

“Jesus Broke Down the Wall:” A Study on the Potential Impact of Student Religious
Organizations on Racial Reconciliation Efforts at the University of Mississippi

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Dedication

To Martin and Lorraine Street, the two greatest parents the world has ever known. Thank you for always encouraging me to pursue my passions, and for showing me through your compassion, the importance of treating everyone with love and respect, no matter their race, income, gender, or sexual orientation.

To my sister, Mary Alex Street, who, through each of her accomplishments has taught me that without hard work and perseverance, our visions for the future can never be realized.

Finally, to my grandfather, George Street. In his time working at the university, he played a role in keeping James Meredith out of the school—an event that served as a source of guilt for him over the next thirty years of life. In 1993, he fell extremely, and during his time in the hospital no one from his own church came to visit him. However, Duncan Gray III, the rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church at the time paid him a visit, and his first Sunday out of the hospital, my grandfather began attending St. Peter's. At the time, the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi and St. Peter's were both taking active measures to address racial reconciliation within the Church. For the last three years of his life, my grandfather became highly involved in these efforts, and the last picture ever taken of him was at a racial reconciliation retreat in Canton, Mississippi, in which he is smiling, talking with a black Episcopal Priest from Panama, and wearing a necklace with a dove on the end that reads "George." At this same retreat he told the group, "I am winding down now. I don't have any hatred in me. I don't have anything to get off my chest." Three months later, my grandfather passed away.

I did not know this story until after I had already begun working on my thesis project; however, I like to believe that God had intended for me to continue his work through this study and find out more about why 11 o'clock on Sunday continues to be "the most segregated hour in America."

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the potential impact of student religious organizations at the University of Mississippi on racial reconciliation efforts on campus. Since 2009, the university has dealt with numerous racialized events that have resulted in a culture of resentment. Additionally, student religious organizations at the university attract a large number of students, and in many ways, serve as a significant influence on campus culture; however, this study demonstrates that they rarely take action to combat these incidents, which are often perceived as racially insensitive, or the culture that cultivates them.

Findings of the study also demonstrated that because of their “identity-forming potential” and their emphasis on religious values, student religious organizations have a unique opportunity to influence student views on race and to organize an effective response when these incidents occur. In order to fulfill this potential, it is important that these organizations take intentional steps to incorporate diversity initiatives into their existing framework and develop a personal action plan for improving their relationship with the University of Mississippi’s institutional diversity goals.

Introduction:

Since federally mandated integration in 1962, the University of Mississippi has borne the burden of a reputation associated with social exclusion and racism. While over half a century has passed, echoes of racial segregation and tension continue to permeate the student culture, which only reinforces this negative perception. Various racialized incidents on campus have led minority students to grow resentful and fearful of the racial climate. In order to combat this culture of exclusion, members of the university community have tried to take concrete steps to alleviate some of the tension that exists; however, these efforts are often met with backlash due to different perspectives regarding the importance of certain traditions.

While many students advocate for these changes, the administration ends up being blamed for many of the changes that occur in regards to diversity, such as the removal of certain campus symbols and traditions. Because of this, some students believe that their opinions are overlooked in the decision making process. This highlights a need for greater student involvement as well as greater awareness of racial insensitivities among members of the student body. While the academic classroom is one venue to encourage this awareness, it is important to explore other options for the promotion of these ideals.

In looking for other options, it is important to think about venues that can influence student opinion, as well as their personal values. In thinking about racial reconciliation in particular, much of the emphasis on this effort stems directly from the

belief in certain values. As a university in the deep South, one of the most influential forces in shaping people's values is religious identity, and as a college student, many of these students are also influenced by their social circles, which include not only friend groups but also organizations students choose to participate in. For these reasons, I have chosen to evaluate the potential impact of student religious organizations on racial reconciliation at the University of Mississippi. I predict that student religious organizations at the University of Mississippi have a strong potential to exert influence over student perceptions about race as well as their involvement in racial reconciliation efforts.

In exploring this potential, I will begin with a discussion of campus culture. This discussion will appear in the first chapter, and in this chapter, I will try to inform the reader about the current racial climate at the University of Mississippi by looking at diversity as one aspect of campus culture. Specifically, I will examine the campus climate under the leadership of Chancellor Dan Jones, beginning in 2009, when he first took office as Chancellor. This chapter will provide information regarding administrative diversity goals, and how these goals often cause conflict with students who perceive these goals as contradictory to campus tradition. Articles which appear in the student newspaper, *The Daily Mississippian* along with other news articles and university reports, will provide a background for discussing these issues of culture and race at the University.

In chapter two, I will argue that student religious organizations can be an effective tool for promoting racial reconciliation on a university campus because of their impact on

student identity and their influence on the campus community. I will begin by discussing how student's behavioral trends can be detrimental to the creation of a diverse campus environment. Next, I will highlight how while student organizations often reflect student behavioral trends, they can often have a strong influence over student behavior, and I will consider the potential role of student organizations in the promotion of institutional diversity goals. In this regard, this chapter will identify six different types of relationships a student organization can have with institutional diversity goals and identify how certain organizations play a critical role in defining the racial climate. It will provide instances in which student organizations have been a positive influence for racial reconciliation and one instance that was specific to the University of Mississippi.

This chapter will also look at how religion has historically been used as a means for oppression and opposition to social and political progress. However, it will also identify ways in which religion can and has been used as a tool for the promotion of positive change in a community. It will evaluate studies that show how religion encourages adherents to actively participate in efforts to better their community as well as studies that discuss religion's "identity-forming potential."

Chapter two will also show that student religious organizations face multiple barriers to integration and racial reconciliation. However, I will demonstrate that due to the fact that both student organizations and religion can shape a student's perception about their role in the community, they can have a particularly powerful impact in creating positive change in the community in regards to racial reconciliation.

In order to gauge the current and potential impact of student religious organizations on racial-reconciliation at the University of Mississippi, I conducted a mixed methods study including both surveys and interviews. In chapter three, I will report and evaluate results from this study. I will begin by reporting survey results, and then analyzing them. Next, I will present some of the findings from the interviews and relate them to what I found in the survey. Finally, I will summarize some key findings and patterns that appeared in the evaluation of the data.

The first part of this study included a survey that consists of twenty-three questions, and was distributed to three prominent student religious organizations on the university campus.¹ All three student religious organizations chosen were from the Christian tradition given the significance of Christianity in student religious affiliation at the University of Mississippi. The results of the survey were anonymous in an attempt to ensure the most accurate results. These twenty-three questions sought to gauge a campus ministry's racial diversity, influence on religious values, influence on student's desire to create positive change in their community, and their impact on student engagement with diversity. The second part of the study involved recorded interviews with the organizational leadership.² The interview questions were composed in an attempt to compliment the survey questions and reveal any information that could not have been evaluated from a survey. These questions addressed organizational potential in regards to organizing events (community service or otherwise), religious values and how they relate to issues of racism, previous involvement in race related events, and organizational

¹ See Appendix A

² See Appendix B

diversity. Campus chaplains were interviewed, and they could choose up to three student leaders to be interviewed as well.

The three student religious organizations were chosen given their different denominations and sizes. All three organizations that were chosen were predominantly white religious organizations given the lack of predominantly black religious organizations on campus; however, they all have some black student members, though their level of involvement was previously unknown. The three organizations chosen for this study include Reformed University Fellowship, Baptist Student Union, and the Episcopal Church at Ole Miss. There were a total of 144 survey respondents—sixty from the Baptist Student Union, sixty-three from Reformed University Fellowship, and twenty-one from the Episcopal Church at Ole Miss, and a total of 10 interview respondents all of whom were white—two from ECOM, four from BSU, and four from RUF.

The Reformed University Fellowship was chosen because of its relevance as one of the largest religious organizations on campus. The Reformed University Fellowship is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church of America. This religious organization is the largest and probably the most influential organization that was chosen for this survey process averaging about 300 participants per week. Unfortunately, in the process of selecting religious groups to interview, no predominantly black religious organizations could be identified. The Baptist Student Union was chosen because it was expected to be more diverse. This organization is not quite as large as RUF, averaging a little over 100 students each week. Finally, the Episcopal Church at Ole Miss is hosted at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Oxford where one of the associate rectors also acts as the campus

chaplain. This is the smallest of all the religious organizations chosen for this study, averaging about thirty- forty attendants each week. This organization includes membership from both college students and young adults in the St. Peter's community; however, for the purposes of this study, only members who are currently enrolled as students at the University of Mississippi were asked to participate. St. Peter's was also chosen because it has a history of promoting racial reconciliation and was one of the only churches that favored the integration of the school in 1962, (Eagles 345). In addition, I am an active member of this organization and have worked as one of the campus interns for the past three years. I chose the organization because it was one of the original inspirations for this project; however, I have tried to present the information as objectively as possible by consistently applying the same research methods to each organization.

In the final chapter, I will take some of the key findings from this study and integrate information presented in chapters 1 and 2 in order to create a concrete "action plan" for these student religious organization. I will provide them with a variety of suggestions that can be utilized to improve their student organization's relationship with racial reconciliation and diversity.

Chapter 1: Campus Climate

“All of our actions seem fruitless and impotent, leaving us broken, scared, humiliated and with burning, difficult questions: What we do we do about it? How do we stop these events from transpiring?” - The Daily Mississippian Staff Editorial

The purpose of this chapter will be to evaluate the current racial climate at the University of Mississippi. First, I will provide general information about how African American students perceive their experience as members of this community. Next, I will examine the components of a university culture, and present a definition of campus culture in order to provide a framework to begin thinking about the culture of diversity at the University of Mississippi. Next, I will highlight some of the values that the university promotes as an institution. Finally, in order to highlight student perceptions of culture, I will look at student reactions to certain racialized incidents as well as reactions to the advancement of certain institutional diversity goals under the leadership of the university’s most recent Chancellor, Dan Jones. In doing this, I will examine articles from the student newspaper, *The Daily Mississippian* and outside articles pertaining to various incidents that have occurred since his leadership began in 2009.

According to Julie Parks, a professor in the College of Education at the University of Maryland who specializes in racial diversity and religion in higher education, black students who attend Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs), “often experience a

psychologically taxing environment, marked by both explicit racial offenses and more subtle racial microaggressions” (“Man This is Hard” 570). This assertion is highly relevant when applied to the University of Mississippi, a university with a student body composed of 76% white students (The University of Mississippi College Portrait). The campus newspaper, *The Daily Mississippian*, frequently features student responses to the racially exclusive environment they experience. For example, in her article, “Black is the New Invisible,” Ole Miss student Hope Owens-Wilson attempts to explain how she and other black students feel discrimination, specifically microaggressions, on our campus every day:

It has happened to me in the following ways: 1. Classrooms immediately going silent when I walk into the room. This is awesome. I know I’m stunning but please, continue your discussions. 2. Ignoring me. I have my hand raised in front of you and no one else does. I guess my question and/or answer will have to wait. Better still, I am sitting to the right of someone and instead of talking to me they choose another person they do not know to talk to... on my right. 3. Staring. I’m friendly, I promise, just say hi or something.

