The Three Hebrew Boys Revisited: Exploring *Border Crossing "Brotha"-Ship* in the Journeys of Three Tenured Black Male Seventh-Day Adventist Professors

Ty-Ron M. O. Douglas [1,*], Sydney Freeman Jr. [2] and André R. Denham [3]

[1] Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211, USA

[2] Department of Leadership & Counseling, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID 83844, USA; sydney.freeman.jr@gmail.com

[3] Department of Educational Leadership, Policy, & Technology Studies, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487, USA; andre.denham@gmail.com

[*] Correspondence: tmodouglas@gmail.com

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Abstract: This paper explores the educational journeys of three tenured, Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) professors who serve at public research-intensive universities as professors of education. We discuss how our journeys in and through Adventist education impact our pedagogy and offer insights that can be helpful to other Christian educators, students, and parents who would like to learn how to navigate a path to a career in higher education. The three of us could be described as somewhat of an anomaly in terms of our identities and positionalities as Black male Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) professors in public universities—yet we know that there are many other people from the neighborhoods and churches where we grew up who could be doing similar work but for various reasons did not get access to this opportunity. The goal of this critical trio-ethnographic paper is to offer a counter-narrative on Black male SDA education and possibilities, through our personal reflections and analyses of our educational experiences in SDA education that inform the way we engage our students now as SDA and culturally relevant teachers in public universities.

Keywords: Black male education; religion; identities

1. Introduction

The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates a robust and comprehensive educational system that provides instruction from birth to the highest levels of tertiary education. As with any institution and organization, one's experiences within structures and systems are impacted by and filtered through the complexity of our multi-dimensional identities, and that of those who operate and control the systems. While navigating the path from adolescence to adulthood is without a doubt challenging for most people, growing up as a Black male in most geographical and geopolitical spaces is particularly arduous. Growing up in or around the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church adds additional layers of consideration (translated: opportunity for some and complexity for others) to the identities and ideologies that youth develop. For example, as members of a Christian denomination that believes in the observance of Saturday as the Sabbath and promotes a health message that includes the avoidance of alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, pork, and shell fish, life can be tough for a young Adventist boy or girl trying to explain to his non-Adventist teammates why he or she cannot eat certain things or participate in particular social activities (i.e., play in competitive soccer or basketball games held on Friday night or on Saturday).

Certainly, there are many borders to cross, conversations to be had, and understandings to be processed as SDA youth navigate our parents' faith journeys and our inclusion in this experience by default (whether through authentic conversion, compliance, or perhaps coercion) and then by decision as we mature spiritually and develop our own theological commitments. This process of *religious identity development* is not entirely different for youth who grow up in any other denomination or faith tradition (Bertram-Troost et al. 2007; Moulin 2013; Wang 2012), but there are some counter-cultural commitments that make the educational and personal journey of a young SDA unique, particularly for Black boys and girls in Western contexts who must simultaneously navigate systematic societal marginalization. Based on our early formative experiences growing up, the authors of this critical trio-ethnography could relate to the biblical narrative of the three Hebrew boys who had to choose not to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's declarations or eat from his table. In particular, in Daniel chapter 1 of the Bible, readers learn of Daniel's three gifted friends and fellow scholars (Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, respectively, as they are also known), who find themselves in the halls of the most prestigious academic institutions of their day. While they are celebrated for the wisdom and academic acumen that was forged by their religious upbringings prior to being captured and taken to Babylon (see Daniel 1), Daniel chapter 3 also reveals the realities and consequences of their counter-cultural beliefs and faith commitments. They would be thrown into a "fiery furnace" because they would not compromise their faith by worshipping a false god. As the biblical narrative is told, only a miracle saved their lives and careers. While the authors of this paper do not seek to make direct hyperbolic comparisons or proclaim equivalency to the story of the original Hebrew boys of the Bible (this is not the focus of the paper), we do face tensions as professionals, leaders, and scholars in academia and university classrooms as Christians who identify as Seventh-day Adventist.

This study seeks to provide a counter-narrative related to the experiences of Black males and their engagement in Christian educational systems. We problematize and challenge prevailing narratives around the experiences and the role of Christian educational institutions in the social, academic, and spiritual education of Black males in utilizing Douglas (2016) *me*search framework. It is the goal of this reflective study to (1) provide the reader with an understanding of the role that Christian education and more specifically SDA education plays in the social, academic, and spiritual development of Black males; (2) share the areas of strength, challenge and potential of these academic institutions; and (3) provide narratives to inspire educators and students regarding the impact that can be made as a result of attending these important schools.

Each author of this paper has had varied journeys and experiences in the SDA church and school system. We are all proud products of SDA institutions. We are all social justice orientated scholars, thinkers, educators and leaders. We are all committed Christians who seek to live out our faith and engage in pedagogical practices that are consistent with our Christianity and commitments to culturally relevant, compassionate approaches to education. While this may add an additional layer of complexity to the work we do, we have all committed to serving within the higher education arena. In our own ways, being *border crossing brotha-scholars* is connected to our experiences in the Seventh-day Adventist Christian education system and our pedagogies and leadership as critically engaged scholars.

2. Border Crossing Brotha-Scholarship

The capacity to use hybridity to rupture the distribution of power is vitally important for us as scholars who embody hybrid positionalities as Black men, educators, husbands, and leaders with varying family connections to African-American, Caribbean, and African-Bermudian lineage. As we engage our work, we draw on the flexibility, connectivity, and breadth of border theory. It is a flexibility that is necessary to account for the diverse experiences and journeys of how individuals form identities as a geopolitical, social, cultural, and religious construction or negotiation (Bertram-Troost et al. 2007; Moulin 2013; Wang 2012). Border theory operates on the edge (Hicks 1991)—on the boundaries

and borders—of theoretical efforts and approaches to understand, recognize, resist, and rupture the "epistemological, political, cultural, and social margins that structure the language of history, power, and difference" (Giroux 2005, p. 20). Border theory has often been used in philosophical and cultural studies, but it has also been employed to account for the marginalization, multidimensionality, and intersectional realities, journeys, perspectives and experiences of Otherness (Douglas 2016; Larson, as cited in Hicks 1991). Said another way, "border theory encompasses the multifaceted approaches that use hybrid positionalities to problematize and reconfigure how power is distributed within and across difference" (Douglas 2017); and this is an important pivot for the work and identities of three Black male Seventh-day Adventist professors, scholars, and educators who seek to resist and problematize essentialist understandings of Black identities and Adventism, while also maximizing the possibilities that exist in liminal spaces: the "gaps created by the juxtaposition of binary terms" (Villaverde 2008, p. 52). In this light, it is important to acknowledge that religious spaces have been and often continue to be exclusionary spaces of marginalization, disrespect and disregard for individuals who may not fit in or embrace traditional identities, binaries and hierarchies of dominance related to race, class, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, age, and education level (Byrd 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Gross 2008; Kowlessar 2018; VanderWaal and David 2017). Moulin (2013), in his work "Negotiating and Constructing Religious Identities" offers critical connections between border theory and the religious identity construction:

