THE EXPERINCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE PRESIDENTS AND RACE-CONSCIOUS AFFIRMATIVE ACTION POLICIES ADMISSIONS POLICIES

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Abstract

The use of interpretative phenomenological analysis served as a lens to direct the researcher in making meaning of the experiences of African American college presidents leading predominantly White institutions with race-conscious affirmative action policies in higher education. This study was a chronicle of the voices of African American college presidents as they negotiated legal ambiguities, polarized racial tensions, and the future of race-conscious affirmative action policies in the United States. The legal system began aiding in racially diversifying higher education with the infamous *Brown v. Board of Education* case (1954). Over the years have come additional policies in support of racial diversity, including affirmative action; however, as the U.S. political, legal, and socioeconomic pendulum continues to swing, there have been efforts to obstruct affirmative action. Despite several researchers having reviewed race-conscious affirmative action, none has looked at the intersectionality of race-conscious affirmative action with the role of college president and African American racial identity. In discussing matters of identity, many presidents expressed an amalgamation of their identities impacted how they and campus constituents viewed their roles. Several participants mentioned not only the intersectionality of race, but also nationality, socioeconomic upbringing, gender, immigrant status, and other identities as factoring into their approach to fulfilling the role of president. A fundamental discovery of this study was that participants perceived multiple definitions of community, including the college community, the community surrounding the college, and the greater community of human beings. There was a connection between how a diverse population of college presidents can contribute to cultural diversity and the intersectionality with community engagement as citizenship. Additionally, presidents related understanding and encounters in their quest to welcome and retain a racially diverse student
population. Identified themes included welcoming African American college presidents, providing support for campus racial diversity, utilizing code switching by presidents, preserving the future of affirmative action, and executing strategies to obtain racial diversity without affirmative action.
Dedication

I am dedicating this research to African American educators and students past and present. To African Americans who educated themselves and others in secret, because they never had the opportunity to obtain an education due to racial discrimination.
Acknowledgments

I give thanks in the glorious name of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Through the intersession of the paraclete this dissertation is complete.
Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 2
List of Tables .................................................................................................................................... 9
List of Figures .................................................................................................................................. 10
Chapter One: Introduction .................................................................................................................. 11
  Purpose Statement .......................................................................................................................... 12
  Context and Background .................................................................................................................. 13
  Research Problem and Research Question ....................................................................................... 15
  Rationale and Significance .............................................................................................................. 16
  Definition of Key Terms .................................................................................................................. 18
  Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................................... 20
    Critical Race Theory ...................................................................................................................... 20
    Rationale for the Theoretical Framework ......................................................................................... 29
Chapter Three: Research Design ......................................................................................................... 64
  Qualitative Research Approach ....................................................................................................... 64
  Participants ....................................................................................................................................... 71
  Procedures ........................................................................................................................................ 73
  Data Analysis .................................................................................................................................... 74
  Criteria for Quality Qualitative Research ....................................................................................... 79
  Ethical Considerations ..................................................................................................................... 79
  Internal Audit ................................................................................................................................... 83
  Self-Reflexivity and Transparency ................................................................................................... 83
  Limitations ....................................................................................................................................... 86
Summary.................................................................................................................. 86

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis ......................................................................... 88

Openness to the African American Identity of the College President ......................... 91

Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 94

Support of Racial Diversity ........................................................................................ 96

Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 99

Citizenship .................................................................................................................... 101

Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 104

Code-Switching............................................................................................................. 103

Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 105

The Intent of Affirmative Action ................................................................................... 105

Future of Affirmative Action ......................................................................................... 107

Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 110

Strategies to Obtain Racial Diversity without Affirmative Action ............................. 111

Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 114

Influence of Politics on Affirmative Action .................................................................. 115

Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 117

Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 118

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice ............................................. 123

Openness to the African American Identity of the College President ......................... 124

Support of Racial Diversity ........................................................................................ 126

Code-Switching............................................................................................................. 129

Intent of Affirmative Action ......................................................................................... 130

Strategies to Obtain Racial Diversity Without Affirmative Action ............................. 132
Influence of Politics on Affirmative Action ................................................................. 135

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................... 136

Recommendations for Practice ...................................................................................... 137

Recommendations for Future Research ........................................................................ 142

References ...................................................................................................................... 144
List of Tables

Table 1. Summary of Participant Experiences................................................................. 90
Table 2. Summary of Themes............................................................................................ 91
List of Figures

Figure 1. Critical Race Theory Tenets ................................................................. 25
Chapter One: Introduction

The hierarchical structure of U.S. higher education institutions means college presidents are the leading administrators negotiating complex educational dynamics. College presidents have the responsibility to enforce federal, state, and institutional policies, often including the strong oversight of corresponding funds under the direction of a board of trustees and federal, state, and private agencies. One federally supported policy they negotiate is affirmative action, which has been asymmetrically mandated over time. Emerging from the 1964 Civil Rights Act, affirmative action is first a legislative policy implemented to eliminate discrimination in many areas, particularly in the workplace hiring practices, and also in educational equity (Stewart & Shapiro, 2000; Weber, Pope, & Simpson, 2005; Wicks-Lim, 2014).

Exploring issues of educational equity and underrepresented individuals who have obtained leadership positions to shape and administer higher education policy provides a unique lens and brings to the forefront challenges regarding institutionalized racism. In the educational arena, a common perception is that African Americans are the beneficiaries of affirmative action policies (Polyné, 2003). However, leaders committed to incorporating affirmative action face enormous challenges—legal, political, and practical—particularly when they come from groups defined as underrepresented, in this case, African Americans.

Unlike the field of employment, there were and are still no categorical federal orders directing institutions of higher education on affirmative action; rather, court decisions interpreted by college officials are what drive policies (Arcidiacono, Lovenheim, & Zhu, 2015). This makes the experience of affirmative action in higher education unique, particularly because of the willingness of initial college leaders to launch race-conscious admissions. Indeed, at institutions of higher education where affirmative action has moved forward, college presidents have
exhibited exceptional leadership and commitment, given the absence of federal obligations requiring them to respect and enhance diversity. They continue to wrestle in their efforts to create educational equality and a diverse learning environment. College leaders employing race-conscious admissions have only their own interpretations of what affirmative action should look like on their campuses, and their efforts set examples that frame the future practices of other institutions. This practice of campus leaders following their own social mandate in structuring race-conscious admissions without concrete national-level guidance or support long continued. Changing this course was a pivotal 1978 Supreme Court ruling the *Regents of University of California v. Bakke*, further addressed in chapter two in the section Legal Challenges to Affirmative Action.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis study was to understand the experiences of African American college presidents leading predominantly White universities (PWIs). Of specific interest was how these participants negotiated affirmative action policies in higher education, particularly race-conscious admissions, in an environment characterized by strident legal ambiguities and polarized racial tensions across the United States. Specific to this research, the central phenomenon of race-conscious admissions is a component of affirmative action policies specific to the higher education setting. Knowledge generated should help to inform individuals working in higher education committed to promoting diversity and inclusivity in campus settings.

This chapter begins with the context and background related to race-conscious admissions and affirmative action to position the study. A discussion of the rationale and significance of the study follows, drawing connections to potential beneficiaries of the work. The
problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions focus and ground the study. Last
the introduction and explanation of the theoretical framework that serves as a lens for the study,
critical race theory.

**Context and Background**

To provide an example of the complex characteristics of the legal context shaping
affirmative action in higher education, the United States Supreme Court heard a case involving a
young woman named Abigail Fisher in 2013. The topic of Fisher’s legal discontent was beliefs
that she experienced discrimination when the University of Texas decided to not grant her
enrollment. The University of Texas employed a race-conscious admissions policy, supported by
their affirmative action efforts, which involved the concept of compelling interest (Reed, 2013).
Compelling interest is a standard established by the U.S. Supreme Court in the *University of
California Regents v. Bakke* (1978) case, requiring institutions of higher education to meet
specific mandates to utilize race-conscious admissions policies within the framework of
constitutionality. The Supreme Court’s decision in the Fischer case represented, for some higher
education professionals, a long-anticipated action, while for others it was an expected
abolishment of affirmative action. Expectations were that the *Fisher v. University of Texas at
Austin* (2013) would roll back affirmative action race-conscious admissions policies (Brodin,
2014; Curfman, Morrissey, & Drazen, 2013; Riccucci, 2014).

Although the Supreme Court’s decision in *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin* (2013)
did not result in the predicted weakening the affirmative action policy, dissonance surrounding
the case was clear. A White woman, Fisher had applied to the University of Texas, which
employed the use of race-based admissions policies, thus denying her admission. The Supreme
Court decided the University of Texas had not violated Fisher’s rights in its efforts to obtain
diversity in student enrollment. These cases continue to affect decision-making in higher education related to affirmative action, and college presidents need to be constantly aware of the changes in this legal landscape.

*Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin* (2013) exemplified 35 years of ambiguity that began with the first major legal challenge to affirmative action, *Regents of University of California v. Bakke* (1978). In short, *of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) played out at the University of California at Davis (UC–Davis), which employed a quota system and a separate admissions process representing standard practices in race-conscious college admissions. Stemming from the Supreme Court decision in the *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) case, colleges received direction to eliminate quota systems and separate admissions processes. As colleges designed new strategies to create a racially diverse campus, another change to affirmative action in race-conscious admissions emerged with *Hopwood v. State of Texas* (1996). Even though this case never made it to the Supreme Court, the U.S Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit upheld that racial diversity is not a compelling interest, a contradiction to the Supreme Court’s *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) decision. The result was that part of the country followed guidelines established by *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) while other parts adhered to directives set forth by *Hopwood v. State of Texas* (1996).

Additionally, two more cases ascended to the Supreme Court in 2003, *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003) and *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), leading to more changes, including terminating the use of race as a compelling interest. These decisions significantly transformed the application of affirmative action policies in higher education (Weber et al., 2005). The contest to affirmative action continued with *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin* (2013), with another student denied
admission. Fisher believed the University of Texas violated her rights in exercising race-based admissions policies. The case eventually went to the Supreme Court, which ruled the desire for colleges and universities to have more racial diversity is a compelling interest (Rosenbaum, Teitelbaum, & Scott, 2013). *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin (2013)* represented another legal challenge. This time, though, there were clear connections between the conservative organization Project on Fair Representation (POFR) resources and their support of legal challenges to race-consciousness in education (Smith, 2012). This marriage between conservative think tanks and legal battles against affirmative action presented an additional layer of complexity. This allegiance created a strong challenge for the public campaign against affirmative action, another layer of complexity for institutions to manage.

**Research Problem and Research Question**

This research study was an attempt to understand the legal ambiguity and complexity of the implementation of affirmative action by documenting the experiences of a particular group of individuals trying to promote change in a racially charged environment: African American college presidents leading predominantly White universities. The objective was to provide unique insights into the dynamics of the implementation of affirmative action policies in general through a specific examination of decisions made in a context of race-conscious admissions and the surrounding dynamics at colleges and universities. Although African American college presidents are underrepresented in higher education, they have succeeded in obtaining strong leadership roles at their universities; they remain taxed with the responsibility of adhering to affirmative action policy changes during a time when the United States is experiencing exceptional tumult around race relations. The study’s aim was to contribute to the literature on affirmative action in a significant manner, as few researchers have focused particularly on the
perspectives of African American academic leaders negotiating the phenomenon of race-conscious admissions and the resulting campus climate in a predominantly White higher education setting.

To address this problem of practice were the following research question: What are the experiences of African American college presidents with negotiating and implementing affirmative action policies as evidenced by interpretive phenomenological analysis in the context of ambiguous legal frameworks and racial tension in the United States?

**Rationale and Significance**

A review of databases of educational publications did not return studies specific to African American college presidents and affirmative action in PWIs. Multiple researchers (Brown-Nagin, 2005; Freeman, Commodore, Gasman, & Carter, 2016) have examined either the presidencies and mentoring relationships or historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in relation to college presidents (Brown, 2013; Clement & Lidsky, 2011; Esters & Strayhorn, 2013), which employ more than half of all African American college presidents in the United States. Researchers who focused on affirmative action and race-conscious admissions in higher education have attempted to document the impact of affirmative action policies, yet they have not significantly examined information specific to college presidents. More specifically, few have explored the role of African American college presidents working in predominantly White institutions (Clark, 2011; Featherman, Krislov, & Hall, 2010; Garces, 2012; Johnson, 2017; Mangum, 2008).

This study was an examination of how African American college presidents in the United States have experienced the policy of affirmative action when working in a predominantly White institution. The objective was to capture the presidents’ understandings of affirmative action,
specifically in situations where they must simultaneously balance the enforcement of historic court decisions, maintain equity in campus racial climates, respond to state constitutional amendments, and manage evolving public opinion and the national politics of racial identity.

Affirmative action has a long history within higher education. The earliest usage of race-conscious affirmative action in admissions was in 1962 when Dartmouth College sought to grow the number of Black students enrolled (Stulberg & Chen, 2014). Also in 1962, Princeton welcomed a new admissions staff, including Alden Dunham, who pushed the conservative college and encouraged all institutions to help increase the positioning of Blacks in society. It was thought that many institutions would lose the monetary and moral support of their alumni; in the case of Princeton, there was dissonance between Dunham’s efforts and institutional constituents, specifically alumni, who withdrew financial support (Stulberg & Chen, 2014). Yale, another early adopter of race-conscious affirmative action in admissions policies in the late 1960s, faced similar protests from alumni and other constituents who withheld their giving, even though many campuses nationwide claimed racial equality. The balancing of campus consciousness, alumni support, and societal progress is still extant in higher education today. College presidents must constantly address diverging thoughts on race-conscious affirmative action in their admissions policies and the conflicting paradigms present among their constituents.

In a study of early race-consciousness and affirmative action in undergraduate admissions, researchers noted that administrators were driven to act on affirmative action based on a principled and ideological responsibility (Stulberg & Chen, 2014); however, those researchers focused on overall college administrators and did not specify college presidents or any particular racial group of administrators. There is a need for research that isolates the
perspectives of African American college presidents with regard to negotiating and implementing affirmative action policies and to race-based college admissions.

African American college presidents are a minority in this predominantly White administrative role. The 2002 American College Presidents Report noted that African Americans held only 6.3% of college presidencies, including those at HBCUs, as compared to 87.2% of European Americans occupying these positions (Jackson, 2004). This study was a means to give voice to this marginalized and underrepresented group.

Researchers have routinely characterized African American college presidents with negative descriptors, including authoritarian, accommodationist, and Uncle Tom. These presidents continue to endure stereotypical impressions of who they are as they attempt to shape their institutions to respond to a future in which diversity is respected (Gasman, 2011). In that context, understanding the challenges African American college presidents face relating to race-conscious affirmative action in admissions may help to prompt college and university leaders and society in general toward a new conversation around affirmative action, giving voice and credence to their perspectives.

**Definition of Key Terms**

The following terms appear throughout this research proposal:

**Affirmative action** are those executed to expel discrimination based on race, color, age, national origin, gender, or religion to provide access to members of those groups. Affirmative action includes the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Weber et al., 2005; Wicks-Lim, 2014).

**Civil Rights Act of 1964** banned discrimination based on color, race, religion, and national origin (Graham, 1992) in the United States.
**African American/Black.** The terms African-American and Black may be used interchangeably throughout the study, signifying those individuals who identify themselves as having ancestral history that aligns with the experiences of Blacks in the United States.

**HBCUs** specify historically Black colleges and universities founded in the United States in the aftermath of the Civil War, growing in number through the Civil Rights enactment in 1964 with the objective of prioritizing the education of Black people. The Higher Education Act of 1965 defined HBCUs “institutions of higher learning established before 1964, whose principal mission was then, as is now the [higher] education of Black Americans” (Albritton, 2012, pp. 311-312). HBCUs include public, private, faith-based, secular, two-year, four-year, and selective institutions. In 2015, there were 102 HBCUs in the U.S., including the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands, with the latest statistics showing 101 (Bracey, 2017).

**Race-conscious affirmative action,** for the purposes of this study, means any admissions policy or program that formally permits a degree of racial consideration, however big or small, in the treatment of potential or actual applicants for admissions (Stulberg & Chen, 2014).

**White supremacy** is a term given to the legislation and underlying economic and cultural structures that permit White and European Americans to dominate in a given society, implying that Whites monopolize power and tangible assets. It also involves conscious or unconscious beliefs around White supremacy, privilege and control, along with social structures that associate subservience to non-Whites throughout society, saturating daily mundane actions and policies that form the societal interests of White people (Gillborn, 2005, 2015; Liu, 2017; Savas, 2014).
Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) has an activist foundation in racial and gender studies with influence by Marxist theory and radical feminism. Additionally, CRT draws on radical U.S. figures such as Sojourner Truth, Fredrick Douglas, W.E.B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Cesar Chavez, as well as the Black Power and Chicano movements (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT, which originated in critical legal studies (CLS), emerged in the 1970s to challenge assertions that the U.S. legal system was impartial in relation to race, gender, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). The intent with CRT was to resist racial oppression and bring awareness to the intersection of law and socioeconomic, cultural, and political influences (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). CRT, however, moved beyond CLS, incorporating a principle emphasis on racism and its intersectionality in the context of U.S. policies, such as school desegregation and affirmative action. CRT centers on the lived experiences of racism evidenced by the dichotomy of viewpoints between European Americans and African Americans on particular social issues, including affirmative action and educational equity. Several CLS scholars including Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Patricia Williams, and Kimberle Crenshaw were concerned about the lack of progress in civil rights legislation and became some of the first scholar-activists of CRT in the 1980s (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Regarded as the father of CRT, Bell was a professor at both Harvard Law School and the New York School of Law and was a scholar-activist throughout his career.

Renowned African American scholar Cornell West noted that CRT “examined the entire edifice of contemporary legal thought and doctrine from the viewpoint of law’s role in the construction and maintenance of social domination and subordination” (Crenshaw, 1995, p. xi).
Indeed, as CRT evolved, it progressively expanded to other fields, including women’s studies and ethnic studies. Intellectuals in women’s studies explored how women of color possess intersecting identities (gender and race), while American studies’ departments integrated information on “critical White studies,” an element developed by CRT proponents. CRT has also significantly influenced the field of education. In 1995, Ladson-Billings, a University of Wisconsin–Madison School of Education professor and researcher at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, copublished a scholarly work entitled, “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education.” The purpose of the article was to show how to employ CRT in education, specifically noting three perspectives: (a) the concept of race is still substantial in the United States, (b) property rights, rather than human rights, is what society values, (c) the concepts of race and property rights create an interpretive means of comprehending the inequities that exist in education (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). In 1992 and 1998, the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy and CRT applied to the field of education with note that certain aspects of education can perpetuate racial inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1998). For example, educational curricula design propagates White majority culture, while educational assessment has helped to perpetuate the notion that African Americans have educational deficiencies, specifically in the field of science. In addition, the lack of funding for schools of color is a conduit for institutional racism (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1998). Parallel to CRT’s tenet of Whiteness as property, it is noted that curriculum is intellectual property (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

CRT’s design directs researchers to look at legal policies with a critical eye while allowing the historically underrepresented groups to tell their story. This is a unique aspect of CRT that will allow this researcher to explore the experience of the role of race and racism in higher education. Additionally, CRT will highlight aspects of affirmative action as they relate to
Whiteness as property, thus allowing for an appraisal on the aspects of affirmative action, which may actually profit White people rather than bringing equity and change. According to McCoy and Rodricks (2015), “Whiteness is very much the cornerstone of higher education delivery” (p. 32).

**History and framing of CRT.** Seen as the pioneer of CRT, Derrick Bell (1976) was a renowned public intellectual thinker and professor at Harvard Law School who wrote expansively on issues facing African Americans, such as school desegregation, diversity in admissions, and rectification of racial inequity (Hughes, Noblit, & Cleveland, 2013). Often Bell’s writings centered on using legal rectification or court-ordered changes in written documents to reflect the original meaning, addressing racism in various fields while commenting on society’s lack of consideration for legal remediation (Hughes et al., 2013). Published in the *Yale Law Review*, Bell’s 1976 journal article, “Serving Two Masters: Integration Ideals and Client Interests in School Desegregation Litigation,” merits distinction as the seminal study shaping CRT (Hughes et al., 2013). In it, Bell provides a scholarly critique of the policies that stemmed from the pivotal Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*, which, by overturning the previous *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decision, ruled that laws instituting separate and segregated schools for African American and White students were indeed unconstitutional (Hughes et al., 2013). Chief Justice Earl Warren noted “that in the field of public education, the doctrine of separate but equal has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (Marble, 2005, p. 34).

In the early 1950s when *Brown v. Board of Education* was under debate, not only was the civil rights movement gaining momentum, but the United States was vying for the loyalties of allies worldwide to counteract postwar Communist expansionism by the Soviet Union in Eastern
Europe, Africa, Asia, and beyond in the context of the Cold War. It behooved the United States to advance equal treatment for Blacks domestically to present a benevolent image in the international community (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Bell (1976) noted the decision to end segregation indeed helped the United States, which was striving practically and ideologically to confront Communism and garner credibility among the emerging Third World countries (Crenshaw, 1995). Additionally, commercial-minded Whites viewed segregation as an obstacle to additional industrialization in the Southern part of the country (Crenshaw, 1995). *Brown v. Board of Education* led to the integration of public schools and prepared the legal context to abolish state-sponsored racial segregation in other public facilities and services (Marble, 2005).

Reflecting on this context, Bell (1976) highlighted the dichotomy between the desires for civil rights attorneys to advocate for educational equality for Blacks when agreement did not exist that desegregation was the road to educational equality. Bell directed his treatise toward attorneys, specifically civil rights attorneys, advising them not to be overcome by confidence in the law and warning them to identify when the legal system and the law itself clouded dimensions of justice and made them blind to the laws’ faults in providing fair and impartial rights to African Americans. Bell acknowledged the attorneys’ ideas often led to conflict in the attorney–client relationship, putting the attorney in the position of serving two masters, implementing the law for desegregation when the community vehemently advocated for true equality in education, not just a formal institutional change (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Bell contended that integration could actually oppose the African American community’s request for fair education, because integration did not guarantee long-term equality and equitable education should not depend on or materialize via the enforcement of desegregation (Hughes et al., 2013). Bell was more interested in bringing about full equality in education and assessing how
assimilation impacted the African American community, rather than simply moving through the motions of school desegregation, which he contended did not guarantee educational equality.