While this particular article only expands on one student’s experience, a campus-wide study conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute in the spring of 2013 at the University of Mississippi showed that minority student responses averaged 2.63 in response to the statement “This college: Has a lot of racial tension,” (1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree). This number demonstrates that on average, the majority of surveyed minority students felt that racial tension on campus was a problem. Other student articles express similar feelings of resentment. For example, in a letter to the editor after the James Meredith incident, black student leaders claimed to “echo the

sentiments of Fannie Lou Hamer of being ‘sick and tired of being sick and tired’ of defending the university [they] intimately call [their own]” (Kolheim, et al). These quotes only represent a few of many articles written regarding the racial climate at the University of Mississippi and feelings of hurt and resentment. ³

When evaluating the racial climate at the University of Mississippi, it is important to identify the various components that comprise a campus culture. In his article entitled “Organizational Culture and Student Persistence,” George Kuh, a professor of educational leadership and policy studies at Indianan University in Bloomington, offers the following definition of campus culture:

the collective, mutually shaping patterns of institutional history, mission, physical settings, norms, traditions, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institution of higher education and which provide a frame of reference for interpreting the meanings of events and actions on and off campus. (25)

Kuh mentions that some larger institutions have taken a neutral stance in regards to non-academic related values, due to the fact that various sub-cultures exist, making it difficult to define a singular culture. However, the University of Mississippi clearly outlines its position in regards to diversity in its official mission statement, core values, and university creed.

In regards to diversity and inclusion, the mission statement claims: “The University of Mississippi’s mission is to create, evaluate, share, and apply knowledge in a free, open, and inclusive environment of intellectual inquiry” (“Vision”). Also, in the university’s list of core values, it includes: “Promotes inclusiveness in its student body,

³ Articles referenced Bibliography

faculty and staff,” and “Requires respect for all individuals and groups.” Most importantly, the University Creed is utilized to promote a sense of cultural unity and shared values on campus. More than any other statement identifying campus goals and values, the Creed is widely recognized by student and faculty, and is often cited at official university events. When incoming students come for orientation, they are all asked to recite the Creed in unison. The beginning of this creed emphasizes university values in regards to inclusion:

The University of Mississippi is a community of learning dedicated to nurturing excellence in intellectual inquiry and personal character in an open and diverse environment. As a voluntary member of this community: I believe in respect for the dignity of each person. I believe in fairness and civility.

These examples demonstrate the diverse culture that the university administration encourages. However, these statements are not reflective of all the components listed in the definition that Kuh provides: institutional history, physical settings, norms, traditions, beliefs, and assumptions. When one evaluates these aspects of campus culture, the University of Mississippi appears to be a much different place from the institution it strives to be. In the next section, I will attempt to highlight some of the key points not already accounted for in Kuh’s definition. In doing this, I will examine news articles referring to various racialized incidents on campus as well as reactions to administrative efforts to improve campus culture. I will pull information from a variety of news sources; however, I will try to focus primarily on articles written in the student newspaper, *The Daily Mississippian*.

Incidents

On February 20, 2014, the *New York Times* published an article entitled “Racist Episodes Continue to Stir Ole Miss Campus.” The very next day, that headline was read all over the world, shedding a negative light on the University and its students. The article was written in response to an incident that had occurred a few days prior. Three white, male students hung a noose and a Confederate battle flag on the statue of James Meredith, a civil rights monument memorializing the first African American Student to attend the university after its integration in 1962. This statue and its dedication, erected and celebrated under the leadership of Chancellor Khayat in 2006, “provided a positive celebration of progress and generated extensive regional and national attention for a university often plagued by negative publicity” (Eagles 443). However, to many members of the Ole Miss community, the actions of these three students threatened the message it intended to represent. While the news piece addressed a singular event, the headline highlighted the reoccurring nature of these events. Though only one incident was described, this headline reveals something about the constant tension between those who wish to promote institutional diversity goals and those who oppose it.

In order to take a closer examination of the campus climate, I will use this section to examine various racialized incidents that occurred under the administration of Chancellor Dan Jones. Chancellor Jones is noted for his efforts to improve the racial campus climate, including controversial decisions to do away with various campus symbols and traditions. I will look at student responses to these incidents from articles

published in *The Daily Mississippian*, as well as responses to some of the controversial decisions made by the administration and analyze what these responses can highlight about the racial climate at the University of Mississippi.

In 2009, Chancellor Dan Jones assumed leadership of the university. During his first year as Chancellor, Jones' administration threatened to ban one of the school's fight songs, "From Dixie with Love." Jones claimed his reasons for doing this were not in response to the content of the song, but rather, because students were shouting, "The South will Rise Again" at the end of the song. Jones offered to keep this song if students agreed not to yell this phrase at the end. In an open letter to the Ole Miss community, Jones stated, "If the chant continues, I will ask the band to discontinue the music that triggers it to ensure that we do nothing to promote or facilitate the use of these hurtful words," (Jones). However, students continued to use the phrase, and eventually the song was banned.

Reactions to this decision highlighted the continual struggle between students who admire the school's traditions and students who are offended by some of them. In various articles published in *The Daily Mississippian*, students voiced opinions that reflected these disagreements. While some applauded the decision, others chastised Jones for his removal of the song. In a letter to the editor, one student asserted, "We are not your friends Chancellor Jones... Now you threaten to ban a song that has been loved by Ole Miss students and alumni long before you ever set foot on campus" (Futrell). Her opinion highlights one side of the issue. Many students and alumni were hurt by the Chancellor's action and believed that he acted in haste and without input from the

students. However, many others believed that this was a much-needed change. For example, one student expressed admiration for Jones' decision, and even accused students who defended the song as "selfish":

The selfish notion that there is no need for any changes on this campus is absurd. The end of "Dixie" actually hurts some people; inaction on the subject would not be a good idea...I am thankful to the chancellor for understanding and trying to make campus life friendlier. (McNeil)

The most prominent opposition occurred when the Ku Klux Klan made appearance on campus to protest the removal of the song. On November 20, 2009, an article from *The Daily Mississippian* article confirmed the Klan's decision to protest:

The Mississippi White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan will hold a protest at the University of Mississippi Saturday from 10 to 11 a.m. in an effort to overturn Chancellor Dan Jones' decision to ask the Ole Miss Band to stop playing 'From Dixie With Love,' according to Exalted Cyclops of the Mississippi White Knights Bill Reid. (Clark)

The Klan's appearance on campus brought national attention to the issue, and reports of the protest appeared in articles in the *Huffington Post* and *USA Today*.⁴ In response to this event, students held a peaceful counter protest nearby. The students wore shirts that said "Turn Your Back on Hate" and recited the university creed.

While Jones faced a lot of opposition, concern regarding the issue began to wane when students diverted their attention to the selection of a new mascot. After the previous Chancellor, Robert Khayat, removed the Colonel Reb as the on-field mascot in 2003, the university did not adopt a new mascot until 2010, under Jones's administration. In the spring of that year, the student body senate passed a resolution that gave students the

⁴ Articles referenced in Bibliography

opportunity to vote on whether or not they supported “a student-led effort to develop and propose a new ‘on-field’ mascot to represent the Ole Miss Rebels” (Morgan). The students voted in favor of this student-led decision process, with almost 75% of students voting “yes” to the initiative (DM Staff). Despite the overwhelming majority, the chancellor was still accused of fowl play. JD Griffin, a columnist for *The Daily Mississippian* wrote an article entitled “Why I voted ‘no.’” In the article, he accused the chancellor of using the student government as a venue through which he can achieve his own goals. He states, “It seems, however, that [the chancellor] is unwilling to make tough decisions on these kinds of issues. Instead, he waits for or encourages the ASB [student government] to pass a resolution — which he then cites as justification for whatever action he takes.” In another article, the same student refers to the Chancellor’s decision as a “war on the traditions of our school” (“A Response”). He goes on to insinuate that Jones intends to strip the school of the name “Ole Miss” and the “Rebels.” Once again, other students noted the importance of the change. For example, former student body president, Taylor McGraw, wrote, “It’s time for students to lead the process of finding a new mascot that unites us, not divides us. It’s time to tell the Save Colonel Reb Foundation to give it a rest.”

Two years later, in the fall of 2012, a student protest broke out in reaction to the re-election of President Barack Obama. After his victory was announced, a few freshmen gathered outside the dorms and burned one of Obama’s campaign signs. An article published in the *New York Times* stated, “A student protest at the University of Mississippi against the re-election of President Obama turned disorderly on Wednesday

morning, with some students chanting racial epithets and two arrested for disorderly conduct” (Brown). In Mississippi, one might expect there to be a negative reaction to the election of a Democratic president. However, what was initially a political protest quickly escalated into an act of racial discrimination.

Student responses in *The Daily Mississippian* were more than a denunciation of the acts committed. Most of them reflected the hope that the university would take the necessary steps to prevent these incidents from happening in the future. Some responses to this incident incorporated a call to action. For example, in a letter to the editor, student Kaitlyn Barnes proposed an educational approach: “So let us educate them. Let us not abandon our mission as an institution of learning. Let us bring them to the table then come away together as a stronger and more loving community.” While Barnes articulates an eagerness to shift the culture through education, other students are not so hopeful.

Unlike Barnes, many students expressed a desire to inflict serious consequences on the perpetrators. These reactions reflect deeply engrained feelings of resentment towards the racist subculture that exists at the University of Mississippi. In a letter to the editor, Boyd Harris shared his opinion on the matter: “The time of indulging those that terrorize their fellow students through racist language or acts is over. No more forced apologies printed in *The Daily Mississippian*. No more sensitivity training or community service. Kick Them Out” (Harris). Harris’s article clearly calls on the university administration to take action against the students identified as responsible.

In a similar response, student leaders addressed the perpetrators directly: “To students who believe what happened on our campus is somehow acceptable, and to those

who partook in hateful speech: you are not welcome at The University of Mississippi. We do not want you here. Our campus is not a safe haven for hate” (B. Barnes). Each of these responses indicates that this is not the first time racist incidents have occurred on campus. It also highlights the frustration that many students face from witnessing various failed attempts to alleviate the racial tension that permeates the culture at the University of Mississippi.

In addition to *The Daily Mississippian* articles, the Chancellor’s Standing Committee on Sensitivity and Respect responded to the incident by putting together a report in which they hoped to highlight some of the main concerns regarding diversity and racial insensitivity on campus. In a description of the committee’s specific duties, it states:

The Committee will serve as an immediate point of contact for any member of our University community who is subjected to actions or words that are in conflict with our EEO anti-discrimination policy. The Committee will be asked to receive and review any such complaints as well as consider proactive measures to encourage community harmony and emphasize the high value we place on respect for the dignity of individuals. (Cole 5)

For this particular incident, the committee decided to temporarily expand and added several new members in order to effectively address the issues of race relations on campus. In the spring of 2013, the committee issued a report of their findings.

In regards to university culture, the report identified issues relating to institutional history, the perpetuation of certain symbols and traditions that are often regarded as racially insensitive, and physical settings. The report claimed that the university has a “well-documented history with regard to racial exclusion” (5). Also, in

regards to campus symbols, the report identified several campus traditions including the Colonel Reb, the confederate monument, and student's attachment to the song "Dixie." It stated, "some members of the university perceive that the symbols across campus serve as beacons for racial insensitivity" (22). In addition to this, the report highlighted two buildings: Vardaman Hall and the Johnson Commons. The report specified that both of these buildings are named after Mississippi politicians that supported racism and segregation (22-23). Also, one reoccurring theme throughout the report was the idea that the university was "implicitly tolerant of racist attitudes and behaviors" demonstrating a perception of university culture that is contradictory to the culture that the administration tries to promote.

More recently, the Chancellor issued a twenty-page letter outlining an administrative "action plan" in response to the defamation of the Meredith statue and to the suggestions highlighted in the committee's report. This action plan included the creation of a new position for the Vice Chancellor of Diversity and Inclusion, more honesty and openness regarding university history and Mississippi history, and the critical evaluation of the school's nickname "Ole Miss." The plan went on to describe how the university would deal with each of these issues and what changes would be made.

