WE’S TIED BOSS: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK PROFESSIONAL STAFF AT A HISTORICALLY WHITE INSTITUTION DURING THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT

Angela Smith Kuykendoll

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WE’S TIED BOSS: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK PROFESSIONAL STAFF AT A HISTORICALLY WHITE INSTITUTION DURING THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT

by

Angela Smith Kuykendoll

A Dissertation
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Dedication

To my ancestors, with the utmost gratitude and reverence, I dedicate the spirit of this dissertation to you. Your memories, despite the oppression and suffering, created a pathway for my existence. You carried the weight of chains, weathered the storms of injustice, and your dreams shackled, yet your hope never wavered. You sowed the seeds of freedom and liberation with your unwavering determination and faith. Watered them with tears of perseverance and cultivated them in the very soil of resistance. Every step I take towards freedom, every dream I dare to chase, is a testament to your enduring legacy. In your honor, I pledge to amplify your silenced voices and uphold the dignity and humanity you fought so valiantly to reclaim. I am the manifestation of your dreams, the product of your sacrifices, and I exist as a testament to the resilience of my ancestors in an ocean of your unanswered cries. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

My great-grandmother, Delma Lawrence, who lived 96 years on this earth. She instilled in me the importance of education as the great equalizer. She lived life fully and believed in serving her community, the privilege to educate children, Asbury United Methodist Church, and her Rust College. Her commitment to her community is why I am continuing her legacy as a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated.

My grandmother, Delma Brookins, who left me way too soon, is my shero. Her spirit continues to still live in me. She was a woman of many talents: a teacher, a piano player, a master gardener, an amazing cook and baker, and a fashion icon. A consummate educator, she pushed her students to be the best version of themselves and experts in grammar. She taught me many things, but the greatest of them all is that I can do all things through Christ Jesus, who
loves me. And never put a question mark where God put a period. She loved me fiercely and unconditionally, and I miss her immensely. Mama, this one is for you.

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Abstract

Although research has been conducted on the lived experiences of Black student affairs professionals and academic advisors at Historically White Institutions (HWIs), the literature is scant in its representation of the larger body of Black Professional Staff (BPS) and their experiences. BPS are undervalued and disregarded and are a vital part of the fabric of HWIs. Drawing on Critical Race Theory in Education, anti-Black racism, and plantation politics, the purpose of this critical race methodology study was to describe how Black Professional Staff experienced and navigated racism at an HWI in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). This study also explored how the participants defined resistance and engaged in acts of resistance.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do Black Professional Staff experience and navigate racism at a Historically White Institution in the Mid-South during the Black Lives Matter Movement?
   a. What are the dehumanizing and discriminatory acts experienced by BPS at HWIs?

2. What are Black Professional Staff’s acts of resistance at HWIs?

To understand the rich counterstories, I conducted semi-structured interviews with eight Black/African-American professional staff members. The findings identified four themes which were represented as four speculative fiction counterstories. Plantation Chronicles, The Whiteness Chip, and The Vampire Chronicles: Miss Anne’s Reckoning revealed that HWIs are not safe for BPS as their bodies and humanity continue to be oppressed. Consequently, the Uprising in the Ivory Tower focused on how the participants defined, engaged in, or carried out acts of resistance. The findings showed that resistance is a state of being rather than doing.
The findings point to the need for institutional reforms at HWIs to establish a more equitable and socially just environment. Institutions should eliminate the exploitation of Black bodies and labor by valuing the contributions made by BPS to the institution and campus community, such as respect for BPS’ professional knowledge, education, and skill set. Additionally, Black Faculty and Staff affinity organizations should form coalitions with the campus workers union, local community organizers, and the city's BLM chapter to help foster a collective push for systemic change.

*Keywords:* higher education, Black higher education, Black professional staff, critical race theory in education, anti-Black racism, plantation politics, critical race methodology, speculative fiction counterstories, Black Lives Matter Movement, BLM, resistance
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Personal and Theoretical Context

It is vital to understand my background, personal and professional experiences, and views that have shaped how I approach this study. I am a Black woman, and my childhood and adult experiences of being born and raised in the south have shaped my ontological and epistemological position as an advocate for social justice and the eradication of racism in this country.

I was born to parents who experienced integration during their final high school years. I graduated from that same high school that continued the practice of marginalizing people of color with outdated practices and traditions. As I matured, I understood how the system worked through people to perpetuate racism. My family watched CNN and shows like Crossfire every day, which shaped my view on politics and how political figures contributed to discrimination through laws and policy. Pat Buchanan was the bane of my father’s existence. That exposure shaped how I viewed the government and its role in perpetuating racism and using policies and laws to discriminate against Black folks. I listened to my father discuss his life experiences, from picking cotton as a child to being discriminated against through various companies where he was employed.

My first introduction to racial hatred was in Holly Springs, MS, where my great-grandmother lived. As children, we were told never to ride or go into the alley leading to the next street. That street housed old antebellum homes, which were beautiful to look at but held a horrid history of the plantation and the master’s house. Along with my cousin and aunt, I decided to go into the alley anyway. We were met by white boys who began throwing rocks and sticks while
chasing us. We were terrified because those moments made us realize how dangerous those boys were. We never went into the alley again, even as we got older.

My high school years were very formative in shaping my desire to be a social justice advocate. I began to cobble together my experiences throughout my childhood and the stages of my life during my early adult years when I was starting to understand who I was, and it had a profound impact on me. Reading books about racism in this country and social justice advocates and those in the Civil Rights Movements and the Revolution, such as Angela Y. Davis and the Black Panther Party, piqued my interest in being part of the change from a grassroots level.

In my early adult years in a professional capacity, I was subjected to many forms of racism, specifically when I worked in retail in an affluent part of town. White customers, primarily white women, were insulting and threw their money/credit cards at me rather than handing them to me. When I returned their money or credit cards in the manner I received them, customers would protest, requesting a manager. My white supervisor frequently reprimanded me if those customers complained of my behavior. I soon realized that environment was not the best place for me, so I moved on to other jobs before entering higher education.

My first position in higher education was an awakening that racism was woven into the fabric of higher education. My supervisor was a Black man; however, he was only allowed to supervise the Black employees. His supervisor consistently undermined him. He supervised a white woman employee who was mediocre, barely did her job, and called out sick frequently. However, he was never allowed to reprimand her for excessive absenteeism or work performance. In a conversation about holiday leave requests, I commented that this employee should not get first preference due to her friendship with the director. My subsequent evaluation was marked low with a comment that I should be concerned about my work and not that of
others. I immediately consulted with Human Resources and was informed that I could submit a statement contesting the evaluation. I did so and decided that I needed to leave that department.

After working in higher education and continuing my academic pursuits, my perspective on my advocacy changed. I witnessed how systemic racism works in and through policy throughout my career working in higher education. I understood that our institutions were created by a system that works to keep those with power in power. Consequently, those experiences have shaped my worldview of oppressive systems and how racism has continued to infiltrate this society. Working in higher education as an employee, I have witnessed and been a victim of overt racism, microaggressions, institutional racism, and other forms of discrimination in the workplace. One particular college that I worked in at the university was cloaked in racism. I was denied a promotion by the assistant Dean, citing a lack of base funding, despite witnessing three white colleagues receive promotions and salary increases in similar positions. When I took the time to play the game and find the base funding, I was met with yet another asinine reason for denying the request. Shortly after I left the position, the position was changed to the title I requested, along with a salary increase and the person who took that position was a white woman that I had to train. Unfortunately, the same thing happened again with the denial of a promotion and salary increase. After nine years, when I left that position, an external candidate—a white woman—was hired and given more money. The most frustrating part of being Black at an Historically White Institution (HWI) is there is no protection for us. It can be isolating and frustrating when you know what it is and understand that this system will never help you (Mena & Vaccaro, 2017). I have experienced microaggressions by white colleagues and administrators that frequently made disparaging comments about the “braids in my hair,” asking if they can touch my hair or if I could wash my hair with my braids. I was once told by a white faculty
member that my voice sounded like a white woman over the telephone, as if speaking intelligently was only reserved for white women or white folks. On the occasions when I called out racist comments, I was accused of being insensitive or misunderstanding the nature of the question or statement. You will forever be the aggressor because you called out racism. Your name will be passed around, effectively blackballing you from progressing in higher education.

I sit at the intersection of a Black/African-American and a woman. I also identify as a parent, a daughter with ailing parents, a doctoral student, an active participant in voter education and registration, and involved in my community, working to address issues of inequality and anti-Black racism. My higher education experiences and my identity as a Black/African-American woman allow me to identify with the racialized experiences of racism, microaggressions, and the participants in this research study.

I approached this dissertation with the understanding that my experiences did not occur in a silo, but I also knew that Black folks are not a monolith. The participants come from different backgrounds, generations, gender, and experiences, but share a common identity of professional staff. I knew my story, and I wanted to hear, commiserate, and elevate their voices through the powerful speculative fiction counterstories. Their experiences are important and their stories are powerful. Resistance is taking back power, and the power in their resistance are their voices.

**Theoretical Framework**

In this research study, I employed Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Education as my theoretical framework (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and methodology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) to highlight the experiences of Black Professional Staff (BPS) at Historically White Institutions (HWIs) and elicited their accounts of challenges, particularly during the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) in the U.S. CRT in education utilized the counterstories of Black
Professional Staff (BPS) to challenge the dominant narrative of a post-racial society and as an act of resistance. Speculative fiction was used as an avenue to elevate marginalized voices through sci-fi or fantasy (Toliver, 2020; 2021).

CRT in education [specifically drawing on the work of Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998], Anti-Blackness Theory (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Gordon, 1995; 1996), and plantation politics made up the theoretical framework for this study. CRT in education was helpful in exposing educational inequities in HWIs using the key characteristics of race and racism are permanent; whiteness as property in higher education; challenging the dominant ideology of colorblindness, meritocracy, neutrality, and objectivity; whiteness as property in higher education (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Race and racism are a permanent and key component of inequities in our institutional structures. They established and maintained white dominance and inequitable structures in our educational system by privileging the needs of white interest above people of color like the BPS in this study (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Amplifying the voices of BPS through speculative fiction counterstories challenged the dominant ideology of colorblindness, meritocracy, neutrality, and objectivity in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Toliver, 2020; 2021). Moreover, whiteness as property provided an avenue to investigate the persistent inequities of treating Black folks as property in the educational system, which extends to higher education (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Patel, 2015; Patton, 2016).

While CRT in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998) analyzed structural racism, anti-Black racism (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Gordon, 1995; 1996) helped to focus on the individual and the extent to which Black folks are dehumanized and
demeaned in this society. In this study, anti-Black racism (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Gordon, 1995; 1996) complements CRT to examine the dehumanization and violent nature of BPS experiences working at HWIs (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Gordon, 1995; 1996). Moreover, CRT in education and anti-Black racism together was useful to analyze how plantation politics (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Gordon, 1995; 1996) remains entrenched in our HWIs by drawing parallels between the infrastructure design of slave plantations to present day HWIs (Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Squire et al., 2018; Squire, 2021; Williams et al., 2021).

**Problem Statement**

Historically, higher education in this country has a checkered past and has not been an inclusive environment for Black folks (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Parker, 2019; Patton, 2016; Wilder, 2013). Moreover, HWIs were participatory agents in the Transatlantic Slave Trade who profited from it but have not faced their role in the subjugation of Black folks during slavery or at the present in contemporary higher education institutions (Dancy et al., 2018; Wilder, 2013). The historical significance of HWIs building wealth and prestige through the subjugation and labor of the enslaved created systems of oppression that have yet to be dismantled (Dancy et al., 2018; Patton, 2016; Wilder, 2013; Thelin, 2019). Thus, HWIs continue to be complicit in being part of an institution and structure that upholds systems of racism that create a hostile and isolating environment for Black folks, including BPS (Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Kayes, 2006; McKinley Jones Brayboy, 2003).

Black experiences of microaggressions (Griffin et al., 2014; Mena & Vaccaro, 2017; Patton & Catching, 2009; Pierce et al., 1977; Pittman, 2012; Perez Huber & Solórzano, 2015; 2020; Sue et al., 2007) and racial battle fatigue (Corbin et al., 2018; Gorski, 2019; Smith, 2008;
Quaye et al., 2020) explain the pervasive acts of racism and anti-Black racism that Black folks, including BPS, have experienced at HWIs. The creation of this system has formed clear patterns of social inequity and race relations (Durant, 1999) which continue today in higher education. When examining the parallel between the plantation and HWIs, institutions modeling the plantation system are creating performative actions through diversity officers and committees with little structural change (Bell, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic; 2012; Harris, 1993; Griffin et al., 2014; Kelly et al., 2017; McKinley Jones Brayboy, 2003; Patton & Catching, 2009; Squire, 2021). Patton (2010) further theorized that in order to have culturally competent citizens, HWIs should reflect diversity through the curriculum and faculty, staff, and students. HWIs that are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion and eradicating systemic racism must acknowledge the barriers that continue to persist and actively address racist practices in the academy (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Patel, 2015; Patton, 2016). Patton (2016) stated that higher education institutions, specifically HWIs, continue to be dominated by a White terrain that controls all facets of the institution. Colorblindness, in higher education enabled institutions continue to allow racist policies that preserve social inequity to be ignored (Hiraldo, 2010). The power structure is one-sided through policies and the way in which they are implemented and used to favor whites (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Accordingly, following the founding of the Black Lives Matter movement, the effort to organize and push against anti-Black racism pushed HWIs for change (Dumas, 2016; Gordon, 1995; 1996; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Thomas, 2019). The Black Lives Matter movement sparked a new era of social justice advocacy and resistance that used multiple avenues of engaging in resistance.

Hailu and Sarubbi (2019) acknowledged the Black Lives Matter movement's role in challenging white supremacy and inequity through institutional policies at HWIs. The Black
Lives Matter movement provides a backdrop that focuses specifically on a crusade to bring to light state-sanctioned violence and murders of Black men and women through protesting, community organizing, and proclaiming that #BlackLivesMatter using hashtags, creating a digital footprint and opportunities for resistance (Blacklivesmatter, 2022). Moreover, the literature highlights how BPS in particular student affairs professionals resist through outlets such as social media and social justice curriculum and programming (Haynes & Bazner, 2019; Haynes et al., 2019; Hill, 2018; Thomas, 2019; Yang, 2016).

What remained unknown was how BPS experienced racism at HWIs in general and particularly during the BLM movement. Black Professional Staff experienced racism, microaggressions, and racial battle fatigue while working at HWIs. Often, BPS are overlooked as an integral part of the fabric of higher educational institutions. The pervasiveness of racism in higher education is documented in the literature (Hiraldo, 2010; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Patel, 2015; Patton, 2016), however, the experiences of BPS during the BLM movement when Black men and women were murdered through state-sanctioned violence while supporting faculty, staff, and students is not documented in the literature. While research has been published on the lived experiences of Black student affairs professionals and academic advisors at HWIs (Erb, 2019; Gorski, 2019; Husband, 2016; Quaye et al., 2020; Sarcedo, 2021), the larger body of BPS and their experiences remain missing from the literature. BPS sit at a unique position as support staff, providing support to faculty, students, and administrators, yet their voices and stories about their racialized experiences at HWIs challenging the dominant narratives was missing from the scholarship. Hence, more research on the racialized experiences of BPS, particularly during the BLM movement, was needed to understand how anti-Black racism and institutional racism affected the lives of BPS in the academy.
**Research Purpose**

Using Critical Race Theory in Education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), anti-Blackness Theory (Dumas, 2016; Gordon, 1995; 1996), and plantation politics (Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Squire et al., 2018; Squire, 2021; Williams et al., 2021), the purpose of this study was to describe a) how Black Professional Staff experienced and navigated racism at HWIs following the murder of Trayvon Martin and the founding of the BLM movement to the present, b) what acts of resistance BPS engaged in or are actively engaging in during those times, and c) how anti-Black racism and plantation politics allowed for the violent nature of dehumanizing and discriminatory practices to continue at HWIs. In this study, I adapted Solórzano & Yosso’s (2002) model of Critical Race methodology which centers race and racism throughout the research study. More importantly, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) used critical race methodology to encourage those who are marginalized to “become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed, and learning to make the arguments to defend themselves” (p. 27). My aim was to understand how the participants experienced racism in predominately white spaces. Additionally, I wanted to understand how the participants defined resistance and how they engaged in acts of resistance.

**Research Design**

Using Critical Race Methodology in Education, I conducted semi-structured interviews with eight Black/African-American professional staff who work at a public HWI located in the Mid-South to elicit their rich counterstories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This method of inquiry provided an understanding of how counterstories function as a method of resistance against oppressive acts. Additionally, the counterstories are shared as four speculative fiction stories to represent the finding in this study (Toliver, 2021; 2021).
Black Professional Staff (BPS) is defined, in this study, as qualified Black or African American support staff who hold an academic degree and as a group does not identify as faculty or administrator (Ryttberg, 2020). Black and African American are used interchangeably in this study. Black professional staff and Black professional support staff are also used interchangeably in this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study.

3. How do Black Professional Staff experience and navigate racism at a Historically White Institution (HWI) in the Mid-South during the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM)?
   a. What are the dehumanizing and discriminatory acts experienced by BPS at HWIs?

4. What are Black Professional Staff’s acts of resistance at HWIs?

Significance of Study

The primary focus of this study was to understand the lived experiences of BPS at HWIs. This research will expand the literature on understanding the experiences of BPS employed at HWIs (Griffin et al., 2014; Goudsouzian & McKinney, 2018; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Mena & Vaccaro, 2017; Patton & Catching, 2009; Patton, 2016), particularly during the BLM movement, add to the body of Critical Race Theory in education scholarship, and provide an opportunity to address institutional racism at HWIs. The BLM movement has galvanized a resurgence of grassroots efforts to resist anti-Blackness through protests and digital activism, which adds to expanding research on the significance of this movement in higher education (Beatty et al., 2020; Bell et al., 2020; Dancy et al., 2018; Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Haynes et al., 2019; Hill, 2018; Husband, 2016; Pasque et al., 2022; Thomas, 2019; Yang, 2016).
Through this research, higher education stakeholders, administrations, and the Board of Trustees (BOTs) should understand the importance of creating an inclusive environment and strategies to address the systemic barriers that perpetuate racism in the academy. Moreover, Black folks at HWIs are not safe in these environments and HWIs have continued to perpetuate institutional violence and harm. Despite this, BPS have defined and practiced resistance in ways that provide a respite for them. Additionally, in their being and existing in spaces that are harmful is its own act of resistance. If HWIs want to attract a diverse student body and faculty and staff, they should examine those institutional practices and norms that create an environment of exclusivity.

At the writing of this dissertation, state legislatures are creating policies that attack CRT and any historical reference to racism and white supremacy, reinforcing the need for CRT and continued research (Anderson & Svrluga, 2022; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Delgado, 2013; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Parker, 2019; Patton, 2016). This study added to scholarship by understanding how Black Professional Staff experience microaggressions and racial battle fatigue, particularly during the Black Lives Matter movement, by applying CRT in Education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker, 2019), plantation politics (Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Squire et al., 2018; Squire, 2021; Williams et al., 2021), and anti-Black racism (Caldera, 2020; Dumas, 2016; Gordon, 1995) to investigate how BPS are demeaned and devalued. Moreover, anti-Black racism remains under theorized in higher education scholarship (Ash et al., 2020; Beatty et al., 2020; Dancy et al., 2018; Genao & Mercedes, 2021; Haynes, 2019; Pasque et al., 2022).

The gap in the literature allowed this research to center on the experiences of BPS, which is often absent from the conversation. As a BPS, who has experienced racism within the
academy, HWIs need to provide an inclusive environment, eradicate those institutional barriers, and understand how pervasive anti-Black racism operates on a singular level (Dumas, 2016; Gordon, 1995). BPS provides support to faculty and students while contributing to their respective professions within their institutions are often on the front lines working with students, faculty, and administration. Therefore, BPS sharing their experiences through counterstories provided an opportunity to acknowledge that racism continues to persist at HWIs and acts as an avenue of healing and resistance.

**Key Terms**

This section provides definitions of key terms that will be discussed throughout this study.

Anti-Black Racism or Anti-Blackness Theory: An antagonistic relationship between humanity and blackness (Dumas & Ross, 2016). I will use anti-Black racism and Anti-Blackness Theory interchangeably throughout the study. I will propose anti-Blackness as a theoretical implication.

Black Lives Matter Movement: A social movement that advances the social, political, and legal issues of Black/African-Americans. Founded by three Black women, Alicia Garza Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, in 2013 after the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s murderer (Blacklivesmatter, 2022).

Historically White Institution: Institutions in which whites account for 50% or more in student enrollment and are understood to be historically white (Lomotey, 2010).

Microaggression: Subtle and overt oppression used in language and body language that put down and target people of color (Perez Huber & Solórzano, 1995; Pierce, 1977).
Plantation Politics: The organization of a plantation society that maintains and perpetuates anti-Black racism and white supremacy in higher education institutions (Squire, 2021).

Black Professional Staff: Black professional support staff is used to describe Black or African American individuals in support roles who are usually highly qualified and have an academic degree (Ryttberg, 2020). They do not necessarily identify as administrators, nor are they employed as academics, but are situated somewhere in between (Ryttberg, 2020). They may be viewed as actors in a third space, a concept used when exploring groups of staff at higher education institutions (HEIs) who do not fit the conventional binary descriptors of ‘academics’ or ‘non-academics’ (Ryttberg, 2020, p. 2). Professional staff and professional support staff will be used interchangeably in this study.

Race: Race is a social construct rather than a biological fact and is fluid across time and space (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano & Huber, 2020).

Racism: Racism subjugates a large group of people by a superior group to maintain power and dominance (Moore, 2008; Solórzano & Huber, 2020).

Findings

The findings of this study identified four themes, which include subthemes. I wrote four speculative fiction counterstories constructed from these four themes: (1) Still on the Plantation; (2) Racial schizophrenia; (3) From Golden Girls to Karens/Beckys; and (4) Where is that folding chair? Plantation Chronicles, The Vampire Chronicles: Miss Anne’s Reckoning indicated that HWIs are not safe for BPS because of the continued subjugation of their bodies and humanity. Further, the speculative fiction counterstories show how HWIs continue to reap the benefits of a plantation society while working to maintain those institutional barriers that prevent any
dismantling of systemic strongholds. Consequently, Uprising in the Ivory Tower explored how the participants engaged in or their acts of resistance. The findings indicate that BPS define resistance in different ways and that resistance is not in the doing, but in the being.

**Implications for Practice**

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of BPS at HWIs, how they experienced and navigated oppressive environments, and their acts of resistance during the Black Lives Matter movement. The findings indicated the need for structural and institutional changes at HWIs to create a more inclusive and socially just environment for BPS. Institutions should work towards dismantling the exploitation of Black bodies and labor and value the contributions BPS contribute to the institution and the campus community. HWIs should respect the professional knowledge, education, and skillset they bring to the table. Additionally, coalition building with an affinity group for Black Faculty and Staff, campus workers union, external community organizers, and the local BLM chapter can establish a collective push to push for systemic change.

**Implications for Future Research**

Further research that centers the voices of BPS, inclusive of advisors and student affairs professionals, should be explored, particularly during the BLM movement. The findings of this study highlighted the need for more research, given the recent backlash of CRT and rolling back DEI programming and policies at public institutions. Further research should explore the implications of how the divisive concepts affect BPS as more protections are being stripped away for Black and Brown folks in higher education institutions.

Theoretically and methodologically, employing the combined framework of CRT in education, anti-Black racism, and plantation politics will provide a comprehensive analysis and
nuanced dynamics of the violent and exploitative nature of institutional and structural racism at HWIs. Utilizing superheroes, fantasy, and science fiction, counterstories as speculative fiction is useful to share stories of those who are often marginalized and refers to a wide range of literary works that do not try to replace every aspect of reality (Toliver, 2020).

**Organization of Dissertation**

The remainder of this study is divided into seven chapters covering the literature review, methodology, speculative fiction counterstories, implications, future research, and final reflections. In chapter two, I review CRT, CRT in education, and anti-Blackness theory. I focus on the tenets of CRT in education and ways in which whiteness as property reinforces the pervasive structural racism that exists in HWIs. Next, I provide a brief overview of anti-Blackness Theory which complements CRT in education in examining the erasure and devaluation of Black folks in higher education. Then I provide an overview of plantation politics. I also provide a historical overview of HWIs and a review of microaggressions and racial battle fatigue as concepts that exacerbate anti-Black racism in HWIs. I will provide an overview of BPS at HWIs. Additionally, an overview of the Black Lives Matter movement and resistance provides a timestamp to view this study. This literature provides an understanding of the importance of anti-Blackness theory as a vehicle to understand the pervasiveness of racism perpetuated and maintained at HWIs.

In chapter three, I discuss Critical Race Methodology using counterstories as acts of healing and resistance (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I further discuss the approach of the theoretical framework, methods, and data analysis used in this study. At the end chapter three, I provide a description of speculative fiction and the method of creating counterstories and speculative fiction counterstories and give a brief introduction to the speculative fiction
counterstories. Chapters four, five, six, and seven consist of the four speculative fiction counterstories. Chapter eight includes the discussion of findings, theoretical implications and implications for practice, future research, my reflections, and conclusion.

In the following sections of this chapter, I review literature on areas critical to this research study. This literature review is divided in the following sections: a brief overview of Critical Race Theory; Critical Race Theory in Education, anti-Blackness theory, and plantation politics which make the theoretical framework of this study; the history of higher education and Blacks in higher education; the Black experience of microaggressions and racial battle fatigue; focusing on the experiences of Black Professional Staff (BPS) at Historically White Institutions (HWIs); the Black Lives Matter movement and resistance in HWIs. The concluding section of this chapter will discuss the scant research on the experiences of BPS in higher education to identify the gap in the literature.

In order to address the issues of race and racism as a mechanism of injustice in our higher educational system, I conducted a study to explore the experiences of Black Professional Staff (BPS) at a Historically White Institution (HWI) to analyze the relationship between race and systems of oppression using Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education. The purpose of this study is to analyze the lived experiences of BPS at HWIs during racial unrest prompted by the murdering of unarmed Black men and women during the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement from 2013 to the present. Further, using a Critical Race Theory in education, along with anti-Blackness theory and plantation politics, this study examined the systemic structures and systems of power that continue to marginalize and oppress Black folks in HWIs in this country. The BLM movement has and can be instrumental in creating change at HWIs because of their participation in the systemic oppression of Black bodies—faculty, staff, and students (Claybrook, 2013; Davies & Morgan, 2012; Delaney, 2010; Goudsouzian & McKinney, 2018; Hailu &
Sarubbi, 2019; Joseph, 2006; Kinchen, 2014; Pasquerella, 2020; Rhoades, 1998; Thelin, 2019; White, 2016; Williamson, 1999). The murder of George Floyd in May 2020 prompted an international response of protests declaring that Black lives matter. For example, students at the University of Missouri (Mizzou) protested in 2015 with students demanding for the president's and chancellor's resignation for being slow to respond to racial issues and protests on campus, which included the Mizzou football team refusing to play in a football game (Trachtenberg, 2018). The unintended consequences resulted in decreased enrollment for Mizzou, which resulted in a loss of revenue (Trachtenberg, 2018). As a result of student protests and the BLM, higher educational institutions declared commitments to addressing systemic racism within their diversity and inclusion programs. However, institutional barriers are still ingrained in our higher education institutions, including HWIs, creating barriers to dismantle discriminatory and racist practices that marginalize Black folks (Dancy et al., 2018; Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Since racism has been challenged through the academic scholarship of Critical Race Theory to expose structures of power that continue to marginalize communities of color, CRT in education will be used as the theoretical framework in this study along with anti-Blackness theory and plantation politics (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Gordon, 1995; Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

**Critical Race Theory**

This literature review on Critical Race Theory (CRT) will first provide an overview of CRT, including its history and development, its key tenets, and then focus on CRT in education. CRT in education examines the inequities that exist in our educational system, which extends to higher education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1998; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Patton, 2016). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) examine education from the context of
property rights and race as a theoretical approach. In this research, I draw on CRT in education as my theoretical framework and methodology to study the lived experiences of Black Professional Staff at Predominately White Institutions. I will focus on CRT as a methodology in Chapter 3.

Critical Race Theory surfaced in the 1970s after activists, attorneys, and other legal scholars began to realize that the civil rights of the 1960s had come to a halt and seemed to move backward, sparking writers Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado, leading legal scholars in the field, to develop new theories and strategies to address the forms of racism that seemed to be gaining momentum (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Delgado, 2013; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged from critical legal studies (CLS) as a response to the stagnant civil rights movement, which too often ignored race-consciousness in our legal system and in our knowledge of race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Minda, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1998) explains that CLS exposes how the legal system has worked to uphold oppressive systemic injustices through discrimination and oppressive structures. The legal system and the law, in theory, are supposed to be colorblind and justice for all; however, those in power have worked within the system to continue to uphold systems of oppression and to maintain power much like in higher education (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Higher education in general and HWIs continue to benefit from the exploitation of Black folks for economic gain, while continuing to uphold white supremacist practices (Aguirre, 2010; Dumas, 2016; Kayes, 2006; Kelly et al., 2017; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Turrentine & Consley, 2001; Wilder, 2013). Higher education continues to reflect a strong commitment to Black degradation as a major element of maintaining a colonial order (Dumas, 2016; Harris, 1993; Wilder, 2013).
Critical Race Theory examines the systemic ways race and racism, at the intersection of gender and class, marginalizes people of color individually and institutionally through laws and policies (Parker, 2019). Critical Race Theory suggests that racism is difficult to cure and acknowledge because it has become so ingrained in our historical consciousness that it has influenced how laws are shaped as well as how racial categories and racial privileges are shaped through racist beliefs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Parker, 2019). Those beliefs and practices have shaped our educational system through structures and policies that provide a barrier to equal access and equal treatment (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical Race Theory has the following tenets that shape this body of research: racism is ordinary, colorblindness, interest convergence, race as a social construct, intersectionality, and storytelling. First, racism is a common occurrence for Black folks in this country (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Gotanda, 1995). Second, there is a notion in this country that our constitution is colorblind which implies that justice is equal across the board (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT problematizes this notion and argues that race was created to establish a hierarchy and social class designed to establish white folks at the top (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harris, 1993) and that eliminating racism will only be supported if it is advantageous to those who hold power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Furthermore, intersectionality addresses the ways race intersects with gender, class and sexual orientation creating further marginalization (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harris, 2001). Finally, storytelling provides those that are minoritized the authority to give voice to their experience of race and racism to counter the dominant narrative. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Critical Race Theory sparked other disciplines to add to scholarship, such as the field of education. Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate are considered the first scholars to introduce
CRT in education. In more recent years, CRT is utilized to critique issues in higher education that focus on policies and anti-discrimination laws (Hiraldo, 2010; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). More recent research using CRT in higher education examines the experiences of Black students, faculty, and staff to expose that racism and white supremacy continue to permeate those spaces (Garrison-Wade et al., 2012; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Patton, 2016) which is relevant to my study. Blacks in higher education frequently experience racism and microaggressions at HWIs (Griffin et al., 2014; Goudsouzian & McKinney, 2018; Mena & Vaccaro, 2017; Patton & Catching, 2009). Specifically, Black faculty encounter racism from white students, colleagues, and administrators with no support to seek recourse (Garrison-Wade et al., 2012; Patton & Catching, 2009; Pittman, 2012). However, there is not much literature on the experiences of Black staff who are the focus of this study.

**Critical Race Theory in Education**

In my study, I will use Critical Race Theory in education to examine the role of race and racism in higher education institutions. Though I am aware of the discussions in the field about the use of the term, colorblindness, I am using it as described in the CRT framework and by the foundational scholars. As explained by Carbado (2011), the term "colorblindness" is a conceptual frame that legal and political figures have used to marginalize individuals of color. So, while "color evasive" may describe some of the meaning of colorblindness, it lacks the discursive racial power that colorblindness possesses (Carbado, 2011). I understand the term colorblindness is seen as a negative or derogatory term by some groups of people.

Critical Race Theory works to expose the blatant and hidden inequities in higher education (Patton, 2016). Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate considered foundational
scholars, use Critical Race Theory in education as an analytical tool to address and understand inequalities in the school system, including higher education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Patton, 2016). Race in education and society remains a contributing factor of inequity and is undertheorized in scholarship (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005; 2018). As identified by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), the three key propositions of CRT in education are:

1. Race and racism are a key factor in inequity and is endemic in the United States.
2. Challenging the dominant ideology of colorblindness, meritocracy, neutrality, and objectivity.
3. Whiteness as property.

I will unpack these key constructs and their application to higher education and to this study below.

**Racism as Endemic and Deeply Ingrained in American Life**

The first proposition is racism is a permanent fixture in how our society functions in the United States and our educational system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) define racism as culturally sanctioned beliefs that defend the advantages of whites through the subordination of marginalized communities. Hiraldo (2010) argues that when ignored, systemic racism perpetuates the marginalization of people of color, thereby making diversity, equity, and inclusion actions unsuccessful in higher education.

**Challenging the Dominant Ideology of Colorblindness, Meritocracy, Neutrality, and Objectivity**

Challenging the dominant ideology of colorblindness, meritocracy, neutrality, and objectivity in the U.S. refutes the idea that we are living in a post-racial society, and race-neutral
policies provide an opportunity for fairness when they only serve white interests (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Affirmative action and other Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies give the appearance of creating and diverse and equitable outcome, but the reality is these measures have only served the interest of dominant white society (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Rai & Critzer, 2000).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) maintain that the dominant group shares stories about marginalized communities to maintain power. The experiential knowledge of BPS in this study will hopefully encourage those in marginalized communities to voice their experiences about racism within education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998), which will counter and challenge the dominant ideology. This provides a form of resistance to challenge those dominant ideologies of colorblindness in higher education. Additionally, storytelling in higher education offers an opportunity for staff of color to tell their stories of experiences of racism experienced in the workplace (Hiraldo, 2010). Efforts should be made to look to the bottom because the experiences and voices of Black people are important and should be heard (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005; Matsuda, 1995; Harris, 2001). HWIs use diversity, equity, and inclusion as marketing efforts for recruitment; however, what are the experiences of Black faculty and staff? The Black experience mirrors a different perspective of a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment through being silenced, disrespected, and viewed as an intruder in white spaces (Griffin et al., 2014; Mena & Vocarro, 2017; Patton & Catching, 2009). Furthermore, HWIs have a history of appearing to offer an inclusive environment with no tangible effort to dismantle the oppressive nature that allows racism to exist (Aguirre, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Kelly et al., 2017). CRT in education values storytelling that will
challenge the majoritarian stories and serve as an avenue for higher education institutions to dismantle systemic racism (Patton, 2016).

Within higher education, Black faculty, staff, and students must conform to white standards in those spaces to prevent being stereotyped. Stemming from the notion of colorblindness, higher education institutions continue to allow racist policies that preserve social inequity to be ignored (Hiraldo, 2010). The power structure is one-sided through policies and the way in which they are implemented and used to favor whites (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In order for there to be true equity/equality, systems must be dismantled and reconstructed to provide a true system of equal access (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Oppressive policies and practices must be dismantled as well as acknowledging they exist (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Furthermore, Hiraldo (2010) explains that “institutions of higher education must recognize and work toward dismantling colorblind policies” (p. 57). Whites are enjoying the benefits of civil rights legislation more than Black folks, particularly white women, as it relates to affirmative action hiring practices (Hiraldo, 2010; Rai & Critzer, 2000).

Patton (2010) shares that higher education should serve as a place for knowledge production and engaging in dialogue that challenges the dominant discourse given to those who will be in positions of power in our classrooms, courtrooms as attorneys and judges, the healthcare industry, and business owners making the undeniable influence higher education has in this country. Patton (2010) further explains that institutions should reflect the diversity within its faculty, staff, and students as well in its curriculum to produce culturally competent citizens.