The field of education was a major arena for CRT, particularly because the seminal document “Serving Two Masters” centered on public education. In his writings, Bell “articulated his own rebellion against the alleged impartiality of the legal system” (Hughes et al., 2013, p. 446). The article’s rebellious tone stemmed from Bell’s critique of the policies that originated from *Brown v. Board of Education* and desegregation plans, even though other scholars and civil rights activists, including African Americans, were touting the great success of such policies. Bell contended that integration did not support the African American community’s request for equitable education, which, he asserted, should not depend on or materialize via the enforcement of desegregation (Hughes et al., 2013).

Through its general tenets, CRT helps scholars examine law and legal structures through the lens of race consciousness. Through CRT, legal professionals ensure that legal analysis has occurred, during which the CRT poses the subordinate question: Does the law or legal practice subordinate the interests of people of color and how is the matter of subordination addressed? This is directly linked to affirmative action.

According to Anderson (2007), “to Bell, this construction of affirmative action reflects both the narrowness of the so-called affirmative action victory, its incapacity to protect the long-term interests of students of color and its vulnerability in future litigation” (p. 204). In short, Bell (1976) argued for a clear substantiation of the need for race-conscious admissions and of presenting affirmative action as a resolve for past racial discrimination. He was opposing the notion that Black students should simply be recipients of the campuses’ benevolence; rather, it was essential for them to become true heirs of merited reparations, which would mean much-
warranted reprieve from and compensation for historical and perpetual racial discrimination (Anderson, 2007).

**Fundamentals of CRT.** The tenets of CRT include (a) permanence of racism, (b) storytelling, (c) interest convergence, (d) social construction, (e) intersectionality, (f) whiteness as property, (g) critique of liberalism, and (h) commitment to social justice. Figure 1 is a visual representation these eight tenets as outlined by McCoy and Rodricks (2015).

![Critical Race Theory Tenets](image)

*Figure 1: Critical Race Theory Tenets (Love, 2017).*

The tenet *permanence of racism* means racism is an element that consistently inhabits the lives of people of color. The constant existence of racism does not mean frequent observation by the dominant culture due to its insidious nature; therefore, the dominant culture can easily repudiate claims of racism. Many in society may identify that the United States has made many strides in desegregation and opportunities; however, according to Delgado, the “net quantum” of racism does not change, even when society has made marked progress in specific areas of
oppression (Brown, 2003). The permanence of racism also receives support by a societal structure that exalts European Americans/Whites over African Americans/Blacks and other people of color (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

The next tenet is *storytelling*, which purports the constant interaction African Americans have with racism gives them a perspective and experience that dominant culture does not possess. CRT theorists embrace possession of the existence of distinctive lived experiences of African Americans (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). African Americans’ “status, in other words, brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 10). Additionally, CRT reflects the necessity for ample attention to the voices and experiences of African Americans and other people of color, because those voices introduce perspectives different from the customarily accepted European American/dominant culture perspective (Su, 2007). This is not to assume African Americans and other people of color have the same experiences, but it that there is a connection people of color have because of the shared experience of racism (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005).

The third tenet, *interest convergence*, is an exposure of the notion that racial equality is only instituted when it in some way meets the needs of majority European American/White people (Taylor, 1998). Taylor noted that interest convergence is closely aligned with Marxist theory, which promotes a caste system where the middle and upper class endures and acquiesces to the working class’s progress for their own advantage (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) argued that, due to the benefits European American/White Americans gain from racism, there is a lack of motivation to end racism.

Next on this list is *social construction*, a suggestion that the creation of race and races are socially constructed and have little to no scientific or genetic basis, yet culture often negates
these facts (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Also, CRT explores differential racialization, the way the dominant culture uses the racialization of different people as its see fit (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) provided the following examples, beginning with a discussion of the shifting needs of the labor market.

At one period, for example, society may have had little use for [Blacks] but much need for Mexican or Japanese agricultural workers. At another time, the Japanese, including citizens of long standing, may have been in intense disfavor and removed to war relocation camps, while society cultivated other groups of color for jobs in war industry or as cannon fodder on the front. (p. 9)

Continuing, they described the fungible nature of social perceptions in the racialization process, in the realm of popular culture:

Popular images and stereotypes of various minority groups shift over time, as well. In one era, a group of color may be depicted as happy-go-lucky, simpleminded, and content to serve White folks. A little later, when conditions change, that very same group may appear in cartoons, movies, and other cultural scripts as menacing, brutish, and out of control, requiring close monitoring and repression. In one age, Middle Eastern people are exotic, fetishized figures wearing veils, wielding curved swords, and summoning genies from lamps. In another era, they emerge as fanatical, religiously crazed terrorists bent on destroying America and killing innocent citizens. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 9).

These social constructs affect not only the relationships between the dominant and subordinated culture, race, or group, but also the solidarity between dominated peoples.

Another concern of CRT is that races are relational in their formation and race is often tied to other identities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). That leads to the fifth tenet,
intersectionality, which acknowledges race is not the only identity individuals possess; therefore, race coincides with other identities, such as gender, religion, and social class. At times, each person may experience divergence between these various identities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). It is important for critical race theorists to consciously focus on race, however, while juxtaposing it with other dominated identities (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

European Americans/White people possess an identity, seen as more of an asset, referred to in CRT as property rights in Whiteness, the sixth tenet. Bell maintained that regardless of White people’s socioeconomic status, they enjoy a perpetual awareness of racial superiority that grants with it property rights (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Property rights in whiteness originated from prominent legal scholar Cheryl Harris (1993) in a Harvard Law Review article entitled “Whiteness as Property,” as she discussed how her pale-skinned and straight-haired grandmother was able to pass as White, accessing privileges like employment that at the time no Black–looking woman could. Harris stated:

. . . being White automatically ensured higher economic returns in the short term, as well as greater economic, political, and social security in the long run. Becoming White meant gaining access to a whole set of public and private privileges that materially and permanently guaranteed basic subsistence needs and, therefore, survival. Becoming White increased the possibility of controlling critical aspects of one’s life rather than being the object of others’ domination. My grandmother’s story illustrates the valorization of Whiteness as treasured property in a society structured on racial caste.

(Harris, 1993, p. 1712)

She further argued these structural inequalities are indeed for Whites an asset they vehemently seek to preserve (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).
CRT also includes a *critique of liberalism*, which exposes alleged progressive policies and attitudes that, while they might sound beneficial to Blacks and other marginalized groups, actually conceal the true foundation of keeping dominant culture in power (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). This includes aspects such as color blindness, equal opportunity, and incremental change. For example, the notion of incremental change is what keeps Blacks and other people of color just out of reach of a complete manifestation of change and puts the timeframe for change at the discretion of White/dominant culture. The final tenet is *commitment to social justice*, which operates to keep critical race theorists committed to supporting activism to transform society and challenge societal inequities (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

Another foundational author of CRT is Delgado, a mentee of Bell, who found academic work, specifically in the area of civil rights in legal writing, often based on race rather than intellectual quality. Other critical race theorists such as Landson-Billings (1998) have also researched CRT and its intersection with education. Landson-Billings showed that critical race theory could apply to a variety of educational reforms, yet warned researchers should abide by a direct inquiry of the legal writings in which these policies are established.

**Rationale for the Theoretical Framework**

CRT provides an excellent lens through which to view legal and political policies such as affirmative action and race-conscious admissions in education. CRT is not an anomaly in the field of education; actually, it started to merge into education in the 1980s, and even though CRT was particularly present in analyses of and research on elementary education, the approach has more currently gained ground in higher education research and pedagogy (Harper, 2012; Hernández, 2016). CRT directs researchers to examine issues while simultaneously acknowledging racism or any other “ism” in society. CRT is expansive enough to acknowledge
the role of racism in the African American experience and colonialism in the Native American experience, the latter known as tribal critical race theory (Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017). Therefore, utilizing CRT will allow this researcher to juxtapose the race-based policies of affirmative action with the endemic presence of structural racial discrimination.

In this context, using CRT will prompt the researcher to concentrate on the influence institutional racism may play in the management and administration of affirmative action policies. This focus on institutionalized racism often goes unnoticed. Harper (2012) noted that research tends to only acknowledge overtly fanatical racist acts rather than the more insidious influence of institutional racism. Including that perspective will provide important insights into the dynamics of racial disparities within a White-dominant institutional structure: higher education. Focusing on race-conscious college admissions, CRT will guide this examination regarding the critical role racism can play in higher education, including the influence racism may have on the administrative capacity and the identities of African American college presidents.

Gillborn (2005) observed that educational policy can be an effective construct and location for the proliferation of racial inequity, stating:

[A]lthough race inequity may not be a planned and deliberate goal of education policy neither is it accidental. The patterning of racial advantage and inequity is structured in domination and its continuation represents a form of tacit intentionality on the part of White power-holders and policy-makers. It is in this sense that education policy is an act of White supremacy. Following others in the CRT tradition, therefore, the paper’s analysis concludes that the most dangerous form of ‘White supremacy’ is not the obvious and extreme fascist posturing of small neo-Nazi groups, but rather the taken-for-granted
routine privileging of White interests that goes unremarked in the political mainstream. (p. 485).

Given Gillborn’s (2005) paradigm, employing CRT in the examination of affirmative action in higher education can facilitate an examination of the racialized underpinnings of higher education in the affirmative action period and/or prior to its evolution. Additionally, affirmative action’s origins in social justice via the civil rights movement are aligned with CRT’s foundation in social justice. Matias, Montoya, & Nishi (2016) emphasized the precondition of enacting CRT is that it is grounded in the concept and actions of social justice, particularly in the field of education. CRT enables recognition that explanations for issues of racial inequities appear in historical movements and the communications of the suppressed (Padgett, 2015). With the use of CRT, scholars can analytically embrace the history of affirmative action in race-conscious admissions in combination with affirmative action bans.

Affirmative action bans represent another aspect of management and administration college presidents consistently confront. As Padgett (2015) wrote, “The United States’ Constitution states that all powers not expressly given to the federal government are held in reserve by the individual states. Education is an example of this power” (p. 153). Therefore, although affirmative action is a policy enforced by the federal government, states can choose to propose their voting constituents can decide the policy of affirmative action.

In 1996, the state of California became the first to prohibit affirmative action, particularly in the areas of employment equity and education, via voter referendum. After California held a passing vote to ban affirmative action, other states followed suit. Examining state affirmative action bans through the framework of CRT will allow for an assessment of the various influences that may impact states voting results on affirmative action.
Additionally, storytelling as it relates to policy interpretation, development, and implementation can be critical to this study. The process of policy development in the arena of affirmative action in higher education from the perspective of African American college presidents, who straddle an intersectionality of subjugation by race but are also privileged through educational and employment status, warrants additional attention in scholarly research. CRT will permit this researcher to collect, code-switch, and analyze data in a way that respects cultural, ethnic, class, and racial relevancy as well as intersectionality.

Although African Americans have had a long history with the U.S. legal system (e.g., constitutionality of slavery, voting rights, educational equality, and housing equity), CRT is the premier theory that allows researchers to look at the intersectionality between race, racism, and society’s legal and political structures. In the broader context of the law and racial equality, the legal system has been central in the lives of African Americans. A central character in the African American legal struggle for equality was Thurgood Marshall who, in 1930, applied to the University of Maryland Law School, yet was refused admittance because he was Black. This experience stayed with Marshall, who was later admitted to Howard Law School and taught to embrace the tenets of the U.S. Constitution as applicable to all people (“Thurgood Marshall,” 2004). Following Howard Law School, Marshall became the chief legal counsel for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and a key legal mind behind the push for desegregation in education. This legal ambition eventually took Marshall to the Supreme. After Marshall’s successful argument in Brown v. Board of Education, he eventually became the first African American Supreme Court Justice in the United States. Thurgood Marshall noted the law did three things for African Americans: it enslaved them, it freed them, and it segregated them (Brown, 2003). With a focus on higher education through the lens of
CRT, the researcher will highlight another legal and political structure, affirmative action, that has profoundly affected not only the lives of African Americans, but the racial, economic, educational, and political contours of American society.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review contains a thorough analysis of the impetus for affirmative action in the United States higher education system. It begins with a review of the history and context of the development of affirmative action in the United States to understand its political, social, and racial underpinnings. Next, is an examination of the evolution of legal challenges and precedent-setting cases related to affirmative action in higher education, with a focus on race-conscious admissions. Finally, this chapter includes an investigation of states that have instituted affirmative action bans, as well as institutions that have discovered how to implement progressive, efficacious race-conscious admissions policies and the effects of these in the arena of higher education.

History of Affirmative Action in Education and Beyond

Introduction

In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled on Brown v. Board of Education that separate educational facilities are illegal, ushering in the era of school desegregation in the midst of the civil rights struggle. However, an examination of U.S. educational policy and practice facilities of today might generate doubt regarding the extent to which desegregation has become a reality. Indeed, scholars have documented that racial segregation still permeates primary, secondary, and college and university systems and cultures (Billingham & Hunt, 2016; Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, & Pollock, 2017; Massey & Fisher, 2006). Additionally, the legal system’s capacity to facilitate redress and reparation of the racism and racial and ethnic inequality permeating education in the United States has come under critique. Present-day legal cases reveal that even after the groundbreaking aftermath of Brown v. Board of Education, the law remains ill-equipped to address racial issues surrounding segregation (Balkin, 2001; Donahoo, 2006; Kluger, 2004;
Martin & Varner, 2017; Patterson, 2001). Indeed, segregation continues to isolate African American, Hispanic, and Native American students into substandard school environments, perpetuating 21st-century structural inequalities (Logan, Minca, & Adar, 2012).

**Origins.** Affirmative action has its origins in antidiscrimination policies, particularly regarding the treatment of Black people in the areas of employment and housing. One early and prominent mention of affirmative action comes from President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s when he described the New Deal; at that time, the term *affirmative action* referred to the protection of rights and the treatment of White union laborers who perceived they were being discriminated against (Pierce, 2014). However, the first legal order of affirmative action related directly to race was by President John F. Kennedy through Executive Order 10925 (1961), which instructed government contractors to hire and advance minorities. Executive Order 10925 noted that equal opportunity should be given to people regardless of race, creed, color, or nation of origin. However, it is important to note this order was voluntary for government contractors, a condition that meant the measure did not go far to bring the deep and desired true change Kennedy and his supporters anticipated, which was for government contractors to voluntarily embrace the solicitation, employment, and promotion of people of color (Arcidiacono et al., 2015; Moreno, 2003).

During the same time period, the civil rights movement grew, and this coincided with President Lyndon Johnson’s public declaration around his vision of affirmative action, which he spoke about at Howard University, an HBCU. That same year, the U.S. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which included Title VI, ordering all public institutions receiving federal funding to eliminate discrimination, itself perpetuated by the lack of government contractors who did not voluntarily participate in affirmative action hiring policies (Moreno,
Holding a strong belief that segregation was wrong, President Johnson was powerfully motivated to push for passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Finkelman, 2014) after becoming aware of the experiences his Black cook had with segregation while working for him. Johnson’s speech was a reiteration of his commitment to equality, and he lobbied and pressured senators to vote in favor.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 states, “No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” This was followed by another executive order (Executive Order 11246, 1965) by President Johnson that implemented more aggressive and mandatory nondiscrimination policies under federal mandate (Arcidiacono et al., 2015). As the country changed, so did the inclusion of affirmative action policies, with Executive Order 11246 modified in 1967 to encompass women (Executive Order 11375, 1967).

Higher education. In the arena of higher education, the process of desegregation affected institutions particularly regarding affirmative action in college admissions, which started as a way to bring racial equality and advance the agenda of Black people. Many people still view institutions of higher education as the spaces to address these inequities (“After Fisher,” 2013; Chang, 2007; Hurtado, Alvarado, & Guillermo-Wann, 2015). However, although President Johnson first expressed affirmative action as an imperative in 1961 to bring equality into the arena of employment in the U.S. government, the higher education affirmative action movement started with selective colleges and universities and their willingness to support and propel the field of higher education to recognize the claims and gains of the civil rights movement (Hirschman & Berrey, 2017).
Hirschman and Berrey (2017) examined the race-conscious practices at nearly 1,000 colleges and universities between 1988 and 2014. With data from yearly surveys collected by the College Board and U.S. News and World Report, they revealed 60% of college and university leaders admitted they used race as a factor in admissions. Through this long-range study, they noted a shift over a 10-year period, and in 2014, only 35% mentioned using race in admissions. The decline is due to the deinstitutionalization of race in college admissions, which means institutions either stopped using this approach to promote diversity or deliberately deemphasized it was a component of their policy. Progress regarding desegregation remains notable within institutions of higher education, however, due to more than five decades of race-conscious admission policies (Massey & Fisher, 2006).

**Legal Precedents and Challenges to Affirmative Action**

Legal challenges to affirmative action in the United States have had a major influence on the shaping and administering of these policies in a variety of arenas, from labor to education, housing to public service and contracting (Aja & Bustillo, 2014; Weber et al., 2005). Legal challenges at the Supreme Court level have centered heavily on contesting the use of race in college and university admissions, while others have addressed ballot initiatives at the state level, with California, Michigan, Florida, Washington, Nebraska, Arizona, New Hampshire, and Oklahoma banning affirmative action (Hirschman & Berrey, 2017). Those making legal decisions regarding affirmative action have not established clear direction and detailed guidance for policy implementation; indeed, ambiguity persists, with decision-makers often wielding a considerable degree of subjectivity regarding outcomes. Additionally, legal decisions pertaining to affirmative action are not legally binding in all states. The following sections of this literature...
review include a detailed examination of the most poignant cases in the arena of affirmative action and race-conscious policies in higher education.

**Cases and their significance.** The following sections provide a detailed examination and analysis of the case history of affirmative action in the United States.

*Bakke (1978).* *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) is an important case in the U.S. legal history of affirmative action, particularly in the field of higher education. *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) was the first to contest the use of affirmative action in college admissions. Allan Bakke established a curiosity for medicine while serving in the U.S. Marine Corps. In 1973, Bakke applied to 11 medical schools, including the University of California at Davis (UC–Davis) medical school. All 11 schools rejected Bakke, and most noted that the rejection was based on his age. Bakke was 32 when he first applied to medical school and 42 when he finally graduated. In 1974, he applied a second time to UC–Davis and was again denied admission. Bakke asserted during the proceedings that he experienced discrimination since other students were admitted in his cohort despite having lower Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) scores than him. Bakke, a White man, contended that other students with lower MCAT scores were people of color who had unjustly received admission to the medical school due to affirmative action policies.

UC–Davis is a public medical school that, at that time, utilized two separate admissions processes as part of the commitment to having a diverse student body: standard and affirmative action. The goal of the latter process was to permit applicants to self-identify with particular groups, such as a person of color (American Indian, Asian, African American, or Chicano) or as economically or academically disadvantaged. This self-identification meant UC–Davis would not measure these applicants against the general applicant pool.
Through this case, Bakke requested the state court compel UC–Davis to admit him because the university was violating the Civil Rights Act of 1964. UC–Davis, a public medical school, received federal funds, as did most institutions of higher education, granted to students determined through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). A perspective to consider is that UC–Davis was and still is, like all medical schools, compelled to educate doctors who might be providing care to the state’s citizens. In this context, scholars have asserted that, in certain circumstances, doctors of color are more able to provide appropriate medical care in neighborhoods of color compared to their White peers (Weber et al., 2005).

In 1978, the case went to the Supreme Court, which found that, indeed, Mr. Bakke’s protections under the U.S. Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protection Clause had been violated. The Court noted that UC Davis’ use of a racial quota was not permissible and space could not be held for specific groups of people. Additionally, the Court noted that the desire for a racially diverse student body was a fitting initiative for an institution of higher education—in other words, they had a “compelling interest” to have a diverse student population. Additionally, the Court noted that race is a reasonable consideration if it is one of multiple considerations. For example, colleges could consider a variety of factors including race, gender, legacy, standing, and unique talents in combination with the practice of evaluating those applicants alongside the entire applicant pool.

The significance of Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (1978) is threefold. First, it was the first case challenging the use of race-conscious affirmative action in higher education, initiating the debate around affirmative action in the sector. Second, it set a new legal precedent for colleges and universities when using race-conscious affirmative action in
admissions. Last, it caused colleges and universities to reexamine the strategies used to increase the number of underrepresented students, specifically Black students.

It was not until the beginning of the 1990s, however, that a significant influx of strategic battles around the practice of race-conscious admissions in affirmative action ensued, both in the social and political arenas, which would influence on case law (Hirschman & Berrey, 2017). In context, during the 1980s, the Reagan administration became known for its strident attempts to oppose affirmative action policies (Pierce, 2014). Then-candidate Reagan opposed President Carter’s affirmative action plans, and after winning the election, President Reagan in 1981 weakened the 1965 Executive Order 11246, a groundbreaking civil rights accomplishment mandating all government contracts use affirmative action in hiring. Changing the mandate to voluntary, the Reagan administration pushed the notion of personal responsibility; in short, the underlying logic was that social institutions like churches and other organizations should help Black people in need, advocating family values of marriage to curtail the rate of single parents in the Black community (Newton, 2006). Reagan’s initial perspective when he became president was to contest civil rights, traditional Black leadership, and government-supported programs designed to promote advancement for Black people by isolating Black civil rights leaders. Reagan also made reductions to social welfare spending, slashed federal funds in the inner cities by $5 million, and dissented from both the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act (Newton, 2006). Reagan’s selection of William Bradford Reynolds as the U.S. Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department was highly controversial, and Reagan supported Reynolds’ sponsoring of the choice to permit businesses to have voluntary, rather than mandatory, affirmative action. This significantly fed Reagan administration moves toward
erasing the advances and gains African Americans had previously made through the very auspices of the Civil Rights Division.

Part of this push involved supporting Black authors whose writings aligned with the notion of race being less of a factor than class or education when it came to inequality. These authors received specific favor from the Reagan administration via book deals, television appearances, academic assignments, cabinet roles, and research opportunities to continue spreading their perspectives to a larger segment of U.S. society (Newton, 2006). Think tanks also wielded this privilege, including the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Hoover Institution, with publications designed to promote conservative views both in general and in regard to race, as well as arguments directed toward White men communicating affirmative action was harmful to them through publication of such “facts” and accounts in books, editorials, and mass media (Newton, 2006; Troy, 2011). It is noted that Reagan utilized prime-time television more frequently than any other president (Troy, 2011), in part to espouse the “research” from the conservative think tanks perpetuating the notion that the decline of White working-class men’s employment during the early 1980s recessionary period was in large part a product of affirmative action policies (Pierce, 2014).

