HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF
THEIR ROLE IN THE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OF THEIR INSTITUTIONS AND STUDENTS

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DEDICATION

For my children Charity, Charles, Cherith and Chandlor Scott

and

my parents Mary Ann and Thomas Smith
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people contributed to this dissertation: my dissertation committee, the presidents of Dillard University, Fayetteville State University, Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, Howard University, Morgan State University, and Paul Quinn College as well as family and friends who supported me through the journey. I am grateful to Charity, my eldest daughter, for the editorial gift God gave her and which she so graciously shared with me to improve my dissertation writing. Matt Hartley, who through his patient but persistent prodding to follow the narrative of my data, guided me through the telling of an important untold story of HBCU presidents' perceptions of their institutions' civic work with their communities. Marybeth Gasman, who was absolutely invaluable to me gaining access to the presidents whose stories I, and she, felt needed to be told. Colette Pierce-Burnett, who gave me insider perspective that enhanced my qualitative researcher skills and better prepared me to fully appreciate the stories of faculty, staff and students who extended themselves to make me feel not only welcomed on their campuses but better informed about them.

The process to complete a doctorate in two years is very challenging. To do it after being out of school nearly three decades seemed almost impossible. The unwavering support of my cousin, Robin Dunlap, my friend, Eugene Sanders, and my mentor, Susan Mosley-Howard made this mid-life endeavor doable. Thank you all for believing enough in me to not just join me on this journey but to pave the way when I could not.

Charity, Charles, Cherith and Chandlor Scott, my children, are my life. Over the past two years, I haven’t been as available to you as you or I have been accustomed. Please know that, despite my preoccupation, it was your pride in my undertaking this endeavor that propelled me forward when I didn’t want to take another step. This is my example to you, following the examples of Nommy and Granddaddy, that you can accomplish all your dreams.
ABSTRACT

HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE IN THE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OF THEIR INSTITUTIONS AND STUDENTS

Monica Paulette Smith
J. Matthew Hartley

The purpose of this study was to investigate Historically Black College and University (HBCU) presidents' perceptions of their role in preserving and promoting civic engagement at their institutions. HBCU presidents from six institutions with exemplary civic engagement initiatives responded to semi-structured interview questions. These questions were centered on identifying key factors and variables associated with how their institutions categorize civic engagement, and the degree to which civic engagement is integrated with their missions. A review of research confirmed a dearth of empirical studies about the leadership attributes of HBCU presidents and the extremely limited research on HBCU civic engagement. Because the phenomenon of HBCU civic engagement can be defined with complexity and contextualization, the study utilized a qualitative research design with two central research questions guiding data collection and analysis. The study examined the role HBCU presidents provide in the preservation and promotion of their HBCU's civic engagement mission. It also examined their perception of the value and impact civic engagement has on the overall success of students at these institutions. Coding analysis yielded three leadership strategies that HBCU presidents implement: presidential community presence; leveraged presidential influence; and community messaging congruence. The result of these three leadership strategies is a distinctive HBCU institutional responsiveness to Black communities. New terminology, liberation engagement, and a theoretical paradigm are offered to explain the unique civic engagement of HBCUs based upon presidents' perspectives.

Keywords: HBCU, presidential leadership, civic engagement, HBCU students, HBCU community engagement, liberation engagement
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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

When Black people were finally acknowledged as United States citizens, after centuries of legalized non-personhood through slavery, institutions dedicated to their educational and social development were necessary as White institutions remained inaccessible. In the span of American history, there has been one institutional phenomenon devoted to the education, social and economic viability of America’s most disenfranchised group. This institutional phenomenon is Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

HBCUs have been the epicenter of Black hope and aspiration since their humble beginnings in the 18th century. The American ethos, which holds up educational attainment and personal achievement above birthright, has not always been applicable to Black people despite aspirations and pursuits. In fact, Black skin has often been the determining factor for what those wrapped in its covering could achieve. This single determining factor has influenced this racial group’s education, employment, residence, and practically every other sociocultural and socioeconomic aspect of existence. Black people’s lack of education, historically dictated and legislated, became the rationale for perpetual subjugation, ultimately justifying the great societal divide (Kozol, 2005).

Establishment of HBCUs was an effort to bridge the social and economic divide. Some of these schools, founded by Whites for the purpose of appeasing Blacks and reducing the likelihood of them attending Historically White Colleges and Universities (HWCUs), were more about protecting a way of life for Whites than elevating life for Blacks (Allen & Jewel, 2002). But, for Black people, establishing their own schools and matriculating at a HBCU was about far more than just the acquisition of knowledge; it was the acknowledgement of their personhood, an awareness of a community that deserved all the benefits of full citizenship. As W.E.B. Du Bois encouraged Black people to aspire to be learned individuals he said, “Education will set this tangle straight” (1903/1997, p. 76).

HBCUs have played a critical role in setting the tangle straight through education, engagement, and attainment. The establishment and advancement of Black personhood, pride
and community value is rooted in HBCUs, their continued operation from slavery and Jim Crow to current marginalization. Durkheim and Giddens (1972) noted, “Education is simply the means by which a society prepares, in its children, the essential conditions of its own existence” (p. 203). Allen, Jewell, Griffin, and Wolf (2007) reflected on Durkheim and Giddens stating, “Education is culturally specific, being rooted in and reflecting the conditions, worldview and purposes of its parent society” (p. 263). By providing educational access to the disenfranchised, whether through open and vocational certification or selective and liberal arts curricula, and inculcating an ethic of collective uplift as moral obligation, HBCUs develop Black citizens and leaders who positively influence Black society, America, and the world.

While HBCUs have a multi-faceted approach to providing education, a singular mission may distinguish them from other institutions (Jones, 1993; Kennard, 1995). That singular mission is an understood obligation or social contract for HBCU students and graduates to be civically engaged in order to advance the economic, educational, political and social uplift of Black people throughout the diaspora. To share their knowledge with those not afforded the opportunity of higher education in ways that will improve their lives and their community is an expectation—one not commonly referred to in the HBCU community as civic engagement.

There is no singularly agreed upon definition of civic engagement (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). Deep divides relative to civic engagement’s merits and strategies have persisted over decades of research. Jacoby (2009) said it best when alluding to the diversity of civic engagement theory and practice: “There are probably as many definitions of civic engagement as there are scholars and practitioners who are concerned with it” (p.7). However, the differences in civic engagement definitions seems justifiable given that civic engagement seeks to respond to what constitutes good citizenship and a good society, about which there are myriad opinions. Thomas Ehrlich (2000), another leader of the field, defined civic engagement as “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and nonpolitical processes” (p. vi). Prentice (2007) argued that the definition of civic engagement should be expanded to non-political actions with the community
providing a segue to the encompassing description offered by Cress, Burack, Giles, Elkins, and Stevens (2010) which most institutions use:

Campuses have used a variety of terms to describe their civic engagement activities and the ways these activities link to learning. Some of the most widely used are service-learning, community engagement, community-based research, civic education, community experiences, community-based learning, democratic practice, and philanthropy education, not to mention a variety of co-curricular offerings for students. Regardless of the term used, if part of the purpose of the activity is to educate or enhance students’ understanding of civic life, the work generally can be referred to as civic engagement. (p.4).

My study has been informed by all of these definitions. The literature I examined as well as my own practice in this field influenced how I conceptualized the study and how I define civic engagement. For the purpose of this study, civic engagement herein is defined as the process of linking the pursuit of education to the pursuit of equity and social justice. HBCUs had no other option, as a result of the circumstances under which they were established, then to practice this definition of civic engagement in order to facilitate the physical as well as the intellectual freedom of their students and their communities.

Today, because of a perception by some that HBCUs have abdicated their community leadership role, they are questioned as to their current viability and necessity. This study, through the prism of HBCU presidential leadership, silences that critique. The role HBCUs have played and continue to play in their communities speak volumes to their unique and essential leadership role in their communities.

While unique in many ways, HBCUs are similar to other higher education institutions in that they are reflections of their senior leadership, most particularly their presidents. The key role a president plays in guiding the institution necessitates an understanding of their perceptions relative to civic engagement. Amid threats of closures, consolidations and other crises, understanding the value presidents place on civic engagement, a historic cornerstone of HBCU survival, is important. Although all aspects of the role of the Black college president need to be explored further (M. Gasman, personal communication, April 2, 2016), this study specifically focuses on their perceptions of civic engagement.
Purpose of the Study

The civic engagement of HBCUs was an ideal inspired, in part, by history of Black people in America. While this ideal has not always been fully realized by every HBCU throughout time, exemplary HBCUs exist. The primary purpose of this study was to explore how presidents at exemplary HBCUs understand the civic responsibilities of their institutions and the role they play in the preservation and promotion of civic engagement at their institutions.

A byproduct of understanding leadership perspectives is also coming to a better appreciation of the nature of civic engagement at HBCUs. There has been significant research on the civic engagement of HWCU, but that is not the case for HBCUs. Given the limited amount of research coupled with recent challenges to the continued necessity for HBCUs, it is important to provide relevant research that may contribute to policy decisions that have the potential to impact HBCUs at this critical time in their evolution. Specifically, this study was designed to provide rich data on HBCU presidents' perceptions about the context and influence civic engagement has on the overall missions of these schools.

Research Questions. The two primary research questions that guided this study were:

1) What is the leadership role a president has in the preservation and promotion of their HBCU's civic engagement mission?

2) What is the president's perception of civic engagement's value and impact on the overall success of students at their HBCU?

To gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions HBCU presidents have relative to civic engagement this study was a qualitative exploration of the language and processes HBCU leadership uses, their communication with key stakeholders, their work with communities, and the civic development of their students. Presidents were selected to participate in the study based upon meeting the following criteria: leading civicly engaged campuses; engaging in national issues pertinent but not exclusive to HBCUs; using data to inform decision-making; and being innovative and student-focused.
Significance of the Study

The president, as the Chief Executive Officer of the university, and with support from the Board of Trustees and faculty, is responsible for achieving the institution’s mission and goals. While HBCU presidents are confronted with organizational and operational challenges, similar to their counterparts at HWCU, there are perennial structural and societal issues that define the Black presidents’ leadership role in dramatically different ways (Gasman, 2011; Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, & Bowman, 2010; Robbins, 1996). It is abundantly clear that academic, financial, and governance issues affect all of higher education’s infrastructure and the ability to meet or exceed organizational goals. However, HBCU presidents have an additional responsibility to continue their institutional identity significance, within higher education and American history, further contextualized by their legacy of civic engagement (Brown, 2010; Esters & Strayhorn, 2013). This identity is often reflected in the HBCU commitment to service and community, referred to in the scholarly literature as civic engagement. What is not clear from the civic engagement literature is if, and how, the HBCU presidents’ perspective influences the institutions’ civic engagement methods and motivations toward community interactions, and if those differ from methods and motivations of HWCU.

To grasp the complexities of the HBCU presidency, it is necessary to examine the history of Black higher education institutions. The social context out of which these schools were created, correlated to the role civic engagement played in their development and its impact on their current viability, provides important background information for understanding the unique responsibilities of HBCU leaders (Boyce, 2014). Given that early Black college presidents were ministers, their focus was, understandably, on teaching Black people to love their God and their Blackness (Cone, 2004). Therefore, fully comprehending the nuances of their collective mission toward Black uplift (Roebuck, 1993; Whiting, 1991) may only be achieved by highlighting the relatively obscure story of HBCUs’ civic engagement. Properly spotlighting these institutions, within the history of higher education’s public purposes, can provide context for appreciating the challenges and opportunities faced by those that established them and those that lead them today.
Study Participants

The following list shows the six institutions and presidents interviewed for this study:

- Walter M. Kimbrough, President, Dillard University New Orleans, LA
- James A. Anderson, Chancellor, Fayetteville State University Fayetteville, NC
- Elmira Mangum, President, Florida Agriculture & Manufacturing University Tallahassee, FL
- Wayne A.I Frederick, President, Howard University in Washington, D.C.
- David Wilson, President, Morgan State University Baltimore, Maryland
- Michael J. Sorrell, President, Paul Quinn College Dallas, TX

Every president spoke to unique aspects of their civic engagement leadership and related institutional history. Their perspectives, individually and collectively, add to the literature of civic engagement by providing insight on how HBCUs developed in partnership with the communities in which they reside, how their civic engagement is similar and different from that at HWCUs, and how cooperatively working with the Black community toward civic and social liberation ensures the survival of both.

Three public and three private HBCU presidents were identified for participation in this study based on their leadership role and their institution’s contribution to legacy and current civic engagement practices. In addition to their strong commitment to civic engagement, the presidents are also “innovative, engaged in national issues, dedicated to using data to make decisions, and are student focus leaders” (M. Gasman, personal communication, March 5, 2016).

Dillard University is a picturesque campus buttressing the infamous 9th ward of the historic Gentilly neighborhood of New Orleans, Louisiana. White painted buildings and mature oak, palm, magnolia, and crepe myrtle trees pepper the 55-acre well-kempt campus, bearing no vestiges of Hurricane Katrina. The black rod-iron gates with painted white brick columns project an air of stateliness rather than aloofness. Most of this private HBCU’s approximately 1200 students are native to Louisiana and not affiliated with the United Methodist Church or the United Church of Christ which founded the school in 1930. Bernard & Clytus (2000) provide a detailed account of Dillard’s history. Dillard’s ancestor institutions (1869-1930) were Straight University,
founded by American Missionary Association of the Congregational Church, and Union Normal School founded by the Freedman's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Both institutions were established for the purpose of educating newly freed Black Americans from New Orleans and the surrounding region. Separately, the institutions have impressive histories but local Black and White leaders wanted a more formidable Black higher education institution dedicated to traditional liberal arts rather than vocational training within New Orleans which led to Dillard being chartered on June 6, 1930.

From its founding, Dillard emphasized "a close engagement with the Black community through various education extension programs, societies, and clubs" (Bernard & Clytus, 2000, p. 11). For nearly one hundred years, Dillard University has been a social justice catalyst in the Gentilly community. From providing cultural programming and educational lectures, to leading public demonstrations and hosting community meetings. From the 1950s’ agenda of segregation to 21st century forums on police brutality, Dillard has remained an active partner in educating and elevating the Black community.

Walter Kimbrough became Dillard University’s seventh president in 2012. He is a native of Atlanta, Georgia and attended Benjamin E. Mays High School, named in honor of Mays, who served as president of Morehouse College. President Kimbrough says that his attendance at Mays High School highly influenced his decision to not only become a HBCU president but continues to guide the kind of president he strives to be each day. Dillard University is Kimbrough’s second HBCU presidency. He served as the 12th president of Philander Smith in Little Rock, Arkansas for seven-and-a-half years prior to taking the helm at Dillard. He holds degrees from the University of Georgia, Miami University in Ohio, and a doctorate in higher education from Georgia State University. Before becoming an HBCU president, Kimbrough had a successful career in Student Affairs at several prominent HWCUs. The “Hip Hop Prez”, as his students and many social media followers affectionately refer to him, defines his civic engagement leadership as activism. As he responded in this study’s survey, President Kimbrough believes activism means “dealing with real issues of our community.” His proclivity for activism is reflected in Dillard’s civic engagement.
Fayetteville State University (FSU) founders embodied the school’s motto, “Deeds not Words” which has guided the institution for almost 150 years. Literally, the result of Fayetteville’s Black community’s unwavering commitment to education, the Howard School was established in 1867, on land donated by seven Black men who together paid $136 for two lots on Gillespie Street and formed from among themselves the school’s first Board of Trustees (Fayetteville State University, n.d.). Amid economic depression, Black people in Fayetteville kept giving money from their meager earnings to provide for the education of young Blacks from that community. A decade later, an act of North Carolina legislature established the first teacher training institute for Blacks in the State and, because of the Howard School’s outstanding reputation, selected it for the designation. Howard became the first state-sponsored institution for the education of Black teachers in the South, and changed its name to the State Colored Normal School. In 1939, the institution was renamed to Fayetteville State Teachers College and remained so until a revision to its charter led to the expansion of its curricular offerings and, ultimately, another name change to Fayetteville State University in 1969.

Today, the midsize campus it comprised of mostly new structures, 75% to be exact (https://www.uncfsu.edu/documents/facilities.../FayettevilleStateUniversityMP). It lines Murchison Road which connects the University to downtown Fayetteville and Fort Bragg Army Base. An impressive library, student center and student housing buildings give the campus a contemporary look and feel. Adjacent to the modern 200-acre campus, is a shopping complex which houses, among retail shops and academic support services offices, the only “Office of Civic Engagement and Service Learning” in the HBCU network. The presence of this office, physically situated between the campus and its neighborhood, bespeaks Fayetteville States’ long and committed connection to and development of its surrounding community. It’s current Chancellor, James Anderson, is shepherding the current civic-focused economic development of Fayetteville State.

James E. Anderson is Chancellor and Professor of Psychology at Fayetteville State University. In his eighth year at the helm of North Carolina’s second-oldest public institution, Anderson is guiding FSU’s evolution “From a Proud Legacy to a Twenty-First World-Class University of Choice” (https://fsunews.uncfsu.edu/2015/08/25/fayetteville-state-university-
chancellor-to-deliver-fall-convocation-address/) leading significant campus building and fund development initiatives. He overcame his difficult upbringing in Washington, D.C. to attend Villanova University, later earning a doctoral degree from Cornell. He has held faculty positions at selective HWCUs before serving as Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs at North Carolina State University for 11 years. After successfully serving in several high-ranking administrative positions, he began as the Chancellor of FSU on June 9, 2008. Anderson uses the language of service learning and civic engagement and his students receive academic credit for course-related service. Yet, in his response to the interview questions, he describes his institution’s civic engagement as the “inherent desperate need to assist [our] communities.” He continues by distinguishing HBCU civic engagement from traditional White institutions, by explaining, “while they see the need, their structural integrity is rooted in things that are unrelated.”

**Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU)** is the quintessential HBCU campus, perched on the highest of seven hills in Tallahassee, Florida. Entering through the main entrance at the hill’s base, one can begin to hear the sounds of students on an open-air mic in the center of campus, fondly referred to as the “quad.” The voices, the music, the beats are just as ambient as the antebellum buildings clustered along Martin Luther King Boulevard which runs straight through the campus. Fourteen such buildings, designated as the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College Historic District, are listed in the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. Visitors to the 420-acre hilltop campus are reminded at every turn of this institution’s humble yet proud beginnings in 1887, when the Florida Constitution prohibited the racial integration of schools. Back then, the only public land-grant college in Florida was named the State Normal College for Colored Students. Four years later, when it received $7500 under the second Morrill Act, its name was changed to the State Normal and Industrial College for Colored Students.

Amid the rich history of FAMU’s campus, sits the starkest reminder of days gone by. The Meek Eaton Black Archives Research Center and Museum, one of only ten such archives in the U.S., was founded in 1976 and built within the original frame of the historic Carnegie Library, the only one located on a historically Black college campus. The Center and Museum is a “vast repository of archival records, museum regalia, and academic holdings about the civic, political,
religious and social groups, as well as public and private businesses throughout Florida and the nation,” boasting more than half a million archival records and more than 5000 museum artifacts (Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, n.d.). The impressive museum holdings are matched by FAMU’s civic legacy. From constructing what was the only hospital within 150 miles until 1971, to starting a school of pharmacy and nursing program in order to give students real world experience while providing for the needs of their community, FAMU has distinguished itself as an engaged HBCU. Under FAMU’s immediate past leader, Elmira Mangum, the campus continued to be a major force working with its community to achieve social and economic equality.

President Elmira Mangum was the first woman to permanently lead Florida Agricultural and Manufacturing University in its 128-year history. As FAMU’s 11th president, taking office on April 1, 2014, she entered under the shroud of negative public scrutiny following a tragic student death. Born in Durham, North Carolina, Mangum received her bachelor’s degree from North Carolina Central University and two master’s degrees from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She earned her Ph.D. in educational leadership and policy from the University of Buffalo. Prior to taking over at FAMU, President Mangum was an associate provost at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for nine years and spent four years as the vice president for budget and planning at Cornell University. She describes her leadership of civic engagement as “advocacy through education, exposure and experience.” Mangum clarified her definition by explaining the exchange that occurs between her HBCU campus and its community, saying, “It exposes our community to us, and it transfers what our students are learning, and they, the community, learns too. We all learn together.”

Howard University, fondly referred to as “the Mecca” that sits on a hilltop in the northwest section of our nation’s capital. The only HBCU ranked in the top 75 of Bloomberg Businessweek college rankings, Howard’s physical presence measures up to its reputational significance. As a doctoral classified, high research university, Howard is the most comprehensive HBCU in the United States, reportedly producing more terminal degree recipients than any other university in the country. Howard’s reputation for conferring terminal degrees is a
far cry from its diffident beginnings as a school envisioned by the First Congregational Society of
Washington to train Black clergy.

Founded as nonsectarian and coeducational in 1867, Howard had expanded to a fully-
fledged university consisting of a College of Liberal Arts and a College of Medicine in the span of
just two years. The Freedmen’s Hospital and Asylum, the first of its kind to provide medical care
to former slaves, was transferred to Howard in 1967. It served D.C.’s Black community for more
than 150 years until 1975 when a new facility was constructed on the former site of Griffith
Stadium, home of the Washington Redskins. Now Howard University Hospital, the only teaching
hospital on an HBCU campus, remains an epitomic example of the school’s motto, “Truth and
Service.” Manifestations of that motto are woven throughout the pivotal role Howard University
played, particularly, in the Civil Rights Movement. Although many HBCUs take credit for birthing
the student sit-in movement, according to President Fredrick, it was Howard students that
pioneered the ‘stool-sitting’ technique. Historians disagree with him. Howard educated many
notable academic-activist leaders of the movement. Kwame Toure, a philosophy student at
Howard, coined the term “Black Power” and was a lifelong voting and civil rights activist.