**Whiteness as Property**

In this section, I describe whiteness as property in CRT in education. I will list and explain the four constructs of this tenet and how the constructs apply to higher education.
Bell’s (1995) investigation of whiteness as property examines the relationship between enslaved Africans, property rights, and human rights to challenge the dominant ideology. Since the founding of this country, much of the debate over its settlement of Native American land has focused on property rights (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Bell's (1995) investigation of the development of the Constitution creates a tension between human rights and property rights, exacerbated by the perception of enslaved Africans as property. Bell further states that the government’s intent to protect the property owner’s rights failed to protect the rights of African-Americans (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Whiteness as property exposes the historical lineage of the intersection of enslaved Africans and property rights. Harris (1993) describes whiteness as property as being intertwined with race and the evolvement of domination and subordination “from color to race to status to property as a progression historically rooted in white supremacy” (Harris, 1993, p. 1714). The interests of whites have moved from tangible property rights, of owning enslaved Africans, to intangible property rights, of white privilege with its ensuing rights upheld by white supremacist structures that continue to perpetuate inequity and deny access to Black folks.

Throughout the progression of time in this country, the interests of whites were at the forefront of important historical advances for equality in our society. In the landmark case of Brown v Board of Education, Bell’s explains that the outcome of this case was not made in the best interest of providing an equal education for people of color but only addressed the interest of the white middle and upper class (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005, 2018; Minda, 1995). Moreover, in response to Brown v Board of Education, there was an increase in white flight, school choice, and resegregation to avoid integration, which continues to uphold white’s property interest of better neighborhoods, better schools, and access to educational
opportunities for their children (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). In fact, despite the decision of Brown v Board of Education, schools remain segregated more than they ever were before the Supreme Court’s decision (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

In reference to higher education, Patton (2016) explains that the establishment of higher education in the U.S. is intricately linked by “the convergence of race, property, and oppression” through participating in the slave trade and labor of the enslaved to build elite and public institutions (p. 320). Whiteness as property provides an avenue to investigate the persistent inequities in the educational system, which extends to higher education (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Patel, 2015; Patton, 2016).

Key Constructs of Whiteness as Property

Critical race scholars use these four key constructs to examine whiteness as property to determine who gets access, who can use and enjoy, who gets to progress in terms of employment, who gets to control “our being, and our bodies”, and who we are as Black folks in higher education. Ladson-Billings and Tate’s (1995) further examination of whiteness as property investigates the following:

1. Rights of disposition
2. Rights to use and enjoyment
3. Reputation and status property
4. The absolute right to exclude

Rights of Disposition.

As described by Harris (1993), the right to disposition is alienable property rights, meaning it can be sold or transferred. McCoy and Rodricks (2015) further explain that Harris
problematizes the notion of property rights as not an issue of being alienable or inalienable, but the inalienability of whiteness makes it a commodity. Therefore, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) describe rights of disposition as white norms only being acceptable when engaging in conformity. Black folks are only deemed acceptable when one assimilates to white standards, engaging in racial a performance of Harris’ analogy of passing and trespassing to uphold the lie that we live in a post-racial society (Lawrence, 2015). Conversely, BPS in higher education must not be authentic in the workplace for fear of being deemed classless or ghetto by conforming to white dress standards, “talking white” and not calling out microaggressions or racist behavior (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Mena & Vaccaro, 2017). Engaging in racial performance prevents the racist tropes and stereotypes from white supremacist narratives that perpetuate racism and oppression (Lawrence, 2015).

**Rights to Use and Enjoy.**

In the legal sense, white privilege enables whites the right of use and enjoyment (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Harris (1993) further states that white privilege is extended to the legal regard and protection to maintain control on a political, institutional, and social level. In the context of property rights, Dixon and Rousseau (2005) further state Cheryl Harris’ analysis of whiteness as property is a legal right of power and privilege that affords those in power control of the educational system. The right to use and enjoy can exclude Black folks from white spaces in the educational settings and the workplace for BPS (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This exclusion includes the ability to network professionally, in social settings in and outside of the workplace, and professional advancements.

**Right of Reputation and Status.**
The right of reputation and status is whiteness affords a status of significant value and reputation that should be recognized (Harris, 1993). When discussing the issue of reputation and status property, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explain the ability of whites to enjoy the status of being white in educational spaces while reinforcing and holding on to that status by pushing to maintain their privilege and power. This is evident by the recent pushback regarding the false narrative of Critical Race Theory being taught in K-12 education. The narrative being pushed is that whites are being disparaged as evil and racist, and children are made to feel bad about themselves because they are white. This further reinforces the idea that whiteness as property controls the education of children through the curriculum while changing the history of slavery and the continued subjugation of Black folks and other minoritized ethnicities in this country (Dutton, 2021).

**Right to Exclude.**

The right to exclude derives from being free of the contamination of blackness (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Harris’ (1993) description of the right to exclude provides that whiteness includes the right of possession, disposition, and use, which gives them the right to exclude. Harris (1993) further explains that “the concept of whiteness is built on both exclusion and racial subjugation” (p. 1737). Whites reserved the right to determine who had access to education, including higher education, with respect to education through policies created that exclude marginalized communities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Property as whiteness is also executed in the right to exclude advanced placement courses, gifted and honors programs through resegregation, school vouchers, public funding for private schools, and school choice (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

**Conclusion to Critical Race Theory in Education**
In higher education, whiteness as property perpetuates the exclusion of students, faculty, and staff from academic spaces (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Patton, 2016). McCoy and Rodricks (2015) state that higher education institutions continue to reinforce whiteness as property in their institutional practices rather than address the pervasiveness of whiteness in higher education. Further, Hiraldo (2010) shares that whites are more important than people of color, and “this systemic reality works against building a diverse and inclusive higher education environment because it supports the embedded hierarchical racist paradigms that currently exists in our society” (p. 55). White supremacist structures allow institutions to exclude and obstruct the mere presence and advancement of BPS in white spaces. There is a large gap between the commitment to creating diversity in HWIs and the lived experiences of BPS and faculty, and that gap strengthens whiteness (Patel, 2015). HWIs have excluded Black faculty from tenured positions and BPS from the support of their institutions when discussing issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020; Husband, 2016; Kayes, 2006; Patton & Catching, 2009; Pittman, 2012; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Moreover, Black faculty are being recruited for the sake of creating diversity but provided no support and are often overburdened with additional work (Kelly et al., 2017). Hiring committees seeking to create a diverse community, but without proper training and are continuing to perpetuate whiteness when selecting diversity faculty candidates (Kayes, 2006; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

CRT in education also looks to how those educational structures and traditions continue to dominate and subordinate those racial positions at higher education institutions (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Black Professional Staff experiences of racism, microaggressions, and racial battle fatigue while working at HWIs creates a hostile work environment (Corbin et al., 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Gorski, 2019; Griffin et al., 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995;
Mena & Vaccaro, 2017; Patton, 2016; Patton & Catching, 2009; Pierce et al., 1977; Pittman, 2012; Quaye et al., 2020; Perez Huber & Solórzano, 2015; Solórzano & Huber, 2020; Sue et al., 2007 Smith, 2008). Patton (2016) states that higher education institutions, specifically HWIs, continue to be dominated by a white terrain that controls all facets of the institution. The pervasiveness of racism existing is documented in the literature (Bell, 1992; Dancy et al., 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Thus, as CRT in education continues to grow, and it seeks to develop independently, recognizing the foundation from whence it started, including expansion into higher education (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005; Patton, 2016). The objective of this inquiry is to understand the experiences of BPS through counter-storytelling amplifying their voices as acts of resistance against systematic racist structures and anti-Black racism at HWIs.

Anti-Blackness Theory

Throughout this study, I will use anti-Blackness theory and anti-Black racism interchangeably. Critical Race Theory provides a framework for studying the structural racism in HWIs, which continues to promote the prevalence of racism in higher education while allowing anti-Blackness to flourish. On an individual level, however, CRT is insufficient to investigate how race and racism affect Black people violently and aggressively. Anti-Blackness theory will help examine how Black folks are devalued and dehumanized (Dumas, 2016; Gordon 1995, 1997) at HWIs. Therefore, drawing on the works of Gordon (1995, 1997) and Dumas (2016), I will employ anti-Blackness theory to examine how anti-Black racism offers a perspective on how institutional racism impacts Black folks on an individual level. Anti-Blackness theory adds another dimension to racism that centers on the marginalization of the Black folks and how their humanity is dismissed. It exposes the violence and contempt that is perpetuated and accepted.
against Black folks as one of the fundamental concepts of anti-Blackness (Dancy et al., 2018; Dumas, 2016; Gilmore et al., 2021), and reveals the treatment of Black folks as disposable, non-human, and devalued.

Anti-Blackness is defined as alluding to a broader adversarial relationship between Blackness and the possibility of humanity, rather than just racism towards Black people (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Anti-Black racism demonstrates how the humanity as Black folks itself is dismissed and exposes the violence and contempt that is perpetuated and accepted against Black folks (Dumas, 2016; Gilmore et al., 2021) to reveal the treatment of Black folks as disposable, non-human, and devalued. Consequently, anti-Blackness theory promotes the idea that the world will be a better place without Black people, and from this vantage point, Black people "must" justify their continued presence (Gordon, 1997). Moreover, the need to justify our humanity and body in white spaces is a central matter to anti-Blackness, which has its roots in Afro-pessimism (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Wilderson et al., 2017).

Conceptually, anti-Blackness was developed from Afro-pessimism, which suggests that Black folks are seen as property, a possession with no right to live, be autonomous, or move and breathe (Dumas & Ross, 2016; Gordon, 1997; Wilderson et al., 2017). Thus, afro-pessimism places Black folks in a structurally adversarial relationship with mankind (Dumas, 2016). Despite the perceived advancement that Black folks overcame after the Civil Rights Act was passed, anti-Blackness theory exposes that whether or not Black folks are enslaved and owned, they are still perceived as property to be exploited, silenced, and violated (Dancy et al., 2018, Harris, 1993). In other words, “Blackness is predicated on …the collection and manageability of property and things” (Dancy et al., 2018, p. 180) as Black folks are seen as a commodity, as
tokens, and disposable. Further substantiating Harris’ (1993) argument that Black folks are seen as property.

The fundamental premise of anti-Blackness theory is that whites are superior to Black folks, implying that whites perceive Black folks differently and with little respect for their bodies (Gordon, 1995). Our very skin becomes the target of individual and institutional oppression by our white counterparts (Gordon, 1995). Dumas (2016) further posits that there is no precise historical moment when slavery was abolished, and Black citizenship and humanity were recognized; nor is there any sign that the technologies of violence, the institutional structures, and social processes that maintain Black subjugation were disrupted. So, did we ever overcome?

In the field of education, while most educational stakeholders may declare their commitment to fairness and diversity or recognize violence against Black people as forms of racism, there is a scarcity of research theorizing about the particulars of (anti)Blackness in education (Dumas, 2016; Gilmore et al., 2021). HWIs have a storied history with slavery and the subjugation of Black folks (Dancy et al., 2018; Wilder, 2013), and although the enslaved built the buildings, cooked the food, and cleaned the dorms, etc., they were treated as property rather than laborers (Dancy et al., 2018). In the colonial state during slavery, colonizers, including college presidents who were slave masters, campaigned for the brutal treatment of Black people from college campus podiums, and violence was a typical occurrence for the enslaved people on college campuses (Dancy et al., 2018). Dumas (2016) adds that the goal of theorizing anti-Blackness is not to provide answers for racial equality but to better understand the Black predicament in the setting of complete contempt for and acceptance of violence against Black people. The lived experience acts as a constant reminder of Black folks’ nonhumanness and the
legitimization of anti-Blackness that has fueled centuries of brutality against Black people (Dumas, 2016).

The gatekeeping that occurs, particularly in professional spaces like in higher education, reinforces the premise that we are not welcomed in these spaces but allowed in these spaces, so long as we remain silent. This seems to support Harris’ (1993) concepts of whiteness as property and Lawrence’s (2015) scholarship of passing and trespassing in higher education, upholding the lie of an inclusive, non-threatening environment. Additionally, Dumas (2016) theorizes that the challenge of engaging in anti-Black racism work is the notion that Blacks folks are seen as equal in this so-called antiracist society and as a beacon of diversity, equity, and inclusion, which only serves as a mechanism to cloak the continued subjugation of Black folks. The practice of subjugation has not changed in higher education, and some Black folks refer to HWI campuses as “the plantation” (Dancy et al., 2018; Squire et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2021). When comparing the organizational and cultural norms of slave plantations with current higher education institutions, a parallel can be drawn (Squire et al., 2018).

**Plantation Politics**

Plantation politics is described as the way higher education has replicated the structure of a plantation society as a system to preserve and promote white supremacy and anti-Black racism in order to oppress people of color (Squire, 2021). During the colonial periods in the United States, slavery was a system used for the purposes of generating economic wealth, power, and prestige (Durant, 1999). To achieve that wealth and power, the slave plantation was established as a social system (Durant, 1999). “The slave plantation was more than a way of life, a form of culture, or a unit of economic production” (Durant, 1999, p. 3), it was a social system. Slave plantations were built for economic, cultural, and political reasons of multiple waves of colonial
rulers, whose goal was to maintain colonial dominance at the cost of Black bodies (Squire, 2021). The creation of this system has formed clear patterns of social inequity and race relations (Durant, 1999) which continue today in higher education.

As a social system, the plantation “is an orderly and systematic social unit composed of identifiable and interdependent parts [social structure] and social processes” (Durant, 1999, p. 5). This social system has contributed to our current racial relations in this country which include white upper class, white supremacy, segregation, and the racialized institutional norms existing currently in higher education (Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Squire et al., 2018; Squire, 2021). Ivy league institutions were built on the backs of Black slave and were complicit in the enslavement of Black folks (Wilder, 2013). This racial subordination of Black folks has been indoctrinated into the fabric of higher education and its systems.

Discrimination and prejudice formed distinct patterns of racial and social inequities on the plantation (Durant, 1999). The organizational structure of this social system created a social hierarchy of class based on status and color for the purposes of achieving economic and social goals. According to Durant (1999) the plantation social system had the following characteristics: (a) the enslaved Black Africans were seen as fixed capital by slave owners and were under their physical and social control (Anderson & Gallman, 1977); (b) slave owners gained power, wealth, profit, and prominence through forced labor; (c) the enslaved Black folks were treated as chattel property; (d) the racialization of a caste system of Black folks that prevented upward mobility; (e) labor distribution of whites at the top and Blacks at the bottom; (f) strict governance systems based on control technologies; (g) establishment of enslaved person and non-slave subsystems created by new social institutions such as the family, economics, education, politics, and faith; (h) a social system that adapts to changes from inside and outside forces. Consequently, Durant
argues that this system draws a parallel to view universities and that this organizational structure has been replicated in present day HWIs. Furthermore, Durant (1999) and Squire use nine structural and six processual elements to illustrate the parallels between the slave plantation and HWIs and how they may show up in today’s campuses (Durant, 1999). The nine structural elements of organization for a slave plantation are:

(a) knowledge; (b) sentiment; (c) goals; (d) norms; (e) status; (f) rank; (g) power; (h) sanctions; (i) facility” (Durant, 1999, pp. 5-6). The six processual elements are (a) “communication; (b) boundary maintenance; (c) systematic linkage; (d) socialization; (e) social control; (f) institutionalization. (Durant, 1999, p. 6).

In this study, I focus on the following structural and processual elements which I describe below to demonstrate the parallels between plantation social systems and HWIs: knowledge; norms; status; power; and sanctions as structural elements and communication; boundary maintenance; socialization; institutionalization as processual elements.

**Structural Elements of Plantation Social Systems**

Higher education, specifically HWIs, functions as a plantation in exploiting Black folks and operates under the notion of anti-Blackness that whites are superior to Blacks (Gordon, 1995). The structural elements show how the planation system operates. The first element of knowledge created the understanding for the enslaved that they were dominated and subjugated by a caste system in which Black folks were seen as property (Durant, 1999; Squire, 2021). The caste system created and perpetuated by whites did this by upholding the continued dehumanization of the enslaved (Squire, 2021). However, the whites trusted the enslaved enough care for and nurture the plantation owners’ family, children, and home, thus, creating a paradoxical relationship in which whites used the enslaved for their benefit (Squire, 2021). HWIs
perpetuate this contradictory relationship by using Black bodies as commodities for economic and institutional gain (Bell, 1995, 2004; Harris, 1993; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Kelly et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Patel, 2005; Wilder, 2013).

The third and fourth elements explain how established norms and rules governed behavior and status or position on the plantation (Squire, 2021). In creating a system of control, a hierarchy was structured with the slave massa at the helm to maintain order and the submission of the enslaved (Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Squire, 2021). In higher education, Black faculty and BPS are controlled by systems such as tenure or failure to grant tenure or merit pay (Squire, 2021), isolation (Mena & Vaccaro, 2017), policing of Black folks’ hair or attire compared to white professional standards to reinforce this hierarchy of control and punishment (Mena & Vaccaro, 2017). Consequently, faculty researching subjects of race, racism, diversity, or inclusion are often challenged for their research and fear of retribution via legislative actions such as the current banning of CRT at colleges and universities (Anderson & Svrluga, 2022; Griffin et al., 2014; Pittman, 2012; Squire et al., 2018, 2019). Squire (2021) describes the board of trustees as enslavers, managers as presidents or executive administrators, provosts as overseers, drivers as diversity officers, and faculty and staff of color as house slaves, and students as field slaves. The element of control and power of others is the fifth element (Squire, 2021). A structured system like this creates a hierarchy of control with levels of movement and restrictions and the power to control those well-behaved Black folks if they remain in their place (Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Squire, 2021). The sixth element of sanctions addresses the ramifications or rewards for the enslaved (Squire, 2021). Those house slaves, the faculty and staff of color, who are well-behaved and assimilated to white standards maintain a certain level of freedom from persecution (Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Squire, 2021).
**Processual Elements**

Processual elements examine how the enslaved were disciplined, the decision-making process in the plantation, modes of communication between the enslaved and the slave massas, and system maintenance, and how they are linked to modern institutions (Squire et al., 2018; Squire, 2021). The first processual element addressed how communication was an obvious barrier when Africans were taken from their native land and enslaved (Squire, 2021). Understanding that the enslaved were robbed of their identity and language, English was adopted as the dominant language and associated with whiteness (Squire, 2021). Consequently, English has become a tool of oppression that is often used to police Black folks in professional spaces (Squire, 2021). In order to preserve and maintain property rights and labor, the processual elements of socialization, control, and institutionalization created boundaries of control for the slave owners to preserve those property rights (Squire, 2021). HWIs increasingly create a rank-and-file system that operates as a network that prevents the progression of Black folks into administrative positions that are often exploitive with no power or decision-making abilities (Durant, 1999; Squire et al., 2018; Squire, 2021). Further, strategically relegating appointments to diversity committees as commodification or visual representations are enough to show diversity without creating diversity or making structural changes (Bell, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic; 2012; Harris, 1993; Griffin et al., 2014; Kelly et al., 2017; Patton & Catching, 2009; Squire, 2021). Moreover, institutions with diversity officers or programs are performative in nature with very little structural change, resulting in institutional gaslighting of eliminating systemic barriers that address racism within HWIs (McKinley Jones Brayboy, 2003; Squire, 2021).
The overview of the slave plantation and the modern university provides a parallel to strengthen the argument that HWIs and their institutional structures are mechanisms of anti-Blackness (Caldera, 2020; Dumas, 2016; Dumas & ross, 2016; Durant, 1999; Durant & Kottnerus, 1999; Gilmore et al., 2021; Gordon, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker, 2019; Squire, 2021; Squire et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2021). HWIs advertise themselves as welcoming environments that embrace diversity and inclusion for recruitment and financial purposes but continue to subjugate Black folks, using their Black bodies as commodities and creating a violent, hostile environment (Bell, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic; 2012; Dancy et al., 2018; Durant, 1999; Durant & Kottnerus, 1999; Harris, 1993; Kayes, 2006; McKinley Jones Brayboy, 2003; Patel, 2005; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Squire et al., 2018; Squire, 2021; Squire et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2021). The similarities between the plantations and the modern institutions allow for the examination of institutional leaders and the power dynamics that continue to marginalize Black folks and create inequities (Squire, 2021). Plantation politics shows how HWIs continue to function as plantation social systems that continue to exploit Black labor for economic gain (Squire, 2021; Williams et al., 2021). The role of plantation politics in the experience of BPS in higher education remains primarily unexamined, and few studies have accounted for how microaggressions and racial battle fatigue perpetuate anti-Blackness and, particularly during the BLM movement (Husband, 2016; DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020).

**History of Higher Education**

From the establishment of higher education institutions in the United States, beginning with Harvard College as the first established college (Thelin, 2019), decades of changes have transformed higher education into the modern institution we see today. However, we must
acknowledge the historical past of these institutions of higher learning and their connections to slavery. Wilder’s (2013) book *Ebony & Ivy* provides a comprehensive history of our nation’s formation of post-secondary institutions of higher learning. The emergence of higher education in the Americas was predicated on the enactment of human slavery (Wilder, 2013). European countries used colleges to assist, protect, and regulate their colonial domains and funded these efforts with African enslavement and the slave trade (Wilder, 2013). Economically, slave traders and owners were transformed into trustees and founders of colleges in British colonies, which rapidly expanded higher education at the height of the slave trade (Wilder, 2013). Revenue generated from planters and slave traders saw the transformation of colleges into elite playgrounds for wealthy colonial boys (Wilder, 2013). Colleges profited from enslaved labor, resulting in higher education's exclusivity of Ivy League institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth (Wilder, 2013).

Founders used the enslaved as servants and to build and maintain their campuses which aided in generating the wealth needed to recruit prestigious scholars (Wilder, 2013). As a system and institution, colleges and universities have continued to generate wealth though the exploitation and continued oppression of Black folks in this country (Dancy et al., 2018; Wilder, 2013). Consequently, American colleges and universities, not exclusive to elite institutions, continue to reap the benefits of their participation in slavery and the exploitation of Black folks. Wilder (2013) provides a thorough historical picture of how deeply ingrained colleges viewed the enslaved as subhuman and used their bodies as a commodity for labor and domination.

The racial subordination of Black folks was indoctrinated into the fabric of higher education and its systems. At the writing of this dissertation, Harvard released a statement earmarking $100 million towards several initiatives as an attempt to acknowledge its ties to
slavery and provide avenues for restorative justice (Mangan, 2022). Wilder (2013) states the American College educated employees supported philosophies that legitimized the enslavement of Africans and the dispossession of Native Americans. Moreover, as colleges moved away from the church, academic research focused on race's political and social construction, creating a hierarchy based on white supremacy (Wilder, 2013). This legitimized the image of the Black body as inferior and unworthy of being regarded as human beings. Using scholarly study bolstered the rationale for enslaved people's subordination and advanced the social construction of race, which is seen today as a racial caste system (Delgado, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; 2017; Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Minda, 1995; Parker, 2019). The racial caste system and subordination of Black folks continues in higher education with its continued oppression of Black folks.

**Blacks in Higher Education**

Historically, higher education in this country has a checkered past as inclusive opportunities for Black folks have not been welcomed. The fight for equality for education for Black folks began with *Plessy v Ferguson*, separate but equal. It continued with the Supreme Court decision of *Brown v Board of Education* to desegregate schools, which extended to HWIs. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 ordered that Black students could be admitted to HWIs or funding from the Department of Education would be withheld if they were found to not be in compliance with equal opportunity mandates. The Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) provided access to financial aid and other financial assistance for Black students, which along with other affirmative action-based initiatives contributed to Black students’ access to those HWIs (Williamson, 1999). When African-Americans were allowed to integrate into HWIs, the experience was not welcoming and was mired by violence and alienation (Claybrook, 2013; Goudsouzian &
McKinney, 2018; Hailu & Sarubbi, 2019; Williamson, 1999). However, following the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Black student enrollment increased, creating the need for Black faculty and support staff to increase at HWIs (Kinchen, 2014; Rai & Criszer, 2003; Weems, 2003).

According to the most recent data from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources, Black and African American employees account for less than 10% of higher education professional staff (Whitford, 2020). This data includes college employees in athletics, information technology, academic affairs, facilities, and other areas (Whitford, 2020). The data also shows that more than three-quarters of higher education professionals are white (Whitford, 2020). Additionally, a report from the National Center for Education Statistics in Fall 2018 shows Black male and female full-time faculty make up only 3 percent each at degree-seeking postsecondary institutions (COE - Characteristics of Postsecondary Faculty, 2020). Concerning student enrollment, a 2017 report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reveals that 14 percent of students are Black, which is more than double the number of Black faculty members and even higher than the percentage of Black professional employees (Whitford, 2020). This means that Black students outnumber Black faculty members by more than 50% and a larger percentage when compared to BPS. Consequently, Black folks, specifically BPS, find themselves isolated and outnumbered at HWIs when engaging in professional spaces.

**Microaggressions and Racial Battle Fatigue**

BPS are often confronted with microaggressions and are forced to deal with the option of addressing the perpetrator and the subsequent backlash or deal with it and suffer in silence. Microaggressions are known as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges
which are “put downs” against Black folks (Pierce et al., 1977, p. 65). Perez Huber and Solórzano (2015) explain microaggressions as layered, cumulative forms of racism that are often subtle and unconscious and target people of color. Microaggressions have multiple layers that can take many forms to dismiss and diminish people of color (Sue et al., 2007). There are three forms of microaggressions identified: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation (Sue et al., 2007). Sue et al. (2007) describe microassaults as purposeful and explicit racial derogation actions towards a person of color, while microinsults are communications that demean a person’s identity or racial heritage. Microinvalidations nullify a person of color’s feelings or experiences as valid when challenged (Sue et al., 2007). Finally, visual microaggressions use visual aids through media, books, film, television, or advertisements that diminish people of color (Perez Huber & Solórzano, 2015; Solórzano & Huber, 2020). Racial microaggressions have severe consequences for both the perpetrator and the target person, resulting in psychological drama that, if not addressed, can lead to increasing racial anger, mistrust, and low self-esteem (Sue et al., 2007).

Microaggressions against Black folks can manifest in many ways in higher education by white administrators, faculty, and students that draw its power from the invisibility of the perpetrator (DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020; Sue et al., 2007). So, the patterns of gestures, tones, or dismissive looks are often so pervasive and occur in daily interactions that they are overlooked and glossed over as innocent (Sue et al., 2007). For example, white peers and faculty frequently fail to acknowledge Black folks’ expertise in the topic and attempt to minimize their experiences and contributions to the department (Griffin et al., 2014; Pittman, 2012; Smith et al., 2011). Such behaviors that Black folks and people of color (POC) face frequently result in their isolation and such disregard renders them invisible when
their presence or contributions are not acknowledged by their white colleagues (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020; Griffin et al., 2014; Mena & Vaccaro, 2017; Patton & Catching, 2009). Additionally, Black folks and POC are often overburdened with extra work such as committee work, program coordinatorship, and appointments to diversity related committees with little to no recognition (Griffin et al., 2014; Patton & Catching, 2009). Moreover, white students commit microinsults by consistently challenging Black faculty while they are teaching and complaining to higher-ups to express dissatisfaction with graded assignments (Patton & Catching, 2009; Pittman, 2012).

Microaggressions can be manifested and committed by white women in higher education who have been characterized as Miss Anne and more recently Becky who have caused a lot of damage to Black women in particular (Matias, 2019; Williams, 2020). They target Black folks in general, but their hatred is focused on Black women (Hamad, 2020; hooks, 1994; 2012; Matias, 2019; Williams, 2020). Patton and Catching (2009) highlight the Black literary character Miss Anne character, historically the plantation’s mistress and overseer of the enslaved, that is deceptive and hates Black women but appears to be well-meaning and untouchable (Thomas, 1973). Smith and Nkomo (2003) describe dangers of the corporate world for Black women by using the Miss Anne character who appears to be innocent and welcoming of Black folks and will listen to claims of microaggressions against them but quickly discounts those claims by dismissing Black folks’ experiences, often placing blame on Black folks for misinterpreting the incident. Smith and Nkomo (2003) go on to state that white women serve as gatekeepers, using their power and influence and crying when confronted about their behavior. Jackson (2020) uses the word violence to describe white women's complicity in the brutalization and dehumanization of Black people. Historically, the words and behaviors of white women have been dangerous, resulting in physical, psychological, and emotional harm against Black folks.
The Miss Anne character has morphed into a character named Becky recently. Becky holds the exact characteristics of being oppressive against Black women however, Jackson provides three types of Beckys to illustrate how white women are manifested through anti-Blackness (Jackson, 2020). The first Becky is much like the Miss Anne character that is vile and is vocal in her disdain of Black folks and upholds white supremacy and patriarchy by supporting the actions of white men (Smith & Nkomo, 2003; Jackson, 2020; Patton & Catching, 2009; Thomas, 1973). The second Becky is the mediocre, progressive, self-appointed ally who claims to be liberal and has Black friends but is oblivious of their privilege or subtle racism (Jackson, 2017, 2020; Matias, 2019). This Becky claims to be an expert on racism but perpetuates microaggressions, microinsults, and tone police and feels attacked when confronted (Jackson, 2017, 2020; Matias, 2019). This Becky weaponizes her tears when challenged, creating potentially dangerous situations for Black folks (Phipps, 2021). The third Becky wants to be Black and appropriates Black culture (Jackson, 2017, 2020). Jackson (2020) uses Rachel Dolezal as an example of a Becky who identifies as transracial, speaking African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and perpetuates Blackness. Matias (2019) describes these Beckys as dangerous, engaging in gaslighting and manipulation to build themselves up while destroying Black women in the process.

Microaggressions that are committed by whites place Black folks in a position of responsibility of either ignoring or responding to the offense (Solórzano & Huber, 2020). Calling out microaggressions are often met with resistance and passive-aggressive behavior and responses from the perpetrators place the blame on Black folks as being too sensitive or uptight (Solórzano & Huber, 2020). These behaviors are dismissive to Black folks and the effects of the microaggressions only serve to reinforce the permanence of racism and ideologies of white
supremacy (Solórzano & Huber, 2020). Consequently, Black folks and POC are left to process emotions and internalize microaggressions that affect the mind, body, and spirit, eventually leading to racial battle fatigue. Racial battle fatigue is the manifestation of constant microaggressions that Black folks internalize along with the constant battle of coping and fighting against racism (Smith, 2008).

In their respective positions, Black Professional Staff are often weary of the constant battle against racism and marginalization of their Blackness. Racial battle fatigue (RBF) examines the psychological, physiological, and behavioral strain of the energy fighting and coping with racism (Smith, 2008). Smith (2008) describes that the stress of RBF is linked to repeated racial microaggressions draining one’s confidence, family and personal coping mechanisms, and suppressing one’s immune system. Another important note is Smith’s (2008) observation that psychologically, RBF ranges from frustration to fear, causing the body to respond to a fight or flight when responding to racial insults. RBF manifests in feelings of exhaustion from the constant barrage of microaggressions, feelings of rage, fighting battles and suppressing our voice when confronted with racism and racist acts for fear of retaliation, white tears, and being social justice warriors and activists (Gorski, 2019; Quaye et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2016). RBF has been known to have detrimental health outcomes due to the stress caused by racism and microaggressions. The pervasive violence of racism and microaggressions in HWIs manifests in multiple ways for Black folks of being rendered invisible, an intruder, working twice as hard to get respect, and silencing our voices (Cowley, 2022; Griffin et al., 2014; Kuykendoll, 2023; Mena & Vocarro, 2017; Patton & Catching, 2009).

Much of the RBF literature focuses on Black and POC faculty and administrators (Gorski, 2019; Griffin et al., 2014; Mean & Vaccaro, 2017; Patton & Catching, 2009; Pittman,
2012; Quaye et al., 2020). There is literature on the experiences and effects of racial battle fatigue on Student affairs professionals (Husband, 2016; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020); however, student affairs professionals only make up a small section of professional staff in higher education. To date, very little research directly investigates the effects of Beckys, microaggressions, and RBF on BPS at HWIs (Jackson, 2017, 2020; Matias, 2019; Phipps, 2021). BPS are in direct contact with faculty, administration, and students daily and are subject to persistent microaggressions resulting in racial battle fatigue. Black Professional are tired. Being Black is exhausting, and every day is a fight to be seen, heard, respected, and remain alive.

**Black Professional Staff (BPS)**

BPS are an important part of the university community that support the mission of the institution. Desrochers & Kirshstein (2014) reported that professional staff are considered the largest noninstructional employees of colleges and universities. Professional positions now account for 20 to 25 percent of campus positions with an average increase of 2.5 percent to 5 percent between 2000-2012 in these positions (Desrochers & Kirshstein, 2014). According to Rytberg (2020), professional staff is used to describe individuals in support roles who are highly qualified for their positions and have an academic degree. They do not necessarily identify as administrators, nor are they employed as academics, but are situated somewhere in between (Rytberg, 2020). They may be viewed as actors in a third space, a concept used when exploring groups of staff at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) who do not fit the conventional binary descriptors of ‘academics’ or ‘non-academics’ (Rytberg, 2020, p. 2). Professional staff provide support to students, administrators, staff, and various stakeholders in the community. Yet, as much as professional staff are an integral part of the institution, they are often overlooked. BPS,
particularly, are a smaller percentage of that population of professional staff accounting for less than 10% of higher education professionals (Whitford, 2020).

BPS face institutional difficulties in representation (Frye & Fulton, 2020) even though there has been an increase in managerial and professional positions in higher education (Frye & Fulton, 2020). In additional to representation, BPS are not paid the same salaries as their white counterparts at HWIs (Frye & Fulton, 2020). Subsequently, BPS are underpaid and undervalued with very few opportunities for professional growth or salary negotiations (Wright & Stewart, 2006). Consequently, retention of staff of color is an issue as Turrentine and Conley (2001) point out the difficulty of retaining staff of color in student affairs at HWIs and provide recommendations for increasing candidate diversity in the hiring process and enrollment in Student Affairs programs. However, increasing diversity in the hiring process and increasing new professionals entering higher education is futile if HWIs continue to create oppressive and hostile environments for BPS.

BPS are subjected to microaggressions (Cowley, 2022; Gorski, 2019; Kuykendoll, 2023; Quaye et al., 2020; Sarcedo, 2021; and anti-Black racism (Erb, 2019; Husband, 2016) at HWIs and often suffer in silence. BPS feel unheard when discussing racist behavior committed by their white counterparts or those in positions of power. Additionally, BPS do not have the benefit of shared governance or the freedom to critique their institution without fear of consequences. Dumas (2016) describes these environments in education as “inherently anti-Black spaces” (p. 9). The emotional labor of supporting other staff, faculty, and students against racism can leave BPS with RBF (Smith, 2008), but can also lead to resistance when silenced and ignored. Thus, BPS should not be ignored, and their voices and experiences are an integral part of the higher education community.
It is important to note there is scant the literature discussing professional staff, specifically BPS, and its nuanced definitions and categories of what is considered professional staff is missing from the literature (Desrochers & Kirshstein, 2014; Frye & Fulton, 2020). The literature seems to show and support that HWIs are unwelcoming spaces where Blacks folks are treated as interlopers in white spaces and only tolerated (Bell et al., 2020; Erb, 2019; Husband, 2016). As Du Bois (1903) says in the Souls of Black Folks, “how does it feel to be a problem?” (p. 12). The scholarship positions Black bodies as a thing, and not as people dehumanized by anti-Black racism (Dumas, 2016; Gordon, 1997).

Much of the literature on BPS focuses on Black student affairs professionals or academic advisors and their professional experiences of supporting students dealing with racism (Erb, 2019; Gorski, 2019; Husband, 2016; Quaye et al., 2020; Sarcedo, 2021). For example, academic advisors are often tasked with supporting and helping students navigate racism while being subjected to racist acts (Erb, 2019; Sarcedo, 2021). But there is a silence in the literature about BPS’ lived experiences with anti-Black racism in hostile higher education environment. Moreover, Black student affairs professionals and academic advisors only make up a small section of positions among higher education professional staff (Erb, 2019; Gorski, 2019; Husband, 2016; Quaye et al., 2020; Sarcedo, 2021) so the majority of BPS is silenced. The lived experiences of BPS in other divisions are missing. This absence of BPS from the literature (Leathwood et al., 2009; Turner & Grauerholz, 2017) renders their Black bodies and experiences invisible. Therefore, more research on the racialized experiences of BPS, is needed to understand how anti-Blackness, plantation politics, and institutional racism affect the lives of BPS in the academy.

