, and manners (Forsythe, 1972). Furthermore in order to reach a level of notoriety and visibility as a leader in these spaces, you needed to be able to exemplify and embody the traditions, graces, and manners of the Black elite community. If one could not claim an elite pedigree, the appearance of one in action would assist in the ability to rise to leadership in Black communities. “Elitism” or being a “Distinguished Negro” became a criterion for leadership (Forsythe, 1972).

“Caste, like class, also divided black from black.” (Pease & Pease, 1971, p.40) Along with class came issues with colorism and Black leadership. Some leaders felt as though Black leaders with whiter, lighter complexions were treated differently (Pease & Pease, 1971). This led to light-skinned Black leadership having their Black authenticity called into question, especially those with White parents (Pease & Pease, 1971). Black authenticity was also questioned of those leaders who failed to cultivate friendships with other Blacks.

Though it may not have been apparent in public, other than popular dissensions such as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois’ famously competing ideologies, the

competition, dispute, and distrust is recorded on the floor of conventions and in private letters (Pease & Pease, 1971). Pease and Pease (1971) aim to show that though there was a movement to unite the Black race and give it direction, the contentions and issues active behind the scenes, due to class and color issues, weakened the movement. Movements can unite but are simultaneously weakened by the divisiveness of “ideological controversy” and personal rivalry. Though Pease and Pease (1971) take a look at a particular time in history, their findings can give lens to some of the possible issues in later movements in the Black race. Also, when looking at intragroup behavior and dynamics, these findings can aid in understanding if disputes such as these hinder expeditious decision-making and consensus building. More must be understood about how Black leadership and those in influential positions, view the relationship between class, color, respectability, and Black authenticity. Furthermore, it must be understood how the relationship between the aforementioned ideas affects who is able to access the leadership pipeline(s) and ascend, in specific, to the HBCU presidency. This is important not only for an institution’s board members, but for the whole of a respective institution’s community. “When ‘leaders’ disagree, division will result as a natural consequence among the masses (Pease & Pease, 1971, p.41).” Therefore when there is divisiveness in a group that is considered leadership, such as a board, it is not the leadership that ultimately suffers but the population, which they serve.

There are brief discussions of social class and gender but rarely does the literature explore the intersection of race on these issues and how it affects leadership. Terms like “middle class” and “upper class” are used in literature but how does race affect the definition of these terms? How is middle class defined in the African American

community? Are there various definitions in various Black communities? How does this affect social network/class perception from board members and presidential hopefuls? Though the body of HBCU leadership literature is growing there is much more to be understood about the leadership of these institutions, who is well suited, and how they will find their way to these positions. To better understand how African Americans will reach HBCU leadership positions we must also understand how race, class, and value systems interact and affect the path to leadership in African American communities.

### **Black Experiences and Black Ideologies**

Social capital and networks are not the only things that culture can influence. Ideologies, how they come to be, and their components are also influenced by culture and therefore important to understand. Specifically, it is important to understand how ideologies may differ or be shaped by various racial communities' practices, history, and traditions. This assists in understanding one of the many lenses through which a number HBCU members make decisions—choosing the president in particular. An argument exists that there is a “Black experience.” Though explored in some literature, caution must be taken when engaging with this research. Historically the approach to the Black experience has not always been one paved with pure intentions (though some would question if such a thing even exists). Racist notions and undertones have underpinned and undermined much of the early literature concerning Black communities, persons, and lived experiences. Arguments arose that research about the “Black experience” could only be properly conducted by Black persons themselves (Aschenbrenner, 1973; Brewer, 1989). Aschenbrenner (1973) argued that even the best intentioned “outsider” could not fully grasp the essence or significance of the “Black experience”. “The strong insider



perspective was rooted in the idea that authentic knowledge about that group could only come from scholars from the group.”(Brewer, 1989, p. 61) Thus is the thrust of Black sociology.

Black sociology is based on the premise that black and white peoples have never shared, to any great degree, the same physical environment or social experiences. People in different positions relate to each other and to their physical environment differently. The result is a different behavior pattern, a configuration that should be analyzed from the view of the oppressed not the oppressor. “Such an analysis is Black sociology. “(Staples 1973, p.168)

This leads to a script forming, a narrative regarding the Black experience—usually negative. This narrative has been constructed partly by stereotypes and storytelling tinged with racism but also due to a lack of in depth study. Though this is the case, and literature is sparse, researchers have found that there are some perspectives and practices that are majorly attributed to the African American culture. Pride in race plays a crucial part in identity. Many African Americans do not want to lose their unique cultural markers to assimilation but desire to preserve specifically African American values and cultural traits (Turner, 1969). “The Afro-American subculture maintains a subterranean and private world of rituals, symbols, and motifs.” (Turner, 1969, p.21) In order to begin to understand how race influences decision making, Black Americans have to be seen as more than a race but a culture—a culture of practices, values, and traditions. It is from this thought that Black Nationalism evolved. Turner (1969) defines Black Nationalism as: “In its crudest and simplest form black nationalism is the assertion that black is good. At its most intellectually sophisticated level of development, it is the

affirmation of the validity of traditions and values of black people derived from their peculiar heritage and creativity (p.23).”

Turner goes on to explain that in an effort to overcome the low status and prestige created in an oppressive society, there develops a pattern of looking inward at traditions and an attempt to construct a new “vision” or ideas based on collective traits of social distinction. If looked at as a deviation from or adaptation of White culture or American culture, Black culture cannot be fully understood. Black culture must be respected as unique in its own right.

### **The extended family**

The extended family is a phenomenon that is prevalent in many Black communities. Though it historically has been presented in a way that would suggest the “Black family” to be incomplete or an unorthodox version of the family, it is an institution in its own right (Aschenbrenner, 1973). Often we try to understand the idea of family through the “nuclear” family model, which is more Eurocentric in nature. However, the extended family is considered “the family” in more African influenced traditions. It is the latter that informs most Black American family traditions and therefore we should view their definition of family through this lens (Hill, 1998). “It is essential to incorporate the African concept of family into our definition of the African American family (Hill, 1998, p.18).” In looking at Black families, Aschenbrenner (1973) finds that many Black families act as the primary socializing agent for Blacks. Hill (1998) notes that often in Black families, family networks include “fictive kin. These “fictive kin” are non-related persons who perform important family functions. Therefore, the socializing agent includes, not only immediate family members, but also aunts,

uncles, cousins, grandparents and persons who may not be blood related. This does not seem directly related to organizational behavior. But, if this extended family is the primary socializing agent of Blacks, one must question how this “extended family” practice affects the framework in which Blacks view people. How exactly does this “extended family” cultural aspect play out in organizational and social capital theory?

Aschenbrenner goes on to point out various events which display the importance of the “extended family” in Black communities. Funerals, family reunions, and events of the like are very important in Black culture. This is not to say these practices are not important in other cultures, but rather to point out their role and importance in Black communities, due to the unique socio-historical context of Black Americans. “Crucial to the geographical mobility of members is the maintenance of family contacts by means of rituals such as funerals, reunions, and other celebrations.” (Aschenbrenner, 1973, p.264) Traits found to be strong in Black families, such as strong achievement orientation, strong work orientation, flexible family roles, strong kinship bonds, and strong religious orientation, are not exclusive to the Black family. It is true that these traits can be found among other racial and ethnic groups. But, because of the unique history of slavery and other racial oppression of Black Americans these strengths and traits have operated differently (Hill, 1998). Jones (1980) alludes to this in her exploration of the practice of homecomings and family reunions in Black communities. She states, “Homecomings and family reunions involve gatherings of kin which function to transmit certain values from generation to generation, and thus insure the continuity of certain perceived notions of correct behavior towards kin.” (1980, p.62) Homecomings and family reunions not only provide opportunity to acknowledge family ties and the past, they also aid in

expressing and articulating family values and expectations (Jones, 1980). Furthermore they serve as a public pronouncement and celebration of family, something that Black Americans were stripped of during slavery. When the ability to legally marry, the ability to control or have a say in the continuity of one's family, the ability to even have final say over one's womb or the body within that womb is deprived it is understandable that members of a group may hold such expressions of family salient and dear.

This could also point to a deeper value of connectedness or feeling "kindred" to persons whether it is through blood or through ritual. Institutions in black communities, such as the "extended family" have been influenced by societal elements that have not been experienced by most other Americans (Aschenbrenner, 1973). These things would include slavery, reconstruction, etc. The author's assertions also apply to HBCUs and the way in which this culture underlies their operations.

### **The "Black Church"**

Black communities are often noted for their tendency to be conservative. This is often attributed to the very large presence and influence of the Christian faith. This strong presence of Christian faith often finds itself interwoven, consciously or subconsciously, into many aspects of the Black experience—even decision making for organizations. Taylor, Thornton, and Chatters (1987) take a look at the role the Black church plays in Black communities' socialization and behavior. The "Black Church" is one of the few places Blacks primarily built, financed, and controlled (Taylor et al., 1987). Also during the time of segregation and Jim Crow laws, the Black church was one of the few places Black persons could attain notable leadership positions. Outside of Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) and a few civic organizations such as the

NAACP, and the Links, Inc., the Black church gave Blacks a platform to lead in their communities and to be seen as both intelligent and respectable. This leads one to wonder, if it is possible, that due to this phenomenon often a position of leadership within a “Black” church communicates a position of leadership in a Black community since in essence, the Black community placed the individual in said position. It was not the White community, nor the system of institutionalized racism that is often attributed with Whites in power that placed the Black person in leadership. This in some way may communicate an authentic Black leadership role in the Black community. To fully understand, more research must be conducted.

Research on racial differences in religious involvement demonstrates the centrality of religion and religious institutions in the lives of Black Americans. (Taylor et al., 1987) Being that this literature is from 1987, a more current look at the role of religion in the Black community may be warranted. With generational and demographic changes we may find this still to be true or that the influence of organized or mainline religions may have changed. Historically Blacks reported high levels of church attendance and confidence in the clergy (Taylor et al., 1987). Though religion and Christianity may still play a large role in the Black community, more must be known regarding the popularity of Christianity in organized form with the current generation.

Some researchers argue that the Black church is a vehicle or tool to prevent Blacks from fully assimilating into a predominately White culture and society. The assimilation-isolation model proposes that the black church serves as a way to keep Blacks from completely assimilating and integrating into American society (Taylor et al., 1987). Many Black churches’ congregations are overwhelmingly Black, if not

completely. The assimilation-isolation model asserts that by socially segregating its members it keeps its members from higher levels of participation in other civic and voluntary associations, which impede their involvement and impact in social action and electoral politics. This theory is flawed in that it appears to not take into account the Black church as an organization involved in politics or social action. A place of religious practice and observance, the Black church also historically played a large role in many major civil rights moments in Black history. There is an additional argument that as Blacks climbed in socioeconomic status, the traditional role of the Black church as a spiritual and social refuge would cease to exist (Frazier, 1974). This assertion builds upon the fallacy of not acknowledging the Black church as a deep rooted, strong structure of social climbing and elitism within the Black community (Graham, 1999). Though Blacks are increasingly able to access places and spaces that were once not accessible, holding prominent roles and membership in many established elite Black organizations and associations still lends credibility to a Black authenticity that is often necessary for one to be considered part of Black leadership—these organizations and associations include Black churches. Overall the assimilation-isolation model is problematic as it minimizes the role segregation and racism played in limited access for Blacks into historically White associations and organizations. The model also downplays the deep rooted, important role the Black church plays in the Black community. Not just as a religious or social refuge but also as an identifier of the Black elite from which Black leadership are often selected and also an identifier of Black authenticity often desired of Black leadership.

The compensatory model makes up for the lack of the assimilation-isolation model. The compensatory model proposes the church as a significant presence in Black communities because of its position as the primary voluntary association of Blacks (Taylor et al., 1987). The model asserts that the church is more than a place of religious and social gathering but rather a functioning and viable community organization. It is through the church that Blacks are able to learn organizational skills and roles, particularly leadership roles that typically are denied in wider society (Taylor et al., 1987). As other historically Black institutions such as HBCUs and BGLOs play similar roles as the Black church in the Black community, the compensatory model may also serve as way to understand leadership in these spaces.

It could be argued that HBCU presidents are viewed through a pastoral leadership lens, similar to the leadership of the Black church. This may point to an affinity of some Black communities to pastoral leadership styles in non- church settings and organizations. The question is raised however if historically Black institutions such as the Black church or HBCUs are viewed as viable institutions in their own right, or a maladaptation as a reaction to discrimination? If HBCUs are indeed viewed as a maladaptation, is it possible that as a result we do not bother to study HBCU leadership and governance for understanding, but rather, in the rare case it is studied, it is studied through the lens of correction? Research must be done that respects and validates the unique identity of HBCUs and studies HBCU leadership to understand this phenomena within its unique context as opposed to an approach that assumes all HBCUs are failing and need to be rescued. In order for this to be done, researchers must also take the time to understand the value systems and characteristics of the Black community. The ethnic

community model emphasizes the role that the church has on the individual as opposed to the community as a whole (Taylor et al, 1987). This model looks at how the church enhances individual self-worth and in turn, enhances building a community based on collective interest.

Taylor et al. (1987) builds on these models using their findings to explore the black church as prismatic instead of one dimensional. Analyzing surveys of Black Americans, Taylor et al. found that there was not a monolithic view towards the church from the Black community. Various demographics within Black communities gave various responses. Older respondents, southerners, and those with more years of formal education were more likely to have helped the Black community than hurt (Taylor et al., 1987). Overall, only one out 20 respondents felt the church negatively impacted the Black community (Taylor et al., 1987). Respondents who viewed the church as being helpful were more heterogeneous in terms of their religious behavior as opposed to those that felt the church had harmed or made no difference (Taylor et al., 1987). Taylor et al. also found from responses that the Black church plays a variety of roles and functions in the Black community—not simply a place of religious gathering. Taylor et al.'s (1987) study is important in that it lays the groundwork in understanding how the church influences the values and perspectives of members of the Black community. In turn, this aids in understanding how the church can also play a role in how HBCU boards make decisions, particularly private HBCUs. The foundation of private church affiliated HBCUs often keeps the institutions with strong ties to Christian denominations and churches. With boards consisting of members that can often be clergy or representative of the affiliated churches, or having institutional missions heavily related to their faith



based origin, understanding the role of the church in Black culture and Black leadership can assist in understanding some of the dynamics involved in private church affiliated HBCU boards' selections of presidents and what presidential candidates they will and will not entertain for the position.

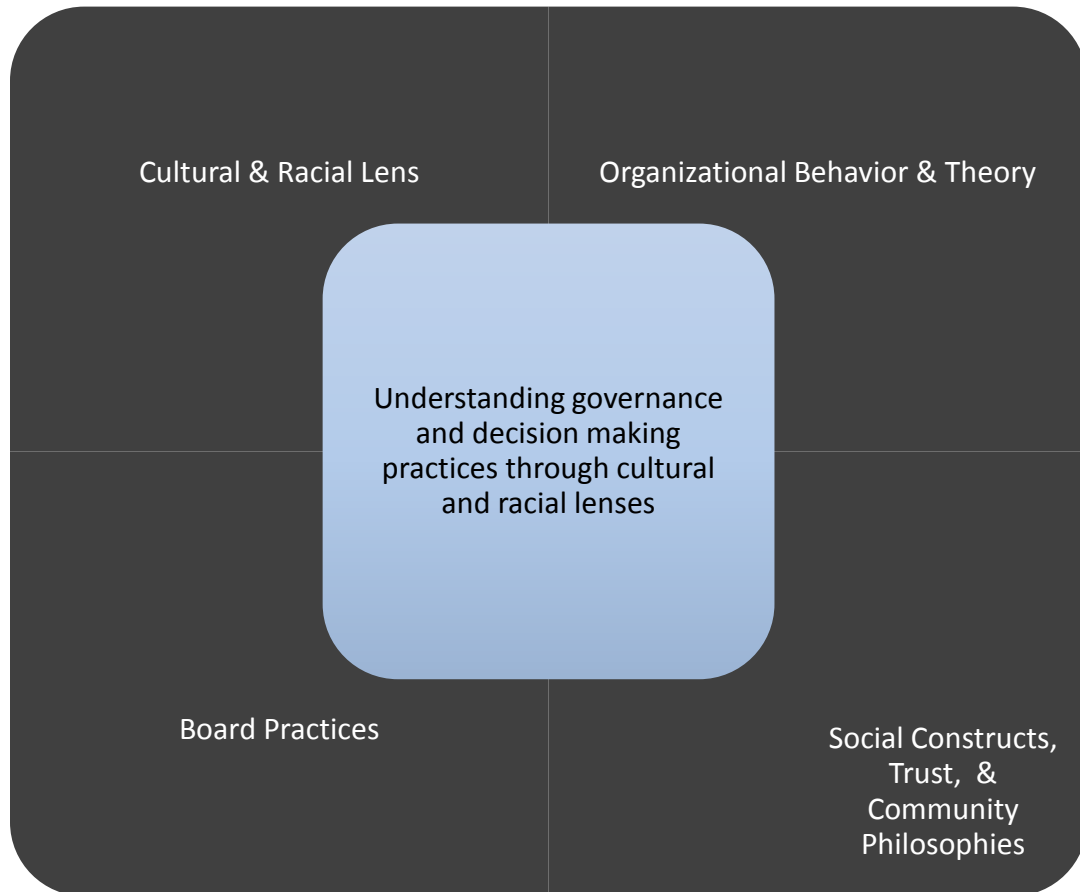
### **Missing Links**

Governance literature is vast but not very nuanced in the areas of race and culture. Often neglecting institutional context, researchers must learn more about how institutions such as HBCUs with strong racial identities may or may not engage in governance in the same manner as their counterparts. More must also be known about HBCU boards and their intricate workings. When more is known about HBCU boards, more can be understood regarding the HBCU presidential selection process. This proves important as it must be ensured that all that possess the pertinent skills to successfully lead these institutions have access to the presidential pipeline. In addition, if there are well suited candidates encountering barriers to the HBCU presidential pipeline(s), it must be understood how to minimize, if not eliminate, said barriers.

There are unique instances where an organization's culture overlaps or intersects with a racial/ethnic culture or history—HBCUs are an example. In these cases it is impossible to look at the organization's culture aside from the influences and impact of its racial identity and history. Furthermore, studies regarding Blacks ascension to leadership in higher education can be studied particularly in the HBCU community. It is important to ensure that Black people are reaching upper level administrative positions across the higher education landscape. But, to ensure that this is happening there must be an understanding of how this attainment of upper level administrative positions can best

occur within all institutional types, not just PWIs. The dynamics of group decision making and organizational behavior are prismatic and layered. Understanding the intersectionality of class, race, culture, and organizational leadership will aid in truly understanding how HBCU boards make their decisions and why. Though there are studies regarding all of these areas in their own right there are very few, if any, who look at how all these areas interact. There is an intersection where areas of race and culture, organizational behavior and theory, board practices, and social constructs, trust and community philosophies meet. Where the aforementioned meet is the space where I aim to understand governance and decision making practices through cultural and racial lenses (Figure 2.1). Most governance work has not been approached in this manner, making it hard to fully understand how cultural and community practices and values play

a role in certain organizations' governance practices. **Figure 2.1**



Through my inquiry of private, AME affiliated HBCU boards of trustees, their members, and how their value systems play a role in the presidential search and selection process, depth will be added to understanding the processes behind the decisions made by HBCU boards. Decisions that are often scrutinized. Being able to better understand the boards' decision-making processes allows for a better, more contextual, non-colorblind analysis of these decisions. More must be known regarding the presidential selection process of HBCU boards of trustees and the people who are sitting on these boards. This information will serve well in the quest to identify paths to the HBCU presidency and persons who should be on them.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

There are questions for which I sought answers. Often quantitative data can answer these questions but does so in a way that only tells a part of the story. Qualitative research allows the researcher to uncover the depth of the story. Qualitative research focuses on understanding the phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 2007). For this reason, the overall design of my project took a qualitative approach, meaning that I used a formal, objective, systematic process where data was utilized to assess the effect of the composition of the board and the value systems of individual members and how it affects who does and does not have access to the presidency at HBCUs. Furthermore, this approach aided in understanding how these individual networks, social capital, and value systems interact in a group dynamic and influence group and organizational decision making.

Qualitative researchers operate through a paradigm when engaging in the act of research (Creswell, 2007). These paradigms are the umbrella, which under you will find a set of beliefs held by the researcher. These beliefs guide the researcher's actions (Creswell, 2007). The various paradigms that can be held are post positivism, social constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism (Creswell, 2007). For this study I acted through the pragmatic paradigm. Key to the pragmatic paradigm is a focus on the outcomes of the research—the problem being studied and the questions asked about the problem (Creswell, 2007). Unlike the post positivist view, which is often reductionist and espouses rigorous methods of qualitative data (Creswell, 2007) the pragmatic view is not committed to any one system or philosophy. The goal of this study was to not only uncover the complexities and intricacies of the phenomena in question but to do so in

order for the data to have practical use. Though there is much benefit in the platform that qualitative research provides, for the often unheard or silenced voices to be heard, my desire was to mostly use these voices and the information gleaned from their stories and perspectives. I focused on “the practical implications of the research, and [emphasized] the importance of conducting research that best addresses the research problem.”

(Creswell, 2007, p.23)

I approached my inquiry using the multi-site case study method. “Case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system,” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). The multi-site case study method allows for an in depth discovery and description of a phenomena within multiple bounded cases. Case study allows for an in-depth understanding of an issue. The presidential selection process at institutions is not as simple as a set of procedures with which a board engages and follows. There are various thoughts, perspectives, lenses, and actors that play a part in the final decision of who will be the president. In order to understand the intricate layers and complex parts of this process, an approach to inquiry must occur that allows for the all of the layers and parts to emerge for analysis. Furthermore, context plays a role in the way in which persons engage or do not engage in the presidential selection process. Therefore, it was important to understand what similarities exist or do not exist across different campus contexts—keeping in mind my goal was not mere discovery but practical implications and the ability to use what is discovered. It is for this reason that the multiple case study approach proved well to give insight to my research question.

There are various aspects of AME church affiliated HBCU boards and the presidential selection process I explored. In examining the access that presidential

aspirants have to a particular institution's presidential pipeline, I attempted to understand more about board processes, cultures, and behaviors. Simultaneously I aimed to learn more about how board members and their individual characteristics and values played a role in the presidential selection process. These characteristics include, but are not limited to, length of service to the board, ties to certain social networks, perceived social capital, age, gender, occupation, and background. I also wanted to be aware of the role any other aspects, such as board training and regionality.

Objectivity is heralded as the gold standard in research—for what all researchers should strive. But true objectivity is nearly impossible to achieve, particularly in qualitative research. Reflexivity or self-awareness is important for the researcher to understand in order to properly approach, engage, and analyze their research. This being the case, I understand that my own goals, experiences, assumptions, feelings, and values as they relate to my research. For this reason I explored my relationship with my study and my positionality therein.

I have grown up in a family buxom with HBCU graduates. In fact, of the college graduates in my family, more persons have graduated from HBCUs than PWIs. Therefore, HBCUs have not only been a part of my life since I can remember, but they also have been celebrated. I did not choose to enroll in an HBCU for my undergraduate education, but still held a very strong affection and high esteem for the institutional type. Much to my shock I found that many of my peers, particularly African Americans, did not share my feelings. This occurrence peaked my interest. As my peers begin to share their reasons for negative thoughts concerning HBCUs, one theme that constantly emerged were administrative practices. Though many had never attended an HBCU, the

accounts that had been shared with them whether from friends, family members, or media reports, convinced them that the way in which HBCUs were run was subpar and inefficient. I too, had heard similar accounts from friends who at the time attended HBCUs, somewhat confirming the simultaneous negative media attention HBCU leadership was garnering. Yet, I knew there had to be more to the story, more that was not understood, more that was not being discussed.

My pride in my culture and heritage as a member of the Black race is deeply connected to my support of HBCUs. However, there is another identity, which influenced my gravitation towards this study. As I come from a long line of HBCU alumni, I also come from a long line of members of the AME church. Being a Christian is a large part of my identity. An extension of that is my active membership in the AME church. As an officer at one of the highest levels of service in the AME church I am in tune and privy to the governance and operation of the church as a denomination and global organization. The intersection of these two identities leads me to be invested in the welfare of AME affiliated institutions. The AME church holds high value in the education of Black people. However, my affiliation and involvement with the church does not make me delusional concerning our challenging relationship with the governance and leadership of our institutions. Being a part of the church and watching the disheartening decline of Morris Brown College, an AME affiliated HBCU, peaked my interest in understanding more about the church's relationship with its institutions.