> Systems of representation are the ways people recognize and represent identities by conventions of depiction and portrayal. Aspects of systems of representation may act as cues or messages that prompt religious identity negotiation [. . .] Adolescents may use symbolic *boundaries* between them and others to show affinity or identification with, religious traditions or their adherents [. . . .] Over time, the process of understanding oneself to be, or seeking to be recognised, or representing oneself in a particular way, as part of identity negotiation, contributes to religious identity construction—the identification with, rejection of, or partial or full integration, or presentation of elements of a religious tradition (or ties with members of that religious tradition) with an individual's worldview, lifestyle, beliefs, practices actions). (p. 6)

Moreover, our work, our narratives, and our decision to utilize border theory in this paper (as opposed to other relevant frameworks like intersectionality) is grounded in our belief that our presence and border-occupying/crossing positionalities of Black male Seventh-day Adventist professors place us strategically at the nexus of key identity development variables (e.g., the role of faith/spirituality, family, schooling, etc.) and institutional realities (e.g., the fact that higher education and religion are bastions of white supremacy, homophobia, xenophobia, and patriarchy). Our theoretical and professional decisions are elements of our activism—our border-crossing brotha scholarship commitments—to choose and to affirm the fact that we have "crossed over" from boys to men who desire to live, promote, and produce anti-oppressive educational approaches and systems. Certainly, the Seventh-day Adventist church is not immune from racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and homophobia (Byrd 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Kowlessar 2017, 2018; Rock 2018; VanderWaal and David 2017). Even as each author of this paper has been able to successfully negotiate racist structures and even benefit from healthy liminal spaces within and across the challenges of religion, educational systems, masculinity, and identity formation, we acknowledge the privileged identities we hold as cisgender heterosexual males and simultaneously acknowledge the fact that females, people with disabilities, non-Christians, and members of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning), intersex, and asexual (or allies) (LGBTQIA) communities have suffered at the hands of religious people and religious organizations who have mistreated, maligned, and marginalized them (Byrd 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Gross 2008; Kowlessar 2018; VanderWaal and David 2017). As *border-crossing brotha scholars*—Black male academicians who have "navigated many geopolitical, cultural, and physical borders between [our places of birth] and the U.S. university classroom—[we] have embraced the

calling to build bridges" and create "spaces [and system] of healing" through our pedagogy and FREEsearch (Douglas 2017).

3. FREEsearch: Doing *Me*search, Building on *Re*search, Sharing our *We*search

Douglas (2017) has developed and previously written about FREEsearch, which he describes as the fruit of "a critical amalgamation of *re*search, *me*search, and *we*search." FREEsearch is "the personal, professional, and pedagogical work of border-crossing brotha/sistah scholars that draws on scholarship, stories, successes and systems to leverage the best of what we know (*re*search), the core of who we are (*me*search), and the needs and histories of those we serve (*we*search). While an understanding of what is considered research is quite common (e.g., we draw on research to share contextual information about Adventist education), *me*search and *we*search require additional clarification, especially since we have chosen to focus on these two aspects of the framework rather than fully utilizing the FREEsearch framework in this paper. The key question to consider within the *me*search construct is "What's my story?" (Douglas 2016). *Me*search requires that we critically reflect on our personal journeys and the impact that our experiences have had on our epistemological and ideological lenses. *Me*search explores the story of self, pushing the thoughtful pedagogue or thinker to consider not just the "why" but the "what" of one's actions and belief systems. Still, any investigation that stops at "me" runs the risk of self-absorption and tunnel vision. As such, we must navigate the transitional ideological space of the *me-we* in that *me*search is part of a three-prong evaluative approach that also includes consideration and incorporation of relevant research (what other scholars and researchers have posited—*their story*) and what Douglas (2016) calls *we*search—(y)our story or the *we-us*: these are the stories of collective people groups within and across intersecting identities and ideological variables. In this paper, the collective stories of three Black male professors who experienced and navigated Seventh-day Adventist Christian education produces a sub-collective narrative of *we*search. Certainly, our *we*search does not and cannot speak for all Black males/educators who attended Seventh-day Adventist schools, but we do have truths to consider and share that we believe can add value and perspective to larger considerations and understandings of the journeys and contributions of Black males in religious and educational context.

Extant literature on the journeys and educational experiences of Black males is robust and telling as it relates to possibilities and obstacles that Black males overcome in their educational journeys. Scholars such as Harper (2012, 2015) affirm that Black males benefit from educators, approaches, language and environments that utilize an anti-deficit framework. Said another way, Black males are best served by individuals and institutions that inherently believe and tangibly manifest the declaration that "yes, we can!" Of particular note, whether in urban PK–12 education (Emdin 2016; Howard 2000, 2003, 2010, 2014; Howard and Rema 2012; Milner 2013; Warren 2017), community-based spaces (Douglas and Peck 2013; Douglas and Arnold 2016; Green 2015), higher education (Harper 2012; Moore 2006), or international contexts (Khalifa 2012; Douglas 2012; Douglas and Peck 2013; Douglas and Arnold 2016), the educational experiences of Black males are diverse and success is determined by a cross section of factors, not the least of which include culturally relevant teachers and teaching practices (Emdin 2016; Ladson-Billings 1995), and access to supportive mentors in healthy and holistic learning spaces.

The work of Douglas (2016) is particularly poignant in considering how and why Black males choose to cross over from various stages and spaces in their journeys. He notes four key variables to consider for understanding border-crossing brotha-ship. These are: Expectations (positive and/or negative); Exposure (positive and/or negative); Experiences/Experimentation (positive and/or negative); and Expression (positive/ negative). These four variables have been found to be significant in multiple studies conducted on Black males across the Black diaspora (Douglas 2012, 2016). In particular, Douglas has engaged in research studies with over 100 Black males in Bermuda, the United States, and South Africa, and each study has affirmed the salience of positive or negative expectations, exposure, experiences, and expression in the identity forming experiences and journeys of Black males. It is also important to note the robust body of literature on and relevance of religious identity formation (see

LeBlanc and Slaughter 2012; Lee et al. 2006; Moulin 2013; Uecker 2008), which Wang (2012) defines as "the process in which an individual solidifies his or her worldview and manifests those convictions through participation in religious community and private aspects of faith" (p. 1).

