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LECRAE AND THE DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS AMONG
AMERICAN PROTESTANTS OF THE CAUSES OF
DISPARATE RACIAL EXPERIENCES

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For the glory of God, for my wife, Karen, and for our son, Matthew.

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PREFACE

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In an interview reflecting on his experience speaking publicly about Michael Brown’s death and the Ferguson unrest, Grammy-winning Christian hip hop artist Lecrae Moore said the following:

When Michael Brown was murdered, I just assumed that all Christians felt the way I did. That this is terrible. You know, this is horrible. And so, I just put it out there, “Hey guys, this is bad.” You would have thought I had just said, “Jesus is not real.” The visceral attacks that came my way were like a shock to my system. And it was an awakening Everybody doesn’t see things the way you do.¹

Moore’s account recalls what fellow Christian artist Shai Linne described as “the presence of a great chasm between many Black and White Christians” on beliefs about racial issues, revealed by a steady stream of racialized incidents throughout the 2010s like the Ferguson unrest.²

As Moore alluded, this chasm came as a surprise, as it did to many within the American Protestant church. While the American Protestant church's history includes racial division, as well as opposition and often-slow acceptance of racial progress by a considerable amount of White Protestants, the turn of the twenty-first century brought

¹ Michelle Higgins, Christina Edmondson, and Ekemini Uwan, “Facts about Lecrae,” September 30, 2017, in *Truth’s Table*, produced by Joshua Heath, podcast, MP3 audio, 50:27, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/facts-about-lecrae/id1212429230?i=1000392909882>.

² Shai Linne, *The New Reformation: Finding Hope in the Fight for Ethnic Unity* (Chicago: Moody, 2021), 73. Linne writes about impact of high-profile racialized incidents on emerging multiracial evangelical movements:

With the mostly White Young, Restless, and Reformed movement and the mostly Black Christian hip-hop movement coming together for various ministry partnerships, there was an added element of cross-cultural pollination that appeared to be an organic and spontaneous continuation of the “racial” reconciliation efforts forwarded by Christian organizations such as Promise Keepers in the 1990s. However, beginning in 2012, there was a steady stream of events, each of which increasingly revealed the presence of a great chasm between many Black and White Christians.

about many positive changes in race relations.³ New racial reconciliation movements arose in the 1990s, followed by a two-decade span where the percentage of multiracial evangelical churches tripled.⁴ Moore resided within a rapidly growing multiracial movement within the Reformed theological tradition of evangelical Protestantism that emerged amidst these broader movements and trends.⁵

No two major religious groups shared as many common theological beliefs and practices as White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants.⁶ Yet when it came to bringing those beliefs to bear on the issue of race, events like the Ferguson unrest demonstrated division between these two groups. While there was widespread consensus

³ For more about the history of racial dynamics within American Protestantism, see Nancy D. Wadsworth, *Ambivalent Miracles: Evangelicals and the Politics of Racial Healing* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012), chap. 2; Russel J. Hawkins and Phillip Sinitiere, eds., *Christians and the Color Line: Race and Religion after Divided by Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019); Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jason E. Shelton and Michael O. Emerson, *Blacks and Whites in Christian America: How Racial Discrimination Shapes Religious Convictions* (New York: NYU Press, 2012).

⁴ Emerson and Smith write, "Since the late 1980s, the evangelical community has witnessed an explosion of racial-reconciliation conferences, books, study guides, videos, speeches, practices by organizations, formal apologies, and even mergers of once racially separate organizations. In 1997, the Wall Street Journal could refer to evangelicals as 'the most energetic element of society addressing racial divisions.'" Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 63. For more on the racial reconciliation movement, see Wadsworth, *Ambivalent Miracles*; Gerardo Marti, *A Mosaic of Believers: Diversity and Innovation in a Multiethnic Church* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009). For more on the growth of the multiracial church movement, see Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*; Korie L. Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Barna Group, "Beyond Diversity: What the Future of Racial Justice Will Require of U.S. Churches," April 2021, <https://barna.gloo.us/reports/beyond-diversity>.

⁵ Linne, *The New Reformation*, 73; Brad Vermurlen, *Reformed Resurgence: The New Calvinist Movement and the Battle over American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 37, 39, 75.

⁶ Speaking on the shared doctrine, faith and practice of black Protestants and white evangelical Protestants, Robert P. Jones and Robert D. Francis write,

White evangelicals and black Protestants are remarkably similar . . . across five standard measures of religious belief and practice—salience of religion, biblical literalism, certainty of God's existence, and frequency of prayer and church attendance—white evangelicals and black Protestants are nearly identical with one another and notably different from the general public. No other major religious groups in America register percentages as high across these measures. (Robert P. Jones and Robert D. Francis, "The Black and White of Moral Values: How Attending to Race Challenges the Mythology of the Relationship between Religiosity and Political Attitudes and Behaviors," in *Faith and Race in American Political Life*, ed. Robin Dale Jacobson and Nancy D. Wadsworth [Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012], 129-30)

For research on the shared doctrine, faith, and practice of Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants, see Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, chap. 3; Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 198.

in the United States and within American Protestantism that Black people should be treated fairly and equally under the law, there was disagreement over underlying racial issues, including systemic racism, the scope of policing bias, and the appropriate means of protest.⁷

Perhaps the widest gulf of beliefs regarded White evangelical Protestants' and Black Protestants' perception of the stream of high-profile incidents of police officers shooting Black men. As of 2015, 72 percent of White evangelical Protestants identified the deadly encounters as isolated incidents. However, more than 84 percent of Black Protestants believed the incidents were part of a broader pattern. These respective figures were the highest percentages for the two perspectives of all religious subgroups polled. Moreover, the figures remained consistent throughout the remainder of the decade.⁸

As White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants generally processed these events differently, the impact was immediate and damaging.⁹ With the ubiquity of cameras on cell phones and the rapid growth of social media in the 2010s, videos of violent encounters between Black men and police officers dominated the public discourse.¹⁰ As Christians processed the broader societal debate over race and policing,

⁷ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 171; Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 172-75.

⁸ Public Religion Research Institute, "Deep Divide between Black and White Americans in Views of Criminal Justice System," May 7, 2015, <https://www.ppri.org/research/divide-White-Black-americans-criminal-justice-system/>; Public Religion Research Institute, "Dueling Realities: Amid Multiple Crises, Trump and Biden Supporters See Different Priorities and Futures for the Nation," October 19, 2020, <https://www.ppri.org/research/amid-multiple-crises-trump-and-biden-supporters-see-different-realities-and-futures-for-the-nation/>; Public Religion Research Institute, "Partisan Polarization Dominates Trump Era: Findings from the 2018 American Values Survey," October 29, 2018, <https://www.ppri.org/research/partisan-polarization-dominates-trump-era-findings-from-the-2018-american-values-survey/>; Public Religion Research Institute, "Summer Unrest over Racial Injustice Moves the Country, but Not Republicans or White Evangelicals," August 21, 2020, <https://www.ppri.org/press-release/summer-unrest-over-racial-injustice-moves-the-country-but-not-republicans-or-White-evangelicals/>.

⁹ Linne, *The New Reformation*, 75. Linne writes, "As Christians publicly processed these things via social media, it quickly became clear that many Black and White Christians landed in completely different places with regard to each of these events. The effects were immediate and damaging. . . . For many Black Christians . . . , there was a feeling of betrayal that many White Christians couldn't understand. . . . For many White Christians, there was confusion about why Black Christians were so affected by these killings, many of which involved people with criminal backgrounds."

¹⁰ Tisby, *Color of Compromise*, 176-83.

alienation ensued in the church and considerably along racial lines. After Michael Brown's death, evangelical author Trevin Wax said that "Ferguson is ripping the bandages of our racial wounds that we thought were healing but full of infection."¹¹

The racial alienation surrounding these conversations resulted in deeper division. A March 2018 *New York Times* article titled "A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshipers Are Leaving White Evangelical Churches" chronicled how the racial alienation within the church prompted many Black Christians to grow uneasy and ultimately depart from majority-White churches and organizations.¹² Over the decade, the percentage of Black Protestants attending multiracial churches significantly decreased.¹³ Lecrae Moore was among those Black Protestants who experienced alienation. Two years after *Washington Post* called Moore the "future face of evangelicalism," Moore signaled he was "loosening ties" with "white evangelicalism." Moore cited the backlash he had received for publicly engaging with the Ferguson unrest and other racial issues as a contributing factor.¹⁴

The tension, disagreement, and alienation surrounding racial issues in the 2010s presented a difficult issue for American Protestants. Even with equal legal protection and improved racial attitudes since the civil rights era, there remain "very wide and deep gaps between blacks and whites across a host of quality-of-life indicators such as income, educational attainment, occupational prestige, unemployment, wealth, home

¹¹ Trevin Wax, "Ferguson Is Ripping the Bandages off Our Racial Wounds," The Gospel Coalition, August 14, 2014, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/ferguson-is-ripping-the-bandages-off-our-racial-wounds/>.

¹² Campbell Robertson, "A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshipers Are Leaving White Evangelical Churches," *New York Times*, March 9, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/us/blacks-evangelical-churches.html>. See also Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*; Mark DeYmaz, "New Research on Multiethnic Churches," *Outreach Magazine* (blog), March 29, 2020, <https://outreachmagazine.com/features/multiethnic/53748-new-research-on-multiethnic-churches.html>; Kevin D. Dougherty, Mark Chaves, and Michael O. Emerson, "Racial Diversity in U.S. Congregations, 1998-2019" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 59, no. 3 (2020): 651-62.

¹³ DeYmaz, "New Research on Multiethnic Churches;" Dougherty, Chaves, and Emerson, "Racial Diversity in U.S. Congregations," 651-62.

¹⁴ Higgins, Edmondson, and Uwan, "Facts about Lecrae."

ownership, life expectancy, health outcomes, family-related factors, drug usage, incarceration rates,” as well as other areas.¹⁵ These disparities are large and enduring and have grown in some cases.¹⁶ Despite closely sharing theological beliefs, practices, and religious commitment, White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants generally differ in their perception of the origin and cause of these disparities.¹⁷ These disparate racial stratification beliefs can inhibit efforts to build bridges across races or engage

¹⁵ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 172-73. Further summarizing these disparities, Shelton and Emerson write,

Here, to give concreteness to this issue, we name just a few of these objective measures. Nearly one-third of black children will experience poverty for 10 or more years while growing up in the United States; less than 1 percent of white children will experience the same. Black men are imprisoned at six and half times the rate of white men. In fact, incredibly, there is about a one-third chance that a black man will be imprisoned at some point in his life. If he was born after 1975 and did not finish high school, the lifetime chance of imprisonment is an astronomical sixty nine percent. Black men are 11 times as likely as white men to die of homicide, so the experiences of losing two close friends to murder described by author Derek Hicks in chapter 2 is vastly more common for African Americans. Middle-class blacks, as compared to middle-class whites, are three times less likely to be able to pass on their middle-class status to their children. That is, their children are three times as likely as the children of middle-class whites to end up poor. African Americans live shorter lives than do whites, and they suffer from many more physical ailments. In health terms, then, on average African Americans have a lower quality of life. They also have a substantially more difficult time being approved for loans, and when they are, they pay on average higher fees and higher interest rates. They are much more likely than whites, when approved for a loan, to receive subprime and predatory loans. Under such unfavorable conditions, not surprisingly, blacks are more likely to experience foreclosure on their homes than are whites. Black neighborhoods, even if we account for income differences between blacks and whites, have fewer supermarkets, banks, non-fast-food restaurants, retail outlets, movie theaters, parks, and other consumer services than do white neighborhoods. We could go on—from lower salaries and substantially less wealth to greater unemployment to the likelihood of being burglarized to the likelihood of being discriminated against—but the point is clear: African Americans experience more measurable problems. (125-26)

For another survey of modern-day racial disparities, see Tony Evans, *Kingdom Race Theology: God’s Answer to Our Racial Crisis* (Chicago: Moody, 2022), 18-30.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 23; Valerie Wilson and William M. Rodgers III, “Black-White Wage Gaps Expand with Rising Wage Inequality,” Economic Policy Institute, September 19, 2016, <https://www.epi.org/publication/black-white-wage-gaps-expand-with-rising-wage-inequality/>; Chuck Collins, et al., “The Road to Zero Wealth: How the Racial Wealth Divide is Hollowing Out America’s Middle Class,” Institute for Policy Studies, September 11, 2017, <https://ips-dc.org/report-the-road-to-zero-wealth/>.

¹⁷ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, chap. 8.

meaningfully in addressing racial inequality.¹⁸ Bringing these beliefs to bear on racial issues or proposed solutions often results in even more racial and social conflict.¹⁹

Several significant studies have demonstrated the disparate racial stratification beliefs between White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants.²⁰ Polling and data research have further tracked the divergent views on many racial issues between these two groups.²¹ Recent works have recounted how applying these disparate beliefs within the American church resulted in racial alienation and division, demonstrating the need for practical works to address these issues within churches.²² Very recently, several such works have emerged.²³

This thesis explores the divergent stratification beliefs of Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants regarding racial inequality. It reflects on how these disparate beliefs have explanatory power for understanding why these groups, while widely sharing faith and practice, experienced division over racial issues in the 2010s. As

¹⁸ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 16, 171; Michelle Oyakawa, “Racial Reconciliation as a Suppressive Frame in Evangelical Multiracial Churches,” *Sociology of Religion* 80 no. 4 (Winter 2019): 496-517, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srz003>.

¹⁹ Michael O. Emerson and George Yancey, *Transcending Racial Barriers: Toward a Mutual Obligations Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 64-67.

²⁰ For instance, Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*; Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*; George A. Yancey, *Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006); Penny A. Edgell and Eric Tranby, “Religious Influences on Understandings of Racial Inequality in the United States,” *Social Problems* 54 no. 2 (2007): 263-88; Michael O. Emerson, Christian Smith, and David Sikkink, “Equal in Christ, but Not in the World: White Conservative Protestants and Explanations of Black-White Inequality,” *Social Problems* 46, no. 3 (1999): 398-417, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3097107>.

²¹ The polling and research firms Barna Group, Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), and Race, Religion, and Justice Project (RRJP) have consistently tracked Black and White Christians beliefs about racial issues over the 2010s, with a trend of findings that consistently revealed gaps in beliefs about racial issues. For instance, see Public Religion Research Institute, “Dueling Realities”; Barna Group, “Beyond Diversity”; Christina Barland Edmondson and Chad Brenan, *Faithful Antiracism: Moving Past Talk to Systemic Change* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022).

²² For instance, Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*; Vermurlen, *Reformed Resurgence*; Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

²³ For instance, Edmondson and Brennan, *Faithful Antiracism*; Linne, *The New Reformation*; Isaac Adams, *Talking about Race: Gospel Hope for Hard Conversations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2022); George A. Yancey, *Beyond Racial Division: A Unifying Alternative to Colorblindness and Antiracism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 127-30; Jemar Tisby, *How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey toward Racial Justice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021).

such, this thesis positions itself as an extension of the research regarding these two groups' beliefs and attitudes about racial issues and the accounts of how these divergent beliefs and attitudes impacted American Protestants.

Applying the frameworks derived from the aforementioned research to a high-profile case study demonstrates their explanatory power, offers depth and conceptual accessibility, and sheds a fuller understanding of racial alienation within the American church. General works that reflect on racial division in the contemporary American Protestant church and seek practical insight and application have recently emerged. Yet this thesis focuses on a specific element of that division, racial stratification beliefs, and applies it in a narrow way to a particular case study.

Thesis

This thesis argues that the case study of Lecrae Moore's public engagement regarding the Ferguson unrest suggests that Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants applied different racial stratification beliefs to the subject of racial inequality and racialized incidents of violence in the 2010s, which carried significant implications for the general trend of division between these two groups over said issues. To explain this thesis, this section will give a brief description of each aspect of the thesis: (1) Black Protestants' and White evangelical Protestants' racial stratification beliefs, (2) the application of these two groups' beliefs to racial inequality and racialized incidents of violence in the 2010s, (3) the significant implications for the general trend of division between these two groups, (4) Lecrae Moore's public engagement regarding the Ferguson unrest.

First, stratification beliefs refer to what people believe about some aspect of disparity or inequality in a society.²⁴ The study of stratification beliefs seeks to discover

²⁴ James R. Kluegel and Eliot R. Smith define stratification beliefs as "a belief about some aspect of economic inequality." James R. Kluegel and Eliot R. Smith, "Beliefs about Inequality," *Annual Review of Sociology* 7, no. 1 (1981): 30.

what people believe about why certain disparities exist in a society.²⁵ Empirical research on stratification beliefs has focused almost exclusively on two primary types of beliefs: individualist and structuralist.²⁶ Individualist stratification beliefs emphasize personal choices, character and abilities, and merit as primary factors for poverty and affluence. Structuralist stratification beliefs emphasize the role of social factors outside of individual initiative or control like institutions, patterns of relationships, and dynamics of status as primarily responsible for poverty and affluence.²⁷ Racial stratification beliefs refer to beliefs about racial inequality and disparate racial experiences.²⁸

Second, sociologists, along with pastors and theologians engaged in social analysis to better understand the American church, have identified individualist and structuralist beliefs as the prominent beliefs about racial stratification in American Protestant churches.²⁹ In the years leading up to and following the Ferguson unrest,

²⁵ Kluegel and Smith refer to the study of stratification beliefs as the study of “what people believe about who gets what and why.” Kluegel and Smith, “Beliefs about Inequality,” 30.

²⁶ Matthew O. Hunt, “Race/Ethnicity and Beliefs about Wealth and Poverty,” *Social Science Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (2004): 830, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0038-4941.2004.00247.x>.

²⁷ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 173; Hunt, “Race/Ethnicity and Beliefs,” 829-30; Kluegel and Smith, “Beliefs about Inequality,” 30.