It is my strong support and affection that led me to inquire about HBCUs in general and AME affiliated HBCUs in particular. It is also this support and affection that desires for these institutions to not only be understood, but to also be able to operate at an

optimum level. I believe for this to occur more must be understood about the leadership of these institutions, not just the president, but the board of trustees as well. I was aware that my strong support and personal relationship with HBCUs and their graduates lends itself to make me susceptible to only highlight the positive and admirable findings of HBCUs. Though I believe there is a gross imbalance of negative research and media reports on HBCUs, I do think it is necessary to be fair in the presentation of my findings. The same can be said for my presentation of the AME church. As not only a member of the church but also as one who holds a position of leadership, there is an inclination to protect the image and perception of the church and its leadership. However, I believe that the only way an organization, religious or otherwise, can be successful is to be open to critique and constructive criticism. Therefore, I most definitely had to engage in activity and methods that allowed me to be aware of how my relationship with the subject and HBCUs could affect my lens in analyzing the data.

HBCUs, though not necessarily all Black in population, are institutions that have a racialized identity. They are not merely seen as individual colleges and universities, or merely as a group of similar institutional types. Rather these institutions are often equated with an aspect of Black culture, tradition, and practice. I myself as a Black woman have experienced being evaluated through the racist lens in which many of these institutions have been viewed. It was important for me to acknowledge my own experiences with racism and how these experiences could have played a role in my analysis of the data and the practices I viewed. My identification as a Black person places me as an insider to Black culture and tradition. Though this is the case, just as HBCUs are not monolithic, neither is Black culture. There are various Black



communities, all having their own cultures and traditions. Yet, there are some aspects that are common and threaded throughout the various Black communities. I understand and relate to a number of these practices and are familiar with them. This also held true for being a member of the AME church. I am not only familiar with the formal structures and practices of the church but also the informal culture and practices. Sometimes this means knowing what is implied behind what is stated. Though this was the case, I had to remember and make a concerted effort to identify biases and not speak for participants—they had to speak for themselves. I had to find the delicate balance between bringing my insider understanding to certain practices and not making assumptions in my analysis based on my understanding or personal experience with the practice or tradition.

I am comprised of various identities; Black, woman, middle class, graduate student, college graduate, and Christian. All of these identities play a role in my views and experiences. Though I desired to be objective, objectivity in research, particularly in qualitative work, was challenging. My main objective in approaching this research, collecting and analyzing the data was to unearth the experiences, practices, and voices of a group and sector within higher education that often goes misunderstood, cloaked, and unheard. Throughout all stages of this study I engaged with my own identities and understanding of how these identities relate to not only the data but also the participants. I believe this engagement helped me to understand the bias that was possibly present during the design and data analysis stages of the research. Being aware of this motivated me to employ various methods of ensuring the validity of my data and protecting the data collection and analysis processes from said biases.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection is an important part of the qualitative research process. The way in which data is collected enables the researcher to gather the best information to answer the researcher's question (Creswell, 2007). For this study, I engaged in purposeful sampling. This means that I "selected individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study." (Creswell, 2007, p.125) Though this is the case, this strategy of sampling was heavily affected by the nature of the question I studied as well as the highly sensitive nature of the information I attained. I selected three private HBCUs as my study sites. The population I studied was current and recently serving board members. Recently serving board members had to serve on the board within the last two years to be eligible to participate. My study population also included the presidents of the three institutions. I extended an invitation to participate to 44 board members and 3 presidents. Those who responded in the affirmative were interviewed for the study. All board members were not contacted as contact information for some board members was unable to be acquired. Travel schedules also created challenges to secure interviews within the study's time constraint. Two board members were in political positions whose nature made direct contact extremely difficult. Two board members in particular expressed a desire to participate but felt unable due to political conflicts within the church. Some board members did not respond after multiple attempts of contact. It is important to note that many of the members who did not return contact were clergy from one particular board. One president did not respond to numerous attempts to secure an interview. I would later learn through interviews that this difficulty in contact was a common occurrence.

Participants derived from various areas of industry. Through the interview and surveying process I was able to identify board members' length of service to the board, and most importantly who participated in presidential search processes.

HBCUs are known for their apprehension of participating in research, particularly private HBCUs. This apprehension is understandable given the historical rocky relationship between HBCUs and researchers. Though understandable, this created barrier makes it hard and at times impossible for researchers that value HBCUs and hold a high ethic of care for these institutions to engage in research that may actually be beneficial. Access is a common challenge among HBCU researchers. Gaining access often involves several steps (Creswell, 2007). In order to collect highly useful data I not only had to gain access to the institutions but also to individual board members. Members who sit on boards of trustees at colleges and universities are often notable members of industry or within the community. They have public and corporate images that are highly sensitive to public opinion and perception. Due to this some persons were hesitant to participate in the study. To navigate this hesitancy, I took a number of steps. First, I established contact with the presidents of each institution. Once explaining the nature of my research along with the types of questions I would be asking, presidents expressed comfort with my study. In one case the office of the president offered support in contacting and establishing relationships with board members. In all three cases I found that once I began interviewing board members, other board members became less reluctant to participate. It seemed that after one board member felt confidence in the interviewing process other members felt confidence as well. Though I initially believed there was a need to express a very high assurance of anonymity, which I did, many

members did not express this as a concern. While securing interviews as well as conducting interviews I also found my identity as a member and officer in the AME church afforded me access and created a sense of comfort and trust for AME affiliated board members. It appeared that there was a sense of comfort and trust present due to shared membership and perceived shared values due to that membership. This experience was one that I found interesting and affirming considering its direct relation to the topic at the core of this study.

Traditional practice on many boards is that only one person speaks on behalf of the board and that is the chairperson. In the case of this study, I needed to speak to numerous members of the board in order to get a full and dynamic understanding of board operations, relationships, and value systems. Initially I thought this approach being different than the normal practice would bring about apprehension among individual members. This was not the case. A number of board members were willing to talk and were actually warm and welcoming to my interviewing. It was almost as if some members had been waiting to have an opportunity to voice their experiences. Creswell (2007) notes that a confidence must exist in order for the researcher gain access through a gatekeeper. It is for this reason I believe that my strategy of purposeful sampling worked well. Already having trusted relationships with a few board members at these three AME affiliated HBCUs allowed me to not only have access to the individual member but also other members who trusted their fellow board member. When using the snowball or chain strategy of purposeful sampling the researcher “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich.” (Creswell, 2007, p. 127) Because HBCUs and their boards tend to be hard to access, as I became connected

with members of the community and those close with board members who fit well with the study, the community members were able to aid in identifying and connecting me with others like themselves.

Though I employed the purposeful sampling strategy, I did not do so at the price of losing variability in the sample. Though the cases were of individual institutions I did my best to interview a broad range of board members. However, this ability to ensure a broad range of members was limited by who responded positively to the invitation to participate in the study. Participants varied in age, gender, and industry. Though it was my desire to aim for diversity in areas such as religion and sexual orientation, I knew it would be difficult to readily identify these identities. Therefore I did not purposefully search out these identities but rather stayed open to identifying them if they happened to arise during the analysis process. Also, being that these three institutions are private church-affiliated HBCUs I expected board members to purposely hold similar values as their affiliated denomination, the AME church, causing a limitation.

### **Data Collection Tools**

I used a number of data collection tools in order to get as much information from as many angles as possible. Once participants were selected a short survey was given to participants simply to provide basic background and demographic information. This allowed me to understand the diversity or lack thereof among participants. I conducted 18 individual interviews. These interviews consisted of 16 board members and two presidents. The interviews were semi structured, and lasted 60-90 minutes. Though face-to-face interviews were my most desired interview type, I realized that board of trustee members are often very busy individuals and that face to face interviews may not be a

possibility for participants. Therefore, if conducting a face to face interview was not available I offered a secondary option of a phone or Skype interview. All but two of the interviews were facilitated via phone. Though I was not able to garner the informal communication available through body language, I believe the interviews were still rich in data. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Interviews were conducted in a private area as to ensure confidentiality and comfort of the participant. All participants completed and signed an interview consent form to ensure they were fully aware of what was occurring and how their interview would be used. The survey questions were as follows:

- Could you state what board you serve on and how long you have served?
- How did you come to be on the board of trustees and what motivated you to accepting participation on the board?
- What is the role of the board of trustees at [Institution]?
- What specific skills (knowledge of higher education, marketing/branding, financial affairs, information technology, etc.) do you bring to the board of trustees?
- Please describe the typical decision-making process of the board?
- Please describe the board's working relationship with the president.
- Have you ever participated in a presidential search process? If so, could you describe that experience?
- Based on your experiences, what characteristics do you feel make a good president for [Institution]?

- What are characteristics ideal for HBCU leadership that may not reflect on a resume? For your institution?
- What characteristics of a presidential candidate would make you cautious in selection?
- What are some things, instances that could make the relationship between the board and the president challenging?
- What are some things, instances that could make the relationship between board members challenging?
- This institution is affiliated with the AME church. How does that relationship play a role in the work of the board?

Due to my research question pertaining to the process of selecting a president, I was aware there were possibilities for references to specific selection processes to occur in interviews. Again, I understood the high sensitivity of this information, so I made an extra effort to receive participant approval to use this data in the write up portion of the study as to not breach the confidentiality of my subject. I also provided the option for participants to go “off the record” during interviews, assuring that any information shared that was designated as such would not be used during the data analysis portion of my study. It took approximately 4-5 months to complete data collection.

### **Data Analysis**

Analyzing and interpreting data can be a daunting task for qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2007). Ensuring that the researcher analyzes the data in a manner that allows for the voices of the participants to speak rather than be spoken for can be challenging, but is necessary. “Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings.” (Patton, 2002) To

analyze qualitative research one has to go through a mass amount of data, reducing it to themes, and figuring out the best way to properly communicate what had been found (Creswell, 2007). It is my goal to be able to present these findings in a variety of spheres and therefore I utilized an analysis procedure that allowed for me to have rich, full, and helpful understandings of the data.

I emailed demographic surveys using the Survey Monkey software. All analyses of the results were run by the same software. All interviews were transcribed. The transcriptions were read through twice. The first reading was conducted for overall understanding from thick description and to pull major common themes between participants' responses. Thick description allows for proper interpretation of the data (Patton, 2002). The second reading was to pull strong quotes or ideas presented by participants. Once this occurred overarching themes and findings were grouped together to better understand the major findings of the study.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Data that can be trusted is important. Many will argue that overall qualitative data cannot be truly reliable or valid because it cannot be objective. This is not the case. Validity refers to the description, conclusion, or interpretation of an account (Maxwell, 2005). There are measures that can be put into place and practices used to ensure qualitative work is both reliable and valid. After performing data analysis on the interviews I used the strategies of peer review, member checking, thick description, and clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study.

At the very beginning of my research journey, I found it important to be clear regarding my bias. Researcher bias can pose a threat to the validity of qualitative data (Maxwell,



2005). It was tempting to select data that will fit my existing theories and preconceptions. Therefore it was important for me to be explicit about what preconceived notions, understandings, and values I would bring with me into the research. As stated earlier, it is impossible to be completely objective as a qualitative researcher—that was not the goal. Rather, the goal was to be honest and constantly engaging with how my bias played a role in my interpretation and analysis. Maxwell (2005) states,

Qualitative research is not primarily concerned with eliminating variance between researchers in the values and expectations they bring to the study, but with understanding how a particular researcher's values and expectations influence the conduct and conclusions of the study (which may be either positive or negative) and avoiding the negative consequences (p.108).

Thick description through intensive interviews allows for “rich” data that lends itself to create a full, revealing picture of what is being studied (Maxwell, 2005). I employed this strategy through the use of verbatim transcripts and analysis write-ups that described in detail the setting and the participants within the setting. Peer review allows the check of analysis from an external source. My peer debriefer assisted in keeping me, the researcher, honest. Member checking is a practice that ensures the credibility of the data by seeking the views of the study participants; getting feedback from the people that are being researched (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005). I shared my written analyses of what participants shared to understand if I captured their account accurately. This is the best way in which to avoid misinterpretation (Maxwell, 2005). In employing these strategies it is my hope to strengthen the validity and reliability of my research.

## **Ethics**

Whenever you are studying people there is risk. When you study leadership and public figures you have an elevated threat. In general, I attempted to handle this research with an ethic of care as HBCUs have been on the receiving end of unethical research. In specific, I attempted to ensure that both the institutions and the board members being studied were not put at any undue risk and felt that they had as much agency in the research as possible.

Threats that were posed to the institutions were the possibility of being shown in a negative light. Though any institution that participates in research takes this risk, it is often of a graver consequence for HBCUs. HBCUs do not get the privilege to be viewed as institutions, but rather they are commonly seen as monolithic—one and the same. Therefore, when one institution is cast in a negative light, or a negative report is given, it defines every other HBCU. Though I approached this research with affection for HBCUs it was also my desire to be honest in my data collection, analysis, and report. It is of no benefit to not be forthright with my findings whether favorable or otherwise. However there is an ethic of care that must be taken. It is for this reason I made efforts to inform the presidents of the institutions about my study, data collection procedures, and offered a communication of findings at the conclusion of the study. I also made sure to have explicit consent from participants. There are no identifying markers on the interview recordings or interview transcripts that link participants to the institutions and data collected. Likewise, when my final write up occurred individual participants were not identified by name. Participants have pseudonyms or are generally identified by the board for which they serve. To further establish anonymity, the gender of participants is

not included in the final write up as this could easily aid in participant identification. To ensure confidentiality, information that inadvertently identified the participant or was highly sensitive was identified by participants and kept off the record. All of this information was presented at the forefront of the study so participants were aware in what they were participating and what that process entailed.

Board of trustee members are often leaders in the community, businessmen or businesswomen, faculty, and in the case of many church affiliated HBCUs, pastors and clergy. Because of their notable positions public image and reputation becomes crucial. Not only do board members have to be concerned with their public image but also the leadership's perception of them on the board. A board member who is viewed as contentious with the president or one that would bring harm to the institution could create problems depending on the environment. Anonymity and credible interpretation is vital. Consent forms were provided to the individual participants prior to interviewing and surveying to ensure they were aware of all that would be occurring during the interview process. I also performed member checks with information to make sure that my interpretation does not misrepresent. All participants received a draft of my final work to review. As I mentioned earlier, I engaged in peer review and debriefing to control for any personal biases. I was unable to totally remove bias, but I believe that being open and honest about my bias from the start of the research project aided in my constant engagement to ensure that I was not analyzing and interpreting data solely through that lens.

## **Limitations**

Every study has limitations. This study is no different. One major limitation was that of finances. My travel was limited to what my personal budget would allow. Due to this, in conjunction with participants' schedules, most of my interviews were limited to Skype and phone interviews as opposed to face to face. My sample also presented limitations in my study. Though it is important to get a range of experiences from a range of board members, I did find that newer board members at times did not know much about how their board works. Furthermore, board members who had not had the experience of participating in a presidential search process were unable to speak to certain areas of my study. To go along with that, some boards have a process that creates a subcommittee to engage in the presidential selection process. Overall, there were board members that were reluctant to participate due to the sensitive nature of the information connected to the work of the board. I also found a limitation that was unexpected. Due to the current political atmosphere in the AME church with a major election being conducted in the near future, some members declined participation due to political ramifications they believed participation would possess. This political concern also affected interviews as a couple of participants felt compelled to share items off the record as to not be at risk for political punishment from the church. Though these limitations presented themselves, through purposeful sampling, and the semi-structured questions that covered board work in general and board member socialization, I was able to collect fruitful data to aid in addressing my research questions.

Other limitations that presented themselves were access to the board meetings. Initially it was my hope to be able to observe institutions' board meetings. However, that

access was denied. Considering I was working within a certain data collection timeframe, I did not find this observation central to my study and decided to move forward with data collection. Board members' schedules also presented limitations. Board members were volunteers and did not work primarily for the university, and were often very busy people. Being able to find board members who had time in their schedules to participate was a task but one that was accomplished. However, there were board members that were unable to be included in the study, not due to lack of desire to participate but an inability to schedule interview times. Though these limitations were present, I attempted my best to keep limitations to a minimum during my data collection.

## **Chapter 4: Foundations and formations: The AME Church, higher education, and institutional Cases**

*“When God has a work to be executed he also chooses a man to execute it.”*

*- Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne*

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church has an instrumental and substantial role in the history of America in general, and Black America in specific. The AME church was more than a church but also a movement that grew out of the Free African Society. The AME church was founded following a walk out of then freed slaves, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, of St. George’s United Methodist Church in Philadelphia. Allen and Jones in an act of civil disobedience knelt at the church altar, where Black people were not allowed. Forcibly removed, Allen and Jones decided that God would want his followers to worship freely and not within the confines of discrimination. Walking out of St. George’s led to what is now one of the largest Black denominations of the Christian church. Initially Allen’s congregation remained a part of the United Methodist church. However, as more congregants faced discrimination Allen sued, successfully so, to be an independent institution. Very soon thereafter, he would follow through with the vision for the congregation to begin a new Wesleyan denomination—the AME church.

One of the symbols that would come to represent the AME church would be a cross intersected with an anvil, commonly found in a blacksmith’s shop. This anvil serves as a reminder of the ancestry of the early AME church. Bethel AME Church in Philadelphia, PA, affectionately known as “Mother Bethel”, is the first church founded by the denomination. Its early days, Mother Bethel was a blacksmith shop that the

congregants would gather to worship. The congregation would move this blacksmith shop to a parcel of land, which they collectively purchased. Mother Bethel still sits on the oldest piece of land owned by African Americans in the US. During its infancy the AME church could be found in cities such as Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Cincinnati, Detroit, and other cities where Blacksmith's work was prominent. Slave states also had congregations. AME churches could be found in Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, Louisiana, and South Carolina. In the 1850s the church found its way to California and Canada.

Once the Civil War concluded and the Reconstruction era began, the AME church would find its way deeper south. Congregations were established in Georgia, Florida, Texas and other Southern States. By 1880, the AME membership had reached 400,000 due to its rapid spread below the "Mason-Dixon" line. The 1890s would see the AME church's foray into the African continent establishing congregations in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and South Africa. Currently the AME church spans 39 countries across 5 continents.

The AME church since its foundation held a strong connection to social action. Participating in abolitionist movements, aiding in the care of Black persons being affected by Yellow Fever during its epidemic in early Philadelphia, allowing women to preach by ordaining Jarena Lee a minister in the church, the AME church saw social action, consciousness, and uplift as part of its ministry. This included the area of education. During the Reconstruction era, the church advocated for education for all citizens, particularly higher education and the education of clergy. One very vocal and

central figure in African Methodism's role in creating opportunities for citizens to access higher education was Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne.

Bishop Daniel A. Payne was born in 1811 to Methodist parents in South Carolina<sup>1</sup> Self-taught, in 1829 he opened his first school. Six years later the state of South Carolina would forbid the education of Blacks that would cause the school to close. Payne would flee north to pursue education and join the AME church in 1841. Bishop Daniel A. Payne contributed many gifts and served many roles in the AME church. These roles included but were not limited to clergyman, abolitionist, poet, ecumenist, hymn composer, and ecclesiastical leader (Strobert, 2003). However his most notable role may be that of educator. Payne saw education as more than a means to an end or a necessary task to achieve employment. Payne viewed education as a vehicle of social, psychological, economic, and religious liberation for oppressed persons, particularly Black people (Strobert, 2003). Furthermore, he believed educated ministers would aid in lifting "the mass of general ignorance" from the black community<sup>2</sup>. It was this view that served as a strong foundation for one of Payne's most notable contributions to American history and to US higher education—the founding of Wilberforce University.

In 1863, Payne convinced the AME church to purchase a school established in 1856 by the Methodist Episcopal Church for Negro children. This school would be what is currently known as Wilberforce University. Payne would be Wilberforce's first president and run the school until 1877.

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<sup>1</sup> ([http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/people/daniel\\_payne.html](http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/people/daniel_payne.html)).

<sup>2</sup> ([http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/people/daniel\\_payne.html](http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/people/daniel_payne.html))



## Wilberforce University

Wilberforce University, located in Xenia, OH, is the nation's oldest private, historically black university. Wilberforce was named in honor of 18th century abolitionist, William Wilberforce (*History of WU*, [www.wilberforce.edu](http://www.wilberforce.edu)). Along with AME pastor James A. Shorter, who would later be an AME bishop, and Dr. John G. Mitchell of the Eastern District Public School of Cincinnati, Bishop Payne bought Wilberforce College now Wilberforce University, paying its debt. Other institutions were birthed from the Wilberforce womb including a normal and industrial department that would later become neighboring HBCU Central State University, and a seminary in Payne Theological Seminary. Wilberforce University plays a significant role in the history of higher education, HBCUs, and US Black culture. Wilberforce was born during the very infancy of the establishment of HBCUs. Education that was being provided for Black students was done through private liberal arts colleges that accepted Black students (Anderson, 1988). However even at these institutions, there was not a large number of Black students enrolled. There also existed a small number of normal schools and colleges in the South, but they were often under resourced and not supported by the state (Anderson, 1988). The movement to establish Black colleges really was hinged on the relationship of philanthropic efforts and Black communities and Black leaders (Anderson, 1988). These philanthropic efforts were housed within three major groups: Missionary philanthropy, Negro philanthropy, and industrial philanthropy (Anderson, 1988). Missionary philanthropy consisted of northern White benevolent societies and denominations. Industrial philanthropy consisted of large corporate philanthropic

foundations and wealthy individuals. The third group, Negro philanthropy, would be where the founders of Wilberforce would fall.

Though all three groups were passionate about Negro education, the motivation for and execution of this education was a heavily debated point (Anderson, 1988). The relationship of classical liberal training to the larger issues facing Black communities was one interpreted differently by different factions. With Reconstruction underway many groups were trying to understand or determine what the Negro's place would be in the "New South." "Each philanthropic group, therefore, took as its point of departure a particular view of the relationship of higher education to the "Negro's place" in the New South and shaped its educational policy and practices around that vision."(Anderson, 1988, p.475). Many White missionaries saw the newly freed slaves as being "tainted" and demoralized by the institution of slavery. Therefore, the education they would provide would serve as not only a way to train them in head, but also to evangelize and instill a sense of piety and morality. Before these newly freed slaves could rejoin society they had to be taught how to be "good people" and conversely "good citizens." White missionary philanthropist also supported classical liberal arts education as a means for Black Americans to achieve racial equality in varied aspects of society. There was a belief, naively so, that this would give Black Americans equal footing with their White counterparts limited only by their own "intrinsic worth and effort." (p.475, Anderson, 1988). To be clear, these missionary philanthropists were not saying that Blacks were equal to Whites. Equality was strictly a political and legal definition; social equality was not believed (Anderson, 1988).

Industrial philanthropists saw Black higher education as an economic investment. Focusing the curriculum of schools they would fund on industrial training, this group of philanthropists favored racial inequality in the American South (Anderson, 1988). Many argued that the liberal arts education pushed by White missionary philanthropists was of no practical use to Blacks as they would not translate into actual jobs. Industrial philanthropists felt it futile and dangerous for Blacks who would mostly only find jobs as sharecroppers and farmers to learn such subjects as Latin and Philosophy. This group of philanthropists espoused that manual labor was the “natural environment” for Blacks and generally opposed the development of Black higher education (Anderson, 1988). For industrial philanthropists the course of Black higher education was to be driven by the immediate needs of society, particularly the New South, and not the individual or even collective aspirations of Black students.

Though the ideals of the White missionary philanthropists and industrial philanthropists often used the Black faces and voices of W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, respectively, to push their agendas, particularly in Black communities, there was a group who still needed to speak regarding Black education—Negro philanthropists. Negro philanthropists were mostly Black religious organizations. Leading the way in the area of Negro Philanthropy was the AME church. The AME church paved the way for Black religious denominations to establish and maintain colleges for Black students (Anderson, 1988). The first of these AME institutions was Wilberforce College, now Wilberforce University. With this history, Wilberforce University is the first HBCU founded by Black people. Wilberforce’s foundation paved the way for groups such as the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion) church and the Colored Methodist

Episcopal (CME) church to found institutions of higher learning for Blacks. Many Black Baptist denominations also founded institutions but were under the auspices and control of the American Baptist Home Mission Society. “Still, several state conventions of black Baptists undertook to provide higher education for black youth in pressing areas not provided for by the ABHMS.” (Anderson, 1988, p. 475). Though many of the Negro philanthropists were at a social and economic disadvantage in comparison with their White counterparts, they proved successful in their ventures. Black church organizations had been able to provide an average annual income that was in excess of those operated by White denominational boards (Anderson, 1988). The AME church was seen as the leader of Black church supported educational institutions for Black persons. Well in line with their identity of a church centered on liberation and social awareness, Wilberforce University became a symbol of education, Black empowerment, and uplift.