While most of the aforementioned studies reveal key variables in how Black males form identities primarily, the purpose of this paper is to explore how three Black males who are also professors have been able to *flourish* in their journeys, with an emphasis on understanding how their experiences in Adventist education have impacted their journeys (or not). The three authors use the four E's above to reverse engineer and reflect on our journeys (*me*search) toward helping other educators develop the next generation of border-crossing brothas or, in the context of the title of this paper, *Hebrew Boys*.

A *border-crossing brotha* is a Black male academician who has navigated many geopolitical, socio-cultural, ideological, physical, spiritual, and educational borders between his place of birth, rearing, and socialization, and his current positionality (Douglas 2016, 2017). A border-crossing brotha—through embodiment, exemplification, and engagement—is a bridge builder who understands that "true education is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers" (White 1903, p. 13), hence true education is not limited to the schoolhouse. To be clear, a border-crossing brotha does not have to be an academic in the narrow and traditional sense of working, leading or teaching in the ivory tower of higher or formal education. Douglas and Peck (2013) contend that many of our most profound and impactful border-crossing brothas are community and thought-leaders found in community spaces like barbershops, athletic settings, neighborhood corners, and faith spaces like churches. As such, our use of vignettes to center and explore our journeys related to Adventist education is really an exploration of the breadth of our educational journeys, of which our exposure to Adventist education and Adventist culture is a part.

4. Methodology

The methodological approach that we chose for this article was critical trio-ethnography. We chose to utilize both critical race theory and trio-ethnography to help us understand the experiences of three Black males and their engagement in the Adventist educational system. It was our goal to provide a counter-narrative regarding the spiritual and academic development of Black males in educational institutions. We sought to problematize the ways in which these institutions are viewed as important sites and incubators of positive religious and scholarly influence and maturation.

Mora (2014) defines counter-narratives as, "narratives that arise from the vantage point of those who have been historically marginalized [. . .] to empower and give agency to those communities" (p. 1). In this paper, we the authors represent the historically marginalized population. Most scholarship related to Adventist Education has centered the voices and perspectives of White scholars and educational leaders. The few examples of scholarship on this topic that include the voices of Black Adventist scholars are from current or retired denominational employees (Brantley 1996). This is one of the first manuscripts that centers the voices of those who have been students within the system and have worked for the system (Ty-Ron Douglas and André Denham as full-time instructors and Sydney Freeman Jr as an adjunct faculty member), yet do not have active ties to the Adventist educational system. This allows us to provide honest reflections both as insiders and outsiders of the system.

Given our unique experiences and trajectories as Black males within Adventist Education, we felt it appropriate to also engage Critical Race Theory of Education (CRT) in our analysis to help us understand how race informed our educational experience (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; Patton 2016). We believed it most appropriate to utilize CRT as an analysis tool because it allowed us to disrupt the notion of racelessness and critically center the ways in which race impacted our academic experiences and development. Throughout our narratives we center race as an a priori construct as we felt it was an important lens to which our experiences should be viewed. Specifically, three key tenets of CRT inform and are evident in our analysis: (1) acknowledging the presence, persistence, and pervasiveness of racism as a normalized systematic construct that positions whiteness and privileges

White people as the embodiment of institutional standards (Khalifa et al. 2016); (2) centering the voices and perspectives of people of color through counter-narratives and storytelling as forms of resistance to historical and contemporary marginalization; and (3) eschewing colorblindness (which is a common and problematic approach of many religious people who are unwilling or unable to grapple with the realities of racism) and instead undertaking "interdisciplinary dialogue and discourse to analyze race relations (Khalifa et al. 2016, p. 491). CRT helps to illuminate how norms, epistemologies (ways of knowing), knowledge, curriculum, textbooks, representation through imagery, policies, practices and behaviors "in the U.S [. . . are] culturally-specific and from a White, Western European, male, upper-class perspective" (Khalifa et al. 2016, p. 492). This problematic reality is represented and specifically relevant to our paper which centers the journeys of three Black males who are members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—a denomination that as of 2019, even in a post-Obama era, has never had a Black General Conference President in its entire history. Within the context of educational leadership, Khalifa et al. 2016) make the following argument:

> [T]he principal as a primary leader in the school, as one who makes decisions without the community's perspectives, as one who was not chosen by the people that he leads, and one who does not speak local languages, as one who may not be spiritual, or even as one who emphasizes hierarchical leadership is all an indication of the very Whitened, Westernized approach to school leadership. Yet, other leadership perspectives that are more suitable for African American (Douglas 2012; Gooden 2005; Siddle Walker 1993; Khalifa 2012) or Latino (Lopez 2003; Aleman 2009) students are often confounded or delegitimized. (p. 500)

From parishioners, similar critiques and questions are being raised about executive, administrative, pastoral, and educational leadership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the broader evangelical community, and it is for this reason and others that we write and share our counter-stories in this article.

Although we chose to both apply CRT and counter-narratives in our analysis, we felt that trio-ethnography was the most appropriate methodological approach to help us understand the relationship between our spiritual identity construction and the atypical trajectory towards becoming tenured faculty at research institutions (Breault 2014). According to Williams-Shakespeare et al. (2018), trio-ethnography is,

> (The) type of research (where) researchers collectively examine an aspect of their lives. Therefore, they become researchers and at the same time participants [. . . and] is a method suitable for critical and reflective examination via conversations among people with different life histories and diverse points of view. (p. 1803)

Our research commenced over a seven-year period, starting with a reflective discussion at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference in 2012. Over the next six years we each wrote down our individual stories based on our experiences as Black males educated within the Adventist Educational system and as faculty utilizing the Douglas (2016) *me*search framework as the initial structure for our analysis. After writing how our personal experiences applied to each of the four steps (expectations, exposure, experiences/experimentation and expression) within the framework, we shared our journaled stories via email, which enabled us to review and discuss our initial findings. We engaged this process of providing feedback to each other three separate times to ensure trustworthiness and reliability.

5. Reflections on Relevant Research and *We*search: Adventist Education

In the past 10 years, the Seventh-day Adventist church has become one of the fastest growing protestant denominations in North America and around the world with over 20 million adherents (MacDonald 2011; McChesney 2015, 2017). The denomination has distinguished itself amongst other faith traditions by promoting doctrines such as Seventh-day Sabbath observance (congregations'

worship on Saturday and keep sacred the hours from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday), the imminence of the second coming of Jesus Christ, and the unconscious state of the dead. Additionally, Adventist are known for four important areas of public witness which includes, their distinctive theology, focus on holistic health, world missions, and education.