²⁸ While the Civil Rights Movement resulted in victories towards equal legal protection for blacks and whites, and racial beliefs have dramatically changed for the better in the United States, Shelton and Emerson note there still remains “very wide and deep gaps between blacks and whites across a host of quality-of-life indicators such as income, educational attainment, occupational prestige, unemployment, wealth, home ownership, life expectancy, health outcomes, family-related factors, drug usage, incarceration rates, and the list goes on and on.” They continue by explaining the study of racial stratification beliefs is concerned with “understanding Americans’ beliefs about the modern origins of racial inequality and attitudes about the government’s role in closing the socioeconomic gaps between blacks and whites. These studies aim to clarify why Americans believe that racial inequality persists—and how they believe we might overcome it—even though blacks and whites are now ‘equal’ before the law.” Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 172-73.

²⁹ The following are examples of pastors, sociologists, and theologians’ categories for racial stratification beliefs in the American church. Evangelical pastor and theologian John Piper identified “Personal Responsibility” and “Systemic Intervention” approaches as the prevailing and competing ways that Christians address racial inequality in America. His description of the “Personal Responsibility” approach resembles individualistic racial stratification beliefs and the “Systemic Intervention” approach resembles structural stratification beliefs. John Piper, *Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), chap. 5. Sociologists Emerson and Smith observed that White evangelical Protestants tend to have individualistic stratification beliefs and that Black Protestants tend to have structural stratification beliefs. Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 173. Professor and Interservice Christian Fellowship’s director of theological formation Jeff Liu identified two prevalent individualistic approaches to racism in the American church, “Individual Moral Responsibility” and “Interpersonal Relationship,” and one structural approach, “Structures and Systems.” Jeff Liu, “Racism,” in *Discerning Ethics: Diverse*

researchers established that White evangelical Protestants' general understanding of racial inequality differed from the prevalent views of Black Protestants about racial inequality.³⁰ The gulf between these two groups' beliefs about the roots of racial disparities and solutions to reducing racial inequality tended to be deeper and wider than among Black and White non-Protestants. Black Protestants were significantly more committed than White evangelical Protestants to structural attribution for racial disparities, attributing economic disparities to macroeconomic inequality in access to quality education or racial discrimination. White evangelical Protestants were significantly more committed than Black Protestants to motivational individualism as an explanation for racial disparities.³¹ As individuals apply these racial stratification beliefs to various issues related to racial inequality, they tend to produce divergent perceptions, explanations, and behaviors in response to those issues.³²

Third, the disparate racial stratification beliefs of White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants had a considerable impact on broader racial division in the church. Emerson and Yancey suggest that the fact that the two prevailing views about racial

Christian Responses to Divisive Moral Issues, ed. Hak Joon Lee and Tim Dearborn (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 245-51. Evangelical pastor Mae Elise Cannon identified "Individual" and "Institutional" approaches to racism within the American church, which resemble individualistic and structural racial stratification beliefs, respectfully. Mae Elise Cannon, *Social Justice Handbook: Small Steps for a Better World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 215-24. Evangelical pastor Timothy Keller identified "Corporate" and "Individual" responses to racism within American society and the American church, which resemble individualistic and structural racial stratification beliefs, respectfully. Tim Keller, "The Sin of Racism," *Life in the Gospel Quarterly* (Summer 2020), <https://quarterly.gospelinlife.com/the-sin-of-racism/>. Sociologist George Yancey identified two individualist responses in American society and the American church, "Individualistic" and "Structural," affirming Emerson and Smith's findings in *Divided by Faith*. Yancey, *Beyond Racial Gridlock*, chap. 1.

³⁰ Shelton and Emerson, writing in 2012, thoroughly document and compare these two groups' beliefs about racial inequality right before the stream of high-profile incidents of racialized violence in the 2010s began; see Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 168-98. See also Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*; Barna Group, "Beyond Diversity"; Emerson, Smith, and Sikkink, "Equal in Christ, but Not in the World," 398-417.

³¹ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 168-75. See also Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*; Emerson, Smith, and Sikkink, "Equal in Christ, but Not in the World."

³² Victor J. Hinojosa and Jerry Z. Park, "Religion and the Paradox of Racial Inequality Attitudes," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 2 (June 2004): 229-38, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2004.00229.x>.

inequality and racial alienation are themselves largely racialized is a chief failure in addressing race relations in the United States. This racialization fosters a social condition where dialogue and proposals to address racial inequality and alienation generate even more racial and social conflict.³³ This dynamic was evident in the period this thesis focuses on, as events and public discourse that surfaced these disparate racial stratification beliefs resulted in considerable alienation and division between Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants. First, there was a significant decrease in Black Protestants attending multiracial churches in the 2010s. There is documentation of a considerable amount of Black congregants and leaders who departed multiracial and majority-White, churches and Christian organizations, citing responses to racial issues as a motivating factor.³⁴ Second, as the stream of high-profile incidents of racialized violence continued to press the problems of racial inequality to the forefront of public discourse, discourse about race resulted in division within Christian churches and organizations.³⁵ Third, as public discourse regarding racial inequality persisted and

³³ Emerson and Yancey write,

As we have argued, then, millions of Americans subscribe to one of these two perspectives. That we have such a conflict in perspective is not itself the failure. After all, Americans disagree on almost everything. We would not call it a failure that huge percentages of Americans are Republicans, huge percentages are Democrats, and many others are neither. Rather, the failure lies in the strong, clear fact that the views described in the above section are racialized. That is, whites (and some honorary whites) overwhelmingly subscribe to the view that racial oppression is of the past, race relations are good and improving, and we have full equality of opportunity. All we need . . . is for most nonwhites to come to agree with most whites and live like most whites. Nonwhites, though, overwhelmingly subscribe to the view that the system is stacked against minorities. It has always been so and continues to be the tragic reality. (Emerson and Yancey, *Transcending Racial Barriers*, 64)

³⁴ On the decline of Black Protestants attending multiracial evangelical churches, see DeYmaz, “New Research on Multiethnic Churches;” Dougherty, Chaves, and Emerson, “Racial Diversity in U.S. Congregations,” 651-62. For more on the motivation of Black Protestants for departing multiracial evangelical churches and organizations, see Robertson, “A Quiet Exodus;” Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 188-90; Linne, *The New Reformation*, 73-78; Vermurlen, *Reformed Resurgence*, 279.

³⁵ For accounts of the division in the American church related to racial discourse during the 2010s, see Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*; Linne, *The New Reformation*; Adams, *Talking about Race*; Ken Davis and Charles Ware, “Ferguson: How Should the Church Respond?,” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 19, no. 1 (2015): 5-58, https://www.clarkssummitu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/JMAT-Vol19_No1_SP15-1.pdf. For reflection on specific examples of said division, see the previously cited sources in this footnote, as well as Yancey, *Beyond Racial Division*; John Piper, “116 Been Real: Lecrae, ‘White Evangelicalism,’ and Hope,” *Desiring God* (blog), October 6, 2017, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/116-been-real>; Robertson, “A Quiet Exodus;” Nicola A. Menzie, “When Black Women Talked about Race and Gender in the Church,” *Religion News Service*, April 5, 2017, <https://religionnews.com/2017/04/05/when-black-women-talked-about-race-and-gender-in-the-church/>

increased, the differences in beliefs and perspectives between Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants over issues related to racial disparities have generally remained steady or increased.³⁶

Fourth, Lecrae Moore's public engagement regarding the Ferguson unrest, including the critical responses that ensued from his engagement, provides a case study that offers insight into the impact of disparate racial stratification beliefs on race relations within American Protestantism. Moore's engagement is a good case study for several reasons. First, Moore is a Black Protestant who shared theological beliefs and practices with White evangelical Protestants.³⁷ Second, Moore participated in multiracial and predominantly White evangelical Protestant ministries and churches in the years leading up to and following the Ferguson unrest.³⁸ Third, Moore's public engagement regarding the Ferguson unrest and his statements about racial stratification align with the

17/04/05/when-black-women-talked-about-race-and-gender-in-the-church/; Rasool Berry, "Dr. Piper: Lecrae & #Facts about 'White Evangelicalism,'" Rberryblog (blog), October 11, 2017, <https://rberryblog.wordpress.com/2017/10/11/dr-piper-lecrae-facts-about-white-evangelicalism/>.

³⁶ Public Religion Research Institute, "Dueling Realities"; Barna Group, "Beyond Diversity."

³⁷ For more on Moore's theological beliefs and practices, see Lecrae Moore, *Unashamed* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 106-74; Moore, "Passion Life Interview with Lecrae," interview by John Piper and John Esher, January 3, 2015, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/passion-life-interview-with-lecrae>; Moore, *I Am Restored: How I Lost My Religion but Found My Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 151-70; Collin Hansen, "Theological Imperialism and the Black Community," The Gospel Coalition, October 5, 2011, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/video/theological-imperialism-and-the-black-community/>.

³⁸ During his emergence as a leader within evangelicalism, Moore was a congregant at a predominantly White evangelical church. For a considerable stretch of his music career, Moore's primary performance venues were predominantly White evangelical ministries. Moore, *I Am Restored*, 45-50. Moore's influence grew in evangelicalism. Vermurlen notes that Moore has the most Twitter followers of any "New Calvinist" leader. Vermurlen, *Reformed Resurgence*, 269. In 2015, *Washington Post* referred to Moore as the "future face of evangelicalism." Michelle Boorstein, "This Rapper Is Trying to Get His Fellow Evangelicals to Talk about Race. Not Everyone Is on Board," *Washington Post*, July 1, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/06/14/this-black-rapper-might-be-americas-next-evangelical-leader/>. Moore regularly performed and spoke at marquee evangelical events like Passion Conference. Ruth Malhotra, "Passion 2015 Conference Opens to 20,000 Students in Atlanta; Giglio Emphasizes Finished Work of Christ," *Christian Post*, January 4, 2015, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/passion-2015-conference-opens-to-20000-students-in-atlanta-giglio-emphasizes-finished-work-of-christ.html>. Christian colleges like Grand Canyon University sponsored his tours. Bob Romantic, "GCU Partners with Lecrae on Unashamed Tour," *Grand Canyon University Today*, July 16, 2012, <https://news.gcu.edu/2012/07/gcu-partners-with-lecrae-on-unashamed-tour/>. Moore contributed to Christian publications like *Desiring God* and *The Gospel Coalition*. Moore, "Passion Life Interview"; Hansen, "Theological Imperialism."

predominant Black Protestant beliefs about racial stratification and high-profile incidents of police officers shooting black men.³⁹ Fourth, the critical responses to Moore’s engagement considerably aligned with individualistic beliefs about racial stratification and high-profile incidents of police officers shooting black men.⁴⁰ Fifth, Moore’s engagement with racial issues in the 2010s contributed to considerable racial alienation.⁴¹

Background

To understand the context of this thesis, it is essential to consider contemporary research on racial stratification beliefs and the foundation of research with which these studies established themselves. The primary categories of stratification beliefs, structural and individualistic, emerged from the sociological research of Joe Feagin, James Kluegel, and Eliot Smith. Studies on stratification beliefs consistently cite their works as foundational to the individualistic and structural categories.⁴² These categories have been utilized in significant studies to evaluate racial stratification beliefs within American Protestantism, the most notable of which are Emerson and Smith in

³⁹ This thesis will provide examples in chapter 3. Moore explicitly articulates a structural view of racial stratification in the following sources: Moore, *I Am Restored*, 68-93; Moore, “Lecrae on Ferguson: ‘The System We Have in Place Has Biases,’” *The Juice* (blog), Billboard, November 26, 2014, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/the-juice/6327837/lecrea-ferguson>.

⁴⁰ This thesis will provide examples in chapter 3. For a summation of individualistic responses, see Moore, “Lecrae on Ferguson”; Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 181.

⁴¹ Moore retained central Protestant beliefs and practices while also announcing that he had publicly “divorced” himself from “White evangelicalism” due to “the lack of empathy and a persistent unwillingness to substantively engage with racial injustice by White evangelicals.” Raymond Chang, “The SBC, Whiteness, and an Exodus of Black Pastors by Raymond Chang,” *Christianity Today*, January 5, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/scotmcknight/2021/january/sbc-whiteness-and-exodus-of-black-pastors-by-raymond-chang.html>; Higgins, Edmondson, and Uwan, “Facts about Lecrae.”

⁴² Joe Feagin, *Subordinating the Poor* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1975); Kluegel and Smith, “Beliefs about Inequality”; Hunt, “Race/Ethnicity and Beliefs,” 829. Shelton and Emerson note, “Some Americans also advance fatalistic attributions However, we do not assess these explanations since “luck” and “chance” have been shown to be less consequential to Americans’ beliefs about the causes of poverty.” Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 248. See also Hunt, “Race/Ethnicity and Beliefs”; Adrian Furnham, “Why Are the Poor Always with Us? Explanations for Poverty in Britain,” *British Psychological Society* 21, no. 4 (November 1982): 311-22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.1982.tb00553.x>. Hunt and Furnham echo Shelton and Emerson’s note about fatalism in their respective studies.

their seminal work *Divided by Faith*.⁴³ Emerson and Shelton have expanded on Emerson and Smith's work with an extensive study of Black Protestants' and White evangelical Protestants' beliefs, including similarities and differences, in *Blacks and Whites in Christian America*.⁴⁴

It is also important to consider contemporary research regarding the impact of applying these racial stratification beliefs on the American church. *Divided by Faith* additionally articulates the effects of disparate racial stratification beliefs on the church, highlighting how these divergent beliefs can impede building bridges across races.⁴⁵ Hinojosa and Park's work suggests that stratification beliefs can shape responses to inequality, creating varying responses even if there is universal agreement that inequality is wrong.⁴⁶ Emerson and Yancey theorize that the racialization of disparate stratification beliefs has resulted in further racial alienation when brought to bear in a community.⁴⁷ Oyakawa's and Wadsworth's works have traced how disparate stratification beliefs within a congregation can impact discourse about racial disparities. These researchers suggest the framing of individualistic conversations limits the discussion of structural considerations.⁴⁸ Prince has recently researched the impact of racial division on Black Protestants in majority-White churches.⁴⁹ Still, there is a need for further scholarly research on how racial alienation has particularly impacted various groups of American Protestants during the period this thesis studies. Barna Group and Public Religion

⁴³ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*.

⁴⁴ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*.

⁴⁵ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*.

⁴⁶ Hinojosa and Park, "Religion and the Paradox of Racial Inequality Attitudes."

⁴⁷ Emerson and Yancey, *Transcending Racial Barriers*.

⁴⁸ Oyakawa, "Racial Reconciliation as a Suppressive Frame"; Wadsworth, *Ambivalent Miracles*.

⁴⁹ Tryce D. Prince, "The Modern Experience of Black Millennial Males in Predominantly White Evangelical Churches in America" (MA thesis, Abilene Christian University, 2018).

Research Institute have extensively tracked beliefs and attitudes regarding racial issues among American Protestants. Still, their research is largely quantitative and without personal accounts of how racial alienation has impacted Christians.⁵⁰

Lastly, it is helpful to consider several works of research documenting the historical relations between Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants. Irons's *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* chronicles the beliefs of pro-slavery White Christians who coexisted with enslaved Black Christians within increasingly integrated churches before the Civil War.⁵¹ Boles's *Dividing the Faith: The Rise of Segregated Churches in the Early American North* traces a dynamic in American churches in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Boles recounts how Black Christians were integrated into churches with restrictions on access and leadership and departed from integrated churches during periods of increased freedom in society.⁵² Mathews's *Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism Between the Wars* captures where Black evangelicals fit within American Protestantism in the early to mid-twentieth century. Mathews suggests Black evangelicals charted a "third way" between White fundamentalists opposed or indifferent to racial equality and White Modernists who rejected orthodox tenets of faith.⁵³

Wadsworth's 2014 book *Ambivalent Miracles* documented the evangelical multiethnic church movement from the 1980s to the 2010s, identifying multiethnic

⁵⁰ Barna Group, "Beyond Diversity." Public Religion Research Institute releases an annual "American Values Atlas" that tracks racial beliefs of various subgroups including White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants and can be found at Public Religion Research Institute, "American Values Atlas," accessed April 7, 2022, <https://www.prii.org/american-values-atlas/>.

⁵¹ Charles Frederick Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

⁵² Richard J. Boles, *Dividing the Faith: The Rise of Segregated Churches in the Early American North* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

⁵³ Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews, *Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism between the Wars* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2018).

churches as a site of meaningful transformation in racial attitudes and relationships and ambivalence towards structural engagement of racial disparities.⁵⁴ Emerson and Smith's *Divided by Faith* provides an in-depth account of the emergence of racial reconciliation theology and the popular wave that expanded the movement to White evangelical Protestant ministries and churches, recounting how the former emphasized structural injustice and the latter did not.⁵⁵ Finally, Vermurlen's *Reformed Resurgence: The New Calvinist Movement and the Battle over American Evangelicalism* documents the rapidly growing, multiracial, theologically Reformed movement within evangelicalism in the 2000s and early 2010s, which Lecrae Moore was a leader within.⁵⁶ While modern Protestants have condemned historical attitudes and actions towards Blacks in America and the American church, the complex history of relationships and dynamics between Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants provides essential context to many of the variables and dynamics in this thesis.⁵⁷

Methodology

The following thesis is a work of social and historical analysis and reflection. It argues that Lecrae Moore's public engagement regarding the Ferguson unrest suggests that Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants applied different racial stratification beliefs to the subject of racial inequality and racialized incidents of violence in the 2010s, which carried significant implications for the general trend of division between these two groups over said issues. The analysis and reflection regarding racial

⁵⁴ Wadsworth, *Ambivalent Miracles*.

⁵⁵ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, chap. 3.

⁵⁶ Vermurlen, *Reformed Resurgence*.