Wilberforce became known as one of the premier institutions to send Black youth, especially those whose families were members of the AME church. It was also not uncommon for young clergypersons and those desiring to pastor in the AME church to begin their higher learning at Wilberforce. Its reputation spreading, it even attracted the likes of W.E.B. Du Bois who served as a professor of the institution for a time. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it expanded its mission to also include the education of South Africans. Among the first group of board of trustees were Bishop Daniel A. Payne, Rev. Lewis Woodson, Ishmael Keith, and Alfred Anderson of the AME church. Also on the board was the Governor of Ohio, a member of the Ohio State legislature, and other Methodist leaders from the White community. Though the dynamics of Wilberforce board membership would change over time one constant would be the presence of an AME

bishop and a number of AME clergy and AME representatives. Bishop Payne would also be the first Black college president in the US. Wilberforce went on to educate generations of Black leaders, scholars, doctors, scientists, teachers, and politicians.

Wilberforce's inception established and solidified the AME church's role in Black higher education. The success of Wilberforce in conjunction with the gospel of education as liberation, and the spread of African Methodism, the AME church found itself in the business of higher education. The church would go on to found a number of other schools including Allen University, Edward Waters College, Morris Brown College, Paul Quinn College, Shorter College, and Wilberforce Community College in Evaton, South Africa and AME University in Monrovia, Liberia. As many successes in higher education and successful graduates of their institutions as the AME church has had they have been no stranger to challenge. As many HBCUs, particularly private HBCUs, AME institutions of higher learning have had to navigate the balancing act of a mission of access and strained resources. Also, as many of these institutions were founded during the Postbellum south and segregation, they were able to rely on a steady stream of students, as Black students had few options and low mobility. The AME church served as a strong feeder into these institutions. However, as segregation came to an end and federal and state legislatures pushed for Historically White Institutions (HWIs) to open their doors to more Black students, lest they face penalty, the HBCU market share of students was cut. Not only were Black students being courted by HWIs, but most HWIs were far better resourced and were able to offer financial assistance and amenities that HBCUs simply could not provide, AME institutions included. Over time various external and internal factors have and continue to present challenges for AME institutions as they

press to effectively execute their missions. These challenges include but are not limited to accreditation challenges, stringent federal funds, fiscal challenges, administrative turnover, and dwindling enrollments. Despite these challenges AME institutions continue to hold a place in the US higher education landscape.

An important component to the sustainability of these institutions, though often overlooked, is the role of the board of trustees. The fiduciary, strategic planning, and decision making responsibilities beholden to this group have direct impact on the success and operation of the institution. As AME church related institutions are all small, private and church affiliated institutions, there is much to learn not only about these institutions but also about what challenges may apply to institutions with similar traits. Though these findings are not generalizable they can lay a foundation to further exploration into the role, impact, and influence of board members at church affiliated HBCUs, among other similar institutions. For this reason, I chose to explore three cases to learn more about AME affiliated board members, their experiences, and the ways in which they approach and engage in the decision making process and work of their respective boards.

### **Allen University**

Allen University, founded in 1870, is located in Columbia, SC. The end of the American Civil War brought with it an expansion of the AME Church in southern states. Allen University found its inception being birthed from this expansion. Following with the self-empowerment principle found in the foundation of the AME belief system, there was a desire from the church to educate the slaves newly freed due to the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. This being the case, funds were raised by AME church members and clergy to purchase a 150 acre farm located in Cokesbury, South Carolina.

“They did so in hopes of locating a school there that would be the “First institution of learning consecrated to negro self- activity and negro manhood”” in the state of South Carolina.” (*Allen’s Legacy*, [www.allen.edu](http://www.allen.edu)).

The development of the institution was led by the Rev. Simon Miller who was serving as the Presiding Elder of the Abbeville District of the AME Church. This institution became known as Payne Institute, after Wilberforce University founder, Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne. The institution was not met with overwhelming support from White South Carolinians as well as Northern Black and White missionaries.

“Payne Institute came into being in spite on objections of white South Carolinians who had a fear of educated African-Americans, and of black and white missionaries from the northern states, who questioned the ability of the AME Church to undertake such an educational enterprise.” (*Allen’s Legacy*, [www.allen.edu](http://www.allen.edu)). However the institution pressed on and in 1871 the deed for the land was presented to the Columbia Annual Conference making it now property of the AME Church.

Under the leadership of Bishop William Fisher Dickerson the Payne Institute was relocated to Columbia, SC in 1880. This move was initiated in belief that it would aid in the school’s growth and expansion. After its relocation Payne Institute’s name was changed to Allen University to honor the AME church founder Bishop Richard Allen. “Allen University is the first such institution in South Carolina founded by African-Americans with the purpose of educating African-Americans.” (*Allen’s Legacy*, [www.allen.edu](http://www.allen.edu)). Allen University rapidly grew once in Columbia, producing 75 graduates within 9 years. “Twelve earned baccalaureate degrees, 15 were graduated with degrees in law, and 48 finished the Normal (teaching) Department.” (*Allen’s Legacy*,

[www.allen.edu](http://www.allen.edu)). Like many HBCUs, Allen University began as an institution to educate Black students at all levels, having elementary and secondary areas as well as postsecondary. “The grammar school was discontinued in the mid-twenties, and the high school was closed after the graduation of the class of 1933.” (*Allen’s Legacy*, [www.allenuniversity.edu](http://www.allenuniversity.edu)).

Allen University has had to endure many challenges as the nation and nature of higher education grew and evolved. The university managed to remain open during The Great Depression and during World War II. The university would also add various departments to its offerings including a department of sciences and languages and a department of humanities, philosophy, psychology, and religion. The university would also physically expand adding and acquiring buildings.

Allen University continues to fulfill its mission of education and uplift. Allen University’s mission statement proposes that, “Allen University is an academic community which provides students an opportunity to obtain a baccalaureate degree in liberal arts and professional programs. The University has a strong unalterable commitment to teaching in delivery of its baccalaureate programs.” (*Institutional Profile*, [www.allenuniversity.edu](http://www.allenuniversity.edu)) The core values are integrity, accountability, respect, excellence, and faith (*Institutional Profile*, [www.allenuniversity.edu](http://www.allenuniversity.edu)). It is with these core values the leadership of Allen University continues to provide an opportunity for young people to attain higher education.

Allen University serves a majority of Black students, with a student population that is 99.4% Black (Education Trust, 2014). The student body is 59.4% female and 40.6% male. Allen also provides great access. One hundred percent of students who



apply are accepted and 91.1% of incoming freshmen are Pell Grant recipients (Education Trust, 2014). Though the average price for students living on campus is \$21,300 the average net price for students minus grants is \$12,785 (Education Trust, 2014). Though this is the case, there are some challenges that Allen University faces as they move forward. Currently, Allen University's six-year graduation rate is 21.3% and their first year retention rate is 36%. They also have a transfer out rate of 20.7%, which could contribute, to their low graduation rate. Their graduation rates have been pretty steady for the past 5 years (NCES, 2013). Allen University is currently accredited but was issued a warning from SACS this past year in June. The warning, which lasts for 12 months, was given after review of a First Monitoring Report following the submission of a Referral Report in December 2013, financial statements, and review by a Special Committee. The reasons provided for the warning were a failure to demonstrate compliance with SACS requirements regarding the governing board, financial resources, fiscal stability of the institution, control of finances, sponsored research/external funds, student achievement, and Title IV program responsibilities.

Allen University has also faced challenges in recent years in regards to leadership. The immediate past president was only in office for 3 years. The school currently has an interim president pulled from within the university ranks. It has yet to be announced if the school is conducting an official presidential search. Also, the enrollment has dropped from 848 students in 2011 to 651 in 2013 (NCES, 2013). Allen University must address these challenges while also finding avenues to increase their endowment, which currently sits at \$312, 884 (Education Trust, 2014). Allen University has many successes, but also

has much to address. Having strong leadership will prove important moving into their next era.

### **Edward Waters College**

Edward Waters College, founded in 1866, is the oldest private institution of higher education in the state of Florida. Initially named “Brown Theological Institute”, the institution was founded specifically to educate newly freed slaves—founded by Blacks for Blacks. With the social and political changes brought about by the Reconstruction era, Rev. Charles H. Pearce, a presiding elder of the AME Church, recognized a need for the education of newly emancipated Blacks. Rev. Pearce also realized there was no such institution in place to meet said need. With the help of the Rev. William G. Steward, the first AME pastor in the state, Rev. Pearce raised funds to establish what would be known as Edward Waters College. The school offered courses at the elementary, high school, college, and seminary levels (*History of Edward Waters College*, [www.ewc.edu](http://www.ewc.edu)). The first building began construction in 1872 on 10 acres of land in Live Oak, FL. Others joined in the support of the institution including General M.S. Littlefield, state Treasurer Simon Conaber, and Lieutenant General William Gleason. In 1892 the school’s name officially became Edward Waters College in honor of the third elected Bishop of the AME Church.

In 1901 Jacksonville was destroyed by fire and Edward Waters College along with it. In 1904 the board of trustees purchased the land and rebuilt where the school currently resides. The school continues to exist and is indeed moving forward in fulfilling its mission of higher education for Black students. Edward Waters College’s mission states that,

“Edward Waters College is a small, private, Christian Historically Black, Urban, and Liberal Arts College that offers quality baccalaureate degree programs. The College strives to prepare students holistically to advance in a global society through the provision of intellectually stimulating programs and an environment, which emphasizes high moral and spiritual values in keeping with the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Edward Waters College seeks to develop excellence in scholarship, research and service for the betterment of humanity.”  
(*Vision, Mission, & Core Values*, [www.ewc.edu](http://www.ewc.edu)).

This mission is carried out through the core values of Christian principles, excellence, civic engagement, cooperation, customer service, professionalism, scholarship, and diversity. Edward Waters has recently received national attention for the ways in which it is serving both its students and community. Just recently biology professor Dr. Anita Mandal participated in a national biomedical research conference. They have also been a part of national conversations regarding how to successfully approach developmental education, particularly in the minority serving institution (MSI) sector of higher education. The Edward Waters College Schell Community Center, located in Northwest Jacksonville, provides services and resources for senior citizens. The success of the school has also translated into giving. Edward Waters just received a \$2 million gift from a Florida philanthropist, the largest gift given by a single donor in the school’s history. Edward Waters College appears to be growing and thriving as they move forward.

However things have not always been calm and smooth for the institution. In 2004 the institution lost its SACS accreditation in a very public case in which the

Commission stated that the institution had plagiarized parts of its Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The school also faced accreditation challenges in the mid 1990's and was placed on probation. Edward Waters College did decide to appeal the SACS decision. The school and SACS decided to pursue mediation when it was found that Edward Waters had a strong case to prove that SACS had not provided the institution with due process. The Commission decided to reinstate Edward Waters accreditation the following June. The president at the time, Jimmy Jenkins, was fired and replaced with an interim president. Edward Waters was able to be released from probation and regain their full accreditation in 2006. In 2007, Claudette Williams made history as the first woman president of Edward Waters College. When Williams took the helm at the institution she was faced with a \$3.3 million deficit. During her tenure she was able to significantly decrease the deficit. Staying until 2010, Williams resigned to transition to a vice-president position with SACS. With Williams' transition, Edward Waters appointed, Nathaniel Glover interim president and he would later be selected as the official president, a position in which he currently continues to serve.

When Glover first entered office he announced that the institution still faced a \$1.8 million deficit. This was one of Glover's main focuses, and he believed with institutional fundraising and the aid of the AME church it would be possible. Glover, an alumnus of Edward Waters, also had strong ties to the Jacksonville community as he served as the first Black sheriff of the city prior to taking on the role of president of Edward Waters. Glover also served on the board of trustees at Edward Waters during the 2005 accreditation challenges and was a part of the presidential search committee that selected Claudette Williams.

Edward Waters continues to thrive under Glover's tenure. Just recently the school opened up the Edward Waters College Center for Criminal Justice and Forensic Science and Jacksonville Sheriff's Office Zone 5 Substation. Edward Waters College currently has an endowment of \$1,660,594 and a 22.7% acceptance rate (Education Trust, 2014). The current first year retention rate is 53%. Their current graduation rate is 22.9% but the institution also has a 33.1% transfer out rate which could play a role in the graduation rate (Education Trust, 2014). It is important to note that though the graduation rate is 22.9% it has risen from the 11% rate that it was in 2008 (NCES, 2014). The current enrollment is 862 students. This is an increase from 843 students in 2008 (NCES, 2014). Edward Waters College has gone through ups and downs. It, like many institutions, knows the influence leadership can have on institutional success.

### **Paul Quinn College**

Paul Quinn College is an institution that has gone through many seasons and evolutions. Founded in 1872, Paul Quinn is the oldest historically Black college west of the Mississippi. Originally called the Connectional High School and Institute, the institution was founded by a group of AME ministers in Austin, TX to educate free Blacks and their children. In 1877 the college made its first move to Waco, Texas. With this move came a name change to Waco College. Modeled after the Tuskegee Institute approach to education the students were taught practical, industrial skills. These skills included blacksmithing, carpentry, and other skills that were common to the jobs available to Blacks. Much like its other southern AME affiliated institutions, the church rallied for more support of the institution as more AME districts were established in the South. It was during this time that the institution expanded, with a land purchase of more

than 20 acres and curriculum additions that included more classical and liberal arts subjects. In 1881 the college was chartered by the state of Texas and changed its name to Paul Quinn after one of the AME bishops.

Paul Quinn continued to grow. Between 1950 and 1954 many buildings were constructed and erected on the campus. Some administrative changes occurred as well. In 1962, Bishop O.L. Sherman had the Charter of the college changed so that trustees could be elected regardless of race, creed, or color. This allowed new leaders from Central Texas to be added to the board. Also in 1972, the board received accreditation from SACS for the first time. Paul Quinn would find itself moving again. After acquiring the Bishop College campus they would move to Dallas, TX in 1990. At the time Paul Quinn boasted of over 1,000 students. But tough times would lie ahead.

It would become apparent that Paul Quinn was facing some trouble, when in 2007, the resignation of then president John Waddell had the institution searching for its fourth president in two years. This instability of leadership was symptomatic of deeper issues occurring within the institution. Paul Quinn would finally find a president in 2007, in board member Michael Sorrell. But, just when it looked like the school was about to turn a corner another challenge arose. In 2009 SACS would announce that Paul Quinn College's accreditation had been revoked. The SACS reasoning for stripping accreditation were financial issues and sub-par student outcomes. Paul Quinn did appeal the SACS decision but the press of the loss of accreditation drastically affected enrollment. With what was akin to a mass exodus, Sorrell and the institution found itself on life support, with many in the higher education community believing they were witnessing the closing of yet another HBCU. Though this would be a tough time for the

institution, President Michael Sorrell held onto the vision that it would not be the last days for Paul Quinn College.

President Sorrell made drastic changes to the physical plant of the institution, tearing down unsightly buildings and making \$4 million of capital improvements. He also reduced institutional debt by 40 percent. A “business dress” code was instituted on campus and a challenge put forth that the institution would heavily focus on recruitment and retention. Sorrell began to build Paul Quinn’s identity of being a great small institution focused on servant leadership, instilling a mantra of “We Over Me.” One of the most press attracting acts, non-traditional of many colleges, was when the football team was eliminated from the athletics program. The field once used for football games was then turned into what is now known as the “We Over Me” farm. With a partnership with PepsiCo the school was able to begin an urban farm, in what was classified as a food desert<sup>3</sup>. Students are able to work at the farm and make \$10 per hour. Paul Quinn has been able to strike a deal with the Dallas Cowboys where they sell 17,500 pounds of food to be used for concessions at the Dallas Cowboys games. The college has also produced over \$2 million in budget surpluses in 2009, 2010, and 2011. In 2011, Paul Quinn received accreditation from Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS) accrediting agency. They have also just received the largest donation in the history of the school with a \$4.4 million gift from philanthropist Trammell S. Crow.

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<sup>3</sup> Food deserts are defined as urban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. Instead of supermarkets and grocery stores, these communities may have no food access or are served only by fast food restaurants and convenience stores that offer few healthy, affordable food options.

Though Paul Quinn is heading in the right direction they still have their challenges. Paul Quinn's graduation rate is currently below 1% (Education Trust, 2014). It is important to note however that graduation rates are based on 4 year cohorts. This means that the cohort that would be calculated in this current graduation rate would be from the time period of Paul Quinn's loss of accreditation. The effect of the changes at Paul Quinn may not reflect in IPEDS data for a few years. An indication of this is apparent when looking at the institution's current retention rates. Though the institution has drastically low graduation rates, they have a 77% retention rate (Education Trust, 2014). Still focused on access, 87% of Paul Quinn's students are Pell Grant recipients. However, with an enrollment of 243 students (NCES, 2014) Paul Quinn is still looking to grow. Paul Quinn believes in greatness and operates with the core values of leave, lead, live, and love; Leave places better than you found them, lead from wherever you are, live a life that matters, love something greater than yourself. Based on a mission of providing, "a quality, faith-based education that addresses the academic, social, and Christian development of students and prepares them to be servant leaders and agents of change in their communities," (*About Paul Quinn*, [www.pqc.edu](http://www.pqc.edu)), and instilling within students, staff, and faculty, the core values known as "The 4 Ls", Paul Quinn aims to become a great institution.

The AME church has played an instrumental role in the education of Blacks in this country. The AME church made practical their belief in self-empowerment by raising their own monies to be the first group of Black people overall and often the first in specific areas to found institutions of higher education for Black people. AME affiliated institutions are living monuments that speak to the resilience, determination,



and collective power of Black Americans. The fortitude of these institutions through various trials, from reconstruction to Jim Crow, from The Great Depression to the recent economic recession, from accreditation challenges to constricting federal funding, also speaks to the deep intertwined faith found in the fabric of these campuses.

At the core of all of these institutions' great sagas is the role of leadership. It was the leadership of the AME church that had the vision to forge into the area of higher education. It was also the leadership of the church that rallied together to create institutions in various areas of the country during Reconstruction and the expansion of the denomination. At each one of these institutions it was the president and the board of trustees in specific eras that enabled the campuses to grow in size and in intellectual depth. It was also the president and trustees that played central roles in some of the most troubling and challenging times in the lives of these institutions. Yet and still, it is the presidents and the trustees who have helped guide these institutions through those valleys only rise to mountaintop experiences once more.

The three institutions I have selected for this multiple case study are all in various places in their institutional life journeys. Understanding the dynamics of the ways in which their leadership, the president and the board of trustees, approaches the decision making process proves important in understanding the role these entities play in the success and strategic planning of the AME affiliated college. Though literature has spoken to the importance of presidential leadership, much has not been said regarding the board of trustees, particularly at HBCUs. With institutions that are founded with such an interest in self-empowerment and control of one's own destiny, understanding the role of boards and the individual role and effect of board members lends insight into the administration

of these institutions. Furthermore, with three AME affiliated institutions, that are all unique in their own right and at different phases of institutional life, this study provides further understanding regarding how the composition and value systems of board members plays a role in the approach to the work of the board.

## **Chapter 5: Boards, backgrounds, and beliefs**

The board of trustees is a key part of the governance structure at a higher education institution. Though a universal fact, how a board looks, is constructed, and operates across institutions varies from institution to institution. Factors ranging from institutional context and culture to funding structures can affect the structure and composition of an institution's board of trustees. Though all three of the cases in this study are AME affiliated institutions, I found the aforementioned principle to be present. There are some similarities among the boards. Equally there are aspects about each board that are unique to each institution. Institutions often have formal structures in place regarding how board members are selected and how boards operate within the institutional leadership structure. However, in most organizations there is an informal understanding of organizational practices as well as formal. Through interviewing board members and presidents I was able to gain insight into the board of trustees at these AME affiliated institutions. Participants' aid in providing a deeper understanding of board selection processes, the composition of boards of trustees, the structure of the board, and various values held by board members. The role of the board and the decision making process of the boards from the perspective of the participants will also be discussed.

### **Board Selection and Composition**

Allen University, Edward Waters College, and Paul Quinn College have various board compositions. Allen University has 17 members on its board of trustees. Of those 17 members, 14 are men and 3 are women. Eight are ordained clergy. Edward Waters College's board consists of 27 members. Of the 27 members, 15 are men and 12 are women. Eleven are ordained clergy. Paul Quinn College's board consists of 19 members.

Of the 19 members, 12 are men and 7 are women. Nine are ordained clergy. Though a number of study participants were ordained clergy members there were a number who were lay members of the AME church. Participants' occupations fell into four main categories: business, clergy, government, and higher education. Each institution had their own procedures to select board members. In their interviews, members shared their personal paths to becoming members of their respective institutions' boards of trustees.

### **Path to the board**

Participants came to serve on their boards by being approached or recommended by a sitting board member, or being approached by the board chair. In these three cases the board chair is also a serving AME bishop<sup>4</sup>. Members were also elected from an annual conference<sup>5</sup> in the AME episcopal district<sup>6</sup> where the institution resides. Being approached by current board members, particularly with boards that have nominating committees, is a common practice. Boards at private institutions often approach board member selection in this manner. However with these AME affiliated institutions this practice is a bit more nuanced as participants revealed that a number of them were approached due to their position, office, or relationship with the AME church. One participant discusses how they were encouraged to seek a seat on the board to ensure the

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<sup>4</sup> A bishop in the AME church is an itinerant elder, elected to the office of bishop by the General Conference (*Doctrine and Discipline of the AME Church, 2012*)

<sup>5</sup> The AME church is organized into 20 districts known as Episcopal Districts. Annual conferences are the designated areas that make up episcopal districts. Annual conferences are composed of all traveling elders, deacons, and licentiates and all local elders and local deacons; presidents of the Conference Lay Organization, Missionary Society; Conference Director of Christian Education and YPD Director, Conference Director of Music together with one elected lay member and at least one elected lay person between the ages of 18-30, when possible from each charge within its bounds. (*Doctrine and Discipline of the AME Church, 2012*)

<sup>6</sup> Episcopal Districts are designated geographic areas, which make up the AME church. Each district is assigned to be supervised by an active bishop for a minimum of four years to a maximum of eight.

voice of the AME laity was present among the numerous AME clergy on the board. This participant shared, "...traditionally the lay organization<sup>7</sup> really wanted representation on the board because we were a little fearful of too many clergy being on the board without any input from the laity. My conference president<sup>8</sup> just really pressed for me to be on the board." Though the participant expressed that they possessed other skills that made them a viable candidate for board service, the pushing factor appeared to be the desire of district laity to have representation on a clergy heavy board. This motivation or push behind seeking board service was very much connected to the political dynamics of the AME church structure. This theme found itself appearing multiple times as participants shared their paths to seats on the board. One participant shared that their spouse held a leadership position in a major component of the AME church, in that district. After she was appointed to her position, this board member was approached to serve on the board. Another board member explained how their board seat was obtained as a part of an election by their annual conference. This is to say that the board seat was obtained by an electorate of church delegates and pastors, who may or may not be privy to the actual state of the institution and its institutional needs. The relationship and positioning of persons in the AME church, particularly in the episcopal district where an institution resides, can play a major role in potential members being approached or selected for the board of trustees at these AME institutions.

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<sup>7</sup> The Lay Organization is a component of the AME church. The purpose of this organization shall be to organize and train the laity of the African Methodist Episcopal Church so that each lay person may utilize to the maximum the abilities and skills granted by God, in assisting with the improvement and extension of God's kingdom, and creating happiness, peace, and harmony among its members. (*Doctrine and Discipline of the AME Church*, 2012)

<sup>8</sup> The conference president is the president of the lay organization at the Annual Conference level

There were a few members however who found themselves in board seats due to longstanding relationships with the institution. One member explained how the company for which he works has held a seat on the institutions' board for a number of years. Therefore, he was selected as the next person to assume the seemingly de facto seat. The trustee states, "I work for *Company*<sup>9</sup> *X* and we have had someone on the board ever since....the 90's and so when our chief executive was actually president, he was on the board and he retired. So I was asked to serve on the board on behalf of *Company X*." Other members previously served in auxiliary roles with the board, which eventually led to an invitation to serve as a member. One such member recalls being invited by a, at the time, sitting member with whom he served on other boards. "He called me to see if I would work with them on raising money. So I went to the college and I worked with them for about a year in trying to raise funds and then they asked me if I would be on the board." Long existing relationships prior to board service were not limited to community, corporate, or consultative sorts. It is not uncommon to have a number of alumni on the board of trustees at any institution of higher education (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). This proves true for the board members of these institutions. One member talked about their long standing relationship with the institution and the seasons of that relationship. The trustee states, "The one reason is that I had worked at [this institution] as a faculty member, well actually as a staff and a faculty member, and I was the first pastor<sup>10</sup> on this district.... So I've been involved with [this institution] for upwards of 30 years."