The Seventh-day Adventist church has the largest protestant educational system in the world. According to the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research at the General Conference of Seventh-day Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research at General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (2018) the denomination owns and operates educational institutions in over 100 countries. The church runs 5915 primary schools with an enrollment of over 1.2 million students; 2435 secondary schools with more than 603,000 students enrolled; and 115 post-secondary institutions with more than 145,000 collectively.

Within North America the SDA church has established schools in order to meet the diverse needs of its members. One of the primary demographic groups within the North American church are Blacks/African-Americans. Most of the schools that specifically address the needs of Black students are found in the densely populated areas where many Blacks reside. Black Adventist schools boast a great history going back to the early 1890s when Edson White, a White Seventh-day Adventist established a mobile school that sailed on the Mississippi River called the *Morning Star* dedicated to educating African-Americans (Baker 2011). In 1896 the church also founded a school which is now known as Oakwood University. It is the only Seventh-day Adventist Historically Black College or University (HBCU) in the United States. At the secondary level the church has established Black Adventist high schools such as Bermuda Institute and Pine Forge Academy, which is one of four Historically Black Boarding Academies (HBBAs) in the nation.

6. Dr. Douglas' Journey

I am the product of public-school education in Bermuda. I attended a public predominately Black elementary school in Bermuda, followed by five years at a historically White high school that became private in my senior year. I then attended Bermuda College, a community college in where I earned an associate degree before transferring to Oakwood University to complete my Bachelor's degree. In truth, I almost did not attend Oakwood University after visiting the campus and being disappointed with elements of my visit: I remember walking in the hot sun to visit the education building multiple times, only to not be able to meet with the person I was scheduled to meet. When the air-conditioned van of a neighboring university picked me up for my tour of their campus, I was prepared to attend that university and see my peers at Oakwood outside of class. Upon my return to Bermuda from the campus visit trip, a mentor of mine who was an Oakwood alumnus wisely counseled me: "attending Oakwood is not about buildings or campus tours, it is about the experience. You should go to Oakwood." So, for two and a half years, I got to live the "Oakwood experience," graduating with a Bachelor's degree in English and a minor in sociology. I then matriculated to the University of Alabama in Huntsville—the neighboring university that took me on the tour in an air-conditioned van during my earlier campus visit—to complete a Master's degree. After completing my Master's degree, I returned to Bermuda where I taught at the only Seventh-day Adventist school on the island country—Bermuda Institute—for five years. Serving as a teacher allowed me to mobilize all that I had experienced inside and outside of the Seventh-day Adventist educational system.

6.1. Expectations

My mom and dad chose not to send me to Bermuda Institute (the only K–12 Adventist school in Bermuda) because the public schools in my neighborhood had good reputations and she embraced a broader definition of Christian or religious education than just the schoolhouse. In many ways my parents were visionaries, choosing not to succumb to the pressure and false narrative that Christian education can only be experienced in Christian schools. Neither of them were members of the SDA church during this time (though my mother grew up in the SDA church) and they were cautious in not allowing me to be overexposed to the nepotism, unhealthy comparisons, and unnecessary

competitions that can exist amidst relatives and church families in small community and school settings. They allowed me to experience the best of the village—the neighborhood, athletic space and barbershop mentors who nurtured me and demonstrated what a commitment and contribution to community looks like. I attended the SDA church with my grandmother during my formative years and benefitted from the care of choir directors and church leaders (e.g., my Sabbath School teacher, who was a faculty member at the Adventist school) who gave me the best of what Christian education had to offer in non-school settings. As a result of these opportunities, I expected to make a positive contribution to my society, I expected to go to college, and I continue to expect that those who will experience the best of Christian education will do so as a result of opportunities beyond the schoolhouse or church house, embracing the breadth of what it means to educate and be educated.

6.2. Exposure

Coming from a country that has a majority Black population, it was not foreign for me to see Black leaders lead my country. Still, my time at Oakwood exposed me to the beauty and diversity of Black identities, including students and faculty from the Caribbean and Africa, and African-Americans from various regions of the United States. It was great to be able to take classes from Black professors, many of whom had doctorate degrees. Within my department (English), there were no fewer than three Black male professors with doctorates, all of whose names begin with B: Dr. Benn, Dr. Basaninzenzi, and Dr. Bowe—two professors from the Caribbean and one from Africa, as well as dynamic Black female professors with doctorate and other advanced degrees. It was also great to have administrators who were Black and progressive.

There was positive peer pressure to not only take my academics seriously but to also consider the importance of being a Christian. While at Oakwood, I was a member of Dynamic Praise (DP)—a student and young adult led gospel choir that traveled across the country and internationally. Notably, DP was actually started 30 years ago and originally directed by a Black Bermudian male (Owen Simons) who, along with others, was also affirming of my matriculation through Oakwood and my participation in the choir. During my time on campus, DP was led by a peer mentor—Andrew "Benji" Young, who now has a doctorate degree and serves as a department chair and professor at Oakwood, I had the positive experience of travelling with Dynamic Praise to England during a spring break trip where we were again exposed to Black British leaders and church members who took us into their homes. Benji modeled servant leadership. We gladly followed his lead as he challenged us to be consistent in our Christian walks. I certainly was not consistent in my faith walk in college but there was an accountability and celebration of things of faith that kept me somewhat grounded. This was important for me as a young man who had inclinations and cultivated tendencies for spiritual compromise.

6.3. Experiences/Experimentation

Oakwood's sports program was burgeoning during my time there. We had a good basketball program but as a soccer athlete, there were limitations for me beyond our campus intramural league. I enjoyed intramural soccer, which was a competitive environment where teams were comprised of students from nations such as Jamaica, Trinidad, Bermuda, Canada, and the United States. This league provided me the opportunity to not just play soccer but to also serve as the league co-commissioner and intramural soccer league organizer. I also developed as a coach of a woman's intramural soccer team and flag football that we founded and this helped my development as an educator and leader. These opportunities would lead us to form the first official soccer team at Oakwood. We organized and won an inaugural Oakwood University Invitational soccer tournament against local university teams from University of Alabama in Huntsville, Alabama A&M, and Drake Technical College.