⁵⁷ For a statement condemning historic treatment of African Americans, see General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, "Overture 20 on Racial Reconciliation," PCA Historical Center, 2002, <https://pcahistory.org/pca/studies/race.html>; Southern Baptist Convention, "Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention" (annual meeting, Atlanta, GA, June 1995), <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/899/resolution-on-racial-reconciliation-on-the-150th-anniversary-of-the-southern-baptist-convention>.

stratification beliefs of these two groups is based on Shelton and Emerson's framework and analysis found in *Blacks and Whites in Christian America: How Racial Discrimination Shapes Religious Convictions*. Shelton and Emerson establish that Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants hold disparate racial stratification beliefs through quantitative research, then connect these findings to a content analysis of quotes and responses from pastors.⁵⁸ Shelton and Emerson's categories and methodology serve as a helpful framework that supports the method taken in this thesis.

Chapter 2 of this thesis utilizes existing quantitative research regarding racial stratification beliefs and beliefs about other racial issues from peer-reviewed articles, polling firms, and seminal sociological works that are widely utilized in peer-reviewed articles.⁵⁹ These studies were conducted between 2008 and 2021, with the exception of the research found in *Divided by Faith*, written in 2000. Each of these studies utilized questionnaires to collect their data. The thesis presents the data from the quantitative analysis and theoretical frameworks from sociological and historical works regarding

⁵⁸ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and White*, chap. 8.

⁵⁹ The studies utilized in this thesis include research by the Race, Religion, and Justice Project in 2019, Shelton and Emerson in 2012, Barna Group from 2015 to 2021, Emerson and Smith in 2000, Aaron Griffith in 2021, Pew Research Center in 2017, and Public Religion Research Institute from 2015 to 2020. Edmondson and Brennan, *Faithful Antiracism*; Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*; Barna Group, "Beyond Diversity"; Barna Group, "Black Lives Matter and Racial Tension in America," May 5, 2016, <https://www.barna.com/research/Black-lives-matter-and-racial-tension-in-america/>; Barna Group, "For Black Americans, the Black Church Counters Feelings of Political Powerlessness," January 18, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/black-church-politics/>; Barna Group, "Most Black Adults Say Religion & the Black Experience Go Hand in Hand," February 18, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/sobc-2/>; Barna Group, *Trends in the Black Church Celebrating Its Legacy and Investing in a Hopeful Future* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2021); Barna Group, "What Is the Church's Role in Racial Reconciliation?," July 30, 2019, <https://www.barna.com/research/racial-reconciliation/>; Barna Group, "White Christians Have Become Even Less Motivated to Address Racial Injustice," September 15, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/american-christians-race-problem/>; Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*; Rich Morin et al., "Behind the Badge," Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project (blog), January 11, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2017/01/11/behind-the-badge/>; Aaron Griffith, "'Policing Is a Profession of the Heart': Evangelicalism and Modern American Policing," *Religions* 12, no. 194 (March 2021): 1-18, <https://doi:10.3390/rel12030194>; Public Religion Research Institute, "Anxiety, Nostalgia, and Mistrust: Findings from the 2015 American Values Survey," November 17, 2015, <https://www.prii.org/research/survey-anxiety-nostalgia-and-mistrust-findings-from-the-2015-american-values-survey/>; Public Religion Research Institute, "Competing Visions of America: An Evolving Identity or a Culture under Attack? Findings from the 2021 American Values Survey," November 1, 2021, <https://www.prii.org/research/competing-visions-of-america-an-evolving-identity-or-a-culture-under-attack/>; Public Religion Research Institute, "Deep Divide between Black and White Americans"; Public Religion Research Institute, "Dueling Realities"; Public Religion Research Institute, "Partisan Polarization Dominates Trump Era"; Public Religion Research Institute, "Summer Unrest over Racial Injustice."

religious beliefs and racial beliefs and attitudes of Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants. Chapter 3 presents a qualitative analysis of social media posts, news articles, interviews, op-eds, and memoirs regarding Moore's engagement with the Ferguson unrest and racial issues in the 2010s.⁶⁰ The analyzed content primarily includes Moore's own words, with content written about Moore supplementing those primary sources. Broad themes and patterns within the researched content are categorized and presented.

While this thesis intends to communicate important and fruitful patterns to observe, it acknowledges several limitations. First, the data this thesis refers to has slight variations in categories. For example, the primary category of Christians surveyed were theologically conservative Protestants, yet some surveys included in the thesis observe "practicing Christians," a more general category. The categories utilized tend to identify metrics of religious devotion and consistency, with additional layers of distinct belief and consistency.⁶¹ Still, the consistent distinction of groups surveyed in each study is racial assignment and a combination of religious practice and identification. Despite slightly varying categories, the consistency of results in various surveys maintains the significance of varying racial stratification beliefs across racial differences within these

⁶⁰ A note on utilizing social media: Social media played a pivotal role in the media coverage, activism, and public discourse regarding the Ferguson unrest. As such, utilizing Moore's social media accounts is appropriate in this thesis, especially being that this was a primary site of engagement for both Moore and his critical responders. See Ginger E. Blackstone, Holly S. Cowart, and Lynsey M. Saunders, "TweetStorm In #ferguson: How News Organizations Framed Dominant Authority, Anti-Authority, and Political Figures in a Restive Community," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 61, no. 3 (2017): 597-614, doi:10.1080/08838151.2017.1344670.

⁶¹ For example, when Edmonson and Brennan utilize studies that surveyed "practicing" and "evangelical" Christians, here were the categories for each: practicing Christians "indicated (1) I am a Christians; (2) My religious faith is very important in my life today; (3) I attend religious services at least monthly," while evangelical Christians "indicated the following: (1) I have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ is still important in my life today; (2) I believe the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches; (3) I have a personal responsibility to tell other people about my religious beliefs; (4) When I die I will go to heaven because I have confessed my sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior; (5) I disagree with the statement, 'If a personal is generally good, or does enough good things for others, they can earn a place in heaven;' (6) I disagree with the statement, 'When he lived on earth, Jesus Christ was human and committed sins, like other people.'" Edmondson and Brennan, *Faithful Antiracism*, 224.

faith communities. Notably, researchers have found that groups of respondents more active in their faith remain consistent and often trend towards increasingly disparate stratification beliefs along racial lines.⁶²

Second, the data is reliant upon the self-reported identification, beliefs, and practices of the subjects, which present limitations of independent verification in a quantitative study.⁶³ There has been particular scrutiny in recent years over how evangelicals are identified in research and reporting.⁶⁴ The concerns over self-reporting Christian and evangelical identification can be mitigated by utilizing metrics of religious practice and belief to define those categories in a study, which most of the studies this thesis utilizes do. Nevertheless, even those metrics possess limitations of self-reporting, which must be recognized.

Third, while genuine patterns emerge through research and theoretical reflection, none of the trends communicate monolithic beliefs from any particular group, nor monocausal relations between related phenomena suggested in the thesis. When the thesis speaks about specific groups holding specific ideas, or disparate beliefs between two groups, it refers to general yet significant trends. The thesis will identify correlations, but the quantitative polling research is difficult to derive causation from, and the qualitative observations do not necessarily indicate hard and fast causation within broader groups.⁶⁵ However, the trends and themes discussed in this thesis have been analyzed in

⁶² Edmondson and Brennan, *Faithful Antiracism*, 19.

⁶³ Stephane Brutus, Herman Aguinis, and Ulrich Wassmer, "Self-Reported Limitations and Future Directions in Scholarly Reports: Analysis and Recommendations," *Journal of Management* 39, no. 1 (January 2014): 48-75.

⁶⁴ See Andrew T. Walker, "Who Is an Evangelical? A Plea for Clarity," *World*, April 7, 2022, <https://wng.org/opinions/who-is-an-evangelical-a-plea-for-clarity-1649332212>; Danielle Kurtzleben, "Are You an Evangelical? Are You Sure?," *NPR*, December 19, 2015, <https://www.npr.org/2015/12/19/458058251/are-you-an-evangelical-are-you-sure>; Kate Shellnutt, "'Political Evangelicals'? More Trump Supporters Adopt the Label," *Christianity Today*, September 16, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/september/trump-evangelical-identity-pew-research-survey-presidency.html>.

⁶⁵ USC Libraries, "The Methodology," last modified March 31, 2022, <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/methodology>.

significant theoretical research. These trends provide useful information for consideration for anyone with interest in these issues within the American church.

Fourth, the source material for chapter 3 includes first-person accounts of Moore's engagement and reporting and historical recounting of his engagement. A limitation this presents is that the documents the thesis includes could have selectively represented the critical responses to his engagement found on social media and public discourse. The full body of thousands of social media responses cannot be comprehensively synthesized and communicated in a thesis of this scope. Thus, this limitation would exist whether the thesis directly selected social media responses to synthesize and present or relied on reporting and first-person accounts from Moore. Furthermore, the thesis engages with various mediums of recounting those responses, memoirs, op-eds, news media, and Moore's own social media posts, to present the trends in critical response to Moore's engagement as accurately as possible. An additional limitation to referring to social media reporting about social subgroups is the difficulty of identifying social media users' identities beyond a doubt, as users can post anonymously or pseudonymously. Nevertheless, this limitation must be recognized, and multiple mediums and sources recounting and reporting on Moore's engagement are utilized to pursue as accurate an account as possible.

This thesis is delimited in multiple ways. First, the thesis is regionally delimited to exploring racial issues within the American church. Second, the thesis is delimited to Black and White Christians and excludes other ethnic groups. Third, the thesis is delimited to exploring Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants.⁶⁶ Categorically, the thesis will examine Christians who hold to what is typically considered evangelical tenets of faith. However, some may not self-identify as evangelical,

⁶⁶ These categories are derived from Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*; Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*.

especially within the Black church which is typically not categorized under evangelicalism by religious statisticians.⁶⁷ Fourth, the thesis is delimited to studying racial issues within the church within the twenty-first century, primarily focusing on the decade of the 2010s.

Definitions of Terms

For this study, the following definitions are provided:

African American or *Black*. African American and Black are used interchangeably to describe a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa born and living in the United States.⁶⁸

Black Protestants. Black Protestants refer to African Americans who hold to beliefs outlined by the “Bebbington Quadrilateral.” I use “Protestant” rather than “evangelical” because Black Christians that hold to the “Bebbington Quadrilateral” are often not identified as evangelical in religious research.⁶⁹

Ethnicity. Ethnicity is “based on perceived cultural similarities which are often linked to a shared ancestral background or heritage. This may include one’s nationality,

⁶⁷ For more on the oft-inconsistent identification of evangelicals and Protestants, see Kurtzleben, “Are You an Evangelical?” The Bebbington Quadrilateral is a commonly used, broad definition for evangelical faith. The distinctives of the Bebbington Quadrilateral include: (1) Conversionism: the belief that lives need to be transformed through a “born-again” experience and a lifelong process of following Jesus (2) Activism: the expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts (3) Biblicism: a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority (4) Crucicentrism: a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity. National Association of Evangelicals, “What Is an Evangelical?,” last modified March 1, 2021, <https://www.nae.org/what-is-an-evangelical/>. Some research includes categories that are slightly broader than theological conservative distinctives. This data is intended to supplement points that can be established within the categorical confines or theologically conservative Protestants.

⁶⁸ The working definition was drawn from The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, “Definitions for New Race and Ethnicity Categories,” National Center for Education Statistics, accessed March 19, 2022, <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/report-your-data/race-ethnicity-definitions>; U.S. Census Bureau, “About the Topic of Race,” accessed March 19, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html>. Chicago Manual prefers to capitalize Black when it refers to racial and ethnic identity. University of Chicago Press Editorial Staff, “Black and White: A Matter of Capitalization,” CMOS Shop Talk (blog), June 22, 2020, <https://cmosshoptalk.com/2020/06/22/black-and-white-a-matter-of-capitalization/>. Also, see definition of “Race.”

⁶⁹ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, chap. 1; Jones, *White Too Long*, 198.

but also may be defined by or exist in combination with one's language, religion, tribe or place of origin.”⁷⁰

Evangelical. An evangelical is identified by holding to at least four primary distinctives: (1) Conversionism: the belief that lives need to be transformed through a “born-again” experience and a lifelong process of following Jesus (2) Activism: the expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts (3) Biblicism: a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority (4) Crucicentrism: a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity. These four distinctives are commonly known as the “Bebbington Quadrilateral” and are a commonly used, broad definition for evangelicals.⁷¹

Ferguson unrest. Ferguson unrest refers to the events which include Michael Brown's death, the grand jury decision of Darren Wilson, and the protests and unrest that followed these events both in Ferguson, MO, and nationally.⁷²

Individualist. An individualist refers to an individual who holds to individualistic stratification beliefs. Within the context of racial stratification beliefs, individualist refers to an individual who holds individualistic racial stratification beliefs.

Individualistic stratification beliefs. Individualistic stratification beliefs emphasize personal choices, character and abilities, and merit as primary factors for poverty and affluence.⁷³

⁷⁰ Katarzyna Hamer et al., “What Is an ‘Ethnic Group’ in Ordinary People’s Eyes? Different Ways of Understanding It among American, British, Mexican, and Polish Respondents,” *Cross-Cultural Research* 54, no. 1 (February 2020): 28-72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069397118816939>.

⁷¹ National Association of Evangelicals, “What Is an Evangelical?”

⁷² BBC News, “Ferguson Unrest: From Shooting to Nationwide Protests,” August 10, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-30193354>.

⁷³ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 173. See also Hunt, “Race/Ethnicity and Beliefs,” 829-30; Kluegel and Smith, “Beliefs about Inequality,” 30.

Multiracial church. Multiracial church refers to a church where no single racial or ethnic group comprises more than 80 percent of the congregation.⁷⁴

Race. Race is a “set of socially created categories based on selected perceived differences in physical traits such as skin tone, facial features, hair texture, etc.”⁷⁵

Racial alienation. Racial alienation refers to profound distrust between racial groups.⁷⁶

Racial division. Racial division refers to a state where socially created racial groups are physically, socially, and psychologically separated from one another.⁷⁷

Racial inequality. Racial inequality refers to economic, political, and other forms of unequal access or possession by a racial group.⁷⁸

Racial stratification beliefs. Racial stratification beliefs refer to beliefs about racial inequality and disparate racial experiences.⁷⁹

Racialized society. A racialized society is a society where racial division, racial inequality, and racial alienation are prevalent.⁸⁰ A racialized society can also be defined

⁷⁴ Dougherty, Chaves, and Emerson, “Racial Diversity in U.S. Congregations,” 651-62. See also DeYmaz, “New Research on Multiethnic Churches.”

⁷⁵ Barna Group, “Beyond Diversity.” Scholars argue race developed in reaction to the trans-Atlantic slave trade and was used to justify the transformation of lacks from indentured servants into chattel slaves. Yancey, *Beyond Racial Division*, 130.

⁷⁶ I borrow the following four terms in this section from the work of Yancey and Emerson in their book *Transcending Racial Barriers*. The articulated goal of their book is “to work toward a solution to racial division, racial inequality, racial alienation, and the racialized society” (10).

⁷⁷ Emerson and Yancey, *Transcending Racial Barriers*, 10.

⁷⁸ Emerson and Yancey, *Transcending Racial Barriers*, 10.

⁷⁹ While the Civil Rights Movement resulted in victories towards equal legal protection for blacks and whites, and racial beliefs have dramatically changed for the better in the United States, Shelton and Emerson note there still remains “very wide and deep gaps between blacks and whites across a host of quality-of-life indicators such as income, educational attainment, occupational prestige, unemployment, wealth, home ownership, life expectancy, health outcomes, family-related factors, drug usage, incarceration rates, and the list goes on and on.” They continue by explaining the study of racial stratification beliefs is concerned with understanding Americans’ beliefs about the modern origins of racial inequality and attitudes about the government’s role in closing the socioeconomic gaps between blacks and whites. These studies aim to clarify why Americans believe that racial inequality persists—and how they believe we might overcome it—even though blacks and whites are now ‘equal’ before the law.” Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and White*, 172-73.

⁸⁰ Emerson and Yancey, *Transcending Racial Barriers*, 10.

as “a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships.”⁸¹ Another alternative definition is a “society that allocates differential economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines; lines that are socially constructed.”⁸²

Stratification beliefs. Stratification beliefs refer to what people believe about some aspect of inequality in a society.⁸³

Structural stratification beliefs. Structuralist stratification beliefs emphasize the role of social factors outside of individual initiative or control like institutions, patterns of relationships, and dynamics of status as primarily responsible for disparities and inequality.⁸⁴

Structuralist. A structuralist refers to an individual who holds to structural stratification beliefs. Within the context of racial stratification beliefs, it refers to an individual who holds structural racial stratification beliefs.

Systemic racism. Systemic racism and structural racism are used interchangeably to refer to the presence or lingering corporate, social, political, and economic effects of racism that reproduce inequality. An example of systemic racism can include the pattern of funding schools based on neighborhood wealth, understanding that centuries of enforced segregation and decades of discrimination and planning have segregated neighborhoods while concentrating wealth in predominantly White areas.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 7.

⁸² Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 7.

⁸³ Kluegel and Smith define stratification beliefs as “a belief about some aspect of economic inequality.” Kluegel and Smith, “Beliefs about Inequality,” 30.

⁸⁴ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 173.

⁸⁵ This working definition was drawn from Evans, *Kingdom Race Theology*, 18-21; Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “What Makes Systemic Racism Systemic?,” *Sociological Inquiry* 91, no. 3 (2021): 513-33.

White. White describes a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe.⁸⁶

White evangelical Protestant. White evangelical Protestant refers to racially assigned White Americans who hold to beliefs outlined by the “Bebbington Quadrilateral.” I include “evangelical” before “Protestant” because White Protestants in the contemporary United States comprise of two primary groups: evangelicals who hold to the “Bebbington Quadrilateral” and mainline Protestants who typically adhere to a distinct, different set of beliefs.⁸⁷

Outline

Chapter 2 suggests that differing perceptions of racial experience and inequality of Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants correlate with differing perceptions and beliefs regarding other racial issues. It presents explanatory suggestions for why, despite holding to remarkably similar theological beliefs, practices, and religious commitments, Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants tend to have disparate stratification beliefs. Additionally, it recounts how the application of disparate stratification beliefs to racial issues contributed to the division of the church in the 2010s.