Thurgood Marshall, known for his courtroom success in Brown v. Board of Education, and as the
first Black Supreme Court justice, graduated from Howard’s School of Law. Vernon Jordan,
Andrew Young, Douglas Wilder, Patricia Roberts Harris, and countless others public servants
were educated at Howard (Howard University, n.d.). A tradition of public service continues today,
under the leadership of President Wayne A. I. Frederick, with many of Howard’s more than
10,000 students actively engaging in their neighborhood’s public schools, social service and
cultural organizations.

President Frederick is a triple alumnus of Howard University, having enrolled as a
freshman at 16 years of age. A distinguished researcher and surgeon, Frederick returned to
Howard to serve as its Provost and Chief Academic Officer in 2012, and stepped in as interim
president before being appointed as the university’s 17th president in July 2014. President
Frederick’s views on civic engagement are distinctive; he connects service with the pursuit of
truth. Howard students are encouraged to seek “the truth” as referenced in the school’s motto.
through their community work. As President Frederick stated, “Howard’s civic engagement is
organic…the students, faculty and staff start it, based upon their pursuit of truth, and my role is to
remove any barriers.”

**Morgan State University**, like Howard, is preparing to celebrate 150 years of providing
excellence in education, but Morgan State’s road to that commemorative celebration has been
more tumultuous than that of its neighboring HBCU to the south. Originally founded as a
Methodist Episcopal Seminary, and later named the Male Free School and Colored Institute, the
college expanded its mission to educate Black women and men to be teachers. With growing
enrollments, the school was given money from Andrew Carnegie to facilitate a move to its current
location in northeast Baltimore. Despite the legal attempts of White residents from nearby
Lauraville to have the sale of the land to the college rescinded, Morgan prevailed and a year later
erected Carnegie Hall as the 143-acre campus’ first building. In 1939, the state of Maryland
bought the private college in an effort to provide more opportunities to the state’s black citizens
and re-named it Morgan State College. Less than a decade later, more than 150 of the college’s
students picketed, sat-in and were arrested for their civil rights activism, desegregating Read’s
Drug Stores in 1955, Arundel Ice Cream Company in 1959, the Rooftop Restaurant in 1960 and
Northwood Theater in 1963 (Morgan State University, n.d.).

The 21st century urban campus has undergone a major physical renaissance in the last
decade, with the addition of nine new state-of-the-art buildings. A walking bridge connects the
original central grassy and herringbone-pattern brick quad on the north side of busy Cold Spring
Lane to the south side of campus which now prominently showcases two of Morgan State’s most
architecturally and esthetically pleasing buildings. A 222,000 square feet library and a high-tech
university student center—complete with a theater and a civil rights exhibition—anchors what
Morgan calls its “student life neighborhood” (Sasaki, n.d.). As Morgan approaches its
sesquicentennial, its current president, David Wilson, ensures that the campus remains
committed and connected to its community.

President David Wilson became the 12th president of Morgan State University on July 1,
2010, after serving as chancellor of both University of Wisconsin Colleges and University of
Wisconsin–Extension. The son of a sharecropper, he learned early how to overcome adversity. He was the first in his family to attend college and he holds four degrees: a B.S. in political science and a M.S. in education from Tuskegee University; an Ed.M. in educational planning and administration and an Ed.D. in administration, planning and social policy from Harvard University. Wilson was appointed by President Barack Obama to the White House Board of Advisors on Historically Black Colleges and Universities in 2010. President Wilson describes his civic engagement leadership as, “outreach with the university serving as a community anchor to bring about transformation.” His leadership perspective about the work of civic engagement, as he admits, has been heavily influenced by his many years serving in senior positions where he was responsible for outreach and engagement.

Paul Quinn College is part of the Highland Hills neighborhood of Dallas, Texas. Its rod-iron fence, softened by the mature shrubs peaking the through each black vertical rod, is the first indication that something is distinctive on the north side of Simpson Stuart Road. The 147-acre campus, just beyond the railroad tracks, feels more rural than the nine miles from Dallas would suggest. Rising up from vast openness, created by the demolition of 15 abandoned campus buildings, are a thoroughfare of flowering trees and rose bushes lined down the center of the campus complimented by neatly manicured grounds everywhere the eye can see. The soccer field, adjacent to the freshly painted basketball courts, sits in front of what has become Paul Quinn’s claim to civic engagement fame, the WE Over Me Farm. The football field repurposed into an organic farm that shares its yield with the college’s community neighbors, still brandishes its scoreboard and goal posts, indicative of the campus reinvention and return to community that has taken place at Paul Quinn College over the past decade.

One of only eighteen remaining HBCUs started by and still affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, Paul Quinn was founded in 1872, in Austin, Texas, as the Connectional High School and Institute. After five years, the college was moved and renamed to reflect its then new home in Waco, Texas. Waco College, patterning itself after the Tuskegee Institute, refocused its curriculum to skills-based training (Paul Quinn College, n.d.) Rapid expansion of the campus and its curriculum, led by Bishop William Paul Quinn, was made
possible by financial support from A.M.E Church members. In May 1881, the college’s name was again changed to commemorate Bishop Quinn’s significant contributions to the school. The college moved to its current location just 16 years ago, acquiring the former campus of Bishop College. Over the past decade, Paul Quinn has emerged as a burgeoning work college, being the first of its kind located in an urban setting. Under the leadership of President Michael Sorrell, the campus’ setting continues to provide curricular and co-curricular learning and living opportunities for Paul Quinn’s students and community members to work cooperatively on social actions that are needed to improve and sustain the quality of life in their shared neighborhood.

President Michael Sorrell assumed leadership at Paul Quinn College in 2007, after unsuccessfully attempting to get the job six years earlier. Instead of the presidency, he was appointed to the Board of Trustees and kept his day job practicing law in Dallas and pursuing the purchase of an NBA team. After several presidents left Paul Quinn in as many years, Sorrell’s dream of owning a professional basketball team was replaced by his desire to lead the college. He became the school’s 34th President. In Sorrell’s nine-year tenure, Paul Quinn has gone from the brink of closure, to the threshold of one of America’s most innovative schools. Using a New Urban College model, President Sorrell has transformed the struggling school into an anchor institution that addresses the practical issues of its community. His Jesuit educational background is reflected in his civic engagement leadership perspective. According to President Sorrell, “Everything is seen through the prism of making a difference in the lives of others.”

Summary

The six presidents in this study provide perspectives on HBCU civic engagement that have been, largely, untold. Their collective story of shared struggles and forged cooperation for the mutual improvement of the campus and community extend beyond current definitions, including the one offered herein, of civic engagement and traditional descriptors of campus-community interactions. The dissertation provides a review of relevant literature synthesizing the historical and contemporary factors associated with HBCUs’ civic engagement, an explanation of the study design and implementation, an analysis of the results, and conclusions and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review concerns the rise of HBCUs, their historical and current civic engagement practices in contrast to those of HWCUs, and the complexities faced by their presidents as a result. The literature evinces a dearth of empirical studies on HBCUs’ civic engagement and presidential perspectives, this despite there being a plethora of literature examining the civic engagement of HWCUs.

To understand HBCUs as an institutional type, it is critical to examine their origins and historical impact. Because HBCUs were founded for, and in many cases by, a people that endured slavery and legislated oppression, resulting in a caste system designed to maintain them as lower class citizens, the HBCU mission is, understandably, toward the uplift and liberation of Black people. Through teaching, research and community actions of uplift, in spite of their origins, HBCUs have improved the lives of Black people, America and the world.

Despite their immense positive impact, HBCUs have structural and perennial organizational challenges that have been documented in the literature. In fact, it would appear that the literature associated with the problems of HBCUs have dominated the limited research, and may even cause some perceptual negative attitudes about these schools. Therefore, this literature review has summarized these challenges. Challenges of fund development, governance, enrollment management as related to retention and recruitment of students, and working with state and federal policies are addressed, specifically, as they impact the broader focus of this dissertation. These challenges are certainly important context for examining HBCUs’ civic engagement—how they interact with, support, and uplift the Black community.

The Rise of Historically Black Colleges and Universities

At a dark time in America’s history, millions of Africans were brought to this country as slaves, having been torn away from their familial, cultural and social systems. They were forbidden to learn to read and write the language of their oppressors, their minds shackled with the invisible chains of ignorance as if in orchestrated solidarity to their fettered Black bodies (Franklin, 1947; Lawyer, 1854; Smylie; 1837; The Independent, 1854; Williams, 2005). During those years, their one permissible outlet for enlightenment was religion. Assembling to worship
developed into an American institution, commonly referred to as the Black church. The Black church became the center of the Black community and it was through this spiritual coalition of believers that Blacks first pursued self-directed social, economic, political, and educational equality (Pattillo-McCoy, 1998).

The African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, established in 1787, out of social rather than theological protest, was the first denomination in America founded by freed Black people (Angell & Pinn, 2000; Wright & Hawkins, 1916). The A.M.E. Church also was first to establish a college to educate Blacks. Based in the leadership of its founder, Richard Allen, “this church understood the manner in which religion must address the spiritual, social and educational liberation promoted by the Gospel message” (Angell & Pinn (2000), p. xiii). In 1843, pursuing the spiritual and social liberation of people of African ancestry, visionary leaders of the A.M.E. Church established Union Seminary in Columbus, Ohio for the purpose of training clergy. After the Civil War ended, the A.M.E. Church purchased Wilberforce University from White Methodist who had founded the school for purposes of educating free Blacks (Wright & Hawkins, 1916). The A.M.E. clergy leaders merged Wilberforce with Union and it was chartered in 1865, making it the first American university owned and operated by Black people “for the purpose of Christian education” (Greene, Jr., 1960, p. 320).

By 1889, the A.M.E. Church founded twelve more colleges, nearly 20 percent of all HBCUs at the time, in almost every southern state: Paul Quinn (TX), Allen (S.C.), Morris Brown (GA), Edward Waters (FL), Payne (AL), Campbell (MS), Lampton (LA), Shorter (AK), Turner (TN), Kittrell (N.C.), Western (KS) and Wayman (KY) (Wright, Jr., & Hawkins, 1916). The astonishing proliferation of A.M.E. Church-owned and operated Black colleges established it as significant but unacknowledged contributor to Black higher education.

The A.M.E Church’s historical commitment to advance social liberation and civic responsibility in the Black community positioned it to legitimately lead in the development of educational institutions. A clear emphasis of this work was dedicated to Christian education and training for leaders interested in ministry but there was also a commitment toward secondary education, business, as well as justice for those who were legally separated from the right to
pursue life, liberty and freedom. Acknowledging the unique leadership of the A.M. E. Church in advancing higher education for Black people, scholars point to Wilberforce as an early model of Black higher educational empowerment, distinctive from those Black colleges established by White industrialists, missionaries and philanthropists (Freeman, 2010; Gerber, 1976; Roach, 2006).

Private HBCUs, like Wilberforce, created "outside the hegemonic relations between industrial and missionary philanthropists and Black colleges" (Freeman, 2010, p. 156) set a context from which to understand the intersection of HBCUs' distinctive civic engagement and the educational empowerment and liberation ministry of the Black church (Anderson, 1980; Bullock, 1967; Watkins, 1990; Cone, 2004). The Black church's core purpose of providing a Christian education for spiritual and social liberation, played a pivotal role in the civic development and engagement of many early private HBCUs.

The Black Church and HBCU Civic Engagement

The Black church's core purpose of providing a Christian education for Christian spiritual and social liberation was the foundation of civic development evidenced in the history of early private HBCUs as well as in many of the publics that followed. The principle example of HBCUs civic engagement is illustrated in the history of Wilberforce University.

Wilberforce, named for a British abolitionist, not only offered Blacks a path out of ignorance, but also offered safety to escaped slaves, as it was a stop on the Underground Railroad (Lomax, 2006). Wilberforce University was the first, and many HBCUs that came later--A.M.E. colleges and others--patterned themselves after Wilberforce's philosophy of liberation from ignorance through education and service.

Meharry Medical College and Howard University Medical School provided medical service and community health education at a time when Blacks were not permitted to receive care in "White only" hospitals. Other HBCUs, with diverse foci, provided different types of community engagement and service. Following the lead of students at Morgan State University as well as North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro, North Carolina, Fisk University students hosted activist Jim Lawson, renowned civil rights leader, and
subsequently staged a multi-week sit-in to integrate lunch counters in downtown Nashville. Their collective efforts were replicated by students in almost 70 cities across the South including some at junior colleges such as Friendship Junior College in Rock Hill, South Carolina (The Friendship Nine). Bennett College allowed Martin Luther King Jr. to speak in February 1958, when other institutions, fearing retaliation, would not. A year later, in March 1959, Shaw University hosted King and subsequently established on that campus the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, one of the civil rights movements most important organizations (Scott, 2000).

The history of all HBCUs, while a reminder of America’s racist past, is more a shining example of Black commitment to advancement through education and civic engagement, despite enslavement and systemic marginalization. Approximately 40 private HBCUs, 12 of them A.M.E. schools, were established prior to 1890 (Gasman & Hilton, 2012). In that year, federally-owned lands were given to the states to provide for the post-secondary education of Black people because deeply entrenched segregationist attitudes had resulted in most southern states ignoring the educational inclusion of Blacks under the first Morrill Act in 1862. Lengthy struggles to compel the southern states to “uphold the constitutional amendments extending educational provisions and civic protections to Black Americans” ended with the Second Morrill Act of 1890 (Brown, 2013, p. 9). As a result, seventeen HBCUs, the ‘1890 schools’, were established throughout the South (Gasman & Hilton, 2012). From 1890 to the late 1900s, HBCUs thrived—providing the sole educational source of Black liberation.

**Black Liberation and HBCU Civic Engagement**

In 1970, the Reverend James Cone, an ordained minister in the A.M.E. Church who later became the Charles A. Briggs Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theology Seminary in New York City, published *A Black Liberation Theology*. The book was, by most accounts, a scathing indictment of Western (read White) theology. Black liberation theology, according to the NPR story, Black Liberation Theology, in its Founder’s Words, set within the context of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s, advanced a revolutionary thesis of God’s benevolence for liberating the world’s oppressed, “mainly a theology that sees God as concerned with the poor and the weak of society” (Gross, 2008).
Cone’s focus was Blacks’ liberation from bondage, oppression and injustice, whether economic, political, religious or social. What is most critical in developing an understanding and appreciation for Black liberation theology is that it was written, according to Cone, for the Black community, and as such that “Whites may read it and to some degree render an intellectual analysis of it, but an authentic understanding is dependent on the blackness of their existence in the world” (Cone, 2004). Of course, Cone’s writings came long after HBCUs were firmly rooted in a liberation mentality but it is plausible that his work was certainly influenced by his upbringing and training in the A.M.E. Church and his undergraduate education at Philander Smith College, a United Methodist-affiliated HBCU in Little Rock, Arkansas. According to Cone, it was Black leadership that demonstrated that “the soul of the black community is inseparable from liberation” (Cone, 2004). It has always been Black leaders, whether religious or academic, to “arouse the spirit of freedom and liberation in the Black community” (Cone, 2004).

**HBCU Presidential Leadership**

Whether public or private, HBCU presidential leadership is dramatically different from that of other higher education institutions (Brown, 2010; Gasman, 2010; Holmes, 2004). Explicating the difference, from a historical perspective, is the personal reflection of a HBCU president, Benner Turner, who was the fourth head of South Carolina State College, a historically Black land-grant institution established in 1896. Boyce (2014) referenced President Turner’s 1952 writings in which he described the HBCU president as “a hewer of wood and a drawer of water, a dray horse, a galley slave, a bellhop, a hack, and a nursemaid all wrapped up in one. He may seem to be the top brass of an educational institution, but actually he spends most of his time polishing other people’s brass—and breaking his back in the process” (as cited in Boyce, 2014, p. 101).

Benjamin E. Mays’, who was the highly regarded president of Morehouse College from 1940 to 1967, and a compatriot of Turner’s, concurred in writing, “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” (Mays, 1971, p. 169). Both presidents’ perspectives must be appreciated in historical context. They led their HBCUs through the turbulent civil rights era when many Black college presidents
were forced to make difficult decisions, some in opposition to their institutional mission of uplifting the Black community, in order to preserve the greater good of keeping the college open (Gasman, 2011). Modern day HBCU presidents are faced with similar challenges but not much is known about them.

It is clear that there is a dearth of empirical research on the leadership dynamics of HBCU presidents, and additional scholarship is needed about these leaders (Gasman et al., 2010). Persisting challenges of fiscal and organizational sustainability, low and shrinking enrollments, unfavorable federal policy changes, governance sanctions as well as allegations of mismanagement and neglect play out in the media and negatively impact public perception of HBCUs and the presidents who lead them (Gasman et al., 2010). These public perceptions, held by many people of all races including Blacks, form the basis of many negative attitudes toward HBCUs.

Amid forced mergers or closures, some scholars have argued that HBCUs are no longer necessary and potentially detrimental to advancing a progressive agenda for Black people (Allen & Jewel, 2002; Brown & Ricard, 2007; Fryer & Greenstone, 2010). Others assert that HBCUs offer an alternative postsecondary experience that is essential for Black students, particularly those from disadvantaged circumstances, as well as for disenfranchised faculty who have been on the fringes of the American academy (Brown, 2001; Brown-Scott, 1994; Fleming, 1976; Hale, 2006; Harris, 2012; Morris, Allen, Maurrasse, & Gilbert, 1995; Williams & Ashley, 2004). Still others suggest that the history and mission of HBCUs, grounded in social responsibility to the Black community, necessitates their continuance for the education of Black contributing members of society and agents of social change (Gasman, 2007; Gasman & Bowman, 2011; Minor, 2008; Palmer, 2008). All of these perspectives, positive and negative, reflect general attitudinal views of HBCUs and their leaders.

The survival of HBCUs seem, in large part, to be dependent on their leaders. In particular, their president’s ability to lead consistent with historic institutional civic missions of Black empowerment and liberation amid contemporary challenges. However, the unique leadership strategies they must provide have not been sufficiently documented (Gasman, 2011).
The importance of strong presidential leadership for civic engagement has been well documented within predominantly White institutions (Bringle & Hatcher 2000; Harkavy, 2006; Thornton & Jaeger, 2006). However, the role the president plays in sustaining this key element of HBCU institutional culture and identity, remains relatively obscure.

HBCUs, much like other American colleges and universities, vary in myriad ways. HBCUs are no more a monolith than any other institutional type. However, unlike other U.S. higher education institutions, HBCUs possess a common purpose based in the uniqueness of their shared history. Conceived by a collective belief in the promises of racial parity through education, and reared in a larger purpose of equity and social justice, the common history of HBCUs is grounded in civic engagement (Gasman, et al., 2015). The manner in which the collective of HBCUs function as an institutional type “within a social system characterized by multiple forms of oppression” (Allen, et al., 2007, p. 264) binds them together in a singular effort to disrupt systemic marginalization; their common challenges positioning them to continue the important work of furthering Black equality.

Allen’s (1992) identification of six goals that HBCUs share elucidates their common purpose, aligned with the Black community’s agenda of progress and personhood: (a) preservation and evolution of Black culture and protection of Black historical traditions, particularly those originating in the Black community; (b) preparation and provision of Black community leadership in addressing community concerns; (c) facilitation of economic function in the Black community, historically as one of the largest economic centers in the Black community; (d) provision of Black role models to inspire the aspirations of other Blacks in the community; (e) preparation and provision of Black college graduates with competencies to act as mediators for Black community issues with the White community; and (f) the cultivation of Black change agents that provide and disseminate critical knowledge for the edification of the Black community.

Ideas about the protection and advancement of Black cultural and historical traditions, while pursuing societal change, are shared across varied HBCUs. The collective preparation of graduates to serve as leaders, role models, and facilitators of Black economic empowerment are common threads woven into the fabric of all HBCUs. These Black institutional characteristics are
reported to result in more cohesive educational outcomes than at other institutional types (Simms & Bock, 2014) and can be encapsulated into four common purposive themes (Allen et al., 2007): 1) HBCUs have a developmental role in the Black community; 2) they also have a transforming role in American society; 3) they operate within educational politics at the intersection of class and race; and 4) their role continues to evolve in a post-Civil Rights context. These historic institutional frames allow for a greater understanding of the role HBCU presidents play in preserving and perpetuating their common civic purposes in the 21st century, particularly as we consider the trends, prospects and challenges they often face.

**Higher Education Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness.** This study relies on the assumption that college presidents’ perspectives of civic engagement impacts how their institutions operationalize it. As a result, this area of relevant research focuses on higher education leadership and organizational effectiveness as related to civic engagement, internal and external to the university.

Most universities engage in a rigorous interview process to select a president. That process often includes a collaborative group of internal and external constituents that spend considerable time developing job descriptions, organizing multiple levels of screening panels, and ultimately narrowing a long list of candidates to a handful of very qualified candidates. Universities and most structured organizations go through this intensive leadership selection process because the expectation of a president is to perform at an elite level, ideally meeting and exceeding the goals and objectives of myriad constituents including the Board of Trustees, faculty, students, government officials and other key stakeholders.

Without question, the president is seen as a decisive leader with broad influence over the organization. Awwad (2009) provided an assessment of the wide range of influence the university president has specifically as related to civic engagement. Awwad identified that a president has influence through (a) speeches, documents, and strategic plans, (b) intellectual and political support for engagement, (c) funding decisions and priorities, (d) leadership style, personal and professional skills, and (f) attracting external funding for projects that benefit the university and the overall community campus. The influence of the president also reaches into faculty and staff
involvement, as well as structure and composition of the senior leadership team. Awwad’s study concluded that university presidents’ wide influence, as related to civic engagement, is primarily due to the alignment of the university’s history to the culture of the community in which its serves.