**Black Lives Matter Movement and Resistance**
As a way of addressing the gap in the prior section, I will provide an overview of the history of the Black Lives Matter movement, the Black Lives Matter movement as a site of resistance, and the importance of examining BPS during BLM in higher education, specifically HWIs. The Black Lives Matter movement (BLM), in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s murder by George Zimmerman, was founded in 2013. The founders of this movement are three Black women, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, who wanted to create a politically centered movement using the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter (Blacklivesmatter, 2022). The continued murders of Tamir Rice, Tanisha Anderson, Mya Hall, Walter Scott, Sandra Bland, and many other Black men and women due to state-sanctioned violence saw an increase in organizing through the BLM movement that resulted in organizing BLM chapters throughout the United States and boots on the ground with protests and tools for community organizing, including on college campuses (Blacklivesmatter, 2022). According to Hailu and Sarubbi (2019), the Black Lives Matter movement can expose "institutional policies [that] perpetuate racial inequity," and the movement has "the capacity to complicate existing discourse about Blackness in higher education and catalyze substantial social change" (p. 1109). Thomas (2019) asserts that BLM provides a Black liberation platform that decentralizes leadership, calls for radical intersectionality, and documents resistance.

As the BLM movement began to spread following the murder of George Floyd, higher education institutions came under scrutiny for their lack of diversity of faculty and administrators (Pasquerella, 2020). Activists were pushing for administration to acknowledge and address their role in being complicit in upholding structural racism (Pasquerella, 2020). In response, higher education institutions released statements in support of Black lives and condemning racism, and their commitment to diversity and inclusion (Pasquerella, 2020). One must question if the
commitment is real when so much of what we see in this country does not reflect this (Williams et al., 2021). Can Black folks like BPS really speak openly about the dehumanizing and oppressive environment of higher education (Williams et al., 2021)? How does an institution begin to value the labor of Black folks when plantation politics prevents it working towards equity (Williams et al., 2021)?

Resistance, during the BLM, has taken different avenues in the context of higher education. Moreover, the BLM movement has provided avenues for Black folks, particularly BPS at HWIs, to engage in forms of resistance. Vinthagen & Johansson (2013) describes everyday resistance as how people behave in their daily lives in ways that challenge power but are often hidden or veiled, individual, and not politically expressed, unlike public and communal opposition, such as rebellions or demonstrations. Stewart (2019) defines resistance as engaging social media to resist using Twitter and other social media platforms, including the use of #hashtags. Resistance can come in many forms, such as self-care, social media apps and engaging in postings and groups, and engaging in social and professional counterspaces (Breeden, 2021; Stewart, 2019). Black folks in higher education have found a variety of ways to engage in resistance. Faculty engage in resistance by including social justice curriculum and centering Black folks, Black authors, and social justice in their courses (Haynes & Bazner, 2019; Haynes et al., 2019). For student affairs professionals, the BLM movement has been a catalyst to speak out about the psychological effects of racial violence, microaggressions, and RBF (Husband, 2016).

Black faculty, staff, and students globally have engaged in activism for Black lives (Williams et al., 2021). Using digital narrative form and #hashtag activism, BLM offers an avenue to vent frustrations or show solidarity in fighting for equality (Haynes & Bazner, 2019;
Haynes et al., 2019; Yang, 2016). Black Twitter has been used in higher education as an avenue for digital resistance and activism with hashtags that draw attention to acts of violence against Black folks and put pressure on our systems to act and deliver justice (Hill, 2018; Kuykendoll, 2023; Thomas, 2019). Examples of these hashtags are #BlackatUofA, #BlackintheIvory, #StayMadAbby, #HandsUpDontShoot, #BlackOnCampus, #SayHerName, and #ICantBreathe are used to vent frustration of the anti-Black racists acts and engage in digital resistance through storytelling (Dumas, 2016). These hashtags on social media apps and other platforms call out institutions to acknowledge the visible accounts of racism and demand more than just institutional statements (Pasquerella, 2020).

The BLM movement offers an avenue to hold higher education, specifically, HWIs accountable for its treatment of Black folks in these spaces (Williams et al., 2021). Engaging in resistance is an important aspect to fight for injustices and dehumanization of Black bodies at HWIs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Dumas, 2016; Dumas & ross, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Much of the research around resistance in higher education during BLM centers on Black women Student Affairs leadership and Black women students. So, more research should be conducted with BPS to provide insight into their definition of resistance and how they participate or not in resistance. When institutions do not acknowledge the humanity of BPS and the physical and mental damage anti-Black racism creates, their existence and voices are silenced and rendered invisible. When this happens, resistance could be the consequence or response to being silenced.

**Conclusion**

Black Professional Staff experience racism, microaggressions, and racial battle fatigue while working at HWIs. Often, BPS are often overlooked as an integral part of the fabric of
higher educational institutions. BPS sit at a unique position as support staff, providing support to faculty, students, and administrators, but research of their experiences is lacking in the literature. This study seeks to acknowledge the voices of BPS and their experiences battling racism in a white space. The pervasiveness of racism at HWIs existing is documented in the literature (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Dancy et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), however, the experiences of BPS during the BLM movement when Black men and women were murdered through state-sanctioned violence while supporting faculty, staff, and students is scant in the literature (Erb, 2019; Husband, 2016). Further plantation politics impedes HWIs from addressing systemic structures that continue to perpetuate anti-Black racism (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Durant, 1999, Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Squire, 2021; Squire et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2021). The voices and humanity of BPS should not be silenced or rendered invisible but needs to be investigated to understand their lived experiences of racism during the BLM movement.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this research study was to amplify the voices of Black Professional Staff (BPS) while acknowledging their experiences and resilience in navigating racism at a Historically White Institution (HWI) during the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). In this chapter, I provide an overview of the research design, providing a connection of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education, anti-Blackness theory, and plantation politics as a theoretical framework and CRT methodology. Then, I provide a description of my data collection, research site, participants, interviews, and journaling. Next, I discuss my data analysis method, addressing trustworthiness and ethical considerations for a quality study, and my positionality. Lastly, I will discuss the researcher’s emotions, creating counterstories, presenting the data as speculative fiction stories, and a chapter summary.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

Black Professional Staff (BPS) support faculty, students, and administrators, but research on their experiences is lacking in the literature. This study acknowledged the voices of BPS and their experiences battling racism in a white space. The pervasiveness of racism is documented in the literature (Bell, 1992; Dancy et al., 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995); however, the experiences of BPS during the BLM movement when Black men and women were murdered through state-sanctioned violence while supporting faculty, staff, and students was not documented in the literature.

Using CRT in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998) and anti-Black racism (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & ross, 2016; Gordon, 1995; 1997), the purpose of this study was to describe a) how BPS experienced and navigated racism at HWIs following the murder of Trayvon Martin and the founding of the BLM movement to present, b) how anti-Black
racism and plantation politics allows for the violent nature of dehumanizing and discriminatory practices to continue at HWIs, and c) what acts of resistance BPS engaged in or are actively engaging in during those times. In this study, I adapted Solórzano & Yosso’s (2002) model of Critical Race Theory as a methodology that centered race and racism throughout the research study. More importantly, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) used critical race methodology to acknowledge those who are marginalized to “become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed, and learning to make the arguments to defend themselves” (p. 27). I aimed to understand how the participants experienced racism in predominately white spaces. Additionally, I wanted to understand how the participants defined resistance and how they engaged in acts of resistance. So, in this study, I amplified their voices as acts of resistance against systematic racist structures and anti-Blackness at HWIs through speculative fiction counter-stories.

The following questions guided this study:

1. How do Black Professional Staff experience and navigate racism at a Historically White Institution (HWI) in the Mid-South during the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM)?
   a. What are the dehumanizing and discriminatory acts experienced by BPS at HWIs?

2. What are Black Professional Staff’s acts of resistance at HWIs?

**Theoretical Framework**

I employed Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education for this research study, complemented by anti-Blackness theory and plantation politics as my theoretical framework. CRT in education, drawing on Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998), exposed educational inequities using the key characteristics of a) race and racism is permanent; b)
challenging the dominant ideology of colorblindness, meritocracy, neutrality, and objectivity; and c) whiteness as property in higher education, which are discussed below. CRT was complemented by anti-Blackness theory to examine the disgust and disregard of Black humanity and the ways Black folks are dehumanized and degraded in white spaces (Caldera, 2020; Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Gordon, 1995). Plantation politics examined how the structure and organization of the slave plantation are replicated at HWIs (Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Squire et al., 2018; Squire, 2021; Williams et al., 2021). CRT in education, anti-Blackness theory, and plantation politics together helped to highlight the experiences of BPS at HWIs and elicited their accounts of challenges during the BLM movement in the U.S.

In this study, I focused on the tenets of race and racism as a key component of inequity in our educational system, a challenge to the dominant ideology of colorblindness, meritocracy, neutrality, and objectivity; whiteness as property (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Race and racism are a permanent and key component of inequities in our institutional structures that work to establish white dominance and maintain those inequitable structures in our educational system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Hiraldo (2010) argued that when ignored, systemic racism perpetuates the marginalization of people of color, thereby making diversity, equity, and inclusion actions unsuccessful in higher education.

Challenging the dominant ideology of colorblindness, meritocracy, neutrality, and objectivity in education was amplified by sharing the stories and experiences of racism of BPS (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). From a critical examination of colorblindness, it is clear that it is appealing to white Americans because it absolves them of the country’s ultimate sin: racism with regard to white supremacy (Donnor & Ladson-Billings, 2017). By focusing on the voices of BPS in this study to uncover the discriminatory and
institutional practices that exist at a HWI, the argument that we live in a post-racial society is refuted. Affirmative action and other diversity, equity, and inclusion policies give the appearance of creating a diverse and equitable outcome, but the reality is these measures have only served the interest of the dominant white society (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The interests of whites have moved from tangible property rights, of owning enslaved Africans, to intangible property rights of white privilege, with its ensuing rights upheld by white supremacist structures that continue to perpetuate inequity and deny access to Black folks (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Whiteness as property in this study provided an avenue to investigate the persistent inequities in the educational system, which extends to higher education (Harris, 1993; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Patel, 2015; Patton, 2016). In the context of this study, centering the experiences of BPS exposed the hierarchies that exist at the HWI to exacerbate the pervasive nature of oppression at their HWI.

As a theoretical framework and methodology, CRT in education worked to place race and racism at the forefront and throughout the study by focusing on the voices of BPS. The counter-stories of the BPS challenged racist structures that oppress and marginalize Black folks at HWIs. Examining racism against BPS with anti-Blackness theory and plantation politics specifically added an additional lens that highlighted the explicit and vile treatment of Black folks (Caldera, 2020; Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016).

**Critical Race Methodology**

I used Critical Race Theory in education as my research methodology, also known as critical race methodology. A critical race methodology “aims to offer emancipatory and liberatory solutions to racial subordination through interdisciplinary means” (Squire, 2017, p. 733) for those who sit at the margins due to lack of representation and the pervasiveness of
racism experienced in the U.S. and higher education institutions. It is an analytical tool to disrupt “existing power structures and promote social change in higher education” (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 34) and provides a means to deconstruct oppressive structures, reconstruct individual power, and construct social justice and equality (Squire, 2017).

Parker (2019) defined critical race methodology as “an approach that foregrounds race and racism in all parts of the research process, from the conception of the problem to the research questions, how the study proceeds, data collection/analysis, and conclusion” (p. 6). Critical race methodology in education has five tenets that inform basic insights, perspectives, methodology, and pedagogy (Parker, 1998; 2019; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The five characteristics as described by Solórzano and Yosso (2002) are:

1. Race and racism are permanent and central to the research process.
2. Challenge to the dominant ideology.
3. Commitment to social justice.
4. Importance of experiential knowledge/counter-storytelling.
5. Use of the transdisciplinary perspective.

The first characteristic centers race and racism at the forefront of society and all phases of the research process (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002). In this study, the lived experiences of BPS at an HWI will be foregrounded and studied to challenge and dismantle the deeply rooted oppressive structures and racism that permeate our educational system. The second tenet of challenging the dominant ideology refutes the claims that higher education institutions are colorblind, offer/provide equal opportunity, or are race-neutral (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002). Central to this tenet is that institutions camouflagae these acts of race neutrality to serve their best interests (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002). Centering the experiences of the BPS
challenges the dominant narrative of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The third tenet is the commitment to social justice, which seeks to eliminate all forms of racism and offers liberatory empowerment to marginalized communities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The fourth tenet of experiential knowledge is central to understanding the pervasiveness of race and racism (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Sharing the stories of BPS at HWIs offered participants an opportunity to share their experiences and ways in which they resisted against the oppressive environment in the workplace. The objective of CRT methodology in education is to empower those who are oppressed with the ability to resist through truth-telling. Their stories matter, and their experiences are valid and acknowledged. The fifth and final tenet recognizes the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to examining the effects of race and racism on marginalized communities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

In this study, I focused on these two characteristics: The importance of experiential knowledge/counter-storytelling and challenging the dominant ideology. These tenets were a methodological fit for this research study and informed all aspects of the research process, from identifying the participants to data collection and data analysis. I used semi-structured interviews to collect participant stories as counter-narratives to highlight their legitimate experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to analyze the data.

Amplifying the voices of marginalized communities challenging the dominant ideology through counter-storytelling is the best methodological fit for this study (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002). Delgado (1989) describes counter-storytelling as a method of telling stories of those who sit at the margins, and it also served as a tool to analyze and challenge the stories of those in positions of power, the dominant stories that are often told, which Delgado (1993) describes as the majoritarian story. Counterstories are narratives that challenge majoritarian stories, but they
also allow for a shared cultural understanding of the discussion of race (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Counterstories address four methodological, theoretical, and pedagogical functions of building community of those in the margins by: (1) giving educational theory and practice a familiar and human face, (2) providing an environment to analyze and change established belief systems so we might question the supposed wisdom of those at the center of society; (3) introducing new windows into the realities of those on the margins by demonstrating possibilities beyond the ones they now have and proving they are not alone in their situation; and (4) teaching people that by mixing elements from both the story and present reality, one may create a work that is richer than either fiction or reality alone (Delgado, 1989).

The tenet of counter-storytelling was a key component in this study that shared BPS’ lived experiences that are not often shared, are legitimate, and critical to understanding racial subordination (Hylton, 2012; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002). Additionally, counter-storytelling in the higher education context provided an opportunity for staff of color to tell their stories of racism experienced in the workplace (Hiraldo, 2010). This supports the efforts to look to the bottom, meaning those who experience racism, because the experiences and voices of Black people are important and should be heard (Bell, 1992; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005; Matsuda, 1995; Harris, 2001). The experiential knowledge of BPS in this study will hopefully encourage those in marginalized communities to speak of their experiences about instances of racism within education (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). Additionally, I used speculative fiction to represent their counterstories which provided an avenue to use sci-fi or fantasy to uplift the voices of the marginalized (Toliver, 2020; 2021).

The next characteristic is the challenge to the dominant ideology. The voices of BPS matter and tell stories of racism, microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, and discrimination
within HWIs that centered race and racism to challenge the dominant narrative of race neutrality and a post-racial society. Sharing their counterstories through speculative fiction provided an opportunity to dispel white majoritarian narratives, gave the marginalized power, and acted as a form of resistance and liberation (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002; Toliver, 2020; 2021). Unchecked white privilege, which provides benefits and opportunities for simply being white, continues to perpetuate those majoritarian narratives that Black professional staff are inferior and affirmative action hires. It also subjects BPS to microaggressions, devalues them in their professions, and makes it hard for them to advance in their profession (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In this study, the tenet of challenging the dominant ideology served to challenge the dominant narrative that HWIs are colorblind, race-neutral, are working to serve the best interests of Black Professional Staff, committed to retaining BPS, and that they are a beacon of racial equality (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Parker, 1998; 2019; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002). Using interviews, I gathered the narratives of BPS to share their stories and ways in which they experience and resist racism at HWIs (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002) to counter the dominant narratives.

I used semi-structured interviews to focus on areas of their background and experiences with race and racism, their professional experiences working at an HWI, and their thoughts and feelings during the Black Lives Matter movement. To accomplish this, I asked questions that explored their perceptions about their identity and their experiences of racism throughout their personal life and in their professional spaces. The structure of these interviews left room for additional probing to uncover a more nuanced understanding and to go deeper into the richness of the counterstories (Sarcedo, 2020).
This study’s theoretical and methodological foundation provided an avenue for me as a Black woman conducting this study and for BPS, the participants, to share their narratives of their experiences with institutional and targeted racism. Hopefully, they will see that they are not alone and that their stories matter (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Black folks have a rich history of storytelling, and the oppressed have instinctively recognized that stories are a powerful means for their own survival and liberation (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1989). Therefore, counter-storytelling was the best theoretical and methodological fit for this study.

**Data Collection**

The data collection was guided by the tenets of counter-storytelling and challenging the dominant narrative (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002). The marginalized voices were an important component to the liberation and empowerment of BPS; therefore, conducting interviews was appropriate for this study (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002). Rich narratives were obtained through semi-structured interviews with BPS, which were shaped by the research questions regarding their lived experiences.

The dehumanizing nature of anti-Black racism (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & ross, 2016; ross, 2020; Gordon, 1995) and HWIs as a replica of slave plantations (Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Squire et al., 1998; Williams et al., 2021) also guided my data collection by asking questions of their experience working at a HWI and their experiences of structural racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Semi-structured interviews provided space for in-depth responses that allowed BPS to share their experiential knowledge through counter-stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I used a semi-structured interview format to “probe deeply into a participant’s experiences” (Savin-Baden
Thus, the participants provided rich data for analysis and provided a balance of thoroughness to the study through compelling details so those reading the study could connect and deepen their understanding of the issues (Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Savin-Baden & Howell-Major, 2013; Seidman, 2019). Critical race theorists use storytelling to demonstrate and emphasize broad legal themes about race and racial/social justice, which are worded to express a greater sense of social justice (Ladson-Billing, 2013). For example, Bell’s (1992) use of allegories and fables, such as “The Space Traders” and “The Afrolantica Awakening,” shows that storytelling has broader implications for society and thought-provoking consequences if the voices of the marginalized that speak to policy issues and implications are ignored (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

Counter-narratives function as resistance and a push for a more socially just and equitable system (Miller et al., 2020). Counter-narratives bridge social action and reflection to achieve educational equity (Miller et al., 2020). Developing counter-stories as chronicles or fictional stories can provide opportunities that could influence or inform educational policy issues that address true equity and social justice reform in higher education (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2013). So, in this study, generating counter-stories through interviews provided more than just an avenue for the participants to share their narratives of their lived experiences. Counter-narratives in this study drawing from CRT in education, anti-Blackness theory, and plantation politics frameworks not only challenged the dominant narrative but acted as a form of resistance and hopefully will spur collective political action that challenges ineffectual policies that continue to have a stronghold on institutional liberation (Miller et al., 2020; Rodriguez & Greer, 2017; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).


Research Site

The research site was Ozelle Smith University (a pseudonym), a public Historically White Institution in the Mid-South. Ozelle Smith University is situated in a metropolitan city with a majority Black population and a history ripe with racial tension. Despite the large percentage of Black residents and Black student population, Black professional staff are underrepresented at Ozelle Smith University. Subsequently, BPS can feel isolated in their respective positions and at the institution.

The selected institution was chosen because of my direct access to the participants as colleagues and other professional connections. Participants worked at this institution in various divisions and positions, which provided a large sample from which to draw and provided a variety of rich perspectives. Additionally, following the death of George Floyd, this institution released a statement that Black Lives Matter and made commitments to addressing and dismantling institutional racism. Further, as an employee of Ozelle Smith University, I was a member of a professional network at the institution for Black faculty and staff, through which I gained access to recruit BPS as interview participants through convenience sampling (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). The association is an organization at Ozelle Smith University that acts as a group to provide support and advocacy for Black faculty and staff. Through convenience sampling, I had immediate access to share the research flyer (Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer) with potential participants after IRB approval was received (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021).

Participant Selection and Sample Size

As a BPS working at Ozelle Smith University, I had access to the university network and current colleagues through workgroups and university associations for potential participants to recruit for this study (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). I have worked in higher education for over 20
years, which has allowed me to gain access to colleagues as an entry point to recruit participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). After receiving IRB approval from the Institutional Review Board at Ozelle Smith University, I reached out to the executive board of Black Faculty and Staff’s professional network to request distribution of the flyer (Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer) to the association members. I emailed the recruitment flyer to members of the association who I thought would meet the criteria for the study through purposeful sampling. I used purposeful sampling to select participants with rich, detailed experiences and perspectives who met the study criteria (Billups, 2020; Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021).

Additionally, I used snowball sampling to recruit participants for the study by asking potential participants to share the flyer with other BPS who fit the study's criteria. A total of two participants were secured through snowball sampling, which allowed selected participants to refer additional participants to me (Seidman, 2019). Choosing knowledgeable participants with firsthand experience enhanced the study's credibility (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). No incentives were offered for participation in this study.

Within higher education, professional staff encompasses student affairs, academic advising, business and finance, student financial aid, admissions, recruitment, and other staffing areas that support the institution. Ryttberg (2020) describes that professional support staff is used to describe individuals in support roles who are commonly highly qualified and have an academic degree. They do not necessarily identify as administrators, nor are they employed as academics. They are situated somewhere in between. According to this research, they may be viewed as actors in a third space. This is a concept used when exploring groups of staff at HEIs who do not fit the conventional binary descriptors of ‘academics’ or ‘non-academics’. (p. 2)
The participants had to meet the following criteria:

- Identify as Black or African-American.
- Identify as a professional staff employee with an academic degree in the areas of student affairs, academic advising, business and finance, student financial aid, admissions, recruitment, and other staffing areas that support the institution.
- Employed at anHWI for a minimum of seven to ten years to provide enhanced narratives of their lived experiences and a historical perspective of their institution.
- Employed at anHWI from 2013 - present during the resurgence of Black activism through the Black Lives Matter movement and the murders of Sandra Bland, Philando Castile, Amir Rice, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd.

To ensure that the participants met the criteria to participate in the study, I met with them to screen for eligibility. The initial contact meeting was held via Zoom, in person, or via phone. Once eligibility to participate in the study was determined, I moved forward and collected demographic information, their preference for meeting days and times, and discussed the informed consent process (Appendix C: Informed Consent). I collected demographic information such as self-identification of race, age, length of employment in higher education, highest level of education, division in which they work, and how long they have worked in their current position. I also gave the participants the option to choose a pseudonym or have one chosen for them. Only three chose their pseudonym, and I assigned pseudonyms to the other five. Signed consent forms were received the same day or within seven days of the meeting.

Recognizing the importance of establishing trust with the participants, I shared information about
my purpose for the study, my professional and personal background, and my intentions to keep their identities confidential. While there is no specific number for a sample size (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013), in a qualitative inquiry, Creswell (2012) recommends a sample size of three to ten participants. Nine potential participants volunteered for the study in total. Eight of the nine met the criteria for the study, while one individual did not meet the required number of years employed. The participant pool consisted of self-identified male and female participants, providing a nuanced experience and representation of Black professionals at the HWI.

**Participant Profile**

Eight participants were interviewed for this study. The participants' profiles provide an overview of the participants in this study. During the initial screening, I collected demographic information from the participants, which included the question of how the participants identified their ethnicity. It was important to ask participants how they chose to identify their ethnic background. To preserve the participants’ anonymity, pseudonyms are used and specific details about the participants have not been shared.

**Maxine**

Maxine identifies as a Black/African-American female higher education professional. The experiences Maxine had during her childhood have shaped the way she advocates for herself and others. She has been in higher education for many years and loves what she does as a profession. Maxine’s background and experiences shaped her outlook on her experiences in higher education.

**Kimberle**

Kimberle identifies as a Black female higher education professional. She uses the pronouns she/her. Kimberle’s parents and grandparents were pivotal in shaping her Black
identity and how she interrogates the world around her. Kimberle’s background and work experiences before moving into higher education prepared her for higher education.

Shuri

Shuri identifies as Black or African-American and has been in higher education for many years. Shuri self-identifies as female. Shuri was retrospective of how she could become a better advocate and raise awareness of social injustices in higher education. Shuri interrogated throughout the interview process how she can contribute to shaping the lives of the students and department, including the Black students.

Tamar

Tamar identifies as female and has worked in higher education for less than ten years. Tamar identifies as Blackity Black Black and believes in promoting all things Black. She loves doing things that promote self-healing and advocates for others to do the same. Tamar loves working in higher education and contributing to student success.

David

David identifies as a male and African-American. He has been in higher education for many years. David’s prior education and work experience have contributed to the wisdom he imparts to those around him. He believes in passing the torch to the younger generation to take up the mantle to move us further than the previous generation.

Rico

Rico is a Black higher education professional and identifies as a male. He has worked in higher education for ten years or less. Rico loves working in higher education and feels that higher education chose him.

Deborah
Deborah identifies as an African-American woman who has worked in higher education for many years. Deborah has a selfless spirit and personality who will help her co-workers in any way she can. She loves her university and is dedicated to its success.

**Duchess of Rochester**

Duchess of Rochester identifies as a Black female. She has worked in higher education for many years. Duchess of Rochester is an advocate for students and student success. She has a gentle personality that is very inviting and friendly.

**Interviews**

To collect rich counterstories, I interviewed eight participants using three semi-structured interviews using Interview Protocols (**Appendix B: Interview Protocols**). Semi-structured interviews follow preset questions but are open-ended to express participants’ perspectives on the issues and cover important topics (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Rubin and Rubin (2011) explain that semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to use limited questions with follow-up questions to understand specific subjects.

I met with the participants three times, lasting 60-120 minutes, using Seidman’s (2019) three-interview method. I wanted to value those at the margins sharing rich narratives of their lived experiences and provide space that respected their time and honored their dignity (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). To do so, Esposito and Evans-Winters (2021) suggested Seidman’s (2019) three-interview method because it required meeting with participants multiple times to better understand the person, the topic, and the participants’ narratives. The interview protocols are in **Appendix B: Interview Protocols**. The first interview provided an opportunity to explore the participant’s life history and experiences, while the second interview focused on their professional experiences, and the third interview focused on BLM, resistance, and overall
reflections (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021; Seidman, 2019). It is also important to note that critical race methodology uproots a deficit-based perspective that portrays marginalized communities as inferior. Through the participants’ interviews, their stories acted as a source of strength and survival and functioned as acts of resistance (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1989; Lawrence, 1992; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

The initial screening meeting was in-person, by phone, or via Zoom, a virtual tool, to collect demographic information, establish an interview schedule, and discuss the informed consent (Appendix C: Informed Consent). This meeting allowed me to build rapport with the participants, establishing a connection and trusting relationship with them (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). After receiving the signed informed consent, the participants were sent a copy, and a Doodle poll was sent to set up the first interview. I used an Excel spreadsheet to track interview scheduling and receipt of signed informed consent forms. I met with each participant three times for 60-90 minutes via Zoom or in person. The interview protocols are available in Appendix B: Interview Protocols. I met with five participants via Zoom; three preferred to meet in person. We met in a private space I reserved at a public library. To accurately reflect the participants’ voices, online interviews were audio recorded using Otter.ai software and the voice memo app on an iPhone. Using Otter.ai and the voice memo app provided an opportunity to listen to the audio and check the transcripts for accuracy. In-person interviews were recorded using the voice memo app on an iPhone and iPad. Recording allowed me to focus on what the interviewee said and take notes to ask follow-up questions. I also utilized field notes during the interviews to note body language and other non-verbal cues (Rubin & Rubin, 2011) and my perceptions of the interviews and interview data.
Interviews were transcribed using a transcription software, Otter.ai, an artificial intelligence software. Transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and to add participant pseudonyms. Transcripts were also de-identified to further protect the participants’ confidentiality. I took the necessary steps to ensure that all recorded audio files were stored electronically on my personal computer under a password-protected file that only I could access.

I reviewed the transcripts thoroughly to ensure the participants’ stories were accurate. It was essential to include nonverbal body movements, utterances, and pauses to authentically share the participants’ stories. Transcripts were reviewed multiple times while listening to the audio recordings to ensure the data was captured. Listening to the recorded interview several times while preparing the transcript for analysis also allowed for an accurate account of the participants’ answers while adding body language to understand the respondents’ interpretation or nature (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

All participants were emailed the transcripts for review at the end of data collection and transcript review to ensure their responses were captured authentically for additional follow-up and member checking. Member checking allowed participants to clear up discrepancies or provide feedback (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). Three of the eight participants responded with edits to the transcripts during member-checking within one week of receipt of the transcript. Edits were made and sent to the three participants for review and approval. Data collection and preparation of transcripts for data analysis lasted eight months.

**Researcher’s Journal**

I kept a journal during the data collection process and recorded my thoughts during the interview process of this study to think through policy tensions or implications for social action through resistance. Keeping a journal allowed me to write about my thoughts, emotions, goals,
and assumptions during the research process (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021; Ortlipp, 2008) and helped me think through my positionality during data analysis. This process consisted of journaling my thoughts about the research after each interview and my thoughts and emotions as a Black professional staff member and woman. While preparing the transcript for analysis, I took extensive notes in the journal to capture my reflections or my reactions to the data and to acknowledge my thoughts and connections to the literature and theoretical frameworks.

Data Analysis

Esposito & Evans-Winters (2021) described data analysis as “a mysterious process” (p. 109). As the researcher, I understand that my identity shapes how the participants view me and how they tell and perform their stories (Riessman, 2008). As Riessman (2008) explains, in the context of oral storytelling, the narrative involves a speaker telling their stories of important events that are “selected, organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience” (Riessman, 2008, p. 3). Counterstories in this study shared stories of BPS and their experiences with racism, which further underscored the power of narratives pushing for social justice (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Consequently, Riessman (2008) states that narratives also engage in political work, mobilizing others toward progressive change and resistance movements by sharing stories of discrimination.

I struggled in the beginning stages of data analysis, trying to determine the best path to analyze the data. As a novice to qualitative research, deciding on the best path forward was overwhelming, and analysis was such a mystery (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). I started and stopped the process, trying to determine the best approach. Data analysis is iterative and does not happen linearly (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021).
Ultimately, I decided to use thematic analysis to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a flexible qualitative analytical tool used in this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) described thematic analysis as a tool for detecting, analyzing, and presenting data themes or patterns while vividly characterizing the data and interpreting elements integrated within the research topic. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme is noteworthy about the data regarding the research question that forms a pattern in the data set.

Braun and Clarke (2016) provide an outline consisting of six key steps for analyzing qualitative data. The six steps are as follows:

1. Becoming familiar with the data: This step involves being immersed in the data to become familiar with the data. Reading and re-reading the transcripts, including noting initial observations, thoughts, or potential patterns.

2. Generations of initial codes: This step includes line by line organizing and labeling the data in a systematic fashion into segments or codes.

3. Searching for themes: Identify broad patterns or themes that encompass the coded data. Codes are grouped into potentials themes that reflect significant parts of the data that offer a coherent narrative.

4. Reviewing themes: Examine the themes in relation to the coded data and how it relates to the research questions, creating a thematic map of analysis.

5. Defining and naming themes: Organize the themes in a coherent structure. Clarify each theme’s definition and name and improve the analysis’ overall narrative by focusing on each theme’s details.

6. Writing the report: Provide a detailed narrative that supports each theme with relevant quotes or examples derived from the data. A scholarly report should
present research findings in a coherent and compelling manner that links them back to the literature and research questions.

The first step of the data analysis process was reading the transcripts several times to familiarize myself with the data. “Immersion usually involves repeated reading of the data and reading the data in an active way – searching for meanings, patterns, and so on” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). I accomplished this step by repeated readings of the transcripts in an active fashion, searching for patterns, and writing my thoughts and connections to the theoretical framework in my journal (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I grouped all three interviews per participant in folders and read through the transcripts several times. I journaled my initial thoughts and ideas for potential codes or patterns between participants.

After reading the transcripts multiple times, I combined all three interviews per participant and uploaded the transcripts to MAXQDA. MAXQDA is a Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) to help store, manage, and analyze your data (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). MAXQDA was installed on my personal computer with a username and password for added protection and confidentiality. After uploading all transcripts, I proceeded to the second step.

The second step was to create in-vivo codes in MAXQDA. Braun & Clarke (2016) discussed working “systematically through the entire data set, giving full and equal attention to each data item, and identifying interesting aspects in the data items that may form the basis of repeated patterns (themes) across the data set” (p. 89). Before beginning the coding process, I posted my research questions and theoretical framework on the wall within eye view to remain cognizant of them while coding. I focused on what seemed pertinent and meaningful to their experiences. I also coded relevant patterns that tied to my theoretical framework. I created in-
vivo codes that were significant and meaningful. I found coded segments of the data that displayed raw emotions about their life, personal and professional experiences, and data that was relevant to the research study. The participants’ emotions surrounding race and racism were noteworthy during this first round of coding.

Data analysis was a particularly arduous process as I wanted to stick close to what the participants said, so I journaled my thoughts, assumptions, and feelings during this coding cycle. This first stage of coding was a difficult process as a researcher to relive the participants’ words again during this first round of coding. I will share my emotions throughout the research study’s data collection and analysis phase later in the chapter. I made notes of the data that did not fit or were outliers and was transparent about the data through journaling. Being open and honest about my higher education experiences as a Black employee shaped how the data was interpreted into particular codes, and it was essential for me to recognize that the evidence to support my position could create a positive or negative outcome for the participants (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2012).

In the next round of coding, I created groups of codes that were similar in nature. I began to group the codes into groups or preliminary themes where I began to see patterns or similarities. For example, when participants talked about their emotions, I created groups of codes such as anger, frustration, being bullied, etc. During this stage, I continued to journal and memo within MAXQDA to highlight key points and ideas within the data.

The third and fourth steps required “collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme,” and “generating a thematic map of the analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2016, p. 87). In the third step, I collated codes into potential or relevant themes or categories that aligned with the theoretical framework (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). Next, I
created eight categories and began to collate the coded data into those broad initial categories, such as ‘higher education experience with racism’ and ‘higher education navigating racism.’ I created more nuanced coding, examined the previous codes for overlaps, and merged similar passages into codes. I also reviewed my field notes and journal to confirm early patterns noted during the data collection and preparing the transcripts for analysis. I also ensured that my theoretical framework guided my thinking when coding the data (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). Critical race methodology using counterstories guided each round of the coding process, understanding that the participants’ stories served to disrupt the master narrative and by not silencing the voices of my participants who experienced racism, I could share their stories, which are acts of resistance (Cook & Dixson, 2103; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Working in MAXQDA allowed me to group the codes, code groups, and categories and look for patterns and potential connections to the framework and literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I began collating the codes into broader potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used MAXQDA to start grouping codes into potential theme “buckets” that were similar. From this step, I began the final process of creating main themes and subthemes within those themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I looked for connections that encapsulated the experiences of BPS. I reviewed the subthemes and looked for additional similarities within the themes for further refinement. I also reviewed each subtheme to determine fit within a main theme. I worked to review and further refine any overlapping codes by combining them under themes and subthemes to end with four themes and subthemes that represented the research questions. This process took some time as I worked to “define and refine, the essence of each theme and what aspect of the data each theme capture[d]” (Brun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). Each individual theme and subtheme had an identifying story that each of them told and ensured that it would fit into
the overall story of the data in relation to my research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I also engaged in member-checking with the participants to share the final themes and sub-themes to get their feedback and suggestions. The thematic map (Table 1) is a visual representation of the final stages of coding.

**Table 1: Thematic Map**

*Thematic map of data analysis*

Working in MAXQDA allowed me to group the codes, code groups, and categories and look for patterns and potential connections to the framework and literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I began collating the codes into broader potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used MAXQDA to start grouping codes into potential theme “buckets” that were similar. From this step, I began the final process of creating main themes and subthemes within those themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I looked for connections that encapsulated the experiences of BPS. I reviewed the subthemes and looked for additional similarities within the themes for further refinement. I also reviewed each subtheme to determine fit within a main theme. I worked to review and further refine any overlapping codes by combining them under themes and subthemes to end with four themes and subthemes that represented the research questions. This process took some time as I worked to “define and refine, the essence of each theme and what
aspect of the data each theme capture[d]” (Brun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). Each individual theme and subtheme had an identifying story that each of them told and ensured that it would fit into the overall story of the data in relation to my research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I also engaged in member checking with the participants to share the final themes and sub-themes to get their feedback and suggestions.