While this plan was meant as a call to action, some white students took offense and quickly turned against the chancellor. In an open letter responding to the event, one student shared her thoughts:

The real problem throughout this entire situation is that by trying to promote racial diversity, you are creating new problems. While I agree that our history as a state and as a school is not perfect, that does not mean the administration should ostracize one group at the benefit of another. By creating this new Vice Chancellor position for diversity and inclusion, you are suggesting to the rest of the world that Ole Miss is inherently a racist school, and her students are incapable of change on their own. (Jennings)

While the letter was originally anonymous, the student later claimed the letter as her own when she received widespread support for her opinions (Russel). The widespread support for her position highlights a couple of problems that may explain the reoccurring tension between some expressions of student opinion and institutional diversity goals. First, many white students may feel attacked or marginalized when the university makes such strong statements about a commitment to diversity. This is an important point, as it reveals a critical problem that arises when trying to improve race relations on a larger scale. Joe Feagin would refer to this type of perspective as “white racial framing.” Feagin argues that an overarching problem with race relations in the United States is white denial of certain racial disparities as well as desire among whites to hold on to their existing social frame in which whites remain superior:

The white racial frame is more than just one significant frame among many; it is one that has routinely defined a way of being, a broad perspective on life, and one that provides the language and interpretations that help structure, normalize, and make sense out of society. (11)

He goes on to argue that oftentimes the language in which whites speak about race reveals only the white perspective, and this language often uses “deflection strategies” in which whites talk about racism in the past tense, as this student did when she referred to the “history” of our state and of our school (24). This is used as almost a coping mechanism for white guilt by allowing a white person to “avoid asserting that whites, in

general or in particular, are the critical actors in the long U.S. drama of racial oppression” (25).

This student claims she feels marginalized when the university attempts to undermine her tradition. However, she acknowledges that the schools is “not perfect,” demonstrating some understanding of a racial injustice that results as a product of the perpetuation and glorification of certain traditions and behaviors. However, does her sentiment stem from the fact that she is unknowingly allowing her frame of mind to ascribe to an overarching “white-frame” which only perpetuates white supremacy? This possibility is one that is important to consider when one evaluates racial climate—that white students, often unknowingly, allow their perspective to be dictated by an overarching white worldview that ends up marginalizing minority students.

Second, the letter proposes that the university regards the students as “incapable of change on their own.” Demonstrating that, at least this student in particular, feels the university is blaming the student body for the perpetuation of implicit racism. Other articles have shown that some students believe the administration is not taking their input into consideration before they make some of these controversial decisions. Is this accusation against the administration a reaction to their inability to consider student opinion, or is it an attempt to defend her fellow white students against what she perceives as an accusation of racist behaviors? The student who wrote this letter seems to imply that students can and should encourage positive social change without interference from the administration. However, this assertion begs the question, why are some students not

acting in response to these incidents, and what can students do to promote change on such a large scale?

The tension lies in the fact that the administration is trying to shift student culture. This culture is identified by many members of the community as a memorial to the confederacy but by others as university “tradition.” The perpetuation of such a culture, though shared through a common educational experience, is not solely an administrative problem. While the administration can remove certain symbols and create new positions, students must be willing to engage in meaningful discussions and create meaningful relationships in order to promote true racial reconciliation. But what resources can students utilize to attain these goals?

The next chapter will evaluate studies that highlight the specific influence of student behaviors on campus life and culture. I will try to highlight how student behaviors can be beneficial or detrimental to campus diversity and the promotion of racial sensitivity. Specifically, it will evaluate social patterns among students in a university, effective tools for influencing student opinion, and the role of student organizations in promoting an institution’s diversity goals.

Chapter 2: Student Religious Organizations

Public universities represent one example of how integration efforts and policies have been successfully applied and carried out. In addition to integration, most public universities are required by law to adopt affirmative action policies, which require them to accept a certain percentage of minority students. One might expect that close proximity between students of different ethnic backgrounds, which is a product of these university policies, would alleviate some of the racial tension that continues to permeate American culture. However, while these efforts increase student exposure to people of different backgrounds, it is not clear whether they effectively promote interracial interaction or friendship. Although universities accept students from a wide variety of racial backgrounds, there is often no system in place to ensure that students are directly interacting with one another in a diverse setting. According to Jim Sidanus, a professor of Psychology and African American studies at Harvard University, the racial strife experienced by African American students on university campuses post-integration “calls into question research findings stating that increased exposure to education necessarily leads to decreased levels of prejudice and ethnocentrism” (10). In fact, one might argue that when students enter the university setting, there are many opportunities for students to separate themselves from this diversity.

Homophily, the theory that “similarity breeds connection” and that “birds of a feather flock together,” presents many obstacles for bridging the gap between students of

different ethnic backgrounds (McPherson 415). When placed into a diverse setting, it is likely that students will be inclined to create bonds and relationships with people that they perceive as sharing similar characteristics. “The result is that people’s personal networks are homogenous with regard to many sociodemographic, behavioral, and intrapersonal characteristics” (415). Students often break into subcultures that reflect this pattern. In Julie Park’s book, *When Diversity Drops*, she defines a subculture as “a distinctive community that exists within a university, such as a student organization, members of a major, or an ethnic minority group” (19). Such groups are a reflection of how students choose to spend their time and organize themselves socially within the university setting. Students join these groups as a way of intentionally creating bonds and building relationships within a collegiate environment. This makes student organizations a primary environment in which students come into contact and create meaningful relationships. Often, student subcultures can reflect social patterns and the desire for students to seek out like-minded individuals with similar backgrounds and goals. However, while these subcultures may reflect a certain level of homogeneity, they can have a powerful impact in influencing students’ thoughts and opinions. Park continues to explain that subcultures also serve as “venues where students become socialized into various norms, values, and expectations that potentially shape their attitudes around race and diversity” (20). This makes student subcultures a useful tool, which can be utilized to help shift a culture.

The purpose of this chapter will be to examine the role that student organizations play in promoting diversity on college campuses. First, I will look at student

organizations and their impact on a university's efforts to diversify. In doing this, I will look at what Park says in her book regarding diversity within student organizations, and I will also look at a study which outlines six different types of relationships that a student organization can have with a university's institutional diversity goals. Second, I will highlight examples of student organizations that have actively promoted values centered on racial equality and social justice. Third, I will argue that student religious organizations in particular have the potential to shape student perspectives regarding racial diversity.

As previously noted, Park has highlighted how student subcultures can have a positive impact in influencing student opinions around issues of race and diversity. In looking at student organizations as one type of student subculture, she notes the importance of intentionality when trying to transform the existing structure of a student group. She explains that in order for students to accept certain values as a valid addition to their organization's overall goals and purpose, these values must first be encouraged and emphasized:

Underlying values, norms and priorities shape a student community, which in turn can facilitate or hinder engagement with racial diversity... such values have to be intentionally fostered before they can become part of the taken for granted assumptions that are part of a groups's organizational structure. (21)

Park's work demonstrates that in order for student organizations to have a positive impact on diversity, there must be effective promotion of diversity goals and values within the organization itself. A student organization has the power to socialize a

particular group of students through the promotion of certain norms and values. In turn, this can benefit a university's climate in regards to diversity if and only if the students allow these values to cross-over into other parts of their campus involvement and daily interactions. While she highlights an important point, this does not fully address how the student organization as a whole can take a more active role in encouraging diversity beyond the scope of their organization and within the larger framework of campus life and culture. It is also important to understand the possible impact of student organizations that do not recognize racial diversity as a goal which productively advances their main purpose. For example, a campus environmental club does not necessarily detract from diversity efforts; however, its main purpose is not to promote them. Considering this, how can one address and define its relationship with a university's institutional diversity goals?

In a study conducted at Colorado State University, Linda Kuk and James Banning, both professors in the School of Education, examine student organizations and their relationship to an institution's diversity goals. Similar to Park's research, this study notes the lack of research on the role that student organizations can play in facilitating an open and diverse environment. The authors observe: "Campus student organizations serve as significant social networks for students on college campuses and serve as important links for students to campus life and to the institution" (354). In an effort to evaluate the impact of student organizations, the study outlines six ways that student organizations can either be beneficial or detrimental to a university's efforts to promote diversity .

Two of the relationships that the study identifies have a negative relationship with an institution's diversity goals—the negative relationship and the null relationship. The negative relationship can either be willful or negligent (355). An organization that fosters a willful negative relationship has organizational values or goals that actively oppose any efforts to diversify. However, a negligent, negative relationship occurs when a student organization is unaware of their exclusive perception. This group may accidentally say or promote something that is perceived as racially insensitive without realizing the negative effects of their actions. The second relationship is the null relationship, which can also be particularly detrimental to an institution's diversity goals (356). This relationship is very similar to the example of the environmental club that was previously addressed. In this case, a student organization does not do anything to hurt a school's multicultural goals, but it also does nothing to address them. Park might say this kind of organization lacks intentionality in regards to racial reconciliation. The idea is that because they are not actively working against diversity efforts, the organization is not doing anything wrong by simply ignoring the issue altogether.

Next, the study identifies two relationships that only play a small role in promoting institutional goals. This includes organizations with a contributions relationship or with an additive relationship (357). In a group with a contributions relationship, the student organization promotes cultural diversity only during significant events. For example, a student organization might join in a campus wide effort to celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, or they might help with events in regards to Black History month. However, aside from these important events, they generally do not

incorporate diversity goals into their organization. On the other hand, the additive relationship attempts to incorporate diversity into some of their organized activities without changing the overall purpose of the organization. For example, if a student architecture organization invites someone who is disabled to come and speak about the importance of planning a building that is handicap accessible.

Finally, the two positive relationships identified by the study are the transformational relationship and a social action relationship. The transformational relationship occurs when a student organization either changes its own rules and procedures to more closely match institutional goals pertaining to diversity (357-358). This is similar to the relationship that Park defined, in which an organization incorporates certain values into their pre-existing framework or if an organization decides to change some of their own policies to stipulate non-discrimination. A student organization can also be considered transformational if it works together on initiatives with diverse student groups. An example of this might be if the environmental club and the black student union organize a community service project or work together to create a documentary series addressing relevant issues. However, to have a social action relationship, a student organization must intentionally work towards attaining the university's goals for diversity (358). These groups are proactive in their efforts to diversify and actively promote diversity in other facets of campus and community life.

One can identify various examples through which student subcultures and organizations have taken action to change the status quo. One famous example of student organized activism was the creation of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee.

In April of 1960, Ella Baker, a student at Shaw University in North Carolina, organized a meeting of student leaders who were all actively involved in the struggle for integration. The formation of this student group spread to schools across the country and resulted in a huge network of college students that played a crucial role in the proliferation of the Civil Rights Movement. This group joined forces with other civil rights organizations in the Freedom Rides of 1961 and helped with the facilitation of the Freedom Summer in 1964, whose initiatives helped register black voters and opened freedom schools to teach black students about their history (“Who was Ella Baker?”).

Around the same time the University of Mississippi was dealing with the Meredith statue incident, the University of Michigan was struggling with their own racial tension. In November of 2013, African American students began a social media campaign with the slogan “BBUM” or, “Being Black at the University of Michigan” (Vega). This campaign gathered the attention of national media as students voiced their frustrations, and tensions only escalated when a predominantly white fraternity on campus organized a party which emphasized “rappers, twerkers, and gangsters” and coming “back to da hood again.” As the racial tension became a clear problem to members of the university community, student activists decided to get involved. To expand the campaign beyond social media, the university’s Black Student Union coordinated a protest on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, in which they held up signs with various “tweets” and quotes from black students explaining their dissatisfaction with the current racial climate.