The methods by which the president exerts their influence is impacted by the organizational model the leader utilizes. Robert Birnbaum (1988) has been cited in the literature as a significant contributor to understanding organizational models and their impact on higher education institutions. Birnbaum’s organizational model has a coupling degree of measurement as it is defined by the tightness or looseness of the model. Birnbaum initially identified four somewhat structured organizational models, (a) collegial, (b) bureaucratic, (c) political, and (d) anarchical. He added a fifth model that is referred to as cybernetic. The cybernetic model is provided to suggest a blend of the four original models. It is likely that many leaders blend Birnbaum’s models as they evolve their leadership perspective.

Another significant and strategic approach to organizational effectiveness in higher education management has been provided by Bolman and Deal (1991). The authors developed four perspectives, often referred to as leadership “frames,” in order to categorize and structure the influence of the leader as an organizational manager. Bolman and Deal (1991) describe these frames as (a) structural, (b) human resource, (c) political, and (d) symbolic. Their study examined the impact of these frames to determine how the frames operationalize in authentic work environments. The study concluded that it is rare for a leader to implement all four frames, and that most leaders typically utilize two frames. In general, leaders identify with an organizational model or description by which they choose to manage, but unique circumstances and institutional nuances may affect the leader’s choice.

While the leadership and organizational context of higher education presidents are similar and consistent across many strands, additional research discussed herein will support a concluding position that while HBCU presidents are faced with similar challenges as any other presidents, given the uniqueness of the Black experience in America, the leadership and organizational context of the HBCU president is, in itself, unique.
The Complexity of HBCU Presidential Leadership. Given HBCUs unique positioning within higher education, it is important to understand what the role of president requires. Wagener & Smith (1993) state that, "as late as the 1960s, HBCUs as a group suffered from stereotypes of their presidents being "those who rode around in limousines and lived in mansions while their colleges verged on the brink of fiscal disaster" (p. 40). Evans, Evans, & Evans (2002) suggested that the problem on HBCU campuses all stemmed from their leaders, and that faculty senates were culpable, sometimes intentionally rejecting the most qualified candidate for president out of fear that the campus would change.

Shared governance is an aspect of presidential leadership that may be atypical for those that lead HBCUs. Birnbaum (2004) asserted that presidents’ efforts to reduce the role of faculty will negatively impact the institution’s ability to make effective decisions about its future. While there is no specific data to connect poor decision-making at HBCUs to diminished shared governance, the ability of the president to involve others, specifically faculty, in the life of the institution would be a skill for an effective president, at any institution, to possess.

An ability to negotiate with state and federal officials to encourage policies beneficial to their institution would be another skill necessary for any successful president to have, regardless of their institutional type, although political negotiating skills may be more acutely required for those that lead HBCUs based on past historical governmental practices (Nichols, 2004). Similarly, mastery in communicating to key constituents—potential funders, alumni, students, faculty or administrators—would be of great value to any president. Possessing the ability to set a vision and champion a course of action would also be beneficial for any higher education leader. In essence, it seems that the distinctive positioning of HBCU presidents may have more to do with the larger society’s’ perception of them more than any extraordinary leadership skills they need to possess. Evans et al. (2002) suggested that due to the negative prevailing perceptions about HBCU leaders, the president must be flawless (p. 5) despite flawlessness being an incredibly high standard for anyone to achieve.

Fields (2001) interviewed five HBCU presidents who were leaving their posts as president or chancellor to pursue other opportunities including retirement. They were asked about
the state of higher education and what advice they would give to the next generation of HBCU leaders. The general consensus was, succinctly, that HBCU presidents will need to address financial constraints, quality of students and caliber of faculty. Another scholar, Nichols (2004), concluded that current and future HBCU presidents will succeed at our nation’s HBCUs if they do what any effective college president must do—incorporate envisioning goals, motivate and affirm values, manage, and unify.

The complexities faced by presidents of HBCUs merits consideration, particularly as we consider how they are positioned to advance their mission of educating Black people. To validate the complex challenges facing HBCUs, Brown (2013) noted, “Historically Black colleges and universities are among the most commented about institutions in the academic literature; however, they remain among the least empirically examined” (p. 4). Although scholarly literature about HBCUs has been growing over the past decade (Gasman, 2011) still not enough is known about HBCU presidents and the complexity of factors associated with exemplary leadership (Brown, 2010). In particular, more needs to be known relative to institutional civic engagement that spawn community solutions and responds to human needs (Scott, 2000, p.270).

A contemporary view of HBCU presidents suggests that many are younger and entering the executive position from nontraditional and varied professional backgrounds. This new breed of presidents is making different but equally difficult choices to preserve the best of HBCUs’ history, while pivoting the institutions toward modernization (Gasman, 2013). Trends and priorities highlight a number of organizational and operational challenges facing traditional and non-traditional HBCU presidents which may be uniquely impacted by the context of their leadership experiences.

Declining Enrollment and Retention Rates. A large part of any higher education institution’s success, and a marker of a good presidency, is the leader’s ability to manage student enrollment effectively. Enrollment and retention are critical metrics that drive the financial viability of any postsecondary institution. Just 50 years ago, nearly all (90%) of Black college students attended an HBCU (Nichols, 2004). Today, only 8% of Black students attend one of the remaining 105 institutions (Conrad & Gasman, 2015, which has negatively affected the financial health of
these tuition-dependent colleges and universities. HBCUs are forced to compete with HWCUs that may be able to offer more modernized campuses with enhanced curricular and co-curricular options and larger financial aid packages, particularly for high-achieving Black students. According to a report by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (2014), “For most HBCUs, the ability to attract, enroll and retain students is tied to their affordability” (p.2).

HBCU affordability is impacted by federal policy (Johnson, Burch, & Gill, 2015). The Obama administration shoulders some of the blame for recent declining enrollments and resulting financial problems at some HBCUs (Gasman & Collins, 2014; Johnson et al., 2015). Restructuring of the Pell grant program and revisions to the Parent Plus loan program had a significant and disparate impact on the financial health of many HBCUs with some reporting as much as a 20 percent loss of their total enrollment (Rodriguez, 2015). Almost 30 percent more Black students attending HBCUs receive financial assistance than their White counterparts attending HWCUs, translating into HBCUs higher dependence on federally subsidized tuition, and resulting in scarcity ratios at these schools. When financial assistance is compromised, so is the education of Black students who, more often than their White counterparts, leave college due to money-related hardships (Sallie Mae, 1999). With many HBCUs operating with already thin margins, it is often not feasible for them to provide the additional support needed to retain and graduate their students (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 2014).

Retention has been a major concern for HBCUs presidents. According to the National Council for Education Statistics (NCES), the 6-year average graduation rate for students at 95 of the 105 HBCUs reporting data is 31.2% (2016). Due in part, to HBCUs’ historic mission of educating Black students, many of whom may be from disadvantaged circumstances, HBCUs often have more liberal admissions policies (Gasman, 2013), sometimes labeled as non-selective. Many HBCU students begin college disadvantaged both academically and financially. When either curriculum or currency becomes too great an obstacle, with limited human or financial resources, many students cannot be retained (Sallie Mae, 1999). Despite HBCUs’ best
efforts, they often do not have the level of endowments that will allow them to offset students’ financial shortfalls.

**Fund Development.** Scarce resources have been a persistent concern for HBCUs. Conventional wisdom suggests without money there is no mission. Despite their ability to perform equally well when comparing graduation rates of Black students across all institutional types, HBCUs are underfunded relative to HWCU (Gasman & Hilton, 2012; Gasman, 2010; Gasman, 2007; Minor 2008). Public HBCUs have historically been challenged to receive equitable funding from their states despite federal legislation requiring them to do so (Gasman & Hilton, 2012; Gasman, 2010; Gasman, 2007; Minor 2008). According to Gasman & Hilton (2012), citing Preer (1982), Congress forced the states to comply in 1977, after years of failure to intercede on HBCUs behalf (Gasman & Hilton, 2012). However, according to State Representative Harold Love (D-Tennessee), many states remain out of compliance today with many state-supported HBCUs, like Tennessee State University, delayed in receiving their full state appropriations (H. Love, personal communication, April 2, 2016). Despite the federal government’s intervention, Minor (2008) in comparing the state per student allocation, found that flagships were receiving more than twice that of HBCUs. Sav (2000) also found, through the use of empirical tests, an approximate 17% difference in the funding of HBCUs and HWCU.

The historic pattern of unequal state and federal funding for HBCUs has only been exacerbated by traditionally low levels of support from foundations and corporations, as well as individual and alumni donors. Low levels of financial support are often justified by negative perceptions of the institutions and their leaders (Donahoo & Lee, 2008; Williams, 2010). Poor financial support from alumni compounds an already difficult situation (Williams, 2010). HBCU presidents have traditionally not excelled at fundraising for a variety of reasons, most particularly the lack of a comprehensive plan and insufficient human and financial development resources to see a plan to fruition (Williams, 2010).

**Governance.** Limited financial resources are comparable to what critics cite as limited scholarly research productivity from some HBCU faculty. Low academic productivity on the part of HBCU faculty, coupled with their campus governance structures, is “peculiar” according to
Gasman et al., (2010). Governance and its operations on these campuses are regularly criticized (Gasman et al., 2010; Minor, 2004) with several HBCUs presidents being sanctioned. Minor (2004) suggests that critics of HBCU’s shared governance seem not to take into account the unique historical, organizational and cultural variables that foster the decision-making processes at these institutions. Minor (2004) asserted that HBCUs’ historic purpose of helping freed slaves gain employment through practical and liberal education, rather than the acquisition of knowledge purely for its own sake, as was the case for the early HWCUs, necessitated HBCU faculty to focus more on teaching and uplifting the Black community through service than on university governance. As a result, Minor (2005) suggested that since HBCUs were established for purposes different from those of HWCUs, the comparison between them and HWCUs on matters of governance should not occur. Minor (2005) asked if governance and leadership success can be defined and measured uniquely for HBCUs.

Delving deeper into the topic of shared governance at HBCUs, Minor (2005) described HBCU faculty focus on teaching, student mentoring, and community uplift over institutional governance as “faculty traditions” that have become entrenched in the institutional cultures of many HBCUs. This institutional culture seems at odds with the standards of shared governance (American Association of University Professors, 1984) but yet is a management concern for HBCU presidents. In 2010, in the span of 25 years, eight HBCUs had been censured by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) for academic freedom, shared governance and tenure violations (Gasman, 2010). Using Clark Atlanta University president’s 2009 termination of 55 full-time faculty members as a backdrop, Gasman (2010) discussed the need for HBCU presidents to practice good shared governance. While care was taken to note the history and resulting challenges of HBCUs, an acknowledgment of faculty traditions as a potential rationale for the differences in shared governance at HBCUs was not offered. In an earlier article Gasman, Baez, Sedgwick, & Tudico (2007) suggested the AAUP provide training to HBCU faculty to help them value and protect shared governance. While practicing traditional shared governance may be necessary to reduce or eliminate censorship from AAUP, HBCUs’ unique
culture identity should be taken into account in these matters in order preserve and respect their unique traditions, community obligations and civic engagement (Whetten & Mackey, 2002).

The Civic Engagement Mission of HBCUs

Most HBCUs were founded as civic incubators of education and empowerment for Black people (Scott, 2000). As one former HBCU president, Ronald Mason Jr. wrote, “Our public posture from the outset was that progress of the university was tied directly to the betterment of the community around it. It was a declaration of necessity” (p. 19). Substantiating President Mason’s point, Scott (2000) offered three institutional examples as representative of all HBCUs civic engagement mission. By illustrating the civil actions of Bennett College for Women, North Carolina A&T University, and Texas Southern University, Scott asserted that HBCUs had the “primary responsibility for the social, political, economic, personal and educational development of Black communities” (p. 269), Scott’s assertion has since been supported by other scholars (Gasman, Spencer, & Orphan, 2015; Minor, 2005; Freeman, 2010) who have provided additional examples of HBCU social justice and civic engagement that will be highlighted later in this literature review.

Although there are still social justice and civil rights concerns, there are twenty-first century concerns that must also be addressed by presidents at HBCUs. Mason (2006), in admonishing HBCU presidents to continue their historical legacy of meeting the needs of the underserved for the betterment of their communities, harkens back to a warning from DuBois where he urges ‘Negro College presidents to not secularize the institutions by deemphasizing their cultural heritage (cited in Aptheker, 1973, p. 83). Michael Lomax, president of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) has also called on HBCU presidents to protect and perpetuate their institutional legacy of civic engagement, adding that they should do so within a modern context (Lomax, 2006). Many HBCU presidents have heeded the call of President Lomax and Black leaders before him to modernize their civic engagement.

An example of HBCUs’ twenty-first century civic engagement is found in Paul Quinn College in Dallas, Texas. Paul Quinn contributes to mitigating the effects of its surrounding community being in a food desert (a geographic area in which no affordable and nutritious food
can be located within a five-mile radius), by sharing food grown on their campus farm with their largely 'minority' and socio-economically challenged neighbors (M. Sorrell, personal communication, December 1, 2015). Helping to feed those surrounding the campus from a converted football field is only one creative modern day civic engagement example. Concerns of mass incarceration, police brutality, insufficient K-12 educational preparation, and other issues of inequity and social injustice persist (Harris, 2012). As evident from the previous examples, HBCU presidents are leading their institution’s civic engagement, making the unique HBCU civic engagement legacy relevant in the current century (Gasman et al., 2015). Morehouse College, Spelman College, Fisk University and many other campuses have taken up each one of these social concerns, continuing their legacy of civic engagement at HBCUs (Gasman & Jennings, 2006).

**In Search of a Larger Purpose: Civic Engagement at American Higher Education Institutions**

American higher education had an early goal of citizenship development (Morse, 1989; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 201). However, given higher education’s exclusivity from the start, the direct beneficiaries of citizenship development, HWCU students, represented only a small and privileged percentage of America’s citizens. According to Sax (2004), as higher education evolved through the nineteenth century, industrialization, educational specialization, and a culture of professionalism seemed to diminish higher education’s focus on citizenship. A slight resurgence was experienced in the mid-twentieth century with the dawn of general education. However, despite the resurgence, by the 1980s, those in the academy were sensing another falling away from higher education’s civic responsibility (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Sax, 2004).

Campus Compact, an alliance of college and university presidents, with a shared commitment to the reclamation of institutional civic engagement missions, sought to address the regression of higher education’s civic responsibility. The alliance was organized in response to many in higher education circles commiserating that the citizenship development aspect of higher education’s mission was being diminished by an increasingly market-focused, workforce production approach (Bloom, Hartley, & Rosovsky, 2006). Through leadership and grass-roots
efforts, civic engagement grew in popularity and prominence just as traditional liberal arts was seemingly in decline (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). This growing curiosity for reclaiming higher education’s civic purposes conveniently coincided with increasing faculty discontent over the shift in higher education’s academic mission (Boyer, 1987).

The convergence of the two trends—increased institutional interest in civic engagement and decreased student interest in traditional liberal arts—seemed to induce a proliferation of scholarly and practical activity impacting curricular and co-curricular offerings at campuses across the country (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). Everything, from the anti-political volunteerism of the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL) to the efforts of the National Society of Experiential Education (NSEE) focusing on connecting service to the curriculum, was part of this new resurgence of interest in campuses connecting with those communities situated, physically and intellectually, outside the ivory tower. However, in the movement’s leaders’ eagerness to change the trajectory of higher education’s civic mission, they failed to conceptualize and agree upon a singular purpose for their movement. Serious and committed scholars and practitioners, some of them no doubt products of the idealistic 1960s, never gave a sense of identity to their movement through common terminology, standards for praxis or expected outcomes and goals (Hartley, 2006).

The movement’s discord was probably never more evident than in the issuance of two unambiguously different proclamations by two overlapping institutional type presidential groups. In 1999, more than 500 presidents signed a ‘Presidential Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education’ calling for more and better civic engagement to develop students’ civic skills (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). In the same year, 24 land-grant presidents issued their own reclamation decree, ‘Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution’ calling for a return to their original service to state purposes (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). According to Hartley (2006), “the conceptualization of ‘engagement’ differed sharply” between these two presidential proclamations (p. 23).

Two years later, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), which represented more than 400 public colleges and universities, issued its own report
highlighting the lack of clarity and substance relative to the civic engagement movement (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). The 2004 Wingspread conference, called to address postsecondary civic engagement, determined that “it had plateaued” and had fallen short of creating sustainable institutional reform in its attempts to remain politically neutral (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). Confirming the conference findings, were the results from the first two rounds of applications for Carnegie Foundation’s elective classification for Community Engagement where only 196 campuses received the classification.

While the number of Carnegie classified campuses has continued to climb since then, with 361 institutions having been classified as of 2015, internal and external financial support for civic engagement at HWCUs seems to have continued its decline while the dissonance persists (Carnegie Foundation, 2015). At HBCUs, the terminology of civic engagement and the aspiration for the Carnegie classification never seemed to fully take hold. Only five HBCUs currently have the elective classification (personal communication, Carnegie representative, 2016).

At HWCUs, primarily, new terminology was introduced for what seemed to be as much an attempt at compromise as it was clarity. Democratic engagement was explained by Saltmarsh & Hartley (2011) as “linking the pursuit of knowledge with the pursuit of a healthier society and a stronger, more robust democracy” (loc. 156). Saltmarsh & Hartley (2011) explained democratic engagement as requiring “a larger sense of purpose and distinct processes to strengthen our communities and to build a participatory democracy” (loc. 241). The authors crystallized the explanation of democratic engagement by providing parameters for the approach, stating that the distinction between this and civic engagement “is not attributed to the kind of knowledge and expertise generated in the academy but to whether that knowledge and its use are inclusive of other sources of knowledge and problem solving” (loc. 346). The authors’ offered term, democratic engagement, is evidenced in the civic engagement of HBCUs. Referring to their community engagements as “moral obligation” two HBCU presidents talked, at length, during a recent pilot study for this research, about the mutuality and respect indicative of the relationship between HBCUs and their communities inferring that democracy, in terms of Black liberation,
the goal of their work with community (F. Sims, personal communication, March 22, 2016; C. Jackson-Hammond, personal communication, April 2, 2016).

Honoring expertise that is outside the academy has proven to have value in achieving mutuality with community. However, the explanation may not be able to address how democratic engagement can be effectively applied to the sometimes conflicting goals of HWCU's. These conflicts are not inherent in the singularity of purpose found in HBCUs. Confronting and challenging the dominant institutional culture, when some within that culture want to maintain status quo, may become problematic. The call for democratic engagement does not appear able to convincingly respond to the natural question of how a university might pursue conflicting democratic engagement agendas simultaneously. The diversity of agenda in working with the ‘other’ as defined by those with public concerns external to the college or university, specifically at HWCU's, complicates the application of democratic engagement and may explain its limited traction within most of the higher education sector. Further, the challenge of integrating the others’ expertise into the curriculum, a bastion of higher education, becomes a very prickly proposition.

Civic Engagement and HBCU Presidents

For HBCU's, civic engagement has always been part of the curriculum, not an optional academic modification to be debated (Gasman et al., 2015). Gasman et al. (2015) citing Michael Lomax (UNCF president), in his 2006 essay entitled “Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Bringing a Tradition of Engagement into the Twenty-First Century” confirms that [civic] “engagement is the birthright of HBCU's” (cited in Gasman et al., 2015, p. 5). HBCU presidents must accept that right and provide leadership to fully embrace it as a cornerstone of their distinguished institutional type.

As has already been established in this paper, many early private HBCU's were founded by Black faith leaders for the purpose of educating Blacks toward the goal of self and community empowerment. The end goal was the remediation of past injustices as vestiges of slavery, initially, and racism, perpetually (Lomax, 2006). A well-documented history of HBCU civic engagement as evinced in civil rights actions, many of which were birthed on the campuses of
Black colleges and developed through the energies and commitments of Black college students, faculty and staff, does exist (Gasman et al., 2015). While the list of civic engagements is too voluminous to innumerate here, a few cornerstone examples in terms of providing health care, educational improvement, and social reform are provided as a synopsis of HBCUs’ comprehensive civic engagement purpose.

The principle example of HBCU civic engagement, is illustrated in the history of the first Black owned and operated HBCU. Wilberforce University, named for a British abolitionist William Wilberforce, not only offered Blacks liberation from ignorance through education, but it also offered safety to escaped slaves, as it was a stop on the Underground Railroad (Lomax, 2006). As Scott (2000) describe, Meharry Medical College and Howard University Medical School provided medical treatment and community health education at a time when Blacks were not permitted to receive care in “White only” hospitals. Following the lead of students at Morgan State University in 1947, and those at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro, North Carolina, Fisk University students hosted activist Jim Lawson and subsequently staged a multi-week sit-in to integrate lunch counters in downtown Nashville. Their collective efforts were replicated by students in almost 70 cities across the South including some at junior colleges such as Friendship Junior College in Rock Hill, South Carolina (The Friendship Nine). Bennett College allowed the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. to speak in February 1958, when other institutions, fearing retaliation, would not. A year later, in March 1959, Shaw University hosted King and subsequently established on that campus the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, one of the civil rights movements most important organizations.

To varying degrees, every HBCU is engaged with its community because that engagement is essential to the survival of both. However, the facts of their institutional legacy and notable civic practices have been seldom acknowledged amid scholarship on the public purposes of higher education (Gasman et al., 2015; Lomax, 2006). “A larger oversight in the civic engagement literature is in the glaring lack of historical memory about the Civil Rights Movement and how it relates to modern organizing and civic activities” (Gasman et al., 2015, p. 349). The research, focused primarily on majority institutions, has generated theoretical clarity, scholarly
expertise, and improved practical application for civic engagement at HWCUs, but HBCUs “have been left out of the conversation…the language they used to discuss civic engagement…as well as their strategies to make it actionable have often been ignored” (Gasman et al., 2015, p. 349).