Beyond Reagan, during the 1980s, conservatives made the eradication of affirmative action a Republican partisan goal. A well-funded conservative movement orchestrated through an active group of organizations and support networks including law firms, foundations, and think tanks—Center for Individual Rights (CIR), the Independence Institute, the American Enterprise Institute, the Washington Legal Foundation, and the Project on Fair Representation (POFR)—was particularly salient in supporting a legal challenge to race-conscious affirmative action in Texas admissions (Hirschman & Berrey, 2017; Okechukwu, 2015). For example, an
attorney from the Washington Legal Foundation named Steven W. Smith examined the University of Texas Law School’s affirmative action policy and subsequently claimed that the University’s admissions policies were discriminatory. Smith looked to the CIR in order to support a case against the University of Texas Law School, claiming White students were receiving unfair treatment. Seeking to recruit White applicants who were rejected from the University of Texas Law School emerged one such student, Cheryl Hopwood (Okechukwu, 2015). Though the *Hopwood v. State of Texas* (1996) case started in Texas, it evolved regionally and impacted Louisiana and Mississippi and is one of the initial legislative cases that challenged affirmative action (Pierce, 2014). The next section explores that case in detail.

**Hopwood (1996).** The *Bakke* (1978) case opened the door for legal challenges to affirmative action and race consciousness in higher education. With this opening came another case almost 20 years later involving a group of students who applied to the highly selective University of Texas law school. This group of White students was denied admission and believed the law school unjustly gave preference to African American and Mexican American students. Hopwood and her peers also asserted the African American and Mexican American students admitted were not as qualified as they were.

Hopwood argued that the decision around affirmative action in the Bakke case was unjust. The *Hopwood v. State of Texas* (1996) case first started in the 5th District Court in 1994. The District Court noted that the law school’s use of race as one consideration was within reason, particularly given the historical discrimination that existed at the University of Texas. Not deterred, *Hopwood v. State of Texas* (1996) went on to appeal to the Circuit Court. This time the Circuit Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, noting that Hopwood’s rights had been violated in accordance with the Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protection Clause as well as the Civil
Rights Act of 1964. Therefore, the Circuit Court upheld the fundamental premise addressed in the *Bakke* case, adding that diversity was not a “compelling interest.” This part of the decision was a change from *Bakke*, which noted that racial diversity was a compelling interest. Part of the Circuit Court’s rationalization was that institutions could only have a compelling interest that justified the utilization of race when the institution sought to correct present results of discrimination, not past results. The law school was unable to evidence current results of past discrimination (Bhagwat, 2002).

Following the decision by the Circuit Court, the University of Texas appealed the ruling to the Supreme Court. However, the Supreme Court denied hearing the case. The way the U.S. judicial system functions is based on rulings and precedent. Therefore, while the Supreme Court’s *Bakke* (1978) ruling set a precedent for affirmative action and race-conscious admissions for the entire country, the *Hopwood v. Texas* (1996) ruling by the Circuit Court changed how affirmative action and race-conscious admissions would function in the 5th District, which included Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Therefore, while there were college presidents in Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi regionally mandated to abide by the court ruling that barred the use of race as an admissions factor to obtain a more diverse student body, college presidents in all other regions of the country did not need to abide by the ruling in *Hopwood v. State of Texas* (1996). They could choose to follow the precepts of *Hopwood v. State of Texas* (1996) if they were so inclined. In short, 5th Circuit Court set a precedent that diversity was not a compelling interest; this contradicted the Supreme Court’s ruling from the 1978 *Bakke* case. Therefore, the country espoused two contradictory rulings and college presidents outside of those three states attempted to design and manage institutional policies in the midst of this legal and thus political ambiguity, subjectively wielding a considerable degree of authority to shape policy
outcomes. The fact the *Hopwood* decision did not bind colleges and universities outside of the 5th District brought uncertainty for any institution concerned with whether the ruling of the 5th Circuit would soon be a ruling that would apply nationwide (Weber et al., 2005).

The major difference the *Hopwood* ruling had from *Bakke* was that it was not a Supreme Court decision, although the legal precedent it set had the potential to impact numerous colleges and universities. The U.S. judicial system is based on rulings and precedents, and within this dynamic, the next set of legal challenges would soon render *Hopwood* irrelevant by setting new legal precedents: the so-called Michigan Cases, which themselves were complex, ambiguous, and to an extent, contradictory, as outlined below.


**Michigan cases.** The Supreme Court rules on both Michigan cases (Grutter v. Bollinger, 2003; Gratz v. Bollinger et al., 2003) and were the first major cases addressing affirmative action nationally across the United States since *Bakke* in 1978. Still considered major milestones in race-conscious affirmative action legal developments, the Michigan cases came out of the University of Michigan, one from the Law School and another from the undergraduate College of Literature, Science, and the Arts. At the University of Michigan Law School where Barbra Grutter applied for admission, the admissions process included reviews of the applicants’ college grades, courses, the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT), and specific talents or accomplishments (Robinson, Franklin, & Epermanis, 2007). In addition, consideration could go
to other factors such as individual circumstances and work experience. Grutter, a White applicant, was denied admission to the University of Michigan Law School, subsequently contending the significant factor of race, specifically not identifying as African American, was the reason she did not receive admission.

Another applicant was Jennifer Gratz, who applied to the University of Michigan’s College of Literature, Science, and the Arts. This College followed a different process than the law school, which included a point system based on certain criteria such as high school grades, high school curriculum, and standardized test scores. Applicants of color had the potential of receiving bonus points that went beyond discrimination or disadvantage based on race, including factors such as being financially disadvantaged or educationally underprepared. Finally, applicants, including frequently those of color, could and did have denial delayed upon request for subsequent consideration. Similar to the UC–Davis Medical School in the Bakke case, the University of Michigan Law School placed great importance on having lawyers of color represented in the legal field.

Both cases, Grutter and Gratz, asserted the University of Michigan violated the U.S. 14th Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 both admissions processes used race as the disqualifying factor. Grutter and Gratz both brought their cases to the 6th District Court, the Court of Appeals, and eventually the U.S. Supreme Court. The University of Michigan Law School and the University of Michigan College of Literature, Science, and the Arts had two different application processes; thus, the Supreme Court rendered two different decisions in 2003. For Grutter, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the defendant and reiterated the Bakke decision, noting that a compelling interest may warrant the use of race-conscious admissions. With the University of Michigan Law School prevailing on the basis of a compelling interest and
a narrowly tailored individualized application process, the next decision was the Gratz case in which the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiff, noting that the Michigan College of Literature, Science, and the Arts’ admissions process gave points merely because applicants identified as persons of color, which did not align with the precedent set by *Bakke* (1978). Additionally, the High Court found the admissions process not narrowly tailored to produce racial diversity. These Supreme Court decisions in the Michigan cases were still in alignment with the legal precedent set in the *Bakke* case; however, some analysts maintained the Supreme Court decision set an even stricter requirement for colleges and universities to substantiate their use of race-conscious admissions processes in striving to obtain a diverse campus community (Harris & Roth, 2008). After the Michigan cases, another legal challenge to affirmative action occurred a decade later by a woman named Abigail Fisher with starkly different results.

*Fisher (2013).* In 2008, Abigail Fisher was denied admission to the University of Texas. Fisher, a White woman, contended that the University of Texas violated her rights by employing the use of race-based admissions policies. To understand the Fisher case, it is necessary to understand the Texas Top 10% Plan, a 1998 law that awards Texas public college admission to any Texas high school student who graduates in the Texas Top 10% of their class. High schools in Texas remained racially segregated, so the idea behind the Texas Top 10% Plan was to promote diversity by making sure candidates from predominantly African American high schools who graduated in the top 10% were guaranteed admission, thus promoting an increased number of African American students enrolling in the state’s institutions of higher education (Maramba, Sulè, & Winkle-Wagner, 2015).

In short, the purpose of this plan was to add diversity to the public institutions of higher education (Nieli, 2013). Abigail Fisher was not part of the top 10% in her class, so the legislation
did not directly pertain to her. It is interesting to note, however, that although the Texas Top 10% Plan was alleged not to employ a race-conscious component, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Ginsburg perceived the plan as having implications for race-consciousness because, given Texas’s historically racially segregated neighborhoods and schools, more minorities were comprising the incoming classes at the University of Texas (“After Fisher,” 2013). Additionally, Justice Kennedy noted that Fisher was essentially more damaged by the Texas Top 10% Plan than she was by the University of Texas admissions process (Fletcher, 2017).

The Supreme Court ruled the University of Texas could use race as one measure of many contributing to obtaining diversity in student enrollment. Therefore, the Fisher case did not change how institutions of higher education approached their affirmative action programs. Support for Fisher came from conservative movement strategies similar to those carried out in the 1980s to end affirmative action initiatives. Indeed, the Fisher case was a concerted effort by the Project on Fair Representation (POFR), founded in 2005. POFR is an organization focused on working to challenge the social, political, and legal structures and initiatives that favor race-based considerations and race-consciousness in education, voting, and employment (Smith, 2012). According to its website, POFR’s mission is to “facilitate pro bono legal representation to political subdivisions and individuals that wish to challenge government distinctions and preferences made on the basis of race and ethnicity” (2018). POFR does this by devoting “all of its efforts to influencing jurisprudence, public policy, and public attitudes regarding race and ethnicity,” in part by providing financial support.

The decision in the Bakke case served to provide initial blueprints for colleges and universities wanting to employ affirmative action based on its original intent of supporting equity for underrepresented groups; this opened the door for additional key legal challenges, which
continued through 2013. These legal challenges to affirmative action have also taken a different form since 1996, including affirmative action bans via ballot initiatives, which is the focus of the next strand of this literature review.

State Affirmative Action Bans, Pro-Initiatives, and Implications for Higher Education

With these legal challenges to affirmative action, it is important to examine the extent to which affirmative action is meeting its goals and whether the United States is fulfilling aspirations for an equal education system as required by the Fourteenth Amendment. To fully understand affirmative action in higher education, it is necessary to understand how affirmative action, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, and the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause intersect. Again, the Civil Rights Act noted that “No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (1964). Title VI is part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and it “prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance” (Title VI, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq.). In 1965, enactment of the Higher Education Act (HEA) was the federal government’s means of providing additional equity in higher education by offering financial resources (Davis, Green-Derry, & Jones, 2013; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005). One aspect of the financial resources included student financial aid, which makes any institution of higher education receiving federal financial aid a recipient of federal financial assistance; additionally, the HEA offers colleges and universities funding for improving college and university libraries, assistance for HBCUs, and continuing education and community service courses for inner-city neighborhoods (Davis et al., 2013). In addition to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits
discrimination for programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance (Title VI, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq.), the Fourteenth Amendment also impacts higher education. Esteemed as one of the longest and most complex amendments in the U.S. Constitution (Li, 2017; Mitchell, 2017), the Fourteenth Amendment includes the Equal Protection Clause, which states:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. (Li, 2017, p. 9)

The purpose of the equal protection clause was to ensure states did not negate individual rights to be treated equally as citizens of the United States and that citizens did not experience discrimination originating at the state level of governance (Green, 2008; Tani, 2015). Additionally, the equal protection clause was part of the legal argument for *Brown v. Board of Education*, which brought a legal end to intentional educational segregation (Ronald, 1995).

Challengers to affirmative action have applied arguments incorporating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (*Gratz & Grutter*, 2003; *Hopwood*, 1996) and/or the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause (*Bakke*, 1978; *Gratz & Grutter*, 2003; *Hopwood*, 1996) to substantiate the illegality of affirmative action. Again, divergent from the field of employment, higher education has no federal guidelines instructing colleges and universities on affirmative action (*Arcidiacono et al.*, 2015). Institutions needed, however, to desegregate; additionally, institutions and other sectors of society including employment and contracts were not to
discriminate based on race and other characteristics if they were receiving federal financial assistance.

With no explicit federal orders guiding colleges and universities on affirmative action, many appealed to the multiple court decisions for guidance (Arcidiacono et al., 2015; Tani, 2015). Since the challenge against institutions using affirmative action—Supreme Court, *Regents of University of California v. Bakke* (1978), *Hopwood v. State of Texas* (1996) University of Michigan cases, *Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003), *Fisher v. University of Texas* (2013)—some institutions have discontinued their affirmative action programs via ballot initiative. One of the first states to terminate the use of race, ethnicity, color, sex, or national origin in public employment, contracting, and education via voter referendum, was California in a referendum not directed toward private employment, contracting, and education (Spann, 1997). In 1996, the citizens in California moved to approve the California Civil Rights Initiative (CCRI), commonly referred to as Proposition 209, which prohibited state agencies from using race, sex, or ethnicity to provide preferences in admissions in public education, public employment, or the awarding of public contracts (Hadley, 2005; Kidder, 2013).

On the level of higher education, the California ban had the following results: The University of California, Berkley and the University of California, Los Angeles each saw over a 35% drop in their enrollment rates for African Americans post–affirmative action (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008). Two years after passage of Proposition 209, the admissions rate of underrepresented students fell over 50% at the University of California, Berkley (Winkler, 2003). Ten years after Proposition 209, the 10 University of California campuses admitted 55,000 students, of which African Americans accounted for a mere 3.4% (JBHE, 2006).
After Texas terminated affirmative action via the Hopwood case, the state saw drops in the percentage of underrepresented students applying for admissions to the University of Texas and Texas A&M. Due to this reduction, the state instituted a plan that would counteract the issue of low enrollment of underrepresented students, as the Texas 10% Plan addressed the lower application rates for underrepresented students (Dickson, 2006). Texas instituted the Texas 10% Plan for the admission into state colleges or universities of the top 10% of graduating high school seniors at each Texas public school to allegedly promote diversity by admitting a blanket number of the best students (Dickson, 2006). With the establishment of the Texas 10% Plan, however, the rate of retention and graduation for underrepresented students decreased (Cortes, 2010).

Following the legislation of Proposition 209 in California, Washington voted similarly on Initiative 200, which seemed to have passed due to the support of the American Civil Rights Institute (ACRI) and the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative (MCRI). The ACRI was founded by Ward Connerly, an anti-affirmative action activist and a prominent California businessman, to oppose racial preferences overtly. Connerly, who had served on the University of California Board of Regents, had also worked on the campaign for California’s Proposition 209 and his organization, the ACRI, donated $700,000 for the campaign to end affirmative action in Michigan (Hinz, 2016). Connerly defined himself as mixed race including African American, and his work on both Proposition 209 and Initiative 200 was instrumental to the passage of these anti-affirmative action initiatives. Proposition 209, *Hopwood v. State of Texas* (1996), and Initiative 200 are seen as major obstacles to the progress of African Americans in higher education (Marble, 2005).

Some people have interpreted affirmative action as a vehicle of indemnification for slavery and its consequences, while others have seen affirmative action as a means of
discrimination; both viewpoints reflect upon the tensions inherent legally and practically in American history and culture (Craemer, 2014; Mosley, 2003; Woessner & Kelly-Woessner, 2006).

**African American College Presidents**

Many of the researchers on African American college presidents focused specifically on top administrators at HBCUs (Esters & Strayhorn, 2013; Freeman & Gasman, 2014) or centered on the experiences of groundbreaking African American women college presidents (Bates, 2007; Gasman, 2011; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Oikelome, 2017; Waring, 2003). Because of the limited research directly addressing the role of African American male college presidents at PWIs, this strand of the literature review includes an overview of the demographics of all African American college presidents; the perceptions of African American college presidents, male and female, heads of HBCUs and PWIs alike; and the systematic exclusion of African American college presidents from PWIs as well as their presence at HBCUs.

First, a brief description of HBCUs and their founding is warranted. The White society in the United States thought African Americans were inept in their ability to learn, that they were inferior, and that an investment made to include them in higher education would not produce results or returns (Albritton, 2012). Before the Civil War, there were only three colleges nationwide, all HBCUs that pursued the mission of educating African Americans: Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, Cheyney University in Pennsylvania, and Wilberforce University in Ohio. After the war, establishment of more HBCUs occurred primarily via church support and the Freedman’s Bureau, an organization established under Abraham Lincoln, founded to support freed slaves. Their duties included helping to educate and obtain basic necessities like food, clothing, shelter, and jobs (Albritton, 2012). Many early HBCUs taught basic education while
simultaneously educating for empowerment in the struggle to oppose oppression and promote civil rights (Albritton, 2012; Brown & Davis, 2001).

Although arriving at the role of college and university president is often perceived as the ultimate pinnacle of academic administrative success, scholarly studies examining leadership in higher education have largely slighted looking specifically at African American college presidents individually or as a group (Holmes, 2004). Diversity in college presidencies has been stagnant over the years: In 1986, the average college president was a White male in his early 50s, and even today, the average college president is a White male in his late 50s. This description of the lack of diversification remains in alignment with the description of and data delineating who has been leading the institutions of higher education since their inception (Gamble & Turner, 2015).

As a group, African American college presidents are minutely represented; indeed, often African Americans do not progress to the level of graduate degrees, specifically doctorates, which then disqualifies them from high-level administrative positions such as provost and president. Despite over half a century of struggles for racial equality including affirmative action, there are minimal advances in the number of African American individuals, males or females, occupying the role of college or university president (Holmes, 2004). For example, in 2001, African Americans constituted a mere 6.3% of the total 2,366 population of college presidents, which is just a 1.3% increase from a 1986 poll (Holmes, 2004). Researchers from the American Council on Education showed that, in 2006, only 6% of college presidents were African American, representing a decline of 3% from 200. The number of African American college presidents stayed stagnant at 6% in 2011, and in 2016, there was a small 2% increase in the representation of African Americans in college presidency. Since 2014, a handful of prestigious
liberal arts colleges celebrated the appointment of their first African American college presidents in the history of liberal arts education: Swarthmore College (Valerie Smith), Kenyon College (Sean Decatur), Trinity College (Joanne Berger-Sweeney), Wellesley College (Paula Johnson), University of Puget Sound (Isaiah Crawford), Muhlenberg College (John Williams), and Pitzer College (Melvin Oliver). Many of these presidents have taken actions to address issues of pluralism and racial tensions on their respective campuses.

For example, immediately after her appointment, President Smith (Swarthmore) advanced conversations with students who were participants in the Black Lives Matter Movement and protests, affirming the importance of the organization’s presence on campus (Lewis, 2016). Meanwhile, President Williams (Muhlenberg) built collaborative relationships with community-based organizations to assist underrepresented students on campus. Additionally, Muhlenberg allocated $125,000 for diversity initiatives aimed at hiring underrepresented tenure-track faculty (Lewis, 2016). Decatur (Kenyon) began a special initiative to target high-performing, underrepresented high school students to visit the Kenyon campus for weekend visits, which sent a clear message to inner-city students of Detroit, Cleveland, and Chicago that Kenyon College was indeed an option for them both academically and financially (Lewis, 2016). Finally, President Berger-Sweeney (Trinity), strapped for resources to increase diversity initiatives, devised a way to rent many campus facilities during the off-session and implemented shared roles for administration and staff, directing the savings and revenues toward initiatives to diversify the student body (Lewis, 2016).

These are indeed positive movements forward for diversity; however, it remains surprising these initiatives were so long in coming. Despite the lack of growth in racially diversifying college presidents to include more African Americans, and despite their meaningful
legacy in U.S. higher education, the perceptions of African American college presidents remain as skewed as their underrepresentation, which is the focus of the next section.

**Perceptions of Black college presidents.** Researchers examining perceptions of African American college presidents have noted a longstanding image of African American college presidents in the United States includes that they are dictatorial and paternalistic (Gasman, 2016). Other negative perspectives of African American college presidents were perpetuated by conservative thinker and educator Thomas Sowell, who touted them as incompetent leaders and claimed they would do a poor job, scaring away competent staff working under them. Sowell noted:

> The tragic irony is that there are already . . . enough competent Black scholars and able Black students in the United States to create several good Black colleges. But . . . it is the old story: incompetents have been put in key positions –where they not only do their job badly, but they create an atmosphere that compels competent people who are so desperately needed. (Gasman, 2011, p. 841)

Another historical perception of African American college presidents was that of the “good Negro,” which is how the White community regarded those Black presidents. It was also a reference used specifically for Black institutions located in segregated regions whose presidents tried to avoid any actions that might embarrass, offend, or alienate the neighboring White community members (Gasman, 2016).

Evaluations of the administrative abilities of early African American college presidents have been contradictory. For example, in 1933, Carter G. Woodson authored *The Mis-Education of the Negro*. Carter was a historian, author, and educator and is a seminal scholar in the study of African American history. Woodson asserted the U.S. educational system had negated African
American history, manifest by the scant number of texts available on the topic. This travesty, he claimed, stripped African American children and all African Americans of a legacy and inheritance, “relegat[ing] him to nothingness and nobody-ness” (Woodson, 1993, p. vi). In The Mis-Education of the Negro, Woodson criticized the system and explained the vicious circle that results from miseducated individuals graduating, and then proceeding to teach and miseducate others. In his book, Woodson noted the perception that Black people are unable to oversee the administration of the only colleges they were allowed to manage, HBCUs. Yet in the early 1900s, Black college presidents successfully led institutions of higher education: Tuskegee University (Booker T. Washington), Morehouse College (John Hope), Bethune-Cookman College (Mary McLeod Bethune), and Frelinghuysen University (Anna Julia Cooper; Bates, 2007; Gasman, 2011).

Acute, historical racial tensions in the United States reflect in the roles African American college presidents have played. Many African American college presidents led their institutions during the socially and racially tumultuous times of the Jim Crow era and the Civil Rights movement, making their roles difficult and complex (Boyce, 2014). Several HBCU presidents underwent pressure by White trustees about cooperation with the White community, manifesting in the dismissal of particularly vocal administrators and staff seen as antisegregationists. For example, the President of Fisk College, Charles Johnson (1946–1956) dismissed one of his finest faculty members because of bold commentary around the racial status quo of the day (Boyce, 2014). The president of Jackson State College (JSC), Jason Reddix (1940–1964), meanwhile, who had an all-White trustee board, received direction to run the institution with an “iron fist” regarding protests against or expressions of open defiance to segregation and racial discrimination. Similarly, Bennet Turner, president of Southern South Carolina State College
(SCSC), had to balance an all-White, pro-segregationist trustee board and state legislative officials (Boyce, 2014). For example, in one meeting Turner had with Governor Strom Thurmond, a White man, Thurmond walked out on Turner, calling him a “goddamn nigger!” Even through that kind of interaction, Turner still acted with compliance to Thurmond’s directives concerning SCSC (Boyce, 2014).

Other college presidents had different responses to the social and political tensions of the day, such as Alonzo Moron, president of Virginia’s Hampton Institute (1949–1959). Moron issued strong critiques regarding racial segregation in the United States and on campus, and he used his position to bring the social issues of the day to an international audience (Boyce, 2014). Benjamin Mays was another critic of racial segregation while serving as president of Morehouse College (1940–1967), which led others to label him a Communist. Both Moron and Mays were presidents of private colleges; therefore, they likely enjoyed a greater degree of freedom when addressing social issues, such as racial segregation, than leaders of publicly funded institutions (Boyce, 2014).