In regards to the University of Mississippi, some of the most successful demonstrations have been led by student organizations. Writing for *The Daily Mississippian*, though a valuable tool for expressing one's thoughts and concerns, can be limited when it is used to gauge student response to these types of events. Not all students read the paper, so an article does not always have the widespread impact that the writer might have anticipated. Also, the paper is limited to the opinions of student writers and those few students who are brave enough to offer criticism of their peers and their university in an official publication. Given the perceived ineffectiveness of these articles, some students have turned to organizing visible demonstrations to express their frustrations.

One demonstration that was particularly effective was coordinated by One Mississippi, a student organization at the university dedicated to promoting racial reconciliation. On the group's web page, their mission statement claims:

One Mississippi is a student group devoted to monitoring race relations on campus and championing the enfranchisement of minority students. Its goals are threefold: to provide an open space for students, staff, and faculty to voice their concerns and experiences; to ensure that the campus is having vital conversations about race and its intersections; and to promote, through events, seminars, and close contact with both student government and campus administration, the inclusion and equality of students of all races. ("One Mississippi")

At the time of the election night riots, the president of the organization was student, Hope-Owens Wilson. The day after the riots broke out, Hope chose to organize a response that would visibly engage students and faculty in protest. That Wednesday night, an unprecedented number of students showed up to show their dedication to

improving race relations. The counter-protest attracted approximately 700 people who came to defend the university's and the student's commitment to "racial harmony" (Mohr). At the beginning of the walk, all the students received a candle and a copy of the University creed. They then proceeded to march from the Union, through the historic grove, and to the oldest and most significant building on campus, the Lyceum. When all of the students arrived at the Lyceum, they held up their candles and recited the university creed as a reminder of university values and expectations.

All of these examples demonstrate what Kuk and Banning would refer to as a "Social Action Relationship." These students have utilized the vocal frustrations of their peers and made the conscious decision to put these words into action. The effectiveness of these initiatives can be attributed to students leaders identifying students with a common goal, and bringing them together to demonstrate not only the collective suffering, but also, community solidarity.

Why Study Religious Organizations?

While these social action oriented organizations have the most positive impact on campus culture and promoting diversity on campus, one cannot expect all student organizations to make diversity their main objective. Ideally, a university would hope to eliminate all "negative" or "null" organizations, have some key "social action" organizations, and have a wide variety of "transformational" organizations. This would allow for "social action" organizations to plan and organize events which other student organizations would participate in. For those organizations that do not identify diversity as a part of their purpose, it would be beneficial to adopt a transformational relationship.

While all student organizations have the potential to develop this kind of transformational relationship, student religious organizations can be a particularly effective venue in which to explore its implementation and effects.

Religion itself is often viewed as socially and politically divisive. Rightfully so, given that religion has often been used as a tool to prolong social injustice and justify discrimination. Due to rigid religious guidelines and often, strong conviction in one's own religious and moral values, religious groups have often been the cause of social conflict. "There is a tendency to view strong religious convictions primarily as constituting a negative force, one that feeds conflict... and prevents rational dialogue and conflict resolution" (Harpviken 352). However, these beliefs are not entirely unwarranted.

Throughout history, strongly conservative religious groups have firmly opposed various civil rights movements. For example, during the Civil Rights Movement, various religious groups actively resisted efforts to integrate. "The immutable division between the black and white races was preached from many a pulpit" (Park 23). Along with this, many religious groups defended the institution of slavery. In his book, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*, Charles Wilson, a retired history professor and former director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, explains how Christian churches used religion as a justification for slavery:

Ministers cited Biblical examples of the coexistence of Christianity and slavery, quoted Old Testament approvals of slavery, and interpreted a passage from Genesis to mean that blacks were descended of the sinner Ham and destined to be forever bondsmen. (4)

This demonstrates how religion and race in the South have been closely linked throughout American history. It also shows how religion has been particularly oppressive and divisive in regards to integration. Even to this day, many congregations remain highly segregated. In his speech, “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” Martin Luther King stated, “We must face the sad fact that at eleven o’clock on Sunday morning when we stand to sing ‘In Christ there is no East or West,’ we stand in the most segregated hour of America.” While racial diversity in Christian congregations has improved, this statement holds relevance today. For example, “surveys from 2007 show that fewer than 8% of American congregations have a significant racial mix” (Van Biema). This information often places religion as an obstacle to progress, a belief that continues to negatively affect the perception of religion and its role in society.

Altogether, religion often appears to be in opposition to positive social change. However, many people fail to recognize that religion has also been utilized for purposes of social justice and unification. In her book, Park highlights that “in an ironic twist, the same Bible used to justify subordinating blacks as slaves and second-class citizens was a source of inspiration for slave resistance... and the civil rights revolution” (*When Diversity* 23). Despite this, there is a growing field of scholarly information on how religion can be used as a tool to promote positive change and social justice in the community.

As a normative system, religion has the potential to be an effective tool for positive change and social justice. This potential stems from the idea that normative systems “define objectives and offer conceptual frameworks and narrative that inspire

action” (Harpviken 353). In this way, religion describes more than just a conceptual understanding of the meaning of existence, but also “prescribing how things *should be*.” Religious communities provide adherents with a structural understanding of norms and values that one should conform to and apply to their everyday lives. This gives both religious leaders and religious texts a lot of influence over the way that adherents think and act, making religious settings or congregations ideal venues for inspiring positive change. Scholarly studies have also shown that involvement with social justice issues is often driven by personal religious convictions and a desire to turn such convictions into action. “A strong religious responsibility emerged as a primary motivation for working for justice... some Christians draw upon the example of Jesus as motivation for helping behavior” (Todd 328).

All of these factors can be attributed to religion’s “identity-forming potential,” (Harpviken 354). This identity-forming potential allows religion to serve as a channel through which an individual can define their place in the community. This encourages people to join religious groups in order to gain an understanding of their identity and a sense of community. However, this identity is not only limited to the church community of which someone is a part; one’s religious identity can also be translated into the external world. According to Harpviken and Røislien, “religion tells you where you belong, and where to proceed.” This idea is particularly important to understanding how religion can inform one’s opinions regarding the importance of social justice work. A religious adherent might ask, “Now that I know how the world ought to be, what can I do to make it this way?”

This “identity forming potential” is a significant point in understanding why student religious organizations can be a particularly effective venue to study race on a university campus. Student religious organizations have two factors working in their favor. Not only do student religious organizations constitute one type of university subculture, but also, religious congregations can have a high level of impact on its members. As previously noted, both religion and student subcultures play a role in helping a student identify his or her place in the community, and share this “identity-forming” nature. Due to these influential factors, it seems that student religious organizations in particular can play a very important role in shaping a student’s understanding of where he or she might fit into the university community and how he or she might impact that community for the better. Also, student religious organizations are unique because they face two separate barriers to integration. As previously noted, religion has historically had a negative effect on integration. Park notes that campus fellowships are a specific subculture “where two cultural legacies intersect: the racial divides of the university and the racial divides of evangelicalism” (*When Diversity* 22). For this reason, the majority of campus fellowships remain racially divided, and in another study conducted by Park she demonstrates that students involved in campus fellowships are less likely to build meaningful interracial friendships in college (“When Race” 10). However, just as religion itself has the potential for positive social reform, religious student organizations also have the potential to be particularly effective promoting matters of social justice.

Altogether, if student religious organizations adopted a “transformational relationship,” they would already have a value system in place in which they could promote religiously motivated messages that support inclusion and racial reconciliation. They can also take part in efforts demonstrated by organizations with a “social action” relationship by participating in their events. This could be very effective at the University of Mississippi given the historical legacies of racism, and the importance of religion in the context of Southern culture.

In the next chapter, I will explore the current potential of student religious organizations on student involvement in the community as well as student engagement with issues of diversity. In doing this, I will examine results from the surveys as well as the interviews. The questions being addressed will look at diversity within the organization, organizational potential, as well as effective practices and barriers to organizing events, how the organization impacts student engagement with issues of diversity, and how the organization currently evaluates its own success in regards to promoting racial reconciliation and diversity

Chapter 3: Survey and Interview Findings

Results

As previously demonstrated in Chapter Two, Student Religious Organizations, in general, have the potential to be a positive force for change on a university campus. This chapter will try to highlight the potential of student religious organizations at the University of Mississippi to have a positive impact on the campus racial climate. In trying to gauge this potential, I conducted a survey as well as an interview both of which were applied to three student religious organizations—Reformed University Fellowship, Baptist Student Union, and the Episcopal Church at Ole Miss. This survey is anonymous and consists of twenty-three questions which specifically focus on racial diversity within the organization, influence of the organization on how one perceives his or her own religious values, influence the organization on a student’s desire to create positive change, and their impact on student engagement with issues of diversity and racial reconciliation efforts. It is also important to remember that these organizations are all predominantly white which may influence some of the findings. In evaluating the results, I will look primarily at collective findings, and in some circumstances, I will show how the results break down within the individual organizations.

It is important to point out that because this survey is collecting information about certain values as well as religious practice, there is a good chance for the presence of social desirability bias. Social desirability bias is defined as “participants’ tendency to

describe themselves in favorable terms by adhering to socio-culturally sanctioned norms” (De Jong 14).

Table 1. Race and Membership in Religious Organizations

Row Labels	Total
BSU	60
Asian	5
Black	1
Hispanic	1
White	52
(blank)	1
ECOM	21
Asian	0
Black	1
Hispanic	1
White	19
(blank)	0
RUF	63
Asian	0
Black	2
Hispanic	0
White	60
(blank)	1
Grand Total	144

Diversity

Each of these organizations demonstrated a very low level of diversity. Eleven participants out of 144 identified themselves as a minority (Table 1). Two of these students were members of RUF, seven were members of BSU, and two were members of ECOM. Also, two minority students considered themselves “very highly involved” meaning that they “attend every week, hold a leadership position, try to attend events outside of the weekly meeting.” This number changes to 5 minority students when “Highly Involved” was included as an option meaning that they “attend every

week, try to attend events outside of the weekly meetings.” This shows that 45.5% of minority students considered themselves “highly” to “very highly” involved, whereas 66.4% of white students considered themselves “highly” to “very highly” involved. However, no minority students responded as less than “moderately involved” meaning that they “attend almost every week, attend some additional events outside of the scheduled weekly meeting.”

Religious Values

Students were asked to assign a number rank to certain religious values based on their importance to the practice of Christianity. Religious values included eight options, forgiveness, compassion, humility, justice, prayer, faith, charity, and other. Students were asked to rank in descending order, with number 1 indicating the highest level of importance, and number 8 indicating the lowest level of importance. First, students were asked to rank these religious values according to their own personal practice of Christianity (Table 2) and then asked to rank them again based on what they believed their student religious organization emphasized the most (Table 3).

Table 2. Individual Religious Values by Student Organization								
	Forgiveness	Compassion	Humility	Justice	Prayer	Faith	Charity	Other
BSU	3.37	3.92	4.85	6.25	2.67	1.45	6.46	4.59
ECOM	2.42	3.43	4.38	6.10	4.81	2.67	4.81	3.39
RUF	3.40	4.33	4.41	6.11	2.94	1.85	6.27	3.17
Grand Total	3.24	4.03	4.59	6.17	3.10	1.80	6.13	4.10

When asked to rank these values according to their personal practice of Christianity, students most often chose faith to be the highest level of importance, averaging a score of 1.80, and justice to be the lowest level of importance, averaging a score of 6.16. However, in examining the individual organizations, ECOM chose forgiveness to be the highest importance scoring 2.42, and RUF and BSU chose charity to be the least important, averaging 6.27 and 6.46 respectively.