There is a need for scholars to conduct more empirical research on the role that HBCU presidents play in the civic engagement of their individual campuses and the collective role of civic engagement at HBCU institutions. There are only six articles written on the civic engagement of HBCUs and none of them are empirical studies (Gasman et al, 2015). While confirming that although largely undocumented, the legacy of preparing a collective of citizens, who embrace a duality of purpose upon graduation, has been foundational to HBCUs since they were established, finding examples beyond the United Negro College Fund’s survey used by Gasman et al (2015) is difficult.

Despite the lack of broad based empirical evidence, a commonly known historical purpose for a significant majority of HBCU graduates has been to seek a vocation where they can contribute to our nation, while elevating the communities to which a majority of HBCU graduates have racial, cultural, social and political connections (M. Sorrell, personal communication, December 1, 2015). These connections have been described, predominantly, by White scholars in the context of higher education’s public purpose, using terms such as service-learning, community, civic, and democratic engagement (Brabant & Braid, 2009; Bringle & Hatcher, 2009; Hollander & Hartley, 2000; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). These terms often explicate campus community exchanges designed to address social ills from an ‘Ivory Tower’ position of authority, knowledge, and power (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011).

The civic connections of HBCUs were not cultivated from a position of authority but from a place of cooperative creation for the authentic and mutual benefit and improvement of both campus and surrounding community (Mason, 2006; Scott, 2000) which debunks the ivory tower image. Although there seems to be no explicit record of the terminology used by HBCUs to describe the colleges’ and universities’ civic engagement during the first half of the 20th century, the evidence of such efforts appears to have been embedded in their institutional culture (Gasman et al., 2015). The historical record uncovered by Gasman et al., (2015), makes it clear
that HBCUs did, out of circumstantial necessity, what White scholars have called on HWCUs to do (Harkavy, 2006; Hartley, 2009; Hartley, Harkavy, & Benson, 2006; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011)—that is, "to develop the civic agency of students and "be socially responsive institutions" (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011, loc. 259).

The education of Blacks, through private and public HBCUs, is inextricably tied to the Reconstruction period (1865-1877) placing, according to Brown & Davis (2001), HBCUs in a "social contract" with America (p. 33). As Charles Mills asserted in 1997, that the founding, development, and maintenance of HBCUs for more than a century is indicative of an implicit agreement with this social contract (Brown & Davis, 2001). As a result, these institutions have and continue to function as ‘social agencies’ for the Black community’s educational access but also for racial equity and economic opportunity (Brown & Davis, 2001).

The social contract, according to Brown & Davis (2001), serves the public interest and secures the public’s cooperation. Although no specific legislation was ever created exclusively for the establishment of HBCUs, they, by default or design, became the predominant arbiter of constitutional amendments and federal legislation offered to reconcile America to her Black citizens, holding up an offering of public higher education as a penance for centuries of structured ignorance, a panacea to avoid civil unrest, or simply an investment for more economic gain (Gasman & Hilton, 2012).

However, changing social, political, and economic conditions coupled with limited mentoring and leadership training over the past 50 years has resulted in some HBCU presidents diminishing the more obvious aspects of their institutional civic engagement (Patterson et al., 2013). The University of Pennsylvania has become one of the few prestigious institutions with a leadership training program that can point to several graduates currently serving presidents at HBCUs. Supporting the idea that executive management educational training for higher education leaders is critical, particularly at HBCUS and other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), the Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions will begin (2017) hosting the MSI Aspiring Leaders training and mentorship program to help ensure quality leadership for future MSI leaders. This kind of professional development offers an avenue of preparation, including the effective management of
substantive civic engagement, for HBCU, MSI and all higher education institution leaders in the twenty-first century.

As presidents, these leaders set the direction and priorities of the institutions. Current HBCU presidential leadership perspective on the civic engagement of the institutions is not known. This speaks to the need for study on HBCU presidents and their role in preserving and perpetuating civic engagement as it relates to students, community, and institutional viability. Based on the historical factors associated with the initial establishment of HBCUs, it is reasonable to conclude that these institutions were founded on the core value of faith, ministry, connectivity to the community, and a unique mission associated with graduating Black professionals committed to uplift of Black people. The ideal in a democratic society is that citizens are actively involved in their own governance and that such participation is based on an informed and critical reflection of political and civic issues (Branson & Quigley, 1998). Damon (2014) asserts that the potential for the country’s future being dictated by citizens who have little understanding of the roles and responsibilities of citizens is the greatest threat to America. HBCUs have contributed to American democratic society and the world by providing some of the most dynamic citizen and political leaders of the 20th and 21st centuries through their civic engagement practices.

Examining the role of the HBCU president in preserving and promoting the critical function of civic engagement at these institutions is vital to understanding, in part, the value of HBCUs. The HBCU, as an institution, was born out of a complex historical context. The role of the HBCU president is also complex—based largely in the social contract that exists between their schools, their students and their community. The unique perspectives of HBCU presidents are critical to understanding the origins of this institutional type which has served a population with a history of enslavement, structural degradation and legislated oppression through engaging with and uplifting them.
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Despite HBCUs being founded with the purpose of creating mutually beneficial bonds with their communities, limited empirical research is available on the subject (Gasman et al., 2015). The lack of rigorous research bespeaks the need for a more foundational, comprehensive and contextualized approach to analyzing HBCU presidents and the role they have in their institution’s civic engagement. Ravitch and Carl (2015) asserted that “qualitative research attempts to understand individuals, groups, and phenomena in their natural settings in ways that are contextualized and reflect the meaning that people make of their own experiences” (p. 2). The phenomena of HBCU civic engagement is contextual and complex. Atieno (2009), “Qualitative research is good at simplifying and managing data without destroying complexity and context” (p.16). Because I attempted to study this phenomenon as a means to interrogate its complexity and ensure accuracy in conclusions drawn, the qualitative research design was well-suited. The conclusions from this study may provide greater understanding of the role and perspectives of HBCU presidents in preserving and promoting their institution’s civic engagement and its value and impact on the overall success of HBCU students. My research contributes the literature on civic engagement, as a core mission of HBCUs, and offers new terminology to more accurately define the civic engagement of these institutions. More will be said about liberation engagement in the data analysis section.

This study’s methodology was shaped by three components--a pilot study, modifications based upon results of the pilot study, followed by implementation and analysis of semi-structured interviews and institutional archival data.

The Pilot Study. The pilot study was conducted in the summer of 2015 with two HBCUs, one public in Ohio and one private in Tennessee. The purpose of the pilot study was to craft, test, and refine an appropriate research methodology. Both institutions have an articulated mission of civic engagement and are exemplars among their peer institutions for civic engagement. Exemplary civic engagement, for purposes of this pilot and subsequent full study, attributed from Gasman et al. (2015) was measured “by the role [an HBCU has] played in their local community”
Only five HBCUs (out of 105 institutions) have received the Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement and thus were not utilized in the pilot study. Further, based upon interview results from the pilot and feedback from a panel of experts, it was determined that the classification was not a good metric for this sample.

The two pilot HBCU presidents responded to a series of seven semi-structured interview questions (see appendix A) in an audio-recorded session in their campus offices. Each pilot study president signed an informed consent form. The purpose of the pilot study was to test the proposed interview questions for clarity, flow, and the questions’ ability to elicit a new understanding of the leaders’ role in shaping their institutions and its students’ civic engagement. Specifically, the interview questions focused on: the language HBCU presidents use to describe their institution’s civic engagement; their leadership style relative to civic engagement; institutional allocation of human and financial resources for civic engagement; and value of civic engagement on their institution’s community leadership. The validity and reliability of the research questions were assessed based on the two presidents’ responses to the pilot study questions and consultation with two content experts—one sitting HBCU president and one renowned HBCU researcher. Both experts provided critical feedback on the ability of the questions to elicit insightful responses, and the consistency with which the questions elicited responses. A post-interview debriefing session was held with each of the pilot presidents and content experts. These sessions provided added insight into the questions’ meaning (as understood by the pilot participants) and the questions’ ability to accurately and consistently access the desired information sought by the study. As a result of the pilot study, coupled with the content experts’ feedback, one question was removed from the interview question pool, one question was revised and one question was added to the final semi-structured interview to be administered to HBCU presidents participating in the full study. Additional details about the feedback from the pilot study is offered in the semi-structured interview section below.

**Full Study Participants & Site Selection**

Although scholarly literature about HBCUs has been increasing over the past decade (Gasman, 2011), still little is known about HBCU presidents’ practices and the complexity of
factors associated with exemplary leadership. As a result, there is a significant dearth of research related to HBCU presidential leadership and their inherent institutional missions of civic engagement. Because there is evidence that HBCUs were established to educate Blacks for uplift of the Black community, it is apparent that civic engagement is at the core of their existence. The field of civic engagement is incomplete without an understanding of HBCU presidents’ contribution and the larger role these institutions play in the collective field of civic engagement.

Mary Beth Gasman, a nationally recognized scholar on HBCUs, identified six HBCU presidents based on their leadership role and their institution’s contribution to legacy and current civic engagement practices. In addition to their strong commitment to civic engagement, they were also identified for participation in this study because they are “innovative, engaged in national issues, dedicated to using data to make decisions, and student focus leaders” (M. Gasman, personal communication, March 5, 2016). Three of the institutions served by the presidents in my purposive sample are public and three are private. The campuses vary in size from approximately 2000 to 10,000 students. Participants are presidents chosen from among the 105 HBCUs based upon their institution’s history and current practice of civic engagement—exemplars among their peer institutions for civic engagement. Exemplary civic engagement, for purposes of my study, was identified from Gasman et. al. (2015) and measured “by the role [an HBCU has] played in their local community” (p. 354).

**Semi-structured Interview Format.** The literature revealed the complicated nature of my study. Brown & Davis (2001) noted, “Historically Black colleges and universities are among the most commented about institutions in the academic literature; however, they remain among the least empirically examined” (p.4). I used semi-structured interviews as the research protocol to generate rich detailed information from the HBCU presidents and to organize and guide the interview. The format provided necessary flexibility for me to include specific follow-up questions (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). According to Creswell et al., (2003) qualitative semi-structured interviews are particularly useful for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the research issues because the interviewer can clarify individual responses through follow-up questions.
As mentioned earlier in the previous section, the experiences gained from the pilot study, shaped the full study’s implementation. Piloting the semi-structured interview questions allowed me to focus on the language HBCU presidents used to describe their institution’s civic engagement; their leadership style relative to civic engagement; institutional allocation of human and financial resources for civic engagement; and the value of civic engagement on their institution’s community leadership. As a result of the pilot study, the seven questions were modified for the full study implementation. The seven revised interview questions were: 1) Can you tell me about how you came to be president of (insert name of HBCU); 2) Can you talk to me about how your institution upholds a definition of civic engagement today; 3) Civic engagement (or whatever term the participant uses), as you’ve just defined it, provides students with a sense of community and purpose—using education to advocate or equity and justice. How do you think that influences their educational experience and persistence to graduation; 4) How do you, if you do, restructure (insert name of HBCU) to expand the role civic engagement plays in the day to day education of your students and community; 5) How do you think, as President, you can shine a light on (insert name of HBCU)’s civic engagement in order to elevate the value of this work to not only your students but your communities as well as current and potential stakeholders and funders; 6) How does current student activism, for example Black Lives Matter, impact your approach if it does; 7) Are there other things you’d like to tell me about this topic or the way it plays out on your campus?

**Research Questions**

Two major research questions guided the data collection and analysis of my study. The research questions were:

1. What is the leadership role a president has in the preservation and promotion of their HBCUs' civic engagement mission?
2. What is the president’s perception of civic engagement’s value and impact on the overall success of students at their HBCU?
In general, the interview protocol was designed to elicit an understanding of how HBCU presidents talk about and provide leadership for institutional civic engagement.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Given the complexity of information required from the university presidents, and the lack of existing data in the research area, my qualitative study used a semi-structured interview format. Gorden (1980) identified several advantages to the interview process; namely providing (1) motivation for accurate and complete information, (2) greater flexibility in questioning, (3) greater control over the interview situation, and (4) greater opportunity to evaluate the validity of the information being observed.

To garner these interviews, each university president was sent a letter of invitation to participate in the study. Several follow-up emails as well as follow-up phone calls were necessary to solidify interview dates and times. Once participation was secured, an on-site interview was scheduled. Before the visit, I scanned each institution’s website, obtaining archival information on their mission, vision, and current strategic initiatives. I reviewed at least two public speeches of each president and their most current annual reports, if available. Five of my six interviews were approximately one hour; one interview was 39 minutes. The seven-question semi-structured protocol was completed in each interview. Each of my site visits also included a campus tour, and for two of the six presidents I participated in a university function (a staff meeting and university event) at the president’s invitation. These campus activities in addition to the presidential interview allowed me a more in-depth view of the campus and the president’s leadership style. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service; and every president interviewed declined my offer to provide them a copy of their transcript.

Qualitative research utilizes coding as a way to organize and formulate analysis from a set of interview data. Saldana (2009) defines coding as “often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). To collect and code my study’s data, I did the following:
1. Conducted a campus site visit and made field notes based upon my observations of the student body, faculty, and campus museums (if applicable);

2. Conducted each president's interview in their campus office during which the presidents mentioned actions, behaviors and values he/she felt were at the core of their civic engagement practices in their responses to the seven semi-structured questions, as well as other questions that emerged during the interviews;

3. Following the interviews, I sought to confirm or refute the presence of the attitudes, behaviors and values reported by the president using triangulation of the data through: archival documents (yearbooks, presidents’ writings, etc.), field notes, current institutional material, resources and staff as made available by the president or their designee.

If a president mentioned a civic engagement attitude, behavior or value and it was confirmed by the archival documents or my field notes or other institutional materials, resources or staff, then that perception became a code. If the president’s assertions that certain attitudes, behaviors and value inherent in their HBCU’s civic engagement work were not confirmed by those other sources, then it did not become a code.

The general goal of my coding process was to generate “categories, themes, and concepts, grasp meanings, and build theory” (Saldana, 2009, p. 8). This process was repeated for each of the six HBCUs. As a result, an original code set consisting of 24 codes was developed (see Table 2). After all interviews were completed, the resulting code set of 24 were evaluated for commonality across HBCUs. For a code to emerge as a final code from this process, the code had to appear in at least two of the institutional coding strands. Later in the analysis process, I reframed these six codes into three leadership strategies that will be presented as part of my findings in the next chapter.
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Qualitative research uses inductive analysis and as such the data is the driving force to determine what patterns, alignments, and themes emerge (Janesick, 1994). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), triangulation is “an attempt to secure in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question” (p.2). Janesick (1994) suggested there are four types of triangulation; (a) data triangulation which is the use of a variety of data sources in the study, (b) investigator triangulation which is the use of several different researchers or evaluators; (c) methodological triangulation which uses multiple methods to study a single problem, and (d) theory triangulation which focuses on the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data. I used data, methodological, and theory triangulation to analyze my data (Janesick, 1994) which resulted in strong similarities despite some slight variation across all the presidents’ responses.

To safeguard against biases and inaccuracies in my interpretation of the data, I used peer debriefers as a sounding board throughout the study. The debriefers included members of my doctoral committee, a retired senior higher education administrator with more than 30 years of experience supervising various civic and community-based work at a HWCU, and a current senior administrative at a HBCU not included in my study. Although the diligence taken to code and categorize, coupled with the degree of similarity in president responses, improved the validity of my research, there were some limitations of my study that I will discuss later in this section.

**Researcher Influence and Methodological Implications.** In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and data analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2015) meaning “the subjectivity, identity, positionality, and meaning making of the researcher shape the research…and must be considered at all phases of the study” (p. 368). As such, it was important that I pay careful attention to my personal biases, acknowledge them, and actively monitor them throughout the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). In my dutiful attempt to protect the integrity of my study, I offer my positionality to this work and remained vigilant throughout the collection and analysis of data to remain objective.

**Researcher positionality.** Some scholars would argue that HBCUs are no longer necessary and potentially detrimental to black progress (Fryer & Greenstone, 2010). I disagree. I did not attend a HBCU. My father did. Two relatives, older than me, who received bachelor
degrees before me, attended HBCUs. I do not know if my decision to attend a HWCU was a natural segue from the private predominantly White K-12 schools my parents sacrificed for me to attend, or if my choice was the result of “The White Man’s Ice Is Colder” syndrome.

The syndrome, as described in the *Handbook of Race, Racism, and the Developing Child* edited by Quintana and McKown (2007) is a “marker of internalized racism affecting childhood as well as adulthood choices” (p. 201) resulting from centuries of physical and mental enslavement. The syndrome, according to Quintana and McKown, manifests in Black people fleeing anything that is part of the Black establishment when permitted to partake of anything that is part of the White establishment. Following Quintana and McKown’s theory, I assert, motivated by pathological thinking consciously or unconsciously, Black people cast aside HBCUs, for the schools of our historical oppressors believing the education any HWCU provides to be superior primarily because it is White. The unintended consequences of this pathology, facilitated by desegregation, could well be the decline and devastation of HBCUs, low to middle-income black neighborhoods and their K-12 schools, as well as black-owned businesses.

“HBCUs are the only institutions in the United States that were created for the express purpose of educating Black citizens” (Gasman, 2013, p.5). HBCUs need to be preserved. Not as a reminder of America’s racist past but as a shining example of Black persistence despite educational marginalization. Therefore, I acknowledge the sociopolitical influences on this study and have situated my research within the microcosmic context of HBCUs as well as the macrocosmic context of a false post-racial America. Ownership of my social location and positionality has freed me to openly discuss my personal, professional, and intellectual goals challenged by structured reflexivity and some dialogic engagement with a small thought community of peers who have different perspectives than my own. My proposed research questions and methodological approaches have been influenced by formal and tacit theories that have cyclically shaped, informed, and been reformed as a result of the other. As an African American who has developed policy and programs to improve institutional and student civic engagement, albeit at a HWCU, I bring a level of personal credibility to this study. Lincoln & Guba
assert that credibility refers to sustained engagement and sufficient investment of time to achieve requisite learning and vetting of erroneous information.

**Ethical Considerations.** It is important to maintain the integrity of each participant and their respective institution. Applying Nakkula & Ravitch's (1998) 'dialectics of mutual influence,' I anticipated and experienced ethical collaboration through the dialogic engagement that occurred in the presidential interviews. In addition, study integrity was maintained by adhering to ethical research practices as dictated by IRB protocols. While neither anonymity nor confidentiality was promised via the informed consent, each individual respondent expressed varying degrees of trust in the care that I would take in carrying out this study. None of the presidents accepted my offer to provide a copy of their transcript. And most of them shared information with me that they stipulated as "off the record," which I considered to be an indication of the integrity they attributed to me. While great care was taken to accurately reflect the words and spirit of each presidents’ perceptions of civic engagement at their institutions, and due diligence was paid to the analysis of all data collected, there are limitations to my study.

**Limitations of the Study.** This qualitative study, as is common practice, relies on the participants' perceptions, thoughts, convictions and recollections in response to the questions posed. As a result, the findings reflect the research participants’ perceptions, thoughts, convictions and recollections and are not meant to convey fact, particularly in terms of historical records, although some historical records were consulted for this study. Additionally, the small number of participants (6), limits the generalizability of the study results to all HBCUs and their presidents. As my study is about presidents’ perceptions, I did not deem it necessary to confirm or refute their perceptions which may translate for some as another limitation. My study mitigates this limitation with the construction of my interview questions. Given that the intent of this study was to explore presidents’ perceptions, I designed my questions in a manner that reduced the need for verifiable answers.

I also attempted to offset the limitations of my study by utilizing printed data. I reviewed three types of documents for my research: historical literatures including presidents’ writings and speeches, annual reports and yearbooks obtained by spending time with each campus’ archivist.
and/or head librarian; contemporary college publications obtained through traditional research methods; and personal artifacts shared by the presidents provided additional insight into their civic engagement perspectives.
CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

HBCU presidents, not unlike their counterparts at HWCUs, come from diverse educational backgrounds and professional experiences. Their personal perspectives, as well as their leadership styles vary. Yet, when HBCU presidents were asked to talk about their leadership role relative to their institution’s civic engagement, despite lacking shared definitions of civic engagement, the presidents asseverated that the larger purpose of Black community uplift—the end goal of their civic engagement—is facilitated in three primary ways: presidential community presence, leveraged presidential influence, and congruent community messaging. By consistently exerting their leadership in these three ways, the presidents play a significant role in preserving and promoting the civic engagement of their institutions—working individually and collectively toward the larger purpose of Black uplift.

These same presidents, when asked about the impact of their institutional civic engagement on student success, were less specific and much more anecdotal in their responses. Only one president, Chancellor Anderson of Fayetteville State University, referenced any data, which was not provided to me, to support his assertion of students being more academically successful when they are civically engaged. The other presidents relied on historical information and personal knowledge to support their responses. The general consensus was that students are more likely to be retained to graduation if they are involved with, and feel a sense of responsibility for, the community around their campus. The presidents each point to historical data specific to their campuses to suggest that current students, just like students from previous generations, remain involved and, in some cases, become leaders of social actions to uplift the Black community.