In a 2017 article published in Inside Higher Ed, a leading academic news source, the author noted that, given the contemporary demographic of college presidents, many of whom are aging and ripe for retirement, an opportunity for racial and ethnic diversification in leadership exists. However, he further noted skepticism from academic sources that such a trend would become a priority given the historical dominance of White males in the role. As Alvin Schexnider, Senior Fellow of the Association of Governing Boards (a college leadership organization) and former chancellor of Winston–Salem, an HBCU, noted:

The data indicates increases of diversity are unlikely without major efforts. Positions are held mainly by White males, and the need to diversify is self-evident. Given the history,
that’s going to be a tough climb, unless there are some more aggressive steps. (Seltzer, 2017)

Another reason for the lack of diversity in the executive leadership roles in higher education is that colleges and universities have not applied their diversity initiatives to those areas, focusing instead on diversity recruitment in student enrollment and faculty hiring, leaving executive leadership roles and higher level administrative roles lacking diversity (Gamble & Turner, 2015). The ability and frequency of African Americans, particularly women, to obtain roles as college/university presidents, has been profusely constrained when compared to their White counterparts. (Gamble & Turner, 2015)

**Dynamics of exclusion.** The operational norm in U.S. higher education is that the board of trustees holds the authority to make decisions for the college or university; this includes the hiring of the institution’s president (Jackson, 2004). It is important to note over 80% of the governing boards at public and private institutions are comprised of White people; therefore, not only the role of the president lacks racial diversity, but also the constitution of the boards (Jackson, 2004). Trustee boards at majority institutions continue to be cautious in hiring African American presidents, citing institutional politics, development responsibilities, and alumni interactions as concerns in hiring an African American president (Fisher & Koch, 1996). A 2006 study was revealed that 86% of college presidents are White and 77% are male (June, 2007). The director of the Center for Policy Analysis at the American Council on Education noted a more diverse picture of the college president landscape will only be accomplished via boards of trustees as they “break away from a cautious approach to hiring that has for the most part shut out those who don’t fit the traditional profile of college president” (June, 2007, p. 1).
Additionally, institutions often choose presidents from within their own institution or analogous colleges (Holmes, 2004). In short, many presidents hired from other colleges had comparable goals, statuses, and demographics. Internal hires, and even cross-institutional recruitment between like or consortium-based institutions, commonly fall under the realm of relationship-dependent, where the tendency to choose from within homogeneous (commonly White) comfort levels dominate (Holmes, 2004). The trustees at those PWIs have an opportunity to address the lack of diversity within their presidential ranks, given that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964) empowered organizations in their efforts to make hiring decisions with race as a factor in favor of those roles that have customarily been segregated, as long as the organization does not negatively affect dominant-culture members (Jackson, 2004). Another aspect that may exclude underrepresented groups in the effort to obtain the role of college president is the lack of presidential experience. Overall, 25% of college presidents arrive at their appointments having had prior experience as college presidents, thus maintaining the racial mix of predominantly White leaders in this horizontal shuffle, which starkly limits the advancement of a more diverse presidential pool (Seltzer, 2017).

The role of race is a strong contributing factor to the maintenance of the underrepresentation of African American college presidents. Additionally, many regard race as an influential aspect of building relationships throughout an institution and between institutions (Holmes, 2004). African American college presidents have expressed over time that the erosion of affirmative action will exacerbate this divide and make it even more difficult for African Americans to become college presidents (Holmes, 2004). Simultaneously, it should be mentioned that some African American college presidents have expressed they do not regard race as a defining characteristic in their profession, noting as their professional careers reached
more advanced stages, they perceived race as a less defining component in their career success. They identified professional advancement as resulting from myriad factors beyond racial preference or attempts toward diversifying the role (Holmes, 2004). In short, for those individuals, affirmative action did not extend to the higher echelons of college leadership.

Systemic racial segregation throughout the academic leadership structure impacts the choice and election of college presidents (Fisher & Koch, 1996; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Henry & Glenn, 2009). The systemic racism African Americans encounter in higher education appears across professions in academia and shapes the potential presidential hiring pool. Analysts have identified that the hiring process itself gives preference to the institution’s dominant racial group, which results in the majority of presidents being of the dominant culture, which in the case of PWIs is White (Henry & Glenn, 2009). Another contributing factor about which scholars have noted that little is known is the lack of African American leaders in positions that feed the presidential list of candidates: deans, provosts, chairs, and vice presidents (Jackson, 2004). When African Americans do enter the pool and receive an offer for the role of president, their hiring package is considerably less ample in salary and benefits than that extended to their White colleagues. In addition, female African American academic leaders receive lower offers than African American and European men, even when the experience and educational backgrounds are comparable (Henry & Glenn, 2009). Although not specific to the role of president, the professional interfaces that African Americans experience in academia can be disrespectful and isolating because of the institutionalization of dominant culture values and restrictive and privileged practices; this is apparent in interfaces with peers, students, and supervisors (Henry & Glenn, 2009).
Black college presidents and HBCUs. Black college presidents from HBCUs are the largest representatives for Black hiring potential at partner or non-HBCU universities; additionally, HBCUs hire the most college presidents from underrepresented groups—and the most African Americans (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson, 2004). However, HBCUs have their share of unique challenges. For example, the financial challenges that HBCUs face are different from PWI counterpart institutions. HBCUs face declining enrollments, which may be similar to other colleges; however, the reason they are encountering these declines are unique to HBCUs.

As the civil rights movement opened doors for more student racial diversity on college campuses HBCU and PWI alike, the impetus for establishing a more diverse college leadership structure followed (Jackson, 2004). However, a 2004 researcher examining the account of African Americans in high-level administrative roles in higher education showed a 70% difference between African Americans and European Americans since this trend developed post affirmative action measures, indicating that it takes more than legal orders to cultivate transformation of starkly racially segregated institutional structures (Jackson, 2004). For HBCUs, the declining enrollments may be connected to and an unintended consequence of the civil rights movement, because affirmative action provided African American students with broader opportunities to attend PWIs (Gamble & Turner, 2015). It is predicted that the majority of the U.S. will be people of color by the year 2020 (Commodore et al., 2016).

One study cited the theory of “representative bureaucracy” that exposes how important it is to have high-level administrators and leaders that reflect the configuration of its constituents, in that the decisions those administrators make would represent the wishes of their constituents (Jackson, 2004). In addition to HBCUs having leadership that reflects the constituents and constituent’s desires, presidents of HBCUs must manage a complexity of issues, revealing a
strong ability to master their time and tackle the challenges of adding enrollment, maintaining students, addressing institutional morale, being change agents, and stabilizing institutional costs in what are commonly financially strapped institutions (Freeman et al., 2016).

**Conclusion**

The challenges African American college presidents have historically faced in both their trajectory toward leadership and maintaining the integrity of their posts appear in detail in the literature (Boyce, 2014; Brown & Davis, 2001; Gasman 2011; Holmes, 2004; Jackson, 2004). Researchers have described the low numerical representation of African American college presidents, the challenges and racialized networking barriers those presidents have in transitioning to PWIs, and the difficulties they have in not being solely relegated to HBCUs. In addition, Black college presidents contend with the notion of negative perceptions and stereotypes perpetuated by majority White institutional trustee boards via their sustained selection of majority culture college presidents. The literature provides insight into the complexities African American college presidents face in running HBCUs and in attempting to move into leadership roles at PWIs.

Additionally, this review has clearly revealed a lack of African American college presidents in comparison to the total number of presidents across the United States. Researchers have confirmed that although the majority of underrepresented presidents are African American, they are often relegated to HBCUs and given few opportunities to preside over PWIs. This inequality in representation is powerfully affected by race and exacerbated by the progressive weakening of affirmative action policies in higher education.

In short: “To be president of a college and White is no bed of roses. To be president of a college and Black is almost a bed of thorns.” —Benjamin E. Mays
Chapter Three: Research Design

The purpose of this research study was to investigate a sophisticated problem of practice in the field of higher education. The objective of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study was to recognize and make meaning of the experiences of African American college presidents at PWIs navigating the complexities of affirmative action policies in higher education, particularly race-conscious admissions. The principal question guiding this study is: What are the experiences of African American college presidents with negotiating and implementing affirmative action policies in the context of ambiguous legal frameworks and racial tensions in the United States? This section includes an overview of research methodology and justification of the rationale for its use in this study, along with the interpretive constructivist paradigm. Also included is a review the research procedures with detailed directions on study management inclusive of data collection, analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness and validity, positionality, and potential study limitations.

**Qualitative Research Approach**

In discussing the approach utilized in this study, a brief discussion of quantitative and qualitative methods is warranted. Quantitative researchers are focused on regulating empirical variables, and the quantification of data is vital for researchers to analyze the correlation within variables, largely through statistical analysis (Ponterotto, 2005). Both quantitative and qualitative researchers employ empirical data and seek to explain inquiries (Duffy & Chenail, 2008). Qualitative research is more about reporting actions and observations rather than regulating variables because the reports are more about the researcher’s contact or involvement with the participant in their environment (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Qualitative methods can aid researchers who are looking at more than mathematical results or quantitative trends. In
qualitative approaches, the researcher looks beyond statistical significance and recognizes sensible implications (Duffy & Chenail, 2008).

When conducting qualitative research, therefore, the researcher focuses on real-world observations, employing a wide category of empirical modes with the purpose of communicating and interpreting the events of the lived experience of the study’s participants (Ponterotto, 2005). Qualitative studies can naturally fit into everyday environments because researchers seek data in the context of organic surroundings. Qualitative data consist of natural events and natural settings for the purpose of understanding the meaning people attribute to their lives in its social context (Miles et al., 2014). The findings derived from qualitative research often appear with common language, and researchers may employ direct quotes from participants as they depict an experience, phenomenon, or psychological situation (Ponterotto, 2005). The relative flexibility found in the reporting of qualitative findings provides the researcher with information that acts as a corpus for the researcher to cull, mold, and interpret the data (Miles et al., 2014). Both quantitative and qualitative approaches are empirical methods because each includes gathering data and information, analysis, and interpretation of observations (Ponterotto, 2005). This researcher has selected a qualitative approach to making meaning of the problem of practice.

In this section, the researcher will discuss several paradigms of inquiry, positivism, postpositivism, constructivism-interpretivism, and critical-ideology. Positivism and postpositivism are closely related, as the latter grew out of an evolution of positivist thought. Positivists seek to confirm a prior hypothesis commonly based in a quantitative premise with a hypothetico-deductive method (Ponterotto, 2005); postpositivists look to identify falsification in a hypothesis. Both look for a reason that will point to a prediction and command of a phenomenon, which holds the groundwork for quantitative research (Ponterotto, 2005).
The constructivism-interpretivism paradigm presents a challenge to the positivist and postpositivist stances, acting as an anchor for qualitative research because it is based on the notion that the minds of people construct reality. This means it is a hermeneutical approach in which meaning is not obvious and requires profound contemplation and consideration (Ponterotto, 2005). By using a hermeneutical approach, the researcher can expect to gain an understanding by excavation, deliberation, and making meaning of the participants’ expressed perceptions (Lindwall, von Post, & Eriksson, 2010). A noted leader in cultivating constructivism, Dilthey considered lived experiences as materializing in the context of historical and social reality (Ponterotto, 2005). The lived experience denotes a person’s receptivity to life’s existence and their present consciousness of that existence (Tool, 2007). This researcher utilized a constructivism-interpretivism theoretical perspective.

Another theoretical perspective is critical-ideology, which supports liberation and transformation and highlights the researcher’s values as essential to the mission, purpose, and approach to research (Ponterotto, 2005). While this is not the primary paradigm informing this particular study, the researcher has noticed its relevance to the research topic, particularly the social change aspect that critical ideology brings to the research perspective. From a critical-ideological perspective, the researcher’s ethics and principles are prominent in the purpose and methods of research (Ponterotto, 2005) and utilized through research in an effort to provide cultural and social critique examination of phenomena from a critical perspective to promote emancipatory change of power relations within the social and historical context. Key to the critical-ideological perspective is the role of discussion and reasoning via dialogue that guides a way to emancipation from oppression (Ponterotto, 2005), which will assist in guiding the research process, discussed below.
Constructivists contend that truth with a small “t” is in the awareness of the individual and is disclosed via intense deliberation. Additionally, the necessary deliberation can be encouraged while the individual and researcher are engaged in discussion (Ponterotto, 2005). Constructivism-interpretivist researchers must embrace the perspective of the participant as well as acknowledging their own values. They do not seek to deduce a single, universal truth; rather, they value the ideographic nature of the truth as understood by the person undergoing and understanding the experience (Ponterotto, 2005). The focus of the researcher from a constructivist perspective is to understand the various social conceptions of meaning and understanding (Mertens, 2009). From a constructivist perspective, the relationship between the researcher and participant is essential in the exploration of the phenomenon, which also creates a symbiotic relationship between the participant and researcher as cocreators in reference to the research interpretation. Several aspects of constructivism-interpretivism complement an IPA study.

Jonathan Smith first introduced IPA in the field of psychology in 1996. As a qualitative approach, researchers use IPA to examine the lived experiences of participants to understand in what manner each participant perceives the experience. IPA is related to how participants make meaning in a specific setting as individuals who partake in a specific experience or a shared phenomenon. Smith noted that “IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of personal lived experiences, the meaning of experience to participants and how participants make sense of that experience” (Smith, 2011, p. 9).

IPA comes from three qualitative approaches: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography. Edmund Husserl (2014), known as the father of phenomenology, wanted to design a scientific approach that would help in the understanding of experiences. Rather than looking
experiences based on individual experience, examination centers on the awareness, recollection, imagination, and feeling of the experience, which Husserl referred to as intentionality (Reiners, 2012). Phenomenologists seek to depict the purest form of an examination of an experience, untainted by the researcher’s history or preconceptions, which Husserl claimed could be accomplished via bracketing (epoché).

In phenomenology, however, there is a debate regarding the efficacy of bracketing because understanding emerges from the communications between the researcher and participant; therefore, some refer to phenomenology as subjective (Reiners, 2012). A second thought is that IPA derives from hermeneutics, or is a theory rooted in a philosophy that looks at the science of gaining understanding and interpretation of a written text or person (Hoy, 1980; Mercier & Deslandes, 2017). Husserl had a student named Martin Heidegger who created interpretive phenomenology with hermeneutics, noting the focus should be on being in the world, not understanding the world (Reiners, 2012). Heidegger focused on the meaning of a particular experience void of bracketing by the researcher, which he asserted was not fully possible or even desirable. Dilthey, a well-known thinker in the area of hermeneutics, noted:

The process of interpretation is characterized above all by what is called the “hermeneutical circle” between parts and whole, between mind and society, between agents and institutions, or between the psychological categories and the historical ones.

(Shionoya, 2010, p. 191)

A final theoretical perspective that underlines IPA is ideography, which focuses on particularities and obligation to a comprehensive finely textured examination (Shinebourne, 2011). By focusing on particularities, researchers can highlight minuscule details within a research study as well as warrant IPA’s smaller sample size, since a small number of participants
would still be able to provide rich data based on the finely textured, in-depth examination.
Although though the research sample size is small, the expectation is that it would be a focused or a purposive sample, with selection based on finding those individuals who can share the most about a particular phenomenon. Finally, IPA has remnants of symbolic interactionism, followers of which advocate for those in social science fields to be specifically engaged in the definition people give to particular experiences, and also note gaining the definition can only occur via the method of interpretation (Smith, 1996). Symbolic interactionists reason that meanings solely derive from, or are an antecedent of, social interplay (Smith, 1996).

This researcher seeks to understand the lived experiences of African American college presidents as they navigate affirmative action policies in the context of higher education. Through the framing of this study in a constructivism-interpretivism paradigm and IPA approach to research, the researcher’s central purpose is to gain insight and understanding of how these presidents experience affirmative action in the current U.S. higher education structure, including the power structures that exist in the context of societal and historical settings (Ponterotto, 2005; Smith, 2011). Therefore, this section will progress to a review of (a) the contextualization of IPA, (b) the rationale for employing IPA in this study, and (c) data collection and analysis as shaped by IPA.

In a qualitative research study, IPA focuses on “a chain of connection between embodied experiences, talk about that experience and a participant’s making sense of, and emotional reaction to, that experience” (Smith, 2011, p. 10). Additionally, through IPA, researchers engage in double hermeneutics because while the participant is attempting to make meaning of their experiences, the researcher is attempting to understand the participant’s interpretations in the process of making meaning. This researcher endeavors to understand the experiences of African
American college presidents. African Americans have faced a long history of racial discrimination in the U.S. educational system, regardless of their intellect or position, and affirmative action has been a complex policy designed to address racially motivated inequities. Utilizing constructivism-interpretivism as a research paradigm through an IPA strategy of inquiry will allow the researcher and participant a greater understanding of the complexities of affirmative action in U.S. higher education.

There are particular aspects of IPA that are well suited to this research study. First, IPA studies are of topics that have meaning to the research participants. The study of African American college presidents will have a modest number of participants, all of whom have held or currently hold the role of college president and have an understanding of affirmative action. In an IPA study, participants should have an acute understanding of the topic; most often this comes from having a longstanding and significant experience with the topic. For this study looking at African American college presidents, the experience will be occupying the role of president while possessing the identity of a Black person in juxtaposition with managing the implementation of affirmative action policies in higher education.

In an IPA study, it is standard to use such formats as semi structured interviews and focus groups (Smith, 2011). This data collection allows for an autobiographical narrative from participants that the researchers record either in writing or electronically to result in an exact transcription. When designing questions for an IPA study, the researcher’s goal should be to ask questions that allow the researcher to understand the participant’s experience in a particular context; an exploratory underpinning should help guide the race consciousness (Larkin & Thompson, 2012).
Participants

Researchers carefully choose participants in an IPA study for their ability to provide a meaningful perspective into the specific matter being studied (Smith, 2011). This selection process means participants will share a commonality in a specific experience. When selecting the participants for an IPA study, researchers use a traditionally small sample size. There is a focus on the value of having rich data collection rather than the number of participants, because what is most important in the participant portion of the research is the robust nature and scope of participants and their particular or ideographic lived experiences.

In this study, there will be six to eight participants who are current or former presidents of public, private, two-year, four-year, or faith-based HBCUs, PWIs, or selective institutions of higher education. Noting that HBCUs employ the greatest number of African American college presidents (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson, 2004), the researcher will attempt to diversify the participants to include presidents from HBCUs and PWIs alike; however, the study will involve participants who are most accessible to the researcher based on distance and availability.

This researcher will enlist current and previous college presidents with the limitation of presidents no more than five years out of the role and without discrimination toward the type of higher education institution (private, public, HBCUs, community colleges). The fact that all participants will have experience as college presidents will provide the sample with a necessary level of analytical homogeneity, which is ideal for an IPA study. Participants will include all genders. The broad spectrum of participant characteristics should lend itself to providing a representative sample of Black college presidents. Yet the selection of Black presidents as participants still grants enough traits that specify these individuals have experienced a particular and important phenomenon. This research study will have a modest sample size, which is typical
for IPA studies with recommendations between six to eight participants. Because the expectation for an IPA study is that there will be deeply concentrated activity surrounding all cases, there is an acceptance that this relatively small sample size will achieve the goals of an IPA study (Shaw, Burton, Xuereb, Gibson, & Lane, 2014).

The goal of this study is to understand the lived experiences of African American college presidents with race-conscious affirmative action in higher education. The objective is to gather data utilized to provide a critical examination of the complexities of affirmative action in race-conscious admissions across a variety of cases and college circumstances, the legal challenges to affirmative action, and the interaction African American college presidents have with this phenomenon. Additionally, the research results may assist college presidents and senior leaders in higher education in understanding the challenges they share in managing affirmative action policies and designing more effective strategies and approaches to implementation.

This research study will employ purposeful sampling, the strategy of recruiting participants who are knowledgeable of higher education because they have served or are serving as college presidents, are African American, and have intersected with the unfolding of the phenomenon of affirmative action policies in race-conscious admissions. It is recognized that the participants’ interpretations will be confined to their capability to express and describe their experiences (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Therefore, it is important to identify participants who are versed in articulating experiences and thoughts, which college presidents are often presumed to possess. Pending approval of the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB), the subsequent steps will be employed to enlist participants:

1. All African American college presidents will receive a solicitation email, beginning with New England where the researcher has contacts and extending nationwide.
Eligible are all African American college presidents who are members of ACSD (Association for Christians in Student Development) in which the researcher holds a leadership position and any African American college presidents referred to the researcher through her additional professional contacts.

2. All African American presidents who communicate interest in participating in the study will receive another email elaborating on the specifics of the study, containing an informed consent document, and including an invitation to ask any questions they may have about the study in a conversation face-to-face, via Skype, or on the phone. Within this email, the researcher will seek to schedule a preliminary meeting.

3. The goal of the original participant invitations is to yield six to eight participants. If this process fails to produce eight participants, Steps 1 through 3 will repeat with an additional group of college presidents until confirmation of eight participants.

The research setting will vary according to the institution the individual participant is leading. Recruitment for this research study will focus on a variety of institutions. Therefore, the setting will involve hosting interviews in locations identified by the participant, via Skype, or at another mutually agreed-upon location. The goal is to speak with the research participants on an individual basis.

**Procedures**

The following section outlines comprehensive, step-by-step instructions of how this research study will be carried out following recommended steps outlined by Brocki and Wearden (2006), Larkin and Thompson (2012), Seidman (2013), Shaw (2010), Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), and Spiers and Smith (2017). The initial step is to obtain approval from the IRB from the researcher’s institution. This section will also include a detailed explanation how the researcher
will observe the procedures for protecting human participants. The following segment ensues with a summary of the methodology the researcher will utilize, including: (a) data collection, (b) data analysis, (c) ethical considerations, (d) credibility, (e) transferability, (f) conformability, (g) internal audit, (h) self-reflexivity and transparency, and (f) limitations.

Data Analysis

Semi structured interviews are an ideal approach for IPA studies, and the focus of semi structured interviews is to highlight the participants as experts (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Larkin & Thompson, 2012). The semi structured interview questions are exploratory in nature (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Utilization of interview schedules ensures participants can share their own experiences in their own voice, which is essential in IPA (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Larkin & Thompson, 2012). The researcher will obtain demographic information on each institution in addition to admissions policies to gain more information and employ reflective journaling.