**Table 2: Themes and Subthemes**

*Themes and subthemes of participants’ counterstories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Still on the Plantation</th>
<th>Racial Schizophrenia</th>
<th>From Golden Girls to Beckys/Karens</th>
<th>Where is the Folding Chair?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme You Can’t Get in Unless We Let You In</td>
<td>Am I Always the Problem?</td>
<td>The Real Mean Girls</td>
<td>You Running Out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where Black Dreams Go to Die</td>
<td>Playing the Game</td>
<td>Professional Sabotage</td>
<td>Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know Your Place</td>
<td>The Golden Girls</td>
<td></td>
<td>I’m About to Head Out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Big House</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final themes (Table 2) provide a visual representation of the final themes and subthemes at the conclusion of the data analysis process of this research study. The themes and subthemes shed light on the nuanced experiences of BPS. The subthemes represented in the table are relevant because they provide structure to the larger, more complex themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, the theme, Still on the Plantation, refers to the long-lasting vestiges of racism and oppression of slavery in the modern-day institution. The subtheme The Big House refers to the structure of a plantation and where administrative decisions are made both on the plantation and at an HWI.
Trustworthiness and Ethics

Tracy’s (2010) criteria for producing strong quality research provides a blueprint of eight best practices categories. The eight criteria are: “(a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence” (Tracy, 2010, p. 837). My chosen topic was essential in my field of study and timely in our society as we work to address inequities in higher education, specifically during our country’s political climate with addressing white supremacy, Black Lives Matter, and the current attack on CRT by conservatives and state legislatures (Anderson & Svrluga, 2022; Tracy, 2010). Tracy (2010) describes the rigor one must have in their study by doing due diligence and taking the appropriate time and thoroughness towards their research.

Sincerity is achieved through research practices of vulnerability, honesty, transparency, and self-reflexivity (Tracy, 2010). I hoped to accomplish this as I wanted to conduct an ethical study that was authentic and raw and told the stories of my participants, which mirrored my own experiences. As the researcher, I understood my epistemological grounding and tensions with the data as I shared their counterstories (Ladson-Billings, 2003). I engaged in reflexivity and was critically aware of how I was located in this study as a Black professional staff, a Black woman, and the researcher (Pillow, 2003). I engaged in continuous reflexivity through memoing throughout the data collection and analysis stages (Pillow, 2003).

Further, thinking deeply about the research process and journaling my thoughts and questions allowed for reflexivity in demonstrating my awareness of those issues of tension that may have occurred (Pillow, 2003). Additionally, by focusing on cultivating reciprocity
with research participants, I was able to balance the researcher relations with the participants by listening to them and conducting research with the participants instead of on them (Pillow, 2003). Consequently, I employed reflexivity by diminishing my power as the researcher during the research and writing process (Pillow, 2013).

Therefore, I had a critical friends group made up of my advisor and other scholars, meeting periodically to discuss my data collection and analysis process and findings. I engaged daily with my critical friend (Costa & Kallick, 1993), who is a classmate, to discuss my thoughts on my research study. We talked with each other about our research, offering feedback and advice about the research process. Our communication and support of each other was therapeutic as this dissertation phase can be a lonely and isolating process. She offered valuable insight and feedback when needed. We met at the public library and Starbucks to write and work on our dissertations to hold each other accountable. She was my saving grace throughout this dissertation journey. Additionally, I joined the Qualitative Inquiry Circle (QUIC) and met monthly with that group to discuss our research studies. QUIC was headed by two premiere critical methodologists who offered invaluable insight and guidance through the data collection and analysis process.

Establishing credibility mirrors the study’s credibility by being consistent, accurate, and trustworthy (Tracy, 2010). I was immersed in the data and provided thick descriptions of the data for readers to draw their conclusions (Tracy, 2010), which added to the credibility of this study. I used member checking by reviewing the transcripts with the participants to ensure I captured their responses and interpretations correctly (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). Tracy (2010) suggested that my study should resonate with or influence the audience by communicating BPS’s lived experiences that evoke empathy or
reverberation. Engaging with the data through speculative fiction stories as counterstories provided vivid narratives of their lived experiences (Tracy, 2010). I hope that my research extends knowledge given the current climate and empowers other BPS to liberate themselves (Tracy, 2010). While I have little expectation that institutions do the work required to dismantle systemic racism within higher education institutions, I hope that this research will make a significant contribution (Tracy, 2010). I hope this dissertation research adds to the body of literature that includes experiences of BPS and their experiences, particularly during the BLM movement. BPS are a vital part of the university community, and centering their voices contributes to the literature and transformative change through open dialogue.

Aluwihare-Samaranayake (2012) describes critical consciousness as being self-aware, reflective, and critically questioning one’s consciousness to prevent short-sightedness. As Canella and Lincoln (2018) explain, ethical work is work through self-criticism that examines the self, builds new approaches to being, and creates new paths to forming relationships. Understanding that my experiences could be similar to those of the participants, I engaged in reflexivity during data collection and throughout the study by writing memos or journaling, which provided insight into what I was learning and my thoughts during the research process (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021).

Addressing ethical concerns as the researcher, being upfront and honest with the participants, listening to their concerns, and respecting their stories were crucial to this research study (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The participants completed an informed consent form detailing the specifics of the study. Still, as the researcher, I assured the participants their information would be kept private and confidential, specifically through a pseudonym and a fictitious name for the
institution where they are employed. I met with the participants to review the transcriptions and capture their responses accurately.

It was also important for me to share power with the participants during the interview. I communicated to the participants that they had the power to stop recording at any time if they wanted to share something off the record. Establishing credibility with the participants was vital to gaining their trust that I would be transparent about the process. So, I engaged in member-checking and follow-up interviews and discussed my positionality with them during the study (Billups, 2021). Recognizing that there was a power dynamic between the researcher and the participants, I was sincere and compassionate in my conversations with the participants while clarifying who I was as a researcher and how my actions impacted the study’s process and outcomes (Esposito & Evans-Winter, 2021; Willow, 2003).

The participants shared their experiences of racism, microaggressions, and macroaggressions. While it could potentially be triggering, sharing stories also represented the researcher’s shared bond and understanding of the effects of racism in white spaces (Solórzano & Huber, 2020). I offered participants mental health resources, understanding that participants may need them after sharing their lived experiences. Conversely, I also recognized that sharing these stories could be seen as therapeutic, as storytelling is a form of resistance that challenges the narratives perpetuating stereotyping and marginalization (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Some research methods have been known to silence and discount the marginalized’s stories and voices; however, critical race methodology, the method used in this study, serves to share unheard stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002).

Moreover, counterstories could function as survival and resistance, giving power and voice to participants who often feel ignored (Bell, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and pushing
for institutional and structural change. I am hopeful that sharing participant stories of racism could create change in how HWIs view and address historical and structural racism experienced by Black folks at HWIs. Assuming HWIs are devoted to diversity, equity, and inclusion, listening to and appreciating the stories of the marginalized might help us understand how to handle the institution’s role in eradicating racism.

Addressing the issue of confidentiality with the participants was essential to protecting their identity throughout this study. I used emails not associated with their employee email, and all communication concerning the research study was done using a Google email. As previously mentioned, the participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities further. Interviews were conducted off-site or via Zoom after the participant’s working hours or what worked with their schedule. Data, including all documents related to this study, was stored on my personal computer, which was password protected. I also did not have access to any part of my dissertation files using university Wi-Fi. Engaging in member-checking with the participants ensured that they had an opportunity to review it for accuracy and decide if parts of their interview should be redacted (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021).

As such, procedural ethics was managed through the IRB process to receive approval to conduct the research study, so special care was taken to adhere to policies and procedures (Tracy, 2010). Situational and relational ethics refers to constantly reflecting on every situation and self-reflection during the study (Tracy, 2010). Journaling was a key component of being reflexive during this process.

Meaningful coherence occurs when the research accomplishes what it was intended to do (Tracy, 2010). I wanted to tell the stories of BPS and their experiences authentically, and the findings answered the research questions (Tracy, 2010). I wanted to contribute to my field
and become a quality researcher, so I believed conducting a methodologically robust research study would accurately and ethically share the participants’ stories.

**Positionality**

I am a Black woman, a higher education professional, a doctoral student, an adjunct instructor, and a mother. My experiences in higher education as an employer, student, and adjunct instructor allowed me to operate as an outsider-insider (Collins, 1986). I am also a daughter, an aunt, a friend, and so much more, which brings me to this research. More importantly, I love my Blackness and my identity as an activist in the community that allows me to do this work.

My identity as a Black woman is synonymous with who I am, and society only sees me as Black AND a woman. My ethnicity and gender are seen as a commodity rather than a human being. Black women are not a monolith, yet we are treated as one when we are categorized and grouped as the "Angry Black Woman" and loud and boisterous. Nevertheless, I take pride in my Black womanhood and the nurturing spirit of Black women in my life and those I encounter. You can always find a Black woman who will welcome you with a hug and words of affirmation that feels like love from the ancestors.

My career in higher education as a professional staff at an HWI allows me to share similar experiences with the participants. I have worked at the same institution for over twenty years, and during that time, I have experienced overt racism and witnessed the violent nature of anti-Blackness. Yet, like the participants in the study, my love for working in higher education overrides the marginalization I have faced working in this field. I have a love-hate relationship with higher education. I love the work, but I hate the racism. My higher education career has allowed me to work in various units to understand how institutional barriers work to marginalize
Black folks in higher education. Working within a system that will enable me to see the mechanisms of institutional racism solidifies that the counterstories of the participants and other Black folks are proof that white supremacy remains a stronghold in this country and in higher education. I recently contributed to research on decolonizing academic advising in a forthcoming book chapter with two co-authors. The book chapter discussed decolonizing the academic advising process for adult learners, particularly from marginalized communities. The chapter also addressed structural and institutional barriers affecting marginalized students' academic success, retention, and completion rates.

I returned to school as an adult student to finish my undergraduate degree. The life of a full-time employee, mother, and student came with many sacrifices and late nights. I needed to set an example to my daughter that hard work would pay off. Finishing my undergraduate degree fueled my desire to pursue an advanced degree. I completed my master's degree and eventually began my doctoral program. By now, my daughter was in college, and I had more time to devote to my studies. However, I soon learned what it felt like to be challenged by a white male student who frequently dismissed my comments made to the class. Some of the participants in this study were adult students. They talked about their racialized experiences in doctoral programs and the struggles with being ostracized or feeling less than in their respective programs. Their stories hold value, as does mine. I dealt with imposter syndrome in the early years of my doctoral program, primarily by white students who made me feel unwelcomed in these spaces. However, it was in my doctoral program that I found Critical Race Theory.

CRT explained everything I was saying and feeling as a Black person in this society. Using CRT allows researchers to operate through a self-revelation mode, enabling them to acknowledge their double or multiple consciousnesses (Ladson-Billings, 2000). I discovered how
my experiences and identity helped shape my research approach. I am also working to
decolonize research and methodologies by privileging scholars of color and departing from
dominant western research methodologies (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). Becoming a Black
scholar and researcher has afforded me many opportunities to present my research at
professional conferences and build relationships with other scholars in the field, which have
proved invaluable.

I am the mother of a Black woman just entering adulthood. I divorced when she was nine,
and we navigated new beginnings together. We have accomplished many things together and
apart as we both learned the trials and joys of mothering. I was her strongest supporter and
biggest critic. I wanted to prepare her for the harsh world outside the safety of home. I knew the
realities of racism and fought every fight on her behalf when I felt her education or experiences
were being compromised because of her Blackness. In a talk during the CRT Summer School,
Kimberle Crenshaw (2022) mentioned that Black folks do not have to understand the
mechanisms of CRT to know it exists. They experience it in their everyday lives. As a Black
woman and mother, I tried to prepare my daughter for the realities of life while imparting that
her life does matter. Her pursuit of a career in music and musical theatre, an industry that is not
dominated by marginalized communities, has pushed me to expose her to the arts and connect
her with Black actors in the field. My daughter will soon graduate college and begin her career,
but parenting never stops; our roles become different.

I am a sister and caregiver to my aging parents. While my siblings are adults, as the
oldest sibling, I still feel responsible for them. I functioned more as a surrogate parent to my
siblings because of the age differences, and that role remains today. As I mentioned, I am my
parents' oldest child, so a lot of responsibility falls on me to make decisions for them as their
advocate for their financial and health matters. It is daunting when you have to assume the role of parent to your parents. You begin to understand the frailties of life and the importance of your role to them as their advocate.

My identity as a mother extends to that of an aunt to five nephews I love dearly. I hold that title dear as a supporter and the cool aunt. Yet, I also worry about their lives in a society that sees them as a threat. How can anyone see them as a threat? How do I help them prepare for life? I look at them and fear that one day, someone will see them as a threat, and their life will not matter.

Navigating life as an adult student and an adjunct instructor has made me a better student and instructor. I understand the needs of students in my class and know the sacrifices made to attend class and contribute to their educational journey. I learned how to parent my daughter through my experiences working in higher education as an employee and instructor. Serving in these roles also allowed me to interrogate how Black students navigate white spaces. Several years ago, an older Black student walked up to me with tears in her eyes and grabbed my hands. She told me I was the first Black teacher she had as a student and was so happy to see me. She planned to tell her granddaughter about me to help her know what is possible.

All of these intersecting identities have allowed me to become a better person, an advocate, and a better researcher. As I approached my research for this dissertation study and future research opportunities, I brought my whole self, made up of these identities. As an early critical race scholar, I have read and studied to understand CRT, its tenets, and methodologies to hone my knowledge of the field. I approached this dissertation study, understanding my role as the researcher, the outsider-insider in higher education, and the responsibility I have to tell the stories of the participants in this study.
Researcher Emotions

I wanted to give space to acknowledge the emotional journey I experienced writing and completing this dissertation study. The data collection process was prolonged due to my need to manage my emotional and mental health throughout this process. I began data collection in August and completed data analysis the following August. My experiences as a Black woman and a professional staff member brought me to this research. As a Black person who has experienced, read about, and studied racism and anti-Blackness, I approached this study with the understanding of the emotional toll telling stories would have on the participants. I was unprepared for the emotional toll hearing the stories would have on me.

Throughout data collection, I began to notice a change in my emotions. I was trying to process and understand the stories I heard from the participants. I experienced a range of emotions, but mostly anger and frustration. I was regularly attending therapy, but it was during this time that my therapist noticed a change in my behavior. As I began to prepare the transcripts for analysis and listen to the audio files over and over in-depth, the emotional toll I experienced was overwhelming. I had to take multiple breaks to distance myself from “hearing” the stories. I never stopped thinking about my research, but hearing and reading through the transcripts would invoke emotional distress. The breaks would range from one to three days or weekend breaks in hopes of returning to my research.

I experienced the same range of emotions during the data analysis process, and it was during this stage that I began to engage my therapists to work through my feelings. I wrote in my dissertation journal during the data analysis that I felt a sick sense of validation that the participants’ stories were proving that racism exists and, in some cases, mirrored my own experiences. Who wants to be happy about that?! I talked a lot to my classmate and comrade,
who was also in the thick of her dissertation, researching a similar topic. After coming to my themes, I was at a crossroad and began thinking about how to represent the data. I did not want to experience the emotional toll I had experienced throughout the study, so I met with my methodologist to discuss my experience and looked for suggestions on presenting the counterstories differently. Emotionally, I did not think my mental health could support a traditional method of discussing the findings.

My methodologist suggested speculative fiction stories, and after reading literature about this method, I became intrigued and excited. I will not say that I did not experience some emotions while writing the speculative fiction stories, but the process was not debilitating to the point of the need to take a break. I met with my participants to present the themes for feedback and discussed the plan for speculative fiction stories. The participants supported this path, and a few offered suggestions and feedback on the ideas for the stories.

** Representation**

Upon completing the analysis, I presented the data as speculative fiction counterstories. I describe below the process I used to create counterstories as speculative fiction.

**Creating Counterstories**

To generate counterstories, I engaged in cultural intuition and theoretical sensitivity (Bernal, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Cultural intuition is developed through ancestral wisdom, intuition, personal experiences, the literature, and professional experiences (Bernal, 1998). Theoretical sensitivity is the ability to have insight, analyze data, and have the capacity to comprehend and distinguish what is important from what is not (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Therefore, I created counterstories from (a) the data acquired throughout the study, (b) the topic’s existing literature, (c) my professional experiences, and (d) my personal experiences
(Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002). The data generated from interviews of the participants using the critical lens of CRT in education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), anti-Blackness theory (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Gordon, 1995; 1996), and plantation politics (Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Squire et al., 2018; Squire, 2021; Williams et al., 2021) helped to create counterstories of their experiences working at a HWI (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002). Next, I looked at the relevant secondary data of the existing literature and drew a connection to the data generated from participant interview data (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Toliver, 2020; 2021). The final step was to draw on my personal and professional experiences and the voices of friends, colleagues, and family (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002; Toliver, 2020; 2021). Finally, once the various sources were gathered and analyzed, composite characters were created in three of the stories to participate in genuine and critical discourse about the findings from interviews, research, and experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002).

To create composite characters, I took the individual intersecting stories of the participants as the basis for establishing a character (Cook & Dixson, 2013). I then aligned the composite characters with the data and data analysis (Cook & Dixson, 2013). I previously discussed the emotional toll I experienced from data collection and analysis. I wanted to present the findings in an authentic, yet light manner.

Using the steps I discussed, I took the themes, subthemes, and codes from the data analysis, cultural experience, existing literature, theoretical lens, and my own personal, professional, and world experiences to develop ideas for counterstories. I chose to write four separate stories to represent the four themes. To avoid confusing the reader, I chose to include the pseudonyms of the participants in the first story and composite characters in the remaining three stories. I wrote several ideas for the storyline of the counterstories and started to build
around the themes and subthemes and the participants’ experiences. The next step was to create
the speculative fiction counterstories.

**Speculative Fiction Counterstories**

To begin creating an outline for the speculative fiction counterstories, I understood that
the process of creating counterstories would differ from this point forward. Solórzano and Yosso
(2002) argued that composite counterstories are counterstories with composite characters
grounded in real-life experiences using existing literature and situations in social contexts in real-
life. Toliver (2020) contends that composite counterstories can be grounded in real-life
experiences and situated in the fictional realm. CRT scholars have used the method of storying
“the realistic world into a fantastic tale” (Toliver, 2020, p. 6).

Thanks to my mother, I was an avid reader as a child and into adulthood. I credit her
because she had numerous science fiction books at home that I would read, including our trips to
the library to get more books to read. It was because of her that my love for science fiction
began. I love Star Wars, Star Trek, Bladerunner, Twilight, and, more recently, The Creator. As a
tenager and adult, I read multiple Steven King novels, and before beginning graduate school, I
read most of his latest work. As a researcher, I love the works of Derek Bell with Space Traders
and Afrolantica. Science fiction allowed me to be creative and dream beyond imagination.

To begin writing the speculative fiction counterstories, I took the four themes and
subthemes and made outlines for four short stories. I decided to write four stories rather than one
story because the themes and subthemes dictated the need for four separate stories. I engaged in
member checking with the participants and shared the themes and plans for the stories to get
their feedback and suggestions on the stories. I received valuable feedback and the blessings of
three participants who agreed to meet with me. I put large stickies on the wall to write ideas for
each story within the context of the themes, theoretical framework, literature, and my personal and professional experience. I organized the story’s plot, started writing, and let my imagination go.

I wrote the stories in no particular order. I made sure to have the plot for each story printed out and the themes and subthemes printed to refer to if needed. Once I was clear on the plot, I began writing the story and allowed my imagination to direct the story. I drew from my love of Stephen King and science fiction to remove boundaries of what is real and what is not. I made sure to come back to the themes and subthemes to stay within the plot. There were times when I did deviate from the original plot, so I allowed myself to be flexible in changing the plot of the story if it aligned with the themes and subthemes. As I wrote, I pulled participant quotes from MAXQDA to support the story with the data and add their authentic voices.

The first story includes the participants in the research study. The remaining three stories have composite characters I created. The participants’ individual stories helped me to create composite characters. I took elements of intersecting stories and created a composite character (Cook & Dixson, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I enjoyed this process because my methodologist encouraged me to take risks and remove any barriers to writing the speculative fiction counterstories. I found it therapeutic to write the stories, as I laugh and cried as I wrote, given the emotional toll I experienced during the data collection and analysis process.

Chapter Summary

This research study examined the lived experiences of BPS at an HWI during the Black Lives Matter Movement. The purpose of the study was to share stories of their experiences when BPS are often the unsung and invisible contributors to institutions' overall success. The research questions that guided this study focused on the experiences they had
with racism, discrimination, and dehumanizing acts, as well as what acts of resistance they engaged in at their HWI. I used Critical race methodology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and thematic analysis to analyze the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I collected and analyzed data gathered through semi-structured interviews with BPS that fit the criteria at an HWI to answer the research questions. I used thematic analysis to analyze the data and uncover the stories that emerged during the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). From the data analysis and final themes from the interviews, I developed speculative fiction counterstories (Toliver, 2020; 2021) that are presented as counterstories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Toliver, 2021).

The following chapters will present the four different speculative fiction counterstories representing the final themes. The themes that I constructed from the data are (1) Still on the plantation, (2) Racial schizophrenia, (3) From Golden Girls to Becky/Karen, and (4) Where is that folding chair? The final chapter will summarize the study, discuss the findings, and make recommendations for praxis and future research.
Chapter 4

Plantation Chronicles

It is a crisp fall day and the smell of fall is in the air. While the campus is bustling outside, Shuri stares at the same email for over 30 minutes. She is in disbelief at what she is reading. The email is from the Republic of Wakanda letting her know of her selection to participate in a campus visit to the University of Wakanda (UofW). Shuri squeals in excitement and reads the rest of the email. She wonders who will join her on this trip of a lifetime. Trying to concentrate on work, she answers a few emails and suddenly her phone rings and she looks at the caller ID and it is Deborah.

“Hey Deborah, guess what?”

“What is it? I got news for you too.”

“I am going to the University of Wakanda!!!”

“Girl, what'?!?! Me too!”

Shuri stands up at her desk. Deborah is her closet friend and she is so happy they will experience this together. They continue to talk more about the trip and what they will wear before ending the call. Shuri tries to finish out her workday, but her mind is all over the place about the upcoming trip. Shortly after her call with Deborah, she receives another email from Wakandan officials about a video conference that evening. The email also indicates that a package is waiting at her home address to use for this meeting. The meeting will cover the visit and other important information concerning travel and what to bring for the experience.

Later that evening, Shuri is home and opening the package that was on her porch when she made it home. The box contains a communication device to use for the meeting tonight. It is a square box with three buttons on it that read: open, answer, and end. Shuri, wondering how this
contraption works, pushes the open button. The box opens and a screen projects in the air in front of her face. She hits the end button and the screen goes away and the box closes. Shuri grabs her phone to text Deborah.

“Hey, get the device out of the box and push the open button to see what happens.”

Ten minutes later, Deborah sends a text back, “Wow, I did and that was so cool. I cannot wait for the meeting.”

The meeting is set for seven o’clock, so a little before seven, Shuri sits down and presses open. As the screen appears, she sees Welcome to Wakanda scroll across the screen. Shuri’s heart begins to beat faster with anticipation for the meeting. She starts to see familiar faces pop up one by one. There are eight in total from her institution appearing on the screen. Afrobeat music begins to play loudly and soon Shuri recognizes the face of the person who heads the program.

Shuri wonders how this tech gadget works since she does not see a camera. She says hello and asks if they can see and hear her. The head of the program responds, “Yes, we can see and hear you. Technology is wonderful here in Wakanda. It is one of the many things you will experience when you are here.” Still, Shuri tries to inconspicuously stick her hand through the screen and look for a camera. The program coordinator chuckles and starts the meeting.

“Thank you all for being here this evening. We do not wish to keep you long, but this is a meeting to go over pertinent information about your visit and provide additional information. Before we begin, we will have you all do a quick greeting in case you all are not familiar with each other.”

“Good evening, my name is Maxine and I know some of the faces I see tonight. Looking forward to this great experience.”
“Hello all, my name is Shuri, and I am so excited for this journey.”

“I guess I will go next, hello everyone, my name is Deborah. I believe I know everyone here. Some more than others, but I am happy to be selected.”

“Good evening, my name is Kimberle and I have to say that it is an honor to be with you all tonight. This opportunity is everything and I am happy to be here.”

“Hello everyone, I am Rico and like others have said, grateful for the opportunity.”

“I am Duchess of Rochester, and I hope you all are having a good evening. I see some familiar faces as well. I look forward to hearing more tonight.”

“My name is David, and it is good to be here tonight.”

“Well, I see that I am last, so you all saved the best of last. So, I am Tamar. I hope everyone had a good day today. I am excited to be here for this opportunity to go home.”

The program director thanks the group for their introductions and introduces themself.

“Great evening to you all. I am Zuri, the program director for this program and I will let the rest of my staff give their introductions.”

“I am happy to see you all. I am Nakia and Okoye and I will work with this group and handle the logistics associated with this program. I or Okoye will communicate with you regularly about travel arrangements and lodging. Okoye will discuss all details for your visit while you are with us on campus.”

Zuri shares, “the reason for the meeting tonight is for you all to meet the participants for this program and to share additional information.” Zuri explains, “we thank you all for agreeing to participate in this work shadow program. We hope to gain valuable insight about your experiences working at a white institution.”
“You mean on the plantation,” Tamar smirks, but her tone indicates the seriousness of her statement.

Zuri continues on, “Tamar, when you leave the plantation to come home, we will welcome you with open arms and not exploit you or your body, or your intellect for our gain, my sister. You will work with your counterparts and exchange knowledge about what you do and your experiences.”

Nakia tells the group, “Please watch for your emails as I will need additional information to coordinate your travel.”

Nakia goes on to explain the travel process to Wakanda and their transport to Lawrenceville upon arrival. The group will fly Wakanda Airlines in one of their private aircrafts. Okoye takes over the next portion and explains they will stay close to the campus of the University of Wakanda.

“The group will stay in the president’s home which is a spacious home and each of you will have your own room and bathroom.”

Okoye shares, “All of your expenses are covered, so no funds are needed for this trip. You will not have to provide passports as you are considered direct descendants of your African ancestors.”

Zuri wraps up the meeting and tells the group to look for additional information in the coming days and ends the meeting.

Shuri immediately emails the group after the meeting to ask if they all want to get together to discuss everything and have a quick meet and greet. After a few emails back and forth, the group decides to meet for dinner over the weekend. Shuri and Deborah agree to take charge of arranging the details for dinner after the group settles on a restaurant. The day of the
dinner arrives and everyone arrives on time. The group settles down to discuss the trip and get to know each other.

Maxine is the first to speak about the upcoming trip, “I am excited about taking this trip.” Kimberle chimes in, “So am I. We are going to leave the plantation and go back to our ancestorial home. Can you believe that?!?”

The group agrees about the shock of not needing their passports.

Tamar mentions, “I am loving the meaning of it, even if only symbolic.”

As everyone eats, Rico asks Tamar, “You had me dying about your plantation comment.”

Tamar responds, “You know we work on the plantation or at least it feels that way.”

Deborah agrees and talks about her supervisor micromanaging her as if she did not know her work ethic. “That was demeaning to me because my supervisor knows how hard I work. She micromanages me all the time as if she does not know my work ethic. That is too much breathing over my shoulder. It is way too much.”

Duchess of Rochester starts talking, “I can relate to that because I often feel like what I contribute is not valued. I have a lot of experience that I bring to the table, but none of that matters when you are treated like the help.”

Shuri says, “I was in a meeting and made a few comments. At first, it was no acknowledgement, like, what I said wasn’t good enough or even worth acknowledging. It is so demeaning when I feel invisible and ignored. I feel like a ghost.” Deborah gives Shuri’s arm a squeeze of reassurance.

“Like I said, I am looking forward to leaving the plantation,” says Kimberle.

The Republic of Wakanda is sponsoring the trip for the select group and agrees to pay their salary during their time away. This also means that their positions are secure while they are
away. Over the next few weeks, the group makes their preparations for the trip and when the day finally arrives, the group meets at the private airport for departure.

Tamar yells, “Okay, Wakanda! We going home in style!” The jet looks majestic in royal purple with gold letters. Since they are boarding on the tarmac, the ground crew meets them to take their luggage and direct them to where they will board the plane. As they walk up to the plane, they see red carpet on the ground leading to the stairs of the plane. “This is so dope,” says Rico. David mentions how impressive everything has been thus far. The pilot and flight crew meet them at the stairs to welcome them aboard.

The plane is not an ordinary aircraft.

Tamar says, “This plane looks like an RV in the sky!”

Rico says, “It puts Air Force One to shame.”

As they walk to find their seats, they notice that each partition has their names on them. Each passenger has their own area, complete with a seating area, bed, and bathroom. The flight crew walks them upstairs to show the common areas where there is a kitchen, bar, eating area, and movie room. The opulence on the plane is beyond anything one could imagine. Rich mahogany wood on the floors and leather chairs are a blend of contemporary and classic designs.

“This is so classy,” Kimberle says.

“Isn’t it though! I could not have imagined this in my wildest dreams,” Shuri gushes.

David chimes in, “I plan to take this all in because who knows if I will ever travel like this for the rest of my life.”

The group make their way to their respective cabins to settle in before takeoff. The flight crew explains the safety precautions and the differences with flying on their aircraft as opposed to commercial aircrafts. The pilot makes the announcement of the estimated arrival time as they
prepare for takeoff. The flight will last several hours, so everyone prepares for takeoff. Once the pilot gives the all clear to move about the cabin, a few from the group heads upstairs to the bar while the rest decide to relax in their cabins.

Kimberle, Maxine, and Duchess of Rochester sit at the bar and place their orders. They make small talk about what their families think about the trip and the list of what they have to bring back as souvenirs. Soon the conversation turns to how their respective offices feel about the trip.

Kimberle begins speaking, “Most of the folks in my office are generally excited. A few white girls are salty about being excluded.”

Maxine adds, “My office was supportive of this trip. I did not care to notice what other folks had to say about it.”

Duchess of Rochester joins in, “I am unsure of the general sentiment of the folks in my office.”

Kimberle laughs, “I am happy to get away from the day-to-day hassle of fighting the good fight. It will be great to be in an environment where everyone is happy you are there..as a person, a human being.”

Duchess of Rochester agrees, “I believe we are there because we check a box. They don’t really want us here.”

Maxine takes a sip of her drink, “Don’t I know it. They do not respect me or my position. You know, certainly there are some white people who don’t appreciate my position. They don’t appreciate some of the things I say. They don’t appreciate some of the things I do.”
Kimberle sighs, “I feel that. Because sometimes there is a lack of professional courtesy and that is tiring. You know, I was vetted before I was allowed to be in this position, so the fact that I’m still here means that I have a right to be here.”

“And you can’t say anything because you need this job,” Duchess of Rochester grumbles.

“Chile, this institution wants us to just shut up and work,” sneers Kimberle.

Maxine nods in agreement adding, “It also feels like there is a hierarchy issue that exists not just with the administration, but with faculty as well. There’s definitely a problem with us versus them between the faculty and the staff. The faculty problems are not the staff problems, at all.”

They all agree about the division about faculty and staff. They continue to talk some more until they notice the late hour and decide to retire to their cabins. As they make their way to their cabins, they notice everyone else is asleep.

The flight crew turns out the lights once everyone retires to their sleeping quarters and the plane continues on throughout the night. As dawn begins to break, the flight crew quietly moves about the cabin to begin preparation for breakfast.

David is the first to wake as the smell of coffee and breakfast fills the cabin. He looks out the window to see the most beautiful, lush green mountains that he has ever seen. He grabs his cell phone to take a picture but realizes the picture will never be able to capture the beauty of what he sees. He soon hears the others begin to wake up and chatter among the group. They all decide to stay in their cabins for breakfast as the plane is due to land in two hours. As David gets ready, he soon hears the pilot announce to the passengers that they will land shortly. As the group prepares for landing, they have no idea how much their lives are about to change.
The plane begins to slow its speed and the pilot announces to look out the window as they approach Wakanda. As the plane makes the approach to the outer border of Wakanda, the pilot begins to speak.

“We are now approaching Wakanda, where innovation rivals all realms. Wakanda remains hidden from the outside world by a shimmering energy barrier that conceals its stunning scenery and advanced civilization.”

Immediately, everyone in the group opens their windows to feast their eyes on what they are about to see.

Deborah whispers, “Right now, it looks like regularly scenery from any old flight.”

Tamar feels the excitement in what the pilot is saying. So much so, her body begins to tense and her heart rate increases in anticipation. “Oh my God, it is about to go down! My life is about to change!”

Maxine laughs, “We are about to see the manifestation of our ancestors’ wildest dreams.”

The pilot continues on, “As we break the barrier, you will see century old towering trees that create a natural entry that is a tranquil setting with exotic birds, a tropical paradise. You will also notice snow-capped mountains and flowing crystal-clear lakes. At the base of the mountain, you will see a vibrant tapestry of flowers gracing the landscape in a kaleidoscope of colors. Fields of lavender covering the fields and towering oak trees with beautiful waterfalls that fall over rugged mountain cliffs.”

Rico shouts, “This is so dope! I wonder if we will feel when it happens. Will our bodies respond to the barrier?”

Tamar snaps her fingers, “This is some other realm experience going on right now! We are about to go to another world where our people live. I am ready!!”
The plane finally arrives at the outer borders and before anyone could blink an eye, they are on the other side of the borders and in Wakanda. The plane fills with gasps, ahhh, oh my Gods, some colorful metaphors, clapping and shouting. “We are home, we are home!”

“Never in my wildest dreams can I describe what I am seeing right now!”

“Look at these space cars or whatever they are flying around! Is this even real?!?”

Tamar pinches her arm, “I just need to make sure I am not dreaming. This seems so unreal.”

Rico laughs, “Come pinch me too Tamar. I need to make sure I am not dreaming the same dream.”

The plane moves through Wakanda for thirty minutes and one of the flight crew pics up the intercom mic, “Welcome to Wakanda! Please enjoy the views and we move through the country. Soon, we will reach the city of Lawrenceville, which is a technological cutting-edge city that is among the mountains and close to magnificent rivers. Lawrenceville is a thriving metropolis using technology to improve the lives of its residents.”

While the pilot is speaking over the intercom, Kimberle looks through the window and tears up, “I wish my grandparents could see this now.”

Duchess of Rochester looks in wonder, “I will never be able to describe this to my family. Words will never do this justice. I have chills all over.”

The pilot continues, “The city uses solar powered hovercrafts to get around the city, which has a bustling market and a variety of cuisines and handcrafted goods. Our citizens are known for developing ground-breaking advancements in transit, medicine, and electricity using vibranium. Vibranium is a very rare mineral this is only found in the Kingdom of Wakanda. In the world of education, Lawrenceville is home to the University of Wakanda. The city has well
known scholars who have contributions in the field of science, philosophy, art, and education. Please take your seats, we will be landing shortly."

The entire group is speechless as they look through their plane window taking in what their eyes can process while listening to the information about the city. Some are in tears as the gravity of what is happening becomes reality.

Tamar shares to the group, “I feel like I am watching a movie at the I-MAX theatre, it seems so surreal.”

Watching in awe as the plane lands, Shuri whispers a silent prayer of thanks for safe travels and this wonderful opportunity.

The ground crew helps guide the plane to its gate and after receiving clearance, the group prepares to leave the plane. When they walk the ramp into the airport, they hear singing that is getting louder as they approach the door to their gate. The doors open and a large group of people are there singing, holding Welcome Home signs, and bearing gifts. They look regal in fabrics that drape their bodies in vibrant, bold, and regal colors. The garments reflect the African heritage of their culture with beautiful necklaces and rings made of wood, gold, and gems. As they walk up to the group, they begin chatting excitedly.

“This is amazing!”

“Look at all of these people here to greet us.”

“The music and singing are speaking to my soul.”

“The fashion, the accessories, and the colors. This is real grand!”

“I literally feel so much love as if they know us.”