The myriad ways that Black community uplift manifests through individual HBCUs has a great deal to do with the institution’s leadership. My findings illustrate that civic engagement at HBCUs is as diverse as the presidents’ perspectives on their role in its preservation, promotion, value, and impact on students, and reflects the presidents’ foci. Every president in my study is keenly aware of their community’s needs. They are tuned-in to the community’s needs as a result of their personal commitment to nurturing and sustaining what they define as the institution’s
roots in the community. The deep and intertwined roots of the HBCU and its community is foremost in the minds of HBCU presidents. Nurturing and cultivating those historic roots are an important part of their leadership role on campus, as well as in the community. The presidents view themselves, as they believe others do, as key facilitators of the campus-community relationship.

**Leadership and Institutional Profile of Subjects**

An HBCU president’s positionality may be influenced by others’ perceptions of their leadership role. Table 2 provides a brief synopsis of the HBCU presidents’ undergraduate education and immediate past professional experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HBCU</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>Undergraduate Background</th>
<th>Immediate Past Professional Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dillard</td>
<td>Walter Kimbrough, since 2012</td>
<td>University of Georgia</td>
<td>President, Philander Smith (HBCU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAMU</td>
<td>Elmira Mangum, 2014-2016</td>
<td>North Carolina Central</td>
<td>Vice President, Cornell University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fayetteville State</td>
<td>James Anderson, since 2008</td>
<td>Villanova</td>
<td>Vice President, University of Albany, SUNY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard</td>
<td>Wayne Frederick, since 2013</td>
<td>Howard (HBCU)</td>
<td>Provost, Howard (HBCU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan State</td>
<td>David Wilson, since 2010</td>
<td>Tuskegee (HBCU)</td>
<td>Chancellor, University of Wisconsin College &amp; the University of Wisconsin-Extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Quinn</td>
<td>Michael Sorrell, since 2007</td>
<td>Oberlin</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While their positionality may impact their civic engagement perspectives and leadership style, aspects that could be examined in future research, the campus community demographics are a factor evinced as influencing their civic engagement in this study. All six campuses in this study are in communities that are predominately Black and overwhelmingly poor. These neighborhoods were not always impoverished. In fact, prior to desegregation, each of these
neighborhoods, as described by the HBCU presidents, were family-oriented communities of respectful citizens, with thriving businesses, and wholesome arts and cultural opportunities.

The neighborhood of Dillard University, fondly called “Sugar Hill” back in the 1940s, was a destination location for professional Blacks to move their families and businesses near the university. In the late 1950s, the neighborhood was left crippled by the construction of Interstate 610, built through the middle of the neighborhood, literally decimating Black businesses and homes. The area has never recovered.

Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University sits within the Greater Frenchtown area comprised of the Griffin Heights and Frenchtown neighborhoods. The once stable, mostly blue-collar community has struggled economically. Recent police shootings in these neighborhoods have exacerbated divisions between these communities and the larger city of Tallahassee.

Fayetteville State University is located in the Southern Murchison Road Corridor, which used to be a center of social and economic enterprise between downtown Fayetteville’s Martin L. King, Jr. Freeway and Fort Bragg. Continuous divestment has left it as little more than a thoroughfare. The current neighborhood had not one grocery store or pharmacy, until Walmart’s entry in 2014.

Howard University is part of the Shaw neighborhood in the middle of North West, Washington DC. Characterized like most big cities on a block-to-block basis, the immediate area surrounding the campus is more impoverished than the area a few blocks on either side. Like other HBCU campus communities, the area has a great history. The home of Duke Ellington, it once was a hotbed of jazz. But riots of 1960s and crack cocaine in the 1990s tore away at its historic cultural fiber, which isn’t being preserved with the more recent gentrification and business development of the area.

Paul Quinn, relocated to its present location in the southern sector of Dallas known as Highland Hills. The neighborhood, like all of those surrounding the campuses in my study, began as a close-knit community of working Black families that established businesses and revenue for their area throughout the 1970s. Highland Hills, like the others, experienced sharp economic downturn in the 1980s followed by the flow of drugs into their community in the 90s. Those that
could left for better neighborhoods and schools, while those that couldn’t were left with a fragmented, economically-depressed community.

With the exception of Paul Quinn College, all the campuses have resided at their present locations for decades; four of the six—Fayetteville State University, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, Howard University, and Morgan State University—have been at their current location for more than a century.

Summary of Thematic Findings

While HBCU presidents are diverse in their perspectives on this topic, three common themes or leadership strategies emerged as indicators of their civic engagement leadership role: 1) presidential community presence—being a leader in and of the surrounding community; 2) leveraged presidential influence—using their sphere of influence to connect the campus’ surrounding community to communities of power; and 3) community messaging congruence—communicating a strong commitment to the campus’ surrounding community by setting a strategic campus direction that is reflected by institutional responses consistent with community needs. Utilizing these three leadership strategies, HBCU presidents facilitate a synergistic system, which I refer to as institutional responsiveness that honors the past, sustains the present, and shapes the future of both campus and community in mutually beneficial and reciprocal ways.

HBCU presidents’ leadership strategies. In this chapter, the three HBCU leadership strategies: presidential community presence, leveraged presidential influence, and community message congruence, will be explicated by the illustrative perspectives of the six presidents interviewed for this study: Walter Kimbrough, Dillard University; James Anderson, Fayetteville State University; Elmira Mangum, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University; Wayne A.I. Frederick, Howard University; David Wilson, Morgan State University; and Michael Sorrell, Paul Quinn College. For ease of interpretative clarity, the leadership strategies will be presented within the context of this study’s two research questions: what is the leadership role a president has in the preservation and promotion of their HBCUs’ civic engagement mission, and what is the president’s perception of civic engagement’s value and impact on the overall success of students
at their HBCU? While each leadership strategy was validated by every HBCU president, examples from two presidents’ will be highlighted to illustrating each strategy.

**Presidential Community Presence**

HBCU presidents’ view themselves as champions of Black community uplift interpreted, heretofore, as civic engagement. The presidents also think that, in general, the Black community as well as the White community views them as community leaders. Their perceived obligation to fulfill leadership expectations could be important to their credibility and ability as a campus and community leaders. These perceived expectations may certainly influence the importance a HBCU president places on being involved with the Black community and representing their interests to other communities. All the HBCU presidents in this study feel a high degree of responsibility to play a leadership role in their campus’ civic engagement and in their campus’ surrounding communities.

**Relationships and engagement.** Longstanding institutional and community relationships can build mutual respect and trust when each entity is committed to the same goals. Each of the six HBCU presidents, regardless of their personal tenure or the longevity of their campus’ residency in their present location, expressed a deep and personal commitment in their community. Every HBCU president wants to see their campus neighborhoods thrive, not just for the benefit of the school but because they see the neighborhood’s viability as a reflection of the campus’ mission to uplift the community. Each of the presidents expressed not only a verbal commitment to connect with their surrounding community but each provided strong evidence of their community connection. Each of these HBCU presidents engage in activities that make them conspicuous as it relates to the civic mission of their institutions. The civic mission of these HBCUs isn’t nebulous. The civic mission is not left to a divisional middle manager. The civic mission of these institutions is made real in their neighboring communities by the presidents themselves.

**President David Wilson, Morgan State University.** President Wilson’s commitment to connect with Morgan State University’s surrounding community is indicative of his leadership perspective on civic engagement. He has been heavily influenced by the groundbreaking work of
George Washington Carver, who created the first campus extension effort in the country at Tuskegee Institute. Carver’s idea to take knowledge to Black people who needed it to become better farmers, better parents and better citizens, guides Wilson in his commitment to Morgan State’s surrounding community. As Wilson states, his concern is his immediate community not the entire city of Baltimore, “…you have to clean your own yard first before you take your rake to somebody else’s.” In northeast Baltimore, Wilson’s backyard, the people he talked to expressed the need for neighborhood revitalization to improve their property values, strengthen their schools and enhance the livability of their community. Morgan State, in cooperation with their neighbors, developed and are implementing, “a plan to improve K through 12 education with the Morgan Mile; promote micro enterprises, small business enterprises, and large-scale economic development projects; maintain green space to encourage family and community outdoor activities; and address issues of public health.”

In the past several months, Morgan State has been plagued by media reports of violence near the campus. While these reports are difficult for the campus and the community, President Wilson is able to bring the campus and community together to begin a healing process. He is seen as a leader in both arenas because he has established himself as such from the earliest days of his presidency. President Wilson believes in reaching out to the community, “extending the olive branch” and “getting to know his new neighbors” as he says. His initial outreach was to walk every street of the neighborhood in which Morgan State resides, introducing himself to neighbors that were out on their porches, on the sidewalks or patronizing local stores and businesses. Six years into his presidency he reflects back on those first days in 2010.

Morgan has been on this site for 100 years...deeply rooted in the community...but meager resources at different times necessitated the university focus more on churning out African-Americans with degrees. Because I came up in higher ed[ucation] through outreach and engagement...at Tuskegee...seeing the work of George Washington Carver...the first extension agent in the country...I saw the academic and the research sides of an institution working to solve community problems. So one of the first things I did, and I do now annually, is to walk the streets of the neighborhoods that abut the campus, knocking on doors, introducing myself to the residents. They invite me in, we sit down, have coffee sometimes, and talk a bit about what their concerns are and how we can work together to solve them. After those first walks at Morgan, we started working through neighborhood associations to build partnerships of equality.
President Wilson admits that he had to mend some fences when he first took over at Morgan. The institution’s relationship with the neighbors had deteriorated as a result of hard financial times and internal strife. Wilson said he heard harsh criticisms, initially, about the university not working with the community, leaving it behind as it flourished or ignoring it when times were lean. But President Wilson pledged to change the community’s more recent perceptions of Morgan State’s commitment to them. The evidence shows that he is keeping his word, with his presence felt in all aspects of Morgan State’s and northeast Baltimore’s mutually beneficial relationship.

Wilson maintains a physical presence in the neighborhood, regularly walking and talking with residents. When he attends meetings in the Black community, he says he has credibility, which he contrasts to his days as the highest ranking Black person at Rutgers Camden.

When I show up here people know Morgan is committed because I am committed. Not like when I was responsible for diversity inclusion and admissions, and financial aid, and all that stuff [at Rutgers Camden] ... when I would go to meetings in the city of Camden...they almost laughed me out of the room when I would open my mouth because they had no respect for Rutgers Camden and its role in the community.

As a result of President Wilson’s community presence and his respectful approach to the community, Morgan State is respected. Wilson says,

You can’t rush into a community like a bull in a china shop, just tearing down everything that you see, because from the standpoint of the university, you’re thinking, ‘We have all the answers and they don’t, so we have to save them.’ Well, that’s a recipe for disaster.

As of result of the high esteem with which Wilson sees the community, the community sees Wilson and the university in the same esteemed way. The mutual respect between the university and the community has provided Morgan State opportunities to works with neighborhood associations to write grants, make and modify development plans, and fortify their and others’ equitable and mutually beneficial partnerships. He clarifies the scope of those partnerships, emphasizing that these working relationships between the campus and community are “for the long haul, not the kind where a faculty member only seeks a letter of support from the community when they want to apply for a grant that requires it.” Morgan State, benefiting from Wilson’s community presence is “in partnership with their community [that is] built on a foundation of equality.”
President Wilson takes the development and sustenance of deep and lasting community partnerships very seriously. Evidence of his commitment and desire to have a continued presence in the community is apparent in his development of a Division of Academic Outreach and Engagement, and the appointment of a vice president over the division. By institutionalizing the outreach and engagement function within the university, President Wilson is able to stay close to the community, directly and indirectly, despite the many other demands for his time and attention.

In addition to organizational changes, President Wilson’s presence is evident in the systems and structures he has created to ensure Morgan and its community remain good partners. The Morgan Community Mile is one such cooperative effort based in Wilson’s basic philosophy that “the community has an equal number of answers to the problems as the university.” Two years ago, under Wilson’s leadership, campus and community representatives came together to create a shared vision of what the institution and the community were about and what they wanted to achieve together. The Morgan Community Mile has taken on community uplift projects dealing with everything from the physically harmful effects of smoking, to the financial implications of campus improvements for neighborhood property owners. It is evident from the work of the Morgan Community Mile that the university fully embraces its role as an anchor institution in the revitalization of northeast Baltimore. It is also apparent from the campus community joint efforts that northeast Baltimore embraces its role as collaborative partner in support of the campus and its students, indicative of mutuality consistent with civic engagement best practices.

President Wilson leads by example with his strong presence in the community and Morgan State students follow his example. Wilson emphasizes that Morgan’s students are the critical component to all the university and community revitalization plans because they fortify the relationships through their ongoing engagement and service. Students support many aspects of the surrounding community’s life—conducting research, hosting lectures, serving in area non-governmental service agencies, and serving as student representatives to campus-community
partnership ventures such as the Morgan Community Mile. President Wilson highlights a couple of pertinent examples to make his point:

There is a high incidence with the [Morgan] Mile, of individuals who are obese, who have hypertension, who have HIV, who have diabetes. And we have a school of community health and policy, a school of education, so we work together, over time, to reduce the incidence of those ills through education, through training, through those kinds of initiatives.

Morgan’s students and faculty support the causes that are important to the community by creating programs in cooperation with, and informed by, community members’ expressed needs.

While President Wilson has made tremendous strides to restore Morgan State’s relationship with its surrounding community, there is a long tradition of Morgan State presidents being present in the Black community and encouraging Morgan students to follow their lead. Martin Jenkins, a President of Morgan State College (1948-1970) who was very active in the civil rights movement in Baltimore (Morgan State, n.d.), admonished first year students at the 1965 Freshman Convocation to use their knowledge to uplift their people.

It is your obligation to be back in the ghetto helping our Black people who are looking, who are asking, begging and thinking of a way to solve their problems. What is your responsibility, Black students of Morgan? When the ghettos rebel you are going to be the buffer. You had better take the knowledge you have gained here and use it to benefit Black people there.

Knowledge and responsibility are the legacy of outreach at Morgan State. Building on past legacies of presidential community presence, Wilson sees the civic work of Morgan State as a direct reflection of his leadership and the institution’s responsibility to the community. He believes that with the changes he has implemented and the presence he maintains in the community that Morgan State will continue to fulfill its mission and commitment to the people of Northeast Baltimore for the next 100 years and beyond.

President Michael Sorrell, Paul Quinn College. Paul Quinn College has only resided in its current location for 16 years. But one would never know that the college is a relatively new neighbor based on President Michael Sorrell’s community commitment and involvement.

President Sorrell first became familiar with Paul Quinn College, about 20 years ago, while playing basketball at a local Dallas gym with some of school’s alums. Sharing their college stories, along with the typical basketball court banter characteristic of former athletes, developed in Sorrell a
deep respect for the college and its lifelong impact on his new friends. Although most of the stories President Sorrell heard were reminiscent of former glory days for the school, his friends also commiserated about Paul Quinn's present situation.

Times were tough for Paul Quinn College. Sorrell felt compelled to join his friends in supporting the school. With his time and his talent, he began volunteering for college and community activities and supporting various fund development efforts for the college. In 2000, Sorrell was appointed to the school's Board of Trustees. It wasn't long after that the college experienced rapid turnover over presidents, one even leaving in the middle of the night. Sorrell, being intimately familiar with the college and its community, offered to assume the presidency. Although his first offer to lead the school wasn't met with appreciation and approval, eventually he did get the opportunity to lead the institution in 2007. He immediately rolled up his sleeves and became even more closely connected with the campus and its community. Despite being faced with accreditation issues, declining enrollments and a crumbling infrastructure, the new president prioritized his relationship with the community. As he stated,

The campus becomes the economic engine...the anchor institution for the community... I couldn't fix the academic issues fast enough...the timeline was too long for that. But I could turn the institution outward-facing and address the issues that people in this community needed addressing, and I could do that immediately. So that is what I did.

Focusing on the school's mission of servant leadership, which resonated with his own Jesuit educational background, President Sorrell emphasized a philosophy of “fighting for others” and “loving something greater than yourself.” He made the initially unpopular decision to turn the schools’ failing football program’s field into an organic sustainable farm right in the middle of the Highland Hills neighborhood, a registered food desert where 98.9 percent of the 5000 residents have annual incomes of $23,529. His thinking was not that the farm would become a profit center for Paul Quinn (although cutting football did save the school money), but that it would be a center of goodwill to the neighborhood, communicating, just as the name of the farm infers, that Paul Quinn under his leadership is all about cooperation: WE Over Me. There were no grocery stores in that neighborhood at that time. As President Sorrell has said in a 2013 TedX talk, “How self-
serving can you be to have people come to your football field for six days a year to watch a game, and they have no place to buy fresh fruits and vegetables every day of the year” (TedX, 2013).

WE Over Me started as a slogan for the rebuild of the campus and the community together. President Sorrell didn’t only focus his energy only on fighting for Paul Quinn’s survival; he also fought for Highland Hills neighborhood surrounding Paul Quinn, and he enlisted his students to help. In his first year seminar, Sorrell challenged the students to get off campus and into Highland Hills. He encouraged them to find an issue and then find a solution. These efforts, coupled with his requests of the community to support Paul Quinn students they see in the community places of business, have forged great relationships and effective partnerships.

Under Sorrell’s leadership, Paul Quinn’s relationship with its community has continued to be strengthened based upon their cooperative goal of solving their real shared problems. One major problem in Highland Hills is its failing schools. As a cooperative effort, Paul Quinn began offering the Weekend University. As Sorrell explains,

[Paul Quinn College] is in an under-resourced community with failing institutions. People in under-resourced communities haven’t had academic success. They haven’t had positive experiences with school. So, you’re saying to them, “Hey, we’re going to give your kids great schools, and that’s how we’re going to change this.” Listen, if you give a student an A education and send him home every night to an F life, all you did was create a C-life for that student. It doesn’t work. So our thing was we have to change the narrative.

To change the narrative, Paul Quinn asked their residents if they could spend an hour learning anything what would it be, and what would they need to be able to spend an hour learning that thing. In response, Paul Quinn started holding classes on those very subjects. For free. As President Sorrell indicates,

We’re disturbing what has been your experience in a classroom. We’re making you start to feel like the classroom is for you. That changes your attitude toward education, but it really changes your kids’ attitudes because they’re coming to college with you. They see mom or dad learning in a college environment. Now, we’re attacking that issue in tiers, which gives you the best chance of success.

He reflectively follows up his explanation of Weekend University by concluding, “That is not civic engagement.”

President Sorrell does not acknowledge civic engagement as a term to describe what happens between Paul Quinn College and its surrounding community. He views civic
engagement, as it is sometimes practiced, as poverty tourism. Sorrell finds the idea that someone would use another person’s life as their classroom, from semester to semester, and leave it to return to their very different life, offends his notion of service. He pushes back on that definition, as not capturing what he’s doing as well as what has been done by historic leaders of Paul Quinn College.

The very foundational tenet of Paul Quinn College was to provide education for community uplift, through skills training. Using the Tuskegee Institute model of providing training for skills needed in the geographic area where the school was located, Paul Quinn started as a trade school for freed Black men and their children (www.amec.org). Bishop J. M. Brown, president of Paul Quinn at that time, had a dual purpose: to provide education and training so that Black free citizens could have marketable skills, and to establish higher education as a community value.

Like many Paul Quinn College presidents before him, Sorrell is fully present and aware of the needs of the campus’s neighboring community. Yet his vision is bigger and bolder. His commitment is currently extending beyond the campus’s local community to its global community, making strides toward a more unified HBCU movement. Weaving the independent presidential presence of the 105 HBCU leaders together has the potential to be substantially impactful. A litmus test for this kind of work was evident in the letter of gun violence recently penned and signed by more than one-third of HBCU presidents. President Sorrell’s hope is to have HBCU presidents continue to work collectively to harness their summative community presence to the benefit of diasporic community uplift.

The HBCU presidents in this sample keep a pulse on their community, engaging with them personally and then bringing information back to their faculty, staff, and students to inform, educate, and act as a bridge that then facilitates full campus engagement. The external-internal bridging these presidents do so well is a critical component of their effective civic engagement. These presidents also implement a fully external approach that embodies their belief that a key civic responsibility of their institution is supporting the community by leveraging their presence and institutional strength as anchor community institutions.
Leveraged Presidential Influence

At the center of these HBCU presidents’ civic engagement leadership perspective is a responsibility to use their influence to improve their campus’ surrounding community, which in every case is a Black neighborhood. In 2014, HUD’s Office of University Partnerships hosted an event that showcased the community and economic development work of two HBCUs—Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina, and Coppin State in Baltimore, Maryland. While these two campuses were highlighted at the conference, many more HBCUs, including those represented in this study, see their role of community uplift embodied in serving as an anchor institution. Maximizing available resources and nurturing collaborations with federal, state and local entities to the improvement of their communities is part of the work. While this work is an aspect of many HBCUs’ civic engagement, some HBCUs, like Paul Quinn College have fully embraced the label, and refer to themselves as anchor institutions. Others, like Fayetteville State University, another participant in this study, do not use the explicit language of anchor institution, but in the case of FSU, its president leverages the university’s influence for the benefit of their community.

Chancellor James Anderson, Fayetteville State University. Leveraging influence, as Chancellor James Anderson speaks to it, is about using his presidential influence for the benefit of the community surrounding the campus even if there is no immediate benefit to the campus. Chancellor Anderson is one of the most sought after leaders in the larger community of Fayetteville. Leaders from business, education, and government want to align with him. Whether seeking support for political, educational, spiritual, and other city and statewide efforts, President Anderson is a key strategic partner. This is because he has positioned himself to be “the plug.” The key to leveraging his influence on behalf of his campus’ surrounding community Anderson says, is “putting himself out there.”