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<sup>9</sup> A pseudonym for the company was used to protect the identity of the participant

<sup>10</sup> The first pastor of a district is a term often used internally in reference to the pastor with the highest ranked charge in the district. Rank is usually determined by number of members and amount of funds annually raised.

The path to the board at these institutions manifested in different ways. However all of these manifestations hinged on one salient aspect—relationship. Though literature focusing on trusteeship speaks to the existence of networks in institutional governance structures, it does not largely speak to the influence and role of those networks on not merely the work of the board, but also the matter of board composition (Kezar, 2004; Taylor, 2012; Tyler, 1998). However, searching widely in the organizational theory and behavior bodies of work it is made clear that social networks—relationships by another name—play a role in the operations of an organization and the members of that organization (Leana & Van Buren, 1999; Kezar, 2004; Taylor, 2012; Tyler, 1998 ). The relationships that brought board members to service in these three cases resided with both people and institutions. The relationship between board members, institutions and people, particularly sitting board members, is a common find at higher education institutions. Many board members did not express being approached to serve due to having a specific skill that the institution needed to fulfill its strategic plan. This is contrary to what Wilson (2015) describes as ideal board recruitment practices. Wilson poses that a strategic plan must be devised by a board and along with that plan, a list specifying different board leadership positions. It is this list that aids a board in anticipating its needs and ultimately recruiting members who hold characteristics which can help meet these needs. Members cannot be considered good selections solely based on relationships (Wilson, 2015). In these three cases, the relationships that members held with the AME church as an institution, shines new light on the relationship between and intersection of two institutions and the institutions’ governing structures and politics.

## Composition

Board members make their way to their respective boards of trustees in various pathways. These various pathways cause individuals to flow into a larger collective. It is important to understand the ways individuals find themselves sitting in board seats. It is also important to understand what a board looks like once all of these individuals are seated at the table. I explore the composition of the boards of trustees at these three institutions through demographic information, backgrounds and skill sets, and the networks and connections represented.

**Demographic information.** In total women consisted of 43% of board members. Of the individual cases Edward Waters College was closest to gender parity on the board with women making up 44% of the board. Paul Quinn would be next with 37% and Allen with 21%. Looking specifically at the board member study, 12 were men and 4 were women. Racially, 13 board members who participated identified as Black/African American and 3 identified as White. Nine board member participants were ordained clergy. The age range for participants was between 45 and 75 years of age and older. Across all three cases, 11 participants mentioned some type of affiliation with the AME church. That is a little over half of the total number of participants. This affiliation may or may not be in the capacity of being an ordained reverend. For non-clergy members, this affiliation included simple local <sup>11</sup>church membership, local church officers, annual conference, episcopal district officer, or connectional<sup>12</sup> officer. It is important to note

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<sup>11</sup> Local church refers to individual charges/churches

<sup>12</sup> The term connection is used to refer to the entire AME church. The connectional level is the highest level a person can serve in the AME church.



that being affiliated with the AME church is not within its self an indicator of occupation—the two are not one and the same. Five participants identified as not being affiliated with the AME church.

**Background and skill sets.** Board members hail from diverse professional backgrounds. These various backgrounds undoubtedly bring diverse skill sets. I want to point out that the skill sets of board members are self-identified. This means that whether or not the participants actually possess or have expertise in these skill sets can be debated. However these self-perceptions prove insightful and contributive to understanding board composition at these institutions. These self-perceptions show themselves as motivators to accepting the opportunity to serve as well as foundational elements to a belief in possessing the competency to serve, and serve well, in the capacity of trustee. The professional backgrounds of participants coalesced into four main areas: Business, clergy, government, and higher education. This reflects the backgrounds of most boards of trustees at private institutions across the nation. (Alderson, 1997; Kohn & Mortimer, 1983; Phillips, 2002) Participants' backgrounds fell into these four areas, however a direct connection between professional background and self-identified skills sets is not always present. That being the case, I have organized the participants' perceived skill sets into four categories: Business and management, ministry and connection to faith communities, communication and personality traits, and education and experience.

Higher education institutions are not only places where students come to learn and develop and where faculty comes to increase and bequeath knowledge. In this era of higher education, institutions are also businesses. As more institutional leaders and governing bodies embrace this reality, leadership with business savvy and prowess

becomes highly desirable; this includes board of trustee members. In this context, participants express that their understanding of and experience in the realm of business are invaluable skill sets that they bring to their role as board members. Often this business oriented skill set focused on the area of finances or fundraising. A participant shared how their background with a federal agency provided strengths in the area of finance and development. The participant states,

Now my background in the other world was with the Housing and Urban Development. So I am really kind of astute in development... How money should be drawn out from the escrow to pay for the renovations or restoration of whatever buildings that we have. So those two, the finance and budget, and buildings and grounds I think I'm pretty solid in those just because of my career with the federal agency.

One participant spoke to the importance of their financial background in the area of accounting for the institution,

I brought to the board my experience as a financial person. I knew finance. I was in charge every year of a ... I was overseeing from an accounting perspective,... I brought my experience of finance and knowledge of finance. I was always involved. I was in charge of accounting budgets every year of over 200 million dollars. So I think that brought something in terms of financial knowledge and that kind of stuff.

Other participants did not speak to specific experiences in financial arenas. Rather these participants expressed that a more general, a more broad understanding of financial issues was the primary asset they brought to their respective boards. Different participants stated:

I think brought some insight from a perspective of somebody to being able to handle a lot of finance and knowledge of finance, and I think that helps -17:29- and I was able to handle that. That was a big experience, amount of experience that helped me about finance and knowledge of finance that I was able to share. and,

... although [I am] not an accountant by training but I've spent enough time around the corporate financials to at least have a good working understanding of the financial statements and so forth.

There were participants who did not see their skill set as one of financial savvy, but rather in the realm of fundraising. Fundraising is a key function of any institution's board of trustees (Alderson, 1997; Taylor et al., 1996). In the HBCU sector, institutions are hypersensitive to the need for fundraising. HBCUs are often under resourced and underfunded in comparison to their PWI counterparts. In the case of private HBCUs, as these three cases, the average endowment amount is a little over \$38 million. This pales in comparison to the average endowment amount of \$223 million found at private PWIs (Gasman & Bowman, 2011; Gasman et al., 2013; NCES, 2011). Having the skill set of fundraising as a board member at private HBCUs is important and immensely beneficial. Participants expressed this in responses regarding the skill sets they brought to the board which spoke to them being a good financial resource to the college and being a skilled fundraiser. A particular member expressed that they had a unique skill in being able to identify streams of money and bringing in resources that would help the university meet its objectives.

Board of trustee members serve as ambassadors for their institutions—individual marketing machines if you will. (Taylor et al., 1996). One participant spoke specifically to the advantage their business connections and marketing gave to the boards on which they previously served. The participant reflected, “So just from influence of raising funds, raising awareness, I think my name brought some credibility to them in terms of folks that know me in the community.” The participant continued in saying, “I run businesses so I have a lot of connections in the community whether it's the legal community in the state or the business community.” Participants also expressed their skill sets in the form of general business knowledge due to either owning businesses or

experience in the real estate industry. A couple of participants also mentioned their legal backgrounds as beneficial skill sets.

As AME affiliated institutions, within every institution's mission is mention of Christian principles or faith based education. Faith and ministry appear to be salient to these institutions. This is reflected in a number of responses from participants concerning the skill sets that they bring to their boards. One participant stated, "I think what I bring to the Board is a fresh perspective of how we should do ministry in the 21st century." At first glance, this statement is perplexing as the discussion is centered upon the board of trustees at institutions of higher education, not churches or ministry outreach organizations. Initially, this response and similar responses seemed out of place in the scope of my study. In some cases, I was concerned that my questioning was not clear or I had not clearly communicated the purpose of my study. However, as I progressed in the interviews with participants with responses of this nature it unfolded that a number of participants saw the business of the institution and ministry, as one and the same. Though the institutions were in the business of education, for these participants, providing education was a ministry within itself.

This concept points to the unique foundation and initial involvement of the AME church in higher education. I will discuss this sentiment and belief in further detail when discussing the values espoused by board members. Within the context of education as ministry, the belief that one's perspective on 21<sup>st</sup> century ministry as a pertinent skill set for a board member to possess makes sense. Other participants mentioned ministry as the skill set that they brought to the board. However, the context of ministry as a skill set was expressed in less of a philosophical manner and more so in a practical manner. One

participant explained the connection between their ministry work and the work of the college, sharing,

By being in Tallahassee we have Florida State, AMU and Tallahassee Community College. Because we have a strong collegiate ministry and because I'm constantly in contact with my collegiate ministry director I know what the students are going through. I know how we should partner with other churches to say let's have in your community to open up your place and space so that you can have an end of the year study session in your fellowship hall, where you can sponsor food and even sponsor teachers or professors to come and tutor and to be a part of this process.

The ministry in which the participant engages is not simply a matter of evangelism.

Rather, it is actually a tool in which to better understand the needs and challenges that current students face and navigate. Furthermore, it is a way in which this board member finds an opportunity for the institution to partner with other organizations in the community. This not only builds better town-gown relationships but also opens avenues to outside resources in providing students the support necessary to achieve success. Both practices contribute to the success of an institution, particularly institutions with strained resources (Taylor et al., 1996).

The ability to effectively communicate and be a team player are useful skills in any organization. Participants echoed this sentiment concerning their own skill sets. Communication and positive personality traits were listed as the important skills sets some participants felt they brought to their boards. Boards of trustees are tasked with strategic planning for an institution (Alderson, 1997; Taylor et al., 1996). This strategic plan is constructed in partnership with the president. As this is the case, it is important for involved parties to clearly understand the goals and vision of leadership. Participants felt that their communication skills and personality traits made this task an easier one for the boards for which they served. One participant spoke to their personal communication

skills stating, “I speak my piece and I listen to peaceful conversation...,” while another speaks to their ability to understand people saying, “Well, I have a Ph.D. in Psychology, so knowledge of human behavior is also a plus,” Another participant spoke to their capacity to see the big vision,

As an individual, I would probably say my capacity to envision the larger picture or the longer vision and see the potential connections between the various distinct parts of the organization and how they can work together in harmony, to look beyond the horizon and can see what is practically possible, and to gauge the various options, and then to help to find reasonable solutions for what is the appropriate pathway.

This participant expressed the necessity to have board members who can connect the smaller parts of a plan together to create and communicate the larger picture that all of those smaller parts create. Closely connected to being able to understand the big vision was the ability to be “in touch” with various constituents of the college, more specifically the parents and the students. Some participants felt that their ability to relate with the perspectives of these two groups were important to have on the board. One participant states,

I think what I bring is a sense of youthfulness even though I’m about 22 or 23 years removed from college I think I’m old enough for them to respect me but young enough to know what is needed. I’m not out of touch with the technology. I’m not out of touch of what the students are going through because I’ve been there where many of my colleagues have been out of school for 30, 40, 50 years. That helps for them to see a different perspective from a member who also has young children. Many of my colleagues do not have young children. So it helps me to kind of stay on the pulse, being also because I’m in a college town that helps as well.

Certain board members did not necessarily view themselves as bringing youthfulness to the board, but rather a current parental perspective. The trustee shared this saying,

I put myself in the place of the parents so then I’m not sitting on a board making a decision about how I see it in the 21<sup>st</sup> century or in 2014 or 2015 but how do the parents see it today. How are they feeling? If we make a decision to increase

tuition what impact is that going to have on a student who is trying to pay for it out of their pocket?

Possessing various vantage points and perspectives was also identified as a beneficial skill set to possess as a board member. “Outsider” perspectives were seen as a way to bring a different approach to activities such as recruiting students, developing new programs, and fundraising. Some participants particularly pointed to having a perspective outside of the AME church as a valuable contribution to the work of these boards. One participant shared, “I think an outsider’s perspective that’s not within the AME itself so I’m able to look at it from a community view, from a corporate view, from a financial and legal view and help hopefully provide some perspective.” Though participants did not explicitly mention diversity as important to their work on the board, through their expression of having different perspectives as a board asset, participants alluded to the importance of diversity on the board. The importance may be alluded to, but to what degree and in what instances diversity is important or welcomed cannot be deciphered.

In any position, knowledge can serve as an important contribution. Some participants identified either their background in education or their experience serving on boards as an important skill set they provided to their respective boards. Decision-making in the higher education sector is not always as straightforward as found in the business sector. The bottom line is not the only issue to consider. Therefore, board members who understand higher education do bring a beneficial body of knowledge. Participants expressed similar sentiment. One participant shared,

I have been in higher education for 16 years and 10 of those years have been, well all 16 have been in administrative positions and 10 of those years have been in senior executive level positions across the spectrum of student affairs, academic

affairs, workforce education and public relations. So I've had extensive experience across three different major divisions within the college environment. So I bring that type of broad background of understanding operations in those particular areas from a ground level as well as from an administrative level. Being able to understand and interpret institutional data was also shared by a participant as a useful skill. The board member expressed that due to their experience with institutional research they held a strong capacity to understand institutional data. Other participants discussed the unique knowledge that having administrative roles at institutions provided. One participant with experience in institutional leadership shared,

It helps in the sense that I recognize that at any given time I could be the one sitting in the chair on the other side of the table being asked the question and frankly I do spend the same time outside of my role as a member of the board being asked questions by board members. So there's a reciprocity of empathy that is there but I do.

One participant expressed that simply having or currently serving on other boards was a beneficial asset. The participant states, "I have a lot of experience on committees with the Board of Directors. So whether it's the nominating committee, the compensation committee, the audit committee, I've worked on all of those committees for boards and so I think that expertise was helpful to be the Allen University board particularly given their change of leadership just to make sure fiscally they were making the right choices."

Whether it was a practical knowledge of business or a possessing soft skills and the ability to empathize with various campus stakeholders, what is apparent is that all of the participants felt they had something beneficial to bring to the boards that they served.

This would play a part in how they viewed their role in both the formal and informal structures of their boards.



## **Board Structure**

Boards at higher education institutions can vary in size and makeup (Alderson, 1997), but broadly they operate generally in the same manner. Each board will have an executive committee, which usually consists of the board chair, vice-chair if the board has said position, and the chairpersons of each committee. The board will also consist of various committees that give special focus to specific issues that the college must consider and address. These issues may include, but are not limited to, academic affairs, buildings and grounds, fundraising, etc. It is within this structure that institutional boards conduct business.

Allen University, Edward Waters College, and Paul Quinn College mirror the structural setup of most boards across higher education. All three institutions have boards consisting of 17, 18, and 23 members respectively. The boards consist of various committees with which members participate. On all boards, there are members who serve on multiple committees. Being that all of the boards had formalized structures, I did not explicitly inquire about board structure. However, when inquiring about individual members' contribution to the board or how their board engaged in the decision-making process, board structure became present in conversation. Most participants who mentioned parts of the board structure spoke to general elements, such as having committees and how the committees worked in relation to the board as a whole. Almost all participants agreed that most of the information gathered for discussion, when discussions were had, were gathered through the work of the committees. Most participants also expressed a direct relationship between their skill strengths and the committees to which they are assigned. Participants with knowledge in academic affairs

tended to be on academic affairs or institutional advancement committees. Participants with knowledge in housing development tended to be on buildings and grounds committees. Boards, large boards in particular, rely on effective and efficient committees to be successful. Most institutional boards do not meet frequently, often only quarterly. The full board coming together infrequently to meet insists that in these meetings full, detailed reports and information can be presented and reported, and members feel secure in voting on the decisions that need to be made for the institution. Participants explicitly espoused the importance of committees. One participant from Edward Waters College explained the role of committees in the work of the board,

So the board is divided into a number of subcommittees. The subcommittees have chairs and each subcommittee is paired with a standing division within the institution. So for example, I serve on the budget and finance subcommittee as well as academic affairs. Academic affairs is paired with an academic affairs division within the institution and the vice president there. Budget and finance is paired with, of course, the CFO and his team.

A participant from Paul Quinn College also shares the role of committees on their boards,

Well, we have, first, we have our Executive Committee that comes together, our Executive Committee hears from each different committee. Each committee has their own separate meetings, and they make their report to the E Board. And once the E Board hears all of the information and has an opportunity to look at all of the information and then we discuss it, and then we vote on the changes, the positive, the things that will stay the same and those things that will change. I think we have an opportunity for each committee to do their work. And being, not being judgmental, but watching what the other committees are doing so that you may not be a part of that committee but you may have an opportunity to receive the information, because we receive the information prior to the meeting, so we can peruse the information so that we can intelligently discuss it once we talk to the Executive Board meetings. I think that helps us give a proper synopsis to them of what they do.

It is important to note that though all participants identified committees on which they serve, no participants from Allen University spoke to the importance of committee work in the manner as participants from the other two institutions.

A few participants did go into deeper detail or explanation about how they viewed the structure of the board in relationship to the work of the board. One participant serves in a leadership capacity at another institution. This participant shared how this unique positioning forces them to be highly aware of the ways in which the two governing structures are unique. The participant shares:

The mission is different at Edward Waters in terms of its target populations, the funding model is different, the governing model is different. There are some other nuances that have related to contractual services related to faculty and operations. But the defining pieces are different. We do share the same accrediting body so that is where there are strong similarities in terms of the accrediting process but in terms of the oversight at a board level just the fact, again, I was appointed through a religious entity to this board. On ours we're dealing with gubernatorial appointments in the state of Florida for our Boards of Trustees. So those things are different in terms of approach. So just some of those things that we just have to understand and be certain of context and intended outcome in offering feedback and/or recommendations as a board member.

Strikingly, most of the participants who brought board structure into the conversation were from one particular institution, Paul Quinn College. It appears that participants felt that the structure of the board played an important role in the board's success. There was one aspect in particular participants repeatedly brought to light feeling it was an important aspect—board chair rotation. The board of trustees' chairperson is traditionally the Bishop of the episcopal district in which the school resides. However at Paul Quinn it appears there is a system that has been developed whereas there is a rotation between the Bishop and a non AME member acting as the chair. Many participants expressed the benefit they saw in this structural design. One participant shared,

Four years ago, the board voted to have for the first time a non-AME as Chairman of the Board. And so each two years, that rotates. The non-AME becomes either the Chair or the Vice Chair, and an AME becomes either the Chair or the Vice Chair. And Bishop McKenzie now is the Chair. But in the, I think it's this year, in the January election, or board member meeting, that we will move from a Chair School leader to the Chair of a private sector, or non-AME. So that had, that's a

big difference in the history of the school. Prior to that time, it was always the presiding prelate of the district. This particular structure, more specifically the rotation of the board seat appeared to be perceived as beneficial for various reasons by board members. One board member in particular shared how this structure and practice really was a great exercise in democracy and the transfer of power and authority. The participant felt that “good relationships” come out of such practices. The structure and rotation of the chair position creating “good relationships” was reiterated by a board member who shared that the 50/50 approach to the board allowed for opportunity between the larger Dallas community and the AME church. Members of Paul Quinn’s board felt that this unique structural design made for more successful decision-making. Where participants from Paul Quinn’s board expressed their satisfaction with the structure and mode of operation for the board, one participant from the board of Edward Waters College voiced concern regarding the affect that the frequency of meetings, or lack thereof, had on the quality of board decisions.

The participant shared,

If you were to ask me I would have to step down from the board in order to meet monthly. I couldn’t do it. I don’t live in the area and I’m also traveling to Jacksonville three times a year for that. So this board is distributed across the entire state of Florida. But I do believe that a more regular meeting would provide for more consistent feedback and insight, perhaps not monthly but even six times a year could be helpful just in terms of maintaining connection with the activities of the college. That’s not to say that there aren’t any number of other ways to engage in the interim between meetings because there are the social and enrichment activities that we are invited to but they are not formal proceedings of the board.

The board member appeared to understand the practicality of the current meeting schedule, but still struggled with if it was the most effective for decision-making. The structure of these boards, the way in which these boards delegated and engaged in their work, and the way participants interpreted the aforementioned were evaluated through a

lens of both values and personal perception of the role of the board of trustees. I desired to explore this lens. What did board members perceive to be the role of the board of trustees at an institution, both broadly and specifically at their institutions? What values did participants feel were salient to their work as board members of their institutions? And ultimately, what role did these values play in the work of the board? These were the questions that I had. As participants shared more about their views of the work of the board, the answers would emerge.

### **Role of the Board**

The board of trustees at institutions of higher education function as an important part of the leadership and governance structure (Alderson, 1997). Boards of trustees are responsible for the fiduciary responsibility and sustainability of the institution (Alderson, 1997; Taylor et al. 1996). Members of boards are expected to make decisions that are for the well-being of the institution and its stakeholders. They are also expected to use and leverage any personal connections, networks, and resources available to aid in doing so (Taylor et al., 1996). There are broad understandings of board work set forth by associations and literature (AGB, 2013; Kezar, 2004; Taylor et al.) 1996), but what is understood broadly and perceived locally can differ. For this study, I decided to ask participants “What is the role of the board of trustees at your institution?” Aware that I would receive responses that would mirror the universal understanding of board work, I also wondered if the participants held views of their roles that were unique to their specific institutions. Participants’ responses regarding the role of the board can be categorized into governance and representation.

Participants expressed the role of the board was to be fundraisers, provide oversight, to generate and enforce policy, to be informed about current institutional and higher education issues, to be a sounding board for the president, and to cast vision for the institution. Literature supports that these duties are encompassed in the role of the board (Taylor et al., 1996). A majority of participants understood that it was important for board members to both solicit and contribute funds to the institution. Whether through personal resources or networks, boards of trustees shoulder the brunt of the task of fundraising (AGB, 2013; Taylor et al., 1996). In the area of oversight, participants expressed that though they understood their role was to provide oversight to the president and the president's staff, they did not need to provide oversight in the day to day operations. This proved to work against many of the assertions made regarding boards at HBCUs being overly concerned with the day to day operations of their institutions (Phillips, 2002). However one board member from Allen University spoke to a concern that there are instances where the board and administration experience a confusion of roles. The participant states, ".sometimes the role of the board and the role of the administration become confused, and one or the other doesn't recognize the proper limits of that role, and it infringes, and they infringe on each other." It is important that both administration and the board of trustees understand their own role, the role of the other, and the importance of clear communication between the two groups. Overall, participants from all of the institutions spoke to the board having a role in setting and executing a "vision" for the institution. Engaging in this task successfully includes but is not limited to being a sounding board for the president and the administration as well as staying abreast of what is going on and being discussed in higher education. An Allen University

trustee summed it up this way, “All of us have to see what direction we want to go and not what I want but you have to have a strategic plan that encompasses the greatness for all of the students in the future.”

In addition to roles that related directly to governance, participants also saw the role of the board in respect to representation. Board members should be advocates and visible connections to the institutions they serve (Alderson, 1997; Taylor et al., 1996). They are, in essence, walking public relations for the institution. Participants expressed that boards and their members should see themselves as activists, advocates, and ambassadors. One board member from Edward Waters sums up the sentiment in saying,

You always have to speak positive about your school. I don't care what the school is going through. I love the, you fill in the blank. I love Edward Waters College. I love Wilberforce University. I love Allen University. And then you tell people why you love your institution.

#### **Values**

In order for these members to collectively fulfill the roles that the board plays in the life of an institution, they must actively engage. Though board members are tasked with being objective, each member brings their own set of personal values and foci to their work. When speaking to participants about their experiences and views on the work of the board, consciously or subconsciously, there were indeed values that presented themselves in conversation. These values spoke to building relationship, having regard, and exhibiting a semblance of “righteousness”.

#### **Relationship**

Networks, connections, and community were values that participants shared as important to possess when working with and for an HBCU. Participants spoke about the HBCU environment as one of family. Because of this family atmosphere, a sentiment

exists. Board members felt that there had to be a sense of connection with the elements that made up that family. These elements included institutional culture, a connection or understanding of Black culture and communities, and openness. One Edward Waters' board member reflected on the unique way relationship building occurs on HBCU campuses, "There's a lot of on the ground relationship building that is essential. There's a lot of beyond your resume we need to know who you are. You are you really besides the paper? Do you understand us? Do you get who we are? That is only discerned on the ground in the HBCU." Another board member from Edward Waters described building this on the ground relationship saying,

I get lots of satisfaction of going to the campus and meeting with faculty and staff, informally sometimes, have lunch or dinner together, and I get to go to the campus and see the students. And I'm Greek, so I get to see the sororities, the fraternities. And it's very satisfying. And I think it is as beneficial to me as I am to them.