“They do know us. We have just been gone, and they are welcoming us home.”
The group walks on the red carpet in front of them into the waiting arms of those present to greet them.

The president of the University of Wakanda and several professional staff members are present to greet the group as well. The escort ushers the group to the side while the singing continues, and the staff gathers up the luggage and other items to prepare for transport. The president holds up his hand to make a remark and as the crowd settles down, he begins with a greeting and official welcome from the institution.

“Welcome to Lawrenceville and the University of Wakanda!! We are very happy you are here and in your ancestral country. Your presence here will bring much joy to us and we hope to you too. We have many things planned for your visit and I am happy to share that you will reside with me during your visit. I will end with this: He takes his arms to make an X and says, “Wakanda Forever.” The music begins as the group is ushered through the crowd.

The president gives instructions on how transportation to the president’s home will happen. Each group member has to place their luggage in front of them as they are given beads to place on their wrists. After everyone in the group has their beads, the instructions are to rub the red bead in a clockwise fashion. As each of the group members do this, they disappear. In the blink of an eye, they appear at the president’s home in his foyer.

“Wow! Tamar says, “That was some beam me up Scotty type of action going on! Let me get myself together.”

Rico replies, “Mane, what you said, I was NOT ready for that, but that was so dope.”

Shuri nods and looks over to Duchess of Rochester who is looking around in amazement, “You okay, Duchess of Rochester?”

“I just can’t believe this is my life right now, girl!” she exclaims.
“Right, just rubs some beads and poof, we gone and popping up someplace. Cause where they do that at?!?!?” laughs Kimberle.

Suddenly, someone appears in the foyer and introduces themselves as Porter who is the administrator of affairs. Porter goes on, “Welcome my brothers and sisters. I am here to make sure you enjoy your visit and coordinate your stay here. I trust your journey here was uneventful and enjoyable. Soon, you will enjoy a tour of the home and grounds to get a lay of the land.”

Later that morning, after taking a tour of the president’s home and everyone settling in, the group is escorted in for lunch. The dining room is a huge stately room with high ceilings, large windows with beautiful heavy drapes in gold and red colors. The table seats 20 people but is intimate enough where no one has to shout. The lunch is a wonderful offering of traditional African foods and beverages that the group enjoys.

“This food is amazing.”

“Everything is delicious and so fresh.”

As the group moves to the main living room, coffee and tea awaits their arrival. The president welcomes the group to his home and begins to discuss the logistics for the next day. He explains to the group the first meeting in the morning will include professional staff at the university.

The president begins to explain to the group, “The meeting will include introductions and matching you with your counterparts here at UofW. We asked for your job descriptions to allow for us to review them and match up your professional counterpart or similar positions and duties. We also requested your salary and I have to say given your job duties and educational requirements; you all are severely underpaid for what the work you do. It is also criminal to expect you to perform these duties for the salary.”
“Tuh,” Maxine responds, “tell us about it.”

The president goes on, “We had you all complete the extensive application to gather information about your experiences working at your institution and you all provided a horrifying picture that we knew to be true. One of you likened your experiences working at your institution to working on a plantation. I was struck by that parallel but it seems that institutions value your labor and further exploit your labor by underpaying you. We did a bit of research to learn that you all are significantly underpaid compared to your white colleagues, even with your experience and education. That information alone appears that your bodies are the only thing of value to your institution. Nevertheless, we hope this program will be the first of many as we plan to implement this program at other white colleges and universities. We are eager to get to know you all and I know everyone is happy you are here.”

The president explains, “To get to the university, rub the orange bead in a counterclockwise direction. Breakfast will be waiting for you during this meeting, so do not worry about eating. If nothing else, you have free rein of the home to move about as you please. In each of your rooms, is a device on your desk to use to order dinner or whatever you need from the staff. I will let you all relax for the rest of the day and recover from your long journey home.”

Everyone retires to their rooms to find their luggage there with gifts left on the beds. The rooms were spacious with floor to ceiling windows with luxurious drapery. The mahogany woods floors complimented the décor of the rooms which were decorated in earth tones accented with royal colors.

The most intriguing of all was an exquisite purple velvet envelope with a large gold wax seal that was left in each room. Kimberle seeing this first, decides to open before doing anything else.
“I wonder what this could be with such a beautiful presentation.”

She breaks the seal and opens the large flap and pulls out the contents. Immediately Kimberle begins to cry upon reading the first page. The page reads: The Kingdom of Wakanda Welcomes You Home. Enclosed you will find the path to your true ancestry. The following pages will share the results of your genealogy, including information on your African tribe and your family name.

While Kimberle continues to read the words in the documents over and over, Tamar’s face is projected into her room and a voice says, “Tamar is requesting a call, do you wish to speak at this time?” Kimberle answers and Tamar starts speaking, “Girl! Did you get the same envelope I got about your ancestry?!”

Kimberle answers, “Yes, I am reading through my documents right now,” but before she could finish, Tamar asks, ”Have you gotten to the last part of the document?”

Kimberle replies, “I am still reading through the first part.”

Tamar shrieks, “Hurry up to the last part of the document and call back.”

Tamar’s face disappears and the room is silent. Kimberle thumbs through the remaining pages that contain information about her African tribe, including maps and historical information about her country of origin. The very last part of the document is a certificate of citizenship recognizing her as full citizen of her country. Kimberle feels something lumpy in the bottom pocket and what she pulls out is a passport with her information and picture. Kimberle whispers softly, “I finally have a home, I finally know my name, my people, I am whole.”

The next morning, the group meets in the foyer of the home all excited and talking to each other about their newfound ancestry. They check to make sure they have all they need for the day and are all wearing their beads. They all rub their orange bead in a counterclockwise
motion and instantly, they are in the conference room at the University of Wakanda. Tamar is first to say, “Whew chile, this is going to take some getting used to. Like, when I get back home, how am I going to want to drive a car again?!?”

Maxine says, “Right! I can wake up at 7:00 a.m. and be ready to leave my house at 7:59 a.m. and be in my office like [snaps fingers] that!”

The group laughs as they move about to greet the group in the room.

Several of the professional staff members greet them with hugs and university swag to wear. Breakfast is there waiting for them and soon they are eating breakfast and doing introductions. Once introductions are done, the UofW professional staff shares information about their duties and responsibilities in their positions. They provide an overview of the institution and their background and career path. Discussions begin about the experiences of the group working at a Historically White Institution.

The president shares prior to discussion, “We understand the pervasive nature of racism and that it exists in society. We also know that you all have experienced racism, but one of the reasons we have you here is because we want to really understand to what extent it affects your everyday experiences working at your institution. We have international students who move to the United States to get an education. We want to know what really goes on in these offices rather than listening to administrators tell us what we want to hear and that they value diversity, equity, and inclusion. We are working on some ways to foster a more inclusive and equitable environment if institutions are going to continue to conduct business with our country. We will not allow our people to be exploited.”

Kimberle starts the discussion. “I think one of the main issues is the refusal to acknowledge that racism exists within the institution. There’s a way that universities engage with
the climate of racism that exists in this country. That is...like it is some sort of third party
observer that can’t imagine how all of this is happening or that all of this is still happening.”

Maxine and others nod their heads in agreement.

Kimberle goes on to add, “That it is, you know, the safe haven, in relationship to all of
the stuff happening in the world and it’s a lack of a willingness to acknowledge that yeah, we
also are not only a site for racial aggressions, in particular anti-Blackness, but often, you know,
we are the places that have produced the knowledge that support it.”

The room is silent for a moment to process that statement.

Duchess of Rochester chimes in, “I also think society contributes to what also happens at
and in the institution. Where I live and work, there is racial divide in the city and so there is a
mentality that mimics the environment.”

Shuri mentions, “It made me feel like these are good old boys kind of club ish. That’s just
the political game that we play in higher education.”

David also adds, “I think barriers are contributed to the idea of limiting people of color. It
is the nature of this culture, from the president on down. I think there is an inherent
understanding and belief that people of color, for the most part, should not be at certain levels.”

Rico chuckles, “Well, the table was never diverse.”

Tamar sighs, “So we are trying to catch up and it’s like sometimes it just feels like we
won’t ever catch up.”

“Especially when we are not compensated equally to our white colleagues.” Maxine
adds. “You see people continuously get promoted in jobs not posted on the job board. And then
they get another piece added to their title with another five to ten or twenty thousand added to
their salary, you know, that kind of stuff gets to you.”
Rico mentions, “The other barrier in advancing is folks will not leave positions, leaving very few opportunities for advancement.”

Shuri agrees with Rico on that statement and adds, “I just think it is important to have these kinds of conversations.”

“It is, but unacknowledged bias and a proactive campaign to diminish the university’s responsibility with relationship to racial equity in particular is the issue. It is not my responsibility as the Black person to remedy the racism I’m experiencing. Because what I know from experience is that if you tell someone that they are being racist against you as a Black person, they will eventually come to the conclusion that I’m [the white person] a good person, I can’t possibly be racist, the problem is you and you have to go,” Kimberle adds.

One of the professional staff members, Tempest, at UofW acknowledges what the group is saying and affirms their statements. Tempest shares, “I participated in a student exchange program when I was in college and it was in Alabama. Whoa, talk about a culture shock, but the racism I experienced there was unimaginable. I was only there for three weeks and every day, I experienced some form of racism, microaggression, or it was obvious I was not welcomed wherever I went. I struggled internally with how to process what was happening in those moments and how to respond. We were given all of these rules about how to act when in stores, such as not to go in your purse or linger at things too long while shopping. There were so many rules, I struggled to keep up, so I wrote them down.”

Kimberle touches her hands, gives a squeeze to acknowledge her experiences and adds, “Even in this environment at my HWI, you can’t outperform your way out of suffering under racism, you can’t out earn your way out of suffering under racism.”
“There’s things you can do to kind of help change the mindsets of people who work and attend our institution,” Tamar thinks.

Shuri agrees, “I think not having open dialogues about race, privilege and systemic racism is a huge barrier.”

One of the staff members, Zola, asks the question, “How do you manage your emotions dealing with these experiences?”

David speaks first, “I attempt to mentally tune these people out.”

Deborah continues, “My supervisor was so egregious in her behavior towards me, including yelling at me, until one day, I had to go outside and cry. Yeah, I was in such shock that she literally was yelling at me as if I was a child or something, and it was just a culmination of her treatment of me that it became too much.”

Shuri feels the emotions coming from Deborah as she speaks about her situation.

Deborah continues, “Later she comes to my office to ask me why I was crying and I tell her, “First of all, I don’t like to be accused of something I didn’t do. She refuses to acknowledge that she did scream at me.” As Deborah is telling the story, you can feel the anguish that still lingers from this experience.

Maxine grumbles, “Sometimes these white people try to make you think you crazy.”

Deborah agrees that her supervisor is a bully who was constantly micromanaging and bullying her. She mutters, “I had five years of hate in my office.”

Overall, the group agrees that managing emotions ranges from anger, helplessness, despair, and numbness.
Zola stands says, “Thank you all for being vulnerable enough to share your experiences with us. I know it is painful to relive and we appreciate you being open and trusting us enough to share your stories. We are going to end this session and have lunch.”

The group breaks for lunch and continue talking.

The afternoon sessions include the group along with the professional staff from that morning and they learn that everyone will pair up with their counterparts. Shuri wonders what knowledge she could share about her work that would compare to working in a space that allows one to be free from oppression. Shuri thinks to herself, “What could I possible share that will pale in comparison to what they do and in the space they get to do it? They have all of these technological advances that we can’t possibly fathom.”

Before pairing off, Zola asks the group, “We do want to ask what led to your journey into higher education?” The majority agrees that being in higher education did not start out as a career aspiration. Despite the current climate, some members of the group love what they do in their respective positions.

David shares, “My experiences overall have been great.”

Deborah and Maxine agree to that as well.

Tamar jumps in and says, “Hell, I am only passing through until I reach my ten years to get my student loans forgiven.”

Everyone in the room laughs.

Tamar adds, “Listen, Biden and The Congress keeps tripping about doing a full sweep of student loan forgiveness.”

The group laughs again.
Duchess of Rochester makes the comment, “Working at a HWI is where Black dreams go to die. Despite everything, no matter how much we love it, it does not love us back. They appreciate the labor but not the individual. We are not seen as individuals, but commodities.”

Rico adds, “Word! I never saw myself in higher education. I had a different career path, but I love what I do and would love to advance, but it will be a hard journey.”

Zola pulls out a small box and as she turns the dial on the top of the box, the groups beads vibrate and a screen projects from the beads in front of their faces. David is paired with Johnathan; Rico is paired with Ena. Deborah, Shuri, and Duchess of Rochester are paired with Mackenzie. Kimberle and Tamar are paired with Mahershala, and Maxine is paired with Damson and Zola. As the group pairs up with their counterparts, their group leaders prepare to transport to their offices to spend their time there.

David finds himself in Johnathan’s office. Johnathan offers a seat and a drink to David, which he accepts. Johnathan says, “So David, before we talk shop, tell me about yourself.” David begins, “Well, I grew in a small town that was a farming community and was educated during times of segregation. While I was in elementary school, my school was closed and I was bused to a white school because of integration. I experienced things such as kids wanting to touch my hair or a white girl blurting out that all Blacks were nothing but a bunch of niggers. She soon left and her parents enrolled her in a private school.”

Johnathan listens intently as David talks. David continues, “I saw my brother get arrested for whistling a white girl and was charged with disturbing the peace. He was sentenced for 30 days, I believe.”
Johnathan says, “I remember reading about Emmett Till and this sounds similar but good the outcome was different. Would you say these childhood experiences shaped how you see the world and navigate white spaces now?”

David thinks and offers, “I believe that what's taught and passed down to every generation, is the idea that Blacks are almost like an extra figure that can either be used for labor, or military or for whatever, but used, but never allowed to share what is supposed to be the American dream. This defined what could be attaining financial security and stability, and establishing a domain of peace and faith, and security. A lot of that is just tenuous, including Blacks who have made it so to speak financially, educationally, or professionally within a work environment. It's still a very confined space for that African American. And that is what I've seen time and time again, in practically every venue, American institutions that I have been involved in. I think these experiences has certainly shaped my life or view on life as an African-American in that country.”

Johnathan thanks David for being open. They begin to dialogue about their daily work tasks. Johnathan explains, “Our positions and duties seem similar in supporting students in particular ways and working with other departments in our offices.”

David agrees and adds, “My day starts out with answering emails and phone calls that can take up a lot of time throughout my day. I like interacting with people and there’s something new every time you meet someone. In my particular job, I am fortunate enough to deal with people from my background, so there’s a positive flow of like experience there. But at the same time, the least thing I like about my job is dealing with the negative aspect of people.” David and Johnathan continue to talk about their positions.
In another building on campus, Rico and Ena are beginning to tour the space where Ena works. Rico is impressed with the space and all of the technology available to the staff and students. Rico asks Ena about her journey to higher education. Ena shares, “I always loved my college experience and never wanted to leave this space.”

Rico says, “Mine is a bit different. I majored in something completely different than what I do now. After college, I worked in a different field, but knew I did not want to do that long term. So, I thought about it and I had been involved as a student leader on campus and enjoyed that, so I tried my luck in higher ed.”

“We have similar paths, but I suspect our experiences are different.” says Ena.

Rico chuckles, “I would agree with you there. Just based on what the president said about our salaries, we, meaning Black folks, are not compensated equally. I put in a lot of hours above and beyond working hours, you know, boots on the ground, in the trenches, yet the salary is so unequal. Even some opportunities as far as moving up don’t equate to the amount of work that I put in.”

Ena talks about her experiences working in her area and acknowledges the differences they have but agree about the fulfilling aspects of helping Black students be successful.

Rico says, “I love providing a space for them to come and be themselves. Sometimes my boss doesn’t like that my office is so open, but they don’t bother me. I can still get my work done and besides, where else can they go, you know? I can’t imagine being in a space, like this, where you are welcomed everywhere.”

Ena shares that she admires that openness and advocacy for the students. She soon switches gears, “So how are your experiences as a Black male at your institution?”
Rico sighs, “Well, I can say that I have experienced my fair share of racism”, [laughs], “while I don’t think it’s been overt racism, but definitely microaggressions and understanding that mechanisms of racism are what keep me from advancing in my career. It is also equally frustrating realizing that you have to play this game of walking the walk, talking the talk, and looking the part if I want to have any chance of moving up in my career. The entire act of switching is tiring at times. On one hand, you have your institution say they value diversity, but at what level? I feel it is only surface level, just what you see in the ads.”

Ena continues, “I can certainly understand how that can be frustrating and that the entire progression of your career or even your identity is based on what white folks think of you or how they view you. If you are the acceptable negro worthy of gaining access to their club. It is a shame that it comes with a price.”

Ena and Rico continue their conversation and a few floors up, Deborah, Shuri, and Duchess of Rochester walk into the office space to meet with Mackenzie. Shuri looks at all the technology and could not believe her eyes. There were large screens with multiple displays at your fingertips.

Mackenzie interrupts her to begin the meeting, “I am happy you all are here! I understand we have a short time frame, so I want to get going. Do you all have specific questions for me?”

“I do! What is it like to exists in a space where you are free to be who you are? I would love to know that.” Deborah asks.

Mackenzie responds, “It is freeing to not live under the gaze of whiteness.”

Deborah continues, “I am a very direct person. I keep it 100, you know? Unfortunately, people say I am rude, and it is mostly white people who complain.”
Shuri adds, “I agree. There are only so many ways you can say certain things and sometimes being direct is the best approach.”

Duchess of Rochester asks, “How is it to work here?”

Mackenzie smiles, “I love what I do because I love working with students. I love other parts of my job too, but I love making an impact on the lives of students.”

Duchess of Rochester and Shuri both agree with Mackenzie and Deborah adds, “I agree about impacting students. I wish the university would understand our lives are important as well. It is hard coming to workday after day in a place of hate.”

“When you work your ass off for a place and have to witness white folks get promotions and salary increases right in front of your face while you are being told there is no money, it can get to be too much. I mean, do they think we are that oblivious?” Shuri laments.

Deborah sarcastically laughs, “No, they just don’t care.”

The group continues to watch as Mackenzie demonstrate the bells and whistles of the technology tracking university data.

Soon, Kimberle, Tamar, and Mahershala walk in with Maxine and Damson. They are discussing the isolating feeling of working in spaces that are hostile in their respective offices and positions. The group agrees that it can be isolating and at times a hostile environment.

Deborah talks about being the only Black staff person for years.

“For years, I was the only Black in the office and I was often the target of racial aggression, and I had no one to turn to for solace or comfort.”

Kimberle recalls an openly hostile incident for doing her job.

“Next thing I know, I’m being called into a meeting with my supervisor and upper administrators and others and it becomes quickly apparent that I am the only Black person in the
room. I am just trying to do my job and in doing so, I am being labeled difficult to work with when my demeanor and language did not reflect that. It was as if I did not have the professional or educational background to do my job, but yet I am here trying to defend myself to the white people for doing my job. It was so hostile that I stopped talking and stopped trying to defend myself.”

Mahershala asks, “I am sure that is so upsetting to hear when you are trying to do the right thing. How do you process those emotions?”

Kimberle feeling the same emotions of that day, “It is like a fight or flight moment where I feel like I need to defend myself, but it is also paralyzing. If I defend myself too much, does that also feed into whatever thoughts that these people already have about me? So, there is a sense of paralysis as well as an inability to really be able to kind of strategically deal with all of the hostility and accusations that was coming at me in that moment.”

The group begins to talk about their experiences with microaggressions on daily basis.

Duchess of Rochester huffs, “My supervisor will never meet with me alone despite never having an issue. It was baffling to me because I did not understand their reasoning.”

“I experience microaggressions every day. I field questions about the car I drive and being able to afford the cars I have. A faculty person was in shock when I told them where I live. I was new to the area and did not know my way around the city. They were not expecting me to live in a white suburb as opposed to a Black neighborhood.” says Maxine.

Speaking in particular about Black women, members of the group talk about experiencing microaggression with the hair. Multiple comments about their hairstyles, the changing of their hairstyles, wanting to touch their hair or acting as if they are a different person because they have changed their hair.
“I believe there is an unspoken rule of professional hair standards that only apply to Black folks.”

“I agree with that because I have never seen a white woman have to explain her hairstyle as much as we do.”

“I spoke to my colleague one morning and of course, they did not speak. Why, you ask? They did not know it was me because my hair was different.”

“Oh yeah, I hate when that happens!”

“But how can someone not know who you are when your face does not change!!?”

“Our point exactly!!”

The group laughs as they continue the conversation.

A few of the women in the group talk about how they have to work at policing their tone in emails or when speaking to avoid any conflict.

Kimberle shares, “The problem of course is that what I do doesn’t matter because the trope of the angry Black woman is a device against Black women irrespective of how they are. It has to do with like people’s imaginations about who Black women are, and like all these stereotypes that exits.”

Deborah talks about her experiences with feeling and being silenced. Recalling an instance where she was due to speak to other campus colleagues and administrators and her supervisor intentionally assigning her part to a white colleague. “I show up to the event and I hear my supervisor whispering to my colleague about my presence. She made the comment that I did not need to worry about speaking to the group. In that moment, I remembering feeling hurt and uncomfortable.”
Following that incident, Deborah whispers, “I chose to remain silent and did not feel comfortable contributing any further.”

Others agree that there have been times when they have had similar situations or feelings of being silenced or ignored.

“I sit in meetings all the time where faculty act as if I am not there. I may as well be invisible because that is how it feels in these meetings. My presence is optional it seems because no one ever asks my opinion. When I do speak, my inputs have little to no value to them because they interrupt me when I am talking. I have a notebook full of doodling because I sit there during these meetings with nothing to contribute.”

I hear you! I have years of experience and a degree but all they see is a Black girl. I am not seen as a professional, so my expertise is only worth so much.”

A UofW administrator, Porter, asks, “Are there any changes in diversity at the administrative level in more recent years?” Maxine says, “The barriers are so thick, even though we have people in administration that could probably help promote diversity amongst the ranks, I think they’re being silenced. And so, then everything just kind of goes along status quo.”

Porter continues, “One of the reasons you are here is to get an idea of the issues that are on-going at your institution. We are working to improve the conditions of our people at these institutions. Obviously, this cannot happen overnight, but we have been in meetings with the Federation of Universities and Colleges International over the last two years. We are developing policies that push these institutions towards change.”

David asks, “How can you push these institutions to change when we are talking about systemic issues that are deeper than just saying stop it?”
Porter responds, “We understand how deeply the issues are systemically. We know that it will not occur overnight. Our methods will include more than just having conversations or making statements. Our government has more influences than you would think.”

The time comes to end the panel and take a campus tour of the university. The staff ushers the group outside to the waiting hovercraft.

The group gets in the hovercraft with two of the administrators and the president to tour the university grounds. The campus is on beautiful acres of lush greenery that includes trees, exotic flowers and towering trees. The buildings on the campus are all architectural wonders that are light years away from home in design. The group takes in the beauty of the campus while listening to all of the information about the campus, students, and the buildings. Rico asks the president where the main building was or where he works. The president points to a building that seems small in comparison to the other buildings, and tells the group, “This is the building where my office is. I have an office in there, but I do not spend a lot of time in my office. I like to move around, be among the people.”

Rico shockingly replies, “I was not expecting the main campus building to be small or not stately.”

Tamar yells, “You know, the big house.”

Maxine declares, “I call it the dark side. When I worked in that building, I called it going to the dark side. I don’t want to step another foot, not another day in the building. There were some terrible things that happened in that building. I have seen them; I’ve been in the middle of them. I believe in doing things right and as a Christian, I have seen things that make me not sleep at night. Every day, when I was going into that building, I would just be quoting scriptures from the car to the building.”
Tamar shouts, “Get thee behind thee Satan!”

Everyone laughs and continues the rest of the tour.

The day ends with a reception in their honor with an opportunity to meet more faculty and students. They group spends the rest of the evening having dinner in the city and enjoying an outdoor festival of lights complete with music and shopping. All of their purchases are compliments of the Republic of Wakanda and the UofW. The green bead on their bracelet was a form of payment for their items. The night ends with the hovercraft dropping them off at the president’s house. The group retires to their rooms after having a full day. Tomorrow is their last day in Lawrenceville before returning home.

The next day, the group has a lazy morning, eating breakfast on the screened patio and enjoying the sun. They discuss the strangeness in seeing hovercrafts flying by as they eat. Discussion soon turns to their experiences yesterday. Maxine wonders if they were expecting to hear those stories or hoping things were improving for their people. “I wonder what they are thinking since hearing our stories.” Maxine wonders aloud.

Tamar chimes in, “Yeah, it was great to get all of that out, but I think they have something in the works.”

David suggests, “I think they probably understand that the more things change, the more things stay the same.”

“That is true, but it sounds like there may be more to it than that. The president was talking about that International Federation of Colleges and Universities and creating policies, so I think they are working on something.”

Maxine adds, “Who knows what has been going on behind the scenes, you know?” As they finish up their morning, the president walks in to greet them.
The president thanks the group for their participation in yesterday’s events. “I want to thank you for yesterday. I know yesterday may have been emotional for some of you.” He continues, “I love the candor of sharing your experiences and I thank you for being so open and honest with them.” They have more discussion about yesterday and what the group enjoyed most about their experiences.

“The technology is so dope. I cannot imagine having that kind of technology at your fingertips.”

“I agree. It would make my job easier, but the technology is only a small but big piece. The technology is a bonus when you get to exist in spaces that are not hostile and unwelcoming.”

“Meeting new people has been the best. Making these connections, both professionally and socially has been my favorite part of the trip. I hope to continue these connections after we return home.”

“Connecting to my ancestry is beyond the best part of this trip. Knowing who my people are and having a last name….”

Soon, the doorbell rings and after a moment, a group of what appears to be royalty walks into the room. The president stands and introduces members of the government from the Republic of Wakanda. They have on royal robes with medallions made of ivory and gold. They usher them into this huge conference room with a large conference table made of African Blackwood. Once everyone is in a seat, the head of the Republic stands and greets the group. “It is indeed an honor to be here with you. I trust your stay has been fruitful and you are enjoying your stay. Three years ago, the Republic of Wakanda began working on programs that will address the plight of our people in your country. We are negotiating agreements with institutions to offer these types of experiences for faculty, staff, and students.”
He begins to talk about the decisions that were made to create this opportunity and hope everyone is happy with their experience. He continues, “We made the decision to bring you here to learn of your experiences and find out what we can do to assist the country and universities with creating a better environment for our people.” Maxine, Kimberle, and David look on as he continues speaking. He shares eagerly, “I trust that you all have the envelopes that were left for you on your first day of arrival. In the last page, you have a certificate of citizenship, recognizing you as an African citizen. With a citizenship, you have a rite of passage in this country and that includes your descendants. You will have an opportunity to submit the documents to conduct their genealogy search and issuance of citizenship.”

Tamar asks, “This is amazing, but what does this mean? Does this mean I can come home here to Wakanda? Or I can visit whenever I want and use the passport in the package?”

The head of the Republic answers, “What this means, my sister, is that you can come home now if you want to. You have a place here; you have a job (or jobs) here.”

The entire group gasps and looks around at each other not believing what they are hearing. The head of the Republic goes on to explain that they have a program that allows them to make the transition to Wakanda. “This program”, he explains, “allows for you to come to live here. You can make Wakanda your home.” Continuing on, he shares, “The program provides a job at the University of Wakanda or other universities of your choosing. This program allows you employment and temporary housing until you can make the transition to permanent housing. In the future, we hope to expand this program to other industries and professions. We hope we can count on you to be ambassadors to speak about your experiences and transition should you decide to make the move.”

David and Maxine ask about their families.
The head of the Republic responds, “They can come too, you all can come home.” The discussion continues and soon the meeting comes to an end. The president takes some time to meet with them to share important information about the program and the transition plans should they decide to make the move. They have a few moments with the president who informs them he will get them to the tarmac in the morning.

The group has some down time prior to their last dinner, which is quiet as they all try to process the events of the day. They all retire to their rooms to pack for their departure. The next morning, they all meet in the foyer for the last time. The president is there with them. They all rub the red bead counterclockwise and instantly are in the airport. Before boarding the plane, the president informs them, “We would like for you to keep the beads. Should you decide to come back, you can rub the purple bead in a clockwise direction. That will signal the Republic of your decision and the process will begin.” The president also adds, “If anyone of you wishes to stay today and begin the process immediately, please stay back with me.”

The air was thick. The weight of making such a huge decision was obvious as the group made their way to the aircraft. There was a mixture of excitement, confusion, and trepidation of such an important decision. The hustle and bustle of airport activity was happening all around the group, but even in the hustle and bustle of the airport, for some of the group members, time was standing still as they thought about the decision to stay or go home.

The door opens and the flight crew appears ready to start the boarding process………

As the plane moves down the tarmac, the pilot comes over the intercom, “I understand we have a few less passengers on this trip back. To the remaining passengers, this is your last chance before takeoff. If you want to stay push the call button.”

Ding……ding…..
Chapter 5

The Whiteness Chip

Sasha sits in the parking lot silently dreading 7:55 a.m. when she will have to leave her car and walk into her office. She sips her coffee and leans her head back against the headrest. Soon, her silence is broken when she hears loud laughing. Without opening her eyes, Sasha knows who it is. It is her colleague, the one she is avoiding. In this moment, Sasha is glad her windows have tint on them. She sinks into her seat until she is sure her colleague is gone. Sasha looks at the clock as it strikes 7:56 a.m., and as she opens her door, she wonders again how she got here.

Sasha comes from a typical background. Both of her parents work full-time jobs. Growing up, Sasha lived in a predominately Black neighborhood. When her father took another position, it came with a hefty salary increase. Soon after, their move to the suburbs meant switching to a predominately white neighborhood and school. Talk about a culture shock! Sasha was in a new environment that was different from her old neighborhood. Her old school was predominately Black and in her new school, she was one of five Black students in the entire student population. That number was smaller in her subdivision. Academically, the new school’s curriculum was advanced compared to her previous school. Sasha was a great student, but the change in schools was difficult. Her new school was a magnet STEM school. In order to not fall behind, Sasha had to work extra hard to make good grades.

By the next school year, Sasha found her stride and her grades were back to A’s. She slowly made friends but missed her friends from the old neighborhood. All of her new friends were white since there were only five Black students enrolled at the school. But, in the back of Sasha’s mind, she was starting to notice a difference in her appearance, the way she talked, and
how she looked at her Black friends. And as Sasha began to take notice, she must admit, she saw the change in her parents first.

Her mother always wore natural hair and kept Sasha’s hair natural or in braids. After some time, Sasha’s mother relaxed her hair and soon changed her wardrobe as well. When Sasha asked for braids, her mother told her she was too old for braids and should relax her hair. Slowly, Sasha noticed the language used in the house changed from slang from the neighborhood to speaking the King’s English. Sasha’s mother constantly told her to stop using slang or people would think she was uneducated. Her father changed as well. Not only did his clothes and wardrobe change, but his attitude about Black folks changed.

His politics went from liberal to conservative. He got up out the hood, so everyone else can too he always said. By the time Sasha graduated from high school, any connections they had to the old neighborhood was severed. They also left their old Baptist and church and attended a predominately white church. They drove expensive cars and cared too much about fitting in with the white folks. That assimilation came at a cost as her parents had to listen to the racists comments or jokes said in their presence because they saw what happened when a Black couple spoke up about a “joke” being racist at Sasha’s graduation party. The husband suddenly lost his job and moved shortly thereafter.

Sasha had always dreamed of going to a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), but her parents would not hear of it. She needed to attend a school that would give her access. No one would hire an HBCU graduate her father said. So, she attended a Historically White Institution (HWI) and graduated with a degree in computer science. However, her college years were a pivotal point in her life. She took a social justice course that discussed systemic racism in the United States. She soon began to realize that she and her parents assimilated to a
white society in order to be deemed as acceptable. When she told her parents about the things she was learning in her class, she was met with pushback about liberal courses feeding her nonsense. The country was getting better, look at them, they said. During Sasha’s junior year, she became a member of a Black Greek Letter Organization (BGLO), Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated.

Her mother was livid, “Why did you do that?! I do not understand you. Why did you not join a white sorority like we discussed?”

“Why would I join a white sorority mother? They do not want me there and I saw no purpose in joining. That entire rush process is ridiculous, and I only see one or two Black students. I chose the sorority that aligns with my values.”

Her mother lets out an exasperated sigh, “You will never advance without those connections Sasha. It is about who you know and being in a white sorority gives you access to those connections.”

“Well, I will take my chances with the connections I already have through my chapter and sorority any day!” Sasha retorts.

Sasha could not believe how much her parents were drinking the Kool-Aid. When she tried to tell her parents that attending a HWI did not insulate her from racism, they would not hear her. The final straw was when Sasha cut her relaxed hair and started her locs. Her mother told her no one would hire her with her ghetto hairstyle. As Sasha finished her degree, her decision to change careers stemmed from the close relationship she developed with her academic advisor, Stella who helped her unlearn her negative stereotypes about Black folks. She reconnected with her friends from her old neighborhood, thanks to social media. She was embracing her Blackness and becoming comfortable with being authentically Black. Soon, Stella
became a mentor for Sasha and when the university had an opening for an entry level position, Sasha took it.

Sasha’s thoughts come back to the present as she walks into her building. Three years later and Sasha still loves working at her HWI. What she does not love are the daily microaggressions or constantly policing her behavior. Her white colleagues in the office are always doing the most and she has been grappling with the pressure to conform to white professional standards in the workplace. She talks with her mentor frequently and other Black colleagues at the university about her experiences, including feeling like she is on display for her colleagues to make comments about her appearance or her hair. She frequently disassociates from the office chatter with the other white women in the office. They do not have much in common and often gossip about she feels like are white people problems, not about another Black man being killed by the police.

Sasha begins to resent her work environment, but she loves helping students. It is exhausting to be multiple people in the workplace. The passive aggressive colleague who tries to appear caring, but really wants to know why Sasha does not engage the group. A typical conversation with this colleague is always met with skepticism.

"Hi Sasha, how are you?"

“I am well, and you?”

“Great. You do such a good job with the students.”

Sasha rolls her eyes and wonders where this is going. “Thank you. I love what I do. What can I do for you? Is it about a student?”
“No, I am curious if you will attend the game night tomorrow. I think it will be great if you could be there since you could not attend the last two. Our colleague works so hard putting it together.”

“Oh, yeah, I will not make it.”

“Can I ask why? Do you have a conflict?”

“No, no conflict. It is on a Friday and by then, I am peopled out.”

“Ah, so we should consider another day to accommodate your schedule. It is so important if everyone can participate.”

“Well, I will not say change the day just for me. I do not socialize outside of work, that’s all.”

“Oh!”

Sasha takes note of the long pause.

“I hope you reconsider because I think you would have a great time.”

“I need to get ready for my next appointment. Is there anything else you want to discuss?”

“No, have a great day.”

“You too. Bye.”

Sasha hangs up the phone and immediately texts her friend Sabrina.

“Hey girl, you will never believe the conversation just now with my co-worker.”

“What?! Do tell!”

“She was pretty much grilling me to find out if I was coming to the gathering they are having. All in my business because I will not attend.”

“Girl, they are so nosey. Like you owe an explanation.”
“Right! I am not going because I will not open myself up to them prying into my life, so they can have ammunition to use against me later. No, thank you!”

“I hear you, Sasha! I do the same with the folks I work around. They are always going out for drinks and I go home. I will not hear secondhand gossip about how much I was drinking or putting myself in a position where they will use anything I say or do against me.”

“We are damned if we do and damned if we don’t. It is a lose lose situation. But I will not go for the sake of playing the game and pretending. It is too much.”

“Sasha, let me get to this meeting. We will talk later tonight.”

“Okay, girl. I’ll talk to you later.”

Sasha sighs and tries to get back to work, but the conversation is at the forefront of her mind. She is over playing the game and needs an outlet, so she takes a walk around campus.