Chapter 3 suggests that Lecrae Moore’s engagement with the Ferguson unrest and the critical response to his engagement contained themes related to disparate racial stratification beliefs between Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants. It analyzes Lecrae Moore’s memoirs, op-eds, social media engagement, and critical responses to his engagement. Finally, it recounts the particular impact of applying

⁸⁶ The working definition was drawn from Edmondson and Brennan, *Faithful Antiracism*, 218; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, “Definitions for New Race and Ethnicity Categories”; U.S. Census Bureau, “About the Topic of Race.” Chicago Manual prefers to capitalize Black when it refers to racial and ethnic identity. University of Chicago Press Editorial Staff, “Black and White.” See also definition of “Race.”

⁸⁷ Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, 37.

disparate racial stratification beliefs on Moore's experience within American Protestantism.

The conclusion offers a summary of the findings of the thesis. Additionally, the conclusion provides suggested applications for the thesis and its methodology. The overall argument of this thesis is that the case study of Lecrae Moore's public engagement regarding the Ferguson unrest suggests that Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants applied different racial stratification beliefs on racial inequality and racialized incidents of violence in the 2010s, which carried significant implications for the general trend of division between these two groups over said issues. The following chapter will analyze these disparate racial stratification beliefs.

CHAPTER 2

EVALUATING THE DISPARATE RACIAL STRATIFICATION BELIEFS OF WHITE EVANGELICAL PROTESTANTS AND BLACK PROTESTANTS

Speaking on the shared doctrine, faith and practice of Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants, Jones and Francis write,

White evangelicals and black Protestants are remarkably similar . . . across five standard measures of religious belief and practice—salience of religion, biblical literalism, certainty of God’s existence, and frequency of prayer and church attendance—white evangelicals and black Protestants are nearly identical with one another and notably different from the general public. No other major religious groups in America register percentages as high across these measures.¹

Yet as they bring their beliefs and practices to bear on racial and political issues, Jones notes, “One of the most remarkable, consistent findings in contemporary public opinion data is the chasm between [white evangelicals and black Protestants,] who otherwise share both geographic proximity and a common evangelical religious orientation.”²

Jones’s and Francis’s remarks underscore the problem and argumentation outlined in the introduction of this thesis. A cohort of shared faith and practice was nevertheless divided over how to process the stream of racialized violent encounters over the 2010s.³ Moreover, their beliefs about the issues that emerged from these incidents

¹ Robert P. Jones and Robert D. Francis, “The Black and White of Moral Values: How Attending to Race Challenges the Mythology of the Relationship between Religiosity and Political Attitudes and Behaviors,” in *Faith and Race in American Political Life*, ed. Robin Dale Jacobson and Nancy D. Wadsworth (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 129-30.

² Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 198.

³ Public Religion Research Institute, “Dueling Realities: Amid Multiple Crises, Trump and Biden Supporters See Different Priorities and Futures for the Nation,” October 19, 2020.

often conflicted along racial lines.⁴ The strife and alienation coinciding with this chasm presented an urgent and complex problem for American Protestant churches in the 2010s that remains today. Disparate racial stratification beliefs are important to consider to understand this dynamic. This thesis examines those beliefs through the case study of Lecrae Moore's engagement with the Ferguson unrest.

This chapter argues that the disparate racial stratification beliefs of White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants influenced these groups' perceptions of racial issues in contemporary America, including the Ferguson unrest. Moreover, the application of these racial stratification beliefs produced responses to racialized incidents and discourse on racial matters that contributed to further racial alienation. Evaluating the relationship between these concepts and developments is crucial to framing the case study in chapter 3.

This evaluation will first examine these two groups' divergent beliefs about racial issues. The differences of views about these issues correlate with their disparate racial stratification beliefs. They are particularly divergent in ways that reflect their tendencies of structural and individualistic views. The analysis will then examine various explanations for these groups' divergent racial stratification beliefs. These explanations are theoretical and, by nature, cannot a causal relationship between specific variables and stratification beliefs.⁵ However, they offer insight into how two groups with strikingly similar beliefs and practices can differ on views about racial issues. Finally, the chapter

⁴ Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 179-185; Shai Linne, *The New Reformation: Finding Hope in the Fight for Ethnic Unity* (Chicago: Moody, 2021), 74.

⁵ Mike Allen, *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2017), 121. Allen writes,

Causality assumes that the value of an interdependent variable is the reason for the value of a dependent variable. In other words, a person's value on Y is caused by that person's value on X, or X causes Y. Most social scientific research is interested in testing causal claims. In fact, most theoretically derived hypotheses implicitly (or explicitly) assume causal relationships. However, causality is very difficult to prove. In fact, some believe that causality can never be demonstrated with finality and that the best researchers can do is to generate increasingly compelling evidence that is consistent with causality.

will survey the impact of these divergent beliefs on racial alienation experienced within American Protestantism in the 2010s. This survey will place the chapter's findings in context, support the previous sections' arguments, and bridge those arguments to the case study in chapter 3.

Correlation of Disparate Racial Stratification Beliefs to Divergent Beliefs about Racial Issues

Placing these divergent beliefs in the context of racial alienation in the American church during the 2010s, this section will examine four categories. First, it will discuss the differing views of racial reconciliation in the years leading up to the Ferguson unrest and thereafter. Second, it will examine divergent views about policing, a central issue in the 2010s. Third, it will examine divergent views about broader issues of racial disparity, racial inequality, and racism. Fourth, it will examine divergent views about how the church should respond to the state of racial issues in America.

The order of categories in this section is intentional. In the years leading up to the stream of high-profile incidents of racialized violence in the 2010s, there was an emerging multiracial movement in Protestantism. While this diverse movement brought Christians together across racial lines, divergent beliefs about racial reconciliation gestured to the disparate racial stratification beliefs that became front and center in American Protestantism in the 2010s. These disparate beliefs became more apparent due to high-profile encounters between police and African Americans, further revealing divergent views about policing between these two groups. The protests, unrest, and conversations related to policing in events like the Ferguson unrest propelled broader discussions about racial issues into public discourse. As discourse about racial issues became more prevalent over the decade, Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants brought their disparate racial stratification beliefs to bear in discussion, often resulting in racial alienation. Considerable alienation stemmed from how the church should respond to these issues.

Beliefs about Racial Reconciliation

The racial reconciliation efforts of Christian organizations and leaders played a significant role in the increasing multiethnicity of American Protestant churches in the decades leading up to the 2010s.⁶ The movement likewise generated avenues for coalition building and the improvement of race relations.⁷ Amidst the progress and personal accounts of transformation indebted to this movement, fractures in perception of the movement itself gestured towards the disparate racial stratification beliefs that became glaring in the 2010s.

Historical accounts recognize two waves of racial reconciliation theology and movements within American Protestantism. In the very formation and development of the movements, there are fingerprints of structural and individualistic racial stratification beliefs from the approaches of those leaders organizing each wave of racial reconciliation. During the first wave of the racial reconciliation movement, Black evangelicals connected racial reconciliation within churches to the need to address structural injustice in society.⁸ The second wave of racial reconciliation, which was largely adopted and advanced by White evangelical Protestants, generally jettisoned or omitted goals related to structural issues in society like material racial disparities and political advocacy.⁹

⁶ Nancy D. Wadsworth, *Ambivalent Miracles: Evangelicals and the Politics of Racial Healing* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012), chap. 8; Linne, *The New Reformation*, 74.

⁷ Wadsworth, *Ambivalent Miracles*, chaps. 4 and 7.

⁸ The racial reconciliation movement within American evangelicalism took shape during the Civil Rights Movement, pioneered by leaders like John Perkins, Tom Skinner, and Samuel Hines. At its early stages, the movement argued that racism was sin, and that Black and White Christians must display God's redemption by reconciling to one another and fighting against inequality and injustice through government and large-scale efforts at improving living conditions and opportunities for minority Americans. Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 62-63; George Yancey, "Color Blindness, Political Correctness, or Racial Reconciliation: Christian Ethics and Race," *Christian Ethics Today* 7.4, no. 35 (2001): 1-9; Michael O. Emerson and George Yancey, "African Americans in Interracial Congregations: An Analysis of Demographics, Social Networks, and Social Attitudes," *Review of Religious Research* 49, no. 3 (2008): 301-18.

⁹ The movement had early successes but truly found its stride in the 1990s with organizations like Promise Keepers embracing racial reconciliation as a core emphasis and leaders like Billy Graham promoting the importance of racial reconciliation. This second wave maintained the message of racism as

As ministries and leaders, like the global men’s ministry Promise Keepers, advanced their racial reconciliation efforts during this second wave, they were met with mixed responses. Notably, the very introduction of a racial reconciliation agenda was met with resistance and jeopardized the broader Promise Keepers movement.¹⁰ Yet, the lack of a structural agenda led a considerable number of Black Protestants, including those leaders who were pivotal in the formation of the first wave, to be less enthusiastic about the second wave of the racial reconciliation movement.¹¹ While various movements under the umbrellas of both waves achieved significant victories, they foreshadowed the tensions that would heighten during the discourse surrounding racial issues and policing in the 2010s.

Research from the early 2010s found that Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants “profoundly differ in their definitions and understandings of ‘racial reconciliation’” along the lines of the differences articulated in this section.¹²

sin and the need for reconciliation. However, it did not maintain the goal of social justice or redistributive efforts. This wave maintained that the problem was individual and cultural and, as such, could be solved with an emphasis on a sole emphasis on reconciliation efforts. Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 67.

¹⁰ The founder of Promise Keepers, Bill McCartney, drove the initiative to introduce racial reconciliation as a core objective of the global men’s ministry. In 1997, *Washington Post* reported that McCartney described

resistance from many Promise Keepers, a predominantly white movement, to his call for racial reconciliation. This message “had clearly hit a raw nerve, igniting a minor firestorm of hate mail and caustic letters.” After speaking about race relations in churches across the country, he often met with “a morgue-like chill,” and 40 percent of complaints received in 1996 concerned this topic. “To this day, the racial message remains a highly-charged element of Promise Keepers’ ministry. . . . I personally believe it was a major factor in the significant fall-off in PK’s 1997 attendance,” [McCartney] writes, revealing that even among Promise Keeper staff, “there has been pressure to de-emphasize or soften the racial message.” (Caryle Murphy, “After the Big Rally, Head of Promise Keepers Brings Out 2nd Autobiography,” *Washington Post*, November 1, 1997, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1997/11/01/after-the-big-rally-head-of-promise-keepers-brings-out-2nd-autobiography/deabb529-bd90-440e-ac35-a1af43503bcd/>)

¹¹ Carl Ellis articulated a sentiment about Promise Keepers in particular, and the second wave of racial reconciliation movement in general, shared by other Black Protestant leaders like Tony Evans, Tony Warner, and Curtiss DeYoung: “Tears and hugs and saying I’m sorry is a good first step, but for me, the question is not one of changing the hearts of individuals as [much as] it is dealing with the systems and the structures that are devastating African-American people.” Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 67. Ellis’s statement exemplifies the differing philosophies of White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants regarding racial inequality. See also Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 182-83.

¹² Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 183. Additionally, Barna Group found differences in the problem and solution of racial reconciliation. Barna also found that when asked about proposals for

These differences in philosophies of racial reconciliation continued to be a source of reservation for Black Protestants when discussing the topic.¹³ Some have argued that, intentionally or unintentionally, contemporary racial reconciliation initiatives functionally frame racial discourse in churches in expressly individualistic terms.¹⁴

The differing philosophies of the first and second wave of racial reconciliation, differing definitions in the contemporary church, and Black leaders' reservations about recent racial reconciliation initiatives exemplify the different understandings and definitions of racial reconciliation held by Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants. These differences have tended to be expressed in ways that reflect disparate racial stratification beliefs. White evangelical Protestants tended to have an astructural view of racial reconciliation, with a focus on personal awareness, communication, and respect for others. While holding these values important, Black Protestants also emphasized actions to address structural issues like various racial disparities.

Policing

In the years leading up to and following the Ferguson unrest, Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants tended to hold divergent beliefs about policing, especially regarding police treatment of minorities.¹⁵ Black Protestants tended to have an

the church's response to racial issues in America, Black Christians answered with more corporate and structural responses than White Christians. Barna Group, "What Is the Church's Role in Racial Reconciliation?," July 30, 2019, <https://www.barna.com/research/racial-reconciliation/>.

¹³ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 183-90. Some Black Protestants went further to express skepticism that racial reconciliation rather functioned to assimilate African Americans into White cultural expressions of faith and understanding of the issues.

¹⁴ Wadsworth, *Ambivalent Miracles*; Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*; Michelle Oyakawa, "Racial Reconciliation as a Suppressive Frame in Evangelical Multiracial Churches," *Sociology of Religion* 80 no. 4 (Winter 2019): 496-517, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srz003>.

¹⁵ According to Aaron Griffith, American evangelicals during the 2010s and early 2020s tended to frame policing as both a divinely sanctioned activity and a site of sentimental engagement. Both frames expand the power and reach of policing, limiting evangelicals' abilities to see and correct problems within the profession. Moreover, these views are shaped along racial lines, as 68 percent of White evangelicals and 58 percent of mainline Protestants gave a positive rating in polling about police treatment of minorities. Conversely, only 25 percent of Black Protestants gave a positive rating. Aaron Griffith, "'Policing Is a Profession of the Heart': Evangelicalism and Modern American Policing," *Religions* 12, no.

unfavorable view of policing, perceiving patterns of unfair treatment of minorities by police. White evangelical Protestants tended to have a favorable and sentimental view of police, with a considerable majority not perceiving disparities in police treatment among racial groups. These divergent beliefs were significant during the stream of high-profile encounters between police and black individuals in the 2010s. A sizeable majority of Black Protestants viewed these events as symptomatic of a pattern of inequality, while a sizeable majority of White evangelical Protestants viewed them as isolated incidents.¹⁶

The prevalent attitudes of these two groups regarding policing and race display distinctly structural and individualistic sentiments. The view that police unfairly target people of color displays a structural stratification belief. To suggest a policing disparities pattern is to locate the inequality at an institutional level that transcends individual police, citizens, and encounters. The view that no unfair pattern exists suggests an individualistic belief about police encounters. This view places the responsibility of the quality of each encounter on the conduct, character, and decisions of individual police officers and

194 (March 2021), <https://doi:10.3390/re12030194>. In a nationwide survey of American adults in 2015, Barna Group asked respondents about their opinion and personal experience regarding police brutality. The study found significant differences between what they called “white born again Christians” and “non-white born again Christians.” Twenty-four percent of White born-again Christians believed police unfairly target people of color, compared to 82 percent of non-White born-again Christians. Barna Group, “Americans’ Views of Police Brutality,” July 14, 2016, <https://www.barna.com/research/americans-views-of-police-brutality/>. Additionally, 2017 polling showed that 71 percent of White evangelical Protestants rated the work of American police as “excellent” or “good.” For Black Protestants, 45 percent rated U.S. police work as “excellent” or “good.” In the same poll, 68 percent of White evangelical Protestants gave a positive rating regarding police treatment of minorities, compared to 25 percent of Black Protestants. Rich Morin et al., “Behind the Badge,” Pew Research Center’s Social & Demographic Trends Project (blog), January 11, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2017/01/11/behind-the-badge/>. Additionally, a notable aspect of beliefs about policing within the American church is that White evangelical Protestants may have been outliers in opinions and trends. For instance, while other White religious groups shifted their beliefs between 2015 and 2020 on the need for police reform, approving at higher rates of the need for police reform over time, and increasingly believing publicized police brutality incidents were not isolated incidents, White evangelicals stayed the same during that same period. Aimee Ortiz, “Confidence in Police Is at Record Low, Gallup Survey Finds,” *New York Times*, August 12, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/12/us/gallup-poll-police.html>.

¹⁶ White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants tended to process and interpret the continued the stream of high-profile incidents of police officers shooting Black men differently. As of 2015, 72 percent of White evangelical Protestants identified the deadly encounters as isolated incidents, while more than 84 percent believed the incidents were part of a broader pattern. Public Religion Research Institute, “Deep Divide between Black and White Americans in Views of Criminal Justice System,” May 7, 2015, <https://www.prii.org/research/divide-White-Black-americans-criminal-justice-system/>.

citizens. As such, when high-profile encounters between police and black individuals pervaded the national consciousness, those who held structural and individualistic views likely perceived the same incidents in significantly different ways. Given the prevailing views of White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants, the expressions of these disparate perceptions often occurred along racial lines.¹⁷

Perceptions of Racial Disparities, Racial Inequality, and Racism

The stream of high-profile, racialized violent encounters sparked conversations about racial issues that expanded beyond the matter of policing. As more incidents dominated the news cycle and social media, the conversations grew increasingly pervasive in the national consciousness. In turn, conversations about racial issues grew in prominence in churches, as well.¹⁸ Research on White evangelical Protestants' and Black Protestants' explanations for racial disparities, perceptions of racial inequality, and understanding of racism during this time suggests gaps in their perception and beliefs about these issues that reflect disparate racial stratification beliefs.

Regarding explanations for racial disparities, Shelton and Emerson's research in the early 2010s found "that white Protestants are more strongly committed to motivational individualism than are black Protestants and that black Protestants are far more likely than white Protestants to attribute racial inequality to racial discrimination."¹⁹ Shelton and Emerson also found that these differences between Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants were more significant than the differences between Black and White American non-Protestants.²⁰ Research conducted following the Ferguson

¹⁷ See Tisby, *Color of Compromise*, 178-79; Linne, *The New Reformation*, 73-78.