One board member spoke to the heavy role that institutional culture plays sharing,

Having not gone to a HBCU and this really being my first exposure working intimately with a HBCU there is a culture, an unwritten but well established culture that I cannot articulate but you know it when you see it. You know it when you are experiencing it and it is this tangible networking that one must do with alumni and business constituents and partners and friends of the institution. It's unwritten but essential to success.

This strong connection is also desirable with the Black community. Another board member shared,

You have to have strong deep roots to the black community, to black leadership. I said black but you know what I mean, to the leadership in the community and get to know them and have favorable connections with them. Not necessarily be their buddy but just know they have a great connection with them or at least a working relationship and get things done.

The feelings of familiarity and connection create a sense of trust for board members.

This trust authenticates a person's good intentions towards the institution and students.

(Kezar, 2004).



## **Regard**

Board members also espoused that those working with or for HBCUs needed to possess a certain regard for various components that made up what they considered HBCU culture. With these three particular cases, those working with or for these specific institutions also needed a regard for the AME church—a salient part of the identity and mission of the institutions. Though the latter is not uncommon for any church affiliated institution, along with the love of education value that was shared, certain values pertaining to regard appeared uniquely applicable to the HBCU sector. Values such as the love of Black people and the necessity to care about HBCUs are examples. Respect, legacy, and a respect for institutional culture also emerged.

Though all of the board members are not affiliated with the AME church, the AME church appears to always have a presence in the room. Many board members expressed always trying to keep “church values” in mind. One board member explained the role of the AME church in the work of the board by sharing that it was important to remember that the institution was “given birth” from the AME church. The participant felt that those engaging with the work of the board had to always remember the sacrifices of the church to insure the life of the institution.

This sentiment that there should always be a consciousness of the relationship with the church actually appeared as one board member expressed his passionate concern about the chapel on campus. The board member shares,

I have something that I think I may challenge the President and the board on, and it may not be important, to them maybe, not even to you, but to me it is. We're a school that's based on religious principles, and we don't have a chapel. The chapel is sitting on the campus but the chapel is in disrepair. It's low on your list of repairs. I have a problem with that.

This is just one example of how important the relationship and at the very least understanding the relationship with the AME church is at these institutions. There is also a certain regard and care for Black people and HBCUs that is expected in these spaces. One board member from Paul Quinn states, “In the business of an HBCU, there has to be a love for African Americans 100%.” This was not completely shocking coming from a board member at an institution whose president often quotes that, “You cannot lead who you do not love.” However, board members from other institutions shared similar sentiments, not just about Black people, but also about HBCUs in general. One board member shared that working at an HBCU does not necessarily equate to caring about HBCU. The member states, “Just because I’ve worked at several HBCUs doesn’t necessarily mean I care about them... Why do you want to work at a HBCU and then you get on the fact finding mission where you do some research on this particular person, if he or she is genuine and really care about HBCUs,” This vetting system for one’s possession of a genuine care for HBCUs is a theme that arises again as participants discuss the presidential selection process. I will delve deeper into that process in the next chapter. Another board member shares the commitment one has to have to not only HBCUs but also the HBCU legacy. The board member states,

When it comes to HBC people who are involved, who go to HBC’s that’s a commitment. That’s legacy, that’s history, it’s something about, that’s something that you would see in those schools that you won’t get in other places. I think it’s passed down. I think it’s just passed down so far as legacy and commitment. I think that’s the difference in those schools. It’s other places but it’s all about the legacy, maintaining and continuing that legacy and building that up.

One board member is even more specific, speaking to the legacy of Paul Quinn College, stating,

I hate to say it this way, but African American young people who may not get to Princeton, who may not get to Harvard immediately. But because they've gone through the academic requirements of Paul Quinn College makes them just as viable as anyone else in America. The scores of the students have shown them being placed in jobs, have shown that it is making a difference, and they are making an impact in society. I think it will be great for us to hold on to that and not lose that.

Overall there is an underlining value of respect that runs through these values of regard.

Respect of the school, respect for HBCUs, respect for the students that attend these institutions, and respect for the church that founded these institutions. Being able to earn and show respect proved important in the work of the boards at these institutions.

However, what is not always clear is how that respect is in fact earned. How does one prove that they respect the various elements of these AME affiliated HBCUs? What is the process to figure this out and if it is not figured out, is trust then questioned? These are questions left unanswered.

### **Righteousness.**

There were values that board members expressed that spoke to things that are intangible but clearly important to participants. These values spoke to a semblance of "righteousness" in persons' motivations and character. The definition of righteousness I am using as the umbrella of these values is, "the concept of being morally right or justifiable" ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)). Possessing a warm spirit, having vision, an ethic of care, and a deep commitment to service were expressed as important. Also important were possessing the character traits of humility, honesty, and sincerity.

Having a warm spirit was expressed various ways, one of which was in the word "compassion". A board member from Edward Waters College shared the importance of compassion at their particular institution,

Because I think with this particular school and this environment of college most of the school, the personalities need very emotional and be very emotional and we like to show emotion, that they care, have compassion. They have to show compassion.

This trait of a warm spirit and having compassion was closely connected to this belief in having a genuine ethic of care. There was a general sense of care for the institution that was expressed. However, there was also an expression of an ethic of care in respect to the students that these institutions serve. A Paul Quinn College board member explains it this way,

I mean people don't consider to do good and do well at the same time, and you cannot do well unless you really have a love for the student. So, I don't know if I can say it any better. I can come up with a whole bunch of different words, and make it sound fancy, but at the end of the day that person has to have a love for those students.

This idea of having a vision was expressed as an important value. What I found most interesting about this particular value is that when discussed it mostly appeared that participants were speaking to the idea of having a goal for the institution. However, most participants, and particularly those affiliated with the AME church, consistently used the word "vision." This is important to note, as the word vision is one often used in religious rhetoric. Though the word vision is not limited to the church community, in my findings it was overwhelmingly used by those affiliated with the church and clergy in particular.

Certain values being communicated in certain phrases and vernacular is a finding within itself. For the sake of values, "vision" was the word chosen to communicate have a large scale goal and belief for the present and future state of the institution. Being committed to service, and viewing the work of the HBCU as a service, were expressed as important values. The values of humility, sincerity, and honesty were also expressed as important. Often these values came out in discussing establishing trust and relationship

with either other board members or presidents. If persons did not come across as sincere, humble, or honest, board members tended to question their motives as well as their character. In following chapters I will discuss, in more detail, the effects and relationship of these values in the work of the board.

Boards of trustees play a major role in the leadership of an institution. Therefore, who sits in the seats as board members is important. Often the strength of a board member is evaluated simply in their professional background and social network. However, the path to service and the motivation to serve influences the way in which individual members engage with the work of the board. Formal and informal board structures, the ways in which board members understand their individual roles on the board, and the ways in which board members understand the collective role of the board, also influences the way board work is engaged. Couched within all of these things is a set of values that threads through not only the work of the board, but also the way in which decisions are evaluated and connections are established. The work of the board of trustees is mostly a series of decisions that must be made for the welfare of the institution. One of the most pertinent decisions is the selection of a president. As I desired to learn more about the unique work of the board at these three AME affiliated institutions, I would learn in greater detail the processes used, both formal and informal, to make decisions. I would also learn the thoughts behind the process of selecting a president. In learning more about these processes, I also unveiled the relationship between the values of board members and the aforementioned processes. It appears that not only does context matter in the area of HBCU governance (Minor, 2005) but the composition of the board of trustees matters as well.

## **Chapter 6: Processes, Problems, and People**

The decision-making processes of boards of trustees within the unique context of HBCUs is not a widely explored area of research. Private church affiliated HBCUs have an even more unique context. It is in these spaces that the unique racial context of HBCUs intersects with principles of faith, and the politics of higher education. It is in this distinct space that I wanted to learn more about how decisions are made, how issues are discussed, and how governance occurs. In this chapter, I will discuss how the participants from each institution described the decision-making process, the challenges the board faces in that process, the challenges within the board and, the challenges between the board and the president. One of the most important decisions that a board of trustees makes is the selection of a president (AGB, 2013; Alderson, 2013). For this reason, I explored the presidential selection process at these three institutions looking closely at the ways in which board members evaluate candidates. By learning more about the decision-making process in general, and exploring the presidential selection process in specific, I uncovered the ways various elements play a part in how these institutions' boards engage in the governance process.

### **Decision-Making**

Participants from each institution were asked to describe the decision-making process at their respective institution. The responses ranged from a formal explanation of the decision-making process to a more general, casual explanation. I grouped the major themes and explanations of participants by institution. This allows the ability to understand how the decision making process is viewed by board members within case, as

opposed to comparing themes across cases as each institution may have individually unique decision-making processes.

### **Allen University**

When asked to describe the decision making process at Allen University board members described a general process where an agenda is put together by the president and executive committee and presented to the full board. This agenda usually begins with the “fitness” of the college, the enrollment, and the budget. Then the report moves forward to issues regarding student life, advancement and fundraising progress, and strategies for fundraising. The report is wrapped up with information about business affairs and financial statements. After the agenda has been addressed, any motions felt necessary by board members are made. These motions are accepted, rejected, or expanded. Board members felt like most of their time was dedicated to making decisions on fiduciary matters. It was noted that the full board only meets four times a year so there are times when things are not presented to the full board. However, when the full board does have its quarterly meeting, a student representative and a faculty representative are present. Heads of institutional divisions are also present at times. One board member expressed that this practice ensured transparency.

One board member expressed how the decision making process can be a challenging one for the president. He explains,

It’s very difficult if a President tries to respond on policy or fiscal matters to an individual member of the board, because that’s chaos because everybody on the board has a different opinion. So you have to satisfy these people that you’re responsive to their interests, but act officially only on the instructions of the

majority of the members of the board. And sometimes board members get that mixed, sometimes Presidents get that mixed up.

In order for the decision making process to be successful, this board member felt that the president had to establish the proper “methodology” to discussing and approaching decisions with the board. Otherwise, the process becomes a difficult one.

### **Edward Waters College**

Board members expressed very similar structures in their decision-making process as their counterparts at Allen University. Policies that need to be addressed are presented to the board. Issues that are presented come from a variety of sources. These sources include board members, the faculty association, the student association, and the community. If a solution has already been reached, board members will sometimes add to the solutions. Otherwise, board members will take a vote. Board members mentioned that sometimes there are no action items to address. In those cases the board just listens to the policies that have been put in place by the administrative team. In situations such as this, the board acts as a support asking, “What do we need to do to make these things happen?” Board members said many questions were asked in meetings to make sure as much information as necessary was understood. Board members also mentioned that many conference calls occurred before the full board meeting. This was another way to ensure that information was shared with members prior to the meeting. When making decisions board members stressed the importance of being objective. One board member shares,

I think, first of all, you respect the opinions of all of these people, and then you help everybody realize that the objective is to advance Ed Waters College as an



institution serving the needs of students. And whatever we are talking about, ultimately that's what we're doing. And so, you don't have a whole lot of differences. As long as it can be established that what you're proposing and recommending is in the best interest of the institution that serves the student, then we can always come to a common decision, I think.

Ultimately, the goal is for the board to be primarily concerned with the well-being of the institution, when making decisions. This should be accomplished aside from personal agendas or feelings.

Focusing on the important role information played in Edward Waters' decision-making process, multiple board members spoke to data collection and the use of data to make decisions. This data collection includes but is not limited to interviewing relevant parties for information, looking at other comparable institutions to see trends and practices, and examining history and current needs. One board member explained the importance of data to the work of the board,

I think one of the problems that we have within so many institutions is that we lack information. When you lack information people make up things and they put their own spin to it. But when people are empowered with information, when people are empowered with intelligence, when people feel as if they're a part of the process and that the leadership is one that is shared leadership then you have an opportunity to continue to move forward in a positive way working hand in hand.

Data collection was described as a committee effort. Committees/sub committees played a major role in the Edward Waters' decision making process. After collecting much of the data and information on an issue or subject of discussion, committees draft recommendations, which are then submitted to the executive committee. If the recommendations are approved by the executive committee, then it goes to the board for final vote. In the absence of the full board, the executive committee can act on the behalf

of the board. Overall, committees/subcommittees do the “deep dive” for information and everything works from the committee/subcommittee up. One board member described, in detail, the role of the committee/subcommittee in the work of the board:

So the board is divided into a number of subcommittees. The subcommittees have chairs and each subcommittee is paired with a standing division within the institution. . . . Academic affairs is paired with an academic affairs division within the institution and the vice president there. Budget and finance is paired with, of course, the CFO and his team. We have per term meetings for the board and per term the respective committee within the academic institution provides to the board and subcommittee a report of activities as well as recommendations. Those are reviewed in a subcommittee meeting prior to the larger board meeting to give the subcommittee board members the opportunity to ask questions directly of that academic department, to raise any concerns or issues and to understand the nature of the recommendations that are being made. Based upon the subcommittee meeting recommendations may be supported or not supported in terms of going forward to the executive committee and the full board for a vote based upon the deliberations that occur in the subcommittee.

Another board member talks about how much discussion actually takes place within committees surrounding various topics.

The first time we talk about it may be on a conference call. The next time we talk about it will probably be on the site of the campus. Nevertheless, we will have qualitative time to sit down, to discuss the issues, discuss the concerns and then we make a recommendation ultimately to the Board of Directors through the Board of Trustees. We have a chance to say we’ve talked about it, we’ve discussed it, we looked at it at various angles. Then the President will talk about it. He will share it with the board and then long story short the chair will have his input and share the concerns that he may have as it relates to the concerns that we have shared to the body. Then we will ultimately vote. So not so much a unilateral decision that is being made. Not one person is making the decision.

If there are issues that must be discussed outside of the scheduled board meetings, for which the full board must vote or address, a formal notice to convene is put forth and the rest of the normal process occurs in a conference call. The Edward Waters’ board takes

seriously the decision-making process, placing great emphasis on objective voting, data based decisions, and constant communication.

### **Paul Quinn College**

Much like their counterparts at Allen University and Edward Waters, Paul Quinn's board works on a committee system. Paul Quinn's decision making process often starts with issues of concern coming through the faculty and the staff to the committees. The issues then make it to the board as agenda items and discussed, presented, discussed again, and voted on. Some decisions can be made by the Executive Committee, at a certain level, in lieu of the meeting of the full board. However, most decisions are made by the full board. Even if it is a mere ratification, it still comes to the full board. The Executive Committee comes together and hears from all of the committees. This is after committees have separate meetings and report to the Executive Board. The Executive Board discusses and votes on changes. Things that are considered positives remain the same. Much like Edward Waters, Paul Quinn board members shared the importance of communication. One board member described the board's decision making process as a hybrid. The member explains,

It's more a hybrid of consensus-making and a decision-making tree, which by decision-making tree I mean you end up with a vote. It's kind of a cross between those two. By the consensus model, it's not exercised in great depth like other, like non-profits of say the World Council of Churches there is a kind of collegiality and the kind of methodology of trying to come to a decision to where the majority of the board is in support of all of the decisions. That does not mean that individual opinions or differences are squelched. They are heard. They are waived. And in a way then, the body can make a decision. And if you can't make a decision by consensus then you end up going to the decision-making model.

Board members receive information prior to the full board meeting, giving them a chance to look over and digest information before discussion takes place. A board member shares that, "...we receive the information prior to the meeting, so we can peruse the information so that we can intelligently discuss it once we talk to the Executive Board meetings." Having information before the actual meeting also aids in flexibility in the way in which board members can engage with the actual voting process. Paul Quinn's board allows for proxy votes. Board members who are unable to attend full board meetings in person can give their vote to the board chair, allowing the board chair to vote on the member's behalf. The confidence in this vote by proxy practice could only exist with the availability of information to board members without their presence at the meeting and the availability of information prior to the meeting. Not only is information readily shared with the board before meetings, but there is also constant communication between the president and the board. One board member describes the relationship,

One of the things about the President of Paul Quinn is that he is in constant dialogue with the board. And, so we are aware of not only management, challenges, and celebrations, and fundraising. So when we come to the meeting, it is not a surprise. We are kept aware of what's going on. And so the decisions are wonderful. The decisions are rather easy because you had a chance to think about them before you walk into the room. And I think that's important that you're not blind-sided, you're not operating in a vacuum, but you are constantly being communicated by the President of the university.

One part of the decision- making process that was highlighted by board members was the acknowledgement and embrace of the surrounding Dallas community voice in the decision making process, particularly the business community. One board member talked about how this mindset and approach has affected the work of the board stating,

I think it gave almost instant encouragement to the community, and it has given since a lot of credibility to the whole decision-making process at a small Liberal Arts historically black college. To have the business section or the business community involved not in a token way, knowing that their decisions are not going to be changed based on AME politics has made a big difference in how we are viewed in a community and how we raise funds...the 50/50 percent model still allows neither the community to have more say or the church to have more say in the life, but the shared govern.

The board structure at Paul Quinn where half of the board members are affiliated with the AME church and half of the board members are not affiliated with the AME church allows the opportunity for community members to feel they have equal say in the direction of the institution. Furthermore, the rotation of the board chair role between an AME affiliate and a non AME affiliate reinforces for the community the sentiment that their voice is heard and valued in the decision-making process. The board members at Paul Quinn College and Edward Waters College spoke about a bulk of their work being done through their committees as opposed to the board members at Allen University. Likewise, the board members at Paul Quinn and Edward Waters expressed a belief that their decision making processes were democratic and objective. There was not a strong consensus concerning this sentiment between the Allen University participants.

### **Board Challenges**

Though these three boards have similar and dissimilar structures and decision-making processes many of the board members expressed similar challenges when engaging in the decision making process. These challenges fell within two categories: issues of operation and structure and issues of relationship.

#### **Operation and Structure**

Board members mentioned issues centered on how the board works, is set up, and the environment in which it operates which made the work of their boards challenging. These issues included board context, confusion of roles, composition, issues with the U.S. Department of Education, differences in priorities, enrollment issues, HBCU culture, longevity of board members' service, time, micromanagement and personnel hires. These issues were brought about by either internal structural issues or issues external to the board but related directly to the work of the board. Board members explained that adjusting from their professional context to the context of a small, private HBCU can create a challenge. Even members who have experience in higher education found this transition something they had to consciously navigate. One member mentions,

I find that experience is helpful but it's probably the one that I have to keep in check most often. Frankly simply because my executive experience has been in a large public institution and this is a small private HBCU and you always have to filter things based upon context.

Another confusion that can occur is the confusion of what exactly are the individual roles and the collective role of the board. This confusion was often explained through expressions of members or administrators not respecting boundaries or understanding limitations. One Allen University board member shared,

...sometimes this is not always the administration's fault, but sometimes the role of the board and the role of the administration become confused, and one or the other doesn't recognize the proper limits of that role, and it infringes, and they infringe on each other. And all of the institutions that I've ever looked at, the biggest problem that arises is the proper definition of the role of the board, the proper recognition of the role of the board and the role of the administration. And I think that has to be established, and honored, and respected.

One board member even stated how this confusion of roles affected employees at the colleges, stating, "It causes problems with the staff, who should they listen to, and

being in some ways intimidated, and at the worst case bullied.” Challenges arose when boards did not understand exactly what their role in institutional leadership entailed. Furthermore, when this role was not understood and not properly communicated by both the board and the administration, the work of the board can suffer. One of the institution’s presidents was able to give their perspective of this particular challenge. The president shares in response to what can create challenges between a board and a president,

A president that’s not communicative and board members who want to get involved in the day to day operations, telling you, telling the president who to hire, who to fire, and all of those things that would have operational implications and them getting involved in there, because it’s not that unusual to have board members who want to run the institution like they’re the president.

A board that is confused about their role leads to another challenge and that is micromanagement. Micromanagement is defined as “trying to control or manage all the small parts of (something, such as an activity) in a way that is usually not wanted or that causes problems.” (www.merriam-webster.com) When micromanagement is discussed it is often describing a manager or supervisor who micromanages subordinates. However, participants talked about micromanagement being exercised by the board. HBCU boards have been criticized for being far too concerned with the day to day and on the ground operations of their institutions (Phillips, 2002), which is not the role of a high functioning board (AGB, 2013; Taylor et al., 1999). One participant expounds,

There are clear delineated lines of responsibilities for board members. And a part of that is to create, approve, in some ways policies, and set parameters, guidelines, approve goals, objectives, curriculum, etc.. But it is not our responsibility to give direct supervision to any of the staff, to write specific programs, or to influence

outside of the board decision-making forums. And when that happens, it causes problems, as it does at any institution.

Though participants listed micromanagement from the board as a challenge, I actually found participants' ability to identify this challenge to be a positive occurrence. The fact that a number of board members were aware of what the role of the board was, and was not, indicated that there was an understanding of the proper role of a board present. This proper understanding being present makes it more likely for the issue of micromanagement to be addressed and corrected. Understanding that this finding at these three institutions is not generalizable, it does aid in creating a counter narrative to the common stereotype of HBCU boards..

How board members see their roles on the board may be related to the individual identities and personalities on a board. This points to the important role that board composition plays. Board composition, or who actually sits on the board, arose as something that at times presents challenges for the board. Though board composition was mentioned by members of all three institutions as a presenter of challenges, the aspect of composition that created the challenge varied from institution to institution. Participants from Paul Quinn College mentioned the diversity of their board composition as a strength and what created challenges. Consisting of members with a number of impressive accomplishments and strong personalities it is challenging to ensure that all voices are respected and no one person's agenda is moved forward. One board member spoke to this challenge in a more general sense, saying,

Whether I accept your belief as being valid or invalid, but that's not the issue. The issue is in tolerance, you allow you to be you and me to be me. And I think, in a lot of board situations that does not happen. You have strong personalities that



exert themselves, and other personalities who are deeply as strong in other situations, which just simply withdraw. And, then when issues come up that are highly political, then there becomes these what seems like eruptions from absolutely nowhere, but they've always been there underneath the surface. And, that's I think is not abnormal in boards. I think that's just the way it happened.

One board member spoke more specifically to the board at Paul Quinn, stating, “..the trustee board members are persons who have generally been highly successful at what they do. And so they come with very strong personality, and strong opinions.” Another shared the necessity to navigate this reality stating,

We have 17 board members or so. It's pretty rare but not everyone is going to see things exactly the same way though you try to at least make them feel like their opinion is heard, discussed. But eventually a decision has to be made and certainly not one decision can be, not one person can stop or force the decision of the entire school.

Whereas the board members at Paul Quinn College spoke to the challenges diversity on a board can bring, members of the Allen University spoke to the challenges a lack of diversity of a board can create. The lack of diversity was spoken about in a variety of ways. One issue that arose was the lack of racial diversity on the board. Allen's board currently only has one non-Black member. There recently were two non-Black members but one stepped down from the board. It is important to note that when the lack of racial diversity was mentioned it was mentioned in a Black-White binary—other racial groups were not mentioned or introduced. Given the unique history of HBCUs matched with the changing racial demographics in the US, the point that more White members need to be on the board proved intriguing. The desire to have more White members could be to have more diverse perspectives at the table. However, many board members, particularly Black board members felt strongly about the importance of

protecting and uplifting the HBCU legacy. A board with an overwhelming presence of White members may signal a loss of legacy or control to current Black board members. If this is the case, apprehension would not seem far-fetched. Yet, one should be careful not to see White membership as a necessity to validate the work of these boards.

Another area where members felt there was a lack of diversity was the balance of AME- affiliated members and non AME affiliated members. More specifically, the over involvement and voice of clergy members in board decisions was highlighted. One member spoke to the strong influence of AME affiliated members on the board,

And we need more corporate and business leaders on the board in order to attract corporate and financial support. And a lot of the AME members on the board, and they love serving on the board, and that's great. And they love having a university. And AME, actually the university is heavily dependent on the AME conference of South Carolina for financial support. And they, the church puts a lot of money into the university. But still, it needs a larger community support and external support, in order to make it viable and comfortable.

Another board member expressed, in length, their view of the difficulty a heavily clergy laden board provided, saying,

We cannot continue to be clergy driven on our board any longer. The expertise is truly not there. In order to get that expertise and then we have something out there. It's a national, oh gosh, trustee organization. It's ACTA, A-C-T-A and they send out information just about every month or so forth on how the board members should, what kind of board member is needed for the various institutions anymore. So that's what I'm, I'm learning from that but I also have a foundation here in South Carolina that I attend every month just to learn more about the responsibilities of the board, not for Allen University but for another nonprofit organization that I'm in. So it's a constant learning process and I don't think that we have that kind of commitment to learn new things. I don't think because they, particularly if you're clergy. You put it in or keep it out but most of the clergy on the board are presiding elders<sup>13</sup>. Presiding elders have their own work to do. To

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<sup>13</sup> The presiding elder is an ordained itinerant elder whose position is administrative and advisory through the District Conference and Church School Convention: an in-service training for pastors, itinerant preachers, local preachers and lay workers. Presiding elders preside over presiding elder districts, which comprise an annual conference. They ensure the efficiency of pastors and churches and regularly

become, to stay on the board is a good thing but you have to learn more than just being a presiding elder for your district or something like that. You have to get outside and there's much more to being a member for the trustee board than probably the requirement of a presiding elder or clergy or even a lay person. This board member also mentioned the role of politicians or political seats on the board.