6.4. Expression

Oakwood University promotes free expression, particularly in music and preaching. The performing arts were encouraged, and I published my first work in the form of a poem ("A

Prayer for Purpose") in a student journal. These experiences built confidence and affirmed my talents. My participation in Dynamic Praise gave me opportunities to lead songs (e.g., singing in a trio with two other Black Bermudian males) and become comfortable expressing myself in corporate worship. My musical development included song writing, which has led to publications in this regard as well.

While serving as league commissioner and soccer player in the highly competitive intramural league, I also tried my hand in sports reporting by writing and sharing match reports to our families and friends on campus and back at home in Bermuda. This venture led me to share my sports writing with the main newspaper in Bermuda and I was invited to serve as a sports reporter during my Christmas break. I reported on local soccer and got to interview top Bermudian sports figures. All of these experiences are consistent with expressive activities I still engage in today. I was able to explore my gifts in an environment that has room for innovation and initiative.

7. Dr. Freeman's Journey

7.1. Expectations

I am a pre-K-through-16 product of Adventist Christian Education. Even as an elementary school student I had expectations that my teachers would take into account my cultural and gendered background. I attended the now defunct W.W. Prescott SDA Elementary school in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, which was affiliated with the New Jersey Conference from PK through grade 4. I attended the predominantly White school (All the teachers were White and the hosting church that housed the school was predominantly White, however the school's student population was predominantly Black). There were four defining experiences related to culturally relevant pedagogy that I would like to highlight from that experience. The first was a discussion between my first through fourth grade teacher about heaven. In our Bible class, we talked about what types of music will be in heaven. As an imaginative child, I shared that I thought that there would be angels that "rapped" (i.e., engaged in the colorful musical artform deriving from the African-American tradition). My White female instructor became infuriated and indignant that such music would be unacceptable to God. What does such a stance and lack of imagination say to a Black child? It could be inferred that their musical offerings and personhood is unacceptable to God.

Another incident included a discussion regarding American heroes. The same teacher asked the class to share the name of an important person in American history. I chose the Black 20th century freedom fighter and devout Muslim leader, Malcolm X. I was the product of second-generation Adventist parents, but they exposed me early-on to leaders of different faith traditions. My instructor was not happy with my answer. However, at the time she was only aware that he had made incendiary remarks and that he was a Muslim. She did not have the background and tools to engage the class in discussions of the complex background of such a leader as Malcolm X. Somehow I learned later that his mother was a devout Adventist woman. I was also taught at that time that William Foy, the great African-American Adventist church pioneer, had denied the call of Christ and was unwilling to share the Advent message. According to the research from Baker (2013) text on the life of Foy, this turned out to be false. Although he desired to share his vision, many White religious leaders of that era were not receptive to hearing the gospel message from a Black man. However, he went on to have a productive ministry.

I also learned early that I expected my instructors to take into account the variable of gender, particularly how to deal with Black masculinity. When I was attending elementary school, pedagogical approaches such as culturally responsive pedagogy were not popularized yet. And I suspect that many of the elementary teachers in Adventist classrooms who were White women at that time were not trained on how to work with Black boys. As a student, I was asked once by my teacher why I did not act more like my female classmate who was quiet and more docile. As a child, that question cut me like a knife. I was left feeling that she did not see value in my disposition, ideas, and self-worth.

Subtlety underlining her question, I took it as a statement to say, to be successful in her class I had to "feminize" myself to be valued.

Lastly, I was once accused of throwing a chair across the classroom which I did not do. However, even in the safe confines of Adventist Christian education, Black males can be presumed with a suspicion of guilt and made to feel like they are guilty until proven innocent. Such incidents were important and formative in my identity development as a Black Seventh-day Adventist man. I knew very early on as Black boy with White teachers that I was different. Even in a Christian environment, I did not always feel safe to express myself. These experiences have had a profound impact on the way in which I view the church, particularly as it relates to my experiences with White congregants and leaders. It has caused me often to be suspicious of their motives, given that some of the ongoing resource inequities that permeate the Adventist church are based on race.

7.2. Exposure

During grades 6–8, I attended a predominantly Black Adventist school in Trenton, N. J., named Mt. Sinai. The principal, Mrs. Sharon Vines Howard, took my class to Princeton University where we observed a lecture from a male African-American scholar. Part-way through his presentation he made a joke about his intelligence, something to the affect that he was not the smartest person in the room. My principal leaned over to me and told me to never do that. Never act or feel that you do not belong among great minds. At that time, I did not know I would become an academic, but I have carried that advice throughout my career. As you can see from this experience, culturally relevant pedagogy can be infused throughout various types of curricular activities, including field trips.

7.3. Experiences/Experimentation

I attended Oakwood University as an undergraduate student. It allowed me to experiment with starting my own student organization, the Progressive Black Caucus. I also was able to take classes that specifically addressed issues related to the Black experience. However, because Black people have been colonized throughout U.S. history, Whiteness still impacts even our Black institutions. for instance, the form of worship and music that was officially supported and/or sanctioned during my academic experience tended to be conservative, with its roots in the White Anglo tradition.

7.4. Expression

I attended Pine Forge Academy, an Adventist high school which is one of four college preparatory Historically Black Boarding Academies. There I was able to engage in various leadership opportunities such as singing and drama ministries. These experiences allowed me to freely and uninhibitedly share and hone my gifts. However, as it related to traditional Black hairstyles, it took a while before the institution would accept male students that wore cornrows or locs. So, in one way the school provided a nurturing environment for me to develop socially, educationally, and spiritually. But on the other hand, its conservative code of conduct would not allow free expression in dress and unique hairstyles.

8. Dr. Denham's Journey

8.1. Expectations

Although I was raised as a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) from birth, I did not attend an Adventist educational institution until I reached the post-secondary level. Instead, I was educated by the New York City public school system from elementary school to high school. What is interesting about this fact is that my mother taught at several SDA schools. While my mother was very thankful for the ability to work in Christian education, she strongly resisted enrolling any of her children within the same system where she worked. While I cannot speak for any of my siblings, I do remember asking several times why I could not attend school with my friends from church. My mother gave me a variety of reasons, but the one that she spoke most strongly and consistently about was her belief that

the SDA school system was not equipped to provide what I needed academically. In other words, she felt that SDA schools were not academically rigorous, and my siblings and I would be better served by attending public schools which had robust gifted and talented programs.