In IPA studies, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection, with the use of personal chronicles captured through interviews (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). As with typical IPA approaches, the researcher collects data via semi structured interviews, which is the format used in this study. Additionally, this researcher will employ a modified interview format in this study as outlined by Seidman (2013). The interviews will provide an opportunity for the participants to talk about themselves and to contextualize the phenomena, concentrating on the participants’ lived experiences (Seidman, 2013). The second part of the interview will be focused on the participants’ thinking about or interpretations of the actual specifics of their current lived experiences (Seidman, 2013). The final step in the interview series is to have the participants make intellectual and emotional associations between their work and life to produce in-depth reflection (Seidman, 2013).
Utilization of the following steps from Seidman (2013) will facilitate collecting data for this research study:

1. This research study will utilize semi structured interview questions that will allow the researcher to combine scripted questions with open-ended questions and spontaneous variation depending on responses.

2. There are two possible styles of open-ended questions. First is the grand tour questions (Spradley, 1979) that allow the researcher to ask the participant to recreate a meaningful piece of an experience. Also available is the mini-tour approach in which the researcher asks the participant to recreate the specifics of a shorter length of time or a specific experience (Seidman, 2013). Both of these styles of open-ended questions will be part of the semi structured interviews.

3. As each individual makes a commitment to take part in the study, the researcher will schedule interviews via email and send the participants all the details beforehand, including consent forms, IRB approval, and an outline of the goals of the research study and the interview. The participant will also receive a pseudonym as a confidential identifier.

4. During the interviews, the researcher will focus on the open-ended questions while being aware that listening is the central formula in the qualitative research data collection process (Seidman, 2013). The questions will help to expose the problem of practice and reveal in-depth, rich data. The researcher will also utilize other interviewing techniques such as asking clarifying questions for understanding, inquiring more about a particular subject, balancing the need for exploratory
questions versus probing questions, having participants share a story, and asking for specific and concrete details.

5. After completion of all interviews, the researcher will use a professional transcription company to transcribe all interviews. Participants will receive a copy of their interview transcripts and asked to make any factual edits or amendments they deem necessary.

6. Field notes and reflective journaling will allow the researcher to note particular observations and subtleties during the interview process at each setting.

IPA interviews are concentrated on vigorously listening to the narratives and reports of study participants while exploring for additional understanding as various subjects matters surface (Shaw, 2010). IPA interviewers focus on exploring meaning rather than gathering facts; therefore, analysis of IPA data is to create an organized, comprehensive, and straightforward narrative of the meaning of the data (Larkin & Thompson, 2011). The researcher will review the data in a detailed fashion in order to create code-switching (Larkin & Thompson, 2011), a designation that gives allegorical meaning to conjectural information gathered during a study (Miles et al., 2014). Coding can incorporate words or phrases that capture the essence of the data (Larkin & Thompson, 2014). Coding creates categories, making the information more manageable for the researcher for the purpose of ascribing units of information to specific themes or questions. It is useful for the reader if the researcher can tie the themes together in a framework, usually providing a visual representation through diagrams, tables, or charts (Miles et al., 2014).

As the researcher is analyzing the data, Spiers and Smith (2017) suggest employing the technique of using hermeneutic circles, as hermeneutics are heavily interpretive in nature. This
implies that, because analysis is ongoing, there is a continuous back and forth with varying ways of processing the data to understand the whole (Spiers & Smith, 2017). With this in mind, the following steps will be part of data analysis.

**Step one.** The researcher will engage with the raw transcription by reading and rereading to create introductory notes (Spiers & Smith, 2017). These notes will be exhaustive and raw, with the researcher looking for words and statements that have explanatory, etymological, and conceptual pertinence (Spiers & Smith, 2017). As Spiers and Smith directed, this researcher will use probing questions to guide the analysis, asking from the participant’s perspective what is genuinely occurring in this segment of the data.

**Step two.** Shaw (2010) proposed that the researcher should use this stage to initiate the process of finding preliminary themes. The researcher creates initial noting, which is similar to a free textural analysis, on which he or she may choose to comment on a variety of areas in the transcript (Smith et al., 2009). The above process will create rich, detailed, and thorough notes (Smith et al., 2009). This researcher will move through the transcript to analyze its deep substance and rich description, subsequently using the descriptive comments to frame the participant’s formation of reality (Smith et al., 2009). Another aspect of initial noting is a review of the data for linguistic comments. As the researcher utilizes this type of review, there will be a focus on tone, rhythm, reiteration, and utilization of various grammar aspects and analogies (Smith et al., 2009).

The final step this researcher will apply will include inquisitive questioning to provide clarity. After the researcher has created initial noting, the next part of the analysis will be to locate themes, each of which capsulizes a meaningful expression of the participant’s contribution.
to the study. The purpose of the themes will be to edify the interpretation and data (Spiers & Smith, 2017).

**Step three.** Cultivated themes are borne from careful reviews, prudent deliberation, and methodical interpretation, rather than themes merely existing in the documents (Shaw, 2010). Developing themes will require this researcher to condense the transcript and review the initial notes by looking at them in segments with the goal of producing themes that encompass more of the researcher’s understanding in cooperation with the participants’ statements (Smith et al., 2009). Additionally, the researcher will identify agreement and contradiction among participant accounts. This will be accomplished by reviewing the participants’ accounts of their experiences as a whole; doing this will highlight any agreement or contradiction. Examining the lived experiences of the participants will aid the researcher in making meaning of the specific points among the condensed extracts (Spiers & Smith, 2017). This researcher is applying the data analysis example provided by Spiers and Smith (2017). At the time of conducting the study, this methods approach was a highly appropriate and current choice for this research study, following the guidelines of Johnathan Smith, the seminal author and originator of IPA. The vast majority of the data analysis will occur by hand supplemented by a software program entitled MAXQDA.

**Step four.** Following the cultivation of themes, the researcher will identify connections across themes with the purpose of detecting truly significant and fascinating parts of the participant’s narrative (Smith et al., 2009). In order to cultivate themes, this study will use abstraction as noted by (Smith et al., 2009) to combine like themes into a cluster of superordinate themes. The researcher will employ subsumption when a cultivated theme links a chain of interrelated themes bringing the cultivated theme to a superordinate standing. Additionally, contextualization is important in aiding this researcher to create more clarity by contemplating
the cultural, chronological, and narrative themes (Smith et al., 2009). This researcher also used numeration, which helps to identify the level of importance a theme has based on the number of times it was mentioned by the participant (Smith et al., 2009).

**Criteria for Quality Qualitative Research**

In order to have a quality qualitative study, this researcher will consider a number of criteria. These include ethical considerations, credibility, transferability, confirmability, internal audit, and self-reflexivity and transparency. I will close this section by identifying the potential limitations of my study.

**Ethical Considerations**

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) noted two main aspects of ethics in qualitative research: First was procedural ethics, which relate to gaining consent from a committee that is germane to the study of human research; the second aspect is ethics in practice, which refers to the daily ethical matters that occur in research. Procedural ethics are not simply about completing paperwork for a committee so the researcher can begin a study. Instead, these include a display of responsibility the researcher has to the research community. Ethics in practice involve the ethical matters that can appear during a research study, particularly the multifaceted dynamics of power and interaction among researcher and participant in a study. Although some occurrences are unpredictable, researchers need to think about how they can forecast and strategize to plan for many situations, including strong emotional responses from the participant, possible disclosure of sensitive information, and, in the case of this study, deep and variable reflections on race and identity politics (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

Essential among ethical considerations, the researcher will assure participant confidentiality by assigning and not sharing unique personal identifiers, names, and institutional
affiliations. Each participant will receive an alias. Research information, including written and electronic notes, will reside in a secured journal using a locked box and secured electronic devices, all of them password-protected.

**Credibility.** Credibility refers to the part of research that provides people with the ability to identify the experience highlighted in the study via the description of the participant (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Credibility will occur via the discovery of lived experiences as they are perceived by participants. For the purposes of this study, it will provide an understanding of how compatible that experience is with similar groups of people (Krefting, 1991) and will compare the research findings with reality (Shenton, 2004). To obtain credibility, the researcher will look at the complete corpus of data and examine it for representativeness, accomplishing this through an analysis of each transcription, examining it for agreement and uniformity (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The intent will be to establish credibility by providing analysis of the experience as identified by others who share the same experience, using thick, detailed description (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Additionally, credibility requires the researcher to be amply immersed in the research environment and to exercise prolonged engagement, allowing for distinguishing and confirming the repeated pattern (Krefting, 1991); this is a process to which the researcher will fully adhere. Determination of credibility can occur in a variety of ways, including triangulation, disconfirming evidence, researcher reflexivity, prolonged engagement in the field, collaboration, peer reviews, and thick, rich description (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

This researcher will utilize a variety of methods, specifically interviews, field notes, observations, and documents to identify classifications and themes. Disconfirming evidence provides validity as the researcher disproves and identifies dissenting proof. Given the risk of
researchers easily being inclined to validate rather than disprove, the researcher will reflexively be aware of this possibility and will remain open to being surprised or finding discrepancies.

Thus, the researcher will provide a description of her positionality and bias to assure presuppositions are made transparent and to bracket (époque) them. Bracketing is when researchers suspend judgment and eradicate to the best of their ability the unnecessary aspects, allegorical meanings, and frame of reference in order to get to the essence of something (Husserl, 2014). However, bracketing is not implemented as fully in an IPA study as with a phenomenological approach. IPA is steady in its perspective that positionality is impossible to remove.

Given IPA’s perspective on bracketing, this researcher study makes this process continuously apparent through a reflexive journal kept during all stages of data collection, interpretation, analysis, and presentation (Shaw, 2010). This will help the researcher to remain aware of bias and suspend it to the best of her ability. Reflective journaling encompasses thinking about and recording thoughts and experiences of the researcher during the research process, including suppositions, ways of connecting, and ways of being (Cunliffe, 2016). It is important to create notes around factors that kindle the researcher’s curiosity and may be meaningful to the participant’s experience (Shaw, 2010).

Another procedure used in this study to assure validity is analyzing each transcription, examining it for agreement and uniformity (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Additionally, while this study will utilize in-depth interviews, employing the reviews of participants of the raw transcripts only will serve to verify the data interpretation is what the participants said and that there is accuracy in the themes identified.
Qualitative rigor or trustworthiness refers to how researchers convince their readers that their research results deserve being paid attention to and that the readers can trust in the research process (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Lincoln and Guba outlined four key aspects of trustworthiness for qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Tuckett, 2005).

**Transferability.** Another aspect of trustworthiness in qualitative research is transferability. Transferability (fittingness) refers to the extent to which the researcher’s results are transferable between groups, and whether or not the results of an inquiry are germane in another setting or with different subjects (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The researcher will achieve transferability because research results may seamlessly apply to settings outside the study situation; establishing this applicability will be by the measure of similarity or suitability between the different contexts of each participant (Krefting, 2011). The limits of transferability for IPA studies have been recognized; however, by providing a thick description of participant experiences, having participants share a phenomenon in detail, and furnishing a substantial chronicle of the population studied via demographic records, a certain degree of transferability will be assured (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). This researcher is confident that, in the case of this study, the attention to detail and particularity of an organization and an experience/phenomenon will support transferability (Shenton, 2004).

The third facet of trustworthiness involves dependability, which is the ability for another researcher to track the choice and judgment path utilized by the researcher. This is known as, and accomplished through the maintenance of, an audit trail (Shenton, 2004; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). For the purposes of this study, the audit trail will include: (a) a depiction of the exact purpose of this study, (b) an explanation of the rationale for how and why the particular
participants were chosen for the research, (c) a depiction of the steps of data collection and the length of time the data collection process persisted, and (d) a clarification of the process for data reduction and transformation for analysis (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Krefting (1991) noted that researchers are able to acquire dependability because researchers are looking at the breadth of an experience instead of an average experience; therefore, the researcher will achieve this dependability by following this approach and by recognizing deviant and nonconforming circumstances that are important to include in the research findings.

Confirmability is the last element of trustworthiness in qualitative research because it relates simultaneously to credibility, transferability, and dependability. Confirmability will, in the context of this study, be established through the reflective process to which the researcher will be committed by constantly remaining aware and by accepting the evolving results in the study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Reflexivity requires the researcher to be self-critical around the ways in which the researcher’s preconceptions impact the research (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Indeed, this will be accomplished in this study by maintaining a detailed reflexive journal throughout the entire process and by interaction with a peer or advisor when doubts arise.

**Internal Audit**

During the research process, establishing an audit trail will confirm that appropriate measures were taken, including a reflective diary, to document and address any issues of bias, keeping track of thoughts and impressions.

**Self-Reflexivity and Transparency**

As a researcher, it is important to take an introspective look at my own perspective on affirmative action, race-conscious admissions, and African American college presidents. I contend that the diversity that exists in higher education is central to the learning and
development of students. Reflecting on the debate over affirmative action makes me wonder what this country’s institutions of higher education would look like without affirmative action. Would I have been afforded the same opportunities during an earlier time in history? Having an awareness of the racial discrimination and oppression that members of my racial group and I have experienced is important as it may impact the technique I use in my research. Also, my positionality is influenced by how others in academia may see me. For example, for some, the fact that I identify with the minority group that I am researching, African Americans, makes me an ideal researcher on this topic.

Briscoe (2005) mentioned work from other theorists, Collins and Delgado, who affirm those in society who have not experienced oppression may be unable to comprehend or properly interpret an experience they have not acquired. Briscoe wrote about privileged individuals viewing everyone through their frame of reference, and that causes a skewed view of those outside of the privileged class. Another barrier to privileged people in research is not being able to have wide-ranging experiences that help in understanding multiple viewpoints. I concur with Briscoe’s case for inclusive representation. People who live in several cliques develop sophisticated perspectives that help them to recognize complexities in research (Briscoe, 2005).

A perspective that Bell and other critical race theorists note is the frame or character of racism. I am less convinced that I need to implement the premise that the United States society and structural underpinnings are inherently racist and cannot be changed. It is not that I do not believe in institutional racism or that such longevity makes it a formidable opponent and hard to eradicate. I contend that if racism is impossible to change, alleviate, or destroy, then the years of marching, sit-ins, die-ins and even deaths have been for no gain. I am not ready to concede to that point; nor do I think I need to embrace it for my particular problem of practice. The question
of whether affirmative action in race-conscious admissions is supported or affirmed depends on who is answering the question. For example, admissions officers often support race-conscious admissions policies as they see diversity as essential in designing a campus of experiential excellence (Lamont & da Silva, 2009; Lipson, 2007; Warikoo, 2016). Additionally, it should be noted that many students attending selective institutions (Harvard, Brown, and Oxford) support race-conscious admissions programs and policies, though their motivation may be in question (Warikoo, 2016).

My motivation as a higher education professional for over 16 years has been in part to gain a better understanding of the problem of practice in general and specifically as it relates to admissions-based affirmative action policies. My interest in the field of higher education began with my undergraduate experience. During my experience as an undergraduate student, I became highly disturbed by the inequality in higher education, and during college, I became a member of the African American Student Organization. As I progressed as a professional in the field of higher education, I found myself engaged in initiatives that focused on equality, equity, and access for underrepresented groups in higher education. I am the founder and former president of AAWHE-NE (African American Women in Higher Education, New England), a leadership team member of the ACSD (Association for Christians in Student Development) Diversity Team, and a member of NBWS (National Black Women’s Society). I have supported several initiatives for students and staff to mobilize in order to strive for equality, equity, and access. I have held several roles in higher education, including Assistant Director of Student Activities, Director of Residential Life, Associate Dean of Student Life, and Dean of Students, to name a few. I have engaged in organizations and activities that are central to who I am as a person; therefore, these involvements often include a focus on African Americans.
Limitations

There are additional limitations to this research study. First, IPA derives from a hermeneutical perspective, which compels the researcher to embrace a process of engagement and analysis with a participant and their experiences, while simultaneously connecting with that experience from the perspective of a participant who is also attempting to make meaning of what is occurring in their environment (Smith, 2011). This double hermeneutic engagement can represent a dilemma to the process of clarifying intersections between the participant and the researcher’s worldviews. The researcher addresses this usually through reflexivity, discussed above and through the other processes of clarifying questions in the interviews. A second limitation is the theoretical framework selected. One of the functions of a theoretical framework is to concentrate the researcher in a particular direction; therefore, it may simultaneously confine the researcher from investigating areas outside of that theoretical framework. Also, other researchers could take the data and view it through a different theoretical lens and possibly propose disparate interpretations. An additional limitation of the study is the variation between institutions: community colleges, large universities, private and public institutions, HBCUs and PWIs, and faith-based and secular colleges. This variety is rich and comprehensive; however, given the small sample size of IPA, it may limit the broader inclusion of multiple perspectives. The institutional type will not be exactly the same, and therefore the study may be affected by the particular aspects and features of the institutions in the study.

Summary

This study will examine the experiences of African American college presidents in their process of managing the unfolding of the dynamics over time of race-conscious affirmative action. Utilizing IPA will allow the participants to articulate their experiences, as well as to
process how they are making meaning of the complexity of race-conscious affirmative action linked to their professional identity as college presidents. As with many IPA studies, semi-structured interviews will be used as the vehicle to gather data, and data analysis will follow a suggested process from IPA’s founder Jonathan Smith. Because IPA does not compel the researcher to fully bracket, given that it upholds that it is impossible to bracket all the researcher’s biases, recognized is that to some extent, the study will have a modicum of alignment with the researcher’s ideology and scholarly commitment. Finally, pairing the paradigms of constructivist-interpretivism and critical-ideology will provide a foundation for the perspective of the participant to be fully articulated while making room for the values of the researcher to be recognized; the critical-ideology paradigm will aim to create a dynamic of liberation through dialogue gained from participants and their interaction with the researcher.
Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

The intent with this qualitative IPA study was to analyze the experiences of African American presidents of PWIs with race-conscious affirmative action admissions policies. It involved an investigation of the insights, challenges, and benefits the presidents acknowledge with race-conscious affirmative action policies. The researcher utilized Bell’s (1976) CRT as a framework to guide the study and facilitate the researcher’s awareness of how race intersects with the role of the college president, how to navigate affirmative action, and what the United States political climate is at PWIs. An IPA methodological approach in this qualitative research facilitated attainment of an in-depth knowledge of the manner by which African American college presidents construct meaning out of navigating the complexities of affirmative action policies in higher education. The researcher also designed the study to ascertain the voice of African American college presidents with concern for policies on race-conscious affirmative action.

Six interviews allowed the researcher to collect data for analysis. With six participants, it is not possible to generalize results to the entire country, but there is insight for similar situations in the United States. Out of the six participants, four were male and two were female. Additionally, the interviews included an HBCU college president. Note that although this study was an examination of the experiences of African American college presidents at PWIs, the researcher was able to include an institution congressionally designated as a historically Black institution; however, it is serving a PWI population.

Overall, what emerged was the understanding of how the history of oppression for African Americans necessitated affirmative action. Additionally, the presidents were able to expound on how affirmative action helped to support racial diversity in higher education,
specifically at institutions that needed the motivation for implementation. The presidents discussed how being an African American impacted their view of the role of president from their perspective and the viewpoint of trustees and staff at their institutions. The presidents discussed the idea of needing to balance the various racial and cultural environments with which they engage, specifically Black and White environments. As the presidents reflected on the prospects of affirmative action, they reviewed the sobering possibilities of the courts prohibiting affirmative action and the setback this could mean for affirmative action. However, the presidents saw this as an opportunity to process how they can still obtain racial diversity on their campuses, even if legal structures supporting affirmative action are compromised.

At the time of this study, five of the six participants were sitting presidents and one was a retiree. Participant #1 is president of a private liberal arts college with an enrollment of over 2,000 students, located in a rural area on the West Coast. This president averred that race is a manmade concept that focuses on skin pigmentation and often avoided the term, but used verbiage such as hue and pigmentation. Participant #2 presides over a rural, public community college located in the rural East Coast of the U.S. that has more than 5,000 enrollees. This is the president’s third term, and the president is also an immigrant. The president’s professional outlook has been influenced by being an immigrant, among other factors. This president also noted that they view being an immigrant as an experience that prepares one to work harder and not have an expectancy of work-life balance. Participant #3 served as president of a small, private liberal arts college situated in an urban community on the U.S. East Coast that has fewer than 1,000 students. This participant, who is the only one who ended the term after serving for over a decade, self-identifies as a “turnaround artist,” which refers to someone administering over declining organizations and improving their standing. The participant credited this skill as
an aid in efforts to improve the college. Participant #4 leads the only public land-grant institution and the only congressionally designated HBCU, located in the South. This president follows a long list of African American presidents at this institution. Participant #5 leads the largest institution included in this study, having a student population of over 6,000. It is a public community college located in a suburban area of a West Coast state. The last participant governs a liberal arts institution situated in a suburban area of an East Coast state and has a little over 2,000 students. Additionally, Participant #6 is biracial, with a White mother and a Black father. However, the participant was not raised by this pair of parents, but by Black parents in a Black environment and had only Black friends outside of schools.

The data reflected six superordinate themes and two subordinate themes, which were (a) openness to the African American identity of the college president, (b) support for racial diversity, (c) citizenship, (d) code-switching, (e) intent of affirmative action, (f) future of affirmative action, (g) strategies to obtain racial diversity without affirmative action, and (h) influence of politics on affirmative action.

Table 1

Summary of Participant Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Openness to Black identity of the college president</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for racial diversity</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code-switching</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The intent of affirmative action</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future of affirmative action</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies to obtain racial diversity without affirmative action</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of politics on affirmative action</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Summary of Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superordinate theme 1: Openness to Black identity of the college president</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The participants’ perceptions that the response to their</td>
<td>Citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American identity as presidents was a welcoming</td>
<td>Participants connecting education, educational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and open environment at their respective college campuses</td>
<td>diversity, and social contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superordinate theme 2: Support of racial diversity</td>
<td>Future of affirmative action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explores the experiences reported by college presidents when</td>
<td>Analysis detailing the understanding these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assessing the campus climate for racial diversity</td>
<td>participants have about the future of race-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conscious affirmative action in higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superordinate theme 3: Code-switching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The presidents explore moving between their intimate cultural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reality and the cultural reality into which they assimilate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superordinate theme 4: Intent of affirmative action</td>
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Openness to the Black Identity of the College President

The data supported the theme of *Openness to the Black identity of the college president*, or the notion that Black college presidents experience a welcoming and open environment at their respective college campuses. The presidents experienced several areas of support and receptiveness. To begin with, the boards of trustees openly displayed an acceptance via their hiring practices (the trustees are the individuals who appoint college presidents). There were presidents who stated that the trustees had been an integral factor for realizing the vision of
having a Black president or a president of color. As declared by Participant #5, “If you don’t have a diverse reflection on your board, then they’re going to look at individuals that may resemble them.” The participant also noted the board of trustees at their institution is comprised of many people of color and that boards, in general, should make sure they adopt an inclusive orientation in assembling their candidate pool. Furthermore, the participant contended that a commitment to diversity at the gubernatorial level is essential because this is the source of trustee appointments at public institutions, and because it produces a trickle-down effect in endeavors to ensure diversity at the college president level. As noted in chapter two, 80% of college and university boards are composed of White people (Jackson, 2004), thereby compounding the lack of diversity among higher education institutions.