¹⁸ Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*; Linne, *The New Reformation*.

¹⁹ Jason E. Shelton and Michael O. Emerson, *Blacks and Whites in Christian America: How Racial Discrimination Shapes Religious Convictions* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 174.

²⁰ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 173.

unrest found these gaps in explanations for racial inequality persisted.²¹ There were wide gaps in beliefs about whether ongoing discrimination played a role in disparities in jobs, housing, and income.²²

There were also differing beliefs about whether disparities existed at all. White evangelical Protestants were generally less convinced that minorities were socially disadvantaged than Black Protestants.²³ For instance, a 2019 Race, Religion and Justice Project (RRJP) survey found that 84 percent of Black Protestants and 28 percent of White evangelical Protestants believed blacks were treated less fairly than whites regarding hiring, pay, and promotions.²⁴ Other studies from the years following the Ferguson unrest found stark disparities in beliefs about whether or not minorities experienced “undeserved hardship,” whether or not “the effects of slavery continue to be felt today,” and whether America “has a race problem.”²⁵ There was also a gap between Black

²¹ Christina Barland Edmondson and Chad Brenan, *Faithful Antiracism: Moving Past Talk to Systemic Change* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), chap. 1. Research conducted in the years following Ferguson found that these gaps in racial stratification beliefs persisted. In a 2019 RRJP study, Black and White Christians were asked why they believed Black people had lower quality jobs, housing, and income than White people. Sixty-three percent of Black Christians attributed inequality to ongoing discrimination, while 32 percent of White Christians shared that attribution. See also Jerry Z. Park, Joyce C. Chang, and James C. Davidson, “Equal Opportunity Beliefs beyond Black and White American Christianity,” *Religions* 11, no. 7 (July 2020): 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11070348>; Ryon J. Cobb, Dilara K. Üsküp, and Steven Jefferson, “Congregational Composition and Explanations for Racial Inequality among Black Religious Affiliates,” *Race and Social Problems* 9, no. 2 (2017): 163-69, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-017-9208-y>.

²² Edmondson and Brenan, *Faithful Antiracism*, 20.

²³ Barna Group, “Black Lives Matter and Racial Tension in America,” May 5, 2016, <https://www.barna.com/research/black-lives-matter-and-racial-tension-in-america/>.

²⁴ Edmondson and Brenan, *Faithful Antiracism*, chap. 1. Notably, 60 percent of White non-Christians and 76 percent of Black non-Christians answered yes.

²⁵ A 2019 RRJP survey found that 84 percent of Black Protestants and 28 percent of White evangelical Protestants believed Blacks were treated less fairly than Whites regarding hiring, pay and promotions. Interestingly, 60 percent of White non-Christians and 76 percent of Black non-Christians answered yes. A 2019 RRJP survey asked respondents why Black people had lower quality jobs, housing, and income than White people in the United States. One-fifth of White Christians did not believe there was a disparity between Blacks and Whites in these quality-of-life categories. Of those who did, 32 percent attributed the gap to ongoing discrimination, 30 percent attributed past discrimination, 27 percent attributed Black fathers leaving their children, 27 percent attributed reliance on the government. As for Black Christians, 63 percent attributed it to ongoing discrimination, and 49 percent attributed it to past discrimination, while less 12 percent attributed it to black fatherhood, 11 percent attributed it to reliance on the government, and 7 percent denied that there were disparities to begin with. Edmondson and Brenan, *Faithful Antiracism*, chap. 1. According to a Barna study in 2018, 35 percent of “black practicing Christians” and 12 percent of “white practicing Christians” agreed that minorities “always” suffer

Protestants' and White evangelical Protestants' perceptions of the historical oppression of minorities in the United States.²⁶

Furthermore, these two groups had different perceptions of what Shelton and Emerson call the “race problem” in contemporary America.²⁷ In other words, members of these groups tended to understand racism differently. For example, a significant majority of White practicing Christians believed that personal prejudice was a bigger problem than discrimination built into institutions. In contrast, a significant majority of Black practicing Christians thought that discrimination built into institutions was a bigger problem than personal prejudice.²⁸ The disparate emphases in the two groups' understandings of racism reflect the tendencies towards structural and individualistic racial stratification beliefs.

Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants tended to have different explanations for racial disparities, perceptions of racial inequality, and understandings of racism. These differences reflect structural and individualistic racial stratification beliefs,

undeserved hardship. Thirty-two percent of Blacks and 21 percent of Whites answered “usually.” Twenty-four percent of Blacks and 56 percent of Whites said “sometimes.” Interestingly, Black Christians said “always” more than black non-Christians (23 percent), and White Christians said “always” less than White non-Christians (15 percent). According to a Barna study in 2018, 79 percent of “black practicing Christians” agreed that “the effects of slavery continue to be felt today,” while 42 percent of “white practicing Christians” agreed with that statement. Barna Group, “Beyond Diversity: What the Future of Racial Justice Will Require of U.S. Churches,” April 2021, <https://barna.gloo.us/reports/beyond-diversity>. According to a Barna study in 2020, 81 percent of Blacks self-identified Christians said America “definitely” had a race problem, compared to 33 percent of White self-identified Christians. Barna Group, “Beyond Diversity: What the Future of Racial Justice Will Require of U.S. Churches,” April 2021, <https://barna.gloo.us/reports/beyond-diversity>.

²⁶ A 2020 Barna study showed that 18 percent of White practicing Christians strongly agree and 28 percent somewhat agree with the statement “Historically, the U.S. has been oppressive to minorities,” while 56 percent of Black practicing Christians strongly agree and 27 percent somewhat agree with that statement. White non-Christians answered 37 percent strongly agree and 32 percent somewhat agree, while Black non-Christians answered 51 percent strongly agree and 12 percent somewhat agree. Barna Group, “Beyond Diversity.”

²⁷ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 169-72.

²⁸ A Barna study from 2020 reported that three in five White practicing Christians said personal prejudice is a bigger problem than discrimination built into institutions. In that same study, two-thirds of Black practicing Christians said institutional discrimination is a bigger problem than personal prejudice. These findings seem to indicate that the disparate stratification beliefs regarding racial inequality have remained in the years following Ferguson and the increased protests surrounding racial inequality. Barna Group, “Beyond Diversity;”

as Black Protestants tended to perceive barriers to inequality on a systemic level that White evangelical Protestants tended not to perceive. Moreover, these differing perceptions may have impacted the two groups' disparate perspectives on racism in general. Together, these differences suggest two alternative experiences of racial conditions in society. Edmondson and Brennan have found that Christians with structural racial stratification beliefs respond to various social issues with structural explanations. In contrast, individualists tend to respond with non-structural explanations.²⁹ The research included in this section suggests this pattern was present amidst these two groups in the 2010s.

Addressing Racial Inequality

The content of discourse about policing and broader racial issues in the 2010s often included whether and how individuals and society should respond to said issues. When asked how the church and society should address racial inequality, Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants often possessed different views. These conditions introduced another area where the two groups, despite shared faith and practices and a consensus on the evil nature of racism, responded in divergent ways to racial issues.

One Barna study found that White Christians were significantly less motivated to “address racial injustice in our society” than Black Christians. The proportion of White Christians who responded as motivated decreased year over year.³⁰ When polled on how the church should respond to historical injustices against Black Americans, Black Christians responded with actionable steps at a significantly higher rate than White

²⁹ Edmondson and Brennan, *Faithful Antiracism*, 30.

³⁰ Barna Group, “White Christians Have Become Even Less Motivated to Address Racial Injustice,” September 15, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/american-christians-race-problem/>. Regarding motivation and engagement with racial disparities, Barna asked self-identified Christians how motivated they were to “address racial injustice in our society.” The research found that 25 percent of White Christians were “very motivated” or “motivated,” compared to 70 percent of Black Christians.

Christians.³¹ Additionally, Emerson and Shelton found that Black Protestants are less likely than White Protestants “to assert that tensions surrounding race relations will dissipate if we, as individuals and as a society, stop talking about our longstanding ‘race problem.’”³² Furthermore, these two groups were further apart in their beliefs about whether Americans should be “talking about race” than Black and White non-Protestants.³³

The two groups also sharply differed in their views about the role the U.S. government should or shouldn’t play in bridging the racial divide. Black Protestants were likely to support government policies aimed at reducing disparities, while White evangelical Protestants tended to resist approaches of government intervention.³⁴ Shelton and Emerson note “existing studies have long since established the links between attitudes about inequality and support for redistributive policy.”³⁵

The divergent responses about how the church and society should respond to racial inequality generally reflect the gaps between how these two groups tended to perceive racial inequality. Both of these groups overwhelmingly believed that racism was evil.³⁶ Yet, as Hinojosa and Park have suggested, stratification beliefs can shape responses to inequality, creating varying responses even if there is universal agreement

³¹ Barna Group, “White Christians Have Become Even Less Motivated.” Regarding practical responses to racial inequality, Barna asked practicing Christians how the Church should respond to the Black community in light of historical injustice against African Americans, 33 percent of White respondents said, “there’s nothing the Church should do,” the largest response out of all options in which multiple choices were allowed. The plurality of Black respondents (33 percent) said, “repair the damage.” Twenty-five percent of Black respondents said, “repent,” compared to 16 percent of White respondents, and 19 percent of Black respondents said, “pursue restitution,” compared to 12 percent of White respondents.

³² Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 197.

³³ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 197.

³⁴ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, chap. 8.

³⁵ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 175.

³⁶ Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 174.

that inequality is wrong.³⁷ An individualistic view of racial disparities can limit the scope of sensible responses institutions should take, as the primary source of those disparities exist within individuals, not within social conditions. Conversely, a structural view of racial disparities might encourage increased urgency for institutions to respond, as institutions are more capable of addressing barriers than individuals. When these two groups brought their prevailing stratification beliefs to bear on the discussion of racial inequality, it consistently produced disparate responses.

Potential Explanations for Disparate Racial Stratification Beliefs

The previous section examined White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants divergent beliefs about a number of racial issues. This section will examine several explanations for these groups' divergent racial stratification beliefs. While it is difficult to demonstrate causal relationships with finality when discussing social scientific phenomenon, exploring proposed explanations fosters insight on why these groups diverge in their racial stratification beliefs while sharing other beliefs and practices. The following section presents three explanations: (1) religious worldview and cultural toolkits, (2) lived experience, (3) views about history. These views are not mutually exclusive and may even impact one another.

Religious Worldview and Cultural Tool Kits

Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants share a remarkable amount of religious beliefs and practices and hold these beliefs and practices central to how they see the world. However, some argue that culture can influence certain elements

³⁷ Victor J. Hinojosa and Jerry Z. Park, "Religion and the Paradox of Racial Inequality Attitudes," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 2 (June 2004): 229-38, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2004.00229.x>.

of those beliefs to take priority in their worldviews. This notion provides one explanation for the two groups disparate racial stratification beliefs amidst a shared faith and practice.

In *Divided by Faith*, Emerson and Smith introduce the concept of a “cultural tool kit.” They suggest “that culture creates ways for individuals and groups to organize experiences and evaluate reality . . . by providing a repertoire or ‘tool kit’ of ideas, habits, skills, and styles.” The cultural tool kit one uses to organize their experiences and evaluate reality plays a significant role in shaping one’s worldview. Citing sociologist Ann Swidler, they add “As certain cultural resources become more central in a given life, and become more fully invested with meaning, they anchor the strategies’ and realities that people develop.” Specific cultural resources and tools emerge as more central to the way people see the world and influence a broader extent of their worldview. Emerson and Smith believe these groups’ cultural tool kits are a significant reason they possess disparate racial stratification beliefs.³⁸

Emerson and Smith further contend that the racially important cultural tools in White evangelical Protestants’ religio-cultural toolkit included three primary emphases: accountable freewill individualism, relationalism, and anti-structuralism.³⁹ Accountable freewill individualism means that “individuals exist independent of structures and institutions, have freewill, and are individually accountable for their own actions.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Several studies from the years leading up to and following the Ferguson unrest show that Emerson and Smith’s observations regarding White evangelical Protestants’ cultural toolkit are still valid. Several of these same studies have shown that Black Protestants are less individualistic and more structural in their viewpoint than both non-Protestant blacks and White evangelical Protestants. See Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 174. Ted M. Brimeyer, “Research Note: Religious Affiliation and Poverty Explanations: Individual, Structural, and Divine Causes,” *Sociological Focus* 41, no. 3 (2008): 226-37, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00380237.2008.10571332>; Penny A. Edgell and Eric Tranby, “Religious Influences on Understandings of Racial Inequality in the United States,” *Social Problems* 54 no. 2 (2007): 263-88; Eric Tranby and Douglas Hartmann, “Critical Whiteness Theories and the Evangelical ‘Race Problem’: Extending Emerson and Smith’s *Divided by Faith*,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 3 (2008): 341-59; J. Matthew Wilson, “‘Blessed Are the Poor’: American Protestantism and Attitudes toward Poverty and Welfare,” *Southeastern Political Review* 27, no. 3 (1999): 421-37.

³⁹ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 75.

⁴⁰ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 76-78. While individualism is a central view of American culture, Emerson and Smith suggest the accountable freewill individualism of White evangelical

Relationalism refers to a strong emphasis on attributing the cause of social problems to broken interpersonal relationships.⁴¹ Lastly, “antistructuralism” is the resistance to blaming systems and structures for inequalities and social ills, opting for an emphasis on individual choices.⁴² These cultural tools have led to a general absence of focus on social structures, the operations of institutions, or forms of segregation in approaching racial issues. Their research found that White evangelical Protestants tended to find structural explanations “irrelevant, or even wrongheaded,” and viewed the invocation of blame to structural elements as an avoidance of personal accountability and sin. At the same time, they believed repenting of personal attitudes of racism and repairing relationships as essential.⁴³

As for Black Protestants’ cultural toolkit, Shelton and Emerson, along with other religious scholars, maintained that Black Christians’ beliefs and actions are influenced by “a Christian experience *rooted in slavery, suffering, active critical engagement with authoritative power, and overcoming.*”⁴⁴ African American faith expressions took significant shape during the enslavement of Blacks in America.⁴⁵ The

Protestants is deeply influenced by the faith movements their traditions broadly emerged from. Both Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants are shaped by the Protestant tradition theologically and believe in the necessity of personal repentance and faith. Still, culture and social conditions shaped the development of the White evangelical Protestant worldview in ways that led to the application of this individual-centered belief to be extended in emphasis and application to broader elements of their worldview.

⁴¹ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 76-78. According to Emerson and Smith, relationalism refers to a strong emphasis on the role of interpersonal relationships in racial dynamics. “Thus, if race problems—poor relationships—result from sin, then race problems must largely be individually based.”

⁴² Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 76-78.

⁴³ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 78.

⁴⁴ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 47.

⁴⁵ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 2-3. Lincoln and Mamiya describe the religious worldview of African-Americans, what they call the “Black sacred cosmos.” They argue that while orthodox beliefs of White and Black Christians in the United States are the same, the relationship between slavery and “the notion of divine rescue” from slavery as given emphasis to certain particular theological emphases found in most Black churches, regardless of denomination. Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 9. Shelton and Emerson suggest this cultural tool kit was influential in shaping “five building

culture and social conditions that these faith expressions emerged in shaped their emphases in biblical interpretation and application towards “a faith distinct in nature and character from the slaveholders’ faith in God. African American faith, therefore, took on a unique essence, with attention placed on the poor and oppressed as a motivating force behind an active partnership with God to bring about social change.”⁴⁶ Scholars argue enslaved Black people’s massive embrace of the Christian faith was due to the appeal of both spiritual and social dimensions. Spiritually, fellowship with a God who loves them provided joy amid extreme hardship. Socially, the doctrine of the image of God offered dignity and the hope of a raised social status. The Exodus theme galvanized fragmented communities of enslaved people with the hope that God was invested in liberating them from slavery. Many enslaved people saw Jesus as a “co-suffering servant” whose death and resurrection rendered him “ultimately victorious over evil and suffering.”⁴⁷

Cultural tool kits help explain the influence of the culture that faith expressions emerge in and the culture they reproduce in turn. Furthermore, they explain why similar faith groups could differ in racial stratification beliefs, and a compelling one given the significance race played in the culture of these two groups as their faith expressions developed. Shelton and Emerson suggest that the cultural toolkits of Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants, along with the racialization of their stratification beliefs, result in a strong connection between their faith, culture, racial subgroup, and views about racial and social issues.⁴⁸ This connection can influence Christians to attribute social ideas associated with their cultural subgroup to their faith and religious

blocks of Black Protestant faith,” emphases that are prominent at the group level and influence individual Black Protestants. These building blocks emphasize the experiential nature of faith, an association of faith with the survival of trials, a mystical appreciation of mystery in life, confidence in the miraculous, and a commitment to social justice and equality for all individuals and groups in society.

⁴⁶ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 43.

⁴⁷ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 43.

⁴⁸ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, chap. 8.

beliefs, resulting in a spiritualization of social views derived from culture.⁴⁹ This suggested relationship may offer an insight into the heightened alienation during a disagreement over racial issues within faith communities.

Lived Experience

Lived experience offers another stream of explanations for why Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants hold different beliefs about racial inequality despite similar theological beliefs. As societal experiences vary in certain ways between groups, several studies have demonstrated the connection between societal status and stratification beliefs. In the United States, lower-class individuals have shown to have more structuralist stratification beliefs, while upper-class individuals have shown to have more individualist beliefs.⁵⁰ For lower-class individuals, these structural beliefs emerge even while maintaining individualist stratification beliefs simultaneously, which is the dominant view in general American culture. This is because the experiences of lower-class individuals produce a layer of structural stratification beliefs on top of their default culturally dominant stratification beliefs. In other words, their lived experience shapes and forms their stratification beliefs.⁵¹

Research confirms that race often hangs over Black practicing Christians, as the majority say their race is frequently on their mind, and nearly one-third say their race is “very often” on their mind.⁵² Conversely 6 in 10 White practicing Christians say that

⁴⁹ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, chap 8; Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, chap. 4.