When asked to rank these values based on what their religious organization emphasized the most, student’s answers were relatively the same. Among all the students surveyed, faith was perceived to be the most important, averaging 1.97, followed by prayer, forgiveness, compassion, humility, charity, in that order, and justice was perceived to be the least important, averaging 6.04. However, reflecting their own religious values, ECOM students believed that forgiveness was emphasized the most, averaging 2.67. RUF students ranked both Charity and Justice to be the least important, both averaging 5.98.

Table 3. Organizational Religious Values by Student Organization								
	Forgiveness	Compassion	Humility	Justice	Prayer	Faith	Charity	Other
BSU	4.53	3.60	5.47	6.02	2.62	1.60	5.30	3.14
ECOM	2.67	2.74	4.68	6.29	3.79	2.95	4.89	7.00
RUF	3.27	3.90	4.52	5.98	3.44	2.03	5.98	2.89
Grand Total	3.73	3.62	4.94	6.04	3.14	1.97	5.55	3.21

In the other category, several students from RUF included “Grace.” Five students reported this as being one of their own values, and three reported it as being something their organization promotes. Also, four BSU students responded that their organization promoted either “evangelism,” “mission,” “discipleship,” or some mixture which included these principles. A significant number of students included “love” as a value that was important to both them and their religious organization. This value was included for all three religious organizations.

Community Service and Organizational Potential

The next portion of the survey looked at how religious organizations motivated students to create positive change in their community. Students were given a series of questions in which they were asked to respond very often, often, sometimes, seldom, or never. For this portion of the survey results, I will highlight the percentage of students who responded “very often” or “often.” I will also highlight the percentage of students who chose the option “sometimes.”

Table 4: Community Service Participation in Student Religious Organizations					
<i>Panel A. Would you say that your religious values encourage you to organize a project or be involved in efforts to create positive change in your community?</i>		<i>Panel B. Has your religious organization ever participated in a community service project or advocacy effort for a specific cause?</i>		<i>Panel C. Did you participate in any of these projects?</i>	
Row Labels	Total	Row Labels	Total	Row Labels	Total
Very Often	43.8%	Very Often	41.7%	Very Often	15.3%
Often	41.7%	Often	43.8%	Often	24.3%
Sometimes	9.7%	Sometimes	11.1%	Sometimes	36.1%
Seldom	4.2%	Seldom	2.1%	Seldom	12.5%
Never	.7%	Never	0%	Never	11.8%
(blank)	0%	(blank)	1.4%	(blank)	0%
<i>Panel D. How often would you say that your religious organization organizes a community service project?</i>		<i>Panel E. Aside from organizing a community service project, does your religious organization keep you up to date about various service opportunities or encourage you to get involved in other student efforts that are service oriented?</i>		<i>Panel F. Do you believe if you proposed a service project or advocacy efforts to the group, that other members would be supportive in helping you reach this goal?</i>	
Row Labels	Total	Row Labels	Total	Row Labels	Total
Very Often	27.8%	Very Often	43.8%	Very Often	57.6%
Often	47.2%	Often	40.1%	Often	29.9%
Sometimes	22.2%	Sometimes	11.1%	Sometimes	9.0%
Seldom	2.1%	Seldom	4.2%	Seldom	2.1%
Never	0%	Never	0%	Never	0%
(blank)	0.7%	(blank)	0%	(blank)	1.4%

When asked whether they believed their religious values encouraged them to organize a project or be involved in efforts to create positive change in their community, 85.4% of students responded “very often” or “often” (Table 4). When asked if their religious organization has ever participated in a community service project or advocacy effort for a specific cause, 85.5% of students responded in this way. For these projects, 39.6% of students responded that they participate. However, the number of students that replied “sometimes” includes 36.1% of respondents, changing the number to 75.7%. When asked how often their religious organization organizes a community service project, 75.0% of students responded in this way. When asked if their religious organization keeps them informed about various service opportunities or encourages them to get involved in other student efforts that are service oriented, 84.7% of students responded in this way. When asked if they believe their student religious organization would be supportive of them and willing to help if they proposed a community service project or advocacy efforts, 87.5% of students responded in this way.

Impact on Students Level of Engagement with Diversity

The next set of questions addresses how student’s involvement in a religious organization has encouraged them to build diverse friendships, their perceptions of diversity within their religious organization, and how their organization has contributed to racial reconciliation on campus. For the first three questions in this survey, students

were asked to respond “yes” or “no.” I will only report the percentage of students that responded “yes.” When asked whether they have met/ gotten to know someone of another race through their involvement in their student religious organization, 92.4% of

participants responded affirmatively (Table 5), while 87.5% responded that they have befriended someone of another race through their involvement, and 81.3% believe that racial diversity should be improved within their organization.

The next part of this section involves five questions that engage how a student’s religious organization has directly impacted their level of involvement with or awareness of the racial climate at the University of Mississippi. For this section of the survey, I will report the percentage of students that responded “very often” and “often” as well as the number of students that replied “sometimes.” Only 25.0% of students have ever discussed how their religious faith relates to the racial climate at Ole Miss with someone in their religious organization; however, 32.6% of respondents replied “sometimes.” (Table 6). Only 16.7% of students say that the leadership of their organization has initiated a discussion regarding how religious values might relate to the racial climate at Ole Miss or racially charged incidents on campus; once again, a huge percentage of students replied “sometimes” to this question (35.4%). Only 15.3% responded that they have heard a sermon from the campus minister regarding the racial climate at Ole Miss or racially charged incidents on campus; 25.0% of respondents answered “sometimes.” Only 10.4% say that their religious student organization has organized a response to negative racial tension on campus, but 19.4% responded “sometimes.” However, only 6.9% of

Table 5: Race Relations within Student Religious Organizations					
<i>Panel A. Have you ever met/ gotten to know anyone of a race other than your own through your involvement in student religious organizations?</i>		<i>Panel B. Have you ever befriended anyone of a race other than your own through your involvement in your student religious organizations?</i>		<i>Panel C. Do you think the level of racial diversity should be improved within your student religious organization?</i>	
Row Labels	Total	Row Labels	Total	Row Labels	Total
Yes	92.4%	Yes	87.5%	Yes	81.3%
No	7.6%	No	12.5%	No	18.8%

students claim to have actively participated in any organized response, no students responded “very often,” and 13.9% responded “sometimes.”

It is important to note here that the largest percentage in many of these categories responded “sometimes.” This could be a result of “social desirability bias” as previous noted in the introduction to this chapter.

Table 6: Organizational Initiatives on Race Relations					
<i>Panel A: Have you ever discussed the racial climate at Ole Miss and / or racially charged incidents and how it may relate to your religious beliefs/ values with people in your religious organization?</i>		<i>Panel B: Has the leadership of your organization ever initiated a discussion regarding the racial climate at Ole Miss and / or racially charged incidents and how it may relate to your religious beliefs/ values with people in your religious organization?</i>		<i>Panel C: Have you ever heard a sermon from your organization’s campus minister regarding racial climate at Ole Miss and/ or racially charged incidents and how it may relate to your religious beliefs/ values?</i>	
Row Labels	Total	Row Labels	Total	Row Labels	Total
Very Often	6.3%	Very Often	3.5%	Very Often	1.4%
Often	18.8%	Often	13.2%	Often	13.9%
Sometimes	32.6%	Sometimes	35.4%	Sometimes	25.0%
Seldom	30.6%	Seldom	31.9%	Seldom	31.3%
Never	11.8%	Never	14.6%	Never	27.8%
(blank)	0%	(blank)	1.4%	(blank)	0.7%
<i>Panel D: Has your student religious organization ever organized a response to negative racial tension on campus?</i>		<i>Panel E: If you answered yes to the previous question, were you an active participant in any of these efforts?</i>			
Row Labels	Total	Row Labels	Total		
Very Often	1.4%	Very Often	0%		
Often	9.0%	Often	6.9%		
Sometimes	19.4%	Sometimes	13.9%		
Seldom	31.9%	Seldom	18.1%		
Never	34.7%	Never	33.3%		
(blank)	3.5%	(blank)	27.8%		

The final question addressed in the survey asks students to rank on a scale of 1-10 how comfortable they would be joining a student religious organization in which the majority of students were of a different race from their own. On average, students ranked

a 7.62; however, when the numbers were broken down by ethnicity the average number was significantly lower for white students than for minority students, with minority students averaging 9.37 and white students averaging 7.44 (Table 7).

Table 7: Comfort with Diversity in Religious Organizations																									
<p><i>Panel A: On a scale of 1- 10, how comfortable would you feel joining or participating in a student religious group in which the majority of members were of a different race from your own? With 1 being not at all comfortable and 10 being very comfortable.</i></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Row Labels</th> <th>Average of Q23</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Asian</td> <td>8.60</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Black</td> <td>10.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hispanic</td> <td>9.50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>White</td> <td>7.44</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(blank)</td> <td>10.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Grand Total</td> <td>7.618881119</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Row Labels	Average of Q23	Asian	8.60	Black	10.00	Hispanic	9.50	White	7.44	(blank)	10.00	Grand Total	7.618881119	<p><i>Panel B: Same Question broken down by Organization</i></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Row Labels</th> <th>Average of Q23</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>BSU</td> <td>7.925</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ECOM</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>RUF</td> <td>7.193548387</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Grand Total</td> <td>7.618881119</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Row Labels	Average of Q23	BSU	7.925	ECOM	8	RUF	7.193548387	Grand Total	7.618881119
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When broken down by religious organization, the results were relatively consistent. However, both ECOM and BSU averaged around 8 while RUF’s was almost a whole point lower, averaging closer to 7.

Analysis of Findings

Given the lack of opportunities for students to join a religious organization that is predominantly black, the lack of black student participants in campus religious organizations is significant, and may reflect a hesitancy among black students to join a religious organization in which the majority of members are white. Also, while there was a lower percentage of minority students with a high level of involvement than white students, there were no minority students that felt less than “moderately involved”

possibly demonstrating a certain level of commitment necessary to feel fully engaged in the community. However, this could also simply be attributed to the lack of minority student respondents, seeing as most white students reported a higher level of involvement.

The results generally show that religious values are particularly useful for motivating students to have a positive impact on their community. Also, it shows that student religious organizations are effective venues in which one can get involved in community service. Not only do campus ministries promote community service and advocacy efforts for particular causes, but also they sometimes organize and sponsor their own community service projects. Students also responded that they felt other members of the organization would support them in an effort to propose their own community service project. However, despite the high percentage of respondents who believed that their religious organization promoted participation in community service, this did not translate into high levels of participation in these projects, with the highest percentage, 37.5% reporting that they only participated “sometimes.” This highlights a disconnect between the observed accessibility of community service initiatives and students actual willingness or availability to participate in these initiatives.

The results also showed that the values promoted by a student religious organization were often the same as the values that students believed to be important to their practice of Christianity. This correlation could mean a variety of things. First of all, this could show that student religious organizations have a high level of influence on student’s religious identity. If this were the case, this would support Park’s argument that

student religious organizations can be good venues to socialize students into various norms and values, as well as the idea that religion has “identity-forming potential.” However, this could also demonstrate that students seek out religious organizations with values that align with their own or that students only perceive their religious organization to promote their same values.