Participants noted that race could play a significant role in determining who will be appointed as the president of a college. PWIs tend to hire White presidents using the rationale that Black presidents would be challenged regarding fundraising, institutional politics, and interfaces with (White) alumni (Fisher & Koch, 1996). Retrospectively, the HBCU president indicated that race seems especially relevant for an HBCU, where the history of the institution is characterized by a strong tradition of having leadership that highlights the underrepresented student population that the institution is founded to serve. Participant #4 commented that the alumni of an HBCU expect the president of the institution to be Black. Again, an important issue to reiterate is that HBCUs hire a vast majority of Black college presidents (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson, 2004).

Several of the participants described their racial identity as a benefit, allowing them to bring a unique experience to the role of president. First, all the presidents expressed that they were not newcomers to hard work because, as African Americans, they had become accustomed
to expectations that they would work twice as hard as their White counterparts for the same recognition or success. This highlights the dichotomy between the work experience of Black presidents and White presidents. Furthermore, the presidents expressed that they understood the importance and impact that their identity and presence on campus had for other students of color, particularly African American students. There was also a sense their racial identity gave them a perspective and a competitive asset that their White counterparts did not possess. For example, Participant #1 observed there is a narrow-minded notion that African Americans are not capable of performing in complex environments at a superior level; indeed, when this participant was accomplishing tasks on an elite level, they received support and encouragement.

Additionally, some participants reported receiving support from African American community members living and organizing in the geographical vicinity of the campus, either during the hiring process or post-appointment. For example, after hire, one president was welcomed into a small, but vibrant, African American community of professionals who were glad an African American person was serving in a high leadership role, such as president of a college. More than half of the participants noted they were the first African American college president at their institution; they indeed were trailblazers for future African American presidents at their institutions and those across society.

In discussing matters of identity, many presidents expressed that an amalgamation or intersectionality of their identities impacted how they viewed their role as president and how the campus and constituents viewed them. For example, several presidents mentioned not only the intersectionality of race but also nationality, socioeconomic upbringing, gender, immigrant status, and other identities that factored into their approach to exercising the role as president. As previously observed, many African American presidents mentioned that being African American
came with a self-imposed expectation of working twice as hard as the White majority culture for the same success and recognition; some also attributed this expectation to being a woman. There was an expectation that hurdles and obstructions are present to them in a way that their majority culture colleagues did not experience.

Simultaneously, many presidents noted that while on one level their racial identity was welcomed on campus, on another level, they experienced racism and believed their race also brought a hazard. The most striking comment was mentioned by Participant #1 who admitted: “There have been instances in my life where my pigmentation [race] has not only put possibly my work in jeopardy but my life also.” Other African American college presidents shared this notion of African American racial identity putting them at risk. For example, they mentioned the idea of driving while Black (DWB), a term used to describe the high likelihood that if an African American person is driving a motor vehicle, they are more likely to be pulled over by law enforcement officials than are White drivers, which can lead to dangerous interactions with law enforcement. African American presidents said they could empathize with African American students around such issues. This example highlights the intersectionality between race and the legal system. The researcher observed that the topic of DWB was prominent in discussions with the African American male college presidents. All participants were cognizant that racism was something they still experienced whether it is racial injustice, microaggressions, or DWB.

Conclusion

Although these presidents expressed a sense of openness toward their presence as African American college leaders, they were also keenly aware of the racism that exists and how it was impacting their job as well as their day-to-day lives. In general, it appeared as if the presidents expected racism and microaggressions to occur; they had become accustomed to encountering
and managing it throughout their lives, often relying on their ability to perform at a high level professionally.

The presidents expressed the importance of having a campus community, including the board of trustees, alumni, and community members, that supported them in their identity and role as African American college presidents. The presidents placed credence on the importance of trustees racially diversifying their ranks to enhance the likelihood of appointing a president of color; concurrently, they emphasized these trustees need to be committed to supporting African American presidents. Ultimately, the participants saw the board of trustees as the primary conduit for supporting an environment for African American college presidents in their power and authority to choose the presidents. However, the board of trustees’ choice to hire an African American college president was only one aspect of race discussed by the college presidents. Also, the presidents discussed their experiences with their campuses’ support of racial diversity as it applied to student racial diversity, which included, among other things, the board of trustees’ support of student racial diversity.

This researcher found that participants attribute community support to the acceptance of their presence as an African American college president. An essential part of the community acceptance was the role of the members of the board of trustees in establishing the tone of acceptance and celebration. Additionally, the participants noted the trustees not only show support in hiring African American college presidents, but they should diversify their trustee ranks. The diversification of the trustee board is an option in addressing the lack of diversity that also exists in the presidential role. More diversity among trustees could translate into more presidents from underrepresented groups. As noted in Jackson (2004), the responsibility of selecting college presidents in the U.S. lies with trustee boards, which in the U.S. are 80% White.
Along with external support the presidents received, the participants noted an internal awareness and appreciation for the African American experience. For many presidents, this African American experience is a positive reality that can be beneficial. Yet the presidents were not blind to the negative experiences of being African American in the U.S.

**Support of Racial Diversity**

The superordinate theme *Support of racial diversity* explores the experiences reported by college presidents when assessing the campus climate for racial diversity. All the college presidents articulated they and their institutions displayed a desire to have a racially diverse student body; indeed, some presidents noted this was supported by many campus trustees who had advocated for more racial diversity in the student population before the African American presidents who were interviewed had arrived on campus.

Many presidents who were interviewed regarded the creation of racially inclusive learning as one of the purposes of higher education. This process at one institution began because of the college’s desire to have its population be more reflective of the local and broader community; however, the institution looked to the president to design and implement a strategy to accomplish this. Presidents embraced the notion that racial diversity in higher education results in the expansion of knowledge for students in a global society. For example, Participant #6 noted:

> As important to that are the arguments I made earlier about the future, the certain future demographically of diversity in our society and the certainty of more global interconnectedness so that anyone who was coming out of college today, their future is going to be one that is confronted with diversity.
Support of racial diversity not only referred to on-campus dynamics, but it also implied a connection to the local community. For campuses located in racially diverse communities, the community itself often asked the institution to open its doors to more racial diversity internally. Indeed, one president noted that the college had set the goal of enhancing its relevance, and promoting racial diversity was one step in the right direction. Indeed, this president notes that, nationally, societal pressure has increased for campuses to be more diverse. Cultural phenomena such as the Black Lives Matter movement and student-led protests against societal inequities are an important precipitant toward moving institutions to racial diversity.

Although most of the presidents discussed receiving a certain level of commitment from people at their institution to enhance racial diversity and awareness, two participants also experienced an undercurrent of fear from the college trustees and opposition from less-progressive students, parents, and alumni. Although this opposition never materialized in tangible form (such as lawsuits or other legal challenges to racial diversity), the possibility of opposition sometimes made it challenging for a president to zealously move the campus toward a higher level of racial diversity. For example, Participant #3 stated:

Even if it’s unlikely your institution’s going to get sued, just the fear of it dampens your ability, the institution’s ability to aggressively do what it needs to do to be more open to a broader, more diverse student population, I think.

This dynamic presented the presidents with complex challenges given that they were receiving backing from boards that believed in racial diversity on campus; however, the trustees, fearful of litigation for promoting racial diversity, needed assurance that the institution would be protected against lawsuits or other juridical actions. In observing and analyzing the president’s description of their experience, this researcher discovered it is challenging to balance the desire
for campus racial diversity with the fear of litigation around race-conscious affirmative action practices.

The participants strongly expressed that they had achieved a level of socioeconomic status that they would not have been able to attain without education, including higher education. This researcher analyzed the presidents saw their students being able to access the same educational opportunities that helped them make a positive impact on society. Participant #5 expressed:

I remember my dean of students of my undergrad. He was an African American male. He was probably the only African American male at the administration at my university I attended undergrad. But I remember the kind of impact he had I was like, “Wow, that will be kind of, cool if I could have a similar impact in work with students.”

Simultaneously several presidents noted the very concrete and realistic outcomes their lives could have had if they had not attended college. Participant #2 stated:

I would be living in the ghetto somewhere. I would have multiple children. I would probably be receiving benefits from the government, and/or struggling working multiple jobs to make ends meet. I certainly would not be a college president, and would not have traveled to 28 countries, as I have.

Imagining the different paths the presidents could have faced without a college degree was a very sobering thought. Participant #1 stated that without a college degree, street pharmaceuticals (dealing drugs) would have been an option. Several presidents noted they would have a lower socioeconomic status, which would have limited their social and political engagement. The concept of social and political engagement has to do with an understanding and desire to participate in society and domestic and nondomestic affairs. For example, Participant #
2 said, “My outlook on the world and my understanding, my general disposition, my optimism, would be obliterated by my socioeconomic condition and the lack of opportunities.” All the presidents considered higher education a life-changing experience that is enhanced when students embrace racial diversity. The participants said they understood that education gave them the opportunity to contribute to society differently, which provides the context for the subordinate theme of Citizenship, discussed in detail below. The concept of citizenship arose for all six presidents. When they discussed citizenship, as it applied to both their own lived experiences and the experiences of their students, they reflected that education is not separate from the dynamics of greater society.

**Citizenship**

All six participants mentioned the connection between education, educational diversity, and contributing to society. Participants claimed that education created the foundation for students to be engaged in the greater society, beyond the individual benefits it procured. The connection to the community was mentioned nearly 15 times from four different participants. In observing and analyzing the presidents’ portrayals of their understandings of the community, this researcher made a fundamental discovery that participants perceived that there are many definitions of community. This multilevel definition of community included the college community, the community surrounding the college, and the greater community of human beings. Even the most foundational concept of knowledge for the sake of obtaining understanding and skills links to skills for a societal community. Many presidents saw education as a value to society for problem-solving and fostering social responsibility.

The concept of social responsibility connected to obtaining a higher education also permeated the interviews. Some presidents emphasized the heightened understanding and
responsibility that college-educated students have to participate in endeavors that help the country and humanity, particularly the less fortunate. Additionally, this researcher understood there was the idea of social activism in the field of politics: the notion that students could become policymakers and leaders in the country. Participant #4 noted:

We are a credential-driven society, and therefore, education is power and knowledge, and policymakers and leaders about a country, leaders of industry, these things, there is this process at those individuals who go on to earn a college education will drive America and our nation to wherever it is going.

Through social activism, students would have a better understanding of who they are in the context of a larger society, among other things related to understanding racial diversity in higher education and its value in society. Racial diversity in higher education was an advantage to society. Participant #3 stated:

If indeed we’re saying education is supposed to broaden our thinking, open our exposure, broaden our exposure, the results will benefit our students who... It’s going to make them, hopefully, better human beings, civically engaged students who turn into civically engaged citizens, adults.

Participant #5 similarly noted how education helped students have a positive impact on society. He focused on the trajectories of African American males in this context. Participant #5 noted:

We want to increase the number of African males pursuing degrees, and also at the same time making sure that they are retained and completed on time, and getting into the workforce, and be a productive citizen in their communities.
This participant was an African American male, and it was apparent during the interview that he self-identified with younger African American men.

Conclusion

The superordinate theme of Support of racial diversity revealed that the participants encountered support from the highest ranks of the college, the board of trustees. This level of support for racial diversity on campus created a positive atmosphere for these college presidents. They did not need to continuously wrestle with their board around the need for racial diversity. The alignment between the presidents and their boards on the matter of racially inclusive learning environments was essential and enhanced the experience that this group of presidents had in their board interactions. Additionally, the presidents themselves all supported racial diversity in higher education, in part because of their personal experiences, and, therefore, they considered access to advanced education as necessary for their students. Seeing this similar relationship between their experiences with diversity and the experiences they believed they should create on their campuses was a sentiment that came up for several presidents.

All the presidents acknowledged the subordinate theme of Citizenship. There appeared to be a strong consciousness around social responsibility for each participant. Education from their perspective, even if it brought individual gain, was simultaneously considered a collective good for society. As evidenced by the data from the interviews, one of the principal purposes of higher education is to improve the condition of humanity, the country, and the local community. The presidents described the enhancement of minority social capital via an educational path, and many expressed that they believed this journey would lead many students to bring about change in political arenas.
Despite the support each president expressed was present, two presidents experienced a duality in their interactions with trustees. They expressed they wanted a more racially diverse student body, yet some trustees voiced strong concern regarding the effect of this diversification in the legal arena. This created tension for these presidents. This researcher noted that managing this different disposition from trustees had the potential to create challenges for presidents who were trying to understand boundaries in their efforts to create a racially inclusive educational experience on their campuses. Though not explicitly expressed by the participants, this researcher acknowledges it can be taxing to have to continually reassure trustees that the educational benefits of racial diversity among the student body would be in some way worth the risk of legal challenges. Additionally, this appears to be a situation the presidents could mitigate if they refrained from or reduced their efforts in diversifying the student population. The need to balance the benefits of racial diversity and the risk of legal challenges was not the only balancing that the presidents had to do. As shown in the interviews, participants viewed the role of higher education as closely tied to understanding and experiencing cultural diversity, which is a component they viewed as an essential part of higher education. It is vital for the presidents to understand and negotiate the delicate balance between racially diversifying the campus and using race or affirmative action as a means for that diversification.

In the study, the researcher made a connection between how a diverse population of college presidents can contribute to cultural diversity and its intersectionality with community engagement as citizenship. These presidents can empower students and faculty to be agents of change that can comprehend and empower an inclusive global society. The role of presidents, who must balance their racial identity between various cultural groups, is crucial, and it leads this discussion into code-switching.
Code-Switching

The superordinate theme code-switching explores the dual languages and identities that particular groups of people, usually underrepresented groups, employ in a variety of situations to move between different cultural realities (Auer, 2005; Downey & Lucena, 2004; Sophocleous, 2011). One of these different cultures is a more intimate reality, while the other is a reality into which people assimilate. During the conversation about code-switching, the notion of dual identity also came up, with definition later in this section. Half the participants mentioned African American presidents need to transform their presentation to the dominant culture. The understanding of how they utilize code-switching to operation in majority culture campuses is informative. For an African American, code-switching is somewhat of instinctive behavior. For example, Participant #6 noted:

I’ve been ambidextrous or bilingual in the sense that I can operate both in the Black community and feel comfortable in the Black community, and safe and able to move through that community in the way that feels comfortable and normal to me and to others around me, but I can also be very safe and comfortable and operate smoothly in the predominantly White community.

When interacting with the majority White culture on campus, some African American college presidents change the language and cultural norms they usually use. Dual identity was an emergent theme that arose when discussing code-switching. Code-switching and dual identity are similar because both are discussing how underrepresented groups relate to more than one identity. According to Simon, Reichert, and Grabow (2013), “Dual identity is defined as identification with both one’s cultural minority in-group and one’s society of residence” (p. 251). As an African American leading an institution of higher education, Participant #1 discussed the
concept of needing to operate in African American society and White society as if they are two different spheres. Participant #1 stated:

W. E. B. Du Bois said that we always . . . that Black people in America always operate out of a dual identity. The two faces. He was talking about intersectionality before it became a word—that idea that we are constantly maneuvering between multiple worlds.

This researcher observed from the interviews the existence of code-switching as a necessary practice for African American college presidents to be able to exist in their professional environment and to maneuver through many other areas of life. The ability to be accepted by college constituents based on an African American’s ability to speak the language and be proficient in the social competencies of the majority culture is a critical concept. Indeed, half of the participants acknowledged and embraced the need to be able to conduct themselves seamlessly between majority cultural spaces and African American spaces. This concept that code-switching requires an emotional intelligence was expressed by Participant #2 who discussed the need to function with dominant culture in higher education and the fact that there was a specific way to function around White people. Participant #2 noted, “You need to be able to have the emotional intelligence to do it, and you need to be able to . . . it’s more of the effective skills. And, that participant expressed that is essential know how to operate in white spaces.” Lastly, Participant #2 expounded on code-switching by also describing how code-switching happens between genders. Her point may highlight a different aspect of code-switching that African American female presidents encounter working with their male counterparts at PWIs. The other participants who discussed code-switching were male.
Conclusion

The superordinate theme of *Code-switching* revealed that half the participants use code-switching as part of their practice while interacting at their PWIs. This kind of modification that African American college presidents need to make at PWIs is necessary for the president to manage the university’s agenda effectively. Additionally, code-switching may go unseen by the particular culture or group with whom the presidents are interacting. Being able to function in multiple domains was something that at times appeared advantageous or challenging as confirmed by Participant #6, who noted: “I think my racial identity, in a number of areas, has been something that, from time to time, has been a barrier or a challenge I had to overcome.”

This researcher understands there is an emotional intelligence these presidents need to possess to integrate their identity into the majority culture in higher education. Simultaneously, the concept of dual identity was part of the presidents’ ability to embrace and feel comfort in being part of the African American culture. This is a more organic cultural experience as compared to their ability to transition into the dominant culture. The next theme will detail the participants’ perceptions of the intent of affirmative action. This discussion builds a foundation for understanding the participants’ interpretation of the initial purpose and history of affirmative action.

The Intent of Affirmative Action

It is imperative to gain an understanding of each participant’s perspective on race-conscious affirmative action in higher education. The central theme of *the Intent of affirmative action* allowed each president to express their perspective on the topic. This theme helped identify to what extent each president expressed that they supported the original premise of race-conscious affirmative action.
Several participants verbalized support for race-conscious affirmative action given the history of racism in the United States. Additionally, some acknowledged affirmative action had been part of a long history that had affirmed White men. As previously noted, an early mentioning of affirmative action could be traced to the 1930s. At that time, affirmative action referred to the protection of White union laborers (Pierce, 2014). Therefore, when affirmative action emerged to assist underrepresented groups of people, specifically African American people, any negative societal response was incongruent with previous support of affirmative action to help White people. Participant #1 noted: “However, quite frankly, the affirmative action that Richard Nixon—yes, a Republican—Richard Nixon put into place: It was about Black Americans. You were originally trying to address Black Americans who were left out.” The presidents supported the notion that affirmative action tries to make reparations for centuries of oppression in the United States. Over half the presidents spoke about affirmative action and its connection to past inequities and injustices. This perspective resonated with a statement made by Participant #1, who discussed that even though affirmative action initially focused on African Americans, that focus has been diluted over time. Participant #1 stated:

[We] were originally trying to address Black Americans who were left out. Now Latinos are part of that pool. Now women are part of that pool. You know, all of these things. . . I think that we need to be more specific. I think that if you want to deal with this, then I think that we need to look at Americans, Black Americans who are the descendants of slaves.

Simultaneously, Participants #1 and #6 recognized there are times when affirmative action is serving African Americans who are not experiencing the same needs as average African Americans. This researcher observed the commitment by the presidents to focus affirmative
action on transforming the lives of socioeconomically challenged African American people.

Participant #1 explained:

Our history of creating an economic advantage for those that are socioeconomically disadvantaged . . . requires that we look at, not just the issue of [race], because it does us no good if we bring in the Black children of very wealthy individuals, we have to look at how do we transform society by lifting up the social economics of the people who may not have had access to higher education because of limitations of funds.

Also, the presidents noted that affirmative action represents a chance to alleviate racial injustice and to help design a society that simultaneously has equity and diversity. Several presidents acknowledged affirmative action is not as successful in creating the equity for which it was intended. One president noted, as a country, we focus more on the discussion of why we should eliminate affirmative action rather than reasons to keep it and actions to procure it. The participants identified there are imperfections in affirmative action. For example, Participant #2 noted:

I think affirmative action tries to create a more equitable access to educational opportunities in the higher education context and the workplace. It’s an attempt to equalize things for centuries of economic social and political suppression, trying to create more balance, but it is imperfect. And, but it’s better than nothing.

The next section will add to the participant’s perspectives on affirmative action, as they shifted their focus toward the future of affirmative action.

**Future of Affirmative Action**

This subtheme arose from an analysis detailing the understanding these presidents have about the future of race-conscious affirmative action in higher education. The vast majority of
presidents noted their belief that affirmative action has a grim future, a premise that they based on a myriad of factors including the lack of societal understanding, historical weakening of affirmative action policies, state referendum bans, and legal challenges. Regarding legal challenges, half the participants mentioned the nomination and eventual confirmation of Justice Brett Kavanaugh along with the Trump Administration’s tone as a possible forthcoming impediment to the future of race-conscious affirmative action admissions policies.

Presidents also revealed there are already so many challenges faced by institutions of higher education, especially small colleges and universities, regarding financial stability and efforts to bring more value to a degree of higher education; therefore, this adds challenges to affirmative action about whether policy can make campus climate and success taxing. Thus, presidents are trying to take a proactive approach to campus racial diversity. Consequently, participants are looking to create racially diverse campuses regardless of what might happen with affirmative action in the future. Participant #5 stated:

We’re not going to wait on no court case or court decision to do the right thing. It’s upon us to make that decision to say that, if there are social or racial injustice that we’re going to response by doing the right thing for these individuals.

As the presidents shared more about the future of affirmative action, there was a discussion about how the racism that brought about the need for affirmative action is still present in society. Presidents mentioned there are still racial tensions and divides that continue to separate groups. They mainly discussed the increase in the presence of people of color and how that still drives racial tension. For example, Participant #4 noted:

I see affirmative action having a tough road ahead. I do, and the reason I say that and I was talking about this at a panel I was on not too long ago, is that the more our nation
changes, the more Black and brown we see growth in our country, the more that many of our White colleagues are going to believe that they are losing ground. And hence, that growth in a demographic shift some will try to equate that to more Black and brown young men and women trying to go to college, which will then squeeze out more White individuals, and there will be this battle about who deserves an education.

Simultaneously, the presidents suggested looking at different characteristics for the future of affirmative action policies. Several presidents mentioned looking at White communities that have been economically disadvantaged. Indeed, they were conscious of an acute intersectionality that could encompass not only racism and its consequences, but other forms of marginalization. In this context, Participant #1 noted:

I would look for those pockets that have historically been denied educational access. For those both rural and urban communities of color, but I would also look at those pockets of the community, the White, the majority community, that had been denied access and find themselves in what we call, areas of despair.