⁵⁰ James R. Kluegel and Eliot R. Smith, “Beliefs about Inequality,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 7, no. 1 (1981): 30.

⁵¹ Kluegel and Smith, “Beliefs about Stratification,” 30.

⁵² Barna Group, “Beyond Diversity.” In 2006, about four in 10 Blacks said they were aware of what race they were every day. In 2012, nearly half of Blacks, including 52 percent of Black Protestants, said they thought about their race daily. Just 10 percent of whites reported the same degree of racial awareness in both waves of the study. Perceived racial injustice rose for both Whites and Blacks. The percentage of Whites who said they had been treated unfairly because of their race in the last three years rose from 8 percent in 2006 to 14 percent in 2012. The percentage of Blacks reporting prejudice rose from 36 percent in 2006 to 46 percent in 2012.

their racial identity is rarely or never on their mind.⁵³ These two groups within the American church have significantly varying experiences regarding their racial experience. Given that lived experience impacts stratification beliefs, the different racial experiences between Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants offer an explanation for their varying racial stratification beliefs.

Regarding the expression of divergent views about race during reactions to high-profile racialized incidents of violence during the 2010s, Isaac Adams writes this about Black and White Christians: “Their conversation isn’t simply between the two of them; it’s between them and their personal histories, experiences, and communities, which in no small part shape who they are.”⁵⁴ Research suggests that these experiences do not merely diverge in individual experiences of racism but also in the constant consciousness of race that most Black Christians experience and the majority of White Christians do not. As differing social experiences tend to correlate with disparate stratification beliefs, they also offer an explanation for diverging responses to conversations about racial issues between Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants.

Views about History

The gaps in perception of American history of Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants offer another explanation for disparate racial stratification beliefs. Some researchers have argued that achieving consensus on an understanding of history is key to bridging the gaps between White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants, and that the current divide is due to divergent views of history.⁵⁵ Subjects of research on

⁵³ Barna Group, “Beyond Diversity.”

⁵⁴ Isaac Adams, *Talking about Race: Gospel Hope for Hard Conversations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2022), 44.

⁵⁵ Edmondson and Brenan, *Faithful Antiracism*, chap. 4; Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 212; Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 81.

these two groups' stratification beliefs often gesture to their view of American history as relevant to their beliefs about inequality.⁵⁶

These two groups are generally distant from a consensus. For instance, a 2020 Barna study showed that 18 percent of White practicing Christians strongly agreed and 28 percent somewhat agreed with the statement "Historically, the U.S. has been oppressive to minorities," while 56 percent of Black practicing Christians strongly agreed and 27 percent somewhat agreed with that statement.⁵⁷ Structural explanations for racial inequality may be contextualized by a belief that the United States has been historically oppressive to minorities. This historical view opens up possibilities of the impact of past oppression or the presence of modern oppression in the social imaginary. Likewise, if an individual does not believe that structural oppression ever significantly existed in the United States, individualist explanations for racial inequality would be a logical conclusion, as the society those inequalities exist in has not been impacted by societal oppression or barriers.

Impact on Church of Disparate Racial Stratification Beliefs Applied to the Ferguson Unrest and Racialized Violence

The first section in this chapter examined divergent views about racial issues that correlated with Black Protestants' and White evangelical Protestants' disparate racial stratification beliefs. The section examined these groups' views about racial reconciliation, policing, racial inequality, and how to respond to racial disparities. The second section examined three different explanations offered for the two groups' disparate racial stratification beliefs: cultural tool kits, lived experience, and perceptions of American history. Finally, this section will give a brief survey of how those racial

⁵⁶ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 73, 81, 104-6.

⁵⁷ Edmondson and Brenan, *Faithful Antiracism*, chap. 1; see also Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 80-82.

stratification beliefs emerged during the conversations about policing and other racial issues in the years leading up to and following the Ferguson unrest.

On August 9, 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri, an encounter between Michael Brown, an unarmed, 18-year-old Black man, and Darren Wilson, a White police officer, ended with Wilson shooting Brown six times and killing him. An immediate backlash led to weeks of protests, riots, and unrest.⁵⁸ When a grand jury decided not to indict Wilson on November 24, 2014, there was a larger response of backlash and outrage as protests spread to 150 different cities. The protests advanced a broader conversation about criminal justice and racial issues in the public square, galvanizing what came to be known as the “Black lives matter” movement. Through the rest of the decade, more high-profile incidents of racialized violent encounters were caught on video and spread on social media. The conversation about race in America grew in ubiquity in the national consciousness.⁵⁹

While the responses to the Ferguson unrest of White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants were by no means monolithic, there were significant trends that correlated with the groups’ disparate stratification beliefs and reflected racial disagreement in broader society. Many White Christians saw Michael Brown’s death and similar encounters after that, as isolated events. Many Black Christians viewed these incidents as symptomatic of systemic racism still alive in America.⁶⁰ Chance articulates the competing narratives about the Ferguson unrest in another way. One narrative framed the shooting of Michael Brown as a fruit of the systematic killing of young Black men at the hands of police officers, something that requires intervention. Another narrative,

⁵⁸ Charles Pulliam-Moore and Margaret Myers, “Timeline of Events in Ferguson,” *PBS NewsHour*, August 20, 2014, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/timeline-events-ferguson>.

⁵⁹ Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 176-79.

⁶⁰ Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 179; Public Religion Research Institute, “Deep Divide between Black and White Americans.”

framed Michael Brown as an aggressor who would not have been killed if he had followed Officer Darren Wilson's orders.⁶¹ These competing narratives emphasized structural and individualistic elements of the event and summarized the prevailing narratives articulated by Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants.

As Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants brought these beliefs and narratives into their shared communities of common faith and practice, tension and conflict ensued. Campbell Robertson articulates the sentiment of some Black Protestants here when he writes,

Black congregants—as recounted by people in Chicago, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Fort Worth, and elsewhere—had already grown uneasy in recent years as they watched their White pastors fail to address police shootings of African-Americans. They heard prayers for Paris, for Brussels, for law enforcement; they heard that one should keep one's eyes on the kingdom, that the church was colorblind, and that talk of racial injustice was divisive, not a matter of the gospel. There was still some hope that this stemmed from an obliviousness rather than some deeper disconnect.⁶²

In Robertson's account, the articulated perspective of "White pastors" is specifically linked to a "colorblind," individualistic racial stratification belief that additionally views addressing "racial injustice" as a secondary matter.⁶³ The "uneasy" response of "Black congregants" viewed this omission or lack of emphasis as a "fail[ure] to address police shootings of African-Americans," events that are seen as connected and the product of "racial injustice."⁶⁴ This view reflects a structural racial stratification belief and a belief that racial injustice is a primary "matter of the gospel."⁶⁵ As these disparate stratification views were brought to bear on the Ferguson unrest and conversations about racial issues

⁶¹ Tyler Chance, "The Church and Michael Brown: The Influence of Christianity on Racialized Political Attitudes in Ferguson, Missouri" (PhD diss., University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2021), 92-93.

⁶² Campbell Robertson, "A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshipers Are Leaving White Evangelical Churches," *New York Times*, March 9, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/us/blacks-evangelical-churches.html>.

⁶³ George A. Yancey, *Beyond Racial Division: A Unifying Alternative to Colorblindness and Antiracism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 13-16.

⁶⁴ Robertson, "A Quiet Exodus."

⁶⁵ Robertson, "A Quiet Exodus."

in faith communities, they often resulted in alienation, regardless of the good faith of both groups involved.

The percentage of Black Protestants in multiracial churches decreased significantly over the 2010s, and numerous accounts attribute division over racial inequality as a contributing factor to departures.⁶⁶ Division over racial inequality was also a contributing factor in division and decline within the rapidly growing multiracial Reformed movement Lecrae Moore was a leader within.⁶⁷ As each incident of racialized violence occurred, and Christians brought their respective racial stratification beliefs to bear on the situation, the disparate interpretations of events resulted in racial alienation. For some Black Christians, to receive pushback or oversight on such a personal and deep topic as systemic racism is symbolic of a more significant lack of belonging within their church.⁶⁸

Shai Linne, a Black Christian leader and artist who belonged to multiracial ministries during this time, summarized what he saw as a common Black Protestant perspective: “The moment we expressed the pain we felt about ‘racial’ injustice, many White Christians were quick to dismiss us, rebuke us, or silently ignore us. If this was how we were going to be treated, we’d rather go back to the [primarily Black] churches where . . . at least we knew we’d be cared for, heard, and understood.”⁶⁹ Linne described a dynamic in majority-White and multiracial Christian settings where unity was disrupted

⁶⁶ On the decline of Black Protestants attending multiracial evangelical churches, see Mark DeYmaz, “New Research on Multiethnic Churches,” *Outreach Magazine* (blog), March 29, 2020, <https://outreachmagazine.com/features/multiethnic/53748-new-research-on-multiethnic-churches.html>; Kevin D. Dougherty, Mark Chaves, and Michael O. Emerson, “Racial Diversity in U.S. Congregations, 1998-2019” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 59, no. 3 (2020): 651-62. For more on the motivation of Black Protestants for departing multiracial evangelical churches and organizations, see Robertson, “A Quiet Exodus”; Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 188-90; Linne, *The New Reformation*, 73-78.

⁶⁷ Linne, *The New Reformation*, 74; Brad Vermurlen, *Reformed Resurgence: The New Calvinist Movement and the Battle over American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 38, 279.

⁶⁸ Tryce D. Prince, “The Modern Experience of Black Millennial Males in Predominantly White Evangelical Churches in America” (MA thesis, Abilene Christian University, 2018), 1.

⁶⁹ Linne, *The New Reformation*, 76.

when Black Protestants lamented over racialized incidents of violence alongside other congregants who either ignored or rebuked their sentiment.

Linne additionally summarized a common White evangelical Protestant posture and response during this time:

For many White Christians, there was confusion about why Black Christians were so affected by these killings, many of which involved people with criminal backgrounds. Especially because the way Black Christians processed the shootings seemed as if they were buying into the narrative of the liberal media, which does everything it can to stoke the flames of “racial” tension and make everything about “race” when it’s not.⁷⁰

Linne articulates narratives that reflect an individualistic perception of the events that emphasize the individual's culpability. Emerson and Smith likewise found a common individualistic response to racial issues was a belief that division was caused by an exaggeration of the racial nature of the event.⁷¹ These views created a disconnect from the prominent Black Protestant experience of the incidents and a barrier to sympathy with the expressed pain of Black Protestants. Moreover, as these groups responded in real-time to the events while sharing a community, it often resulted in racial alienation.⁷²

To be sure, disparate racial stratification beliefs are by no means a monocausal explanation for the divergent responses to the Ferguson unrest and other incidents of racialized violence. However, they are prominent in the experience of the racial alienation and division that ensued from these events within the church and a reasonable contribution to the varying ways Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants experienced them.

⁷⁰ Linne, *The New Reformation*, 76. Linne’s summary resembles the qualitative research in Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 74-89.

⁷¹ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 74, 81, 89.

⁷² Linne, *The New Reformation*, 76.

Conclusion

In summary, an analysis of racial stratification beliefs of White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants and the two groups' beliefs about other issues related to racial inequality reveals several themes. These groups' disparate racial stratification beliefs correlate with divergent beliefs and perceptions about racial inequality in the United States, policing, racial reconciliation, and how the church should respond to racial inequality. Research supports several explanations for these disparate beliefs in spite of the two groups' strikingly similar religious beliefs and practices. When these disparate racial stratification beliefs, as well as divergent related beliefs, were applied to the Ferguson unrest, they produced divergent perspectives and responses to the events. These responses were a contributing factor in racial alienation within American Protestantism in the 2010s.

CHAPTER 3

LECRAE MOORE'S PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT REGARDING THE FERGUSON UNREST AS A CASE STUDY OF APPLIED DISPARATE RACIAL STRATIFICATION BELIEFS

In his Billboard op-ed two days after a grand jury decided not to indict Officer Darren Wilson, Lecrae Moore stated that “Two dominant views pervade public opinion regarding Ferguson.” One view saw the Ferguson unrest as an isolated issue, while the other connected the events to historical inequality and oppression. According to Moore, “More often than not, these two views reflect white and black America respectively.”¹

The two dominant views Moore alludes to resemble the individualistic and structural racial stratification beliefs explored in chapter 2. The chapter also explored how Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants differ in their views on several racial issues, several explanations for their disparate stratification beliefs, and how their disparate beliefs may have impacted race relations within American Protestants churches in the 2010s.

Building on the research and analysis of the second chapter, the case study of Lecrae Moore's public engagement regarding the Ferguson unrest provides depth and dimension to those findings. In his book *Color of Compromise*, which surveys the history of race relations in the American church, Jemar Tisby highlights Moore's engagement as a pivotal event in modern race relations within American Christianity. Tisby summarizes Moore's engagement:

¹ Lecrae Moore, “Lecrae on Ferguson: ‘The System We Have in Place Has Biases,’” The Juice (blog), Billboard, November 26, 2014, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/the-juice/6327837/lecrae-ferguson>.

When Grammy-winning hip hop artist Lecrae, who is both Christian and black, began speaking up about Ferguson and black lives matter, the backlash from his white evangelical fans came swiftly. In response to his posts on social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook, commenters said he was playing the “race card” and creating division. And when Lecrae said he was praying for Ferguson, the first response in a long thread of replies reads “#Pray4Police” as if in rebuttal to the need to pray for the black people affected by the tragedy.²

Moore’s public statements and the critical responses to his engagement reflect broader trends of disagreement across society and within faith communities over how to interpret the Ferguson unrest. In addition, the sentiment of Moore’s and his responders’ statements reflects the disparate racial stratification beliefs explored in this thesis.

This analysis will examine Moore’s public statements, the critical responders to his discourse, and reflections on his experience. Furthermore, it will examine the racial alienation related to his engagement. In addition, the themes, patterns, and trends that emerged earlier in this thesis will be referenced and utilized. Finally, this analysis will further support the concepts articulated in chapter 2 and demonstrate the utility and relevance of those ideas for understanding the division over racial issues in the American church in the 2010s.

Lecrae Moore’s Engagement with the Ferguson Unrest and Disparate Racial Stratification Beliefs

This section evaluates Lecrae Moore’s engagement with the Ferguson unrest, critical responses to his engagement, and his self-reflection on his experience. It analyzes Lecrae Moore’s memoirs, op-eds, social media engagement, and the critical reactions to his engagement.³ First, it recognizes Moore’s observation that structural and

² Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church’s Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 181.

³ One difficulty with studying social media engagement is that it is nearly impossible to reliably observe the racial assignment of individuals responding and commenting on posts. Furthermore, while the scope of this focus is particularly Protestant racial stratification beliefs, it is difficult to know the faith identification of individuals responding and commenting on posts. This thesis recognizes these limitations. Several variables make me comfortable including social media engagement within the conversation of disparate racial stratification beliefs between White and Black Protestants. First, Moore was intentionally focusing his ministry on the American evangelical church which, around the time of his ministry beginning, 90 percent of self-identified evangelicals were white. Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3. Second, there are

individualistic racial stratification beliefs emerged during the Ferguson unrest in a racialized way. Second, it analyzes emerging Moore's engagement and finds structural themes in his words. Third, it analyzes the critical responses to his engagement and finds individualistic themes in the responses. Lecrae Moore's public response to the Ferguson unrest, the critical responses he received, and his reflections on divergent responses support that disparate racial stratification beliefs influenced the generally divergent responses to the Ferguson unrest.

Structural and Individualistic Stratification Beliefs

This section evaluates the "two dominant views" about the Ferguson unrest that Lecrae Moore observed during his engagement with the Ferguson unrest, arguing that these views reflect the racialized disparate stratification beliefs of Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants. Two days after a grand jury announced its decision not to indict Ferguson police Officer Darren Wilson, Moore wrote an op-ed for Billboard. It opened with the following statement, "Two dominant views pervade public opinion regarding Ferguson."⁴

One view, according to Moore, believed Michael Brown's death and the grand jury decision was "an isolated issue," that race was not relevant to the case, and that the justice system "worked as well as it always has." In other words, the events that took place were not reflective of a pattern of racial disparities in criminal justice or general barriers in racial equality. Moore gestured to lived experience as an influence in this view. He suggested that "many of these people have had only positive experiences with

accounts from those who have historically and socially observed Moore's engagement that recognize the dynamic between Moore and his white evangelical fans. Third, Moore is a Black Protestant who we can confidently observe by his own words. Fourth, faith language is often brought up in the discourse between Moore and his fans, suggesting that faith impacted how they saw the events and engaged. And finally, the chapter does not exclusively rely on social media and often relies on Moore's account of engagement from his own writings.

⁴ Moore, "Lecrae on Ferguson."

law enforcement” which influenced them to be “instantly sympathetic to Wilson, his family, and fellow officers who risk their lives daily.”⁵

Others held a different view which saw “this case at a macro level. For them, it’s not an isolated issue, but it is instead connected to hundreds of years of inequality and oppression. To them, Mike Brown was a product of a broken system.”⁶ This view connected the Ferguson unrest to several structural barriers and historical oppression of Black people in the United States. The Ferguson unrest pointed to a “greater narrative—a narrative full of pain that has created an unrest And this case was the igniter.” The protests were not about the Ferguson unrest alone but were about broader structural issues.⁷

The first view Moore articulates emphasizes the individual actors and isolated incidents, modeling an individualistic approach. In contrast, the second view emphasizes broader structural variables responsible for inequality that produced the incident as an outcome, modeling a structural perspective. Moore continued in his op-ed, “More often than not, these two views reflect white and black America respectively.”⁸ He went on to recognize that these views were not monolithic, but “simply . . . the predominant views that are held by each culture,” echoing Emerson and Yancey’s observation that the predominant racial stratification beliefs are racialized themselves.⁹ As Moore engaged publicly regarding the Ferguson unrest, he observed structural and individualistic responses as dominant views which were conflicting and often held along racial lines. In

⁵ Moore, “Lecrae on Ferguson.”