To relieve stress, Sasha falls back on her major, computer science. She is working on creating mods for the Sims games she loves playing. This mod will add Black issues, mannerisms, or cultural references to present to the creators of The Sims. She thinks to herself, “If they refuse to listen to my pitch, I will just work on creating The Black Sims.” Later that night, Sasha is writing in her journal her thoughts about the multiple ways she has to show up at work. She remembers talking to her colleague, Sabrina about this same issue. She remembers Sabrina sharing, “When I am at work, they get the work Sabrina, and when I go home, my family gets the home Sabrina.” Sasha continues writing until well after midnight. As she is falling asleep, she wishes things were different. Sasha thinks, “At least I will get a break from work since I have this procedure tomorrow. I could use a break from them.” Sasha sets her alarm and drifts off to sleep.
The next day, Sasha has a minor procedure requiring sedation. Sasha’s mother is there to transport her to and from the outpatient facility. After sleeping for the rest of the day, when Sasha wakes up, she feels different. She attributes it to the drugs and soon goes back to sleep.

The next morning when Sasha wakes up, she notices how different she still feels as she gets ready for work. She shrugs it off and figures it is from the procedure and sedation. When she pulls into the carpark and immediately exits her car, she knows something is different. The time is 7:30 a.m., and she never leaves her car this early. She runs into Sabrina on her way into the office.

“Good morning, Sasha!”

“Good morning, Sabrina, how are you doing?”

“I cannot believe you are walking in this early, but I am so glad you are because I need to tell you about something. Can you believe my colleague, my white colleague told a Black male student to cut his locs if he wants to get a job?!”

“Shut up! OUCH!!!”

“Sasha, are you okay?!?”

“I think so, I felt something sting me.”

“Anyway, I was livid. Why would she say something like that!? I know they are the ones doing the hiring, but I am mad because I..why can’t I express myself. I should be able to but it’s like I’m in a society or whatever where I can’t.”

“I can see your colleague’s point. They are the ones doing the hiring. Maybe she is trying to help him.”

“Maybe you are right. People like her are going to be hiring him. Anyway, I have to run, see you at lunch?”
“Sure thing, until then.”

As Sabrina walks away, Sasha is thinking to herself, “What the hell was that?!?! Why did I say that?!?!” She makes it to her office and begins to make coffee. Turning on her computer, her phone rings and it is her mother. Sasha immediately sends her to voicemail. “Not talking to her right now.” retorts Sasha.

Soon, her colleagues start to trickle in the office. Sasha is standing at the counter getting her coffee when she excitedly exclaims, “Good morning, everyone,” and walks to her desk. Again, Sasha tries to figure out her demeanor. She assumes it stems from the medication from the procedure. She makes a mental note to call her doctor just in case. While responding to an email, she gets a notification of her meeting in ten minutes. “Off to the races.” she sings and makes her way down the hall to her meeting.

Sasha waits for her colleague to call her in for their meeting. While waiting, she makes small talk with her assistant. Sasha does not like her because she has made several inappropriate comments about Black folks. While the assistant is chatting away, Sasha is trying to understand her strange behavior.

The assistant is talking, but all Sasha hears is, “Wah wah wah wah.” She is deep in her thoughts about the cause of her strange behavior. She snaps out of her thoughts when she hears her name for the third time. Her colleague calls her in and she sits down to begin her meeting.

Sasha is meeting with Chris and before they can begin the meeting, Sasha says, “Mane, it’s been a morning. Ouch! Damn it! Ouch!” Chris jumps and leans towards Sasha, “What happened?”

Sasha rubs the back of her neck, “It is nothing, just a catch in my neck, I guess. I am okay.” Sasha shrugs it off and they get the meeting underway.
As the meeting moves on, Chris changes the subject to a conversation he had with another Black colleague Olivia the other day.

Chris speaks to Olivia, “Hey, what’s up. How’s it going?”

“Mane, everything cool. What’s good with you?” Olivia replies.

“Tired, tired of performing for these folks,” Chris answers.

“I promise, it is like a full-time job,” Olivia laughs.

Chris laughs and mentions, “Yeah, the code-switching and making sure to be nice, and laugh at jokes even though I don’t want to or they are not funny is exhausting.”

Chris adds, “I can be in my office and feel like, let me go and speak because it is what I feel I have to do to make those connections. If they come in my office, let me entertain them for a few minutes even though I’m trying to do something else.”

Olivia nodding in agreement, “Ummhmmm.”

“You know, I need to keep that relationship and that bridge open. Even if there is an instance where you say something snappy. I think, let me not pop off on you or keep it tame and not talk too crazy like I would with coworkers or bosses that are Black.”

Olivia agrees, “Yeah, cause you know me, I am very direct person. I don’t sugarcoat, so some people call that rude. If you feel that way, or that’s the type of energy you feel from me, that’s on you. I’m not being rude. I’m just being honest. I keep it 100. Either you can take it or you can’t.”

Chris exclaims, “Exactly! That’s what I’m talking about right there. Why should we change who we are because you have a problem with it? It is who I am. I am not asking white folks to change how they talk or their demeanor, but they sure expect us to change. And if we say something or call it out, then we are the problem.”
Olivia bellows, “Exactly! Why is it that we are always the problem?”

Chris tells Sasha he and Olivia chat for a bit more and he heads to another meeting. Sasha sits and listens to Chris talks about this meeting and feels so much conflict within her psyche but cannot understand why. On one hand, she agrees with the entire conversation, but another part of her brain is saying it is a fallacy. Sasha hears her parents in her head telling her that in order to get ahead and fit into their world, that means conforming to their standards of whiteness.

Sasha and Chris finish their meeting and Sasha heads back to her desk. She emails Sabrina to cancel her lunch date. “Hey Sabrina, I need to cancel lunch today. Sorry for the short notice, but I need to catch up on work from yesterday. Reschedule soon!” Sasha reads it over and clicks send.

She feels so much conflict within herself and does not understand what is happening. Her mother calls her four times throughout the rest of the day, but Sasha ignores all of her calls. She cannot deal with her mother right now. The workday ends and Sasha heads home.

Her mother is waiting for her when she pulls into her driveway. Sasha takes a deep breath and prepares to exit her car. Her head is pounding and she is not in the mood for her mother’s shenanigans. As she walks to her door, Sasha’s mother rushes up to her demanding to know why she will not take her calls.

“Girl, are you crazy?!?! Now, I know you saw all 1,000 of my calls today?! And I know some of them went directly to voicemail, which means you hit ignore. You know I don’t play that, ignoring my calls.”

Sasha unlocks her door and her mother rushes in before Sasha could say anything. She walks past her mother and puts her things down on the table. Sasha sighs, “What is it, mother, that is so important?”
“I want to know how you are doing after your procedure or did you forget the honor your mother and answer all calls part in the Bible? You know, you never know how much longer I have on this earth. I would hate to leave here and you feel guilty because of these unanswered calls.” her mother yells.

Sasha exhales, “Mother, why must you always be this dramatic, and I am pretty sure it does not say that in the bible. But, to answer your question, I have been having these weirds zaps or shocks to my body since my procedure. I am not sure what is happening, but I will call the doctor for a follow-up visit.”

“Sasha, there is no need to call the doctor, I know what’s going on.” her mother replies.

Sasha looks at her mother and she notices her looking around at her décor. Sasha states, “What’s wrong mother, don’t like my Black art?”

“As a matter of fact, I don’t, but anyway, no need to worry about that. It will change soon enough.” she declares.

Sasha looks at her mother wondering what she means but decides to let it go for now.

Sasha finally decides to sit down, weary from the pounding headache, but now she’s having to listen to her mother make these strange statements.

“Sasha, you have to understand, this had to be done. You have been out of control lately, and your father and I want the best for you. You were going on and on with this Black power, down with the people, Black Lives Matter (BLM) business, so we had to do something!” her mother exclaims.

Sasha jumps up, “What did you do?!?”
Her mother takes a deep breath, “So, when you had your procedure, we had the doctor place a chip in you that will make you act and think like white people. It is called the whiteness chip. Sasha stares at her, not sure if she is believing what she is hearing.

Her mother goes on, “Your father had his done years ago, it is how he got his promotion. I had mine done shortly after we had enough money. We thought we could raise you to be that way and would not need the chip. It was working until you got to college and took that damn social justice class and met that woman! She poisoned your mind you know?! So, we felt we did not have a choice.”

Sasha is sitting there in disbelief and finally shouts, “I want it out of me with the quickness!” ZAP!! “Damn it!” She grabs her head in pain.

Her mother goes on, “Well, baby….you see…..we can’t exactly do that. You remember that Black guy that was at your graduation party?

Sasha sits there for a minute thinking and finally answers, “Yes, I think I remember him. But still…..”

Her mother continues her story, “You remember he made a comment about the joke that was made and all of a sudden, he lost his job and was gone? Well, your father was saying that he had a chip too, but apparently was really militant before deciding to get it. So, it took him a little longer to conform. Anyway, I find out that he didn’t exactly just leave.

Sasha questions, “What do you mean he didn’t exactly leave?! What did he do?”

Taking a deep breath, her mother explains, “They came and got him and well, destroyed him. If you refuse to comply, they deem you a problem and get rid of you. So, you see, we HAD to do it.”
Sasha sits in shock trying to process everything. So many things are running through her mind as she listens to what seems like a far-fetched story. “This cannot be real,” she is thinking. She asks her mother to leave, “I need you to leave mother, I need to process.”

Her mother pushes back, “Sasha, I do not want to leave you. I have more information to give you about your chip. As you just saw, if it detects any hint of doing or saying anything that goes against whiteness, you will get a zap or a jolt to your body.”

Sasha yells, “You think?! I know about that all too well after today! How could you do something like this to me?!”

Sasha’s mother snaps, “Girl, I am about to take this zap because who the hell you talking to crazy like that?!?! You done lost your damn mind?! [ZAP] Her mother bends over from the pain of the shock. “UGH. Once you conform, the zaps are excruciating because they think you are revolting, but that was worth it.”

“Please leave mother. I need to be alone.”

Her mother sighs. She leaves something on the table, promises to call later, and swiftly exits.

Sasha sits in silence for over an hour. Darkness falls in the room. The only light is the moonlight illuminating in the living room through the blinds that are still open. She finally gets up to fix dinner. As she’s eating, she reads through the information her mother left on the table. Thinking this is all a dream brought on by her pain medication, Sasha takes more meds and goes to sleep.

The next morning, Sasha calls out of work. She has to figure out what her mother has done to her and how she can fight this. She starts browsing on her computer trying to find information on what her next move is to deal with this craziness. She remembers her background
in computer science. She quickly leaves the house and heads to the tech store to purchase what
she needs.

When she gets home, she notices a package at her door. She goes inside and puts her
things down. Sasha thinks aloud, “I did not order anything recently, I wonder what it is.”

She reads the label on the package and realizes it is from the people who put the chip in
her. She opens the box and it contains a welcome letter and more information about the chip.
Sasha reads through the pamphlets in the box. She realizes it contains the same information her
mother left yesterday.

Sasha pulls out the letter and begins reading through it. What catches her eye is the last
sentence on the letter. It reads, “We are happy you took the first step into whiteness. You will
soon enjoy the benefits of whiteness as long as you conform to our standards. We value order
and compliance from our subjects.”

Sasha threw the letter down, gathers up her items to make her way to her office. “How
am I going to get out of this?” Sasha wonders. As soon as she got that thought out…ZAP!
“Damn!” yells Sasha. She works through the evening until she falls asleep at her desk.

The next morning, Sasha gets ready for work. She pulls into the carpark and makes her
way to her office. She gets coffee on the way to work, so once she is in her office, she shuts her
door. Sasha thinks, “The less interaction the better.” She hears the chatter outside her door, but
she silently prays they abide by the closed-door rule. Soon, she gets a reminder of a meeting with
Anita and immediately she says, “Shit, I totally forgot about this! Not today of all days!” She
thinks about skipping, but she has no room to reschedule, so she heads over to the student center.

She finds a table and waits for Anita. She makes sure to face to door to avoid missing
Anita, who wants to meet with Sasha about her experiences working at her institution. Sasha
pulls out her phone to check her email and make sure Anita did not cancel. Just as Sasha begins to text Anita, she blows into the café and rushes up to Sasha.

“Sorry!! It was a nightmare getting here. Hope you have not been waiting long?” Anita says breathlessly.

Sasha replies, “No, not at all. No worries.”

The two make small talk to catch up.

Anita recounts a conversation she had with a colleague. Anita tells Sasha, “This lady said to me, I am old school and I do think that people judge you by your appearance point blank period. And people take you seriously or not seriously by your appearance. Because I know how to conduct myself and look professional, that opens doors that my mouth and network couldn’t open because they knew that I was going to show up a certain way.”

Anita continues, “I know how to speak the King’s English, and we as Black people know that we have a certain vernacular that we use to speak to each other. We know how to turn it on, and we know how to turn it off.

Sasha nods her head in agreement.

Anita further explains, “But, I don’t outwardly feel like somebody is looking at me and saying you better say the right words or whatever. If I say something they might not understand, I will break it down and tell them, this is what this mean in my language and then I will give them the Merriam Webster Dictionary version. I’ve never felt pressure to speak a certain way because I am who I am. You know, I’ll tell ‘em. I don’t care who it is, and they can like it or not.”

Sasha adds, “Everybody wants to believe that they accept you for whoever we are, but that’s your private self. You have a public self that you have to present, especially if you are in a
leadership position.” Sasha feels the zap and jumps but disguises it by adjusting her body and stifles her groan from the pain.

Anita agrees, “I believe there is this pressure to do all of the things my other colleagues talk about frequently. It didn’t just come from out the blue sky, right? The need to read emails 100 times before sending.”

Sasha concurs, “Yes, I try to make sure that I spellcheck my words, and I’m using the correct grammar, you know, cause I want to be taken seriously when I’m saying something.”

Anita adds, “The tone of the email or anything we say is key because God forbid Becky or Karen say we were aggressive and they are scared of us.”

Sasha rolls her eyes as Anita mentions Becky/Karen. Her eye roll is in annoyance of the Beckys and Karens of the world, but also because she has been enduring zaps during this meeting. To combat the pain, Sasha has her pain medication from her procedure that seems to dull the pain from the zaps.

Sasha sighs, “I had a professor ask once to come to his class because I have a scary face. You know, it gets to the point where you are afraid to get angry or show anger, so I’ve had to be calmer than I’ve ever had to be in my life, or more diplomatic I guess you could say.”

Anita sort of laughs, “Well, that time they were playing with my money is when I became an angry Black woman. Here’s my angry Black woman because I don’t play about my money. But I think I’m always labeled as combative and angry because I’m just there to tell ‘em. You know, I’m not going to sit back. If you wrong or what you are doing is wrong, I’m not gonna sit there and shut my mouth.”

Anita sees Fin and stands to motions for Fin to come over. Anita introduces to Fin to Sasha, “Sasha, this is Fin and I would like him to join us if you don’t mind?”
Sasha does not object and as Fin takes his seat, the conversation continues as Anita asks Fin to talk about his experiences.

Fin joins the conversation, “I don’t think I’ve had any issues with being seen as angry or aggressive because I’ve gotten older and people accept that. Most people I run into take the position of not asking or expecting anything out of me because I ain’t about to change.”

The group laugh at Fin’s declaration about not changing.

Fin resumes, “But, when I was in my 30’s or 40’s, I believe there was a great deal of pressure, and this included whatever institution I was in. There was a mold that you had to fit into to be considered as someone who had the potential and worth for advancement. Essentially, you could not be ethnically Black.”

Sasha begins, “This is will probably be long because I got a lot to say [laughs]. I don’t ever want to go in and give people license to disrespect me, because I feel like that’s the thing that people do really quickly when they feel like, you know, she’s a little hood. People get real familiar really quickly.

The group give each other high fives.

Sasha continues talking, “As far as code switching, it is a daily practice for me. The older I get or maybe the more comfortable I get, it takes longer to do things like respond to people’s emails because I want to make sure that there’s no grammatical errors and I’m not doing too much. It’s the kind of overcompensation when you walk into a space with new people. Let me make sure I’m speaking with proper diction. I’m gonna bust my brain to make sure my vocabulary is like on point, on point! Okay! So, like, now, I’m pulling out words like, you know, 18th century words that people don’t even use anymore. And this may not apply to all Black women, but I know it’s an issue. I have even tried to adjust my body posture to not be as curvy
and round. There’s a way that our bodies can look to people that where they hypersexualize everything about you because you’re curvier, so I have to make decisions about my wardrobe.”

“Whew! That was a lot.” Sasha laughs. All the while, she had six zaps during that dialogue. Sasha realizes that it is taking a lot to fight the urge to conform. She wonders how this whiteness chip is working and where it is specifically back there on her neck.

Anita continues, “I think that goes back to that professionalism. I’ve had professors yell at me, and things like that. Of course, I will stand my ground. I don’t have to yell back. I think you have to be the bigger person. And I think a lot of times, people don’t expect you to be the bigger person. But you have to be the bigger person because you got to beat the stereotype.”

“It’s a part of survival. And in some places, like for me, it’s almost like putting on armor,” Anita shares.

“I understood that there were just parts of my life that I needed to share, because that made people around me more comfortable. The more you know about me, the comfortable you are.”

Sasha replies, “I guess that is where I differ because I think they have no right to know who I am outside of work. I work hard to protect my private life and they hate it. They tell all of their business and expect me to follow suit….no ma’am, mind ya business.”

Sasha clinches her fist under the table in response to the zaps. She wonders how much longer this meeting will last.

Fin switches gears a bit by adding, “I think there is a set structure that isn’t necessarily friendly to African Americans. And there’s a lot of parameters that I view that help define that. Part of which is learning the language and then the structure that they have for advancement and evaluation. A lot of that I believe, is set from a white male patriarchal model. And it’s hard to fit
into that and I recognize that because I have lived it. If nothing else, my age and life has taught me how to identify the structure of what an institution or organization looks like.”

They continue their conversation for a few minutes longer and wrap up as Anita has to leave for another meeting. Sasha heads back to her office to finish her workday. Driving home, Sasha thinks about all the things that were said during the meeting. How will she get herself out of this mess her parents have put her in now. She has more resolve than she ever did to beat this whiteness chip. She feels severe exhaustion from the zaps and as the pain medication wears off, she is happy the workday is done. She grabs dinner and heads home to get back to work on her project.

After reading through the material about the whiteness chip, Sasha learns the chip attaches to nerves in the back of her neck. Sasha works late into the night figuring out how to create a chip that will dull her nervous system. She realizes the danger of constantly taking pain medicine to dull the pain from the triggers to her nervous system. This chip she is working to create will go directly into her wrist attaching to the nervous system. She designs it to respond immediately to the whiteness chip.

While she works diligently on this project, she continues playing the game as much as she could to avoid triggering suspicion. Sasha decides to play nice with her colleagues by being overly talkative and oversharing some details about her life. Sasha cannot believe how exhausting it is becoming to keep up with this charade each day. She eventually does get a promotion and uses the extra money to buy more supplies for her project.

She also tricks the chip by going back to her old neighborhood thinking she is going to volunteer for the “poor at risk” kids. She tells her white colleagues of her volunteer activities in her old neighborhood, and they praise her for giving back. She learns how to bypass the chip by
dropping off money to claim for tax write off purposes. Little does anyone know, but the money Sasha is dropping off as charity is really contributing to her old friend’s non-profit to teach Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) to Black kids.

Secretly, through this non-profit, Sasha is also working on a top-secret project with her friends. Using the non-profit as a front for volunteering, she gets the opportunity to mentor kids and work on her project simultaneously without triggering any red flags.

This practice goes on for over a year until finally Sasha feels things are in place. Knowing that she will have to work quickly to avoid the whiteness chip people from snatching her up when she rebels, she figures out a way to disable the GPS tracker in the chip. A few days prior, Sasha made a few trips around the city, stopping at various places. Her GPS records as she makes the various stops, so that when she is ready to disable the tracker, she can set the GPS to replay the trips in real time. She fires off a quick text to her old friends in the neighborhood to ask if their old hangout is ready. She gets a text in the affirmative and that Pookie and Ray Ray are on standby.

Sasha goes into her closet and pulls out her all black outfit. She pulls a box down and inside is her black beret. She manages to avoid the chip’s prompt to relax her hair by cutting off her locs and pressing her hair. She knew that eventually, she would reattach her locs, so she stored them in a bag for safe keeping. But now, it is an afro. She puts the beret on and grabs her black leather jacket and the rest of supplies. She goes into her garage and throws everything in her trunk and hops in the car. As she pulls out of her garage, she takes one last look at her house. She presses play on her GPS recording. The revolution is about to begin. She sends the text to the group, “The revolution is live.”
Sasha drives off into the night towards the old neighborhood. What Sasha was working on with her old friends from the hood was a serum for every Black person who had a chip. Sasha’s old friends are smart. They are chemists, accountants, engineers, and computer engineers and scientists. Monique is an accountant and she was managing the finances for the non-profit and Sasha’s project. Pookie and Chris are computer engineers and Morehouse men. Sasha’s childhood best friend, Kiesha, is a chemist. Kiesha was working closely with Sasha on the antidote to the whiteness chip. Kiesha and Chris were able to use the information Pookie wrote down for them after breaking into the mainframe. Sasha would communicate in code and hand signals to avoid alerts of strange behavior. They create special glasses that will show who is infected with the chip. The group will have special devices that will deactivate the chip long enough for them to inject them with the antidote. Instantly, Black folks everywhere will no longer be under the control of whiteness. They will be free to be authentically and unapologetically Black!
Chapter 6

The Vampire Chronicles: Miss Anne’s Reckoning

It is 4:45 p.m. and Kiesha is sitting at the conference table tapping her white glossed fingernails on the table, mulling over the agenda for the meeting. As she stares at the agenda, she wonders how the others will respond to the latest mission they must undertake. This mission will test everyone, but in order to preserve the future of her people and change the trajectory of Miss Anne, it is one they must take.

Kiesha stands and walks to the window to take in the view of the city. Darkness has come and the city is about to come alive. She closes her eyes and immediately her ears zone in on the footsteps coming down the hall. “Ahhh, the drink of choice is here.” Kiesha raves. In the speed of light, Kiesha opens the door for her office assistant. She tilts her head back and smells the human as she breezes by her. She directs the assistant to place the cart by the window and assume the position. The assistant shakily pushes the cart by the window, taking time to make sure everything is in place and slowly turns around, placing her hands by her side, closes her eyes, and puts her head back.

Kiesha walks up to her and whispers in her ear, “This will only take a minute since we have our drinks here, but nothing like fresh blood.” She opens her mouth to reveal fangs and as she slowly sinks her teeth into her assistant’s neck, she closes her eyes and flashes back to her first taste of blood.

Kiesha is part of the first vampire tribe, the Algin Coven. Reborn in 2135, Kiesha remembers her first taste of blood as a newborn. As a Black vampire, Kiesha also knows the pain of hiding her true identity among the humans. Her fear of being discovered is two-fold. She is a vampire and she is Black. Humans live among Black people, but they do not know that Black
vampires exist. One reason that Black vampires have remained hidden is the melanin in their skin. The melanin allows them to withstand sunlight. The Algin Coven has rules governing the use of their powers to remain hidden among humans. The rules are quite simple, not to use them, particularly for personal gain. Given Kiesha’s recent report, that is about to change.

Two years ago, the Coven sent Kiesha and several others to Smith University in Smithville to investigate reports of racism, specifically from white women. Smith University is a Historically White Institution (HWI) in a predominately Black metropolis. The city has a sordid history of economic and political injustices that prevent the city from thriving, particularly for the Black population.

The university has a predominately white population of faculty, staff, and administrators. However, the student population is diverse with Black students making up a large percentage of the student body. Kiesha works at the institution as professional staff and works mainly with students and faculty. Over the last two years, Kiesha enjoys the work she does and found another vampire from a different coven working at the university.

Unfortunately, despite her love of working in higher education, Kiesha has been subjected to racism, both structurally and individually from white colleagues. In particular, Kiesha’s experiences with racism and microaggressions comes at the hands of white women. Fed up with the treatment, Kiesha flew home to meet with the Coven and give her report. That report has led us to this evening, as Kiesha awaits the arrival of everyone. Kiesha finishes her modest feed on her assistant and excuses her for the night.

Charlyze, Lynn, and Wesley arrive first and as they make their way on to the elevator, Charlyze speaks first, “Any idea what this meeting is about?”
Lynn shrugs as if to indicate she is clueless. Wesley is too busy texting on his phone to answer Charlyze.

Charlyze gives a dramatic sigh as she flips her long braids with gold highlights. “Well, I hope it does not take all night, I got fangs to do.”

Lynn gives her the side-eye and laughs to herself, knowing Charlyze has nothing to do.

Finally, Lynn and Charlyze look at Wesley who still has his face in his phone. Lynn immediately senses that Wesley is up to no good when Wesley snaps, “Get out of my head Lynn!”

Lynn responds through gritted teeth, “Why are you texting a human Wesley? You know it will not end well…again.”

Charlyze laughs and says nothing because of her own secrets. Soon, the elevator doors open and they all file out and head to the conference room. Wesley walks slowly so that he can delete the text messages before Kiesha can sense the secret he holds. He knows her powers are unmatched and his relationship with a human must be kept a secret.

Kiesha stands up as Charlyze, Lynn, and Wesley walk in and take seats at the table. Before Kiesha can ask, Karter, Carolyn, Tiereny, and Connie walk in and take seats. Everyone exchanges pleasantries and make small talk. Kiesha quietly surveys the table hoping the meeting will not turn into a train wreck.

Everyone helps themselves to chilled blood and settle in to find out why they are here tonight.

Carolyn breaks the silence and asks, “So, why are we all here?”

Kiesha takes a deep breath, “We have a problem. And the Coven is sending us on a mission to travel back in time to fix the Becky’s and Karen’s of the world.”
Charlyze jumped up and did a little two step dance and shouts, “Whoop whoop, it is about time!”

Connie sits quietly and wonders, “How will this work?”

Kiesha sensing Connie’s thoughts, pulls out her scroll and reads the words from the Coven.

By Order of the Algin Coven, you must travel back to four significant time periods in Black American history: Slavery, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Lives Matter Movement. The mission is to address the behavior of white women beginning with Miss Anne. This is a dangerous mission. All Coven rules governing the use of powers are suspended for this mission.

Kiesha reads the words from the Coven out loud as the others listen intently.

Tiereny is the first to speak. “I, for one, am ready for this mission because let me tell you, my supervisor had the nerve to yell at me last week for talking to someone while they were working in my office.”

Carolyn sits up and looks at Tiereny in shock. “She actually yelled at you, like raised her voice?”

Tiereny laughs and says, “Yes, girl, and I was two seconds away from using my powers and making her hallucinate that a giant Chucky doll or Pennywise was chasing her down the hallway.”

Charlyze gets up to give Tiereny a high five and falls out laughing. Connie gets up and walks to the window, looking out at the sparkling lights of night life. She turns around to ask
when the mission would begin. Kiesha informs the group that the transport machine is in the basement and they will leave at midnight.

She tells them, “Drink up to conserve your energy for the journey.”

She makes her way to the large wardrobe left for them, “We have a selection of clothing to take along with us, so please take what you like.”

Tiereny asks, “Soooooo, about our jobs. They gone just let us be gone to do revenge of the Becky’s/Karen’s?”

Kiesha responds, “You are good. No worries, your jobs are safe.”

Karter finally asks, “Do we have any more details on this transport machine and if the Coven is sure this mission will work?”

“I am just trying to be pragmatic here” with an expression of concern, “how do we know this will work?”

Karter knew all too well the experiences during the Civil Rights Movement. “I remember my childhood experiences of racism as a child while I was human.”

Kiesha smiles and before she could speak, Carolyn blurts out, “We have no choice but to try”.

Kiesha nods in agreement and begins to speak in detail about the mission.

“The first stop of the mission is during slavery. We will travel back to the late 1800s to deal with the Miss Annes of the plantation. When we arrive, we will survey the area and find a place to setup. We will have to work within the confines of our power to deal with Miss Anne as she exerts her influence as the plantation mistress over the enslaved.”

As the group makes their way down to the basement to the transport machine, Carolyn starts to remember a conversation she had with a colleague about white women.
“I can’t fully trust white women on the job because it’s a lot of… it’s a lot of backtalk that goes on with management uhh. And you get thrown under the bus very quickly.”

She goes on to say, “They’ll turn into mean girls kind of thing… I feel like there’s some kind of competition, some kind of low-level competition that happens on the job with white women, so I don’t trust them.”

Carolyn hears her name and comes back to reality. “I’m sorry, what?”, she says.

Connie repeats, “Are you ready? It’s time to go.”

The transport machine is sitting in the middle of the basement and looks like a large vehicle with space like capabilities. They all settle in the transport machine and hear the whirling of the machine come to life. Kiesha pushes several buttons and tells everyone, “Buckle up. This will happen quickly.” Kiesha pushes the button and there is a large flash and darkness.

Wesley blinks his eyes as he tries to adjust to the darkness. They are in a field in the middle of the night. He hears Tiereny complain about the drop and stands up to survey the area.

After they all gather around each other, they decide to find a meeting spot for the night. They begin to investigate the area and formulate a plan to move forward. As daylight begins to break, they all go into stealth mode and move out to begin gathering intel on Miss Anne.

Lynn is the first to spot Miss Anne walking around standing over the enslaved workers with her big stick. Lynn begins to walk around Miss Anne taking in all the details of her face, and she could see the hate and disdain on her face.

As Miss Anne yells orders at them, Lynn’s mind flashes back to one day at work when Lynn was holding the door and this white colleague walks up and asks, “Are you holding the door for us”, and Lynn thinks, “Don’t get it twisted lady. Nahhhh, you know, like, you are my slave. It was just the way she said it to me.”
Lynn quickly shakes her head to come back to the present. Miss Anne is still yelling orders to the enslaved workers as they toil with weary looks on their faces. Lynn quickly remembers that they have carte blanche on the use of their powers.

Lynn suddenly closes her eye and suddenly Miss Anne begins to sing *Masquerade* from the Phantom of the Opera loudly.

“Masquerade! Paper face on parade. Masquerade! Hide your face so the world will never find you. Masquerade! Every face a different shade. Masquerade! Look around, there’s another mask behind you.” Miss Anne sings loudly off key.

Lynn stifles a laugh and Miss Anne continues to belt out the song with a horrid mix of confusion and fear. The enslaved look on equally confused and amused.

Carolyn and Wesley walk up and quickly morph to remain unseen.

Lynn switches gears and Miss Anne begins singing and dancing to *Respect* by Aretha Franklin.

“What you want! Baby I got it! What you need, you know I got it! All I’m asking is for a little respect you get home! Hey baby!! When you get home!” Miss Anne sings as she does the jerk.

Finally, Lynn, with her nod of head, Miss Anne begins yelling, “Say it loud, I’m Black and I’m proud!!”

Those who were working stop and look around at each other and stare at Miss Anne. Even in their confusion, they know they cannot laugh openly for fear of beatings. But, inside, there is a mixture of amusement and bewilderment.
Carolyn and Wesley double over in laughter at what they are seeing. Even through her singing, Miss Anne looks terrified at what is happening and feels like she has lost control of her body.

Lynn decides to end the shenanigans and brings Miss Anne back to herself. She comes out of her performance and yells, “GET TO WORK!” and immediately turns to run towards the house.

Miss Anne runs in the house trying to understand the singing and dancing. She runs into the bathroom and looks in the mirror. In a flash, Lynn is there and decides that Miss Anne will see her reflection in the mirror, except her reflection will start talking. The reflection begins speaking while Miss Anne stands and looks in horror.

“Anne, what the hell are you doing out there?”

“This cannot be real. I am going to close my eyes and when I open them, there won’t be anyone talking back to me.”

Miss Anne closes her eyes, takes a deep breath and opens her eyes.

“Hey girl, heyyyyyyyyyy!” Anne in the mirror laughs. “I am real, so listen up.”

“Stop blinking and rubbing your eyes, I am real. Now, what are you doing out there yelling at your workers Anne?”

Miss Anne hardens her face and retorts, “They deserve no respect, especially from me.”

The reflection in the mirror narrows her eyes and speaks through gritted teeth, “until you do right by them, you will never be rid of me.” The lights blink off and on and when Miss Anne looks at the mirror, it is cracked and blood is seeping through the cracked glass.

Miss Anne breaks down in tears and runs to the parlor and tries to get a drink. She is crying hysterically, pacing back and forth trying to rationalize what is happening.
“This has to be a dream!”

She flings her body on her chaise and slaps herself across the face, “Get it together Anne!”

She tries to pour out a drink but her hands are shaking too much, so she decides to lie down in hopes of waking up from this nightmare.

Later that night, the group decides to meet about the events for the day. The topic of discussion is around Miss Anne and Lynn’s antics. Kiesha feels that Lynn’s efforts were a good start. As they continue their discussion, the conversation takes a turn as they discuss their own experiences.

Karter, who is laying on the ground looking up at the stars, begins to talk about an experience at work with a white woman colleague. “She literally walks into my office where I had the door pulled up, she opens my door and comes into my office to ask me if I had, by chance taken an extension cord of hers. I look at her. I am stunned that she would invade someone’s space like that.”

Tiereny lets out an irritated sigh.

Karter goes on to say, “The invasion of personal space where you feel as if you have that level of power in which you can just come into my space without announcement is disturbing. I’ve never seen her do that with someone who is white.”

Wesley, who is sitting up against the tree adds, “That’s wild man.”

Wesley sits up and continues, “But I truly believe that is where she is coming from. The idea that I’ve got this right, to come in here and question a nigger that may have taken my stuff, because you people are doing it all the time.”
A silence looms, and the group acknowledges the weight of what Karter is saying and the reality of where they are in that moment. It feels like a wet blanket draping on them.

Wesley breaks the silence, “Now that I think about it, most if not all of my negative interactions are with white women.”

Wesley begins to recount an instance with a white woman colleague.

“I am standing together with a Black male colleague when our white colleague tries to explain to us the voting process.”

Wesley continues, “She was trying to explain to us how voting worked. When I asked her who the candidate was and what district they were in, she acted like I probably didn’t know who the candidate was and couldn’t vote for this person, umm, you know, because we weren’t in the same neighborhood. As if I couldn’t possibly live in the same you know, areas as her and this person.”

“No, she didn’t!” Charlyze exclaims.

Wesley goes on to explain another example or the same colleague, “She did! She also kinda came in my office without knocking, telling me she needed to leave and instead of asking could I cover her [caseload], It was like, hey, you have to do this.”

“Umph!” snaps Charlyze.

“Umph is right because I don’t have to do anything but stay Black and die!”

Karter responds, “This is what I am talking about here. Some Black colleagues and I are standing around talking about a particular subject in our areas and a white woman storms out of her office, to our area where we are talking and reprimands and chides us as if we are children.”

Kiesha nods in agreement adding, “They engage with me in these ways that are hostile, accusatory, umm, and paternalistic. It can also range from women engaging with me in a sister
girlish kind of way or just ignore me into oblivion, or pretend they have no idea who I am because my hair looks different this week than it did last week.”

Charlyze starts clapping with every word, “All (clap) I (clap) know (clap) is (clap) white women are gold, and they can do no wrong.”

The group nods in agreement.

Carolyn begins to talk about her experiences managing white women.

“There’s an air of privilege and all the requests that are made in relation to things they want to happen. If there is a response that they don’t like, you can, you can just kind of know that it’s going to be at the highest levels. Your authority is constantly questioned all the time.”

Charlyze shakes her head in frustration.

“Well, at least they not stealing your ideas.”

Tiereny yells, “Do tell!”

Charlyze explains, “I apply for a job and I get the interview. I give a great presentation with great ideas for improving services. I did not get the job, and a white woman with no direct experience was hired.”

Charlyze laments, “They literally took my idea and passed it off as their own. The question still remains, how did she get the idea when it was presented in my presentation? We all know the answer to that.”

Wesley stands up to stretch and says, “Some of them, not all of them, definitely manage to make a way for themselves to higher places without necessarily being qualified or have more experience to be in those positions that they’ve gotten.”

Charlyze nods her head in agreement and talks about the unequal workload from that of her white women colleagues.
“I am doing my job; I just need her [her supervisor who is a white woman] to make sure the rest of [her] staff members do theirs too because it is creating burnout.”

Kiesha speaks up, “Yes, after they get done fawning over you, then the kind of heaping on of work happens, where magically, all of a sudden, well, you know, we couldn’t do it without you. You’re the only one who could do this.”