I would be hypocritical…if I wasn’t out in the community doing as much as our students are doing…but I also wouldn’t be as effective if I couldn’t link what broader communities want to what my community needs. The business community values entrepreneurship, the community values something else…so I make a visit to the Boys and Girls Club, Children’s Advocacy Center…because they already know me…and I say, here’s why I need you to be involved with us…they see the President stepping up, and being the voice and the one doing the frontline work and that makes them feel that the work has more value. I spend a lot of time doing that kind of connecting because it is important to me and it is critical for this community and this campus.
Chancellor Anderson continues with another illustration of leveraged presidential influence he exerts in Fayetteville:

The newspaper published a story about my early life, and the schools latched onto it because it was the reality, probably worse, than many of the Black kids in this area...so I used that as my entrée into the K-12 educational system to start doing needed things with the school and the community around us...we look for different avenues of connection, whether it’s the business community, entrepreneurship...to engage them with me...then with my campus and community.

Fayetteville State University’s history is consistent with its current president’s penchant for leveraging resources for the benefit of the college. In 1867, seven Black men: Matthew N. Leary, Andrew J. Chestnut, Robert Simmons, George Grainger, Thomas Lomax, Nelson Carter, and David A. Bryant used $136 of their own money to pay for two lots. Those two lots would become the site of the Howard School to educate the Black children in Fayetteville. A decade later, this school would be leveraged by Principal Robert Harris to convince the North Carolina legislature to provide funds for a Normal School which would become the Fayetteville State Teachers College, the oldest normal school for Black people in the south.

Fayetteville State Teachers College’s original building provided for the education of Fayetteville’s Black children, as well as the Normal School students who aspired to one day teach them. That is until Ezekiel Ezra Smith, the school’s third principal, assumed leadership. Although Smith served from 1883-1888, he returned in 1899. His tenure is noted here because he, too, leveraged his influence to carry out the civic engagement of the institution. Smith convinced four other gentlemen: F.D. Williston, E.N. Williams, J.G. Smith and P.N. Melchor to join with him and endorse a $3000 note. The note was used to pay for the expansion of the campus from the one small frame structure to a physical plant consisting of ten buildings on fifty acres. After the note was renewed several times, Smith paid it off himself.

Many Fayetteville State presidents have used their personal and professional resources to benefit the campus and community. In 2007, President T. J. Bryan leveraged the posture past presidents had in the Fayetteville community, to facilitate the launch of the Center for Community Social Justice. After receiving a service learning grant, the office’s name was changed to include service learning in the title. Later the office became the Center for Service Learning and Civic
Engagement, almost visibly and methodologically indistinguishable from other such offices at many HWCU campuses.

While similar in many ways to White campus offices of civic engagement, Chancellor Anderson is quick to point out the differences. “The difference is not in the words but rather in the what and how those words are linked, by leadership, to what the community needs.” The needs in the community surrounding Fayetteville State are great. In fact, the area is classified by the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service as a food desert. To mitigate the lack of fresh food in the neighborhood, one of the office’s major undertakings has been to facilitate bi-weekly Farmers Markets. Many university presidents might have been content with providing students with a service opportunity that brought neighborhood people to campus to purchase fresh fruit and produce every other week. But President Anderson, motivated by a sense of purpose in community uplift, leveraged his local government connections to negotiate the purchase of floodplain land adjacent to campus and the Office of Civic Engagement and Service Learning. The land was worthless to developers but priceless to the community as it now provides a sprawling and ever-expanding Farmers Market consistent with Chancellor Anderson and the community’s vision and need.

**President Wayne Frederick, Howard University.** President Wayne A. I. Frederick agrees that leveraging his influence for the benefit of Howard’s neighborhood community is important to preserving and promoting the institution’s civic engagement. He speaks clearly to using his influence to remove barriers that may deter, deflect or deny the community-based work of the university’s students, faculty, and staff. Contextualizing his role within Howard’s mission of “truth and service,” Frederick is transparent on how his role facilitates, albeit indirectly, the essential civic engagement of his students, faculty and staff. “There is no education at Howard without some type of civic engagement. It’s for naught otherwise.” According to President Frederick, students don’t come to Howard only for a degree; they come for an education. “Of the young people I meet and engage with, regardless of where they went to high school, who they are, where they’ve come from, I would say the vast majority of them are concerned about what’s happening around them.”
The kind of education offered at Howard University only comes alive if the knowledge received at Howard is applied to the things they care about and want to change for the better. Frederick emphasizes the importance of students initiating these “organic” efforts to make the kinds of change they want to see in the world. President Frederick uses his influence to connect students to Washington’s political and corporate elite to provide appropriate resources for their self-initiated civic efforts, taking care to reduce and eliminate psychological, social, and financial barriers. While it is challenging to have distinctive efforts of civic engagement in the nation’s capital, Howard has distinguished itself through its current and past presidents. Historic actions to open a hospital, the Freedmen’s Hospital, for Blacks in the 1862, have been joined with current efforts to educate the community about police brutality, safety and health concerns. In many instances, President Frederick uses his influence to secure student jobs and internships and to shepherd those relationships on behalf of the university. Just as frequently, he is using his influence to convince those with financial resources to direct them to support community-based efforts.

Trained as a medical doctor, President Frederick has a natural inclination toward civic efforts that improve the physical, psychological and emotional health of his campus and surrounding community. Calling attention to a national statistic of African-Americans being five times more likely to drown than White Americans, Frederick leveraged his influence in the D.C. area to join forces with the YWCA and a financial partner to provide swimming lessons for Howard students, and more importantly, children from the surrounding community. As he explains, whether he brokered the YWCA relationship or not, Howard students would have the opportunity to register for a water safety/swimming credit-bearing class but the neighborhood children often have no options to learn to swim. Leveraging his influence on behalf of the community’s children is important to Frederick even though there is not an obvious and direct benefit to Howard or its students.

For President Frederick, leveraging his influence to benefit the community also happens indirectly but intentionally through his consistent communication with his students. Although he wasn’t initially excited about the president’s weekly address, a long-standing Howard tradition, he
says that he now appreciates the platform it provides him to raise students’ awareness of larger community concerns. Frederick believes that with increased awareness, students may do additional research and, if so inclined, take further action. These weekly talks have been used to spark, calm, and inform student protests of the past. As Frederick describes, “Howard has been a hotbed [of] fertile soil for [civic engagement] to occur organically. I let the students and faculty decide what that is, and to deconstruct it…whether it’s Black Lives Matter, criminal injustice, income inequality…my administration leads by example…If you tell people you’ll do one thing and then you, yourself, are reflecting something else, that is a false prophet, a false prophecy, so we try not to do that.”

**Community Messaging Congruence**

Communicating consistently, by words and actions, is critically important to preserving and promoting civic engagement, according to HBCU presidents. Mission statements like Dillard University’s clearly speak to “producing graduates who are culturally aware and concerned with the human condition.” HBCU presidents collectively say that message congruence—mission statement to methodological strategies must be consistent in order to build trust and sustain healthy relationships with students and community members.

**President Walter Kimbrough, Dillard University.** Walter Kimbrough, President of Dillard University, says having a concise mission statement with a broad impactful strategy is his approach—short statements and deep partnerships are things that everyone can remember. According to President Kimbrough, being short on words and long on action that is consistent with those words is important particularly at Dillard where he defines civic engagement, primarily, in terms of social justice.

Reminiscing about his immediate past presidency at another HBCU, President Kimbrough substantiates his point with a piece of history. If your mission is short, it’s a conversation starter that you can add to…like Philander Smith’s mission statement…there are distinctive parts…[one] part talks about academic accomplishments…then [another part] talks about social justice…people can understand what that means particularly being that the college is a mile down the street from Central High School…Little Rock nine. You’ve acquire knowledge, you understand what’s going on and then you’re going to do something with it.
At Dillard University, President Kimbrough has remained consistent in communicating his civic engagement leadership perspective as social justice activism. While Dillard is involved in voter registrations, community service activities and the like, President Kimbrough talks about communicating the importance of more activism, which he backs up with his own participation. Given that our interview was the day after the anniversary of the slaying of Michael Brown, Kimbrough was reminded of an activism example stemming from that police shooting. “We had a thousand people on campus talking about how to address the issues between police and Black men in this community.” When circumstance later necessitated action, according to President Kimbrough, the campus and community came together to act. The scale of an event like that was the result of the president walking the talk. As he continues,

I tell my campus and community; stuff is going on...how are we going to deal with it? Tomorrow when the police chief has a community meeting about community policing, I will send out an email blast telling everyone that they need to be there and after we hear what he’s saying, how do we engage in [follow-up] conversations on campus and in the community to make a change...this is civic engagement to me.

President Kimbrough reinforces his perspective by making the point that his approach is to understand, support, and advocate for his community, even when it is unpopular or controversial to do so. To Kimbrough’s mind, it is his, and the institution’s responsibility, to educate students and the community about current issues. Pointing to another current issue for New Orleans, like many urban centers, he talks about charter school education. The issue is contentious and highly politicized but that doesn’t dissuade President Kimbrough. He does not shirk away from the hot button topics that could land him in difficult conversations but that impact the wellbeing of his campus and community. As evidence of his message congruency, this year he is bringing an author and speaker to campus that addresses the controversies surrounding Teach for America’s influx and impact on Black communities and their children’s education. He recapitulates the importance of talking across difference and offers his campus as a neutral place in the community for those important conversations to occur but he insists that social action that is in the best interests of the campus and community is must be tantamount.

According to President Kimbrough, the social principles of the United Methodist Church, particularly the first principle of social justice, provides the foundation for his and his campus' civic
engagement. The tenets of his church, which are aligned with his moral compass, makes it easy for Kimbrough’s words and actions to be congruent.

President Elmira Mangum, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. Elmira Mangum, president of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, echoes Kimbrough’s sentiment about the importance of HBCUs exhibiting consonance of words and deeds. The 1890 land grant’s mission statement explicitly speaks to the empowerment of citizens and communities. Beginning with convocation, Mangum introduces students to the ideas of public service and the importance of their full participation in our democracy. Her message is reinforced by her leadership, as well as the curricular and co-curricular opportunities students are provided. Living Learning Communities give students practice in the democratic principles of community responsibility beginning, as Mangum says, “to understand themselves as a contributing adult...that can solve problems...and to know the impact they have in the community. This is the Rattler Impact.”

The Rattler Impact is FAMU’s key strategy for citizen advocacy. Through Rattler Impact, members of the FAMU community stay informed and can get involved in issues affecting the campus, surrounding community and state of Florida. According to President Mangum, Rattler Impact emphasizes the power of citizen action consistent with the institution’s mission and vision. Message congruence is carried out in the many ways the school trains students for participation and the ways its leadership models citizen engagement.

Participatory democracy, for President Mangum, is the ultimate citizen engagement. Therefore, under her leadership living learning communities became a way for students to learn, by living in microcosmic communities, about democratic processes and their roles in the same. On campus learning experiences can be expanded to campus and community efforts. As is the case with FAMU’s sustainable farming efforts that feed approximately 2000 area families and teaches citizens about sustainable agricultural practices with a focus on quality food and nutrition. Consistent with these public actions is the university’s president talking in public forums about health and nutrition as critical community issues. Hosting dinners and festivals that only offer healthy foods and promote, even if subliminally, healthy eating and lifestyle choices are other
President Mangum cites as her consistent messaging to support the school’s civic engagement.

President Mangum believes her words and actions aligning with the institution’s civic engagement to be a critical component of HBCUs’ civic engagement. This perception has been true for FAMU leaders dating back to some of its earliest presidents. President George W. Gore, Jr., FAMU’s fourth president, in one of his early addresses to first year students said:

I am coming increasingly to believe that education is not enough. I mean by this that if you go away from college and return to your communities or other communities merely more competent in some particular academic or scientific area and that if you do not go back to those community without some realization that the opportunities you have had should not be confined solely to the improvement of your own mind then we have failed...rather it should go further...you must have gained a greater and more sympathetic understanding of the human predicament...and be committed to act (Gore, n.d.)

By taking institutional action, in response to current social issues, consistent with past pronouncements, HBCU presidents reinforce their community commitments. Thus, their institutional responsiveness illustrates how the presidents lead their campus on matters of civic importance when rhetoric needs to be real. Each of the presidents in my study exhibit strong message congruence as evinced in current examples of institutional responsiveness. One example from each president in this study is provided below to illustrate more poignantly the distinctive civic engagement of HBCUs and the role their presidents have in facilitating the same.

For the first time in its 51-year history, the national conference of the Black Arts Movement was held at an HBCU—Dillard University. Seeing a great need in the rich cultural community of New Orleans to educate and connect local Black artists to a larger and historical movement of art in protest, President Kimbrough compelled the conference planners to select Dillard, confirming the importance of showcasing Black artistic contributions at a historically Black institution and to Black communities. Local artists and members of the New Orleans community joined with students from Dillard and other universities for the three-day conference whose sessions reminded artists and community leaders of the historic power of Black art as a tool for Black empowerment and political protest. Conference attendees were encouraged to continue to uplift the community and eliminate social ills through artistic expression. The conference was a
Millennials, but more specifically, Black millennials played a critical role in the 2008 and 2012 elections, turning out in record numbers. For Black youth, in particular, although the excitement of electing America’s first Black president may not be matched by the idea of electing its first woman president, being civically engaged in the most basic of citizenship actions, voting, was essential to FAMU President Mangum. In response, Mangum, located in the battleground state of Florida, worked with her Student Government Association President, Faculty Senate Vice President, and the community representatives to mobilize FAMU students to register to vote and to get others registered to vote. Encouraged by campus visits from vice presidential nominee Senator Tim Kaine and Birth of a Nation actress, Aja Naomi King, FAMU’s Strike the Vote Initiative rallied to a goal of 100 percent of its full-time students getting registered.

Under Chancellor Anderson, community development, specifically the redevelopment of the Murchison Road corridor has continued to be a civic focus for Fayetteville State University. As a key stakeholder in the revitalization of Murchison Road which connects the University’s main campus to downtown Fayetteville and Fort Bragg Army Base, Fayetteville State’s Development Corporation owns 50% interest in a public/private partnership that owns several retail and business space along the corridor. Most recently, Fayetteville State entered into an agreement with the city of Fayetteville to receive the home of one of the university’s early leaders and former president, E.E. Smith. The city will move, at no cost to Fayetteville State, the house from its downtown location to the campus. The university has agreed to restore the home and make it a museum to capture Fayetteville State’s rich history.

Howard University has had a historic commitment of providing health care services to Black people. As of September 2016, despite financial challenges which have plagued many small independent hospitals, Howard will soon be able to better meet the needs of its underserved neighbors. Based in the university’s longstanding commitment to people of DC’s 7th and 8th Wards, under President Frederick, Howard University Hospital entered into a pact with
United Medical Center, to share physicians and to provide expanded specialty services including ambulatory care, which had been woefully deficient in those Wards.

Since 2013, Morgan State and the Northeast community of Baltimore have been working together to stem the rise of crime on the campus and in the community in traditional and non-traditional ways. The Morgan Community Mile, comprised of community representatives and campus officials, are involved in myriad mutually beneficial projects but the most current is the jointly-supported venture to repurpose a blighted shopping center that had long been a magnet for crime. The Morgan Community Mile endorsed a $220 million development plan, the first phase of which resulted in the ribbon-cutting, last Fall, of a $72 million business school which includes 10 hotel rooms and space for community use. Other academic and residential buildings along with community services, such as a grocery store, are planned. According to Wilson, to role of the university may very well be to begin to empower communities. “Mapping, validating to enable communities to understand what an asset is, and then to sit back and watch them then look at things that they may not have considered an asset, view them as assets. And then all of a sudden it’s like, since that is an asset, we are planning from a position of strength.”

The community in which Paul Quinn College resides was not operating from a position of strength when President Sorrell made the unpopular decision to convert a football field to an organic farm more than six years ago. But in the span of several years, by implementing the three leadership strategies common to HBCU presidents with strong institutional civic engagement, community members now are empowered by the grand opening of a taxpayer-sponsored grocery store in the middle of what has been a federally-recognized food desert. This multi-year effort that has transcended politics manifested an $2.8 million tax dollar investment to help get Save-A-Lot grocery store open just a couple of blocks from Paul Quinn College. In the same week of the store’s grand opening, President Sorrell accepted a $1.1 million check from the Dallas Impact Investing Collaborative, a group of Dallas business leaders who are intentionally investing their capital in projects for social change. With the Dallas Impact Investing Collaborative group’s investment, Paul Quinn will oversee a mixed-use development deal that will expand affordable housing and provide space for much needed social services in the Highland Hills community.
Summary

As the interview and archival data suggest, this sample of HBCU presidents conceptualize their leadership role and impact within the civic engagement context as being manifested through 1) presidential community presence, 2) leveraging presidential influence, and 3) community messaging congruence leading to institutional responsiveness. The leadership phenomenon appears to be not only present for current HBCU presidents, but also has a historical precedent serving as a foundation of HBCU identity, institutional life, and operational structure. A more robust discussion of this phenomena and its meaning is presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5 ANALYSIS

Civic engagement, philosophically and rhetorically, has been part of the American higher education ethos from its foundation (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, Stephens & Shulman, 2003). Nearly every college or university has a mission statement that mentions educating students "morally, and for good citizenship" (Kezar, 2002, p.15). But higher education has come under criticism for falling away from its foundational civic purposes—offering knowledge that is disengaged from society’s most pressing concerns (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). Not only has this work been criticized for its changing emphasis but also for its heavy focus on Historically White Colleges and Universities (HWCUs) to the near exclusion of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), institutions that were “founded with and, in many cases, have maintained these purposes through their histories” (Gasman et al., 2015, p. 4). Gasman et al. emphasized their position, pointing to the overlooked but well-documented civil rights civic engagement of Black colleges, saying “The language HBCUs have used to discuss civic engagement as well as their strategies to make it actionable have often been ignored” (Gasman et al., 2015, p.4).

This study is as much a response to Saltmarsh and Hartley’s critique and Gasman et al.’s pronouncement of limited research on HBCU’s civic engagement as it is a personal desire to give voice to HBCU leaders who have largely been nameless and faceless beyond their immediate communities of engagement. Therefore, this study relies on the perspectives of current HBCU presidents to elucidate their exemplary civic engagement leadership role. This study sought to answer two research questions:

1. What is the leadership role a president has in the preservation and promotion of their HBCUs’ civic engagement mission?
2. What is the president’s perception of civic engagement’s value and impact on the overall success of students at their HBCU?

The study’s findings suggest that these HBCU presidents are facilitators of a unique Black college - Black community relationship. To facilitate that relationship, the presidents use three leadership strategies as identified by this study: presidential community presence, leveraged presidential influence and community message congruence. The implementation of
these three leadership strategies, creates a synergistic system between the campus and community that impacts student, campus, and community success. I refer to this synergistic system as institutional responsiveness. Institutional responsiveness honors HBCUs past, sustains the present, and shapes the future of students, the university and community. It is one way the presidents measure civic engagement’s value to and impact on student success. More will be said about the strategies, institutional responsiveness, and other ancillary findings later in this chapter.

From the presidents’ words, informed by past civic engagement theories, I have come to a deeper understanding of HBCUs’ engagement with their communities. I have come to realize that while past theories were informative, they fall short of explaining some of the nuances of the Black college - Black community civic exchange. Therefore, in addition to presenting an analysis of HBCU leadership strategies used to facilitate their role in institutional and student civic engagement, I am offering new language—supported by historical civic actions, for context, in order to define and describe the distinctive relationship as well as the complexities of those HBCU campus and Black community civic interactions which underpin HBCU engagement. Those complexities are presented as a theoretical paradigm offered at the end of this chapter. The theoretical paradigm is intentionally and unconventionally placed at the end of the chapter as an acknowledgement that the thinking which generated it represents my preliminary understanding of how the unique components of HBCU engagement fit and work together. The theoretical paradigm requires further study which will be address in greater detail in the next chapter.

Three overarching factors evolved from the analysis and form the basis of the theoretical paradigm: 1) HBCUs and surrounding communities have a shared history which constitutes a unique bond; 2) the bond between the campus and the community is preserved and promoted by HBCU presidents implementing leadership strategies; and 3) the president’s leadership role in advancing that unique campus-community bond is inextricably tied to the impact and success of the HBCU’s civic, or more accurately called, liberation engagement, but that leadership role does not operate in isolation, rather in cooperation with campus and the Black community.
Black Community Uplift, HBCU Leadership, Ebony Sodalities

Unlike their White counterparts, HBCUs have not been viewed by their communities as ivory towers—born of disputed purposes (Bok, 1992), detached from their communities, and above the masses. Nor have they, contrary to the terminology offered by Joy Williamson Lott in her book Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Freedom Struggle in Mississippi, been viewed as “ebony towers” in the same vein as HWCUs, differentiated only by their darker hue. HBCUs are distinctive in their color, but more so in their conception. They, generally, are seen by the Black community “as being one with the community” (personal communication, Jackson Hammond, 2015). HBCUs, led by the strategic and intentional actions of their presidents, did not build “metaphysical fences” (Frankle, 1999 p.90) but rather formed relationships with people and resources facilitate positive change in their communities. Working together in mutual support, HBCUs and Black communities have a special bond from which both are able to thrive. That special bond provides the foundation from which HBCUs’ singular civic purpose of Black uplift is constructed.

As we seek to understand the bond that exists between the HBCU and its community and the community and the HBCU, it is informative to look to social psychology’s social representation theory. Social representation theory considers the role of history in the social identity development of groups, specifically, applying social and historical context to the commonalities within group formation as well as differences among groups. This theory says that historical and social context can assist us in understanding the social identity development of groups, specifically how groups operate now but also how groups will likely act in the future (Liu, Wilson, McClure & Higgins, 1999, p. 1022). According to Liu et al. (1999):

A group’s representation of its history will condition its sense of what it was, is, can and should be, and is thus central to the construction of its identity, norms, and values. Representations of history help to define the social identity of peoples, especially in how they relate to other peoples and to current issues of international politics and internal diversity (p. 537).