⁶ Moore, “Lecrae on Ferguson.”

⁷ Moore, “Lecrae on Ferguson.”

⁸ Moore, “Lecrae on Ferguson.”

⁹ Moore, “Lecrae on Ferguson”; Michael O. Emerson and George Yancey, *Transcending Racial Barriers: Toward a Mutual Obligations Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 63.

the Billboard op-ed, Moore expressed that the structural understanding of the Ferguson unrest was the view that he possessed.¹⁰

Moore's Engagement with the Ferguson Unrest

This section will examine Moore's public statements related to his engagement with the Ferguson unrest. The section is organized according to specific themes that emerge in Moore's statements relevant to this thesis's discussion. Four particular themes emerge from Moore's engagement with the Ferguson unrest, which will be examined in this section: (1) the Ferguson unrest was not an isolated incident, (2) the Ferguson unrest was connected to structural inequality, (3) the Ferguson unrest was connected to the historical oppression of African Americans, (4) sin is the ultimate issue, and the gospel is the ultimate response.

First, Moore identified the Ferguson unrest as a broader issue of race and policing and did not view it as an isolated incident. On November 25, 2014, he tweeted, "Facts are facts. I don't have them all. But I do know I fear for the lives of Black American males. This is my reality."¹¹ Moore communicated a belief that there is inequality in the policing of Black American males and saw the Ferguson unrest as related to this inequality in a way that transcended the particular "facts" and details of the case. He also connected his experience to his identification with his racial group, namely a collective fear related to biased policing that he has with his racial group.

Second, Moore connected the Ferguson unrest to contemporary structural features that generate and perpetuate inequality. In his Billboard op-ed, Moore wrote that although he "can't with a clear conscience say who is guilty and who isn't . . . Here's

¹⁰ Moore, "Lecrae on Ferguson."

¹¹ Lecrae Moore (@lecræ), "Facts are facts. I don't have them all. But I do know I fear for the lives of Black American males. This is my reality," Twitter, November 24, 2014, 8:45 p.m., <https://twitter.com/lecræ/status/537074457190604801>.

what I do know: the system we have in place has biases because well . . . it's kept by people with biases. People like you and me.”¹² Moore articulates that the most urgent issue in the Ferguson unrest is the structural conditions perpetuating inequality. Once again, Moore prioritizes structural problems over the details of the incident. Elsewhere in the op-ed, while condemning rioting, Moore attributed the unrest to “disenfranchised, marginalized, and systemically oppressed people . . . looking for a different outcome . . . [and] responding to multiple acts of hurt, loss, and injustice.” Again, Moore sees the actions and events happening directly within a larger context of structural conditions. Notably, when Moore frames the biases that uphold structural barriers as “kept by people . . . like you and me,” he is gesturing to attitudes that transcend individual attitudes or even individual unconscious biases, but that are instead collectively held by Black and Whites alike and reified by “the system.”¹³

Third, Moore further connected the Ferguson unrest to the historical treatment of African Americans. Moore posted on Facebook, “This Ferguson case was a mascot for something much bigger. . . . A dream. A dream that has been etched in our hearts for hundreds of years.”¹⁴ He also identified the Ferguson unrest with “the systemic oppression that our country was built off of and how it affects everything.” Ferguson was not merely related to present-day structural barriers to equality. Lecrae viewed the Ferguson unrest as a scene in a centuries-long narrative of “systemic oppression” and the collective struggle of African Americans. The events over the prior months in Ferguson were a “mascot,” or representative symbol of this history. Notably, the “dream that has been etched in our hearts for hundreds of years” recounts the formation of Black

¹² Moore, “Lecrae on Ferguson.”

¹³ Moore, “Lecrae on Ferguson.”

¹⁴ Lecrae Moore, “Sometimes I wonder how we get so up in arms and culturally empathetic with people in other countries,” Facebook, November 25, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/Lecrae/posts/10152476022620222>; Moore, “Lecrae on Ferguson.”

Christian religious expressions and cultural tools amidst the hope that faith provided during historical structural oppression.¹⁵

Fourth, Moore responded to the Ferguson unrest by articulating that sin was the ultimate problem at the heart of the events and broader issues, and the gospel was the ultimate solution. Moore tweeted, “I’m fully aware that the problem is and will always be SIN. The answer is always the Gospel.”¹⁶ Years later, as Moore reflected on this theme in his initial response to the Ferguson unrest, he framed his structural explanation for racial inequality under a broader biblical redemptive narrative. In particular, the impact of people's sin shaping oppressive societal conditions centuries ago is still felt today. Depravity has individual and corporate effects that need to be redeemed and restored.¹⁷ This response positioned his structural racial stratification beliefs as contingent or penultimate to his beliefs about sin and redemption. It also may have been a clarification in light of the public criticism that he was underemphasizing the gospel as a solution to the Ferguson unrest.

Critical Response to Lecrae’s Engagement

Moore was one of the most prominent public leaders within the emerging multiracial evangelical movement within American Protestantism during the Ferguson

¹⁵ Moore, “Lecrae on Ferguson.”

¹⁶ Lecrae Moore (@lecræ), “I’m fully aware that the problem is and will always be SIN. The answer is always the Gospel,” Twitter, November 25, 2014, 10:08 p.m., <https://twitter.com/lecræ/status/537080375030579201>.

¹⁷ Moore wrote,

Christians, of all people, should recognize that America is not the ultimate source of brokenness nor the ultimate source of joy. America is not the ultimate hero. The problem (the villain) is always sin, and the solution (the hero) is always the gospel. Of course, that’s a simplification of how sin and depravity have not only tainted the hearts of people but also tainted our hands and the things we build with them. Sinful people have created institutions and infrastructures that are negatively affecting the world today. Laws, businesses, and common practices created by depraved hearts and hands hundreds of years ago are still producing bad fruit. It will take redeemed people to restore these broken systems. (Lecrae Moore, “The Artist,” in *Uncommon Ground: Living Faithfully in a World of Difference*, ed. Timothy Keller and John Inazu [Nashville: Nelson Books, 2020], 133)

unrest.¹⁸ Moore's public engagement reached millions and received a considerable amount of backlash.¹⁹ The critical responses suggest that Moore and his critical responders viewed the same event differently. This section will analyze the critical responses to Moore's engagement. Likewise, the section will be organized by specific themes that emerged in the critical responses. Four thematic patterns in the critical responses to Lecrae's initial response to the Ferguson unrest: (1) suggestions that Moore was erroneously attributing race to the Ferguson unrest, (2) a focus on Michael Brown's culpability, (3) a focus on rioting, (4) suggestions that Moore was drifting from faithful Christian engagement.

The first pattern of critical response was suggestions that Moore was erroneously attributing race to the Ferguson unrest. Responders told Moore he was "making this a racial thing" and "playing the 'race card' and creating division."²⁰ These responses resemble two common responses from Emerson and Smith's survey of White evangelical Protestants with individualistic racial stratification beliefs. The first responsive theme suggests that America's racial issues are fabricated or exaggerated,

¹⁸ In 2015, *Washington Post* referred to Moore as the "future face of evangelicalism." Michelle Boorstein, "This Rapper Is Trying to Get His Fellow Evangelicals to Talk about Race. Not Everyone Is on Board," *Washington Post*, July 1, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/06/14/this-black-rapper-might-be-americas-next-evangelical-leader/>. Vermurlen notes that Moore has the most Twitter followers of any "New Calvinist" leader. Vermurlen, *Reformed Resurgence*, 269. Moore regularly performed and spoke at marquee evangelical events like Passion Conference. Ruth Malhotra, "Passion 2015 Conference Opens to 20,000 Students in Atlanta; Giglio Emphasizes Finished Work of Christ," *Christian Post*, January 4, 2015, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/passion-2015-conference-opens-to-20000-students-in-atlanta-giglio-emphasizes-finished-work-of-christ.html>. Christian colleges like Grand Canyon University sponsored his tours. Bob Romantic, "GCU Partners With Lecrae on Unashamed Tour," *Grand Canyon University Today*, July 16, 2012, <https://news.gcu.edu/2012/07/gcu-partners-with-lecrae-on-unashamed-tour/>. He contributed to Christian publications like *Desiring God* and *The Gospel Coalition*. Lecrae Moore, "Passion Life Interview with Lecrae," interview by John Piper and John Esher, January 3, 2015, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/passion-life-interview-with-lecrae>; Collin Hansen, "Theological Imperialism and the Black Community," *The Gospel Coalition*, October 5, 2011, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/video/theological-imperialism-and-the-black-community/>.

¹⁹ Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 181.

²⁰ Lecrae Moore (@lecrae), "When people say 'why are you making this a racial thing?' They've unknowingly answered their own question," Twitter, November 25, 2014, 9:00 p.m., <https://twitter.com/lecrae/status/537078224787079169?s=20&t=245AmC9euvEykv0DSSs7Kg>; Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 180.

often by vested interests.²¹ The second responsive theme is the belief that America's race problem would disappear if left alone and that addressing it perpetuates the issues.²² These conceptions frame discourse about racial inequality and racial alienation for those who do not believe structural elements are responsible for racial inequality. In other words, if there are no structural barriers to equality, but racial alienation and discourse about racial injustice persist, these responses make sense of those conditions' persistence. The reactions also align with what Yancey calls a "colorblind" view of racial inequality. This view is an individualistic approach that rejects sustained racialization in American society and resists proactive answers to racial disparities and alienation.²³

The second pattern of critical response was a tendency to focus on the culpability of Michael Brown in his death. Moore summarized this pattern of comments, "Months ago, when I posted about . . . Ferguson . . . , many of my White brothers and sisters met me with responses such as . . . 'Michael Brown was a thug who got what he deserved.'"²⁴ In response to these comments, Moore stated in a Facebook post, "If I tell you my brother got killed in a gang war, would you tell me, 'That's what he gets! Shouldn't be gang banging!'[?] Of course not."²⁵ Moore's primary emphasis was to prioritize compassion over callousness or debate. Still, his comment also drew attention to a posture that emphasizes individual responsibility for the encounter over structural considerations like bias or police brutality, or collective lament.

²¹ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 74, 80.

²² Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 79.

²³ George A. Yancey, *Beyond Racial Division: A Unifying Alternative to Colorblindness and Antiracism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 2-3.

²⁴ Lecrae Moore, "Lecrae Op-Ed: Charleston Shooting Comes from Deeply Rooted Racism & Injustice," *Billboard*, June 22, 2015, <https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/lecrea-charleston-shooting-op-ed-6605623/>.

²⁵ Moore, "Sometimes I wonder," Facebook.

The third pattern of critical response was a response that emphasized the rioting that occurred during the Ferguson unrest. Moore stated that “many of my white brothers and sisters” responded to his engagement with the Ferguson unrest by saying, “I hope you’re not defending those thugs and looters.”²⁶ Responders expressed concern about the riots being reported amidst the Ferguson protests and communicated that Lecrae was excusing the riots. In his Billboard op-ed after the grand jury decision, Moore condemned the riots, insisting that rioting “hurts the dream of Dr. King.” He then drew attention to the motivation of the rioters, “responding to multiple acts of hurt, loss, and injustice.”²⁷ Both Lecrae and his critical responders condemned rioting. The point of emphasis is where they diverge. While Moore emphasized the motivations behind rioting, namely structural injustice, his responders emphasized the criminal actions of the rioters. Additionally, the dynamic between racial protest, counter-protest, and the framing of riots has been a site of contention and division since the Civil Rights, often between those who affirm and resist the respective protest referenced.²⁸

The fourth pattern of critical response was suggestions that Moore was diverging from his Christian message by “wading into politics and should focus on ‘the gospel.’”²⁹ The framing of this response offers a dichotomy between engagement with perceived racial inequality and the proclamation of the gospel for personal salvation. The response poses a dichotomy that potentially divides individualistic and structural perceptions in at least two ways. The responses could suggest that Moore is wading into social issues and becoming distracted from more important matters of personal

²⁶ Moore, “Lecrae Op-Ed.”

²⁷ Moore, “Lecrae on Ferguson.”

²⁸ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 57; Teun A. van Dijk, “Race, Riots and the Press: An Analysis of Editorials in the British Press about the 1985 Disorders,” *International Communication Gazette* 43, no. 3 (June 1989): 229-53, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001654928904300305>.

²⁹ Boorstein, “This Rapper is Trying.”

salvation.³⁰ The responses could also suggest that Moore is advocating against racial inequality on a political level when he should focus on personal transformation.³¹ Both interpretations reflect faultlines in American Protestantism between individualistic and structural racial stratification beliefs.

Moore's Reflection of Structural and Individualistic Views and the Church

As Moore reflected on the criticism and division that ensued from his engagement with the Ferguson unrest, structural and individualistic views emerged from his observations as key points of division. From Lecrae's perspective, division stemmed from divergent approaches to addressing policing and racial issues. Lecrae cited a difference in perspective on responding to social problems as a particular site of conflict.³²

Moore appealed to his view of American history and the history of American Christianity to draw parallels to the responses he received and observed. Reflecting on

³⁰ The structural priority is viewed as a distraction or secondary concern relative to the individual priority. For example, a response from a Black Protestant minister in Jason E. Shelton and Michael O. Emerson's qualitative research describes his skepticism of racial reconciliation initiatives and summarizes this dichotomy:

I believe in a lot of what these people are saying, but they have to also live it out. Evangelical Christianity rightly stresses the need for eternal salvation. The problem historically, though, is that the emphasis for many evangelicals has been so strong on personal salvation that many of the social dimensions of the gospel have been neglected. So that's allowed many people to ignore such injustices like slavery or poverty, while reasoning that salvation of the soul is the only thing that matters. (Jason E. Shelton and Michael O. Emerson, *Blacks and Whites in Christian America: How Racial Discrimination Shapes Religious Convictions* [New York: NYU Press, 2012], 189)

This minister's interpretation of this dynamic suggests that a stated emphasis on spiritual priorities justifies the neglect of "social dimensions of the gospel." The "need for eternal salvation" is a particular priority in the Christian faith that is relevant to individuals, and the "social dimensions" refer to structural issues. Additionally, a Christian holding individualistic stratification beliefs may not see those social issues as urgent or able to be addressed at a structural level, but rather as a distraction from the urgent need for personal salvation.

³¹ This view reflects Emerson and Smith's suggested cultural tool kit of White evangelical Protestants. This cultural tool kit frames social issues as the product of personal sin and broken relationships and encourages skepticism towards structural explanations to social issues. Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 79-84.

³² Moore, "Lecrae on Ferguson."

the Ferguson unrest, Moore wrote, “Let’s not simply encourage the oppressed to be calm and act peacefully. Let us in the words of Isaiah 1:17, ‘Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression.’”³³ He continued by comparing the division to historical trends in the church: “During the period of slavery and segregation, the majority of the orthodox, conservative church was silent. They said, ‘We aren’t called to social issues; we are called to preach the gospel. If they just accept Jesus, they will eventually be free.’ But that reduces communities to projects and not complex people.”³⁴ For Moore, division and divergence in beliefs about racial issues stemmed from different views about solving those issues. Moore frames two options for addressing social issues: directly engage at a structural level or focus on the personal transformation of the individuals within a society.

Notably, these two options also reflect tools in the cultural tool kits of Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants. According to Shelton and Emerson, the Black Protestant cultural tool of “active critical engagement with authoritative power” has historically compelled Christians to political engagement regarding racial issues.³⁵ According to Emerson and Smith, the White evangelical Protestant cultural tools “anti-structuralism” and “relationalism” have often encouraged skepticism towards a structural explanation of social issues and an emphasis on personal transformation as a solution.³⁶

Lecrae Moore’s Reflections on the Impact of the Application of Divergent Racial Stratification Beliefs

As Lecrae Moore inserted himself amid a public discourse that contained two divergent racial stratification beliefs, division and tension ensued. Moore’s engagement

³³ Moore, “Lecrae Op-Ed.”

³⁴ Moore, “Lecrae Op-Ed.”

³⁵ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 47

³⁶ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 75.

was centered on American Christians, and Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants held divergent racial stratification beliefs in a racialized way. This thesis suggests that these disparate racial stratification beliefs played a role in amplifying the division. Ultimately, the division and backlash Moore experienced within his affiliated faith community led him to distance himself from that community.

The previous section of this chapter analyzed prominent themes in Lecrae Moore's engagement with the Ferguson unrest and his critical responders. It identified structural racial stratification beliefs in Lecrae Moore's engagement and individualistic racial stratification beliefs in his critical responders. As Moore and his critical responders brought these beliefs to bear on the Ferguson unrest, division and further racial alienation ensued.

The essence of the response to Moore's public engagement has been described as "backlash."³⁷ Moore received passionate pushback and threats from his public engagement that were often extreme.³⁸ As he continued to engage with issues of race publicly, Moore recounts losing fans and some of his standing within the sphere of Protestantism he prominently worked within in the past. Moore stated that his relationships suffered as well: "I lost some fans forever, but the fans weren't the worst losses. The worst losses were my friends. I lost relationships with people who were close to me."³⁹ Moore witnessed racial alienation from discourse about racial issues at a local church level. Moore recounts, "Over 130 people left my church after my pastor began to heavily address the ills of racism."⁴⁰

³⁷ Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 180.

³⁸ Moore stated, "Simply because I spoke out on social media I faced death threats. I was called every slur that applied to me by online trolls, as well as being called a "race baiter" by fellow believers. Threatening letters were sent to my house, violating the most private parts of my life. I had no idea that the consequences for speaking out would be so severe." Lecrae Moore, *I Am Restored: How I Lost My Religion but Found My Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 92.