As she talks, Kiesha passes out dinner in the form of blood that she put to the side earlier that evening. As they eat, she continues the discussion of being careful to never show emotions.

“I am keenly aware that it is incumbent upon me to always maintain my composure, even in the face of, you know, the kind of snide, snarking foolishness that they try to utilize because even a hint that I’m annoyed will result in me just being castigated. It lays the groundwork for them to then engage in the project of characterizing you as the angry Black woman who is so awful and so difficult to work with, you know.”

Charlyze and Tiereny both concur, “That is so true.”

Kiesha continues, “I think that white women know that and I think that’s why they do that. I can’t prove it, because I don’t think any white woman would ever admit it, but I think they know that and I think that’s why they do it.”

Lynn, who is listening, talks about the frustration surrounding working in this type of environment. Soon, others add to the conversation.

“It’s a white woman’s whining that disturbs my soul. They just whine and complain...and the things they’re whining and complaining about, I don’t find it valid.”

Connie agrees, “They handle their aggressions differently. They express themselves differently. I think they are able to be vulnerable in the workplace or taught a vulnerability that maybe other female people are not taught.”
“Amen!” says Charlyze.

Karter breaks up the conversation and begins discussions about the plan for tomorrow. Karter shares that they only have tomorrow to work on Miss Anne to try to make some sort of change before leaving. The group sits down to come up with a strategy for and give out assignments for the group.

Karter, Lynn, and Kiesha leave the group to zap over to the living quarters for the enslaved. As they sleep, the three of them make their selections. They tap them on the shoulder and as they begin to wake up and before they could speak, each of them are bitten. The three feel the excruciating pain as the venom travels through their body. As they writhe in pain, they use their powers to lessen the pain as they whisper their assignments.

Meanwhile, at the plantation house, Miss Anne is sitting in her parlor trying to make sense of the events earlier that day. Her husband has refused to listen to her rambling and accuses her of “hitting the sauce.”

As she begins to yell for the servant to bring her something, her mind switches back to that morning, and she softens her tone. The servant, who is Black and enslaved, cannot believe the change in behavior. Miss Anne even says thanks to her as she walks back to her quarters.

Miss Anne lays down to try to sleep, and as she drifts off to sleep, Charlyze is over in the corner waiting. Suddenly, Miss Anne feels her body floating into the air. She tries to scream, but nothing comes out. She looks over at her husband who is sleeping soundly. She tries to move but feels paralyzed.

As her body reaches the ceiling, she unexpectedly feels her body start to turn over. She sees her body in her bed appearing to sleep soundly when the floor next to the bed opens up to reveal a dark hole. She sees her husband over to the side, who is still asleep. Miss Anne feels
heat and she begins to see fire coming from the dark hole. She soon hears screaming and crying for help!

A male voice shouts, “Leave my people alone or I will come get you!”

Miss Anne tries to scream but nothing comes out! Her mind is screaming, “Somebody help me!”

“No one can help you, Anne! This is a hell of your own making!”

As Charlyze lowers Miss Anne’s body closer to the black hole, it closes up, the bed comes together, and Miss Anne returns to her bed. Charlyze giggles uncontrollably as Miss Anne begins to whisper, “It’s not real, it’s not real, it’s not real, it’s not real” over and over again.

Her husband turns over, “Anne! What are you babbling about now?!”

“Something is happening to me in this house. You have to believe me.”

“I do not believe you Anne. Stay out of the liquor cabinet. Are you mad?!?”

Miss Anne abandons any hope of receiving any help from her husband and lays in silence refusing to let sleep take over her.

As the sun rises, the enslaved gather to receive the daily orders. They look around for Miss Anne and wonders where she could be at this late hour. The three who were bitten last night, are in place and waiting for their cue to carry out their assignments. They feel invigorated knowing what the future could hold for them.

Finally, Miss Anne shows up looking disheveled and weary. Given her mood, she looks out with contempt and before she could open her mouth, she sees one of the enslaved vampires turn green and gets bigger and bigger. She quickly covers her mouth and before she could scream, another one appears to her as an Oompa Loompa.
Miss Anne faints. As she comes to, she hears someone whisper in her ear, “Treat my people well or we will be backkkkkk.” Miss Anne faints again.

Later, the group gathers back in the boardroom to finalize the report to the Coven. As they are talking, Kiesha gets a notification from the Coven of a new message. It reads: Job well done. Prepare to visit the next era in time, Jim Crow. Kiesha looks at the group and says, “It is liberation time.”
Chapter 7

Uprising in the Ivory Tower

This story pays homage to the waterfront incident on August 5, 2023, in Montgomery, Alabama, where Black folks took back a little bit of their power. This incident or my celebration or reference of it in this story in no way encourages or celebrates violence. As you saw in the video, our—because this is a collective win—response was in defense of the security guard who put the call out for help. The colonizers built their wealth on dominance and violence, so in the words of the great philosopher, better known as Lil John, “Don’t start no shit, won’t be no shit.”

Cameron performs his last task of the day and logs out of his system and leaves his office, ending his workday. Walking to his car and lost in his thoughts, he is thinking about the meeting that will take place tonight. The meeting will be an important step for him and other Black professionals at Ivory Tower University. As he is walking to his car, he hears the name Camper.

“Camper!”

Cameron immediately thinks, “No one knows me by that name.” He turns around and see his friend Dominic walking towards him. They dap it out and Dominic says, “You ready for this meeting tonight?”

Cameron replies, “As ready as I’m gonna be man. I just know we need to do something. Things are getting out of hand.”

They talk a bit more about the meeting and leave campus to prepare for tonight.

There is an organization of Black Professional Staff Alliance (BPSA) that works to address the needs of Black folks at Ivory Tower. The organization has been around for decades
but has been inactive for a few years. The more recent incidents of racism and oppression saw a resurgence of protests and the creation of the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM).

Cameron is reviving the BPSA and with support from the members, he will lead the charge for change at Ivory Tower. Cameron understands that in order to have a plan, they must meet in secret and strategically plan the next steps. The meeting will happen off-campus in a community space the local social justice organization uses. The meeting will address the concerns of the members and the collective group, determine the best course of action, and work collaboratively with BLM to stage protests and make their demands. Cameron also knew now more than ever was the time for collective action. The BLM movement as a social movement would provide the knowledge and support to assist their efforts to push their institution for change. He also knew that meant having colleagues who would be courageous enough to join the fight but had specialized skills to develop a list of demands, create hashtags for those who did not want to get directly involved, and think of roles folks could have to join their efforts. Using a hashtag could help gain momentum via social media and get their message out to other higher education employees who may want to join the movement.

Cameron is the first to arrive and quickly goes in to make sure everything is in place. The day staff is gracious enough to accept the food delivery and work the sign-up table. Soon, Dominic and Tamara arrive and help Cameron set up the food and sign-in table.

They make small talk and Tamara says, “I hope we have enough people to show up. I was discreet when talking to people on campus, but I was able to let several people know about tonight.”

Someone from the office staff stops by to let Cameron know that folks are waiting to sign-in and will be in shortly. Cameron watches as several people come in, start to mingle and
grab food. Unsure of how long the meeting will last, Cameron notices the time and decides to get the meeting underway.

Cameron calls the meeting to order and presents the agenda for the meeting.

“Attention everyone. I would like to thank you all for coming tonight. I know it is hard to show up on a weeknight after working all day, so thank you.”

Cameron provides an overview for opening the floor for comments on the current state of affairs at Ivory Tower.

“I want you all to have an opportunity to voice your concerns or experiences about working at Ivory Tower. We also want you to have the opportunity to express why you want to join this fight and hold space to share your experiences as a Black staff member.”

Cameron opens the floor for discussions and comments. An audience member stands up to share their thoughts.

“I, for one, think the institution does not value the work Black professionals bring to the institution on a daily basis. The institution likes to use us when it is time to talk about diversity but the actions are a different story.”

Emmanuel stands up to add, “You are right and it is because the structure is still there. I think the school is good at this, the idea of token representation as it equates to, we are a school that speaks well to diversity and inclusion. But they don’t seem to understand from someone who is a person of color that it looks like just tokenism.”

Marsha agrees, “When you look at what we’re being paid versus, someone at another institution in the city or somebody in corporate American for what we’re doing, we would be paid six figures for it. But for us to even have the unmitigated gall to think we’re worth, it’s like who do you think you are to ask for that kind of money.”
Cameron replies, “I agree with that Marsha, because there is a huge disparity between the salaries for our white counterparts in similar positions.”

Cameron asks for others to contribute to the conversation.

Tamara stands up, “I, for one, am sick of feeling like they undervalue me and what I bring to the table. I am a person, with a skillset but I feel like a robot. Invisible and non-human and quite frankly, disposable.”

You hear audible sounds of agreement from the crowd.

Tamara continues, “There’s so many Black men and women who are more than capable of promotions. We have these ideas that are so amazing, but we never get the opportunity to share that because we’re not always offered the roles that some of our white women or counterparts have. And it’s unfortunate, but it’s like they always want ideas and things from us and love the idea. Next thing you know, you see what so and so put together and they praising it as a great idea but they didn’t come up with that…AT [hand claps] ALL [hand clap]!!!”

Tamara is visibly upset and takes her seat. There are a few to offer applause to echo her sentiments.

Shayla begins to talk, “I am just over the feeling of being silenced and ignored, you know? As if my contributions and my hard work do not matter. I give 200% to the university, working nights, weekends, holidays, vacation, and it never gives that love and dedication back.”

Cameron takes this time to have a break for folks who were late coming in and to reset the room for the next agenda item. After ten minutes pass, Cameron calls the meeting back to order to discuss the next item on the agenda. The items up for discussion are how are staff members engaging in resistance or practicing self-care, if at all. The purpose is to determine the
capacity of the group to develop a strategic plan for moving forward as an organization to address the institution.

Toya addresses the group, “I think resistance is complicated. Because I think for Black people, resistance is tied to our ability to survive. The fact that I am still alive is resistance. I do consider educating my people about the reality of what is happening in society either via my students or social media postings. In terms of self-care, I do things such a meditating or yoga, even therapy. But I am very much in a place where I feel like you can’t self-care your way out of racism or to deal with racism.”

Members in the audience reacts to what Toya said and appreciate the heaviness of her words.

Tamara replies, “I can understand that because self-care is something I have struggled with too with so much going on. Especially because we have to show up every day at work as if nothing is going on in the world. And no one at work says a mumbling word. So, I have to just unplug. Now, with resistance, I’m ready, let’s go. I am social media person and I am a hashtag queen, so I share information about BLM or other things that we need to know about in this country.”

The group agrees that while the pandemic was nothing to celebrate, it was a godsend to Black folks because it provided a reprieve from the oppressive nature of their work environment. With the murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd, they were able to process and grieve in private and not under the gaze of their work environment.

They continue the discussion with Marsha and Shayla mentioning prayer as a form of self-care.
“I rely on my religious teachings in practicing self-care. Prayer and my church family keeps me going.”

“I too draw on my Christian background because I do have to pray to remain sane through all of the foolishness I put up with at work. When the George Floyd murder was happening, I would pray and listen to gospel music because it was just too much.”

Dominic mentions working out and family as a source of self-care. “I go to the gym as much as I can to take my mind off the things that are happening in the world and at work. It is a stress reliever for me.”

Everyone has different philosophies of resistance and how they engage in resistance. Emmanuel feels it is his job to educate the younger generation as he protested in his younger years. He feels educating those who will take up the mantle and move it forward was his contribution to social justice.

Marsha talks about her efforts at work to educate those on diversity equity and inclusion by selecting a book centered around those initiatives. She also advocates for creating diversity in her department, which is important. Soon, Cameron calls for the meeting to wrap up because of the late hour. He shares final thoughts and hopes to take the information tonight to understand the capacity of the group to move forward.

Dominic and Cameron walk out together and they discuss the meeting tonight. Cameron puts a few things in this trunk and as Dominic is driving off, he remembers he left something in the room. He walks back into the room and calls out to the staff person. Not getting a response, he hears something in the basement.

“Hello!” Cameron yells.
He walks to the office and notices the light is still on, so he heads to the basement hoping no one is hurt. He walks down the steps and when he gets to the bottom, he reaches for the light switch.

‘Click’.

The basement is partially empty, but in the corner is a table with a book on it and a folding chair. The book is open as if someone was there reading. Cameron walks to the table and takes a seat and immediately, he feels a jolt to his body. He grabs his head as his body goes stiff and falls out of the chair to the floor.

Cameron lays there for a minute and looks around trying to understand what took place. When he stands up, Cameron looks around the room, touching his face, trying to make sure he is not dead. He rubs his head to feel for a knot from when he hit the floor. As he turns to leave, something tells him to take the chair. He hears a voice that sounds like James Earl Jones.

The voice says, “You should take this chair home.”

He swings around looking for someone and yells out, “Who is here?!?”

Cameron is met with silence.

Again, he hears a voice, “I said take the chair home mane!!”

He grabs the folding chair and walks back upstairs and out the door. He puts the folding chair in the backseat and heads home.

The next morning, Cameron wakes up and prepares for work. While making his coffee, he looks at his email and immediately regrets that decision. His colleague has copied his supervisor on an email to chastise him for something he did not do.

“A’ight, bet. I got something for you when I get to work.” Cameron says while sipping his coffee.
He grabs his bag and heads to work.

As Cameron is getting his things out of the car, Shayla walks up to speak. She stares weirdly at Cameron and finally asks about the folding chair.

“Hey Cameron! Sooooo, are you going to tell me why you are carrying a folding chair? Did they cut the budget in your office or something? HAHA!!”

Before he can explain, Shayla touches the chair and instantly jerks from the bolt.

"Ouch! What the hell was that?!?! That chair just put off a shock!”

What is also strange is the bolt is louder because Cameron’s hand is also on the chair. He feels the bolt as well.

“I am so sorry! That hurt too!”

They look down and notice there are now two chairs.

“Whoa!”

“Yo, where…how….what….yooooooo?”

Shayla looks on in total confusion about the incident, but also has a meeting in thirty minutes. Something in her head tells her to take the chair.

"Take that extra chair girl!” (In Jennifer Lewis’ voice)

She grabs it and waves to Cameron.

“Well, since it is two, I am taking one with me. Later!”

Still in a state of confusion, Shayla carries the chair into her office and unfolds the chair to sit down in it. Total calmness and resolve enter her body and shefeels herself floating out of her body. She can see herself sitting in the chair as her consciousness floats down to the hall to her colleague’s office.
Once there, she walks around the desk looking at her colleague and cannot believe she does not see her. Shayla decides to push her paperweight off the desk [THUD] and push the door shut [BOOM].

Her colleague jumps up and runs to the door, open it and immediately looks in the hallway.

"Hello! Who’s there?!"

She laughs thinking it is a prank and goes back to her desk.

Shayla decides to up the ante and knocks over her coffee. [SPLASH]

This sends her colleague into a panic and she leaves to get paper towels.

“What is happening?! Hello?!”

Shayla floats back to her seat laughing hysterically as her colleague cleans her coffee spill from her desk.

Shayla looks at her clock and sees the time, so she stands up and something in her head tells her to take the folding chair.

"Take that chair GUL!"

She walks into her supervisor’s office with the folding chair and sits down in it. He watches and decides to ignore the antics and begins the meeting.

Supervisor’s inner voice: “So, we are bringing personal chairs now?”

Suddenly, Shayla feels the chair vibrating and she is filled with resolve and courage. She finally has the courage to demand what she deserves. She begins the meeting with stating the value that she brings to the table.

"I want to start this meeting by sharing that I have been in this department for some time now. My contributions to the overall mission of this division and university are vast. I have the
data to confirm the value I bring to this team. Yet, my value is not given the recognition I deserve.”

“By all means, Shayla, I agree that you are a great addition to our team. I wish I could promote you, but the budget does not allow for any wiggle room.”

“I am my own advocate for the promotion and pay that I deserve. Not only that, but I am working in an oppressive work environment that I and other Black colleagues suffer while working in this space. I know for a fact that my white colleague is getting a promotion with a hefty salary increase. She does not have the experience or education I have, yet here we are.”

The folding chair gave her the power. Her supervisor agrees to take everything under advisement and get back with her. Shayla lets them know they have thirty days or she will move on and takes her chair and walks out leaving the supervisor speechless. When Shayla gets back to her office, her heart is racing and she cannot believe that she did that but is happy she finally did it.

Two days later, the BPSA have their second meeting to discuss next steps. Cameron is still reeling from the incidents from the last two days. In two days, he negotiates a raise for himself and his white colleague was held accountable for racially insensitive comments to him. Those issues have been a thorn in his side for three years. He can only attribute these events to the folding chair.

When Shayla walks in with her chair and walks over to Cameron to talk about the events over the last two days. As they compare notes, they realize that touching the folding chair has given them the power to uncover and fight injustices that are happening to them.

“Imagine what we could do if everyone had a chair?!” Shayla says excitedly.

Cameron says, “I have an idea.”
The meeting gets underway and Cameron and Shayla explain the events over the last few days, including touching the folding chair. Soon, the group begin to discuss what the options could be if they were to touch the chair or if theirs were the only two available.

Tamara raises her hand to touch the folding chair. As she touched the chair, she feels a surge of electricity run through her and not only did another folding chair appear, but they began to glow.

"O…M…G…look at that!"

As the three chairs glow, bolts of electricity light up the room and zap all in the meeting space, knocking everyone out of their chairs.

When everyone comes to and looks around, there are over three hundred chairs in the room.

Marsha looks up and sees the words, My Seat At the Table etched on the chair.

Tamara yells, “You know Shirley what Chisholm says about not having a seat at the table?!?! Bring your own folding chair or something like that. Well…..we got a room full of them!”

She looks down at her shirt and it reads, My Stories are Acts of Resistance.

Everyone stands up noticing the folding chairs and their shirts. The group begins to talk excitedly about everything trying to make sense of what happened. Cameron works to settle everyone down. The group strategize until after midnight for their next move and are given their assignments.

Dominic, Emmanuel, and Cameron begin to pack up the chairs in their cars and others join in with moving the chairs. The plan for tomorrow is in place.
The plan was that each time one of them touches, unfolds, or sits in the chair and enters the Resistance Zone, they gain new intuitions, gifts, and powers to resist the oppressive practices within the Ivory Tower.

For instance, Marsha gains the capability of reading minds, uncovering hidden biases with the institution's leadership. Marsha is then able to share with the group what she learns. Having this information will be helpful to creating counter attacks.

Danesha discovers the power of mind and mood control over people, allowing the group to create innovative solutions to problems that were previously ignored. The ability to control their minds and emotions can allow for changing the oppressive behavior of those who continue to uphold systemic barriers and oppress Black folks at Ivory Tower.

Toya develops the gift of persuasion beyond the ordinary, winning court cases that expose discriminatory practices.

As the group continues to use the Folding Chair of Empowerment and Resistance, they document their experiences and gradually unveil a hidden history of the chair.

They learn that it was created by other Black activists from the past, who used it to protest against racial injustice throughout history. They are learning that as each new generation of people make advances, white supremacy works to deepen the systemic ties to remain in position of power that continue to uphold racists practices. The folding chair was put up, but Cameron’s desire to revitalize the BPSA and the group’s willingness to sacrifice, to resist against oppressive practices, the folding chair was activated.

With their newfound abilities and knowledge, the group initiates a campaign of resistance at the Ivory Tower University. They expose systemic racism, discrimination, and unethical practices, gradually eroding the institution's oppressive power structure. The Folding Chair of
Empowerment and Resistance serves as a symbol of their collective strength, resilience, unity, and a seat at the table.
Chapter 8

In the previous chapters, I explored through speculative fiction counterstories (Solórzano & Yosso; Toliver, 2020; 2021; See chapters 4 - 7) the lived experiences of eight Black professional staff members at Ozelle University. This chapter includes a discussion of the major findings, including five key takeaways from this study and their connections to the literature, implications, and recommendations for future research. This chapter will conclude with my reflections on this research study and conclusion.

The purpose of this study was to describe how Black Professional Staff (BPS) experienced and navigated racism at a Historically White Institution (HWI) during the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM). Using critical race theory in education, anti-Black racism, and plantation politics as a theoretical framework and a critical race methodology research design, I also examined how they engaged in acts of resistance. As a Black professional staff and researcher, I wanted to provide an opportunity to describe and share the experiences of Black professional staff and acknowledge their experiences and resiliency in navigating racism at an HWI. I explored how BPS experienced institutional and structural barriers, individual racism and oppression, navigating self-care, and their forms of resistance. Additionally, the study focused on the participant’s stories and sharing their truths of their experiences while supporting faculty and students. To learn about those stories, I used the following research questions:

1. How do Black Professional Staff experience and navigate racism at a Historically White Institution (HWI) in the Mid-South during the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM)?
   a. What are the dehumanizing and discriminatory acts experienced by BPS at HWIs?

2. What are Black Professional Staff’s acts of resistance at HWIs?
Findings

I constructed four themes from the data: (1) Still on the Plantation, (2) Racial schizophrenia, (3) From Golden Girls to Beckys/Karens, and (4) Where is that folding chair? In this section, I will provide a brief overview of the themes and subthemes (Table 2 and See Chapter 3, p. 79) in relation to the speculative fiction counterstories.

In Plantation Chronicles, I used the theme Still on the Plantation to refer to the lingering effects of racism and oppression from slavery to the modern institution. I incorporated the subthemes You Can’t Get In Unless We Let You In, Where Black Dreams Go to Die, and Know your place to address the barriers to career advancement, discriminatory practices, limited agency, unequal power dynamics, and the symbolic Big House subtheme that serves as the epicenter of historical exclusion and exploitation of BPS. I titled the story, The Whiteness Chip, to connect the second theme, Racial Schizophrenia, to the duality of BPS’ racial and cultural identity. Du Bois (1903) used racial schizophrenia, a terminology used in the medical field, to describe double consciousness as a metaphorical mental disorder (Young, 2009). This metaphorical mental disorder describes the psychological impact of Black folks remaining true to themselves or conforming to white society. It also refers to the pressure to conform to white cultural norms and code-switching, which can be mentally and emotionally taxing. The subthemes, Am I Always the Problem, and Playing the Game, were integrated into the story to refer to the pressure to play the game, which can lead to feelings of stress, burnout, or inauthenticity, the internal dialogue that happens when attempting to comprehend why racial situations connect, or the gaslighting tactics that suggest BPS are being overly sensitive. The speculative fiction counterstory, The Vampire Chronicles: The Reckoning of Miss Anne, aligned with the third theme, From Golden Girls to Beckys/Karens, to highlight the
problematic nature of white women. The narratives clearly show BPS’ negative interactions with white women and how damaging it was to the participants. The plot of the counterstory dealt with the behavior of white women who use their privilege to assert their authority and cause harm to Black folks. I used the subthemes, The Real Mean Girls, Professional Sabotage, and The Golden Girls to address white women’s bullying, verbal abuse, professional sabotage, and manipulation to create narratives that were damaging to BPS’ professional and individual reputations.

Additionally, I wanted to make sure the storyline addressed how white women have the space to show their emotions and vulnerability and enjoy favorable treatment while BPS do not. I connected Uprising in the Ivory Tower to the fourth theme, Where is that Folding Chair? I incorporated the theme and subthemes into the plot of the counterstory to examine how BPS define and engage in resistance by refusing to remain silent, seeking self-care, managing oppressive environments, and pushing for change.

Discussion

The backdrop of this dissertation study is the Black Lives Matter Movement. BLM, sparked by the murder of Trayvon Martin, created a progressive movement that pushed community organizing nationwide, which included higher education institutions (Blacklivesmatter, 2022; Hailu & Sarubbi, 2019). Additionally, through the media, social media, and other technology opportunities, digital activism allowed individuals to capture, share, and consume information related to the movement about social justice issues (Breeden, 2021; Stewart, 2019).

BLM, like other Black liberation movements, offers a platform that called for radical intersectionality and reorganization of leadership and chronicles resistance (Thomas, 2019). To
illustrate, social media has enabled Black folks to engage in resistance through postings that relate to current events that affect Black communities, higher education issues, using hashtags that convey Black issues, or wearing or carrying BLM paraphernalia such as t-shirts, backpacks, canvas bags, or hats. In the context of higher education, resistance has taken different forms during the BLM. Furthermore, the BLM movement provided Black folks with the opportunity to engage in resistance through protests, advocacy, and education, particularly BPS at HWIs.

Therefore, research question two in this study explored the question: What are BPS’ acts of resistance? What this study showed was how the participants defined what resistance means to them. More importantly, for the participants, resistance is not in the doing, but in the being. In this study, engaging in resistance came in different forms, from first defining what resistance is, speaking out against racism, telling their stories, self-care and creating safe spaces, resistance as their being, and deciding to leave the institution.

However, what the BLM movement has also shown is that now, more than ever, the time for collective action is now. Anti-Blackness is steeped in the erasure of Black lives, and white supremacy is the vehicle to perpetuate and drive the attack on Black existence. Research question one explored this in the context of higher education on how Black Professional Staff experience and navigate racism at an HWI during BLM and the discriminatory and dehumanizing acts they experienced. The results highlighted how BPS experienced institutional racism and oppression. For example, the participants talked about being underpaid, undervalued, and overworked, and their labor and humanity are exploited for economic gain.

Further, institutional mechanisms have created power structures that have stripped agency from BPS, perpetuating an environment of retaliation against BPS for advocating or raising concerns. However, I also found that BPS experienced and managed racism in different
ways. Participants talked about experiences of overt and subtle forms of racism that ranged from witnessing or experiencing employment discrimination, being labeled as difficult or aggressive, or being subjected to microaggressions about their hair, disposition, or attire. Some of the ways that the participants managed racism varied from calling it out, explaining the act as ignorance, to choosing to remain silent, or managing their emotions internally.

**Five Key Takeaways**

I want to highlight five key takeaways from this study based on the speculative fiction counterstories constructed from the four themes:

1) Black Professional Staff were subjected to institutional, structural, and individual racism that created an oppressive work environment,

2) white colleagues, faculty, and institutions used plantation systems to demean and undervalue Black professionals and viewed them as commodities and less than human,

3) BPS have limited remedy or support to advocate for themselves,

4) the participants defined resistance in different ways and

5) resistance is not what the participants do, but it is their being.

In the following sub-sections, I will briefly expand on these points by connecting them to the research questions and supporting them with the literature. I also want to note that in this section, I will interchange the words participants and composite characters to acknowledge how they are represented in the study and the speculative fiction counterstories.

**Key Takeaway One**

The first key takeaway of this study confirmed the pervasiveness of the systemic and institutional barriers and practices that allowed BPS to be subjected to marginalization at their HWI. The narratives of the participants’ experiences of microaggressions and overt acts of
racism were highlighted in all of the speculative fiction counterstories. It was important to structure the narratives of the participants within these stories to convey not only the voices of the participants but also the emotions of the participants as they navigated their experiences. For example, in Plantation Chronicles, the participants experienced tokenism, feelings of being invisible, and employment discrimination.

BPS continued to face institutional oppression (Kayes, 2006; McKinley Jones Brayboy, 2003) and exploitation of labor (Dancy et al., 2018). Labor exploitation took the form of BPS being undervalued and underpaid, with few opportunities to negotiate salaries or professional growth (Wright & Stewart, 2006). In the workplace, participants discussed how they felt their presence was merely to fulfill a quota or promote diversity, and that was the only thing the university valued. The university did not value them as individuals (McKinley Jones Brayboy, 2003; Squire, 2017). The participants faced discriminatory employment practices that favored white candidates despite their experience and qualifications, and they experienced limited opportunities for career advancement or advancement into leadership positions. Because BPS experienced discriminatory treatment with little to no avenues for recourse, the working environment was considered unsafe because of the unequal power dynamics throughout the institution.

Further, the institution functioned as a system upholding the practices that continue to marginalize BPS. One of the ways these practices are upheld is through people, particularly white women. The study’s findings revealed through the Vampire Chronicles: Miss Anne’s Reckoning storyline the problematic nature of white women to BPS. White women caused the most significant harm to the participants in this study because of the insidious nature of their behavior as it related to their position concerning Black folks in these white spaces, such as
being held in higher regard, their support of white male patriarchy, and perpetuating anti-Blackness (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Smith & Nkomo, 2003; Gordon, 1997; Harris, 1993; Jackson, 2020; Patton & Catching, 2009; Thomas, 1973). White women also engaged in professional sabotage, which was included in the storyline with dialogue between the composite characters where they manipulated situations and people to their advantage while also creating narratives that could damage the reputation of BPS, and this also included stealing work product or ideas and claiming them as their own which was highlighted in the findings of this study (Jackson, 2017; 2020; Matias, 2019; Phipps, 2021).

Consequently, white women have served as gatekeepers, using their whiteness and privilege to uphold patriarchy, exert violence and psychological and emotional harm to BPS, as evidenced in The Vampire Chronicles: Miss Anne’s Reckoning (Smith & Nkomo, 2003; Jackson, 2020; Patton & Catching, 2009; Thomas, 1973). It is anti-Black (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Gordon, 1997) and reeks of white supremacy and plantation politics (Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Squire et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2021). Moreover, this dissertation study supports that white women are the real mean girls and are dangerous (Cowley, 2022; Hamad, 2020; hooks, 2012; Kuykendoll, 2023; Matias, 2019; Williams, 2020).

**Key Takeaway Two**

The second key takeaway in this study was that the institution replicated the harsh conditions of the plantation, and the participants were not viewed as personnel but as property. The politics and hierarchy of the plantation replicated in the HWI reduced BPS to property, only to be used for labor. This study highlighted and confirmed that the participants were reduced to commodities where their humanness and their professional knowledge and skillset were erased while their bodies were exploited. The theme “Still on the plantation” storied in the Plantation
Chronicles focused on the narratives of BPS being treated as property, being dehumanized and supports the finding that BPS were perceived not as professionals or individuals who deserved respect, thereby confirming the literature that plantation systems are replicated as a means to uphold white supremacy in higher education, specifically HWIs (Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Squire et al., 2018; Squire, 2021).

**Key Takeaway Three**

Thus, the third takeaway is the cultural norm of HWIs, which maintains social order, which means that you fall in line and be seen and not heard (Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Squire, 2021). In this study, the existing power dynamics show that participants have limited agency or autonomy to speak up or push back against unfair work environments compared to their white counterparts, further confirming the hierarchy differential (Hiraldo, 2010). Further, the participants do not have the benefit of shared governance; therefore, the agency to push back against experiences puts them in a vulnerable position of being deemed a problem to be handled. Staff are seen as replaceable. They are not seen as valuable assets like faculty and students but as commodities (Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Harris, 1993; Squire et al., 2018). As evidenced in this study through the speculative fiction counterstories, the participants understood that it was known that they needed to stay in their place, be seen and not heard, especially for purposes of diversity (Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Squire et al., 2018). Existing in this type of institutional environment is violent and anti-Black and creates a hostile work environment (Beatty, 2020; Dancy et al., 2018; Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Gilmore et al., 2021; Gordon, 1995; 1997; Steele, 2018). Working in environments that are anti-Black and hostile results in BPS experiencing racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2008). Repeated experiences of microaggressions and coping with racism can
have a psychological strain, resulting in feelings of frustration, fear, imposter syndrome, or being in a fight or flight situation (Smith, 2008). Participants discussed feeling a range of these emotions when dealing with racism and trying to navigate white spaces and a system that is entrenched in the erasure of their being. In particular, in The Whiteness Chip, the storyline focuses on the pressures to conform in spaces not designed for them and the ramifications when one pushes against the system. Moreover, the dialogue and overarching point of the storyline is to convey the psychological and emotional impact working in that environment has on BPS.

Black professional staff experiences with racism confirm that racism is real and dispels the myth of a post-racial society (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billing, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Race is endemic and in every facet of their life (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billing, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), but in this study and stories, the participants talked about their experiences with racism from their childhood to their present professional life, confirming the permanence of racism (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billing, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The speculative fiction counterstories confirm that the participants know their experiences are real and can understand the institutional gaslighting of HWIs’ fake promises of an inclusive work environment that is committed to eradicating institutional racism.

In closing, the stories and experiences of the participants confirmed that HWIs exploit Black labor for economic gain and to preserve and uphold white supremacy (Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Squire, 2021; Squire et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2021). In this study, participants were viewed as property or commodities for institutions to exploit for their own economic needs while also creating barriers and access to success (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billing, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Meaning that whiteness as property is very much
present in HWIs where whites control the right to access, the right to enjoy the privileges that whiteness gives upon assimilation, and the right to restrict access through discriminatory hiring practices that exclude them from career advancement and out of white spaces (Cowley, 2022; Harris, 1993; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Patel, 2015; Patton, 2016). Participants in this study shared stories of feeling invisible in white spaces where the insidious nature of racism made them feel less than human (Dancy et al., 2018; Dumas, 2016; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Gordon, 1995; 1997; Gilmore et al., 2021).

**Key Takeaway Four**

The study’s findings indicated that speaking out was one way participants defined resistance. Maxine stated that resistance was speaking out against any racist statement or act in that moment. David felt that resistance was tied to his ability to educate the younger generation so that they could move the movement forward. Further, Shuri described resistance as her responsibility to learn and read more about herself and her culture. Deborah defined resistance as holding back when you want to speak out. For example, Deborah was demeaned and subjected to racist behavior by a white woman, and for Deborah, resistance was holding back and refusing to acknowledge the ignorance that was spewed at her. Centering these dialogues in the speculative fiction counterstories highlighted the range of subtle to more overt ways the participants discussed how they defined and engaged in resistance.

However, the refusal to be silenced or dismissed (Dumas, 2106; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Griffin et al., 2014; Mena & Vocarro, 2017; Patton & Catching, 2009) or refusing to let white colleagues or other folks acknowledge that racism does not exist are acts of resistance as evidenced in this study. Uprising in the Ivory Tower shares the narratives around how the characters engaged in resistance. For example, Maxine refused to remain silent during a meeting
the day after George Floyd was murdered. She spoke up in a meeting after the incident was not acknowledged or they were not given space for a discussion.

Engaging in acts of resistance was an individual choice (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013), and what this study revealed was that some of the participants were ready to tell their stories. Telling their stories were seen as cathartic, freeing, and for some, therapy (Breeden, 2021; Stewart, 2019; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). Thus, the courage to tell their stories was an act of resistance. Their stories were acts of resistance.

Further, engaging in self-care was also an act of resistance for these participants (Breeden, 2021; Stewart, 2019). In this study, in addition to telling their stories, seeking therapy, meditating, and religion were seen as avenues of self-care and acts of resistance (Breeden, 2021; Stewart, 2019; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013) by the participants. Taking care to convey the emotional turmoil and how the composite characters in the counterstories, like Uprising in the Ivory Tower, described self-care as an important aspect of this study. Additionally, finding safe spaces with colleagues and allies who face racism and discrimination was equally important to building community and engaging in resistance. Participants found that creating safe spaces with other BPS (Breeden, 2021; Husband, 2016; Stewart, 2019), family members, or friends were outlets rather than suffering in silence. At the same time, choosing to remain silent, avoiding contact with, or refusing to engage with individuals was also considered resistance (Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Oftentimes, removing oneself from a hostile situation or refusing to engage white colleagues (Shorter-Gooden, 2004) is the best approach to avoid conflict.

**Key Takeaway Five**

Resistance is not in the doing, but in the being. To that point, Kimberle believed that resistance was a complicated thing because, for Black folks, resistance is tied to our ability to
survive, and the fact that she is alive is resistance. Moreover, Deborah described her presence in these white spaces as resistance, an acknowledgment that she deserved to be there and that her life mattered. All speculative stories highlight the egregious nature of anti-Black racism (Dumas, 2106; Dumas & ross, 2016; Gordon, 1995) and plantation politics (Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Squire et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2021) and the erasure of their presence from this space that is particularly anti-Black. For BPS, resistance is inextricably linked to self-awareness and survival in systems of oppression. In other words, resistance goes further than ordinary actions and is deeply rooted in BPS’ existence.

Consequently, the final point in this study is that great resignation has been a thorn in the side of higher education in recent times (Morales, 2022). While none of the participants talked about leaving because of racial issues, in other cases, they have considered leaving for career opportunities, to advance their salary or other opportunities. Both systemic and personal factors influenced BPS’ decision to leave the institution or stay.