The member stated,

Politicians get on boards, yes, because some of them have connections. We have one that has good connections and get connections and so forth for Allen University. Others are with companies but the companies don't give any money. So they fall off because what our leadership says is not in synch with what those big companies want to do with their monies. So for a year or so they're on and then they're gone.

This is an interesting aspect as literature tends to associate political board seats with public institutions more than private boards, due to the governor and state government involvement with the board selection process found in the public sector as opposed to private (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983). What is brought to light with this finding is that political seats and politicians on boards are also important in the private sector. This aspect of composition creates challenges to the board accomplishing goals when the leadership or the decisions made do not align with those political or, in this case, corporate goals or ideologies. For resourced strapped institutions, such as HBCUs, this can result in restricted access to much needed streams of resource.

Members of the Edward Waters College board espoused the importance of a diverse board, both racially and in professional affiliation. However the length of service as a member, the impact of politicians, and an overwhelming presence of alumni, were discussed as bringing about challenges for the board. With boards of trustees there is

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communicate such with the bishop of that episcopal district. *Doctrine and Discipline of the AME Church*, 2012.

often a mix of more senior members and more neophyte members. This breakdown can create an unspoken hierarchy among members, as it does in many organizations (Janis, 1992, Leana & Van Buren III, 1999; Legon, 2013). One member explains,

Sometimes there are just elements of longevity of service that have to do with unwritten rules of rank and authority that may sometimes intermingle in the culture of a board. So it's similar to any other type of organization to say when you come in the front door you are just there at the front door. That doesn't mean that you automatically have an equal voice at the table just because you have a seat at the table. So sometimes there are those types of, it's not anything overt in my mind but it's because many times the board is engaged in a collaborative process to reach levels of consensus. So people in a very human way gravitate towards perspectives that they consider to be reputable and tested. Sometimes when people are new you have not had the opportunity to demonstrate a level of expertise because people don't know your portfolio of work and contributions.

Who sits on the board continued has impact on the board. Much like the members at Allen University, political seats and political views on the board were perceived to come with a set of challenges. One board member shares,

There's always political parties that can make things challenging. When you have different perspectives based upon your personal politics there are those same types of external affiliations between board members that sometimes can compete with vision for the institution.

It is not uncommon for boards of trustees at any institution to have alumni presence. However, it was expressed that a large number of board members being alumni can bring challenges to having diverse perspectives regarding decisions and goals for the institution. Although this was expressed, I found that it was only expressed by members who were not alumni, possibly indicating that alumni board members are unaware of the sentiment of their fellow, non-alumni board members. The challenge created by the alumni and non-alumni composition extended into a larger conversation regarding the challenges of HBCU affiliated and non- HBCU affiliated members. For this study, I

define an HBCU affiliated person as a person who has attended or worked extensively at an HBCU. One Edward Waters' board member shares the strong role HBCU and institutional culture plays in board work,

You will not be successful at the HBCU without it. You have to, pardon the phrase, drink the Kool-Aid of that particular institution or institution's culture and its history or you have to provide them with a different beverage that they're willing to begin to start consuming, that they're going to like better than what they've had. Sometimes you may see very sound business practice reasons to do that but they're not enough to overcome the cultural lore. Other times there may be external factors that necessitate a shift and so it makes it easier to overcome the cultural lore. In the absence of those things it's challenging.

The board member continues to talk about the more individual experience of the HBCU affiliated and non HBCU affiliated relationship,

But by the same token it's not uncommon outside of our formal meetings for those of us that went to majority institutions to be reminded of such as we're sitting around chatting or whatever the case is. That's what I mean about that culture. So it's become a joke for us and sometimes we'll say well okay we're all going to sit over here at the majority table and go from there. So we make light of it but it's clear that there is a cultural component that if you take it too seriously there could be an us and a them. That's not happening but it is something that people tease about. I think it means different things based upon different generations.

It is important to understand the important role of HBCUs and institutional culture in the work of the board. Without this understanding, engaging in and navigating the work of the board can be difficult. A board member from Paul Quinn College reiterates this, speaking specifically to the position of board chair. The member, speaking about leadership understanding the survival mode that many HBCUs find themselves in constantly, states,

The board president that operates in that same system, and really operates in that same kind of continuum because of survivor ability is a major challenge, and sometimes board presidents come, in particular when they're coming from the business community, they have difficulties understanding or ... they understand it

but they have difficulty identifying with this current, this constant challenge of survival mode, because for the most part if they're from the corporate world they have been ignorantly successful, and survival is not their issue, thriving is their issue.

The professional backgrounds of board members can bring their own challenges to the work of the board. It is also apparent that the perspectives, the experiences, the allegiances, the politics and how all of these things interact in the board room brings challenges as well. Furthermore, the understanding of roles is affected by the way all of the aforementioned things play out in the work of the board. Though roles may be formally defined, this informal understanding of roles can create challenges for boards if gone unnoticed or unaddressed.

### **Relationships**

Board members not only spoke about how the composition of a board and the way in which it formally and informally operates creates challenges. Board members also talked about how issues centered on relationships create challenges to doing the work of the board. These issues include issues of individual ego, intraboard conflict, the relationship between AMEs and non-AMEs, and the relationship between board members who are clergy and the chair of the board. Board members spoke about challenges that arise that are directly related to board members relationships external to the board but mostly members' relationships with each other.

### **Intraboard Conflict**

With any board of trustees there are bound to be moments of intraboard conflict. These institutions were no different. Board members discussed the challenges that intraboard

conflict can cause in the board accomplishing goals. Participants from Allen University and Paul Quinn College spoke specifically to the challenges of intraboard conflict.

Though Edward Waters College participants did speak to board challenges, they did not speak specifically to intraboard conflict. The Paul Quinn College and Allen University participants identified elements that played a role in intraboard conflict arising. Those elements are “mess” or distractions, politics, and ego. “Mess” was a word that was introduced through a participant’s response during an interview. I wanted to ensure that I did not take the liberty of creating my own definition for this term, so I asked the participant if they could define the term for me. This was their response:

I think mess is ... what I mean by mess is an issue that takes you off subject, an issue that has little to do with the mission of the organization, and something that is, something that becomes real that isn't, and so it's fun to talk about the mess because the real work requires some sweat equity. There you go. The real work requires hard work. And so sometimes it's easier to major in mess and minor in the real work.

Based on this participant’s response “mess” can be issues between members, or issues on the board that are not salient or pertinent to the work at hand. This “mess” creates conflict between members and ultimately causes a distraction. A board member at Paul Quinn College explains, “Board members talk among board members, and you can’t get caught up in a mess and you forget about your real responsibilities.” When digging deeper into this idea of “mess” what was found at the core was the element of ego. Ego for the sake of this study is “the opinion that you have about yourself”. ([www.merriam-](http://www.merriam-)

[webster.com](http://webster.com)). Participants felt that “mess” or intraboard conflict that arose pointed back to the mismanagement of individual ego within the group context of the board. One board member stated, “I think ego is the biggest one, having a need to be right or win an argument as opposed to doing what’s best for the school, coming into it with too much ownership of a decision is probably the biggest problem.” Another board member explains how ego comes into board dynamics,

Often times, we can take a basic decision that should have been a win for all involved and turn it into a win for me. And sometimes we can take a decision that was not very well done and we can turn it into them, or it’s the blame game, or the winner take all game. And neither one of those postures or ways of operating is good for the institution for an organization in my estimation.

According to participants, when a member’s ego becomes too much of the focus, or a member focuses more on their own wants and agendas than the board or the institution, this causes intraboard conflict. This intraboard conflict results in challenges for the work of the board and eventually a stumbling or roadblock in the board accomplishing their goals.

### **Relationship between AMEs and non-AMEs**

Boards of trustees at these three institutions must navigate the culture and climate of AME-affiliated institutions as mixed groups of AME affiliated and non-AME affiliated members. As the interactions between non-HBCU affiliated members and HBCU affiliated members contributed to board challenges, the relationship between AME affiliated and non AME affiliated members rose to the surface an issue that can pose challenges to the work of the board. One Allen University board member



commented on their observation of the way in which non AME board members' were received in board discussions. The board member states,

...I think we are too, the board should have the freedom and I don't know why we don't have the freedom to express the concern because I've seen when board members outside of our members that are affiliated with the AME church. When those expressions are made they are not really received in a professional manner. The professional manner is that we are still deep into tradition as far as AME's are concerned and that kind of, is not in synch with what's out there in the world where the money is and where the activity is. So I've seen a lot of members that came on board with me and before me and they stay on for a year, do the input and the next thing you know they're sending a letter of resignation and so forth. So I think we need to think outside of the AME box and I think that's what really deterring Allen University in becoming a great university.

The sentiment that non AME board members' opinions were not always welcomed in a "professional manner" or considered was something that both non-AME affiliated and AME affiliated members expressed. Another Allen University board member alludes to the board possibly not engaging fully with non- AME ideas or connections. The board member states,

And a lot of the AME members on the board, and they love serving on the board, and that's great. And they love having a university. And AME, actually the university is heavily dependent on the AME conference of South Carolina for financial support. And they, the church puts a lot of money into the university. But still, it needs a larger community support and external support, in order to make it viable and comfortable.

Board members felt that at times the non-AME affiliated members were not heard or were not used to their fullest potential. This at times created an atmosphere where AME board members' felt or perceived that their voices and perspectives were more valuable. At Allen University this perception could be a product of the substantial financial dependency the institution has on the Seventh Episcopal District. One board member echoes this possibility sharing,

Well, when members of the AME church contribute to the financial stability of the institution, I think sometimes, and it's a very, very, large denomination in South Carolina, they cover 95,000 people, I think sometimes when people provide financial support from the different churches, they may believe that that gives them some kind of, I won't say authority over the institution, but some kind of influence over the institution in the matters of the institution. But as a lay person and a Higher Education administrator, my view is academic integrity of the institution has to be maintained no matter where the money comes from. That's not a very big problem but sometimes I see that create some discussion.

This relationship with the AME church seemed to create another layer of challenges at Allen University in particular. The relationship between the clergy board members and the chair of the board was expressed by Allen University board members as one that comes with a set of trials. The governance structure of the AME church is such that the presiding prelate, or bishop, of a particular episcopal district has the authority to appoint pastors to their charges. The bishop can move a pastor from one charge to another at will, as long as due notice is given (Doctrine & Discipline of AME Church, 2012). This means that an active pastor in an episcopal district answers to the bishop—the bishop is in essence the pastor's boss. For bi-vocational pastors this may not pose as a huge issue. Yet, for pastors who do so full-time, where one pastors can drastically affect their and their family's standard of living. Presiding elders, who work someone as a middle manager in the AME church governance structure, also answer to the bishop. This power dynamic outside of the board can undoubtedly find itself into the work of the board of trustees where clergy members are active pastors and presiding elders in the same episcopal district where the chair of the board also serves as Bishop. This is the case at both Allen University and Edward Waters College. Paul Quinn College has a different composition where there are clergy members who serve in the episcopal district where the chair serves as bishop, but many clergy members are from outside episcopal

districts. Allen board members expressed how their setup creates challenges in their work. One Allen board member states,

Human nature would say if you are just adamant about something or just speak up and sometime your opinion may go up against the grain of the presiding prelate then it's always that , "well I can't say because my job depends, is in the hand of the bishop." I think they just need to have less clergy or community folks. I think if we have that, there's nothing wrong with our presiding prelate but my thing, even when I was an administrator or whatever, is that you need opinions...

Another states their concern with the clergy members on the board,

And these ministers, I think sometimes the ministers bring to the board a view of a relationship of the university to the AME church. And my view is of course, and this is just me, that the institution is an independent entity and while the AME church supports it, that it has to have academic integrity and independence. And, I worry about that a little bit from time to time.

I pointed out earlier how the relationship between clergy and the chair did not seem to pose an issue at Paul Quinn College, and this could be due to the composition of the board. This trend seemed to carry over into the relations between AME board members and non-AME board members. A Paul Quinn College board member did feel that though the non-AME members and the AME members can find themselves in tense board relations, the way to nullify this is that board members are familiar with each other prior to serving. The board member explains,

Well a lot of us have had prior relationships. Like I said, if we have past support, then we all just recommend, then we all know each other. We all know each other. Jim<sup>14</sup> and I, we're in the same history, we served together. We served together in the military....David again, we served together. He's military, retired as well, and he is a member of our church,... Bishop, of course, is our boss.... And Matthew and I started ministry together. He's a very good friend of mine. So all of the ministers know each other. Now, I do know some of the business

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<sup>14</sup>All names used in this quote are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

executives as well, because if you're not super smart and you're in Dallas, you might need to know somebody. So I know them. I think that because we do know each other, and because we know something about one another, I think that helps us rather than hinders us in what we do. I think it brings, it's a big plus that we do know each other so that we can work together.

One may question the strength of the actual relationship or ties between the AME church and these three institutions. The church as an organization does not have legal or legislated say in the governance of the institutions. Furthermore, Allen University was the only institution that expressed a large portion of its monetary support coming from the church. However, the institutional legacy and political connections with the church, particularly in the cases of Allen University and Edward Waters College, keep strong cultural and political ties to the institutions. These ties in essence maintain a relationship prime for influence from the AME church and the work of the boards.

The two takes on the institutional relationship with the AME church reflects the two ways in which the institutions approach the relationship of the board. Allen University consists of a clergy laden board whereas the board at Paul Quinn College has a 50/50 composition. It is possible that the actual numerical representation on the board of non-AME members and AME members communicates, in itself, the value of each party's voice and perspective. Regardless of the composition, the nature and quality of the relationships between board members impacts the work of the board at these institutions.

## **Chapter 7: Presidential Selection Process and Personality**

One of the most important decisions a board of trustees has to make at an institution is the selection of a president. There are many technical pieces to the presidential search process that are found at institutions across the country. However, there is much about the presidential search process, particularly at HBCUs that remains mysterious. Being that this is such an important process in the work of a board, and a very crucial one at HBCUs, I presumed that exploring the presidential selection process at these institutions would give further insight into the decision making processes and the elements there within. Furthermore, my qualitative approach to understanding this process would unearth elements of the process that spoke to the ways in which individual members engaged with and viewed the process.

Through questions, board members had the opportunity to share not only the way they approach the selection process but also how they evaluate potential candidates and the measures used for said evaluation. I also took the opportunity to speak with current presidents at the institutions to get their perspectives regarding the criteria that solidified the confidence of the board to select the sitting president for the position. Participants were asked about their experience in being involved in the presidential selection process, what they considered positive attributes of a presidential candidate, and what traits would make them cautious in selecting a president. In the case of the presidents, they were asked to discuss their experience with the presidential search process while a presidential candidate, what attributes they felt a president of an HBCU needed, and what characteristics would make a candidate not be selected by a board. All board members were not able to comment in detail about their experiences with the process as some had

never been on the actual committee that dealt primarily with the search. However, all participants were able to speak to what they felt were positive and negative attributes to a candidate. This is important to understand as candidates are eventually presented to the full board for a vote. Therefore the ways in which various members of a board evaluate candidates is vital. It is also important to note that only two of the presidents of the three institutions were available to participate in the study.

The presidential search process varies from institution to institution. The amount of persons involved in the process can vary depending on the degree to which shared governance is employed as well as institutional policies regarding the search process. In most cases, a search committee is formed from within the board of trustees. This committee discusses the state of the institution and what are desirable traits of an ideal candidate. The committee then strategizes ways to embark upon the search. An increasingly common tool that committees use for their presidential searches are search firms. Search firms are professional organizations that service higher education institutions in performing national searches and identifying potential candidates for executive leadership that meet the assessed needs of the institution. Participants spoke to their experience using search firms. In fact, participants expressed that using search firms was an expected and common practice. Various participants shared their experience using search firms in the presidential selection process:

One participant shared,

I thought the search firm was absolutely necessary. They could help winnow down the very significant number of applications that we received and they could help us with where people were in their career path and experience in terms of what we were looking for. So as an example, we would have maybe the fundraiser for a college applying for the president or we might have the provost

from another college applying for the president, so really varied backgrounds. They helped us to look through to find the most complete backgrounds that we were looking for.

Another participant shared,

Well, they, the professional consulting firms, I don't know how much you know about it, but companies, consulting firms, that will assist Boards of Trustees in the search for a President, they have a lot of things in common. One is they charge you a lot of money. Then they will scour the nation and they will get up a list of candidates. And they will present the board with however many candidates the board would like to have, four, five, six, seven, or eight. And they'll thoroughly explore their backgrounds. And then they would help evaluate the candidates and the board will ... under South Carolina law, when it gets down to the three finalists, they have to make the names of those finalists public if it's a public institution. That doesn't apply this is a private institution. And it's kind of a standard process. They just go all over the country and find Presidents who might have indicated an interest in moving up, and then they'll, whenever they find however many the board requests.

Another participant shared,

Well, from the, as a board member, the process is usually you hire a search firm to feel all of the applicants because it's usually an overwhelming number, and there has to be a screening entity.

Participants at these institutions were comfortable and confident in the use of

search firms in the presidential search process. Though this may be common practice search firms do not have the final say—boards decide who will lead best. “Finding the right leader requires serious and deep consideration, even with the help of a reputable search firm and a dedicated search committee.” (Ezzell Jr. & Schexnider, 2010, p.5)

Selecting a president is not merely a process of sorting through search firm recommendations, but rather a deliberation and evaluating process of the board that moves a candidate to the president's seat. A part of this deliberation is the interview process.

The interview portion of any hiring process is a way for the hiring party to understand and learn more about the candidate they have found suitable via application.

Participants shared that the interview process serves a similar purpose for their institutions' presidential selection processes. Many participants shared that the way you can really find out the characteristics and traits of a candidate, that don't appear on a resume, is through asking interview questions. One participant described the interview process sharing,

The question I would ask first of all candidates is tell me who you are. Once he starts telling me or she starts telling me who they are then I will be able to, okay, how did you become this way by way of your experience. How many jobs have you been on and so forth and what were your responsibilities? Give me some ideas of your responsibility. Who did you supervise and so forth? So once you get into that kind of setting the questions will flow. Even if the person is not giving you the answer you can push someone to answer because typically interviews are stealing just to get the person to kind of relax and so you can have an honest dialog with the person.

Another participant shares a similar sentiment,

...in the process of the interview, you'll deal with hard questions and you'll hear the answers come out. Beyond just simply looking at what they've done. Now some people may not have had a highly extensive background in certain of these areas, but they've shown indications that they can do it. Or, you have some reference that suggests that they are ignorantly trainable in a particular area. Interviewing allows board members to decipher and filter out if candidates hold

the traits they find favorable for a president. This interview process also helps board members readily identify traits they find undesirable for a president. The question that came to my mind from this information was, what exactly are these favorable and unfavorable traits? Why are they important to the presidency? And why are these traits important to the presidency at these particular HBCUs? I asked participants what they felt were desirable and not so desirable traits in a presidential candidate. Their responses for desirable traits coalesced into three main areas: skill, personality, and networks. The responses for non-desirable traits coalesced into three main areas: Physical, personality, and skill.



## Desirable Traits

### Skills

Skills that board members expressed as desirable for presidential candidates included being an academician, having achievement and execution skills, being an administrator, having balance, being able to bring people together, being business minded, being a communicator, having credentials, exhibiting success, being a fundraiser, having legal and policy skills, having management skills, and being a salesperson. I focus on the most commonly referred to skills—being able to bring people together, being a communicator, being a fundraiser, and being a salesperson.

Fundraising is a concern of priority for most HBCUs (AGB, 2013; Gasman, 2010; Gasman et al., 2013). Due to this reality, it is often an important trait institutions look for in a presidential candidate (Jones & Weathersby, 1978; Willie et. al., 2006; Gasman et. al., 2007; Gasman, 2008; Pelletier, 2008). Participants in this study affirmed the sentiment. One board member shared how important it was to have a president that could get those outside of the Allen University community to give money to the institution.

The trustee states,

I'm talking about being able to sell the university to the outside world to generate income for the survival of Allen University. I don't know if you understand what I'm saying but that's where we need a person that can communicate not only to AME and to the faculty and staff and to the student body but we need someone out into the public that can sell Allen University, to make Allen University so attractive that these private philanthropists would gladly donate funds for the survival of Allen University.

One trustee explained that being able to fundraise may actually be more important than a presidential candidates academic credentials. The trustee shares,

You can have someone with all the personality, all the smarts, all the Ph.D.'s and degrees in education but if you don't know how to foster relationships outside the

college to build your financial resources and to raise money and endowments and things you will lose the battle.

Another trustee explains that a president has to be able to not just fundraise but to also engage in development work. The trustee explains, “One has to be skilled in development in terms of fundraising and development of not just of fundraising but assets and resources. That is extremely important.” A Paul Quinn College trustee sums up the sentiment shared by most participants regarding the dire importance for an HBCU president to have fundraising skills.

.... I think that you have to be a good fundraiser, because that’s what Presidents do as part of their job, is to raise funds and to give students... and if you’re not going to be able to do that then you’re not going to make it as President of a college, a black college. We don’t have the resources that other schools such as my alma mater have, we just don’t have it like that.

Aside from being a strong fundraiser participants expressed, with almost the same level of vigor, the importance for a presidential candidate to be a great communicator. The president of a university is a public figure and in some cases a politician. At an HBCU, the president also plays a symbolic role in the Black community as a community leader—representing the best of the race and culture (Evans et al., 2002). These roles force the president to be in various capacities and constituencies with which they will have to effectively communicate. One board member speaks to the need for a presidential candidate to be able to communicate with multiple groups of people stating,

The second is there are so many constituents that you have to really react to and persuade and influence that I think you have to be very broad in that ability to communicate on that level and not be afraid to knock on doors, not be afraid to meet with people. Frankly, you’re meeting with people all the time.

Another board member echoes these sentiments,

The ability to communicate with internal and external constituencies is a primary thing. You must be able to communicate with the internal and external constituencies of the institution, if the President is going to succeed and the institution is going to be, move forward. And that means in the business

community outside. It means political agencies and other grant funding sources from outside. And internally it means that the administration, the staff, the faculty, and the students. And you just, really good Presidents have a talent for communicating with all of the constituencies of the institution.

One board member spoke to the need to evaluate the candidate's technical

communication skills, stating,

...you look at their ability to communicate. Communication skills you would not see on a resume but that you would see when interviewing. How do they project? What they're saying is it convincing? Do I think that this person can help bridge the gap and be the liaison between the students and the board?

A member from Paul Quinn College focused on the need for the presidential candidate to

be able to communicate effectively with the board, explaining it in terms of

communicating vision,

Well I'm not saying that they ought not have a vision, they ought not have, but it should be able to be again articulated so that others can embrace the vision. And if it can't be articulated in a manner where every day people and our board members can't embrace it, then it becomes very difficult to see it come to fruition.

Another Paul Quinn College board member echoed these sentiments stating, "The president of the college, I think, has to be decisive in terms of his or her articulation of the vision of the college." However approached, and regardless of the audience, the general consensus was that a viable candidate must be able to communicate and be able to communicate well. The skills of being a salesperson and being able to bring people together were the next most commonly desirable skills lifted by participants. Being able to perform as a salesperson appeared to be an extension of the desire for the candidate to be a great communicator. One board member shared this sentiment saying,

I think first and foremost you have to be an outstanding communicator and you have to be somebody who is comfortable essentially selling your product, which is the university or college, 24/7 whether it's to students, to parents, to faculty, to alumni, to donors, to local business folks. You're essentially that spokesperson for that college and frankly you have to be sort of be all things to all people, which is really difficult.

This reiterates my earlier assertion that the college presidency is not simply a structural position of leadership but also a symbolic position—a living logo (McLaughlin & Reisman, 1996). Another board member elaborates,

We have to elect a person, a president that has the charisma to go out and try to get the money for Allen University. I don't care how much we have little ad hoc committees established saying we're going get monies and so forth. If the president is not out there begging and pleading those ad hoc committees cannot do but so much. The world or the state of the community looks for that leadership which is in the presidency.

The board member goes on to explain how this public persona can affect enrollment,

And the other thing is the public persona of Allen is very important because Allen needs to attract more students. And if you don't build a constructive public image for Allen, it does not enhance the chore of attracting more students. They really need to build enrollment at the institution.