In most cases, faith and prayer held the most importance in terms of religious values. However, values that could be associated with social action and involvement in the larger community such as forgiveness, compassion, charity, and justice ranked behind these values in both instances.

Findings also showed that student religious organizations had a positive effect on creating diverse friendships. A large majority of students responded that they had befriended someone of another race through their involvement in their campus ministry. However, the relatively low level of diversity in each of these organizations highlights the influence of homophily on the racial make-up of these organizations, and while students may have befriended someone of another race, there are few opportunities to build these kinds of friendships, and for white students, the actual number of interracial relationships they could form is very limited. In addition to this, most students believed that racial diversity should be improved within their religious organization, which could display an awareness of the homogeneity and the potential positive impact that racial diversity could have on their religious organization.

Results showed that students only sometimes engage in discussion regarding how their religious values relate to issues of race at the University of Mississippi; however,

these numbers go down with each additional layer of structural involvement. For example, while students responded that they sometimes have these discussions with one another, results showed that they are less likely to engage in these conversations with the organization's leadership or to hear a sermon regarding these issues from a campus minister. Also, despite their increased motivation to impact the community, respondents demonstrated low levels of participation in any organized efforts to promote racial reconciliation.

In the final question, students responded that they would be relatively comfortable in joining a student religious organization in which the majority of members were of a different race from their own. On average, white students were less comfortable than minority students. This is probably due to the fact that the minority students surveyed for this study are currently members of a predominantly white student religious organization, exhibiting their high level of comfort. However, this does not by any means demonstrate that all minority students are comfortable joining a student religious organization that is of a predominantly different race from their own. While minority students already active in these organizations consider themselves comfortable, they represent a very small portion of minority students at the University of Mississippi. Also, as previously noted, lack of black student participation in these groups could reflect a hesitation or level of discomfort in joining given the absence of predominantly African-American student religious groups on campus.

Next, I will evaluate responses from the interviews. In examining the findings, I will try to make connections with the survey results and highlight key points that were

not identified through the survey findings. First, I will look at the potential impact that these religious organizations could have on the community, and then, I will look at diversity within these student religious organizations

Potential Impact on the Community

In this section, I will highlight both the factors that respondents identified as beneficial and detrimental to student involvement in events outside of the weekly organized meetings, community service or otherwise. Next, I will try to gauge opinion regarding racial reconciliation and how it relates to religious values, as well as the current impact student religious organizations have on racial reconciliation efforts.

In Chapter 2, I referred to a study that found Christians who are motivated to create positive change in the community often derive these desires and commitments from their religious values as well as a goal to imitate the life of Christ. Findings from the interview reflect this phenomenon, and when explaining the importance of community service, most respondents claimed this importance stemmed from being a member of the church or from trying to live out Christ's message through actions. For example, the RUF chaplain explained the importance of being the "hands and feet of Christ in the community." He goes on to say, "If that's not happening, then I think we're not really getting to the heart of what Jesus has done, and that's serve us to go serve other people." Similarly, a student leader from BSU claimed, "[we're] an extension of the church, so we should be involved in community efforts wherever we can be." In addition to this, almost all of survey responses demonstrated that their student organization is an effective venue for being engaged in community service as well as using their religious beliefs as

motivation for having a positive impact in their community, a finding that is also reflected in these interview responses.

Aside from religious motivations, respondents reflected on other factors that they believed influenced the success of events outside the regular meetings, community service or otherwise. Some of these factors included the increased effectiveness of student leadership and the significance of having a unique connection with other people in the group. For example, the BSU chaplain discussed the success of student leadership. He explains that BSU tactfully employs students to run certain community service initiatives, and in taking on that leadership role, they are able to encourage other students to get involved:

Our organization is to allow students to lead under my leadership. You know, I won't do everything, we recruit students to lead in various program areas according to their interest and ability, and we've recruited a student to basically be our community missions type leader, and it's her responsibility to recruit and train other students to get involved in that ministry, to conduct the ministry, to build relationships out there, and because we've entrusted them we'll supply the resources, but they supply the power, and we've entrusted them with that opportunity, and they have shined.

This method shows how students can be effective at both planning and leading outside events as well as influencing other students level of involvement within the organization.

One RUF student discussed the success of more intimate events. In particular, he talked about their Sunday night fellowship meetings: "I think it's been successful because it just feels really genuine... it's personal because you're in somebody's home, and you just get to come together and sing stuff that we believe." In some way, almost all of these responses center on relationships and on sharing their beliefs. In every case, students are

benefitting from their relationship with either people in the organization or people in the community, and those close bonds often stem from the foundation of shared religious belief. However, another RUF student noted how a lack of connection within the organization can be detrimental to student involvement:

I would say that if people don't feel super connected within that organization, then they don't want to go farther and get more connected in the community. So, they need to feel really welcome, and kind of like they're in the group, in the religious organization, to actually be able to go further.

This student highlighted the importance of recognizing students who do not participate because they do not feel plugged into the community. In accordance with his observation, the survey results showed that the availability of service opportunities did not always translate into increased participation, which highlights that there may be barriers involved to student participation in these events as well as other events that are held outside of the standard-weekly meetings. For example, almost all interview respondents believed that time was a huge barrier in getting students to participate in organized events (community service or otherwise) outside of the standard weekly meetings. The ECOM Chaplain responded saying, "college students and especially students at large universities like Ole Miss have so many opportunities, and so many different things they can be involved in." However, the ECOM student leader noted the voluntary nature of the events put on by religious organizations as opposed to events that some student organizations require their members to participate in.

Similar to opinions regarding community service, almost all respondents believed that issues of racial reconciliation were significant in the context of Christian ethics. They

also noted the relevance of race relations in the South, and/or the idea that all people are equal in the eyes of God. Respondents spoke passionately about this question, and all of them drew from their religious beliefs and values in response to the question. One of the RUF student leaders touched on both of these factors:

Growing up I didn't really get the whole picture... since I've gotten to college I've kind of understood more of Mississippi's history and the South's history, and just kind of understood how bad race relations have really been, and I think just understanding from a religious standpoint that God created all people in his image, and I guess what we want as Christians is to create something that kind of resembles what heaven will be like, or something that's more indicative of that, and that, you know it says it's going to be people of all nations, all tongues, and people with different backgrounds, different races have different perspectives that they bring that we wouldn't be able to see certain aspects of God's character without that, and really that's been one of the coolest things.

This response demonstrates a desire to create a society that is more reflective of Christ's kingdom. Other respondents echoed this same idea of striving to make the communities they live and participate in look more like heaven. This response in particular is unique because the student goes on to explain that in seeking out diverse groups, a person can come to know more about "certain aspects of God's character." This is important because the student is immediately recognizing the cultural divide that separates many racial and ethnic groups. However, the response also reflects a willingness to look beyond cultural barriers in order to promote a higher goal as well as a respect for different backgrounds by admitting that these represent distinct aspects of "God's character."

The RUF chaplain offered a response that reflected these same sentiments : "Jesus broke down the wall that exists between us and God, so that therefore, we can go... lead the way in taking down the walls that exists between us and other people." He also

mentions that this especially important given the context of living in the Deep South. This response also demonstrates the idea that these cultural barriers exist that may be products of a past associated with racial injustice, but a willingness to try and break down these walls in order to build a community “that looks like the kingdom, that looks like heaven, looks like every nation, tribe and tongue.”

A BSU student leader highlighted the hypocrisy of condoning racism in the context of Christianity:

Aside from basic human decency, deeper is our moral responsibility to love everyone, there is no favoritism with God... there's no way that anyone is greater or lesser than anyone based on race or anything like that, and that in terms of Christianity and in terms of God, and how people were made, there is absolutely no justification for anyone, anywhere in Christianity to be racist.

This response is significant as well given the historical legacies of using Christianity as a justification for both slavery and segregation, which was especially prevalent in the South. All of these responses demonstrate thinking about Christian values in terms of how they promote equality. Additionally, the respondents indirectly apply their own Christian concepts of justice when trying to explain how racism is contradictory to Christian values. This shows how some Christian perspectives concerning race have dramatically shifted. These students were not alone in expressing these opinions. Almost all of the answers reflect either a condemnation of racism or a desire to promote diversity in their individual communities.

While these responses demonstrate a perceived importance of the issue, respondents very rarely mentioned concrete examples of how and when their

organizations have addressed issues of race. In correspondence with the results from the survey, none of the student organizations interviewed for this project claimed to have initiated any organized response to specific racial incidents that have occurred on the Ole Miss campus, nor did they officially participate as an organization in any events that have been organized by other student groups. Survey responses also showed that students rarely heard sermons from their campus ministers regarding racial issues. These results are strongly supported by the interview findings. For example, the BSU Chaplain explained that he believed it was a priority, but they “have not done that as much on an organizational level, other than trying to teach students basic principles of discipleship.” He went on to explain that they try to promote social action, but they do not explicitly address issues of race very often.

In fact, the only organization that seemed to have addressed the issue directly was RUF. Respondents reported that they often talked about and prayed about diversity in their leadership meetings. The RUF chaplain also referred to the election night incident, after which he took the opportunity to address this incident in one of the standard weekly meetings:

I actually used the first ten minutes of RUF to actually say ‘what does the gospel say about race?’ And the main point I made was the Gospel is the tearing down of walls, and so if anything speaks to racial reconciliation, it’s us. We need to be leading the way, because it’s at the very heart of the gospels.

Like RUF, respondents from other organizations claimed that the leadership was aware of the lack of diversity; however, this was one of the only responses that indicated an effort to explicitly address diversity with the entire student religious organization. This lack of

open communication regarding issues of diversity with regular members of the organization could reflect one reason why the survey results showed that students felt less comfortable engaging with the leadership of their organization in topics of race than they did with one another.

While none of the organizations claimed to have planned their own events, many of the respondents noted that some of their members chose to participate as individuals, and most of them referred to individual participation in the Candle Light Walk arranged by One Mississippi. However, some respondents believed that just as religious motivations affected the success of community service events, student participation in this event was influenced by religious values. For example, one of the BSU student leaders asserted, “I think we have learned very well here about loving everyone and about trying to make peace and makes things right... I think the BSU showing that is what inspired the individuals to participate.” This insight demonstrates how social action groups can unify students who have a common purpose; however, in this case, religious values play a distinct role in defining this purpose.

Chapter 2 briefly discusses how student religious organizations can adopt a “transformational” relationship which would motivate them to work with and take part in events hosted by organizations that have a “social action” relationship. If this student’s assertion is correct, then this provides evidence that student religious organizations already have the potential to adopt this type of relationship. Along with this, respondents demonstrated that Christian ethics are relevant in regards to community service as well as racial reconciliation. Student religious organization can utilize this knowledge to

highlight the importance of racial reconciliation in terms of the values they already promote.

Diversity Within the Organizations

In this section, I will evaluate levels of diversity within student organizations and how these organizations perceive the need to diversify. As the survey responses reflected, all religious organizations reported to have low levels of diversity. The survey results provoked questions concerning whether or not students are creating a significant number of meaningful interracial relationships through their involvement in a student religious organization. While I have already emphasized the influence of homophily, these interview questions provided the opportunity to look beyond these numbers and identify some of the reasons that these student organizations remain overwhelmingly racially homogenous.