³⁹ Moore, *I Am Restored*, 92

⁴⁰ Moore, *I Am Restored*, 93.

The racial alienation stemming from his public engagement with the Ferguson unrest affected Moore in significant ways that resemble other accounts of Black Protestants wrestling through these issues during this period. Moore articulated a sense of betrayal and a destabilization of his identity within the church.⁴¹ While maintaining a belief in the Protestant faith distinctives, Moore signaled he was “loosening ties” with “white evangelicalism.” Moore cited the backlash he had received for publicly engaging with the Ferguson unrest and other racial issues as a contributing factor.⁴² Moore’s experience resembles many accounts from Black Protestants during this time.⁴³

Throughout his public statements and writings, Moore attributes the racial alienation he experienced to his engagement with the Ferguson unrest and other racial issues during this time. The causal relationship between the disparate racial stratification beliefs of Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants and the alienating events and outcomes Moore describes is difficult to demonstrate firmly in a linear way. Still, those disparate beliefs resulted in very different interpretations of the Ferguson unrest and racial issues Moore spoke about publicly. These interpretations resulted in responses and conflict that Moore cited as pivotal in the racial alienation he experienced and witnessed within the church.

Conclusion

In summary, chapter 3 evaluated the case study of Lecrae Moore’s public engagement regarding the Ferguson unrest and racial inequality provides depth and

⁴¹ Moore, *I Am Restored*, 92; Michelle Higgins, Christina Edmondson, and Ekemini Uwan, “Facts about Lecrae,” September 30, 2017, in *Truth’s Table*, produced by Joshua Heath, podcast, MP3 audio, 50:27, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/facts-about-lecrae/id1212429230?i=1000392909882>.

⁴² Higgins, Edmondson, and Uwan, “Facts about Lecrae.”

⁴³ Campbell Robertson, “A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshipers Are Leaving White Evangelical Churches,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/us/blacks-evangelical-churches.html>; Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*; Tryce D. Prince, “The Modern Experience of Black Millennial Males in Predominantly White Evangelical Churches in America” (MA thesis, Abilene Christian University, 2018).

dimension to the findings of chapter 2. To examine Moore as a case study, this chapter analyzed Moore's public discourse, the critical responders to his discourse, and his reflections. Moore's account is pertinent for understanding the division over racial issues in the American church in the 2010s.

Moore's case study demonstrates the consistency with which racial stratification beliefs were the point of tension in the content of discourse of a well-known incident of racial alienation. While Moore and his responders likely shared a host of beliefs and practices, identifying as fellow members of a faith community, there remained harsh disagreement and division. The research presented in chapter 2 regarding disparate racial stratification beliefs demonstrates that Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants often looked at the exact same public incident in strikingly different ways. Moreover, their divergent views were often held a deep worldview level.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Two statistics mentioned in this thesis are extremely stark to place next to one another. The first statistic is that regarding core theological beliefs and religious practices, “white evangelicals and black Protestants are nearly identical with one another and notably different from the general public. No other major religious groups in America register percentages as high across these measures.”¹ The second statistic regards the stream of high-profile encounters between police and black men throughout the 2010s. Following the Ferguson unrest, no demographic believed those encounters were isolated incidents more than White evangelical Protestants. In contrast, no demographic thought these encounters were part of a broader systemic problem at a higher rate than Black Protestants.² No two groups were further apart in beliefs about race and policing than these two groups that were closer together than any other in their faith and practice.

Reflecting on the divergent beliefs about racial issues held by the two groups studied in this thesis, Shelton and Emerson concluded that their finding “suggests that

¹ Robert P. Jones and Robert D. Francis, “The Black and White of Moral Values: How Attending to Race Challenges the Mythology of the Relationship between Religiosity and Political Attitudes and Behaviors,” in *Faith and Race in American Political Life*, ed. Robin Dale Jacobson and Nancy D. Wadsworth (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 129-30.

² Public Religion Research Institute, “Deep Divide between Black and White Americans in Views of Criminal Justice System,” May 7, 2015, <https://www.ppri.org/research/divide-White-Black-americans-criminal-justice-system/>; Public Religion Research Institute, “Dueling Realities: Amid Multiple Crises, Trump and Biden Supporters See Different Priorities and Futures for the Nation,” October 19, 2020, <https://www.ppri.org/research/amid-multiple-crises-trump-and-biden-supporters-see-different-realities-and-futures-for-the-nation/>; Public Religion Research Institute, “Partisan Polarization Dominates Trump Era: Findings from the 2018 American Values Survey,” October 29, 2018, <https://www.ppri.org/research/partisan-polarization-dominates-trump-era-findings-from-the-2018-american-values-survey/>; Public Religion Research Institute, “Summer Unrest over Racial Injustice Moves the Country, but Not Republicans or White Evangelicals,” August 21, 2020, <https://www.ppri.org/press-release/summer-unrest-over-racial-injustice-moves-the-country-but-not-republicans-or-White-evangelicals/>.

black and white Protestants’ ‘hearts and minds’ are more contrary than our research methodology can account for: racial reconciliation cannot happen until a number of very wide and deep structural, cultural, individual, and interpersonal communication gaps between black and white Protestants are closed.”³ Shelton and Emerson wrote *Blacks and Whites* two years before the Ferguson unrest. At least one of the gaps they observed between the two groups’ racial stratification beliefs did not close when widespread protest and a nationwide discourse on racial inequality and policing broke out.⁴ As this thesis argued, applying those racial stratification beliefs to the Ferguson unrest and racial discourse contributed to profound racial alienation.

As an analysis of Lecrae Moore’s public engagement suggested, when White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants articulated their often-divergent perspectives on the Ferguson unrest, they additionally articulated disparate racial stratification beliefs. As more events like the Ferguson unrest occurred throughout the decade, those beliefs remained steadily disparate. As a result, they emerged at the center of further racial alienation between Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants.⁵ Similar to Moore, this alienation impacted many American Protestants’ relationships within their faith community.⁶

³ Jason E. Shelton and Michael O. Emerson, *Blacks and Whites in Christian America: How Racial Discrimination Shapes Religious Convictions* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 198.

⁴ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, chap. 8.

⁵ “Dueling Realities: Amid Multiple Crises, Trump and Biden Supporters See Different Priorities and Futures for the Nation,” October 19, 2020, <https://www.prii.org/research/amid-multiple-crises-trump-and-biden-supporters-see-different-realities-and-futures-for-the-nation/>; Barna Group, “Beyond Diversity: What the Future of Racial Justice Will Require of U.S. Churches,” April 2021, <https://barna.gloo.us/reports/beyond-diversity>.

⁶ Campbell Robertson, “A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshipers Are Leaving White Evangelical Churches,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/us/blacks-evangelical-churches.html>; Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church’s Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019); Mark DeYmaz, “New Research on Multiethnic Churches,” *Outreach Magazine* (blog), March 29, 2020, <https://outreachmagazine.com/features/multiethnic/53748-new-research-on-multiethnic-churches.html>; Kevin D. Dougherty, Mark Chaves, and Michael O. Emerson, “Racial Diversity in U.S. Congregations, 1998-2019” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 59, no. 3 (2020): 651-62.

Shelton and Emerson's caution and charge remain, just as the hope for deep racial reconciliation remains at the heart of Christ's church.⁷ The findings included in this thesis offer a humble and limited insight, presented in the hopes of being useful to the various practical strategies and actions currently being proposed and taken within American Protestantism.⁸ Shelton and Emerson identify these wide and deep gaps, structural, cultural, individual, and interpersonal, that must be identified and understood to assess the state of racial relations within American Protestantism.⁹ Likewise, this thesis identifies a particular condition prevalent in American Protestantism that those who would seek to close those gaps must consider.

In Acts 6, the apostles practically addressed a scenario of disparities along ethnic lines and the alienation that those conditions provoked (Acts 6:1-6). If the apostles had not become aware of the source of those conditions, that Hellenistic Jewish widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food, they would not have been able to address the issue. When the apostles were made aware of these conditions, they were able to apply the heart of Christ to the conditions they faced and construct an informed strategy of how to resolve the matter.

This thesis has sought to contribute to the awareness of conditions that have contributed to significant turmoil within American Protestantism. Of course, racial alienation within the church is an issue much more vast and complex than the scope of what this thesis addresses. However, the research in chapter 2 suggests that disparate

⁷ Shelton and Emerson, *Blacks and Whites*, 198.

⁸ Recent works that propose practical strategies and application for American Protestant racial relations include *Faithful Antiracism: Moving Past Talk to Systemic Change* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022); Shai Linne, *The New Reformation: Finding Hope in the Fight for Ethnic Unity* (Chicago: Moody, 2021); Isaac Adams, *Talking about Race: Gospel Hope for Hard Conversations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2022); George A. Yancey, *Beyond Racial Division: A Unifying Alternative to Colorblindness and Antiracism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022); Jemar Tisby, *How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey toward Racial Justice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021).

⁹ Emerson and Smith, *Blacks and Whites*, chap. 8.

racial stratification beliefs are important conditions to consider. The case study in chapter 3 suggests how significant those conditions are to points of racial alienation. If disparate racial stratification beliefs are understood as meaningful and important to address, this conclusion positions itself as an encouragement for Christians to respond as the apostles did and consider where an informed strategic response or application might begin.

Summary of Arguments

The preceding chapters have attempted to argue that the case study of Lecrae Moore's public engagement regarding the Ferguson unrest suggests that Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants applied different racial stratification beliefs on racial inequality and racialized incidents of violence in the 2010s, which carried significant implications for the general trend of division between these two groups over said issues. A summary of each chapter's findings follows.

Chapter 1 positioned the subject of division within the American church in the 2010s pertaining to the Ferguson unrest and discussions about racial inequality in a historical and social context. The Ferguson unrest and stream of incidents of racialized violence were a point of division between Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants, who applied disparate racial stratification beliefs to understanding these events and issues. This chapter introduced the foundational concepts to the study of racial stratification beliefs. This chapter also introduced Lecrae Moore as a dynamic case study. His engagement with the Ferguson unrest provides insights into the disparate racial stratification beliefs and division within the church in the 2010s. Finally, this chapter offered the thesis, methodology, background and defining terms of the paper, contending that the case study of Moore's engagement would suggest disparate racial stratification beliefs were applied to racialized violence and issues in the 2010s, contributing to division within the church.

Chapter 2 suggested that Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants tended to possess differing perceptions of racial experience, racial inequality, and proposed responses to racial issues that correlated with their disparate racial stratification beliefs. It presented potential explanations for why, despite holding to remarkably similar theological beliefs, practices, and religious commitments, Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants tend to have disparate stratification beliefs. Additionally, it recounted how the application of disparate stratification beliefs to racial issues contributed to divergent responses to the Ferguson unrest and racial alienation between members of each group.

Chapter 3 suggested that Lecrae Moore's engagement with the Ferguson unrest and the critical response to his engagement contained themes related to disparate racial stratification beliefs between Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants. It analyzed Lecrae Moore's memoirs, op-eds, social media engagement, and critical responses to his engagement. It recounted the particular impact this discourse had on Moore's experiences of racial alienation that resembled broader accounts of racial alienation within segments of American Protestantism. The analysis of this high-profile case study further advanced the argument that racial stratification beliefs were a key feature of racial alienation experienced by White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants in the 2010s.

Overall, this thesis has attempted to contribute to the research that emphasizes the significance of disparate racial stratification beliefs of Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants. Why was a new contribution necessary? Several foundational works on this phenomenon were written before the stream of racialized violence and protests in the 2010s and, thus, lack reflection on how the findings of those works impacted race relations during that period. Furthermore, as many were personally and communally impacted by the division within the church related to these issues, a fuller understanding of where the tensions and division lie offers practical insight for those

concerned with the church's welfare. Furthermore, utilizing a high-profile case study illuminates the important research about disparate racial stratification beliefs and demonstrates those concepts' utility.

Areas of Further Research

First, further research into where and how racial stratification beliefs factor into Black Protestants' and White evangelical Protestants' worldviews and beliefs about other social issues would be helpful. This thesis sought to demonstrate that disparate racial stratification beliefs are important to consider. Yet this thesis was limited to identifying how disparate racial stratification beliefs emerge in racial discourse and understanding. Further worldview analysis on how those beliefs shape Christians' understanding of other social issues could be significantly beneficial.

Second, it would be useful to understand better how the identification and articulation of racial stratification beliefs impact discourse on racial issues between White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants. How would naming this worldview difference shape racial reconciliation efforts and racial justice discourse? Would a fuller awareness and understanding of this chasm alleviate or exacerbate racial alienation? Consider, for instance, how White evangelical Protestants who Emerson and Smith studied made sense of African Americans' divergent views on racial issues by attributing those views to self-interest or media exaggeration.¹⁰ Would awareness of disparate racial stratification beliefs provide an explanation for divergent beliefs about racial issues that alleviate such expressions of inter-group suspicion? Further studies on this dynamic could include structured interviews with White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants that study how subjects frame racial alienation and divergent racial beliefs, as well as their understanding of disparate racial stratification beliefs. Such research might

¹⁰ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 74, 84.

increase the depth of understanding of disparate racial stratification beliefs between these groups and increase the practical usefulness of this information.

Third, it would be useful to understand better how structuralist and individualistic Protestants perceive how their own racial stratification beliefs relate to their theological beliefs. In other words, a qualitative analysis of how Christians with similar theological convictions and disparate racial stratification beliefs articulate how their faith informs responses to contemporary racial issues would be helpful. For instance, in his chapter in *Uncommon Ground*, Moore explains how his beliefs about the Christian responsibility to alleviate racial inequality connect to a Reformed understanding of the biblical-redemptive narrative.¹¹ This explanation is insightful in seeing how Moore self-conceives his theological convictions and perception of racial stratification. This articulation also provides insight into how Moore brings his theological convictions to bear on his perception of social conditions. Furthering an understanding of how structuralists and individualists articulate and develop their beliefs in relation to their faith might also advance mutual understanding. Further research could be conducted by analyzing public statements or writings similar to the case study in this thesis. It could also be accomplished through structured interviews that identify participants' racial stratification beliefs and theological commitments while inviting them to flesh out how these beliefs relate to one another through interview questions.

Fourth, further research would be useful on where Christians with disparate racial stratification beliefs find common ground to work together regarding racial disparities and alienation. Additionally, it would be helpful to understand what personal conclusions stemming from racial stratification beliefs are sacrificed in bridging that common ground. Wadsworth notes that within multiracial churches that trend towards

¹¹ Lecrae Moore, "The Artist," in *Uncommon Ground: Living Faithfully in a World of Difference*, ed. Timothy Keller and John Inazu (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2020), 133.

individualistic framing of racial issues, the frameworks within these churches “can and do provide paths for social action for some participants.”¹² However, when social action occurs, where does the social action conflict with or fall short of each participant's racial stratification beliefs? Are structuralists working towards more individualistic solutions for the sake of a coalition? Are individualists participating in a project with a structural initiative even if they do not fully grasp the issue or proposed solution? Information on these dynamics can offer insight into how faith communities pursue coalitions and goals of racial justice and reconciliation despite still-existent gaps in disparate racial stratification beliefs. Further research could be conducted through structured interviews about participants’ beliefs and experiences in organizational initiatives related to racial issues. Such research would seek to derive key commitments by inquiring about perceptions of racial issues and about active engagement and activity in racial initiatives.

Conclusion

In his book *Race Matters*, Cornel West wrote, “The paradox of race in America is that our common destiny is more pronounced and imperiled precisely when our divisions are deeper.”¹³ The racial alienation examined in this thesis exists to the detriment of societal and ecclesial flourishing and the flourishing of both Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants. This alienation is multidimensional and historically complex, but this thesis attempted to suggest that these two groups' disparate racial stratification beliefs are a meaningful variable. An examination of the case study of Lecrae Moore’s engagement with the Ferguson unrest sought to contribute to a fuller understanding of this dynamic.

¹² Nancy D. Wadsworth, *Ambivalent Miracles: Evangelicals and the Politics of Racial Healing* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 12.

¹³ Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon, 2001), 40.

It is desired that this thesis allows American Protestants better to understand the racial alienation within contemporary American Protestantism. Furthermore, for the good of the church, the arguments herein are offered in hopes that a fuller understanding of the disparate racial stratification beliefs within American Protestantism can contribute to racial reconciliation efforts and, in turn, broader ecclesial contributions towards a more just and flourishing society.

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ABSTRACT

LECRAE AND THE DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS AMONG AMERICAN PROTESTANTS OF THE CAUSES OF DISPARATE RACIAL EXPERIENCES

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While White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants are remarkably similar across measures of theological belief and practice, their views on racial issues tend to be deeply divergent. These divergent views have often been a source of racial alienation when applied to contemporary discourse about the state of race relations and racial dynamics in the United States. This thesis seeks to contribute to research that emphasizes the significance of disparate racial stratification beliefs of Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants.

This thesis argues that the case study of Lecrae Moore's public engagement regarding the Ferguson unrest suggests that Black Protestants and White evangelical Protestants applied different racial stratification beliefs to the issues of racial inequality and racialized incidents of violence in the 2010s, which carried significant implications for the general trend of division between these two groups over said issues. The thesis reflects on sociological research, data, and analyses within the historical context of the contemporary church, namely in the years leading up to and following the Ferguson unrest. It explores where these two groups diverge on perceptions of racial issues, examines explanations for this divergence, and recounts the impact of bringing these disparate beliefs to bear on racial discourse within American Protestantism in the 2010s. Additionally, this thesis applies the synthesis of sociological research, data, and analyses

to the particular case study of Lecrae Moore's public engagement regarding the Ferguson unrest by analyzing Moore's memoirs, op-eds, social media engagement, and critical responses to his engagement. The findings of this case study advance the argument that disparate racial stratification beliefs were a key feature of racial alienation experienced by White evangelical Protestants and Black Protestants in the 2010s.

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