HBCUs and Black communities share the historical experiences of chattel slavery, disenfranchisement, marginalization, oppression, and systemic racism. That shared history creates and perpetuates commonly held shared beliefs and is the basis of group formation (Bar-
Tal, 1996). These commonly held shared beliefs are passed down from generation to generation through both interpersonal communication and propagated by trusted institutions which for Black people are HBCUs and the Black Church. As Liu et al. (1999) have argued, "History can be a unifying device for social identity and it can be used as a divisive lever" (p. 1022). In the case of HBCUs and their communities, I assert that the bond created in shared history has created a community view of the HBCU as an “Ebony Sodality.”

First used in the 1600s, the term “sodality” was defined as an organized society or fellowship of the Roman Catholic laity (Catholic Online, n.d.). Later, sodality came to be interpreted to mean possessing a special connection, with an emphasis on brotherhood and sisterhood, in a devotional or charitable relationship. I am borrowing the term, sodality, and applying it, consistent with the descriptions of the presidents interviewed, to the unique relationship a civically engaged HBCU has with its surrounding community. Passed down common beliefs about shared history binds the community and the HBCU in a unique and deep psychological way. Bar-Tal (1990) called shared beliefs “group beliefs.” The social psychologist went on to say, “sharing beliefs is an integral part of group membership...some of which serves as the basis for group formation” (p. xii). His later research expanded the notion of group beliefs to “societal beliefs” in which he found victimization to be a key element of group formation around shared beliefs.

Black America’s victimization, historic and current, forged and perpetuates a unique psychological bond, an ebony sodality, between the HBCU and the Black community. Social psychologists used to assert that group and societal beliefs are carried out at the macro and micro level. However, current social psychology research has identified three levels of group culture: macro, meso and micro (Erez and Gati, 2004). Based in this research, people of the African Diaspora share common beliefs at a macro level; Black communities share common beliefs at the meso level, and Black individuals share common beliefs at a micro level.

At the diasporic level, generally people of African ancestry recognize the global effects of world colonization. At meso community level, generally Black Americans recognize the devastating and persisting effects of slavery and discrimination. At the micro individual level,
Black people recognize that being Black in America means that institutionalized racism factors into one’s daily life. These shared recognitions, create empathy for others like you because you have felt what “the other” feels, you have experienced what “the other” experiences. The shared history, shared pain, shared disenfranchisement, shared marginalization fortifies a unity of purpose that has been forged in victimization.

The common experiential bond or oneness of thought and mutual identification was echoed, although un-named, repeatedly in the presidential interviews. This connection served as a firm foundation for the relationship between the HBCU and its surrounding community. Not only are HBCUs’ identities grounded in this bond, but it helps to fuel an institutional commitment to serve, support and liberate the community. The higher purpose of HBCU engagement is the purpose of liberation freedom from oppression. More will be said about this purpose later in this chapter, however understanding more deeply the role of the HBCU president as leader will further illustrate the facilitative role of the president in the HBCU and in the community. Building upon the ebony sodality dynamic, the HBCU president’s leadership style will be discussed next.

**HBCU Presidents’ Leadership Strategies and Styles**

Junarso (2009) defined leadership as consisting of practices used by leaders “to transform values into actions, visions into realities, obstacles into innovations, separateness into solidarity, and risks into rewards. It’s about leadership that creates the climate in which people turn challenging opportunities into remarkable successes” (Junarso, 2009; p. 99). My study sought to understand how HBCU presidents perceive their leadership role in the preservation and promotion of their institutions’ and students’ civic engagement. For this dissertation, the definition of leadership put forth by Kouzes and Posner (2002) provides a solid framework for analysis. Their definition of exemplary leadership has five factors: modeling the way; inspiring a shared vision; challenging the process; enabling others to act; and encouraging the heart. Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson & Jinks (2007) used Kouzes and Posner’s (2002) five factors to explain the foundations of servant leadership, finding that school principals were often able to create feelings of motivation among faculty and students, and facilitate the achievement of their goals (2007). Servant leadership, which was specifically addressed by at least one of the HBCU presidents in
this study, focuses on understanding the needs and interests of others as way of serving through collaboration and empowerment. The five factors of the Kouzes and Posner’s definition of leadership contextualized by servant leadership will be used to analyze the perceptions of the participating six HBCU presidents compared to other presidents that have been classified as effective or exemplary.

Based on their selection for this study, all the participants have exemplary campus civic engagement as defined in Chapter 1. For that reason, this research is not an assessment of the quality or quantity of the participating HBCU campus’ civic engagement but rather an attempt to hear from the HBCUs presidents on the subject of civic engagement. The research and anecdotal data reviewed provide an overview of presidential leadership from a historical perspective to provide insight into the scope and substance of HBCUs’ civic engagement. It should be noted that this study is timely given governmental and societal pressure on higher education in general, and HBCUs in particular, to provide outcome measures as validation of their worth. Civic engagement as defined by Ehrlich, “to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference” (2000, p. vi) provides the context for analyzing how HBCU presidents perceive of their role in preserving and promoting their civic work, and as a result, the societal worth of their HBCUs.

As has been mentioned, HBCUs have a thinly documented but broadly known history of engagement in the Black community. Using historical survey data collected from 39 United Negro College Fund supported HBCUs, Gasman et al. (2015) expanded awareness about the civic engagement of HBCUs. The study provided important empirical data which substantiated that HBCUs have done incredible and largely unacknowledged work with their communities since their beginnings (Gasman et al., 2015). However, even that important study was limited by the historical data available from UNCF, which only included private HBCUs. The study gave no insight into the president’s role and influence on the institution’s civic engagement nor did it attempt to understand the deeper motivations, beyond the methods, of HBCUs’ civic engagement.
While there has been limited scholarship on the civic engagement of HBCUs, even less is known about the role the president has in shaping the campus community civic interaction and what motivates those actions. At a time when HBCUs are under intense pressure to prove the need for their continued existence, their approach to connecting academic research and teaching with community issues and concerns merits a closer look. Recent research, confirmed by this study, shows that HBCUs’ relationships with their communities, speaks to their social relevance and useful purpose, collectively and individually. Repeatedly, the HBCU presidents in this study alluded to the importance of the university community relationship, and its centrality to both their work as president and to the institution’s very existence.

Although dissertations on academic leadership have examined the role of university presidents (Brown, 2010; Burgess, 2011), none have explained the leadership of university presidents at HBCUs, much less within the context of civic engagement. One of the most current and comprehensive quantitative studies on the effect and impact of presidential leadership in the development of civic engagement was done by Burgess (2011) in completion of the requirements for her dissertation.

In her effort to determine the extent that presidential leadership impacts institutional civic engagement, Burgess asked respondents, via emailed surveys, to indicate what factors contributed most and least to the success of civic engagement on their campus. Offering twelve of the most commonly referred to factors in the literature and an “other” category, Burgess found that “presidential leadership is integral to the success of campus-wide civic engagement on a university campus” (p.114). She also found that “although there is a large amount of rhetoric supporting civic engagement at higher education institutions, ultimately there is far less actual practice to develop and support civic engagement efforts” (p. 114). A tangential but illuminating finding from Burgess’ research was that the most dominant form of emphasis placed on civic engagement was having a dedicated office for civic engagement efforts. Given Burgess’ parameters for institutional selection—2010 members of Campus Compact and those with 2008 Carnegie Community Engagement classification—coupled with her findings relative to funding and designated offices, it is probable that there were no HBCUs in her study of 155 institutions,
as most HBCUs would not meet Burgess’ requirements for successful civic engagement. Despite the possibility that Burgess’ study included no HBCUs, her findings relating to her one constant variable of presidential leadership is consistent with earlier research (Nelson, 2002; Colby et al., 2003; Ward, 1996) and informs this study.

As previously discussed in chapter 4, HBCU presidents play a major role in defining the purpose of their institutions. How the HBCU president functions in and communicates with its community relative to the institution’s civic purpose, on and off campus, is a key factor in the civic success of their institution. Largely due to their institutional size and governance, HBCU presidents are uniquely positioned, on and off campus, to facilitate their institution’s civic work.

This study found that the HBCU presidents’ leadership role and impact within the civic engagement context is manifested through three leadership strategies: 1) presidential community presence—being a visibly committed leader for causes important to the community and campus; 2) leveraged presidential influence—using the clout of the presidency to leverage positive change on behalf of the community as well as the campus; and 3) message congruence—being clear about a consistent message that is backed up with action. Taken together these leadership strategies result in their institutions being more attuned and responsive to their communities’ needs. I define the resulting leadership phenomenon of acute community awareness and cooperation as “institutional responsiveness.” The three leadership strategies and resulting leadership phenomena effectuate the HBCUs’ unique civic engagement.

**Presidential community presence.** Presidential community presence is primarily an outward facing leadership strategy with both outward- and inward-facing results. Presidents engage in community activities that make them conspicuous, reinforcing their institution’s civic mission to community members and influential others who are external to the community, but also their campus faculty, staff, and students. The HBCU presidents in this study also function as facilitators of civic engagement by brokering new relationships or new aspects of existing relationships, and then connecting community entities to appropriate campus faculty, departments, and students. By exhibiting high levels of active engagement, the HBCU presidents operate in contrast to many of their contemporaries (Association of Governing Boards of
Universities and Colleges, 1996; Ehrlich, 2000). “In a departure from the role of earlier presidents, many current college presidents are not actively engaged in public discourse regarding social issues nor are they actively involved in community affairs” (Hoyle, 2002 p. 2).

Neighborhood demographics, relationships and engagement. Unlike what much of the research indicates about HWCU presidents’ civic engagement, these HBCU presidents do not shirk away from the public visibility brought about by their participation in civic matters on behalf of their institutions. In fact, many HBCU presidents reported that these engagements are some of the most personally rewarding aspects of their role.

I assert that due to their unique bond, based in shared identity, these leaders are not disengaged from their campus’ surrounding communities, nor from the social policy issues that affect them. These HBCU presidents insert themselves in contentious political matters such as police brutality, public education, and social reform, sometimes finding themselves at odds with board members and donors. Despite this, while they may professionally share the concern of presidents who indicate that they “fear offending donors and therefore minimize their own civic engagement or close affiliation with community organization and other groups” (Fisher, Tack & Wheeler, 1988), these HBCU presidents do not allow those concerns to dissuade them from what many of them refer to as their “moral obligation” to their community.

The HBCU presidents’ choices of what issues to address is influenced and informed by their upbringing, their shared common beliefs and shared history with their campus’ surrounding community. The leadership strategies exhibited by the HBCU presidents in this study stand in stark contrast to the behaviors of presidents that completed the Fisher/Tack Leadership Inventory (Fisher, Tack & Wheeler, 1988). In that research study, Fisher, Tack and Wheeler (1988) found that effective presidents were different than others in that they were less collegial and more distant. The HBCU presidents’ perceptions of their community relationships signal much more collegiality and familiarity with their community and campus. As a result, these HBCU presidents report that they are more in touch with the needs and issues of their communities contrary to the effective leaders in Fisher & Tack’s study who rely more on respect than affiliation (Fisher, Tack & Wheeler, 1988). The HBCU presidents in this sample are risk takers, particularly when it comes
to their community engagement, which is also in opposition to the leaders classified as effective using the Fisher/Tack Effective Leadership Inventory (1988).

One aspect of Fisher, Tack and Wheeler’s study that shows similarity between the HBCU presidents in this study and those deemed effective by Fisher/Tack Effective Leadership Inventory relates to their commitments to “an ideal or a vision than to the institution.” Yet, what may be distinctive, even on this point of convergence, is related to what informs the presidents’ vision for the institution. HBCU presidents report gaining insight from the community on what the vision of university should be.

**Leveraged presidential influence.** Like presidential community presence, leveraged presidential influence is primarily an outward-facing strategy with both inward- and outward-facing results. HBCU presidents see addressing community issues as a key civic responsibility of the institution (and they as the institutional leader) to support the community. The notion of the university as a community anchor is based in this line of thinking. In the presidents’ view, because the university is part of the community, and often one of the stronger community-based entities, it has a responsibility to serve as an engine of Black community uplift.

HBCU presidents, similar to other university presidents, are able to gain access to people with power, money and influence. What is important to note is how these presidents tend to use that access. HBCU presidents, due to their unique positioning within the Black community, can facilitate the university acting as an anchor institution in several ways. They can leverage their influence because of who they know, and also because of what they know. Like all presidents, HBCU presidents gain access by using their academic credentials to connect with people that have money or other resources. But, distinctively, HBCU presidents also gain access to the people of the community by using their street credibility—their shared history.

All of the presidents in this study talked about how sharing information about their upbringing, in addition to their academic credentials, provides credibility in both worlds. So while they make the usual and customary rounds to corporate and political types, they also make certain to attend church functions, family events, and even go door-to-door to talk to people. In all these diverse settings, the HBCU presidents can, when appropriate, speak truth to power with
earned validity. Under the veil of intellectualism, they can speak truth to the Black community based in their shared history, and they are able to speak truth to students—inspiring them to use their knowledge to give back to the community. With each constituency group, HBCU presidents exert considerable influence.

E.D. Brown (2010) studied presidential leadership at three HBCUs exploring factors that either promoted or constrained the presidents’ influence. He found that HBCU presidents are highly influential and that their influence conforms to French and Raven’s (1959) theories of social power. French and Raven’s updated framework posits six bases of social power: (1) Reward Power—the ability to influence the behavior of others by providing benefits; (2) Coercive Power—the ability to influence others’ behavior through the application of punishments; (3) Legitimate Power—the ability to influence one’s internalized values (based on cultural values or occupancy of position) resulting in feelings of obligation; (4) Referent Power—the ability to influence based on likeability and personality; (5) Expert Power—the ability to influence based on special knowledge; and (6) Information Power—the ability to influence based upon knowledge of facts in the organization (French & Raven, 1959). Based on the framework, the HBCU presidents in this study use social power as they leverage their influence in various spheres for the benefit of civic engagement. The HBCU presidents provide benefits to others by where they choose to be visible and what they choose to say or write about relative to public matters.

Community messaging congruence. Presidents are critical for making civic engagement legitimate (Ward, 1996). They are also the key spokespersons for mobilizing their institutions’ civic engagement commitment (Ward, 1996). Maurrasee (2002), addressing presidents’ rhetorical support of civic engagement, asserted that in order “to achieve true compatibility between the higher educational mission and community partnerships, higher education institutions have to change [in ways that recognize] campus public engagement as a major public policy priority” (p. 271). Weerts (2014), in his examination of the civic engagement commitments of land grant institutions, used five categories to define engaged universities: (a) institutional history and culture; (b) leadership; (c) organizational structure and policies; (d) faculty and staff involvement; and (e) campus communications. Weerts (2014) connected these
categorical factors to how community perceptions were informed by university presidents’ rhetoric and behavior. In addition, Weerts (2014) looked at the extent to which campus and community relationships were based on respect, shared goals, and trust.

It is relatively common these days to hear university presidents tout their institution’s civic engagement—to speak with great pride about the public purposes of their universities. Many of them wax poetic about the virtues of faculty research and service, with some going so far as to highlight the words ‘civic engagement’ in university publications complete with glossy photographs of students ‘serving the community.’ The words sound good, the pictures illicit emotional responses, and all of it plays well with parents, alumni, donors, and organizations that give out awards for such actions. Yet beyond public pontifications, it is often challenging to find substantive evidence of real presidential commitment. Ward (1996) found “that if universities can receive credit for their rhetoric concerning civic engagement, there is no incentive to up that rhetoric into practice” (p. 110). But the participating HBCU presidents can point to evidence of their civic engagement rather than talking points. Rhetorical community messages that promise civic action to address social issues is not an option for the HBCU presidents in this study.

McGovern, Foster & Ward (2002) researched the changing role of college presidents from higher education’s start in America until early 21st century. He found that among a president’s primary responsibilities is the duty to reflect upon and articulate the institutional value, goals, and mission (McGovern et al., 2002). Each HBCU in this study has a mission statement that communicates the importance of service to community. Each of the presidents addressed their commitment to remain individually and institutionally aligned with that mission statement in word and actions.

For the HBCU presidents in this study, walking the talk is the way they earn the community’s trust. For these presidents, having the trust of community is just as important as having the trust of their boards, their faculty, and government officials. The development and nourishment of that trust fortifies the HBCU as an ebony sodality as defined earlier in this chapter. In some instances, these presidents began their current positions rebuilding community trust while others, by virtue of past community experiences, had presumed trust. Truth is a critically
important factor, from the presidents’ perspectives, in facilitating effective engagement. It is not enough for them to articulate, particularly in venues with high visibility, a message of civic purpose because the community will take them to task, publicly, if the president’s words are not backed up with clear and consistent action. The presidents report the critical importance of backing up their words with action to protect trust. The presidents remain congruent in their words and actions, which they report critically important to preserving and promoting civic engagement. Without message congruence, trust is compromised and can erode community relationships.

Often, HWCUs rhetoric of civic engagement doesn’t quite match reality (Ward, 1996), likely the result of conflicting societal and institutional expectations. Originally, the university as the ‘ivory tower’ was expected to be lofty in its pursuit of intellectual ideas. Later, the university was expected to make practical contributions to fixing society’s problems. These conflicting expectations, as knowledge purveyor versus knowledge transferor has confused HWCUs ‘third mission’ (Chantler, 2016) and “begun to erode their ivory tower status” (Chantler, 2016). The third mission, attempts to synthesize ivory towers into engaged universities, shifting the original focus from knowledge-purveyor and knowledge-transferor to now “knowledge-exchanger” (Chantler, 2016). In this vein, many HWCUs are undergoing an identity crisis as engaged universities because to become an engaged university they must embrace the community as intrinsic to their identity which, heretofore, as an institutional type they have never done. However, HBCUs have always embraced the Black community as central to their identity.

**Institutional responsiveness.** Kent Keith (1998), asserted that the need for institutions to be responsive to their students as well as society at large (*The Responsive University in the Twenty-First Century*). Gillard (2005) describes aligned institutional leadership behavior as the most challenging part of serving the public good. She contends that “eventually [all management practices] must undergo scrutiny framed by the question: What might be possible if this process were aligned with the vision and values” (p. 312).

Research, past and current, illustrates that the phenomenon of institutional responsiveness is not isolated to HBCUs (Ward, 1996; Gillard, 2005). “A number of education institutions and non-profit organizations seek to be responsive toward the stakeholders they
serve....and engage in evaluative processes to be perceived as responsive” (Bheda, 2013, p. iv). According to Bheda (2013), “[institutional] responsiveness is the process of assessing the needs of its community, meeting those needs, and collecting feedback from the community that its needs have been met” (p. 19). Institutions with resources have elaborate evaluative systems that can be used to determine how well the institution is meeting its stakeholders needs. For purposes of this study, I borrowed from Bheda’s (2013) definition of needs, where she describes needs as what people must have to be in a satisfied state where the context is restricted by location, time, and group belonging. For institutions to be responsive they must be clear about what needs they are seeking to satisfy and for what stakeholders.

For HBCUs, a review of their limited available institutional archival data reflects historical precedent from past presidents to the current which indicates that the phenomena of meeting identified community needs shapes HBCU identity, institutional life, and operational structure. By taking institutional action in response to current community social issues, and consistent with past pronouncements, HBCU presidents reinforce their community commitments. Thus, their institutional responsiveness illustrates how the presidents lead their campus on matters of civic importance. Also demonstrated is that institutional responsive can be an indicator that the rhetoric of civic engagement is real.

A larger purpose. Black community uplift or, in more direct wording, freedom from oppression has been and generally remains the larger purpose of HBCUs in that they, by origin, were to act as a countermeasure to the devastating vestiges of slavery and the persisting effects of institutionalized racism. Constitutional laws, such as Plessy v. Ferguson, served to legislate separate learning environments for Black and Whites and all but ensured that HBCUs would not be academic institutions exclusively but would need to serve as freedom schools as well. As a result of their history, HBCUs’ have existed for the purposes of educating Black people through knowledge and skills, but equally important has been their role of enlightening Blacks, raising Black consciousness about social justice, citizenship rights, fairness, and equality as a means to empower Black people to fight against persisting discrimination and marginalization and to seek equality. These civic goals, articulated as Black community uplift by HBCU presidents, are
intrinsically interwoven with HBCUs’ academic goals. The landmark decision of Brown v. Board of Education, making separate but equal unlawful, has not diminished HBCUs’ larger purpose to lift up, in cooperation with it, the Black community out of oppression, primarily because what gave birth to them, racism, persists.

This analysis of HBCU presidents’ leadership strategies, phenomena, and engagement goals led to an examination of related outcomes of this work. Thus, attention is given next to the potential evolution and intentions of liberation engagement.

**Liberation Engagement**

The interviews for this study, bore out the influence of common beliefs and shared history on the unique bond between HBCUs and the Black community. Five of the HBCU presidents are Black Americans—two came from working class backgrounds, one came from an early childhood of abject poverty, one from a family of sharecroppers, and one was born and raised in another country, and came to America as a college student. The five American-born presidents spoke about how their backgrounds influence their civic actions as HBCU presidents. They expressed an understanding of, and appreciation for the challenges of their community’s residents in a way that signaled empathy, not just sympathy.

HBCU presidents’ shared history and common beliefs with the people of their surrounding community fosters their leadership strategies. Their leadership strategies result in a high level of institutional responsiveness to their community (Bheda, 2013). However current definitions of civic engagement do not adequately describe, according to the HBCU presidents, how they interact—civilly and civically with their communities. Therefore, based on the evident need for new language (Gasman et al., 2015) to describe this unique engagement approach, I coin the term, liberation engagement. Liberation engagement includes aspects of civic engagement but may be best understood as an evolution of democratic engagement theory. Democratic and liberation engagement are similar. Their understanding of community as possessing assets, their approach to working with community in a collaborative, relational and contextual manner, and their similar focus on process and purpose are the same. However, where democratic engagements’ desired outcome is the co-creation of knowledge with shared
authority to address community problems and build democracy, liberation engagement’s desired outcome is the co-creation of knowledge with shared authority to address systemic problems that oppress people within the democracy.