When it came time to choose a college to attend, like many of my high school classmates I applied to several prestigious universities in the northeast portion of the United States. I also applied to two SDA institutions. Once it was time to make decision on what school I would attend, I chose Oakwood College (now Oakwood University), much to the consternation of my mother. She once again verbalized her objection to SDA education and worried that I would be better served by attending one of the more well-known schools that I was accepted into. I remained steadfast in my conviction to attend Oakwood, and my mother eventually relented when I pointed out that many of my friends had attended Oakwood and done well for themselves.

My main reasons for wanting to attend Oakwood were purely social: Oakwood was an HBCU, had a low enrollment, and most importantly, I would finally be able to attend school with fellow believers. I must admit that my mother's view of SDA education colored my own. I was convicted in my belief that Oakwood was not strong academically and that I would wait till graduate school to capitalize on the prestige that is carried by attending a well-known university.

While my expectations were met in terms of my initial shallow reasons for attending Oakwood, I had to quickly revisit my preconceived notions of the academic rigor of an SDA education. It turns out that calculus and differential equations are universally difficult courses regardless of where you are enrolled for college! What I also did not expect was the impact my time spent in taking courses within the religion department would have on my understanding of doctrine and belief. As a mathematics major, I had to have a minor so I selected Religion as my minor seeing that we were already required to take 12 h of religion and a minor only required me to take 2–3 more courses. Many of the things that I had learned about at home, in Sabbath school and through sermons throughout my formative years were now being explained in more depth and detail than I had ever experienced before. I was not expecting to have my beliefs challenged to the degree that they were, but I fully understood that this challenge of beliefs was necessary for spiritual growth.

8.2. Exposure

In reflecting on how SDA education provided glimpses of the best that I could be, I would have to say two of my instructors come to mind. The first is Dr. Blake, who was the head of the mathematics and computer science department while I was enrolled at Oakwood. Dr. Blake was my advisor and whenever I went to his office during my freshman year, I would notice a box filled with brochures outside his door. When I asked him about the box, he explained the box contained flyers for summer programs for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) students throughout the United States. He encouraged me to look through the box and apply to a particular program as it would be a good experience for me. I took him up on this suggestion and was accepted into a research experience for an undergraduate program at one of the federal government's research laboratories. That summer was life-changing and planted the seeds for my interest in conducting research as a full-time occupation.

The second instructor that provided me with a glimpse of my future self was Dr. Anthony Piña, my Master's advisor at La Sierra University. Dr. Piña had an assignment which required us to research PhD programs in educational technology, along with the major educational technology professional organizations. At this point I was not inclined to pursue a PhD., but the assignment triggered something in me. I believed I had found my calling within the field of educational technology but had not realized the full extent of the field. The most important takeaway from this assignment was that there were those doing research in educational technology, and the findings from these studies were having a significant impact on educational policy and practice. In my discussions with Dr. Piña about the assignment, he strongly encouraged me to pursue a PhD and recommended several programs to me, one being the program that I eventually graduated from at Arizona State University.

The fact that Dr. Piña believed that I could and should continue my education was the major impetus for me stepping out on faith and applying for a terminal degree.

8.3. Experiences/Experimentation

Attending a school like Oakwood means that SDA education extends beyond the classroom. Adventism permeates everything that happens at Oakwood, from social activities to the food that we were 'allowed' to eat. For that reason, Oakwood provided me an opportunity to interact with many of the spectrums of Adventism. This is especially true when it comes to experiencing various liturgical styles of worship. The churches surrounding Oakwood have a variety of liturgical styles and attending school there allowed me to experience and experiment with different styles of worship.

While this experience had a significant impact on how I saw myself as an Adventist and how I felt about worship, once I left Oakwood I realized my experience and experimentation only provided me with a fragment of the entire picture. Leaving Oakwood made me realize that there are more important things the church should be focusing on besides what style of worship is acceptable. The core mission of the SDA church is to spread the good news of the second coming of Christ and focusing on whether there should be drums in the church is a distraction from that.

8.4. Expression

I feel that my time spent outside of the SDA education community post Oakwood has provided me with a vantage point to reflect and fully express myself in terms of being a *border crossing brotha*. In my professional life I more likely than not find myself in situations where I am the only Black person in the room. This is not something that I was prepared for when leaving Oakwood, but this is not something I would fault Oakwood for. Oakwood's mission is to serve Black SDA students, and so its climate and culture is welcoming and inviting for this demographic. The world outside of Oakwood has no such mission and so it was a bit of an awakening for me to enter spaces that were hostile to me. So, I had to learn how to navigate these frequently unwelcoming spaces to accomplish what I needed to professionally and academically. Going through this process provided me the vantage point I needed to reflect on my Oakwood experience. This time of reflection led me to feelings of gratefulness and a longing for a day and time where I can experience the world like I experienced Oakwood. It also provided me the time to gain insight on importance the relationships and friendships I made at Oakwood and how this institution provided me with the "family" I would lean on during my post Oakwood travails. I found that many of my peers were going through the same growing pains as I was. I learned I was not the only one learning on the fly how to be a *border crossing brotha* or *sistah*. Finding out that I was not alone allowed me the permission to express the thoughts and feelings I had bottled up inside and provided me the strength to press on.

9. Discussion and Implications

While Dr. Douglas and Dr. Denham knew each other from attending Oakwood at the same time and serving in Dynamic Praise choir together, their friendship and collegial relationship only developed after Oakwood. Ironically, Dr. Douglas and Dr. Freeman met at an academic conference for underrepresented graduate students. During a lunch break, they learned of their intersecting history as Oakwood graduates and their sidewalk conversation matured into a friendship and professional relationship that continues today. Together, all three of us have encouraged each other to and through *the fiery furnace* of the tenure process, shared hotel rooms at conferences, and provided overall support when seeking to navigate the world of higher education as Black males who are members of the SDA church.

Taken together, our narratives reveal promise and complexity in understanding the educational journeys and roles that SDA Christian education played in our development and positionality as professors. For instance, of the three of us, Dr. Freeman is the only one who attended Adventist Education K–12 with mixed results. Dr. Douglas and Dr. Denham's experiences were in public

schools, with both noting that it was an overall positive experience. For Dr. Douglas, it would seem that his experiences outside, within, and across the SDA system provided him with access to the best educational options available to him. Oakwood served as an excellent complement to his experiences in a historically White high school where his confidence had taken a knock from less than affirming teachers (e.g., a guidance counselor who wrote a letter of recommendation describing him as "an average student with average academic ability") and a highly competitive, punitive environment. Transferring to Oakwood from community college where he earned an associate degree also meant that he was more mature, he had completed most of his prerequisites and he had saved money on tuition, having avoided paying private collegiate fees for his entire journey to a Bachelor's degree. More than merely having the "Oakwood experience," he was actually able to monetize his tertiary educational journey—earning multiple scholarships (despite his guidance counselors problematic letter) and eventually emerging from his Master's degree with money in the bank to start a business soon after graduation. Clearly, when and for how long one attends a school—SDA or otherwise—affects the experience. Dr. Douglas admits that his social experience as a transfer student was likely a little different from those who were immersed in the environment from freshman orientation through graduation.