Enrollment is an important issue for HBCUs as most are heavily tuition dependent (Sav, 2000). A board member for Paul Quinn put the need to be a salesperson this way,

Presidents should serve at the top cheerleader, the top cheerleader for that student who has interest in not only going to school but graduating from school, and not just graduating but doing well while they're there.

Not only did board members desire the skill of being a salesperson but also the skill of bringing people together. A number of board members felt that this was a skill that could be detected through the way in which a candidate handled him or her self in an interview. The manner in which candidates engaged in conversation communicated to a number of participants whether or not they would be able to accomplish creating an environment conducive for consensus building. A board member at Allen University explains the importance of possessing this skill for their particular institution,

..in the case of Allen, I think, Allen University, the ability to juggle all of these different constituencies and bring them together is going to be the biggest chore, and it's going to be the biggest, the largest necessity because we, Allen has to have the support of all of the constituencies in order to prosper.

A board member at Edward Waters College mentioned how a person who did not appear

to be a team player would bring pause,

In this day and age I am cautious of an individual that seems to be singular in their advancement of vision, purpose, scope, someone who is not a collaborator in their work, ,that has much more of an autocratic approach.

Another board member from Paul Quinn College member also affirmed these sentiments stating,

I think the president has to have the ability to incorporate other persons' viewpoints in his or her managerial and administrative style to include staff members, and to include board members in the context of being advisors to the activities that the president is involved in or engaged in.

Board members want a leader, but a leader who leads through consensus and team work, especially in conjunction with the board.

### **Personality**

Personality traits also proved important to board members. These personality traits include being available, being committed to HBCUs, being committed to the institution, faith, having good board relations, having good faculty relationships, being innovative, intelligence, being open minded, having a certain type of personality, having a passion for education, having a personal interest in the institution, having a presence, being realistic, being school focused, being student focused, being able to accept constructive criticism, being able to understand failure, and having vision. I focus on the traits most mentioned by board members across all three institutions. These traits are having a certain type of personality, having presence, being student focused, and being innovative.

Charisma, is a trait desired of many college presidents regardless of sector as it is a trait often associated with leadership (Northouse, 2012). Board members at these institutions agreed but desired leaders to possess a certain type of charisma and

personality. The personality that is desired is one that is big but connected. Though on the surface this would be another commonly desired trait of a college president, when taking a closer look the way in which board members wanted a president to be connected held more nuance. One Edward Waters College trustee explains that the school needs, “Someone who is able to connect with the community and the community has to connect with him or her, that particular president....they have to be likeable.” Another Edward Waters College trustee shared a more detailed desire,

The President has to have a gregarious personality. You have to be able to be friendly and kind and not afraid of the people. You need to be able to have a common touch,, that you could relate to everyone and make everyone feel special. So you’ve got to be a people’s person.

This idea of being “touchable,” being a people person, and having a “warm spirit” was a reoccurring theme across trustees. A Paul Quinn College trustee expressed this sentiment as a candidate having good energy and that energy being transparent through the interview process.

This “touchable” personality worked in conjunction with what board members described as presence. Having a presence whether physically or through one’s presence was a trait that board members felt was necessary to be a successful president at their institutions.

One board member states the importance of having presence for a president, “Your presence and your caring nature, you have to, because at an HBCU, it’s family.” Another board member states the impact that presence has,

I would like the President to be outgoing. I would like to see the President going to games, football games, basketball games. Maybe during halftime walking the stands and just speaking to everybody, just saying hello, how are you doing, welcome to Edward Waters College or welcome to Florida State or welcome to FMU. That gives a sense of that’s my President.

One Paul Quinn College board member uses the current president as an example to the importance of presence,

The President is there. He's visible. His presence means a lot. He gave to me, sold it to me...But to see the President there on that grounds, we don't have, I don't think the major presence. I think that's what Sorrel, Doctor [sic] Sorrel is making the impact that he's making, the presence, and the caring nature, the interaction with the presence there with the faculty and the students is important. Presence and personality are important to board members at these institutions.

Presence and personality are not necessarily tied to an actual function of the position of president. Rather, the presence and personality of a candidate communicates a commitment of sorts to board members. It reinforces the symbolic nature of the HBCU president, a symbolic nature that board members desired a presidential candidate to be complicit in undertaking. Board members also wanted to know that a candidate is student focused. HBCUs proudly tout their campuses as nurturing spaces for students. Board members expressed that an ideal president must understand that students are at the center of many of the decisions and practices on campus. One Edward Waters College trustee explains how central students are to campus operations,

So I might not have repeated it. But actually respect and appreciation for the job, which is advancing students. I mean students is the key to everything on campus. Without the students, you don't have a college, you don't need a college. So students, you have to be able to serve the need for the students. And that means that you've got to identify and be willing to address it.

An Allen University board member goes on to explain why a presidential candidate must exude this,

For the students' sake you need a person that can relate and understand the need of these young people that are away from home and how comfortable they feel on a campus under your leadership. So everything is geared toward the students. Don't try to impress me. I want you to tell me how you are going to make the students comfortable so that he or she can get all that he or she needs from the university to go out in this crazy world that we have.

A trustee from Paul Quinn College shares why being student focused is not only about the students but loving the type of student that are at Paul Quinn. In fact, this trustee feels this trait may be even more important than a candidate's pedigree,

To have a love for the students. You have to have a love for the parents. You have to have a clear understanding about the challenges that these students are here are facing. Without that you are in trouble, because it's good to have someone who made straight As, graduated from Harvard, graduated from Yale, lived in the Hamptons, if they really don't understand, then you've got the wrong person in the there. You've got the wrong person.

An ideal candidate, for these board members, is one who understands the institution is about the students and can convey they too are for the students, and not just students in general, but the specific type of students that these institutions service. Servicing students well is of growing importance. In order for campuses to be able to serve students well they must be able to stay current and relative to the needs of students. Being open to innovation plays an important role in this being accomplished. Board members of these three institutions expressed that being innovative is also a trait they desire in an ideal president. Being innovative was also communicated as being "creative". An Edward Waters College board member shared concerning an ideal candidate, "They need to be creative, they need to be sensitive and caring, and willing to operate on occasion within the rules but outside the box." A Paul Quinn College trustee echoed this sentiment saying that a candidate "needs to be creative". Another Edward Waters College trustee elaborated,

I just believe no matter how skilled an individual may be the success of institutions is so complex that while they may be strengthening one aspect of the college it is likely that that other aspects are being starved simply because they have a blind spot towards the needs of the whole institution. So I am a bit leery of that and I am a big leery of anyone who does not have a penchant for innovation and change because I believe higher education we're in a season of higher education is responding to the needs to be much more adaptive.



Innovation or “creativity” are necessary traits, to these board members, for candidates to be seriously considered as a person they can entrust as the president of their respective institutions.

## **Networks**

The networks that a candidate was a part of or connected to were important to board members. This was expressed both through the explicit explanation of networks but also through the use of words that were related to the idea of networks. These networks and ideas about the importance of networks include being affiliated with the AME church, being an alumnus, being connected with the community, being familiar with HBCUs, being an HBCU insider or having established relationships with HBCUs, having multiple networks, and having an understanding of the AME church. For this study, I focus on the most common to arise in participant discussions: Being connected to the community, having multiple networks, having a relationship with HBCUs and having an understanding of the AME church. Having a prior relationship, whether attending an HBCU or previously working at an HBCU provided members with a belief that a candidate had a sincere care for HBCUs—the HBCU legacy would be safe in her hands. Similarly, a candidate who had an understanding of the AME church communicated a sense of legitimacy to board members.

**Multiple Networks.** Having multiple networks presented itself as a desirable trait for presidential candidates. Though this was a trait that could be represented on a resume or through references, many board members felt this was best gauged through the interview process. These networks were used to vouch other characteristics about the

candidate but were also viewed as a means to access finances for the institution. A board member from Edward Waters College states,

One of the main characteristics that makes a good president is having a relationship outside of the college that will impact the board, be in community leaders, national and local, state and federal levels. I think he or she needs to have relationships, great relationships with people who love education, who are willing to give dollars towards education to his or her particular school. This trustee saw the networks a candidate was a part of as access to people or entities that would invest in education and the institution. However this trustee also saw networks as a way to determine if a candidate genuinely cared about HBCUs and the Black community. The trustee continues to state, ...what connections does he or she have. If you're a true advocate people will know it. People will know it. They will know it... You have to have strong deep roots to the black community, to black leadership. I said black but you know what I mean, to the leadership in the community and get to know them and have favorable connections with them. Not necessarily be their buddy but just know they have a great connection with them or at least a working relationship and get things done.

Networks appear to be a way to determine "credibility" for a presidential candidate.

Some trustees saw a necessity to have a diverse set of networks, particularly a racially diverse set of networks. Another Edward Waters trustee states,

....you have to know people other than in your own ethnicity. You have to know folk who are Caucasians, Hispanics, Greeks, Polish, I mean the whole nine. It has to be a melting pot. You can't just be limited to one group of folk but your reach has to be far reaching. It has to be broad. You have to know more than just people in your own denomination. You have to be ecumenical in your mindset. So even though it's an AME school but guess what not just, you have more than just AME's who attend your school. You have to know the folk in the Baptist denomination. You have to know folk in the Presbyterian. You have to know folk in the heads of these judicatories in order to make a successful school.

A Paul Quinn College trustee reiterated this, with a focus on the business community, stating

I think the president of Paul Quinn must have an ability to develop contact in the community, especially with the business community and you've got to be able to know how to ask for money, if the school wants for it, to have contributions and those are mainly going to come from the business community.

A candidate having networks was important not only for the institution but for a better understanding of the personhood of the candidate. One of those networks that board members felt was important for a candidate to possess was a connection to the community. The definition of community would vary between the HBCU community, the surrounding community of the institution, and the larger Black community. Trustees may have differed in how they viewed or defined the word community, but they did feel that having a connection to “the community” was an important trait for a candidate to possess. One Edward Waters College president speaks to the candidate being connected to the Edward Waters’ community,

They have to connect and feel they have to own the community and the community has to take ownership in them and like him or her. It feels like that president, be it he or she, is invested in the life of that college particularly Edward Waters College.

However that same trustee then speaks to the importance of an HBCU president needing to know the HBCU community, stating, “I think historically black college presidents personally you need to know the lay of the land. They need to know the people.”

Another trustee shares the importance of being and having connection to this “community”,

You need folk who may not be in an official capacity but you need to find out from folk what folk are saying in the community about my school that you don’t get from folk who you pay. Like in the church we would say you need some folk other than stewards and trustees even though they are a part of the official cabinet. They are an extension of the pastor. However, you need folk, you need Sally who you can call on the phone and say what do you think about this, what do you think about that. That’s what you need even with the school. You need folk who have their ear to the ground, that they have their finger to the pulse and that you’ll be able to get a great representation of what is being said in the community, what’s being said by the students, the whole nine, in order to make sure that you can make intelligent decisions.

An already established connection with the HBCU community continued to reoccur as important. This was not completely surprising as many HBCU presidents have some sort of HBCU pedigree (Freeman & Gasman, 2014; Mishra, 2007). Board members shared how this is an important trait, the various ways that this is exhibited by candidates, and what this trait communicates. One Edward Waters board member shares very strong sentiments regarding this matter,

I've always said that an apple cannot judge an orange. You've got to be from the same cut. HBCU's have some unique issues. A president who's been through it and they went to a historically black college would understand.

This statement proved interesting and insightful. HBCUs have often been criticized for the recycling of presidents among the institutions (Gasman et al., 2007; Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, & Bowman, 2010; Ezzell & Schexnider, 2010; Wagener & Smith, 1993). The sentiments shared by this trustee could shed light on this phenomenon in pointing out the high value and highly desirable trait of having previously served as an HBCU president. The trustee doesn't speak to the value of service, just that the service existed. The trustee continues,

I just don't the president of a predominately white school, state school or private will understand the issues of a HBCU college....It takes someone who grew up, who's been to an HB they would understand. They would understand the lay of the land and unique issues.

Very similar to this connection to HBCUs was a connection or at least an understanding of the AME church. For these institutions, the AME church is very much intertwined into the identity of the institutions, at least for the members of the board. Therefore it was very important to board members that a presidential candidate not only respected this relationship but understood the church and the way in which it works in concert with the institutions. Of the three institutions Allen University appears to have

the strongest AME influence in school operations and decision making. The trustees of Allen shared their sentiments regarding a candidate understanding and respecting the AME church. One Allen trustee shares,

I think an understanding of the AME church in the smaller communities around South Carolina would be helpful. The students are really being, they're drawing from those churches for their students. So I think just a good understanding of that community, the bishop, to really understand their mission and what they're telling their community or their parishes

Another Allen trustee shares, "...and the AME church is very important because a lot of money comes to the institution from the AME church and from the alumni." Trustees from the other two institutions echoed similar sentiments. An Edward Waters' trustee shares,

I would want my president to know about if the person is not AME I would like for that person to know about our heritage, our history. I would like for our President to go to the AME churches, speak at our churches and develop days, special days in our churches where we would have an Edward Waters College Day, that the President would speak and then the choir would come and be a part of that. Would the President be amenable? Would the President be willing to do those things? I think that helps to shape the outlook and it helps to develop positive relationships even in the churches because you don't know who you're going to reach on a Sunday morning. You don't know who is sitting in your pew.

A Paul Quinn trustee shares,

I guess from the public sector side, he or she has to have a compassion, and a passion, for ministry, and understand the educational process for a historically black college that's under the auspices of the AME church, that it has a relationship. Even though it is autonomous to, or it stands on its own, and it is not necessarily, the General Conference does not dictate to the institution its goals and objectives. But even so, it still should be mindful of its history, and that should certainly inform and hope, I hope in some way, influence its present and its future.

Trustees took very seriously a candidate having an understanding and respect for the AME church. This did not appear to be just a historical understanding but also an understanding of the current, seemingly active relationship. This trait, much like the

other traits speaking to networks, communicated a sense of commitment and respect to trustees. One they desired from a presidential candidate.

### **Non-Desirable Traits**

#### **Physical**

As there are traits that board members find desirable, there are traits that they do not find desirable. Board members expressed strong feelings about traits that would make them leery of selecting a candidate for the presidency. One area that board members shared, that would bring them pause, was in the physicality of the candidate, in the areas of age and bad health. These issues basically were in regards to if a candidate was too young or not healthy enough for the rigor of the job. Both of these traits present an interesting paradox. As bad health is often associated with aging, I found it interesting that a candidate's youth could also serve as problematic. However the aversion to younger candidates is affirmed by the slightly higher average age of HBCU presidents in comparison to their PWI counterparts. (Mishra, 2007)

#### **Skill**

The area of skill, or rather lack of skill, was another area that could alert board members that a candidate was not suitable to lead their respective institution. Items mentioned were a lack of academic training and a failing track record. Though board members acknowledged that there were candidates who may not be academics that could serve well, they would be cautious of selecting someone who was not comfortable or accomplished in the area of academics. This proved interesting considering two of the three institutions have current presidents that came from non-academic careers—both of whom board members praised. Though it is clear that board members will select a

candidate that may not be a traditional academic, it is also apparent that an academic career or academic achievements communicate a qualification of sorts to board members. Having a failing track record also was of concern for board members selecting a presidential candidate. One Paul Quinn College trustee explained,

Track record. I would look at their track record. I'm not opposed to someone who had never been a president being president before. I am opposed to someone who has been a president or who has been a high-level administrator of a college or university and their track record spells failing.

Having a strong track record indicated to board members that candidates could be successful leading their institutions. This finding works against the common narrative of HBCUs having records of recycling fired and failed presidents (Gasman et al., 2007; Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, & Bowman, 2010; Ezzell & Schexnider, 2010; Wagener & Smith, 1993). This finding raised the question, if HBCU boards in fact disregard failed track records, or are other traits that communicate a stronger sense of trust and confidence, eventually overshadowing the tension that a failing track record creates? Even though practice may vary from what was professed, board members did identify that not having a strong academic background and having a failing track record were not desirable of a candidate.

### **Personality**

Much like the desirable traits, most of the non-desirable traits that board members identified fell into the category of a candidate's personality. These traits included, not willing to listen to board members, not wanting to fundraise, lack of accountability for staff, not encouraging board development, being a bad communicator, having a lack of innovation, not being able to build relationships or lacking in relationships, being short tempered, having a lack of understanding, being selfish,

micromanaging, having a personal agenda, negative attitude, and not having a realistic mindset. I will focus on the traits that were mentioned the most in discussion: Lack of communication, not willing to listen to the board, being selfish, and having a personal agenda. When looked at closely, these most commonly mentioned non-desirable traits worked in pairs—lack of communication complimenting not being willing to listen to the board and being selfish complementing having a personal agenda. Therefore, for the best analysis, I will discuss them as such.

### **Lack of communication and not being willing to listen to the board**

Being a strong communicator was lifted as a desirable trait in a candidate, the opposite, lacking communication was seen as a non-desirable trait. This lack of communication presented itself in two different ways. One way it was presented was the very technical sense of communication. Board members wanted someone who could articulate and express him or her self in a manner that multiple parties could understand. A person who was unable to do so was not one seemingly suitable for the presidency. One board member shared, “I would want someone to have vision and I would like for you to tell me even though you could not tell me what your vision is for Edward Waters College give me your vision for any school.” When asked how one could determine if a candidate lacked this skill another board member replied,

I would say in their initial presentation to not seem credible, to speak too general, and not have the depth of understanding, and not being able to articulate that in a way that it becomes clear quickly that he or she understands the scope of the task or the challenge before them, and opportunity.

The inability to clearly articulate a vision or an idea made board members question the credibility and ability of the candidate. The second way that board members communicated this lack of communication was in terms of being open and transparent



with the board. Board members who felt that a candidate did not appear transparent or honest questioned their ability to work with the board and in turn their ability to lead. One board member from Edward Waters explained why they would be leery of selecting a candidate who lacked communication in terms of consensus building stating, “In this day and age I am cautious of an individual that seems to be singular in their advancement of vision, purpose, scope, someone who is not a collaborator in their work, that has much more of an autocratic approach.” However, other board members clearly connected the lack of communication with a sense of dishonesty. One board member stated, “Well, if they’re not open and honest, that’s the main thing. If they keep things from the board, or they are just not open, there’s not transparency, and just honesty, that would cause a real challenge.” Another reflected on a bad experience with a president as an example, sharing,

Now, I had one President in South Carolina who was a wonderful President but she didn’t think that the board ought to be meddling in her business, so she just wouldn’t tell them what was going on and hell they fired her. I mean you can’t have that. You’ve just got to have a good working relationship between the board and the President in order for the President to succeed and move the institution forward.

Appearing open and honest is important to these board members. To appear otherwise brings alarm and signals that the candidate will not be able to work with the board. This leads into the non-desirable trait of being selfish and being focused on a personal agenda.

### **Being selfish and having a personal agenda**

Any leader has goals. However, the way in which a candidate communicates their goals can affect whether or not a board deems them fit to lead one of these institutions. Selfishness was echoed as a trait that made board members cautious. When

asked if there was a characteristic in a candidate that would make them cautious in selecting said candidate for the presidency, one board member replied, “Yes, if they’re selfish and interested in their own advancement instead of advancement of the institution, I have some reservations.” Another board member shared this aversion to selfishness in the form of seeing the presidency as a stepping stone of sorts. They explain,

...the decisions cannot be selfish or they cannot have an ulterior motive or the only reason why I’m doing what I’m doing is because I’m using this as a platform to go to somewhere else. This is a springboard to go somewhere else. I’m looking at another opportunity.

This sentiment points to what appears to be the real concern—personal agenda.

Board members are leery of a presidential candidate that speaks too much of their own agenda as it signals or communicates a possibility of not being a team player. Though they want a candidate that can articulate goals, they want those goals to be presented in a way where they are not the candidate’s goals, but “everyone’s” goals. As I spoke with participants, I pondered if there was an underlying belief that a president that presented too strong of an agenda made board members feel their position and even power as board members would be diminished? Was this desire for a candidate to not be selfish a mask for a candidate to not think they were more powerful than the board? In essence, was it important for a candidate to be confident but to “know their role” and understand that the still worked at the pleasure of the board?

These board members expressed a number of ways they use the identification of desirable and non-desirable traits to navigate suitable candidates in the presidential selection process. At times these traits mirrored skills needed for the tasks necessary to fulfill the duties of the presidency. Other times, the traits identified appeared to be more about values communicated to board members or measures of character. Board members

seemed equally concerned, if not more so, with what kind of person the candidate appeared to be as if the candidate could do the job. Board members were not just looking for a good president. Board members were looking for a certain kind of good president. It appears that this certain type of good president is one who exhibits values that closely align with those of the members of the board.

## **Chapter 8: Discussion and Implications**

The sustainability of HBCUs is important to increasing access to higher education for underrepresented groups of students. To ensure sustainability of these institutions leadership is key. Due to this fact, how HBCUs' boards of trustees engage in the decision making process, particularly the presidential selection process, is important to understand. Conversely, the decision making processes and governance practices of institutions can be layered and complex. When taking a closer look at the influence of individual institutional culture the layers and complexity increase. For HBCUs, the added cultural aspect of race intertwines with institutional practices. To assess the governance and decision making practices of HBCUs we must first understand their processes' inner workings and motivations. A contextually correct and culturally sensitive approach allows for a better understanding and more true assessment of the work of the board of trustees in these institutional settings.

Through the use of case study methodology, I sought out a deeper understanding of the members of AME affiliated HBCU boards of trustees. I also sought a deeper understanding of how these members individually and collectively approached their role as the ultimate decision making body at these institutions. Board members and presidents shared their experiences and beliefs concerning the role of the board at their institutions, how they performed their duties as board members, what the presidential selection process entails, and what board members considered traits of a good or bad presidential candidate. The qualitative data that these participants provided answered my major questions:

- 1.) What are the values of board members at AME affiliated HBCUs?

- 2.) How do these boards engage in the decision-making process, particularly the presidential selection process?
- 3.) What is the relationship, if any, between board members' values and the presidential selection process

The data shared by participants largely fell into three main categories. These categories were, the composition and values of boards, the decision making process, and the presidential selection process. Due to the case study and qualitative method employed, the findings of this study are not generalizable to all private HBCUs. Though this is the case, these findings lay a foundation for future researchers to explore the role of boards of trustees at similar institutions. This research begins the conversation of how individual board members and board composition can play a very important role in the strategic planning of an institution, particularly the selection of leadership.

## **Key Findings**

### **Board Composition**

Board members at these three institutions were all invited to sit on the board of trustees, in typical manner of private boards (Taylor, 2012). However, I found that though these three institutions were all AME affiliated, the path to the board on which board members found themselves varied. Also, the way in which boards selected members varied. A number of board members who were affiliated with the AME church found their way to the board by virtue of their position or relationship to the church. One institution's board members explicitly spoke to their positions in the church, including being pastors of certain churches, presiding elders, and officers in pertinent organizational components of the AME church. These positions aided in their being

invited to the board. Another institution explained that many of the AME members of the board were elected to serve on the board by the Annual Conferences of the Episcopal District of the AME church where the school resides. The third institution had members of the AME church but unlike its other two counterparts, these members were approached less for their position in the AME church and more so for their relationship with the institution, access to broader networks, or experience with higher education. This appears to be a strategic change of practice from much earlier administrations. This finding was important in not only understanding the composition of the board but the important role of the AME church in the way in which a board comes to be.

Church affiliated institutions and their relationship with their respective churches are often explored and discussed within the singular scope of being religious institutions. The focus of the influence of the church is framed in its religious and moral tenets and beliefs. However, my research points to understanding the influence of the church in respect to the political and power structures of the religious entity and denomination. Furthermore, what is commonly referred to as “The Black Church”, must be acknowledged as a structure of social mobility and elitism in the Black community (Graham, 1999). To understand the relationship and influence of the AME church and AME affiliated institutions, the political structure of the AME church must also be understood. In fact, this study unveils that it is not so much the religious affinity that affects decision making, but more so the denominational structure. This is important to understand when evaluating and assessing board work at similar institutions. The case of Paul Quinn College does highlight that though there may be no ability to completely avoid the influence or presence of the political aspect of the church, there is a way to

neutralize the effects. Schools affiliated with highly structured and politicized churches may have similar relationships. Schools affiliated with less structured, less politicized denominations may experience a different relationship. This study points to the need to understand the governance and structure of the churches in order to fully understand how the relationship plays out in the governance of the church affiliate institution.