Though most religious organizations believed racial diversity would be a positive outcome for their organization, some were hesitant to refer to diversity as a “goal.” For example, when asked whether he felt comfortable recruiting minority students, the RUF chaplain claimed that though he believed racial diversity was definitely a goal for RUF, he felt uncomfortable recruiting minority students for fear of it being perceived as disingenuous: “I want it to be organic. I don’t want it to be like, ‘hey we’re trying to boost our diversity,’ and it come across as being inauthentic and just about a number.” He went on to explain that he would rather increased diversity be a result of building individual relationships and extending an invitation to “friends that are a different race.” The ECOM chaplain shared a similar response; however, in his response, he asserted that

he did not consider racial diversity a goal, but rather, “a favorable outcome.” He explained that the goal of a religious organization does not have as much to do with what your congregation looks like, but rather, the message that they are receiving:

I would say the goal of our organization for me would be to proclaim Christ crucified and a world transformed by the visitation of God in our world in the person of Jesus Christ and God in our hearts in the person of the Holy Spirit and that proclaiming that message inside the Episcopal tradition, I think if that led to a racially mixed congregation I think that would be a wonderful outcome, but if it led to a congregation exclusively of white people who loved everyone else in the world like they were their brothers and sisters because they were transformed by a radical reading of a gospel of love, that would be a great outcome too.

He went on to explain that the ultimate goal would not be to promote just reconciliation, because that seems limiting in some way. He proposed that in addition to reconciliation, the church begins promoting “transformation.” He commented that it was important to recognize the wounds of the past, but it was also important to look to the future:

Because I think racial reconciliation, and this could be my reaction to the term, I think it implies a level of division that is certainly existent, but simply healing that division is not the end goal of religious organizations or of Christianity in general, I think the end goal would be rather than just reconciliation, transformation... how do we make transformational change now as opposed to merely talking about the changes that we’ve already accomplished, and so I think that is sort of the next step for religious organizations and race issues is sort of having the conversation about ‘what do we do next?’

His response highlights a readiness to take race relations a step further and to move beyond just reconciling and to begin erasing any divisions that exist between blacks and whites.

The students from BSU were interviewed as a group, and their responses to the questions often turned into discussions about the issue being addressed. For this topic in particular, they came up with several important points. One BSU student was inclined to agree with the ECOM chaplain. He hesitated to call racial diversity a “goal” because he believed the “point is to love everyone who comes through the door” no matter their gender, ethnicity, classification, etc. However, another BSU student challenged this assertion: “I think that begs the question of, ‘why do only white people come here then?’” Finally, as a third student leader from the organization reflected on this question, he explained, “if we were to find out that most of the black community on campus was not involved in any of the campus ministries, then that would be a question of why or what could we do about that as we reach out to the campus as a whole and everyone on it.” He did not recognize at that time that there are no predominantly black student religious organizations on campus.

Their discussion emphasizes some significant points. If student religious organizations are trying to reach out to every student equally, but their numbers are not reflective of the campus demographics, what more can they do? How do student religious organizations distinguish from minority students who are simply engaged in church communities aside from student religious organizations and students who feel excluded or uncomfortable in joining a predominantly white student organization? This highlights another theme that emerged from the interview findings: respondents very often reflected on their concerns about the process of diversifying. While many of them had an interest in diversifying, they often discussed barriers to diversity and sometimes expressed

uncertainty about how to go about inviting more minority students. For example, the BSU Chaplain explained,

I think we deal somewhat with the history of Ole Miss and Oxford and the Deep South working against us, but we can't use that as an excuse. I do think that though it's difficult to involve a lot of African American students for whatever reason, I think some of it is different religious expression, but it's also just not crossing those barriers to meet students and to welcome our students.

This response is important because the chaplain highlights how the history of the school can act as a barrier to student involvement. This ties back to how the tradition of the school can create an uncomfortable environment for African American students, as I discussed in Chapter 1.

One student reflected on how a minority student might feel in their initial experience of joining a predominantly white religious organization: "I don't think that you would walk in and feel super where you belong, not that anyone's making someone uncomfortable, but just for anyone that walks in, you're surrounded by people that aren't like you, you immediately kind of feel out of place." One student from BSU expressed her concerns regarding the best way to promote diversity:

I think one of the main issues with how to improve that is that, how do we improve that? It's not like there's some formula, and go in and this will most certainly make us more diverse. I think it's just difficult, because ...there's this established community that is majority white, and how do we welcome other groups into that, and how do they feel welcome here?

While the willingness to diversify is certainly evident, the actual implementation and concrete efforts to diversify are not as apparent. Much of this is due to an effort not

to lose sight of the identified purpose of the religious organization, as well as a lack of understanding on how to approach diversity. All of these responses reveal an awareness of the difficulty that racially homogenous groups often face in an attempt to diversify—homophily. In this case, homophily acts as a barrier not only by creating communities of people who exhibit “sameness” in regards to economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, but also by unintentionally repelling students from different backgrounds.

Key Findings

In evaluating all of the findings, a few key highlights emerged. The results showed that student religious organizations provide great venues for promoting community service, and that religious values often motivate students to create positive change in their community. The findings also showed that one of the most effective ways to maximize student involvement is to foster meaningful and unique relationships between students within the organization and in the case of community service, between students and those they are serving in the community. Almost all survey respondents claimed that they had built a meaningful relationship with someone in their student religious organization and a large majority believed that diversity should be improved within their organization. Also, all of the interview respondents discussed how they would like to see more diversity within their organization. The results also showed a willingness to engage with issues of diversity in their communities, and a desire to improve race relations both on the campus and in general.

However, these results also presented some concerns. While campus ministries promote community engagement, they sometimes suffer from an inability to compete

with the time and commitment that school work and other organizations often require from their members. This is one of the greatest barriers to student engagement in these events outside of the groups' standard weekly meetings. These groups also have a difficult time reaching out to all of the students in the community to ensure that they feel included and have a meaningful place in the group.

The survey results also revealed a disconnect between students and the leadership. The responses demonstrated that students had a more difficult time engaging in issues of race with the campus chaplains than they did with other students in the organization. Also, none of the religious organizations had organized any events to try to promote racial reconciliation, and all but one failed to identify any instance in which they addressed race with the entire organization. This could stem from other findings that showed many leaders in the organization hesitated to refer to diversity as a "goal" for their organization. Many feared that an emphasis on racial reconciliation would distract from the main purpose of the organization. This could possibly be due to the fact that these organizations place more emphasis on Christian values such as "faith" and "prayer" than other values that are often associated with concrete action and equal treatment of others.

Finally, one of the key struggles faced by each of these organizations is identifying the next step to take in regards to diversity. All of the student organizations experience barriers due to homophily. However, some of the responses reflected an understanding of barriers that exist beyond this cultural phenomenon. This demonstrates an understanding that racial division within these organizations could be more than just a coincidence. Respondents referred to cultural barriers as well as campus culture as

potential deterrents to racial diversity. This implies that racial diversity will require more than just increased outreach to diverse students, but also, a commitment to addressing some of the controversial issues highlighted in Chapter 1. The next step it seems is addressing some of the key questions that emerged in regards to promoting diversity: “how do we make [minority students] feel welcome here?” and “how do we create transformational change?” These questions reflect a desire to move forward but uncertainty regarding how to implement these changes.

How can student religious organizations integrate these strengths and weaknesses to effectively promote diversity and racial reconciliation? In the next chapter, I will outline a potential “action plan” that these student religious organizations can utilize to address some of the strengths and weaknesses that emerged during this study. This will draw on both previous literature as well as my own personal perspective in order to formulate an informed and all-encompassing plan of action.

Chapter 4: Action Plan

In this chapter, I will outline a potential action plan that student religious organizations can utilize to improve student involvement in the community as well as their engagement with diversity. I will begin by encouraging student organizations to identify the barriers to student involvement in order to organize the most effective events and maximize participation. Next, I will highlight the importance of “intentionality” and using this as a framework for which student religious organization can improve different areas of weakness within their structural framework. I will then discuss concrete steps that these organizations can take. Next, I will propose that student organizations, and specifically organizational leadership, work on encouraging a safe space where students feel comfortable engaging in conversations that concern racial issues. Third, I will outline the importance of continuing to promote community involvement through the framework of Christian values. Fourth, I will recommend that student religious organizations adopt a “transformational” relationship with institutional diversity goals. Finally, I will encourage student religious organizations to come up with their own “action plan” in order to better accommodate their individual needs.

Identify the Barriers to Student Involvement

The interview responses highlighted a lot of insight into what factors make certain events more effective than others. Organizational leadership can utilize some of this information to improve future events by framing them in the same context as the more

effective examples. What prevents students from participating? Some possible examples of these deterrents might include school work, busy schedules, or a student who lacks a feeling of “belonging” to the organization. Along with this, it is important for the leadership to identify what factors make certain community service projects or advocacy efforts more effective than others. Are students more likely to stay involved in smaller, weekly events that can become a regular part of their routine, or are they more likely to contribute to large projects that do not occur as often? Are these projects more successful if they are student led initiatives? By identifying the factors that predict level of student participation, organizational leadership can develop more effective systems to encourage student involvement.

Be Intentional

Chapter two highlighted Julie Park’s assertion that intentionality plays an important role when trying to promote effective structural change within a student organization. She argues that before diversity can be considered a main principle of an organization, these values must be “intentionally fostered.” In order for student organizations to make significant changes regarding diversity and issues of race, they must first establish these initiatives as a goal for their organization and identify systematic ways to achieve this goal. That being said, if a student religious organization truly wishes to make lasting structural change, then it is important to be intentional about every aspect of this change. In addition, “intentionality” should be the framework through which campus ministries address all changes and improvements within their organizational structure and purpose. This intentionality would not exclusively address

student perceptions about diversity; it could also be useful in addressing every step of this action plan, some of which do not specifically address diversity.

Encourage a Safe Space

The findings show that with each added level of structural involvement, students are less likely to engage in discussions concerning how issues of race at Ole Miss relate to their religious values. However, more often, students have these conversations among themselves. This could reflect a misunderstanding among the leadership of students willingness to engage in topics of race. In order to have productive conversation concerning race, student religious organizations should create a safe space in which students are encouraged to speak their mind without fear of criticism.

In a study which utilized both surveys and focus groups, Dr. Angela Ausbrooks, a Professor in the School of Social Work at Texas State University, and Dr. Sherri Benn, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs and Director of the Office of Student Diversity and Inclusion, found that “100% of survey respondents and focus group participants responded affirmatively when asked if they would be interested in having a trans-racial conversation about race” (16). However, focus group participants also noted that one of their primary hesitations in engaging in these conversations was fear that their words might cause “irreparable harm” to meaningful interracial relationships. In the case of white participants, this stemmed from fear of saying something that might be perceived as offensive or overtly racist. In the case of black participants, hesitation stemmed from fear that they might be seen as too sensitive.

This study shows that lack of dialogue about racial issues is often attributed to the sensitivity of the issue, and it highlights the importance of having someone in authority ensure participants that they are in a “safe space” (Ausbrooks 20). If student religious organizations could foster this kind of environment, it could help bridge the gap that exists between students and organizational leadership. This could also allow students to feel more comfortable participating in meaningful dialogue and asking productive questions that can help to break down misconceptions about race.

Continue Promoting Moral Responsibility Through the Framework of Christian Values

The results showed that students perceived their religious organization to be an effective venue for the promotion of community service. In this case, religious organizations are having a positive impact on student opinion about their role as Christians in the community. In a study on social justice and religious participation, the authors demonstrated how religious congregations are “empowering community settings that have potential to promote norms for social justice, group-based beliefs, and opportunities for social justice and action” (Todd 317). In this regard, student religious organizations can continue to be a powerful tool and should continue to promote religious values that encourage community action.