Certainly, considerations for the role and effect of life stage are important. For instance, Dr. Freeman not only attended Adventist educational institutions from pre-Kindergarten through Oakwood, but he also matriculated straight through to his Masters and doctorate degrees after his undergraduate education, whereas Dr. Douglas and Denham both gained other experiences as teachers in K–12 schools prior to going back for their PhDs. These realities give pause for consideration on how we think about Adventist Education, particularly as a holistic undertaking that transcends books and transcripts to include culture, family and relationships. For example, Dr. Freeman's wife also attended K–12 Adventist education prior to Oakwood, Dr. Denham's wife also attended Oakwood, while Dr. Douglas' wife attended Adventist schools for most of her elementary schooling and all of her high school journey. Both Drs. Freeman and Denham met their life partners in or around the Oakwood community, while Dr. Douglas met his wife back in Bermuda.

Collectively, our experiences as students in SDA education inform our teaching, leadership, and in the case of Dr. Douglas currently, our parenting. Consistent with Dr. Douglas' eclectic border-crossing educational experiences, he and his wife are currently homeschooling their youngest son, in part because of their sensitivity to culture and school climate for raising a Black son in a predominately White, Midwestern space. Dr. Douglas continues to see SDA education as more than a particular emblem on a schoolhouse or the use of a particular curriculum. Instead, he sees it as a commitment to true education (White 1903): "the harmonious development of the spiritual, mental, [social] and physical powers" (p. 13)—and this can and must happen beyond the walls of any one institution. Dr. Douglas refuses to rely on an institution, religious or otherwise, to solely attend to the needs and socio-cultural nuances of rearing and nurturing a child.

Dr. Denham was the only one of the authors to attend a SDA university as part of his graduate studies. This experience was essential to his obtaining a tenure track position at a flagship state university. In retrospect Dr. Denham wondered why he was not encouraged to pursue a position in the academy from his instructors at Oakwood. Instead, it was due to the urging of a faculty member at a predominately White SDA institution that Dr. Denham even considered obtaining a terminal degree. This faculty member also provided Dr. Denham with advice on which PhD. programs to pursue and provided a recommendation that played a significant role in him obtaining a graduate fellowship, which completely supported his doctoral studies. Each of the other two authors share a similar story about their path to the academy. It seems that while Oakwood provided the strong foundation that the authors' needed to succeed later in life, Oakwood could also make it more apparent to its students that there is a space for them in the academy and illuminate the path needed to get there.

10. Suggestions for Educators, Administrators, Parents and Students

Our critical trio-ethnography offers key elements to the success of our educational journeys that may be helpful for parents, educators and students from all backgrounds, particularly students who share identities with us as Christians, Seventh-day Adventists, and/or Black males. For simplicity of presentation and consideration, we list the following suggestions:

Expectations:

(1)   Expect that you will have to advocate for your child(ren) at each level of the educational journey. There is a particular need for parental advocacy at the K–12 level; instilling skillsets and confidence for self-advocacy at the higher education level will be vital for the healthy development of students. For us, the qualities we developed at Oakwood University to advocate for ourselves and the causes we believed in continue to undergird growth and resilience as professionals. Parents should remember that every child and context is unique; avoiding a one-size fits approach for students is wise; instead prayerfully seeking the right spaces and support systems for each child and his or her calling and proclivities.

(2)   Expect resistance. Racism and its effects are pernicious and present in Christian institutions; ensure that students are in the care of pedagogues and administrators who embrace and operationalize culturally relevant, anti-deficit belief systems about the possibilities for and potential of Black and Brown youth. We cannot assume that participation in Black-led institutions makes us immune from cultural incompetence and deficit-based White supremacist ideologies that infect and infuse teaching, theologies, practices, policies, and norms.

(3)   Expect Christian/SDA schools, leaders, and educators to be excellent, and hold them accountable to be just that, with the knowledge that you will need to buttress each child's educational experience with resources and opportunities from various spaces.

Exposure:

(1)   Christian and Seventh-day Adventist education at its best is an amalgamation of the best that students can experience and be exposed to inside and outside of the schoolhouse, toward the healthy and balanced development of excellence in spiritual, mental, physical, and socio-cultural faculties and realms.

(2)   Be accountable, active, and intentional in your advocacy for your students, with an openness to the role and breadth of what success can be or look like for students and families—for example, while each of the authors of this paper attended college, we understand that college may not be the best or desirable option for each student, depending on their career interests, financial realities, etc.

(3)   Beware of "under"-exposure to the best the world and the church has to offer. Each author in this paper has experienced the possibilities of positive exposure and the limitations that also exist within some of our educational communities. For example, the exposure of visiting Princeton University in middle school prepared Dr. Freeman to later confidently present twice as a doctoral student at Harvard University. All of the authors have mentioned that their undergraduate experience did not expose them to all of the possibilities that we could have known related to graduate education, professional options, and how to navigate these processes. To this end, faculty at Christian/SDA K–12 schools and universities must be intentional in their own exposure to current research, educational practices and communities of learning and professional development beyond the Christian and Adventist networks.

Experiences/Experimentation:

(1)   Encourage your students to engage in professional development seminars, internships, and mentorship opportunities beyond what may be found on their campuses; students should be encouraged to take initiative and ownership of these opportunities, maximizing the global reach of the internet, social media and entrepreneurial exploits.

(2)   Support leadership opportunities at every level of educational development, particularly those that affirm students' Black and religious identities. Each author of this paper values the latitude given for us to create and lead initiatives and organizations in our K–12 and undergraduate journeys. Dr. Denham is currently the president of the Black faculty and staff organization at his institution, a position he was prepared for having formerly served as president of Dynamic Praise gospel choir at Oakwood University. Dr. Douglas' coaching and league building experiences at Oakwood University have helped prepare him to engage in work and consultancy with collegiate and professional sporting teams and organizations, including the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the National Football League (NFL), as well as former professional basketball players.