Board diversity did not present itself as important to many of the participants. Very few participants across cases discussed the importance of a diverse group of board members. There could be various reasons for this happening, but without further study any assertions would be my mere speculation. Board diversity, when discussed broadly, is often framed in the context of race. Furthermore, in the larger conversation of diversity, the topic is often a code word for implying a need for an increase of persons of color. In spaces that have a critical mass of persons of color, such as an HBCU board, it is possible diversity issues are not in the forefront as they are seen as inapplicable. However diversity is not limited to having people of color but people representing a diverse group of backgrounds, genders, political beliefs, and occupations.

This study shows that boards who made an effort to have a diverse group of members in terms of occupations and backgrounds appeared to feel that the decision making process was one that was more balanced and objective—a perception complicated by the findings of this study. The case of Allen found that a lack of diversity in the background and occupation of members (members were mostly AME and mostly clergy) caused other members to be concerned with the objective quality of decisions being made. Though it was not largely discussed, looking at the demographic makeup of the boards also brings concerns of diversity. All boards were majorly Black, in some

cases only having one White member. In the area of gender equity, Paul Quinn and Edward Waters had seemingly more gender balanced boards, whereas Allen only had 3 women seated on a 17 member board.

It is important to note that achieving racial equity, gender equity, and diversity is not an issue unique to the HBCU sector. The concern is present across the breadth of the higher education landscape (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983; Taylor et al., 1991). However, given the unique context of HBCUs, both historically and contemporarily, it is important to understand why this gender and racial inequity exists on certain boards and not on others. In the private sector, the question is raised if this lack of racial diversity is or is not in the best interests of the institution's identity, interests, and ethos. Board diversity is important (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983; Taylor et al., 1991). These findings propose the question as to how board diversity is defined, valued, and achieved in HBCU governing spaces.

### **Values**

This study showed that as objective as board members pronounced to be, there were value systems that were present. Though these values were espoused by individual members, they were found to be present in all cases. These values fell into the categories of relationship, regard, and "righteousness". In all cases the importance of relationship, possessing a feeling of family arose as an important sentiment of board members. HBCUs are touted for their nurturing, family feel. This attribute is usually discussed in regards to the student environment or student experience. These cases show that the "family feel" aspect is more than just a culture instituted for student success. It is a value deeply engrained into the university culture, including the board of trustees. This reflects



the “extended family” culture Aschenbrenner (1973) and Hill (1998) discuss as being practiced and valued in African American communities. Feeling akin to others, having strong relationships is more than a culture—it is a value system. Furthermore, the importance of these relationships, or networks, in the decision making process solidifies the necessity to understand more about the how various social capital is evaluated and interpreted within specific cultural context. My study reinforces Orr’s (1999) findings regarding social capital in Black communities, but in a higher education context. If board members and presidents, both current and prospective, do not subscribe to and do not emit this sentiment their future or ability to be embraced by the board drastically decreases. I do not presume this high value on relationship to be either positive or negative. What is more important is what matter and type of relationships are considered most valuable? Are there certain relationships that are more valuable than others? These findings lay the foundation for understanding the strong value relationships hold. A deeper understanding about these relationships is necessary to properly evaluate whether this trait proves beneficial or detrimental to the work of the board.

All cases held a high value for culture, whether it was HBCU culture, Black culture, or AME culture. Participants highly valued culture and held a high regard for these particular cultures. Working in tandem with this value of regard is the value of respect. Another value that held across all three cases were the principles, which I categorized as “righteousness.” These principles mostly dealt with motivation and character. These principles included but were not limited to honesty, humility, a warm spirit, having vision, and an ethic of care. Across all cases, what was most interesting concerning this finding was the way in which this value was communicated. With

participants who were affiliated with the church (both clergy and non-clergy) morally charged language and vernacular common to the Black church culture were used to describe these traits. Terms such as “spirit,” “vision,” “holier than thou” were used by participants. These traits or principles centered on moral motivation and character were communicated as a means to establish trust. This confirms Kezar’s (2004) theory regarding the role that shared values play in relationship building. Board members in all three cases not only used these traits to evaluate people but also as a signifier of a person’s trustworthiness.

### **Decision making, operation, and structure**

The structure and operation of the board of trustees lends insight into their decision-making processes. Understanding more about the decision-making process sheds light on the decisions that are made. There were basic similarities between the structure and operation of the three cases. All three institutions’ boards were comprised of various committees which members served. Much of the legwork collecting information and data regarding issues was conducted by these committees. The committees report to the full board and discussions and votes commence. Paul Quinn College did stand out in their board structure. In this case, the board was uniquely 50% AME affiliated members, and 50% non AME affiliated members. This case also had a unique setup concerning the role of the chair of the board. The board chair and vice chair consisted of the Bishop of the AME church assigned to Texas and a non AME person, usually from the business community, respectively. This setup would remain as such for 2-3 years and then rotate. This model is one that I have yet to see replicated at other AME affiliated HBCUs but seems to be working well for the case of Paul Quinn. The

ability to access various networks of support are important for institutional leadership (Taylor et al., 1996). This structure somehow symbolizes to the business and surrounding communities a commitment to true consensus building. The recent \$4.4 million gift acquired by the institution from a major Dallas philanthropist is implied by participants as evidence.

When taking a closer look at the decision-making processes differences arose. Allen's board has an agenda that is presented by the president and the executive committee. Though the board members make motions on various issues, it was expressed that, at times, board members can forget to move towards consensus building, making it difficult for the president to manage. Edward Waters appeared to stress data and information based decision making process more so than their Allen counterparts. Committees were expected to collect as much data as possible regarding a topic. Communication of this information was also stressed as important. Objectivity presented itself as the goal of board members. Paul Quinn also saw the importance in communication, emphasizing it as a practiced modeled by the president. Described by one member as "a hybrid of a consensus-making and decision making tree," leadership felt it imperative that all board members had access to all information and most decisions made by the full board. Board members received information prior to the board meeting for consumption and digestion. In addition, the president of the board engages in constant dialogue with the board. Communication was heralded and important to the function and decision making process of this board.

Though structure seemed to play a role in the decision-making process, it appeared minor. What board structure did appear to influence, however, is the perception

of the decision-making process from outside entities. In most cases this would not be important, but HBCUs are stereotypically perceived as spaces where shared governance and consensus decision making do not occur (Gasman, 2011; Minor, 2005; Phillips, 2002; Wagener & Smith, 1993). These cases, particularly Paul Quinn and Edward Waters do well to debunk that myth. Furthermore the cases of Paul Quinn and Edward Waters show the high value of data and communication present in their decision making process. This supports the best practices suggested from AGB (2013). Also, the fact that all participants from these two cases mentioned the presence of clear communication insinuates that this practice is general board culture and not just the practice of a select few.

The three cases possessed a number of differences in their decision making processes, yet the challenges they faced were quite similar. One major challenge was the understanding of roles between the president and the board. Each entity had temporary moments where each group overstepped their boundaries. This could cause confusion for not only the parties involved but also for other campus constituencies (i.e.-faculty, staff, alumni). When there is confusion of authority and roles between a board and a president, the decision-making process is hindered. Pointing back to the Edward Waters and Paul Quinn cases, constant communication can keep this issue from growing into one that is problematic.

Intraboard conflict was also seen as a challenge to the work of the board in all cases. The conflict that did arise seemed to deal with individual member's perceptions of their role on the board. One case in particular, pointed out that board composition contributed to the conflict and confusion. Edward Waters' participants discussed the way

in which an AME clergy heavy board and political seats caused issues in successfully making decisions. When the president has a vision or strategies that do not align with this specific group of board members' desires or ideologies, problems occur. The unique issue in this case, as mentioned earlier, is that the clergy seats can also be seen as political seats, due to the nature of the governing structure of the AME church. However, other cases expressed challenges with seats on the board held by politicians. The three cases also spoke to the tension between more tenured members and newer members that sometimes existed. Having a good relationship, diverse membership, and clear communication is what assists in keeping these conflicts from derailing the board. When these things are not present work and progress can be challenging.

There were also two types of relationships that were lifted up as creating challenges for boards as well. These two relationships are important to talk about as they speak directly to the institutional contexts of these cases. The relationship between members who are HBCU alumni and non HBCU alumni, along with the relationship between AME affiliated members and non AME affiliated members, were relationships that board members mentioned as having an effect on the board and its work. HBCU culture and the understanding of it play a large role at HBCUs—even in the work of the board. Non-HBCU affiliated board members were steadily reminded, whether consciously or subliminally, of the importance of the HBCU culture. Not only are they reminded of the importance of the culture but that there is a shared value between those who can call themselves alumni as opposed to those who cannot. It seems that most board members in these cases have learned to navigate this relationship, but the connection created by the shared value of affiliation to the HBCU community creates a

level of trust between members, which excludes those affiliated otherwise. The same can be said for the relationship between AME members and non AME members.

Though this was present across cases, it proved more prevalent at Allen. Allen was seemingly the most clergy heavy board as well. The sentiment existed that often AME members saw the school as an extension of the church and conversely that AME voices were more valuable than other members. Technically, per board operations this is untrue. Yet, with the strong financial dependency on the church there is an unspoken understanding that the AME voices are weighty. Both of these relationships and their effect on the work of the board confirm the importance of understanding how culture intertwines and intersects with the governance of an institution. However, when looking at the Paul Quinn case, board composition is the key to navigating this effect of culture successfully.

### **Presidential selection process**

The presidential selection process is a highly important, if not the most important task a board faces. The participants of these three cases shared their experiences and views on the process. The most important takeaway concerning the presidential selection process at these institutions is the desirable and non-desirable traits of a presidential candidate. Three categories encompassed traits found desirable: Skills, personality, and networks. Three categories also encompassed the non-desirable traits: Physical, skill, and personality. In both desirable and non-desirable traits the most commonly referred traits fell into the personality category. These traits were communicated across all three traits at a higher rate than skills, networks, or physical shortcomings. This finding implies that personality and character traits may have more bearing on the perception of the viability

of a presidential candidate than the candidate's resume or past job performance.

Networks also proved to be of great importance.

When analyzing the desirable and non-desirable traits of presidents communicated by board members I found a direct reflection of values expressed in personality and network traits. The areas of skills and physical did not reflect values. This was not surprising considering that skills and physical traits tend to be more technical and less value laden and subjective than traits concerning personality and networks. Focusing on the desirable personality traits, 17 of the 19 traits presented reflected values espoused by board members (Table 8.1). Of non-desirable personality traits, 6 of the 11 traits reflected values espoused by board members (Table 8.2). When looking at the desirable network traits, 8 of the 8 traits reflected values espoused by board members (Table 8.3). Based on these findings, a relationship exists between the values espoused by members and traits they find desirable or non-desirable in a president.

More must be understood concerning this relationship to fully understand its significance. However, these findings indicate that who sits on a board and the value systems they bring affect the decision making process. More specifically, during the presidential selection process, the values that board members have provide lens to how various traits of a candidate are evaluated. This is important as these evaluations play a role in which candidates successfully attain the presidency. If the way members evaluate traits of candidates is connected to their values, the traits a candidate expresses can communicate the existence of shared values between members and candidate. Kezar (2004) proposes that the existence of shared values establishes trust. The relationship of trust established can make board members confident in a presidential pick. These

findings do not indicate that board members in all instances select a president based on traits associated with values as opposed to or more so than traits associated with skills. However, in instances where similarly skilled applicants are candidates, the way in which personality and network traits are communicated to board members rests on the values of who sits on the board. This also shed lights on the scrutinized phenomena of “recycled” presidents that often occurs within the HBCU sector (Gasman et al., 2007; Gasman et al., 2010; Ezzell & Schexnider, 2010; Wagener & Smith, 1993). It is possible that candidates were able to display traits that spoke to the values of board members, establishing stronger trust than other candidates. That trust, in turn, overshadowed a questionable employment past. The issue of an unsuccessful tenure is then seen as less of a matter of performance and more of a matter of fit. If this is the case, then board composition becomes of high importance. Importance of board composition is often discussed in respect to networks and access to financial means. I suggest that the personal value systems of board members should be added into the conversation. As values and value systems find their way into the fabric of the decision-making process, knowing what values current and potential board members bring are important as they will undoubtedly affect how the process is approached and decisions that are made.

**Table8.1- Desirable Personality Traits and Corresponding Values**

<b>Desirable Personality Traits</b>	<b>Values</b>
Being available	Possessing a warm spirit
Committed to HBCUs	Care about HBCUs
Committed to the institution	Respect for institutional culture
Faith	Church Values
Having good board relations	Respect
Good faculty relationship	Respect
Being innovative	Having vision



Intelligence	N/A
Open minded	Humility
Certain type of personality	Possessing a warm spirit/compassion
Passion for education	Love of education
Personal interest in institution	Respect for institutional culture
Having presence	N/A
Being realistic	Honesty
School focused	Respect for institutional culture
Student focused	Love of education
Being able to accept constructive criticism	Humility
Understanding failure	Humility
Having vision	Having vision

**Table 8.2- Non- Desirable Personality Traits and Corresponding Values**

<b>Non- Desirable Personality Traits</b>	<b>Values</b>
Not willing to listen to board members	Humility
Not wanting to fundraise	N/A
Lack of accountability for staff	N/A
Bad communicator	N/A
Lack of motivation	Having Vision
Not being able to build relationships/Lack of relationships	Connections, Networks, Possessing a warm spirit
Short temper	Possessing a warm spirit, Compassion
Lack of understanding	N/A
Selfish	Deep commitment to service, sincerity
Micromanaging	N/A
Personal agenda	Humility, Deep commitment to service, Sincerity

**Table 8.3- Desirable Network Traits and Corresponding Values**

<b>Desirable Network Traits</b>	<b>Values</b>
Being affiliated with the AME church	Connections, Regard for the AME church
Being an alumnus	Connections
Being connected to the community	Community
Being familiar with HBCUs	Care about HBCUs
Being and HBCU insider	Care about HBCUs, Connections
Having established relationships w/ HBCUs	Networks, Connections

Having multiple networks	Networks
Understanding of the AME church	Regard for AME Church

### **Recommendations**

The work of an institution’s board of trustees is an important part of the life of an institution. The individual institution’s needs and culture are so pertinent to the work of the board, assessment and evaluation can be challenging. Looking at these three cases’ board compositions, decision-making processes, and presidential selection processes, I provide the following recommendations.

In the case of Allen University the financial dependency of the institution on the AME church, though understood and accepted by most participants, brings tension to the decision making process. Though the support of the institution, through both students attending and monetary contributions, is invaluable and much appreciated by participants it still is not enough to place the school in financial stability. Private, church affiliated boards need to strive for diversity on their board, with a particular focus on the clergy to lay ratio, to make room for and increase access to more diverse streams of income and development. A healthy balance of lay and clergy create an increased sense of fairness and non-bias in the decision making process. The institutional culture and identity of church affiliated institutions can be deeply invested in the church of affiliation and therefore church representatives should be a definitive part of leadership. Yet, there needs to be a deeper assessment of what exactly these church affiliated members contribute. The first priority of the board when conducting member selection should be

the networks, access, and values that a member brings to the table. The influence of church politics and denominational governance structures should play a minimal role.

Intraboard communication and communication between the board and the president must be constant and clear. In cases of frequent leadership turnover and a string of interim presidents, this may prove difficult to establish. According to this research, communication and the ability to be transparent with a board were both important values to board members. Allen was the only case where there was not a consensus from participants that good communication was occurring. Stability in leadership arose as a concern for the Allen case. A board's dissatisfaction with numerous previous presidents, in a short period of time, signals a need for evaluation of the presidential selection process. In alignment with my findings, an understanding of the role and degree of influence values possess in the process is needed. This understanding will assist in evaluating and ensuring the presidential process leads to optimal results for the institution.

The board at Edward Waters expressed a focus on board development in recent years, even selecting a member of the board to be dedicated to the task of board development and having a board retreat focusing on training and the roles and responsibilities of board members. Institutions who may not have resources to send members to training should designate a person to facilitate and coordinate board training and development. Well trained and educated board members are more likely to be high performing (AGB, 2013; Taylor et al., 1996). A good relationship, consisting of respect and communication, with the president is also important.

One interesting aspect to the board composition at Edward Waters is the way in which some of the AME affiliated board members come to serve on the board. The practice of board members at church affiliated institutions being elected from church governance structures and various bodies within the church gives the church constituency representative say in the leadership of the institution, making the board more diplomatic in a sense. However, leaving the selection of board members to people who may not be aware of the needs of the institution opens the door for non-optimal choices. This practice is one that gives members of the affiliated church a sense of buy-in to the institution, which in turn can garner support. Therefore, I do not recommend that the process itself change. Yet, I do recommend that communication regarding the role and responsibilities of board members occur with the Annual conferences prior to elections. If potential members of the board will be selected from these bodies, then these bodies must be educated regarding the state of the institution and the work of the board. This can occur via workshops, invitational seminars, and talks. This will aid the Annual Conference bodies and interested parties in making educated choices when electing members. It will also aid in having more selected and elected board members who are more prepared.

Paul Quinn College, of the three cases, appears to have figured out a board structure and mode of operation that works well for the institution. The 50/50 composition of AME and non AME members establishes a sense of fairness and equal voice among members. This sentiment is reinforced by the rotation of chair and vice-chair between the AME bishop and a representative from the business community. Not only do board members sense fairness and equal voice, but it is interpreted as such from

the business community, the Dallas community, and other constituents. Church affiliated institutions that find difficulty in developing and establishing strong and beneficial relationships with businesses and surrounding communities should consider a similar structure. A balanced board is ideal.

Another unique aspect to the board is that many of the AME clergy on the board do not serve in the 10<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District. This means that these clergy members do not serve under nor take charge appointments from the bishop serving in the 10<sup>th</sup> episcopal district, who also serves as the board chair. For institutions working within similar denominational governance structures, this approach works to neutralize the role of church politics in the work of the board. Selecting clergy members outside of the service area of the denomination aid in diminishing the conflict of interest during the decision making process that arises from having the chair of the board essentially also be your boss. This unique structure is dependent on having parties that all subscribe and agree, particularly the board chair or Bishop. This structure was put into place prior to the current board chair, proving that this board structure can sustain multiple administrations. However, institutions want to ensure this practice is one that is official regardless of the president or the bishop assigned to the area and is communicated as such.

### **Future Research**

Board of trustees and board composition are areas of research full of opportunity. More specifically, there is a need for more understanding of board of trustees in the HBCU sector. As the higher education community strives to ensure institutions are servicing students well and explore strategies to achieve the Obama administration's 2020 college completion goal, HBCUs must be efficiently and effectively led. In recent

years there has been discussions regarding the HBCU presidency. Yet, there has been little discussion in research regarding boards of trustees. This research lays the foundation for research exploring people's paths to serving on board of trustees. This would include motivation for serving and the impact of relationships on service. Relationships, networks, and communities showed to be important values to study participants. All of these values are related to the idea of social capital. Social capital's role in academic governance has been superficially explored (Leana & Van Buren III, 1999; Tyler, 1998). What has yet to be explored is the intersection of culture, race, and social capital.

Orr (1999) explores the differences in how racial communities view and evaluate social capital. However, Orr's work stays within the context of community organizations and secondary education. Institutions with unique racial and culture identities, such as HBCUs and TCUs, have governance practices that are influenced by race and culture. Therefore, future research needs to look at what relationships and networks are of high value valued or of low value in certain cultural communities. In understanding this, in relationship with an understanding of how shared values establish trust, a better contextual understanding can be attained concerning how boards are constructed and how they engage decision making.

Private institutions often have governance structures that are deeply connected to institutional culture and identity. Private institutions that are church affiliated have an even more unique challenge, as they often have some semblance, strong or otherwise, of the affiliated church within their leadership. The board of trustees is an area where this church culture can find itself intertwined and influential. This study showed the

influence a church's or denomination's governance structures can have on an institution's board of trustees. For this reason, research on the relationship between governance systems of church's and their respective private institutions' board composition can give insight into the church's role in school leadership and governance. To go a step further, a comparison of practices across denominations lends itself to an analysis of best practices and successful structures.

The more that is understood about what works well and what does not work well within the private institution context leads to stronger assessment and implementation of effective board practices. For HBCUs in particular, a cross analysis of private, church affiliated institutions, the relationship they have with their affiliated denomination, and the way in which the governing structure of the church affects board composition can provide proper context to board assessment. This becomes an even more layered area of inquiry when taking into account and comparing the number of private HBCUs affiliated with historically and predominately White church denominations in comparison to private HBCUs connected with historically and predominately Black church denominations. This research can lead to an even broader study of understanding the effects of politics and values in board composition and decision making on public HBCU boards. Although public HBCUs have less control over board appointments as they are mostly made by the governor, the presence of politics and value systems are still present in the decision making process. The role and way in which social capital networks affect board composition would be most interesting in this sector.

The findings of this research pointed to the importance of a balanced and diverse board. Board diversity is touted as ideal (Kohn & Mortimer, 1983; Taylor et al., 1999)

but not heavily researched. As the college going population becomes more diverse institutional leadership should be a reflection—this includes boards of trustees. More research concerning the effect of a diverse board, or lack thereof, on institutional effectiveness is an area of promise. Furthermore, understanding the relationship between board diversity and strategic planning for the institution establishes first steps in seeing the role of governing boards in institutional diversity initiatives. Often the discussion of diversity is limited to the context of race. In this case, HBCU boards are often left out of the board diversity conversations due to their usually being majority Black. However, diversity encompasses many things including political affiliations, religion, gender, regionality, institutional affiliation, occupation, etc. More must be explored concerning board diversity at HBCUs. How diversity is achieved on these boards and how it affects institutional planning and decision making are questions to be asked and answered. Also, one must ask, what does having or not having diverse boards communicate to various stakeholders? What is the perception of HBCU boards that are not diverse in the higher education, business, and philanthropic communities? Does that perception hold steady for HWIs who also lack board diversity? These questions can give insight into the issue of board diversity both broadly and within the HBCU context.



## **Chapter 9: Conclusion**

When I embarked on this study I hoped to learn more about the role, function, and experiences of board members and boards as a whole at AME affiliated institutions. The AME church's role in higher education in general, and for Blacks in specific, has been one of great impact in American society and history. It has also been a role that has had trials and tribulations. These trials and tribulations, at times, bring about question, concern, and speculation about the leadership, governance, and operation of these institutions. With this scrutiny comes questions regarding the institution's relationship with the church and inevitably questions concerning the board of trustees. Since I began this study various happenings have occurred in the life of AME affiliated HBCUs. Wilberforce University, who was not a study participant, has performed a major overhaul of its board of trustees and hired a new president. This occurred in the wake of fighting against a show-cause order handed down to the institution from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). If the institution does not pass a visit from the HLC it faces the threat of losing its accreditation. However, other institutions had some highlights. Paul Quinn College received a \$4.4 million gift, the largest in school history and Edward Waters College has experienced steady enrollment growth. However, with concerns regarding the financial stability of the institutions, church leadership have been discussing strategies to ensure that the institutions do not go the way of the now barely existing Morris Brown College. Governance will be key in this goal. Boards of trustees and their decision making will play a major role.

In this case study participants from three AME affiliated institutions shared their paths and motivations for serving as board members. Though I expected to find a variety

of things pertaining to relationships and networks, I was most shocked to discover the heavy influence of the politics of the AME church on the way in which boards were constructed and engaged in their work. This finding reinforced how entities, such as churches, can be more politically powerful than they seem depending on the community to which they are connected. Furthermore, when attempting to understand issues of governance at institutions, understanding the importance and prismatic nature of institutional context is of great importance. Through my study understanding was provided of the decision making process, specifically the presidential selection process, at their respective institutions. In doing so, unearthed was the way in which board members' values and value systems intermingled with these processes. Board members' values were reflected in the way they viewed a president or presidential candidate. Undoubtedly, board member values played a role in the presidential selection process. When looking for a president, boards of trustees can espouse that they are looking for a leader, an innovator, someone to take the institution into its next era. They are searching for a leader, but not just any leader, a certain type of leader. That certain type of leader often embodies what those members inherently value. Reflecting this unique form of xenophobia (Piper, 1997), they may not realize it and may even deny that is how they are indeed operating when in the midst of the selection process.

Members whole heartedly believe they are being fair, objective, and logical. But values seep into everything. They are present in the questions asked. They are present in the interpretation of actions, responses, networks, and personalities. No board is ever truly objective because no board member can ever be truly objective. Values walk through the frames of doors, bypassing the steps where they were supposedly laid. Values

are not a bad thing. But, it cannot be ignored that they are at the table. They have a vote. They are indeed the tie that binds the leader wanted and the leader that is selected. They are the tie that binds the leader selected to those selecting the leader. The question is, can boards acknowledge this fact and once they do how will this value laden process be addressed? How will this aid in approaching the construction of the board and the execution of the board's work? The answers to these questions lead to stronger, higher functioning boards which inevitably lead to more effective and successful institutions.

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