Adopt a Transformational Relationship

While it is important to think about these issues in terms of intentional change, many of the organizations reflected a hesitancy to commit to addressing issues of diversity. Findings showed that none of the groups organized responses or community

outreach with regards to racial reconciliation. It also showed that students very rarely heard sermons or engaged in conversations about race with their campus chaplain. This hesitation could stem from similar issues highlighted in the study at Texas State University—inability to address these issues could be due to fear of saying something deemed insensitive or offensive. It could also be attributed to Feagin’s argument presented in Chapter 1 that a hesitation to acknowledge the problem of racism stems from a fear that it might be perceived as an accusation against whites in general. In my initial attempts to conduct this study, some groups expressed hesitation in participating, which could be reflective of these same concerns. However, as the study demonstrated, this problem can be counter-acted by encouraging a “safe-space” with someone in authority leading the conversation. On the other hand, this reluctance to commit could also stem from fear of distracting from the overall goal of the organization.

While distracting from the purpose of the organization is a legitimate concern, a few problems emerge from this argument. First, all respondents believed that issues of race were important in the context of Christianity and cited religious reasons for believing that all people should be treated equally. Students shared a similar response when they referred to community service and very often discussed religious motivations as the primary reason one should be involved in community service efforts. If religious values are the motivation behind both of these opinions, then why would community outreach regarding issues of race be of any less value? However, when prompted, all respondents noted the need for greater attention and action in regards to issues of race. Given this, when concrete action to promote racial reconciliation is thought of in the

framework of community service, it can fulfill these same aspirations to live out one's Christian values and imitate a life of Christ.

However, it seems that while student religious organizations believed community service was important, the overall goal was to encourage members to adopt certain Christian values. As we learned in chapter two and noted in the previous section, participation in community service is only an effect of the desire to put these Christian values into concrete action. This same outcome could be achieved in regards to racial reconciliation if student organizations adopt a "transformational" relationship.

Currently, it seems that each of these organizations has a relationship with institutional diversity goals that falls somewhere in between a null relationship and a contributions relationship. However, neither of these relationships demonstrates any significant potential to help advance institutional diversity goals or positively impact campus racial climate. On the other hand, chapter 2 discussed the importance of adopting a "transformational" relationships. Kuk and Banning discuss how this relationship can help a student organization to promote institutional diversity goals. James A. Banks, a professor at the University of Washington, and an expert in multicultural education was the originator of this term. He defines the transformational relationship as one in which the structure of an organization is "changed to enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspectives of diverse ethnic and cultural groups" (246). As previously addressed, this kind of relationship can occur when student organizations change their own procedures or policies such that they intentionally address diversity,

and it can also occur when an organization collaborates with a group that identifies diversity as its primary objective.

In order to improve their potential, it is important for student religious organizations to adopt a “transformational” relationship. However, it is also important to address how an organization moves from a null or contributions relationship to a transformational relationship. In the case of student religious organizations, this type of relationship works especially well because these organizations already have a value system in place which they can use to frame conversations about race relations at the University of Mississippi. This allows them to discuss and address issues of race without changing the overall purpose of their organization. Leadership will have the opportunity to take a more active role in encouraging students to think about these racialized incidents in the context of Christian values that the organization already promotes. Also, because these organizations are predominantly white, it may be difficult to plan events that address racial issues or engage in trans-racial conversations without participation from another group. Instead of planning their own responses to racial incidents, transformational groups usually work together with other groups or encourage student participation in events planned by student groups which specifically focus on racial equality.

Create your own “Action Plan”

One aspect of intentionality could involve student religious organizations developing their own action plans. While I have offered some suggestions to improving student engagement in the community and student perceptions about diversity, not all

student religious organizations are alike, and some face these challenges more than others. There is no one solution to these issues, and this action plan is not intended to be a “one size fits all” formula for organizational improvement. However, interview respondents reflected on concerns about how to address diversity, and the best approach is likely to be one that is developed by one’s own organization to ensure that it can fit into the pre-existing structural framework.

This highlights the importance of encouraging each student group to develop their own action plan, in which they can address their specific needs and concerns. This step is probably the most crucial seeing as it will allow student organizations to further consider their place in the Ole Miss community and their current relationship with diversity. This will also allow them to frame any efforts to promote these issues within their current framework and in the context of the religious values they currently emphasize. By individualizing this action plan, it will be far more effective for implementing lasting, structural change.

Conclusion:

While the University of Mississippi continues to combat racial insensitivities, both community members and administration have not done enough to explore other venues for the promotion of values associated with racial reconciliation and diversity. While the administration can make certain changes they deem necessary to encourage racial sensitivity, they cannot effectively shift a culture without influencing student opinion in regards to these changes. This study aimed at exploring whether or not student religious organizations could act as effective venues for encouraging students to be more aware of and involved in issues of race at the University of Mississippi. Altogether, this study demonstrated that student religious organizations at the University of Mississippi can and do have the potential to positively impact racial reconciliation efforts, and they should definitely be considered as an option through which one can encourage greater awareness of and involvement in racial issues that permeate campus culture. While these organizations already promote racial reconciliation to an extent through the cultivation of certain religious values, by no means do they reach their full potential. However, these organizations already have a framework in place through which they can incorporate the importance of racial reconciliation, and through the implementation of certain practices, these organizations can make a difference not only for their organization in particular, but also for the campus in general.

Despite accomplishing the overall purpose of this study, I ran into various obstacles in the process. It was originally my intention to survey a predominantly black

organization, and after consulting various campus administrators, it did not appear there were any predominantly black religious organization on campus. However, after all of the surveys were conducted, one organization was identified and though it was not predominantly black, it was much more diverse than any of the religious organizations identified for this study. Additionally, per request of the campus chaplain, I was unable to attend a regular RUF meeting. Instead I attended a leadership meeting as well as a freshman Bible Study in order to try and get a more even distribution of members. It is important to note that 34.9% of respondents for RUF were members of their leadership team, which could have affected the distribution of students who identified themselves as “highly involved.” It could have affected other questions as well simply due to increased exposure to the group’s activities.

Also, this study was limited to three, predominantly white organizations, all of which were affiliated with the Christian tradition. In the future, this study could be expanded to include some of the racially mixed student organizations that were later identified, as well as some non-Christian organizations including the University of Mississippi Jewish Community, the Unitarian Universalist Student Organization, and the Muslim Student Association. Additionally, while this study attempted to address racial diversity, it focused primarily on diversity in regards to the African-American community. A study in the future might include a closer look at other racial groups and an exploration of the impact of student religious groups on the LGBTQ community.

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Appendix A

Please fill out the following survey. The survey is 23 questions. Your survey results will remain completely anonymous, so answer as honestly as possible.

1. Are you 18 years or older?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

If you answered “No” to the previous question, please do not complete the survey and return it to the investigator.

2. Classification: _____
3. Gender:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
4. Race: _____
5. What student religious organization are you are a part of?
 - a. Reformed University Fellowship
 - b. Baptist Student Union
 - c. Episcopal Church at Ole Miss
6. How would you describe your level of involvement?
 - a. Very Highly Involved—attend every week, hold a leadership position, try to attend events outside of the weekly meeting
 - b. Highly Involved—attend every week, try to attend events outside of the weekly meetings
 - c. Moderately involved—attend almost every week, attend some additional events outside of the scheduled weekly meeting
 - d. Not Very Involved—attend every few often, have been to few or none of the events outside of the weekly meetings
 - e. Almost no involvement—have attended 5 meetings or less

7. What religious values do you believe are most important to your practice of Christianity? Please rank from 1-8 in order of importance, with the number 1 indicating the highest level of importance and the number 8 indicating the lowest level of importance.

___ Forgiveness

___ Compassion

___ Humility

___ Justice

___ Prayer

___ Faith

___ Charity

___ Other- please specify: _____

8. What religious values do you believe your religious organization emphasizes the most. Please rank from 1-8 in order of importance, with the number 1 indicating the highest level of importance and the number 8 indicating the lowest level of importance.

___ Forgiveness

___ Compassion

___ Humility

___ Justice

___ Prayer

___ Faith

___ Charity

___ Other—please specify

9. Would you say that your religious values encourage you to organize a project or be involved in efforts to create positive change in your community?
- Very Often
 - Often
 - Sometimes
 - Seldom
 - Never
10. Has your religious organization ever participated in a community service project or advocacy effort for a specific cause?
- Very Often
 - Often
 - Sometimes
 - Seldom
 - Never
11. Did you participate in any of these projects?
- Very Often
 - Often
 - Sometimes
 - Seldom
 - Never
12. How often would you say that your religious organization organizes a community service project?
- Very Often
 - Often
 - Sometimes
 - Seldom
 - Never
13. Aside from organizing a community service project, does your religious organization keep you up to date about various service opportunities or encourage you to get involved in other student efforts that are service oriented?
- Very Often
 - Often
 - Sometimes
 - Seldom
 - Never

14. Do you believe if you proposed a service project or advocacy efforts to the group, that other members would be supportive in helping you reach this goal?
- Very Often
 - Often
 - Sometimes
 - Seldom
 - Never
15. Have you ever met/ gotten to know anyone of a race other than your own through your involvement in student religious organizations?
- Yes
 - No
16. Have you ever befriended anyone of a race other than you own through your involvement in your student religious organizations?
- Yes
 - No
17. Do you think the level of racial diversity should be improved within your student religious organization?
- Yes
 - No
18. Have you ever discussed the racial climate at Ole Miss and / or racially charged incidents and how it may relate to your religious beliefs/ values with people in your religious organization?
- Very Often
 - Often
 - Sometimes
 - Seldom
 - Never
19. Has the leadership of your organization ever initiated a discussion regarding the racial climate at Ole Miss and / or racially charged incidents and how it may relate to your religious beliefs/ values with people in your religious organization?
- Very Often
 - Often
 - Sometimes
 - Seldom
 - Never

20. Have you ever heard a sermon from your organization's campus minister regarding racial climate at Ole Miss and/ or racially charged incidents and how it may relate to your religious beliefs/ values?
- a. Very Often
 - b. Often
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. Seldom
 - e. Never
21. Has your student religious organization ever organized a response to negative racial tension on campus?
- a. Very Often
 - b. Often
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. Seldom
 - e. Never
22. If you answered yes to the previous question, were you an active participant in any of these efforts?
- a. Very Often
 - b. Often
 - c. Sometimes
 - d. Seldom
 - e. Never
23. On a scale of 1- 10, how comfortable would you feel joining or participating in a student religious group in which the majority of members were of a different race from your own? With 1 being not at all comfortable and 10 being very comfortable.
-

Appendix B

1. Do you believe that it's important for student religious organizations to be involved in community service?
2. What's most challenging about getting students to participate in events (community service or otherwise) outside of the weekly organized meetings?
3. What's an event that you have organized outside of the group's weekly meeting that has been successful? What factors do you think made it successful?
4. Has your organization initiated or been involved in any campus event/ activity to respond to recent racial incidents such as vandalism of the James Meredith Statue? If so, how successful were you in getting students to participate?
5. Do you believe that your religious faith is relevant to issues of race at Ole Miss? Do you consider it part of your job as a campus minister to address racial problems on our campus? If so, have you tried to do that?
6. What is the racial make-up of your religious organization? Do you consider racial diversity a goal as a leader in this organization?
7. Would you feel comfortable recruiting students who are of a different race than the majority of students in your religious organization? Why or why not? Does your religious organization already do this in some capacity?