(3)   Encourage, facilitate and pursue impact beyond the walls and realm of the Church/Christian-school campuses. The motto "enter to learn, depart to serve" at Oakwood University—and similar mantras, must become a daily commitment for students rather than a futuristic expectation post-graduation. We must avoid insular programs that fail to invite or invest in the non-Christian/non-Adventist youth surrounding our Christian, Adventist campuses; instead, we should create opportunities for Adventist students on our campuses to consistently minister to and connect with those who may never get to our campuses without intentional efforts to reach them. Dr. Douglas has seen the value of these approaches in his efforts to build pipelines between his undergraduate institution and his current institution, which has led to the planting of a new church in his current city and graduate school and professional opportunities for Oakwood alumni.

Expression:

(1)   While traditional church-related skillsets such as preaching, and singing are often celebrated and encouraged in SDA/Christian schools, it is vital that the breadth, diversity and beauty of expression in various art forms (including sport, dance, art, etc.) be encouraged, celebrated and invested in by educators and our institutions. Preaching and singing are particularly celebrated in the Black (Christian/Adventist) tradition; medicine and education are also celebrated in some of our educational settings. Centering the voices, experiences and expertise of individuals and leaders who function outside of the aforementioned fields (including those in blue collar professions) will be vital in cultivating the gifts and growth of the church and the fulfillment of its mission.

(2)   We can no longer wait for non-Adventist affirmation to celebrate the gifts and growth of our students before they are accepted and celebrated. The examples and contributions of pioneering Adventist leaders, thinkers and artists like Dr. Barry Black, U.S Senate Chaplain; Sheila Jackson Lee, U.S. Congresswoman of Texas; Grammy-award winners Take 6; Hollywood film producer DeVon Franklin; and renowned motivational speaker Eric Thomas confirm the significance and influence of careers outside of traditionally celebrated disciplines in the Adventist church. Acknowledgement of serving and engaging in opportunities outside of the Adventist context should no longer be approached with knee-jerk skepticism or heavy-handedness (for example, if a student desires to create movies or music, consideration and counsel on how one can approach these opportunities within the context of their Christian principles and worldview should be a focus, rather than an uncritical assumption that exclusion or non-engagement must be the option).

(3)   Beware of hierarchical arrangements and marginalization that does not respect or include the expertise and voices of Adventist leaders and thinkers (across multiple generations) who are not employed by the Adventist church or do not occupy particular privileged positions (e.g., pastors). Finding ways to communicate inclusivity and creating healthy and healing spaces for expression in these regards is necessary and needed.

11. Conclusions

We recognize that there is much work to be done if we are to truly be *border crossing brothas* and enact the ethos of CRT, which acknowledges the permanence of racism as an ever-present force that we will always have with us. We affirm that this work must be engaged in partnership with *border crossing sistahs*—black and brown women of similar commitment whose significant contributions and leadership often go unacknowledged—and people of conscience, conviction and courage of all backgrounds who are committed to this emancipatory cause. Within Christian communities, the permanence of racism is understood as a consequence of Sin, with the antidote being Jesus Christ. We concur, but we do not embrace the distant, dismissive or eschatological manner of ignoring social justice issues until all is made well at His Second Coming, which, notwithstanding the engagement of some Black Adventist leaders and church members, was the general approach of the Adventist Church during the Civil Rights Movement (London Jr. 2010) and sadly continues to be the modus operandi of far too many White and complicit people of color who serve as denominational administrators, pastors, school leaders, teachers, and church members[1]. Instead, the authors of this paper subscribe to a hands on, urgently-compassionate commitment to a theology of social justice that allows us to identify with, love, meet the needs of, fight for, and share the gospel with the marginalized—even if they may share different views and backgrounds from us. Our capacity and willingness to model Christ's example inside and outside of the classroom is not instigated from hopes of an evangelistic return on our investment. We simply choose to love our students, their families and communities. All educators and leaders irrespective of religious affiliation (or not) can and should being doing this too. It is what Jesus did. It is, in part, why Jesus was hated and crucified by the religious establishment of his day, even as individuals who would never accept Him and His sacrifice as the Truth. It was a test of love for which Jesus was willing to be examined, to be convicted, and to be (mis)understood. As educators, we are called to a similar test. The self-sacrificing love and commitment of true educators[2] living *true education* draws its life-blood and ultimate example from Jesus—not just in theory or theological rhetoric, but in practice, as best exemplified by how we see, serve, seek, and stand with the oppressed and marginalized (Matthew 25: 40–45).

Much like the significance of the Hebrews boys' presence in Babylon in the Biblical narrative was confirmed through opportunity and adversity, the efficacy of our presence in the academy today as Black Adventist professors in predominately White research institutions has also been forged through testing, trials, and triumph. We know that there is a space for us and others like us in the academy. We stand on the shoulders of many others who have paved the way for our generation and those to come (e.g., Dr. David Williams, Harvard University professor and one of the most cited living Black academic authors; Dr. Ella Simmons, who has engaged in leadership in secular and Adventist institutions, and has ascended to the highest levels of our world church as a vice-president; Dr. Arnetha Ball, Stanford University professor and former president of AERA—the premier educational research conference in the world with over 20,000 members; and Dr. Kevin McDonald, current Chief Diversity Officer of the University of Missouri; and Dr. Lou Matthews, a Black Bermudian mathematician and scholar who has served as a professor at U.S. public research universities and a school and district level administrator)

In our own ways we—the authors—are illuminating paths for others in higher education and beyond. At the 2018 American Educational Research Association (AERA) Conference in New York

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[1] Consistent with the anti-deficit commitments of the authors of this manuscript, it is important to acknowledge that there are Adventist leaders and administrators of various backgrounds who are actively engaged in social justice efforts, including dynamic young professionals in organizations such as *Adventists for Social Justice* and college students like those who led the #ItIsTimeAU campus protest at Andrews University.

[2] To be clear, we do not seek to assert that only those who identify as Christians are true educators; we believe and have experienced the powerful, loving, and transformative pedagogy of educators who may not nor ever frame the source of their compassion and grace with the same language that we do as individuals who identify as followers of Christ.

City, all three of us Black male Oakwood graduates and now professors at public research-intensive universities gathered for a picture to celebrate the fact that we have all now earned tenure and promotion. This was a special moment for us. Seven years earlier at the 2011 AERA Conference, we had all shared a room, discussed our border-crossing experiences as "Hebrew boys" in the academy, and conceptualized the initial iterations of this paper. Our goal then was to complete our dissertations, graduate, secure jobs, and one day be able to inspire the next generation of scholars. We are living this vision, and it is our goal that this paper, our continued scholarship and leadership, and our lives of influence will allow us to more fully fulfill this vision in the days and years to come.

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