At engaged HBCUs, liberation engagement is focused on the amelioration of the systemic problem of Black oppression and the simultaneous mitigation of the current consequences of that oppression. Democratic engagement stops short of pursuing this type of systemic change, although as HBCUs implement liberation engagement, some of what they do, specifically the mitigation of current consequences of oppression, certainly be considered by definition and description democratic engagement.

When HBCUs were founded, the systemic problem liberation engagement sought to solve was oppression manifested as physical bondage. Through time, the systemic problem was still oppression but took the form of Jim Crow, segregation and today it is oppression manifested as mass incarceration, voter suppression and myriad other forms of institutionalized racism. The HBCU and the Black community feel the weight of these oppressive systems and seek freedom from them.

Liberation engagement borrows from the Black Liberation Movement in that it’s focus, as applied herein, is direct and indirect community and campus efforts that can produce social progress and full freedom for Black people. In addition, liberation engagement can produce scholar-activists who will either directly or indirectly serve the ongoing cause of liberation. For HBCUs, their history and that of the people they were founded to educate dictates that those within them, as faculty, staff, and students act as activists and/or activist allies toward a liberation agenda. Despite the changing demographics at HBCUs, the agenda and work of liberation engagement has not change. It is this conceptual definition of liberation engagement that is referenced within the remainder of this dissertation whenever the term “liberation engagement” is used.

Kwame Ture (formerly known as Stokely Carmichael) wrote, “we shall have to struggle for the right to create our own terms through which to define ourselves and our relationship to the society, and to have these terms recognized” (Carmichael (1966), p. 639). While all the
presidents in this study were actively engaged with their communities, fulfilling the civic purposes of their institutions and their personal actions, none of them could point to a common term that they believed captured the essence of their community work. Most of the HBCU presidents rejected the term “civic engagement,” calling it “poverty studies” or “misuse or abuse of intellectual power” or “privileged people serving underprivileged people in ways that exacerbate power differentials that already exist between the academy and communities they tend to serve—Black, Brown, urban and poor.” Even those that use the term “civic engagement” to describe the work they do, qualify its use by specifically stating, “while the methods may look the same, the motivations are very different.” When asked what their motivations are, the presidents cited the uplift of the Black community or liberation of Black people through education and service so that restoration and reconciliation can occur.

Liberation engagement is the predominant engagement facilitated by HBCU presidents in this sample. While not all of the engagement work of these HBCUs is directed exclusively at the Black community, the motivation for all of it is liberation from oppression. This type of engagement has been alluded to in the literature but those researchers never named the work explicitly (Frankle, 1999). This type of engagement combines social, political, and economic activism and academic intellectualism to pursue the liberation of a historically and perpetually disenfranchised and marginalized people.

**Liberation Engagement and the Black Liberation Movement.** As Ture and Hamilton (1992), asserted, “The concept of Black Power rests on a fundamental premise: Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks” (p. 54). Racism provided the impetus, and Plessy v Ferguson institutionalized separate learning environments for Black and Whites. As a result, HBCUs were never only academic institutions; they were always freedom schools—places to learn academic, social, cultural, and liberation lessons. Due to this reality, HBCUs have always operated to educate and empower their students and community. Although liberation engagement as defined herein is about the liberation of Black people, it does not highlight racial divisions, but instead is an action of closing ranks.
Black Power, a term popularized by Kwame Ture in the late 1960s, was focused on Black people closing ranks by focusing on self-help, racial pride and unity (Ture & Hamilton, 1992). The Black Power or Black Liberation Movement was supported, in part, by HBCUs. Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was founded on the campus of Shaw University and many of the initial actions of the Civil Rights Movement are credited to students at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College, Morgan State University, Tennessee State University, and others.

The Black intelligentsia of HBCUs began merging activism and intellectual production from their beginnings. HBCUs, like Wilberforce University, provided shelter and protection for escaped slaves at the same time that they were providing skills training and a liberal arts education. The practice of merging social activism with academic endeavors has persisted because Black academia realized, then and now, that Black liberation required both an academically- and politically-engaged community.

Reading the personal accounts of members of the Black Panthers and others involved in the Black Liberation Movement (Newton, 1973; Shakur, 1987; Ture & Hamilton, 1992), it is clear that campus-based scholar-activists were involved in the Black Liberation Movement, serving the cause of liberation as analysts and advisors, while others were more involved in direct action. There was vast diversity of their actions and efforts, most likely due to the diversity of specific Black community needs and goals. In fact, part of its dynamism was found in the work’s creativity and experimentation—organizing and working with Black communities to bring about liberation from oppression for Black people. Despite developing a liberation agenda by fusing academic pursuits and activist actions, the originators of this type of engagement never named or defined what they were doing. A former HBCU president, Ronald Mason Jr, alluded to this phenomenon when he asserted, based on his personal experiences, that HBCUs have what Gasman et al., referred to as a “natural inclination to be civic minded” (Gasman et al., 2015, p. 350), but without naming or defining these actions, HBCUs’ liberation engagement was relatively easy to ignore.

**Liberation Engagement: A Brain Revolution.** The intra-communal liberation efforts of the Black academy and the Black community was and remains, largely, about disrupting cultural
ignorance in order to uplift the community. The disruption of cultural ignorance “by those that share a cultural history is not seen as cultural demeaning but rather culturally uplifting” (Hamilton, 1992, p. 208). To liberate a people requires a shift, a revolution of the thinking. In this regard, it may be that HBCUs act as boot camps for a brain, not blood, revolution—the peaceful disruption of social and economic conditions through education and liberation engagement.

Freire (1969/1973) indicates that “Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit…not by those who are oppressed, exploited and unrecognized” (p. 55). Liberation theologians like Helder Camara, a Brazilian Catholic archbishop, see revolution as a “second violence”; that is, one that is a proper reaction to oppression” (Kirk, 1979, p. 31). It may be that the educational revolution that occurs through liberation engagement can be seen as a second but intellectual violence that interrogates the origins and manifestations of the oppression as a means of systemic change. According to Freire, home and school transmit oppressive myths from generation to generation for the purposes of controlling them (Freire, 1969/1993). The threat that HBCUs pose is that they uniquely have the opportunity to interrupt the transmission of oppressive messages and offer common beliefs based in a shared history through liberation engagement education and practice. HBCUs can revolutionize a student’s thinking—countering the oppressive messages they may have received in their K-12 educational experience. HBCUs, as was evinced by the Civil Rights Movement, have the ability to create a brain revolution to come out from under the oppressor’s domination but it requires a total reconstruction of society which is what HBCUs were and, in some cases today, are attempting to do through liberation engagement.

Freire (1969/1993) embraced and envisioned the teacher as the revolutionary leader. A commitment to the systemic liberation of oppressed people is the distinguishing factor for liberation engagement and is what differentiates it from civic or democratic engagement. Those committed to social justice for others that have been treated unjustly are committed to a revolution that is the liberation of a disenfranchised people, most particularly within a democracy. The Martin L. King, Jr. said, “All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny (Baldwin, 2013). Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” The liberation of one group of people contributes to the liberation of all people. Therefore,
liberation engagement, while originating at HBCUs, can and should be the work of all colleges truly seeking to fulfill their missions of citizen development and participation.

The original notion for this study was that civic engagement at HBCUs somehow differed from civic engagement at HWCU. It was further that postulated that an HBCU’s engagement was heavily influenced and largely guided by its president. What has emerged from this study is confirmation of the uniqueness of civic engagement at HBCUs and confirmation of the important role HBU presidents have in determining the substance and scope of the institution’s work with the community. Although not an expected outcome of this study, uncovering specific leadership strategies that facilitate an institution’s responsiveness to its community provides some understanding of the “actionable strategies” called for by Gasman et al. (2015).

What was not envisioned at the study’s origin was that the data would elicit new language to define the engagement work of HBCUs and their communities. As such, it could not have been hypothesized that liberation engagement had a supporting, if not initiating role, the Civil Rights Movement. An attempt to understand the civic interaction between HBCUs and their surrounding communities yielded another unanticipated study outcome. The term, ebony sodality, surfaced from the analysis, and it is hoped that it will prove viable in the future as researchers seek to describe how communities view HBCUs in contrast to HWCU. The unique and interesting campus-community interplay, albeit described with the new language of liberation engagement and ebony sodality, between the HBCU and surrounding community does not effectively happen, as this study shows, without the intentional actions of the president.

A deeper analysis of the findings suggests an interplay between the HBCU president, the institution, and the shared space between the institution and the community. To summarize the interaction of this tripartite relationship, I offer a theoretical paradigm of HBCU liberation engagement in figure 1 below.
In the theoretical paradigm for HBCU liberation engagement, presidents implement three leadership strategies: presidential community presence, leveraged presidential influence, and community message congruence, which supports the community perception that the institution is responsive and supportive. The community perception of the HBCU, which I have named ebony sodality, provides the basis for liberation engagement to successfully operate. The president, on the campus or in the community, exercises the leadership strategies based on their shared history and common beliefs with both the HBCU and the community. The university works toward its goal of providing knowledge to students by offering engaged curricular and co-curricular opportunities to increase their knowledge, awareness, and skills in preparation for the civic actions, however they do so with the motivation toward freedom from oppression. The community provides knowledge and expertise, as well as community-based opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to work with them in support of their quality of life goal. Through liberation engagement the three entities in this tripartite relationship work toward the shared goal and
purpose of reconciliation and equality. In the theoretical paradigm, while the university
acknowledges its goal to transfer knowledge for student learning, student learning is not the only
goal. At HBCUs, the end goals are twofold—student learning for freedom from oppression—
reconciliation and equality. This binary focus fortifies, in the community’s view, the university’s
role as an ebony sodality.

Summary

My foray into the largely unexplored territory of HBCU civic engagement elicited a
number of new and unanticipated discoveries. Those discoveries were analyzed without the
benefit of a significant swath of academic literature relative to this institutional type. Therefore, the
literature of social psychology, Black power and liberation movements, and Black liberation
theology along with higher education theories was used to construct a strong analysis. Beyond
analyzing the study’s findings, I grounded myself in the important and well-documented
theoretical constructs of civic and democratic engagement, as presented in chapter 2. That
literature points heavily to the role of the president, which initially influenced my focus on the
presidents’ lens and their role at the micro level. However, onsite data collection coupled with the
HBCU presidents’ perspectives, informed my thinking and deepened my analysis such that I
realize HBCUs’ liberation engagement work is inextricably linked, at the meso level, to the
campus’ surrounding Black community as well as the HBCUs institutional identity and history.
And broader still, the diasporic community, HBCUs, and their presidents are all impacted at the
macro level by the realities of Black existence in the United States and around the globe.
CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The final chapter of this dissertation will address the research conclusions and provide a perspective on recommendations for further study. The conclusions will be summarized within the context of the HBCUs presidents’ leadership strategies, which signify the substantial role they have in preserving and promoting the civic engagement of their institutions. The presidents’ perceptions of civic engagements’ value and impact on the overall success of their students will also be summarized using terminology introduced in the analysis chapter—ebony sodality and liberation engagement. Seven recommendations for further study will be offered, given that research on the civic engagement of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) has been sparse to date.

The existent, and much larger, body of research on the civic engagement practices of Historically White Colleges and Universities (HWCUs) evinces a recurring issue that has some application to HBCUs: specifically, the impossibility of scripting a proven plan for successful civic engagement among and across institutional types with similar demographics. The first aspect of this perspective is the result of differences across institutional variables such as structure, human and financial resources, and faculty by-in. This aspect of the theme holds true for the HBCUs. HBCU leaders in this study advanced the notion that their institutions implemented engagement in a fashion I view as liberation engagement. The second issue challenging the practice of community engagement, is tied to the homogeneity of the institutional types studied. Homogeneity of the institutional types studied for civic engagement practices has stymied our understanding of the work. However, this study contributes to our knowledge of civic engagement by examining the unique aspects of HBCU leadership perspectives.

This study’s findings support the conclusion that HBCUs possess a unique relationship with the Black community and their leaders broker a unique relationship with that community which leads to a distinctive type of engagement.

Summary and significance of study findings

The 30th Anniversary of “Campus Compact,” was commemorated just over a year and a half ago with presidents and chancellors coming together to reaffirm their shared commitment to
the public purposes of higher education. According to Campus Compact’s *2014 Member Survey Affinity Report: Minority, HBCU and Tribal Institutions*, none of the 87 respondents to the survey were Campus Compact member institutions (Campus Compact, 2014). Yet, the major outcome of the 30th Anniversary commemoration was an Action Statement, a written commitment of institutional leaders to “deepen engagement work that maximizes impact for students and communities by building effective partnerships, preparing students for lives of citizenship, embracing place-based responsibilities, and challenging inequality” (Wasescha, 2016). There was no mention of the need to examine HBCUs, which have a historical record of civic engagement (liberation engagement) grounded in the freedom and liberation of Black people.

Amid presidential action statements of national engagement organizations (which are overwhelmingly White), there is a persistent absence of best practices, which contributes to the ongoing variance in civic engagement quality and quantity. Further, there is a lack of acknowledgement and research about the civic engagement of HBCUs which shortchanges the knowledge base upon which these organizations might rely. Therefore, a resulting narrow view of civic engagement and how it can be successfully carried out persists. Understanding the perspectives of HBCU presidents regarding their leadership role in preserving and promoting civic engagement may help to shape the civic engagement practices of HWCU.

Therefore, this study sought to examine the role HBCU presidents have in the preservation and promotion of civic engagement at the institutions and with their students. Three leadership strategies were found to be common among HBCUs that are exemplars for civic engagement: presidential community presence; leveraged presidential influence; and community messaging congruence. When these leadership strategies were practiced, the result was high institutional responsiveness to the needs of the campus’ surrounding community. In response to RQ1: What is the leadership role a president has in the preservation and promotion of their HBCUs’ civic engagement mission? This study found that HBCU presidents play a significant role in the preservation and promotion of institutional civic engagement. HBCU presidents play a key role in effectuating the civic purpose of their institutions, and thereby the community actions of their institutions and their students. They play that significant role by consistently utilizing three
leadership strategies. In response to RQ2: What is the president’s perception of civic engagement’s value and impact on the overall success of students at their HBCU? This study found that HBCU presidents perceive that civic engagement has high value and impact on the overall success of their students measured, anecdotally, by their view that students who interact in mutually and meaningfully beneficial ways with their campus’ surrounding communities continue to remain involved in similar social issues just as those graduates have done generations before them.

As a foray, of sorts, into what has largely been unexplored territory—hearing from HBCU presidents in order to understand the civic engagement of the institutional type they lead, required deep analysis to first understand, then describe, define, and contextualize the perspectival information they provided. That information will be presented next as an alignment of this study’s findings and those of existing research.

**Alignment of study findings to existing research**

Although Gasman et al. (2015) is the only empirical study to examine the civic engagement practices of private HBCUs from 1944 to 1965, there are other studies that can be used to contextualize and validate this study’s findings. Four studies, Allen et al. (2007), Allen (1992), Awwad (2009), and Ward (1996) are relied upon to draw parallels for this study’s findings and conclusions.

Allen’s (1992) identification of six goals that HBCUs share elucidates their common purpose, aligned with the Black community’s agenda of progress and personhood. The six goals are: (1) preservation and evolution of Black culture and protection of Black historical traditions, particularly those originating in the Black community; (2) preparation and provision of Black community leadership in addressing community concerns; (3) facilitation of economic function in the Black community, historically as one of the largest economic centers in the Black community; (4) provision of Black role models to inspire the aspirations of other Blacks in the community; (5) preparation and provision of Black college graduates with competencies to act as mediators for Black community issues with the White community; and (6) the cultivation of Black change agents that provide and disseminate critical knowledge for the edification of the Black community.
Acknowledging the development role, according to Allen et al. (2007), that HBCUs have in the Black community substantiates that the president is a key factor in facilitating the institution’s engagement with its surrounding community.

Black institutional characteristics reflective of the goals identified by Allen (1992) are reported to result in more cohesive educational outcomes than at other institutional types (Simms & Bock, 2014), and can be encapsulated into four common purposive themes (Allen et al., 2007) that are confirmed by this study’s findings: 1) HBCUs have a developmental role in the Black community; 2) they also have a transforming role in American society; 3) they operate within educational politics at the intersection of class and race; and 4) their role continues to evolve in a post-Civil Rights context. These historic institutional frames allow for a greater understanding of the role HBCU presidents play in preserving and perpetuating their common civic purposes in the 21st century, particularly as we consider the trends, prospects, and challenges they often face. In every presidential interview, elements of each goal are evident in the actions, behaviors, and values the presidents espoused as part of their leadership strategies to effectuate liberation engagement.

This study’s findings confirm Awwad (2009), which concluded that university presidents’ wide influence, as related to civic engagement, is primarily due to the alignment of the university’s history to the culture of the community in which it serves, shared identity. Archival and current documents as well as field notes and the presidents’ responses substantiates that each of the leaders, as well as their predecessors, viewed the institution’s work with the community as a moral obligation, which they take great care to fulfill. They are aware of and accept that moral obligation because of the shared university and community culture and history. The HBCU and its surrounding community’s history, people, and future are perceived by the presidents to be intertwined, thus the presidents’ perceived obligation to be engaged with the community.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The primary objective of the study was to understand the role HBCU presidents perceive themselves to have in the preservation and promotion of their institution’s and students’ civic engagement. Since much of the research related to civic engagement is based on the practices
of HWCUs, this focus on HBCUs provides a basis for beginning to understand this institutional type. Although the study produced some clear findings, it also indicated areas that would benefit from further research.

1. Ward (1996) suggested that there were only two types of engaged institutions: those that incorporate service as part of the academic experience, and those that merely express it rhetorically. As a result of this study, might there be a third type that has incorporated service as a part of the academic experience but also has a highly committed president whose rhetoric is made authentic by their own engaged leadership actions? Further, does the institution’s historic use of liberation engagement play a role in this dynamic?

2. The three leadership strategies found in this study: presidential community presence; leveraged presidential influence; and community messaging congruence were consistent across all six presidents interviewed. However, this sample is made up of exemplars. Would these leadership strategies be exhibited by all HBCU presidents? Knowing if these leadership strategies are consistent across this institutional type in general, would be important as a means of vetting these strategies as well as unearthing others. If these strategies are found to be consistent, these findings may increase our understanding of what makes HBCUs more or less successful and distinctive in their civic engagement. Further, that research could assist in the development of a proven plan for successful civic engagement for all institutional types.

3. The study suggested that institutional responsiveness results from the HBCU presidents’ use of the three leadership strategies. I have introduced the term “ebony sodality” to describe the institution’s responsiveness and relationship to its community. It would be helpful to determine if the relationship between the three leadership strategies and institutional responsiveness is causal, and if it is, can ebony sodality be confirmed as a more descriptive term to designate the HBCU academic environment as connected to the practical concerns of the Black community.
4. Since it has been determined by other studies and confirmed by this one that presidential leadership is important to the preservation and promotion of civic engagement, it could be useful to examine the motivations that prompt presidents to do so. Relatedly, what if any impact does family and/or community background variables contribute to making the president more likely to accept the moral obligation expected by these institutions?

5. To respond to the second research question, HBCU presidents relied on anecdotal data to define the impact of civic engagement on student success because they did not have this information available or it was not currently tracked. It could be beneficial to conduct research that can focus on measuring this outcome of student learning. Specifically, are there specific levers or touch-points that students must experience in order to lead to a life of a knowledge-informed civic engagement?

6. The study suggests that HBCU civic engagement, as I have termed it, liberation engagement, is distinct from civic and democratic engagement at HWCUs. Further research to either confirm or refute this finding would be beneficial. If liberation engagement is different, can other institutional types do liberation engagement? If so, what are the essential characteristics they must possess in order to practice liberation engagement?

7. Given that I have introduced a theoretical paradigm for HBCU liberation engagement, the specific aspects of this model, which my sample uncovered and the literature supports, needs to be fleshed out. Further research to determine if the theoretical paradigm would be applicable to other samples of HBCU presidents would also be enlightening.

Despite study limitations, overall this study has unearthed an intriguing notion that HBCU liberation engagement is intricately tied to its historical context, the dynamics of the HBCU presidency, and the community in which the HBCU exists. Given further study, it is hoped that the rich lessons hidden within these powerful and historically significant institutions will illuminate lessons for all who wish to pursue the noble work of community engagement and service. This is
the work upon which our nation’s institutions of higher education have used to transform the very world in which we exist, and impact our next generation of leaders for the better. Potentially, this study has pointed us in a promising direction.
APPENDIX A

Semi-structured interview protocol:

1) Can you tell me about how you came to be president of (insert name of HBCU)?

2) Can you talk to me about how (insert name of HBCU) upholds a definition of civic engagement today?

3) Civic engagement (or whatever term the participant uses), as you’ve just defined it, provides students with a sense of community and purpose—using education to advocate for equity and justice. How do you think that influences their educational experience and persistence to graduation?

4) How do you, if you do, restructure (insert name of HBCU) to expand the role civic engagement plays in the day to day education of your students and community?

5) How do you think, as President, you can shine a light on (insert name of HBCU)’s civic engagement in order to elevate the value of this work to not only your students but your communities as well as current and potential stakeholders and funders?

6) How does current student activism, for example Black Lives Matter, impact your approach if it does?

7) Are there other things you’d like to tell me about this topic or the way it plays out on your campus?
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