Thus, engaging in resistance were practiced in multiple ways by the participants in this study. BPS’ presence in these white spaces were acts of resistance. Moreover, in addition to providing a deeper understanding of how resistance manifests in their HWI, this research study highlights the resilience and courage of BPS to face systemic inequity.

**Theoretical Implications**

This study adds to the body of research amplifying the voices of BPS and not just focusing on advisors or student affairs professionals (Erb, 2019; Gorski, 2019; Husband, 2016; Quaye et al., 2020; Sarcedo, 2021). BPS make up more than just advisors and student affairs professionals. BPS are in various divisions and departments across the university and support
faculty, students, and community stakeholders, advancing the institution's mission. More research is needed to study their experiences, separate and apart from Black students and Black faculty, advisors, and student affairs professionals. Research on BPS adds to the scholarship and advocates for social justice reform in the academy. Centering their voices in this research can highlight ways institutions should be responsive to the needs of BPS while fostering an inclusive environment.

The findings also highlight how unsafe HWIs are for BPS, particularly in the Mid-South. Legacies of white supremacy and plantation politics allow for systemic racism to persist in the Mid-South, exacerbating the environment at HWIs for BPS (Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Squire et al., 2018; Squire, 2021; Squire et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2021). Institutions that continue to uphold white supremacist structures create hostile work environments for BPS and reinforce how entrenched systemic racism is at HWIs. The findings contribute to the higher education literature by providing insight into the way BPS are marginalized and treated as commodities rather than individuals (Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Squire et al., 2018; Squire, 2021; Squire et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2021).

Another key contribution of this study to the higher education literature around BLM is how the participants talk about the BLM movement as a social movement and expose the insidious nature of racism within HWIs, particularly in the Mid-South during the BLM movement. Social movement refer to a collective effort to resist, promote, or reverse a social change (Eitzen & Stewart, 2007). Social movements are formed by groups that operate outside of institutional power and employ unconventional tactics to achieve their goals (Snow & Soule, 2010). Furthermore, those groups are excluded from institutional, economic, and political
systems and function as a primary motivation for taking action in social movements (Almeida, 2019).

Through social and political activism, Black Lives Matter (BLM) as a social movement supports racial justice and equity and ending violence and racism against Black folks. From the acquittal of George Zimmerman for murdering Trayvon Martin, Black Lives Matter began through social media as a social justice movement (Williams et al., 2021). The usage of social media and hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter and #BLM were used to convey outrage at the disregard for Black humanity and state-sanctioned violence (Bowman et al., 2021; Blacklivesmatter, 2022; Williams et al., 2021). BLM saw an expansion from social media to demonstrations and protest marches in Ferguson, Missouri, after Darren Wilson murdered Michael Brown (Bowman et al., 2021; Blacklivesmatter, 2022; Williams et al., 2021). BLM created a social movement that used social media as an opportunity to "frame, formalize, and advance their agenda" (Williams et al., p. 7, 2021). This decentralization allowed anyone to engage in activism with their cell phones, computers, and bodies. Moreover, the expansion of BLM created a global mobilization that worked to decentralize the organization with local chapters worldwide (Johnson, 2024; Williams et al., 2021).

In the Summer of 2020, Johnson (2024) argued that following the murder of George Floyd, the BLM movement saw an increase in its size and complexity. Johnson (2024) argues that historically, movements have been better understood as ambivalent collectives than as monolithic groups, typically led by a leader. Participants rally behind a specific cause, and as that cause transforms their identities and commitments, their identities and commitments also influence the purposes, objectives, and activities of that movement (Johnson, 2024). This means that everyday citizens with no activism background or political involvement can participate in a
movement such as BLM, which provides an opportunity to understand how impactful they can be to the movement (Johnson, 2024) or the larger cause of fighting for Black lives and humanity. Consequently, participants in this study discussed how BLM served as a significant social movement and how they individually used social media or other forms of protest to engage in resistance.

The participants discussed using social media and the use of BLM hashtags to disseminate information about BLM, wearing Black-centric apparel, racism, racism in higher education (HWIs), or educating about Black issues. Participants also shared a desire to engage in resistance through organizing and protesting. Further, BLM and social media provided an opportunity for faculty, staff, and students to push back against institutions' claims of diversity and inclusive environments through the use of hashtags such as #BlackintheIvoryTower, #BlackatUofA as examples to talk about their experiences. Participants discussed sharing articles and stories of others through social media and hashtags as truth-telling of the racism experienced at HWIs (Breeden, 2021; Stewart, 2019). Furthermore, the use of social media by institutions has created an opportunity for Black faculty, staff, and students to hold institutions accountable for their participation in and upholding white supremacy (Hailu and Sarubbi, 2019; Thomas, 2019).

The contribution of this study to higher education in the context of the BLM movement is around the larger efforts to push institutions to take accountability for its past and continued systemic inequities and practices and push for racial justice and change. Institutions have lacked a clear plan to increase the representation of Black faculty, staff, and administrators and have been slow to respond to the BLM movement (Browning, 2022; Pasquerella, 2020). Moreover, the experiences of Black students, teachers, and staff that sparked these protests show higher education's engagement in sustaining an institutional and social relationship of ownership with
people of color, particularly Black people (Cole & Grace, 2020; Dancy et al., 2018). BPS contribute to the institution's overall success, contributing to the mission while fighting for their existence in HWIs (Williams et al., 2021). The participants' experiences contribute to the higher education literature and should force institutions to respond to the movement's push for Black lives to matter and systemic change.

Critical Race Theory in education is a useful theory to analyze the systemic and institutional structures that exist and perpetuate racism and oppression against marginalized communities in education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), but it is insufficient to examine racism committed against Black folks and the dehumanizing ways racism affects Black folks in education, particularly in higher education. CRT in education examines the structures and hierarchies that marginalize people of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). While CRT does address people of color, anti-Black racism focuses on the specific violent nature of racism experienced by Black folks. Anti-Black racism analyzes the violent and hostile nature that racism can impose on Black folks, and combining it with CRT was a necessary component in this study to analyze how dismissive and dehumanizing racism can be on Black folks at HWIs. Further, creating an anti-Blackness theory would be sufficient as a theory and as a theoretical framework to stand alone to talk about the ways in which racism, the nuances of racism, and the violent nature and exploitation racism has on Black folks in America, and in this case HWIs.

The use of CRT in education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), anti-Black racism (Caldera, 2020; Dumas, 2016; Dumas & ross, 2016; Gordon 1995, 1997), and plantation politics (Durant, 1999; Durant & Knottnerus, 1999; Squire et al., 2018; Squire, 2021; Squire et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2021) was a robust combined framework to analyze the
experiences of Black folks in educational settings. Using the components together added dimension and provides a robust framework to address structural racism, the dehumanizing and violent nature of racism, and the economic exploitation that perpetuates and upholds white supremacy.

This study utilized CRT as a methodology (Parker, 2019; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002), and my use of speculative fiction counterstories contributes to these areas. Using speculative fiction allows counterstories or counternarratives to represent the data in new ways through science fiction and Afro-futurism (Bell, 1992; Tolliver, 2020; 2021). Afrofuturism is a cultural aesthetic in which Black authors produce speculative texts that revolve around Black characters as a means of recovering and reclaiming the past as well as countering negatives and elevating positive realities in the present (Toliver, 2021). Toliver (2020) also contends that while composite counterstories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) are developed from real characters in real-life experiences coupled with research and not fictionalized, composite counterstories can be fictionalized with real-life experiences (Toliver, 2020).

Therefore, speculative fiction, which employs science fiction, superheroes, Afro-futurism, and fantasy to share the experiences of those who are marginalized in order to "denote a broad category of literature that encompasses all genres that fail to mimic our every reality" (Toliver, 2020) contributes theoretically in innovative ways. Speculative fiction (Toliver, 2020; 2021) also contributes methodologically to the field of qualitative research, as this work has not been done in the field of higher education.

Implications for Practice

In this section, I will address implications for practice that address creating safe spaces for BPS, providing professional development opportunities valuing contributions to the
profession, and the role of the Black faculty and staff organization. These recommendations create the potential to address some of the challenges faced by BPS and work to provide a more inclusive and safe work environment.

The findings of this study revealed that HWIs are not safe spaces for Black folks and BPS, in particular. HWIs have and continue to perpetuate institutional and individual racism on BPS, creating a hostile and dangerous work environment that offers little protection or remedy. Recently, Dr. Antoinette Candida-Bailey, Vice President of Student Affairs, ended her life due to the mental anguish inflicted on her by the president of Lincoln University, a white man (Weissman, 2024). Dr. Candida-Bailey repeatedly asked the Board of Curators for help, and those requests were dismissed, citing the Board does not engage in personal issues (Kyaw, 2024). While this is only one example to illustrate racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2008) and the severity of mental anguish, depression, and anxiety that racism can inflict on Black folks in higher education, I wanted to say her name because it is important to hold institutions responsible for its part when tragic incidents happen.

Creating safe spaces for BPS may be vital to having environments that are free of oppressive spaces that cause unnecessary stress on a regular basis. Understanding that in the Mid-South, the politics of a conservative state where CRT and DEI efforts are being attacked and gutted by republican legislatures, these are lofty goals to include; however, other institutions in the southern states have cultural centers that support the development of Black issues with programming, research, and other activities (Anthym & Tuitt, 2019; 2003; Hefner, 2002; Kupo, 2011; Patton, 2006; Pittman, 1994; Stewart, 2011; Tichavakunda, 2022; 2024). Establishing practices and programming that address cultural competence or LinkedIn learning are ways
institutions can incorporate current training to address a more equitable space for Black folks in higher education.

Further, while this study does focus on BPS, I recognize that Black C-Suite, middle to upper administrators do not always fall within faculty lines, and they too, are subjected to pervasive acts of racism. Those positions also do not have the benefit of shared governance, and while human resources offices support personnel issues, I would be a fool not to acknowledge that human resources are there to protect the institution and not the individual and are often perpetrators of violence and anti-Blackness against Black folks in higher education institutions.

To develop a culture of respect and appreciation by the HWI, institutions must acknowledge and value the knowledge and professional skill set that BPS bring to the table. This includes investing in professional development opportunities for professional staff through opportunities to conduct research and present at conferences. Professional staff rarely receive support to participate in these associations or conferences due to a lack of budgeting consideration (Basko, 2022). BPS who want to advance in their field and attend and present at conferences often do so at their own expense on a limited salary. Human resources should advocate for professional staff development, including funding for professional associations and conference travel. Offering professional development opportunities enhances BPS’s skills, leadership development, and opportunities for career advancement (Killough et al., 2017; Leathwood et al., 2009).

Finally, the findings in this study also mentioned the need for a Black faculty and staff organization. An association of this nature can provide a supportive space for Black employees and also create spaces for networking, programming, and advocacy. This type of organization can work to recruit faculty and staff and develop new strategies to move the organization
forward. While I previously mentioned the difference between Black faculty and staff, Black faculty are also subjected to institutional and individual racism. Creating an alliance through the Black Faculty and Staff network group will strengthen both parties’ push for institutional justice. More importantly, it stresses the need for collective action and organizing with the Black Faculty and Staff network group, Black students, community partners, and campus worker unions to push for change.

Institutions should engage in more work to work towards dismantling systemic racism within higher education institutions. Those strategies include developing a mission statement and plans to push the institution to understand the needs of Black faculty and staff. While research and experience have shown racism is entrenched in our institutional structures and given the current attack on CRT and right-wing politics, the strongholds that prevent the dismantling of white supremacy are getting stronger. In this study, a participant talked about staging a walkout or a sick out as a collective effort to get HWIs, particularly their institution, to understand that they are tired of being dismissed. They are tired of being demeaned, devalued, and rendered invisible. The participants also expressed creating community, coping, creating safe spaces for themselves, and engaging in self-care, which are acts of resistance.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The existing literature focused on the experiences of Black advisors and student affairs professionals (Erb, 2019; Gorski, 2019; Husband, 2016; Quaye et al., 2020; Sarcedo, 2021). What was missing from the literature was how BPS experienced racism at HWIs in general and particularly during the BLM movement, including acts of resistance committed by BPS. This research sought to begin this work and more research is needed to understand the experiences of BPS at HWIs from diverse geographies. These different geographies will provide an opportunity
to examine how regional demographics, local politics, and history influence racism within these institutions. In order to identify patterns and trends in the experiences of different regions and to highlight similarities and differences in the way racism is addressed and equity is promoted, it will be necessary to examine experiences across diverse regions.

The literature highlights the pervasive acts of racism and anti-Black racism that Black folks, including BPS, still encounter at HWIs can be explained by Black experiences of microaggressions (Griffin et al., 2014; Mena & Vaccaro, 2017; Patton & Catching, 2009; Pierce et al., 1977; Pittman, 2012; Perez Huber & Solórzano, 2015; Solórzano & Huber, 2020; Sue et al., 2007) and racial battle fatigue (Gorski, 2019; Smith, 2008; Quaye et al., 2020). However, more research, beyond this research study, should be conducted to understand the experiences of BPS at HWIs that include addressing the unique positions of BPS that are utilizing tuition benefits to further their education and their experiences in their academic programs. A few participants in this study mentioned their experiences with racism while earning their degree, which puts the BPS in a unique position of being an employee and student.

Reflections

I would like to take this time to reflect on this dissertation study. It has been a labor of love, but it has been difficult at times due to the nature of the research and listening to the stories, but I would not change anything about this journey. I learned a lot about my participants, and I learned a lot about myself throughout this process. I experienced more of what I knew to be the insidious nature of racism and the detrimental effects that it has had on the lives of the participants and myself. I realized a lot about who I am as a Black person, as a Black woman, as a Black professional, as a Black mother, as a Black daughter, as a Black partner, a Black sister, and a Black friend. I used the word Black each time to convey the importance my Blackness has
on my identity in relation to each of those relationships or identifiers. That identity comes with ancestral ties that honor and guide each of those relationships. I understand that my voice is needed in this world.

I felt very proud and honored the participants trusted me to hold their stories close, do right by their stories, and tell them as authentically as possible. The participants are special to me. When I started this study, I had no idea the type of data I would get. I had no idea if I could get participants or be able to recruit participants who would be courageous enough to tell their stories, but that was not the case. They were ready, which tells me this was needed. This was a welcomed opportunity for them to talk about their experiences. And I'm very thankful and humbled that they trusted me with their stories. I'm a better person. I am a better researcher. I'm a better advocate. I'm a better scholar for having gone through this process. Their voices have a place in this world. My voice has a place. And I will continue to tell their stories, including my own story.

Conclusion

In this study, I explored and documented the lived experiences of BPS at a HWI during the Black Lives Matter Movement. Using the Critical Race Theory framework in education, I examined the dynamics of anti-Black racism and plantation politics in the HWIs. This chapter described the primary findings and bridged the gap between the research and the existing literature, shining light on the implications for practice and future research. Using four speculative fiction counterstories, I shared stories that represented the final themes in this study.

The primary goal was to raise the voices of BPS through the speculative fiction counterstories while acknowledging their experiences and resilience in navigating racism at an HWI. This study examined institutional barriers, the brutality of individual racism and
oppression, and the tactics used to sustain self-care and engage in resistance. The BLM Movement provided an avenue for a new form of resistance and advocacy in a social justice movement that pushes for institutional change and sharing stories of racism and resistance.

The findings revealed a disheartening reality: The Plantation Chronicles, The Vampire Chronicles: Miss Anne’s Reckoning, and The Whiteness Chip show how BPS employees suffer institutional and individual hatred, which conspired to create a stressful and hostile work environment. BPS are not only devalued, but they are also treated deplorably by white professors, white colleagues, and their respective divisions. The findings of this study leave no room for ambiguity: BPS are not viewed as professionals or individuals deserving of respect and acknowledgment but rather as commodities, frequently dehumanized and exposed to the humiliation of discrimination.

However, the findings go beyond highlighting the difficulties BPS face. It also represents the spirit of perseverance and resistance. The findings show through Uprising in the Ivory Tower how BPS identify and practice resistance, providing insight into how the participants negotiate oppressive environments, draw on the strength of their inner power, engage in self-care and resistance, and their being is an act of resistance. Utilizing speculative fiction counterstories (Toliver, 2020; 2021) provides an imaginative space to tell the stories of the BPS. Speculative fiction counterstories allow an avenue to interrogate the power dynamics in HWIs, center the voices of BPS, and imagine liberatory futures through alternative realities or science fiction.

In conclusion, this study provides both a documentation of the harsh realities of racism encountered by BPS and an indication of their steadfast spirit and resistance. The lived experiences of Black Professional Staff within HWIs reflect a diverse and rich narrative that, when examined through the lens of CRT in education, plantation politics, and anti-Black racism,
provided key information for the larger conversation about equity, justice, and inclusion in higher education. The findings highlighted the importance for institutional change, the implementation of inclusive policies, and ongoing efforts to eradicate the deeply entrenched systems that perpetuate anti-Black racism and plantation politics in higher education. The push for the erasure of Black lives is at a pivotal point, and action must come to demand change. HWIs continue to function as plantations, exploiting and profiting from Black bodies and labor for economic gain. As I reflect on this study, I am reminded of how critical it is to highlight the voices of BPS, advocate for change, and work toward more just and inclusive academic spaces in the academy.
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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Volunteers Wanted for Research Study

Research study examining the lived experiences of Black professional staff at a historically white institution during the Black Lives Matter movement to better understand ways institutions can create an inclusive environment for Black folks.

To participate, you must:

- Identify as Black or African-American
- Work at a Historically White Institution for a minimum of seven to ten years
- Identify as a professional staff in the areas of Enrollment Services, Business and Finance, Human Resources, Academic Affairs, etc.
- Employed at their institution from 2013-present.

Study will last approximately 30 days. Three interviews will be conducted via Zoom or in-person that fits the participant's schedule.

Call or Email for more information
901.262.3525 Angela Shea Kuykendoll
angelakuykendoll17@gmail.com

Dr. Edith Gnanadass, Dissertation advisor
Appendix B: Interview Protocols

GUIDE FOR INTERVIEW(S) FOR: We’s Tied Boss: The Lived Experiences of Black Professional Staff during the Black Lives Matter Movement

Interview Procedure

You are being asked to participate in a study seeking to describe the lived experiences of Black professional staff at Historically White Institutions during the Black Lives Matter movement. The purpose of this study is to examine Black professional staff’s experience of anti-Black racism, microaggressions, and racial battle fatigue, particularly during the Black Lives Matter movement. This study will also seek to gain perspective if how Black professional staff engage in resistance during the Black Lives Matter movement. This is a semi-structured interview. You will be asked a series of open-ended questions. You may choose not to answer all the questions. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with the line of questions or the interview itself, we will cease recording and, if desired, end the interview. The procedure will involve taping the interview, and the recording will be transcribed verbatim. Your results will be confidential, and you will not be identified individually.

Guiding Research Questions

1) Primary: How do Black Professional Staff experience and navigate racism at Predominately White Institutions (PWI) in the Mid-South during the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM)?
   a) Sub-Question: What are the dehumanizing and discriminatory acts experienced by BPS at HWIs?

2) Secondary: What acts of resistance does Black Professional Staff at PWIs participate in during the BLM?

INTERVIEW ONE PROTOCOL

Guide for Interview(s) on the experiences and narratives of Black Professional Staff racialized experiences and resistance at a Historically White Institution during the Black Lives Matter movement. Interview One Objectives: Identity, Life Experience, Race/Discrimination.

Time of Interview: ______________ Date: ______________ Place: ______________
Interviewer: ______________ Interviewee: ______________

The interviews for this study will be semi-structured life history interviews. The following questions will serve as a guide for the interviews, with questions to be covered with participants in bold followed by possible prompts.

Questions
1. Background Information: I first want to ask you a little about your background…
   a. Tell me about where you grew up?
b. Tell me about the racial issues in the city where you grew up.
c. Talk about your memories of hearing your parents/family talk about race or racism?
d. Tell me about the time did you realized you were Black.

2. Tell me about your childhood concerning racism or discrimination?
a. Describe your response.
b. Tell me about your emotions or how it made you feel.

3. When did you realize you were Black?
a. How would you describe your ethnicity?
b. Share with me the pride you feel about being Black?
c. Describe if you ever held any negative feelings about being Black?

4. What do you consider to be struggles of being Black?
a. Share with me your thoughts on if this country values Black folks?
b. Share your thoughts on our struggles in this country and if they have improved.

5. As an adult, prior to entering higher education, tell me about your experiences dealing with racism or discrimination because you are Black?
a. Please share your response to the incident(s)?
b. If you felt powerless, please describe how that made you feel?

6. Tell me about a time you had to “not act Black” in order to be accepted in white spaces?
a. Please share your feelings about denying your identity to be accepted?
b. Describe your mental or emotion feelings if you had to engage in this practice.

7. As a final wrap up, do you have anything to add?

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INTERVIEW TWO PROTOCOL
Guide for Interview(s) on the experiences and narratives of Black Professional Staff racialized experiences and resistance at a Historically White Institution during the Black Lives Matter movement. Interview Two Objectives: Professional experiences, Race/Discrimination Experience.

Time of Interview: ______________
Date: ______________
Place: ______________
Interviewer: ______________
Interviewee: ______________

The interviews for this study will be semi-structured life history interviews. The following questions will serve as a guide for the interviews, with questions to be covered with participants in bold followed by possible prompts.

Questions

1. What led you to pursue a career in higher education?

2. As a higher education professional, walk me through a normal day in your office.
   a. Talk to me about your reasons if would look forward to leaving work?
   b. Tell me about your normal routines when you leave work?

3. Please describe to me what you love about your job?
   a. Please share what you like least about your job?

4. Tell me about an instance(s) you experienced racism during your employment at your current institution?
   a. If no, what about previous HWIs?
   b. Describe how did that make you feel?
   c. Tell me if you felt you could speak to your supervisor or the person who committed these acts?
   d. Share with me if you view it as part of being Black and how that feels?

5. Tell me about a time you felt a microaggression?
   a. Please share how that made you feel?
   b. Please share if you talked to anyone about it? If so, whom?
   c. If not, can you tell me why you chose not to tell anyone?

6. Tell me about any experiences with being labeled as an “angry Black woman/man” or being labeled as aggressive, combative, mean, or not inviting or approachable?
   a. Please share how that made you feel?
   b. Please share with me if you felt you had to change your behavior to not be labeled as such and why if you did?

7. What has been your experience with advancement in your professional career?
   a. Please share if you had an opportunity to advance your career?
   b. Please share if you were encouraged or supported by your white supervisor/colleagues to advance your career? If so, how did that make you feel?
c. Please share if you were discouraged or supported by your white supervisor/colleagues to advance your career? How did that make you feel?

8. What, if any, barriers have contributed to your career advancement?
   a. Please tell me about conversations, if any, with your supervisor about those barriers?
   b. Tell me about what, if any, barriers did you encounter with professional development opportunities to increase skillset? (Conferences, certifications, educational opportunities, etc.)

9. Please share your decisions, if any, of changing positions due to lack of career advancement?
   a. What, if any, animosity did you encounter for doing so?

10. In your current position, please share if you feel valued in your current position?
    a. Describe a time where you felt you valued and how that made you feel?
    b. Tell me about a time you ever felt unvalued or invisible by your colleagues or supervisor?
    c. Please share how that made you feel?

11. Tell me about a time when you witnessed a colleague or supervisor said something offensive in your presence about a Black person?
    a. Please share your response. Describe the events following your response.
    b. Please share how that made you feel?
    c. Please share if you felt powerless if you remained silent and how that made you feel?

12. Describe your experiences with another colleague or supervisor making comments about your attire, hair, or overall appearance in a serious or joking manner?
    a. Please share your response. Describe the events following your response.
    b. Please share how that made you feel?
    c. Please share if you felt powerless if you remained silent and how that made you feel?

13. Tell me about your experiences of feeling pressured to speak in a certain manner or change anything about your Blackness to be accepted by your white colleagues or supervisor?
    a. How did it make you feel?
    b.

14. How would you describe your feelings/emotions if you were demeaned by any white person at your institution (faculty, other professional staff, administrators?)
    a. Please share your response. Describe the events following your response.
    b. Please share how that made you feel?
    c. Please share if you felt powerless if you remained silent and how that made you feel?

15. From your experience/perspective, what barriers do you think contribute to inequities in higher education?

16. Please describe for me a time you have considered leaving your HWI because of racial challenges?
    a. Describe your decision or thoughts were an isolated incident or a buildup on occurrences?
    b. If you decided to stay, can you tell me what decisions led to your remaining with the HWI?
17. As a final wrap up, do you have anything to add?

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INTERVIEW THREE PROTOCOL
Guide for Interview(s) on the experiences and narratives of Black Professional Staff racialized experiences and resistance at a Historically White Institution during the Black Lives Matter movement. Interview Three Objectives: Professional experiences, Resistance Experience.

Time of Interview: ______________
Date: ________________    Place: ________________
Interviewer: ________________    Interviewee: ________________

The interviews for this study will be semi-structured life history interviews. The following questions will serve as a guide for the interviews, with questions to be covered with participants in bold followed by possible prompts.

Questions

1. Take me through your experience/frame of mind during the days following the murder of George Floyd?
   a. Describe to what the next day at work was like for you.
   b. Describe your emotional state and if you felt pressure to perform at your best capacity?
   c. Let’s talk about your white colleagues and if they acknowledged George Floyd or any events in the following days?
   d. Please share how you felt if they or did not acknowledge the events.
   d. Please describe how you felt if your white colleagues asked or neglected to ask about your emotional state after George Floyd.
   e. Please share if call-in sick or take annual leave to escape work due to these murders? If so, what led you to do so?

2. How do you define resistance?

3. Tell me about a time when you spoke out against statements in your office regarding the Black Lives Matter movement or the deaths of unarmed Black folks in your office?
   a. Talk to me about the responses, if any?
   b. Walk me through your participation in any campus protests or events in the city and your decision to do so.

4. How would you describe sharing your thoughts and feelings during these time period?
   a. Please share if you feel supported by your white peers or supervisor?
   b. If not, describe why you did not feel safe with sharing your thoughts and feelings?

5. Tell about your experiences with white women in your professional space?
   a. Please describe the positive experiences.
   b. Please describe the negative experiences.

6. Let’s talk about your social media platforms and which ones you use.
   a. Please talk to me about your decision to be friends or not with your white colleagues/supervisors?
b. How do you respond if your white colleagues sent a friend/follow request?

7. Tell me about your social media postings about racism and the BLM or social justice issues on your social media platforms?
   a. Do you use hashtags to convey your thoughts about racism? Please tell me more about why hashtags you use and the frequency in which you share these types of posts.

8. Please describe for me how you practice self-care when dealing with racism?

9. Tell me about your experience with finding your tribe or circle at your HWI to express your thoughts and feelings?
   a. Tell me how this helps you cope?

10. As we wrap up, is there anything else you’d like to talk about?

Thank you for participating in these interviews! I appreciate you taking the time to do this. I may contact you in the future for the purpose of follow up interviews. Again, let me assure you of the confidentiality of your responses. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.
Appendix C: Informed Consent

Informed Consent for Research Participation

Title: PRO-FY2022-433: We’s Tied Boss: The Lived Experiences of Black Professional Staff during the Black Lives Matter Movement

Researcher(s) Angela S. Kuykendoll, University of Memphis
Researchers Contact Information 901.262.3525, askykndl@memphis.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The box below highlights key information for you to consider when deciding if you want to participate. More detailed information is provided below the box. Please ask the researcher(s) any questions about the study before you make your decision. If you volunteer, you will be one of about 8-10 people to do so.

Key Information for You to Consider

Voluntary Consent: You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to better understand and explain the lived racialized experiences of Black Professional Staff at a HWI during the Black Lives Matter movement. Through this research, higher education stakeholders, administrations, and the Board of Trustees (BOTs) will understand the importance of creating an inclusive environment and strategies to address the systemic barriers that perpetuate racism in the academy.

Duration: It is expected that your participation will last for 30-45 days.

Procedures and Activities: You will be asked to three (3) one-on-one interviews that will last about 60-90 minutes each. The interviews will explore your experiences working at a Historically White Institution (HWI) during the Black Lives Matter movement. To best honor our conversations, I will record the conversations on a digital recorder to help me when transcribing the interview on paper. I may need to ask you to participate in a follow-up telephone interview (for about 30 minutes to an hour) later to ensure that I accurately interpreted your statements.

Risk: Some of the foreseeable risk or discomforts of your participation may include experiencing a range of emotions throughout the data collection process. While there are no physical risks associated with this research study, participants will be asked to recall instances that may conjure up painful memories or experiences. Participants will be asked to share experiences and memories of racism or oppressive experiences or their avenues for healing, resistance, and self-care. I will provide participants information to utilize mental health resources through the EAP program, which provides a referral to a mental health professional for five free sessions by calling Here4TN at 1-855-437-3486 for assistance.
Benefits: There are no direct benefits to the subject, but the potential direct societal contributions include participants contributing to the literature regarding the lived experiences of Black Professional Staff and Black folks in the fields of adult and higher education, qualitative research, social justice, and liberation provide direct societal benefits. You also might get a better understanding of your own life experiences and might realize how others have similar experiences as you. This research might also provide a better understanding of the culture and experiences of Black faculty, staff, and students attending a HWI, which would assist administrators and stakeholders to see the benefits of diverse perspectives when discussing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Lastly, examining lived experiences of Black Professional Staff might help explain how these factors shape views of themselves as Black professionals and individuals, as well as show how to reshape beliefs and practices within the larger university community.

Alternatives: Participation is voluntary, and the only alternative is to not participate.

Who is conducting this research?

Angela S. Kuykendoll (Lead Investigator, LI) of the University of Memphis, Department of Leadership is in charge of the study. His/her faculty advisor is Edith Gnanadass(Advisor). There are no other research team members assisting during the study. No members of the research team associated with this study have any significant conflict or interest of financial interest with this study.

What happens if I agree to participate in this Research?

If you agree you will be asked to participate in three (3) one-on-one interviews that will last approximately 60-90 minutes each. To maintain an accurate account of our conversations, I will use a recording device to capture our conversation for transcription. You, as the participant, will have an opportunity to review the transcripts to check for accuracy and that your voice is represented.

No identifying information concerning the participant will be gathered during the interviews. The informed consent document is the only time that I will keep any of your identifying personal information about you as the participant. Additionally, none of your personal information will be connected to the data provided during the research study, as you will be assigned a pseudonym.

During the interviews, participants will be asked to respond to questions on the interview protocol. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. You can skip any questions and can stop the interview at any time. Participants also can pause or take a break during the interview to gather their emotions or process their thoughts. Examples of questions you could be asked are:

1. Background Information: I first want to ask you a little about your background…

a. Tell me about where you grew up?
b. Tell me about the racial issues in the city where you grew up.

3. Please describe to me what you love about your job?

a. Please share what you like least about your job?

The goal during the interview process is to schedule interviews within three-to seven days apart. This time frame is subject to change based on availability of participants. All interviews will be audio and recorded via Zoom in order to transcribe the interviews. No photography if in person will be made during the interviews.

The analyses of the transcripts will be conducted, and participants will have an opportunity to review the analysis for accuracy of interpretation and representation.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

Information collected for this research will be used as part of my doctoral dissertation data collection and analysis. The results of this research may be published and presented. However, the identifies of the participants of this study will remain confidential and not revealed or published. I will continue to use pseudonyms provided during this research study. Therefore, the data collected during this research study will be de-identified and stored for the life of the study and up to seven years. The de-identified data may be used in additional research projects or publications until 2030 or seven years following completion of this research study. Data will be destroyed after seven years from 2023, which would be 2030 or seven years after completion of dissertation. The de-identified data will be stored in a password protected file on the researcher’s personal computer. The audio recordings will be kept until the follow-up interviews and transcriptions are completed. The audio recordings will be deleted once the follow-up interview has been finished and all interviews have been transcribed. The anticipated storage period is no more than 90 days.

How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?

We promise to protect your privacy and security of your personal information as best we can. Although you need to know about some limits to this promise. Measures we will take include:

- Interviews will be done in a private setting in-person or via Zoom, which you as the participant has the option to choose.
- As the primary researcher, I will only have access to the participants true identities.
- Once pseudonyms have been assigned, the participant’s names and the master list will be deleted.
- Data will be de-identified of during the review of the transcription and data analysis, if needed.
- The data will be de-identified and stored on the researcher’s personal computer in a password protected file throughout the life of this research study.
- Data will be kept on a data management system that is not connected to the university server that only the lead investigator and my doctoral advisor, Dr. Edith Gnanadass, will have access to via password-protected computer.
• Communication between the research and the participants will be through non-university emails or phone to further protect the anonymity participants who are employed at the institution.
• Individuals and organization that monitor this research may be permitted access to inspect the research records. This monitoring may include access to your interview data. These individual and organization include:
  • Institutional Review Board
  • Dr. Edith Ganandass, Dissertation Advisor

What are the risks if I participate in this research?

The risk or discomforts of participating in this research include:

a) There are no physical risks associated with this research study, although participants may experience a range of emotions throughout the data collection process.

b) Participants in this research study will be asked to recall instances that may conjure up painful memories or experiences. Participants will be asked to share experiences and memories of racism or oppressive experiences or their avenues for healing, resistance, and self-care.

c) To minimize the potential for emotional distress, I will convey to the participants that they can pause the interview or take a break at any moment if they become too emotional. Participants also have the option to not share or respond to any question that may cause emotional harm. If the participant needs a moment to self-care, the researcher will honor the participant’s request. At any time, all participants will have the option to delay, suspend, or end the interview. The researcher will offer mental health resources at any point during the interview if the participant experiences emotional distress or at the conclusion of the interview.

d) During or immediately following the interview and interview process, I will offer mental health resources to participants should they experience emotional distress during or at the conclusion of the study. Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) information will be provided to participants as this is a service offered through the Human Resources Benefits office for university employees for assistance with finding a mental health provider for five free sessions.

What are the benefits of participating in this research?
You may or may not have direct benefit from participating in this research, but your participation could have:

• The result of this study is intended to add to the scholarship regarding Black Professional Staff and could be useful to institutions for creating an inclusive environment for Black folks.
• This research might also provide a better understanding of the culture and experiences of Black faculty and students attending a HWI, which would assist administrators and stakeholders to see the benefits of diverse perspectives when discussing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.
• Potential direct societal contributions include participants contributing to the literature regarding the lived experiences of Black Professional Staff and Black
folks in the fields of adult and higher education, qualitative research, social justice, and liberation provide direct societal benefits.

- Contributions are also expected to advance anti-Blackness ideology and plantation politics.

What if I want to stop participating in this research?

It is up to you to decide whether you want to volunteer for this study. It is also ok to decide to end your participation at any time. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decided to withdraw your participation. Your decision about participating will not affect your relationship with the researcher(s) or the University of Memphis. If you feel at any point, you do not want to continue participation in this study, let me know and I will withdraw you from the study. I will also destroy your signed consent form and the data I have collected thus far, if you so choose.

Will it cost me money to take part in this research?

There are no costs associated with participation in this research study.

You do not give up your legal right by signing this document.

Will I receive any compensation or reward for participating in this research?

You will not be compensated for taking part in this research.

Who can answer my question about this research?

Before you decide to volunteer for this study, please ask any questions that might come to mind. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Angela Kuykendoll at 901.262.3525 or my advisor, Dr. Edith Gnanadass at E.gnanadass@memphis.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705 or email irb@memphis.edu. We will give you a signed copy of this consent to take with you.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT (The statement of consent should not be separated on multiple pages)

I have had the opportunity to consider the information in this document. I have asked any questions needed for me to decide about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions through the study.

By signing below, I volunteer to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been given a copy of this consent document. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, my legal representative or I may be asked to consent again prior to my continued participation.
As described above, you will be audio/video recorded while performing the activities described above. Audio/video recording will be used for data collection and analysis. Initial the space below if you consent to the use of audio/video recording as described.

____ I agree to the use of audio/video recording

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Name of Adult Participant       Signature of Adult Participant       Date

Researcher Signature (To be completed at the time of Informed Consent)

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understand the information described in this consent and freely consent to participate.

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Name of Research Team Member       Signature of Research Team Member       Date