Participant #2 echoed this sentiment, agreeing that looking at the socioeconomic class would provide more success regarding providing opportunities.

This researcher viewed the presidents’ openness to including White, dominant color students in this approach to diversity as a tectonic shift. The weight of this statement is enormous and brought other inquiries to the surface, including how people of color might respond to such a suggestion. Additionally, does this ultimately take away from the intent of affirmative action and restructure affirmative action to such a degree that some might view the presidents as diminishing affirmative action?
Conclusion

The superordinate theme of *the Intent of affirmative action* revealed that the participants strongly support the original intention and need for affirmative action based on the country’s historical context. This researcher contends there was sobering importance to the association of past repressions of African Americans. The presidents understood the connection affirmative action had to the history of racial discrimination against African Americans and how racial discrimination is still present today. The discussion around affirmative action’s actual intent evolved into a conversation around the future of affirmative action. The participants were also able to acknowledge the future of affirmative action is in question, as many factors may limit affirmative action’s reach in race-conscious admissions policies.

This researcher understands the presidents understood and agreed that during the time that affirmative action was developed to address racial inequities, African American people were seen as the primary group in need of the action. Although the presidents understood the efforts of affirmative action to address racial inequities, the presidents’ accepted the current policy might not be an effective policy for providing racial equity for African Americans and other people of color. The presidents know the implementation of affirmative action to bring about cultural diversity did not end racism, but the approach to cultural diversity through affirmative action has been weakened, and the presidents’ role is to look for future ways to gain campus racial diversity. This conversation organically evolved into discussions about how the presidents plan to promote racial diversity in the predicted absence of affirmative action, which introduces the next superordinate theme: *Strategies to obtain racial diversity without affirmative action.*
Strategies to Obtain Racial Diversity without Affirmative Action

The superordinate theme Strategies to obtain racial diversity without affirmative action related to the experiences the college presidents were having in evaluating ideas and methods of diversifying higher education outside of the structures (legal and political) of affirmative action. For some college presidents, this evaluation seemed to be a very real and present issue for their institutions. For example, presidents at institutions located in states that do not have affirmative action (meaning there was a state-level ballot initiative that allowed the constituents to vote to end affirmative action in their state) faced an obvious task of creating a racially inclusive campus void of affirmative action. All participants faced the task of leading a majority White institution that sought more racial diversity. Strategies utilized by several presidents included reframing of racial diversity as “increasing opportunities,” “urban education,” or “reflecting the diversity of humanity.”

Some participants felt vacating the term “affirmative action” would be the better course of action for the presidents when trying to garner support for a myriad of strategies they would utilize to achieve racial diversity. For example, Participant #3 noted:

We talked about it [race-conscious affirmative action] much more around reflection of society and diversity, and commitment to, in our case, urban education. So those are all code-switching words for, if we need to, those are other ways of saying we need to expand the opportunity.

In short, the participants inferred the term affirmative action is less palatable, more political, and more confusing than less stigmatized descriptions. Even though all participants previously mentioned support for affirmative action, they were strategic in using a different
lexicon to discuss it. There is an apparent effort to maintain some practice of affirmative action even if race is not the central parameter. For example, Participant #4 noted:

You can look at gender, you can look at economic status, you can look at generational status, you can look at all of those factors that cast a broad enough net that is simply not focused in on the hue [race] of one’s skin. Because when you talk about generational status that includes poor Blacks, poor Whites, poor Latinos, poor Native Americans alike as well as the for economic argument, that’s not race-based. If we’re smart enough what we will continue to see is that there is more of an economic dis-balance in our nation than it is an actual race imbalance.

Two presidents advocated looking at particular zip codes and communities as a methodology to gaining more racial diversity, theorizing that communities are often segregated, making it possible to specifically recruit students of color without needing to disclose that that’s what was happening. Participant #1 suggested:

I have a simple response to those institutions that want to get around so-called race-based affirmative action. Offer affirmative action by zip code, because guess what? In the United States of America, we might not lead segregated lives anymore, but we still lead separate lives. If you offer scholarships to students from those areas who are low-income, or first-generation, you can achieve the same impact without having to deal with the whole bugaboo of race.

Several presidents discussed looking at the socioeconomic class in place of or in combination with race. The presidents wanted to help students who were coming from less advantaged socioeconomic communities, which they often saw coincided with African American communities, but they simultaneously acknowledged that low-income communities also include
majority culture communities. Another president strategically noted that enrolling a more racially
diverse student population could become part of the solution to increasing the college’s
enrollment. One president discussed exploring generational status, meaning the first generation
to attend college, while eliminating race. For example, Participant #1 asserted:

Legal challenges are legal challenges, you know. And so what people are saying is that it
produces unfair bias. I think that we have to think about how to do this, so I’m actually
going to give you a very concrete example of this that I have actually dealt with here. I
eliminated the diversity scholarship and replaced it with a first-generation scholarship.

Thus, the presidents saw looking at socioeconomics as another option to reach
marginalized groups of students that include a high percentage of students of color. Participant
#4 had the idea of combining a variety of factors to obtain racial diversity that combined
generational status amongst other factors, stating:

We can give points based on generational status, based on economic status and some
other factors because there you include white students as you do other students who come
from African-American background and so forth. Assigning points to generational status,
gender, those things, not to race, that is where I would try to drive that argument and be
on greater solid footing.

There is a concern that the participants who are making efforts to provide a racially
diverse learning environment seem to need to toe a line with multiple priorities, such as not using
the term or policies of affirmative action, not directly discussing race, or directly employing race.
These are a few examples of the complexities with which African American college presidents
appear to contend.
Conclusion

The superordinate theme of *Strategies to obtain racial diversity without affirmative action* revealed that all the participants are employing a variety of strategies to increase their campuses’ racial diversity. The presidents acknowledged that not every African American needs the benefits that affirmative action can provide, specifically African American students who are highly economically and educationally advantaged. The presidents’ focus rested on how affirmative action could be most beneficial to African American students who are disadvantaged both economically and educationally. Furthermore, the presidents experienced repeated support when obtaining racial diversity by expanding their approaches to include a wider variety of recruitment qualifications. It was the presidents’ expressed belief that, because of the historical and current inequities, broadening the scope to include factors such as first-generation college students, geographic location, and socioeconomics would still produce racial diversity because quite often those factors are aligned with African American students.

The presidents had an openness to omitting race as a factor or expanding race as a factor and including other races, embracing White, majority culture. There was the understanding that it was of great importance to have to provide educational access to everyone who has historically been denied and that would ultimately include disadvantaged White people. In lieu of the participants’ view that affirmative action as a policy is at risk of eradication or weakening, it becomes necessary to think about developing strategies to have a racially diverse campus without affirmative action. This researcher recognizes that some participants expressed they were designing ways to discuss racial diversity using a language that may be perceived as more agreeable than affirmative action by diverging from a racial focus. This use of language to reframe the discourse and disposition of racial diversity is an approach some presidents indeed
said they were utilizing on their campuses. Other strategies the presidents utilized offered
credence to the physical factors that could produce diversity in the absence of affirmative action,
such as generational status concerning higher education or economic status.

The researcher noted again that not using race as a factor was an approach the presidents
perceived as helpful to avoid legal challenges to race-conscious affirmative action and possibly
politically aggravated terminology. The influence of the political climate on affirmative action
was another superordinate theme that arose in discussion.

**Influence of Politics on Affirmative Action**

The next superordinate theme explores the *Influence of politics on affirmative action*. The
perspective of how the political atmosphere currently or in previous years impacted affirmative
action produced several points of alignment, including the connection to the Supreme Court and
political affiliations, and identity politics. The majority of participants voiced that politics play a
role in the debate around race-conscious affirmative action admissions policies. First, it is
important to note that although the role of the Supreme Court is historically described as being
bipartisan, the participants made no clear distinction between the Court and politics. Actually,
Participant #6 noted that the Supreme Court is very political and noted the role of the Court in
the *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin* (2013) case and what is predicted to be the Court’s
role in the race-conscious affirmative action admissions policies case against *Students for Fair
race-conscious admissions policy confronts their mission of attaining diversity through their
practice of attempting to diversify the campus community. The case came from Students for Fair
Admissions Inc., which is managed by Edward Blum. Blum is the conservative who founded
Project on Fair Representation (POFR), which provides backing to legal challenges on race-
conscious admissions in education, discussed in chapter one (Gluckman, 2018; Reilly, 2018).

There was one significant difference between the presidents when it came to the topic of political influences on affirmative action and the Court. While some presidents looked to the Supreme Court to make decisions that would aid and strengthen affirmative action policies, others looked to the Court as a conduit for weakening and possibly terminating affirmative action or its utility.

Furthermore, some presidents blamed political parties for the dilution of the impact of affirmative action. Although no specific political party was mentioned, the presidents did speak directly about President Donald J. Trump and his association with this concept of political influences as weakening affirmative action. This researcher observed the majority of presidents see President Trump as a president who wants to not only give political and social power to those in White society who already have power, but he also wants to maintain the power structure that already exists in society. For example, Participant #2 noted:

The country is using identity politics right now for all kinds of- to create division, very intentionally so because that’s how Donald Trump can get into power and that’s how he can stay into power. So he’s driving narrative of division. And having had a African American president, he’s like telling people, hey look they got affirmative action. He’s got all these African American people who’s [sic] given a leg up, and look at you poor rural white person who’s never had a leg-up. Life is difficult for you. Yet, these African American people are getting everything.

Participant #4 recognized this power structure notion and asserted, “Education is power and knowledge. It is important for some to maintain that level of authority, power, and knowledge, and limit it for others. Affirmative action has always been seen as a way to disrupt and threaten that.” Furthermore, the association of political influence and power was present for
half the presidents. They explained the absence or weakening of affirmative action keeps a status quo in our national power structure, which they credited President Trump with propagating.

Conclusion

During the conversation concerning the *Influence of politics on affirmative action*, the presidents revealed there is an overlap with politics and affirmative action, including what is viewed as political. While presidential administrations may be seen as political, other branches of government such as the Supreme Court have historically been designed to be nonpartisan. For example, the participants noted that legal entities influence race-conscious affirmative action admissions policies, specifically the Supreme Court. Although the presidents agreed the High Court influences legal decisions on affirmative action, the presidents varied in what they believed the influence was. Some presidents looked to the Court to fortify affirmative action, while others noted the Court has undermined the impact of affirmative action.

Additionally, several presidents processed the complexities of how politics intersected with the operational powers in society and believed affirmative action could help to resist inequity in the political power structure that is present in society. One president concluded that the foundation of affirmative action confronts and impedes the existing conditions of power. The researcher notes the presidents are aware of the political impact on affirmative action, including the Supreme Court. Though there was a divide in the presidents’ perspectives on whether the Court would make decisions supporting or not supporting affirmative action, it was clear the presidents attached a political description to the Court. Some of the presidents needed to deal with a balance of a Court that they viewed as partisan.
Conclusion

Overall there was a great diversity in the research data, including within the participants who were recruited for the study and the conclusions. Although all participants were presidents of PWIs, one president serves at an HBCU that has become a PWI due to geographic migration patterns, adding an informative perspective to the topic. Additionally, another participant possesses a biracial identity while simultaneously having an upbringing in an African American community and family.

The primary research question for this study was: What are the experiences of African American college presidents with negotiating and implementing affirmative action policies in the context of ambiguous legal frameworks and racial tensions in the United States? After reviewing the data coding, analysis, and findings, this researcher identified six superordinate themes and two subthemes. From the themes came insights on how the presidents experience race-conscious affirmative action admissions policies in the current legal and political atmosphere. First, all presidents expressed that their institutions were a welcoming place for their presidency and their identity as an African American identity. A major factor presidents discussed was the acceptance and support that started at the highest points within the organization: the board of trustees. Additionally, by several participants believed the board of trustees needed to be committed to diversifying their own boards along with their hiring practices to increase the number of African American presidents across the nation. This researcher found the presidents needed to navigate two different positions: one where the trustees were welcoming to their presence as African American presidents and another where the trustees were limiting diversity. For example, although the presidents see their trustees as welcoming to having a president who represents their
openness to racial diversity, the same trustees are limited when it comes to diversifying their own ranks.

A couple of presidents shared their concern that their boards of trustees were wary of the legal ramifications of any efforts to become a more racially diverse campus. This factor did not stop the presidents from working toward campus racial diversity. Additionally, the presidents expressed that being African American was a unique perspective they could bring to their work, and they had been conditioned to a specific work ethic. Yet there was the experience for some presidents that their race brought them negative, even dangerous, attention. This negative attention was connected to the professional image of African American presidents, and the dangerous attention was connected to experiences presidents’ perceived living as an African American in the United States, particularly in interactions with law enforcement. This was an additional point the researcher expected in evaluating the experiences of this underrepresented group.

In terms of race-conscious diversity in education, the presidents made a link to the larger societal benefit. This took the topic of racial diversity in higher education to a global perspective by discussing how the racial diversity on college campuses is a benefit on all levels of the community: the campus community, the local community, and worldwide. Presidents noted that racial diversity in higher education is something that is valuable to society. The researcher observed that it is key for presidents to understand the connection that higher education has in addressing social issues and social divides.

Yet half the presidents expressed that their racial diversity is accompanied by code-switching in order to be able to be an African American college president interacting with majority White campus. There was a clear understanding this is an intellectual skill African
American people need to access when intermingling within White environments. Knowing how to conduct communications with dual identities helped the presidents in multiple areas.

The most unexpected finding was the ways in which participants interface with affirmative action in their role as president. Based on the interviews, the presidents did not have struggles with the negotiation or implementation of race-conscious affirmative action admissions policies; most presidents either used other methods for diversifying student racial identity, such as income and geographic location, or expanded their student campus diversity to include majority culture White students who possessed other disadvantaged identities or they worked at institutions that did not utilize race-conscious affirmative action admissions policies due to state ballot affirmative action bans or institutional policy. This researcher noted the lack of struggle with affirmative action that surfaced may be connected to a variety of circumstances, including the presidents’ desire and need to avoid any constituent, political, or legal challenges. The presidents displayed great savvy in their approach to obtaining racial diversity without interfacing with affirmative action; simultaneously, this brings up the possibility the presidents may be avoiding affirmative action to evade backlash from constituents or legal challenges.

The fact that many institutions were not employing race-conscious affirmative action admissions policies was a significant discovery not anticipated by the researcher. This does not imply the participants did not support the purpose of affirmative action; the future the presidents saw for affirmative action was often bleak, with many presidents believing there would likely be an eventual diminishing or dismantling of affirmative action. The presidents saw politics as a current and future influencer on affirmative action. This researcher uncovered the presidents’ concerns regarding how they politically and legally managed the intricacies around affirmative action and how they were both proactive and reactive in managing this minefield. The proactive
approach has resulted in the participants being highly functional and strategic in their approach to campus racial diversity.

The majority of presidents expressed that politics had a strong influence on race-conscious affirmative action. First, the presidents interpreted the multiple Supreme Court decisions as politically driven, even though the Court is supposed to be nonpartisan. Within this perspective, the presidents believed the Court’s rulings had strong influences on affirmative action; some were intent on undermining it, others fortified affirmative action’s use. An informative aspect was the anticipation around the most recent affirmative action challenge against Harvard University and how the Court would rule. Additionally, the traditional political party notion was another influencer, and participants viewed President Trump and his administration as forces that seek to diminish affirmative action and use affirmative action to shape a narrative of division, telling people affirmative action is a benefit to African American people and White people are alienated from this benefit. The irony is that several African American presidents were open to expanding affirmative action to benefit disadvantaged White people. Here again, we return to intersectionality as a progressive mindset to redefining affirmative action. This redefining could include an expansion of other underrepresented groups in higher education that are not race-based, yet the historical injustices and marginalizing that have indeed been based on race in the United States must continue to be addressed simultaneously with expanded inclusion.

In this study, the researcher verified via the data analysis that using Bell’s (1976) CRT is still valid as a process to determine and analyze the experiences of African American presidents of PWIs with race-conscious affirmative action admissions policies. In the next chapter, the researcher will review the discussion and implications for practice. Chapter five will also include
the results grounded in the theoretical framework and themes, with an assessment of the study results as they compare to the articles presented in Chapter Two: Literature Review. Suggestions for additional research in this area are also forthcoming.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice

The purpose of this study was to document the experiences of African American college presidents at PWIs to gain an understanding of how they perceive race-conscious affirmative action policies in higher education. The methodology was a qualitative IPA utilizing semi structured interviews for data collection. The researcher used a qualitative approach as it allowed the researcher to recognize common events in common settings to comprehend the meaning the participants ascribed to their lived experiences in its social context (Miles et al., 2014). Qualitative data are comprised of natural events and natural settings for the purpose of understanding the meaning people attribute to their lives in its social context (Miles et al., 2014).

Derrick Bell (1976) is the pioneer of CRT, the theoretical framework applied to understand the experience of the participants. The emphasis on the importance of racism and its intersectionality on U.S. legal policies, such as affirmative action, provided a basis to formulate questions, analysis, discussion, and implications. The participant group included five college presidents from PWIs at public and private institutions, as well as one college president from an HBCU. The presidents served at colleges located in suburban, urban, and rural environments on the East and West Coast of the United States. Lastly, the presidents represented community colleges or liberal arts institutions. They had varying backgrounds, including biracial identity, immigrant identity, and male and female gender.

Six superordinate themes emerged from the data: (a) openness to the African American identity of the college president, (b) support for racial diversity, (c) code-switching, (d) intent of affirmative action, (e) strategies to obtain racial diversity without affirmative action, and (f) influence of politics on affirmative action. In addition, two subordinate themes emerged: (a) citizenship, as a component of support for racial diversity and (b) the future of affirmative
action as a component of the intent of affirmative action. The themes that emerged depicted how the participants perceived the intersectionality of their roles as African American college presidents at PWIs and race-conscious affirmative action policies in higher education.

This chapter includes a description of the results of the study connected to each central theme. The information provided in this chapter demonstrates how the results correlate with the literature review presented in chapter two and how the chosen theoretical background, CRT, connects to this research study. Next, this chapter includes a discussion of the implications of the findings with practical suggestions and proposals for practice, including guidance for future research in the area of race-conscious affirmative action admissions policies. The chapter begins with a discussion of the findings related to the first theme, openness to the Black identity of the college president, and how they link to previous studies and the theoretical framework.

**Openness to the Black Identity of the College President**

The presidents noted their racial identity is a value added to the institution, and as African Americans, the participants believed they had to work harder than their White peers for the same acknowledgment. The presidents were aware racism was present in various forms, including microaggressions and racial injustice.

When analyzing this theme *Openness to the African American identity of the college president*, the researcher also found the participants reported they experienced a welcoming environment at their respective college campuses as it relates to their racial identity. The presidents associated this open environment with the colleges’ boards of trustees, who were also responsible for choosing the president. The presidents noted the boards of trustees were committed to diversifying the institution and that a racially diverse board of trustees facilitated the hiring of more racially diverse presidents. With a 70% disparity between Black and White
representatives in high-level administrative positions in higher education (Jackson, 2004), the participants highlighted the importance of the trustees in racially diversifying key institutional roles.

This perspective is in line with research by Fisher and Koch (1996), who noted that college trustee boards comprised of majority culture are wary of hiring African American presidents. As noted by Jackson (2004), the responsibility of selecting college presidents in the U.S. lies with the trustee board, but boards in the U.S. are comprised of 80% White representatives. Additionally, the participants mention it is incumbent upon trustee boards to embrace a different positioning to recruit potential applicants.

Though the presidents noted there was an openness to their presence on campus as African American college presidents, they also acknowledged experiencing adverse reactions because of their racial identities. Despite their positions as college presidents, they still experience racist stereotypes. Based on the studies in chapter two, the researcher anticipated this experience. Gasman (2011, 2016) showed part of the stereotype of African American college presidents includes their propensity for having inferior work performance, along with dogmatic and paternalistic approaches to the presidential role. The participants in the current study affirmed this perspective; for example, Participant #1 confirmed the limited view that African Americans are incompetent in complex environments.

Furthermore, some participants discussed the phenomenon of Driving While Black. Participants stated their roles as college presidents do not shelter them from an elevated probability of being pulled over by law enforcement for being Black, an interaction that could be hazardous. This example underscores the convergence between race and the legal system, which is the primary foundation of CRT as noted in the literature (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).
Race can be an integral part of influencing the selection of a president. The current study can enhance the theoretical framework of CRT by looking at whether having the voice of marginalized individuals, specifically African Americans, in the creation, redesign, or administration of legal policies, such as affirmative action, will aid in challenging the racialized structure that preserves the social oppression of marginalized people groups. Additionally, this study can enhance CRT theory by echoing the role of race and racism in the selection of college presidents. Additionally, this study highlights the difference in how African American college presidents perceive their approach to their work versus their White counterparts.

**Support of Racial Diversity**

Because of the presidents’ personal experiences, they all supported higher education’s initiative to have racially diverse campuses. Additionally, each participant found their institution to be open to having more racial diversity on campus. Furthermore, the presidents possess a fervent awareness that education is about the betterment of society, as a citizen of humanity. Sáenz (2010) noted colleges and universities that have a racial diversity hold the capacity to diminish segregation by creating the ability for students to interact with different cultural and racial groups, an environment higher education is uniquely positioned to foster.

The findings in this theme, *Support of racial diversity*, revealed participants’ understanding in assessing the racial diversity of the campus environment. As noted in the previous section regarding *Openness to the Black identity of the college president*, the trustees are a cornerstone for introducing racial diversity in the role of college presidents, yet the presidents shared that there were some difficulties in balancing trustee expectations. For example, they are balancing the aspiration for increased racial diversity on campus with the concern of litigation against race-conscious affirmative action practices. The trustees’ fear of the
campus being sued for race-conscious affirmative action practices often offset their aspirations for campus racial diversity. For example, there were times when the presidents needed to assure the trustees that the support and value the trustees placed on campus racial diversity would not put the institutions at risk for litigation. The notion of litigation against affirmative action policies is not novel; Aja and Bustillo (2014) and Weber et al. (2005) noted how the concern around legal challenges to affirmative action affects the management of affirmative action.

Furthermore, the presidents and their boards see diversity as a benefit to all students from all racial groups in a global society. One tenet of CRT is “the critique of liberalism,” meaning policies designed to aid marginalized groups may genuinely be initiated and supported due to the benefits they pose for majority culture (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Therefore, the notion of campus racial diversity may receive support, not because of its benefit to students of color, but the benefit to White students. Warikoo (2016) noted that institutions of higher education, specifically selective institutions, have focused their presentation of campus racial diversity on its advantage to the dominant culture. When viewed as an asset to marginalized groups and utilizing strategies that eliminate or reduce the use of race slows the progress of marginalized people, specifically African Americans.

Additionally, Hirschman and Berrey (2017) noted the many Supreme Court legal challenges against affirmative action are centrally concentrated on the utilization of race-conscious admissions. The use of race in college admissions has been an issue since higher education began in this country. In the beginning, White people, especially men, were the only individuals allowed to pursue a college education, clearly making race a cornerstone of admission. Additionally, in their longitudinal study between 1994 and 2014, Hirschman and Berrey (2017) noted in 2004 that 60% of institutions of higher education admitted to utilizing
race as part of their admissions component. Simultaneously, in the same study, researchers revealed many institutions are concerned with litigation because, in 2014, only 35% of institutions acknowledged utilizing race as part of their admissions component. This decrease in reporting the utilization of race may indicate that, in addition to the trustee members represented by this study’s participants, other trustees are concerned with litigation.

Additionally, some participants noted they not only needed to confront trustees’ concerns about litigation, but also had to face having more conservative constituents who had less interest in racially diversifying the campus, especially if there might be legal repercussions. This aligns with the history of decision-makers in institutions who believed they would lose backing from supporters (Stulberg & Chen, 2014). Many presidents see racial diversity as the key to the purpose of higher education, helping students to progress in a global society. Racially diverse campuses signified relevance in society.

All the presidents view higher education as transformational, providing them with a different life: a more hopeful, social, and economically empowered life. Moreover, the presidents stated education is improved with a racially inclusive campus. The presidents saw a mirror image as they looked at their students. This mirror effect resonated with the presidents and they viewed their students as being positioned to obtain similar educational opportunities as they had and to make a change in society via their education. The presidents regarded higher education as providing the connection between the student and greater society.

Higher education is connected to students being more involved in the social and political aspects of their community, which is referred to as citizenship. Each participant spoke of this notion of citizenship. The discussion around how education connects students to community ranged from micro to macro communities (local, national, and universal). The presidents
understood higher education’s impact on their lives explicitly provided them with the ability to influence humanity differently, which helped them to develop the concept of citizenship.

**Code-Switching**

The term code-switching indicates the dual dialects and characteristics marginalized cultures use to shift between majority and nonmajority cultures (Auer, 2005; Downey & Lucena, 2004; Sophocleous, 2011). The participants identified code-switching as a required practice to survive in their roles as president and to operate through daily life. The findings in code-switching revealed the experiences the participants had moving from their personal cultural identity to the cultural realities they assimilated into at work, which is often majority culture. The exercise of code-switching is an essential practice for African American college presidents to thrive in higher education and to operate in various aspects of life.

The code-switching African American college presidents need to perform resonates with several of the points that Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced in discussing how CRT and education intersect (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). First, the concept of code-switching is about switching between different racial or cultural groups. The presidents’ need to employ code-switching denotes that race is still significant in this country. Additionally, the concept of code-switching seemed to intertwine with CRT’s sixth tenet, “property rights in Whiteness,” which caused the researcher to consider whether code-switching afforded the presidents with some level of advantage over other nonconforming members of their own racial identity. Although this researcher did not focus on isolating whether presidents who do not code-switch were able to succeed in their role as president, it would be an area to study in future research. Finally, code-switching supports CRT’s fifth tenet of “intersectionality,” which notes that, while race is central, there are other principal identities. Being an African American is
a central identity, which leaves one to question if the exercise of assimilating into another culture brings forth a different cultural identity that is specific to the experiences of African American college presidents.

The necessity of code-switching to successfully exist and function in the role of a college president is a distinct finding. CRT emphasizes racial oppression and how it intersects with cultural influences, among others, in the framework of U.S. policies (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). This portion of the study can enrich the theoretical framework of CRT by demonstrating how the specific cultural influence of code-switching may influence one’s perspective and approach toward affirmative action. As one participant mentioned, race-conscious affirmative action is discussed using code-switching words and statements mentioned by participants regarding diversity and commitment to urban education. The practice of code-switching may influence these code-switching words and statements.

**Intent of Affirmative Action**

The presidents acknowledged affirmative action’s connection to racial discrimination and still recognize that same racial discrimination in society today. For example, researchers noted racism is rooted in society in racial domination structures such colonization, slavery, labor migration, and so forth, and once those structures are operational, they are fixed (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2015; Robinson, 2000). The participants were cognizant of the imperfections that exist in affirmative action and they are poised to address those issues.

The vast majority of participants favored the initial race-conscious affirmative action policies, which were a reaction to the racist history that the U.S. had with nonmajority culture, particularly African Americans. This connection between the support of affirmative action and racism reflects CRT, which examines topics alongside racism. The presidents acknowledged the
presence of racism as their motivation for supporting affirmative action. Additionally, this association with racism connects to CRT’s first tenet, the permanence of racism.

Racism is not only present for the inception of affirmative action, which was designed to prevent racial discrimination against nonmajority culture groups, but, as mentioned by the participants, racism was present when affirmative action was used to support the experience of the majority culture groups. In the context of higher education admissions policies, in this study, the researcher notes that affirmative action is designed to produce fairer access to institutions. This point aligns with several researchers noted in the literature review, who suggested colleges and universities continue to hold the framework for addressing educational inequities (Chang, 2007; Hurtado et al., 2015).

In the framework of CRT, it is essential to focus on higher education’s institutionalized racism that emanates from societal racism. This resonates with the presidents’ perspectives in their discussion around the challenges to affirmative action in higher education. One president mentioned that society is more fixated on abolishing affirmative action instead of taking steps to genuinely secure affirmative action.

Simultaneously, as the participants supported affirmative action in its organic form, they still acknowledged affirmative action in its present form had not stopped institutionalized racism as it pertains to racial inclusion and access in higher education. Additionally, the presidents noted that affirmative action had been undermined via legal and political vehicles, and furthermore, the future of affirmative action is in jeopardy. As noted in the “Legal Precedents and Challenges to Affirmative Action” section of the literature review, legal challenges have profoundly impacted the execution and direction of affirmative action in higher education (Aja & Bustillo, 2014; Weber et al., 2005). For example, Harris and Roth (2008) noted the Supreme Court established
Stricter criteria for the utilization of race-conscious admissions practices. As the researchers suggest, there are both challenges and opportunities for the future of affirmative action in higher education.

**Strategies to Obtain Racial Diversity Without Affirmative Action**

With the future of affirmative action unknown, one strategy to achieve more racially diverse campuses may be to include a wider variety of recruitment qualifications. Additionally, presidents were open to the elimination of race in race-conscious affirmative action or the expansion of race. Though not all participants discussed strategies for obtaining racial diversity in the absence of affirmative action, all wanted racially diverse campuses. In strategizing for ways to facilitate a more racially diverse campus, the presidents noted that race-conscious affirmative action caused concern among constituents; therefore, the presidents discovered ways to obtain racial diversity with less offense to constituents, including not using the term *affirmative action*. This approach helped the presidents to plan and introduce diversity initiatives on campus with less opposition and concern for the initiatives. Presidents suggested that PWIs should start looking at the socioeconomic status of prospective students to gain more racial diversity. This approach may help increase diversity, although it may not pinpoint racial diversity. As Bell noted, the socioeconomics of a White person do not hinder White privilege (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). This lack of obstruction in White privilege resonates with the CRT in the domain of “Whiteness as property,” which is the sixth tenet in CRT.

Additionally, some participants suggested institutions use zip codes and others suggested generational access (access to first-generation college students), with the understanding that those factors are often racially aligned. The approach of eliminating the specific use of race and considering other factors is an ideal example of the fourth tenet of CRT, “the critique of
liberalism,” which highlights perceived liberal policies and procedures that might seem to benefit marginalized groups, yet they mask the actual basis of preserving the influence of dominant culture (McCoy & Rodrigs, 2015). Utilizing strategies that eliminate or reduce the use of race continues to slow the progress of marginalized people, specifically African Americans.

Furthermore, the results of these suggested approaches may result in returning institutions of higher education to the segregated numbers of the past. The results of not using race-conscious admission policies have already appeared in the states that eliminated affirmative action. As highlighted in the literature review, the first state to ban affirmative action by a ballot initiative was California, and there was a 35% drop in the enrollment of African Americans at the University of California, Berkley (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008). Additionally, after the state of Texas voted to ban affirmative action, its saw drops in the applications to the University of Texas and Texas A&M from marginalized people. Some presidents have suggested institutions exclude race or expand race to embrace White people who may have also experienced societal disadvantages. Again, this exemplifies the CRT tenet of interest convergence, which is the idea that racial equity is created solely when it benefits the majority White culture (Taylor, 1998).

Furthermore, there was a general absence of struggle with affirmative action, and that may be associated with the presidents’ want and need to prevent various challenges, including legal, societal, and campus-based challenges. This social and political understanding, even conciliation, presidents utilize when they strategize for more racial diversity on college campuses represents the concept of interest convergence.

A conciliatory approach is not novel. Gasman (2016) discussed the concept of the “good Negro,” a term used in the 1960s denoting Black college presidents who strived to achieve positive and approving relationships with the White community. This researcher found Black
college presidents still find it necessary to appease White people, specifically White trustees. This finding reflects the concept Bell (1976) first mentioned in his 1976 *Yale Law Review* journal article, “Serving Two Masters: Integration Ideals and Client Interests in School Desegregation Litigation,” in which he stipulated there was a conflict between attorneys implementing a legal policy with which the Black community did not entirely agree (Crenshaw, 1995). In the current study, the role the presidents have as the primary college administrator can conflict with the relationship the college presidents have between themselves and the college trustees. The trustees’ concerns around affirmative action represent one master, while the presidents’ desires to put more momentum into obtaining a greater level of campus diversity represent another.

The need to satisfy White trustees and White conservative constituents still exists. Several examples of the role of White conservative thinkers in the propagation of negative stereotypes about African Americans and affirmative action exist. Gasman (2016) highlighted Thomas Sowell, who, as a conservative thinker and professor, was someone who wrote negatively about African American college presidents. A recommendation for addressing the complexities of this finding will be discussed in the section on recommendations for practice.

Lastly, the presidents were committed to campus racial diversity not as directed by an affirmative action mandate but as a socially just imperative along with an education in a moral imperative. This may suggest campuses need to evolve into making the goal of campus racial diversity more focused on social justice rather than a legal prescription. Although the original purpose of affirmative action was to address the injustice experienced by African Americans and other marginalized groups of people, perhaps the fundamental understanding of affirmative action needs to be reaffirmed via the social justice perspective continuously. This reaffirmation
could aid in changing the lack of understanding the participants mentioned that society has around affirmative action. This resonates with the eighth tenet in CRT, commitment to social justice.

**Influence of Politics on Affirmative Action**

The presidents understood that just as societal politics influenced the formation of affirmative action in the 1960s, today’s politics continue to affect the policy. This political effect derives from the court system, partisanship, and political think tanks. The most current and prevalent political think tank project is Students for Fair Admissions, Inc., which has joined the Project on Fair Representation (POFR), discussed in Chapter Two: Literature Review.

The majority of presidents expressed they believe there is an influence of politics on affirmative action. Additionally, the presidents were clear not to distinguish between politics and the judicial system. There was more focus on the intersectionality of political affiliations and identity politics. The participants noted political parties are responsible for the erosion of affirmative action, which aligns with past researchers documenting the intentional campaigns and fights against race-conscious affirmative action admissions practices in the political field, which in turn affected affirmative action case law (Hirschman & Berrey, 2017).

Additionally, participants noted President Trump’s agenda reinforces the institutionalized racial structure that favors the dominant culture and increases White privilege. This perspective, when viewed through the lens of CRT, would exemplify the sixth tenet of CRT, Whiteness as property. Bell (1976) noted that White people experience a continuous realization of racial supremacy, and it allows White people to have property rights (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). The current political atmosphere, which is accused of perpetuating White supremacy, further perpetuates the permanence of racism, the first tenet of CRT.
Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to gain knowledge of the experiences of African American college presidents working at PWIs as they make meaning of race-conscious affirmative action policies in higher education. The researcher utilized IPA with a semi structured interview to allow the participants to tell their stories and to gain authentic intellect as it applies to race-conscious affirmative action policies within colleges and universities. Additionally, the researcher in this study employed CRT as an approach to data collection and analysis to assess how the six participants from public and private institutions approach the interpretation and management of race-conscious affirmative action policies, including past, present, and possible future legal standings of race-conscious affirmative action. Additionally, the researcher in this study looked at the intersectionality of the role of the presidents’ race on their perspective of their experiences. In the analysis of the experiences of the presidents through the lens of CRT, this researcher was able to understand the narrative of race-conscious affirmative action from the viewpoint of African American college presidents and consider the strategies for approaching campus racial diversity in the context of affirmative action challenges.

The presidents understood the intersectionality of race-conscious affirmative action admissions policies and historical racial discrimination. The participants acknowledge that racism is still present in society, and as African American presidents, they experienced racism and learned how to operate in the framework of the majority culture. Furthermore, the presidents were able to dissect and balance the multiple areas of oversight (e.g., trustees and courts) and obscurities of campus racial diversity. The participants noted the diversity of college and university trustees might help to increase the racial diversity of college presidents.
As the presidents are processing the various aspects of race-conscious affirmative action, they are still driven to ensure their campuses represent a global environment. The participants viewed this racially diverse environment as the conduit for helping students to be more actively engaged in humanity. To ensure the campuses gain racial diversity, the presidents have been committed to devising innovative and inclusive approaches to achieving campus racial diversity. The next section will highlight recommendations for the scholar-practitioner.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Based on the findings in the current study, the first recommendation is that institutions of higher education make a rigorous effort to address the issues that African American presidents have been facing in reference to negative stereotypes about work performance and leadership expectations. These are samples of microaggressions that continue to exist and reproduce over the decades. Addressing the microaggressions the participants encounter on campus will help to combat the racialized negative experiences. These microaggressions should first be addressed at the trustee level of the institution. To attend to the absence of racial diversity that exists in the role of the president, there needs to be an understanding and embracing of the identity of African American presidents as positive. Simultaneously and reflective of the premise of CRT, which is to emphasize racism and its intersectionality on U.S. policies such as affirmative action, there needs to be an acknowledgment that race, racism, and racial oppression still exists in U.S. society.

As noted previously, the “net quantum” of racism is constant, despite society’s noticeable evolution in specific areas of oppression (Brown, 2003). The permanence of racism is perpetuated by a collective structure that elevates Whiteness over Blackness and other marginalized groups (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Also, Ladson-Billings (1998) noted there had
been an evolution of race from a biogenetic grouping to a racialization of several cultural practices.

Given the researchers who support the persistent existence of racism, it is clear that racism is alive and well, yet the belief in that existence may not be as well established. If institutional trustees and other institutional constituents do not accept the presence of racism, it may be challenging to move forward with the recommendations in this section. Additionally, after analyzing the results of the current study, the researcher suggests an expansion of racial diversity within boards of trustees in higher education. Racial diversity in college and university trusteeship may aid in creating more diverse candidate pools for the role of college president, leading to a more significant presence of racial diversity in this administrative role.

During the course of the study, the presidents also revealed a need for improvement or change in the race-conscious affirmative action admissions processes. The presidents had several suggestions to redesign affirmative action as it is currently known and noted affirmative action is not currently accomplishing its original goals. It should be noted affirmative action can benefit some African Americans as well as other individuals who do not need that particular benefit based on socioeconomic background and family class. Given this perspective, efforts toward creating diversity via other vehicles merit consideration. For example, enrolling students by geographic location could be a practical plan for addressing the desire for more racial diversity.

Furthermore, enrolling students by geographic location resembles another program designed to respond to the elimination of affirmative action in Texas, the Texas Top 10% Plan, which gives the top 10% of high school graduates guaranteed admission to the Texas public colleges. In Texas, 10% of the public high schools have 90% to 100% students of color, which would then help the public colleges obtain some measure of diversity. The Texas Top 10% Plan
has therefore fostered more African American students’ enrollment into Texas’s public colleges and universities (Maramba et al., 2015). Looking at the geographic location could be a workable option given that much of the country is racially segregated. It should be noted the segregation between White people and other racial groups (e.g., African American, Latino, and Asian people) is a major element in the struggle to have more integrated communities and to further include nonmajority group members in social, political, and economic society (Timberlake & Iceland, 2007).

Additionally, enrolling students based on their socioeconomics is another option for obtaining racial diversity because socioeconomics has an association with geographic neighborhoods and race. If race and income are associated, it can lead to extreme racial segregation (Bruch & Mare, 2006). Finally, considering the variety of enrollment foci—geographic locations, socioeconomic statuses, and generational statuses—institutions can utilize in the absence of affirmative action or in combination with affirmative action provides a look at capturing marginalized groups. Furthermore, individuals might qualify for all three categories because the intersectionality of identities can help achieve racial diversity on campus.

In the current study, the presidents clearly saw the future of race-conscious affirmative action as uncertain, yet they were all sincerely committed to campus racial diversity for the benefit of the campus community. The presidents presented the field of higher education with their view of affirmative action’s future, and the presidents are poised to be able to address the matters of affirmative action based on their thorough understanding of higher education administration and the complexities of race and racism. At the beginning of this study, the researcher assumed that, as African American presidents, they would be fighting to keep
affirmative action; therefore, it was not expected the presidents would be open to expanding affirmative action to include a segment of the White population.

It is a critical time for the field of higher education to come together and collaborate on how campuses can be more racially diverse absent affirmative action. Additionally, institutions of higher education should look at this opportunity as a blank canvas. Although there have been legal challenges to affirmative action, there are no categorical federal orders directing institutions of higher education on affirmative action (Arcidiacono et al., 2015). Given this fact, this is the opportunity for institutions of higher education to design and propose procedures that would create racial diversity.

This researcher recommends a macro and micro approach. First, from a macro perspective, the presidents can come together to examine closely some of the previously mentioned concepts that explore ideas on how to obtain students that represent a more diverse background, such as recruitment and enrollment based on geographic location, generational access, and socioeconomic income. Additionally, the researcher suggests recruitment and enrollment of two groups not previously mentioned by the presidents, yet traditionally disenfranchised and racially skewed toward people of color: individuals who are currently or have previously been incarcerated and those who are homeless. Incarceration levels for people of color are higher than their White counterparts (Warner, 2015); therefore, focusing recruitment and enrollment on incarceration status could result in higher levels of racial diversity. Furthermore, incarceration is a pipeline to homelessness (Schneider & Turney, 2015). Having a criminal record is an obstacle to finding housing, and people of color have higher levels of incarceration, enlarging the issue (Schneider & Turney, 2015).
On a micro level, the presidents need to affirm their individual, moral imperative as it relates to campus racial diversity and assess the racial diversity values of their institution. Once the moral imperative and values are clear, there needs to be ongoing reaffirmation with the board of trustees of the racial diversity values and a clear strategic plan outlining the actions to recruit, enroll, and retain students to achieve campus racial diversity in all areas. This must be an institutionalized process that is replicated at every level of the institution, and all departments must take aggressive steps to meet the strategic plan to recruit, enroll, and retain racially diverse students. Presidents have the opportunity to chart an innovative course of action for affirmative action or the absence of affirmative action. Unlike the legal system, institutions of higher education have the knowledge required to apply best practices to issues that arise in the field.

Moreover, an innovative course of action could include an educational component as a method of addressing the lack of knowledge and distorted perception the presidents believe society has regarding affirmative action. For example, it is vital to address the current social and political climate around racial diversity and equity. Similar to the commitment between conservative think tanks and legal battles against affirmative action that generated a public campaign against affirmative action, reviewed in chapter two, a marriage between liberal think tanks and liberal public policy organizations could produce a society-wide campaign to help society understand the benefits of campus racial diversity and how race and specifically racism continues to play a significant role in access and equity to higher education. Additionally, the need for campus racial diversity should be intertwined throughout the curriculum of each institution, beginning with new student orientation programs, continuing with first-year experience courses, and ending with class projects that act as think tanks for innovative ideas that
will help students understand the moral imperative and the educational benefit of affirmative action.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Given that there is a dearth of researchers who have examined this same topic, future studies would add to the body of research on the experiences of African American college presidents with race-conscious affirmative action admissions policies. Future researchers focusing on a comprehensive study of the various strategic suggestions that the presidents have made about preparing for the elimination of affirmative action would be an excellent resource for scholar-practitioners. Additionally, as mentioned in this study, legal decisions regarding race-conscious affirmative action have sometimes created ambiguity. Given that the federal government has neglected to provide categorical orders instructing colleges and universities managing affirmative action, there is a unique opportunity for institutions of higher education to collaborate and explore best practices for race-conscious affirmative action or acquiring and sustaining campus racial diversity.

The social construct tenet in CRT addresses society’s design of the concept of race and racial groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In the social construct tenet, society is at the center of race and race is often affiliated with a variety of subjects. Therefore, future researchers could look at the influence of the current political climate on the social policy of affirmative action and racism. Future research focusing on political climate would have an added complexity because the political climate is often fluctuating. As the most recent challenge to race-conscious affirmative action, *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President & Fellows of Harvard College* (2015), makes its way through the court system, researchers could look at how the changes in the Supreme Court justices may influence that case.
Additionally, African American college presidents are often excluded in research studies (Holmes, 2004); therefore, any researchers who focus on African American college presidents from a variety of perspectives will add to the body of literature. Furthermore, the presidents need to develop the social intellect to successfully move through the majority White culture and yet continue to maintain the connection to their Black culture. Therefore, looking further into the subject matter of code-switching is another area for future researchers to persist in this work, as code-switching may be a vehicle to help gain additional information regarding the role of being an African American college president.

Lastly, there are still several aspects to explore in light of the unique experiences African Americans are constantly processing. Future researchers could look at the impact, if any, that the experiences of African American college presidents have on their day-to-day mental and emotional condition. James Baldwin said, “To be Black in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time.” As research studies continue to include African American intellects in more studies, African Americans will gain more of a presence and establish a voice in the field of education. One of the most pressing tenets from CRT that applies to this study is storytelling, which suggests African Americans have persistent connections to the experiences of racism, which gives African Americans a knowledge that European Americans do not hold. The experience of being an African American comes with an aptitude in communicating about race and racism in this country (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT accepts the voice and intimate experience of African Americans as irrefutably significant in the understanding of how marginalized individuals experience higher education in a majority White context (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).
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**Johnson, 2017**


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