THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN ACTION:
ADULT LEARNING ABOUT RACE IN THE STUDENT INTERRACIAL MINISTRY
OF UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, 1960-1968

A Dissertation in
Adult Education

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to study the learning experiences of participants in the Student Interracial Ministry (SIM) of Union Theological Seminary in New York. SIM provided the seminarians with an intense learning environment in which they crossed borders including race, gender, class, and culture. For many of these participants, this experience offered them rich opportunities for transformative learning. This study investigated the ways in which participation in SIM affected the racial perspectives of the participants, with special attention to the interplay between religious background, theological education, and faith development. As it sought to understand adult learning about race among participants for whom religion and spirituality were important concerns, this study employed three theoretical perspectives: transformative learning theory, intergroup contact theory, and faith development theory.

In the Spring of 1960, graduate theological students at Union Theological Seminary in New York, with its long history of social activism, formed the Student Interracial Ministry (SIM), as a response to the national phase of the African American lunch counter sit-in movement, which began in February 1960. From a pilot project of four students in the summer of 1960, SIM grew into an ecumenical program, drawing a total of 234 students from some 50 protestant seminaries, lasting from 1960 to 1968. This interracial program placed white students to live and work in African American churches/communities in the South, and African American seminarians to live and work in white churches/communities in the North, Midwest, and West, serving as assistant pastors for entire summers or full-year internships. It also sent students to work in direct action civil rights organizations, with the largest site being the Southwest Georgia Project led by Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) leader Charles Sherrod.

In-depth oral history interviews were conducted with twelve white participants (10 men, 2 women) who were students at Union Theological Seminary in New York and participated in
SIM placements in the South from 1960 to 1967. The principal findings were: 1) In-person exposure to the reality and effects of segregation and racism acted as a powerful disorienting dilemma for SIM participants, which in some cases led to the transformation of racial perspectives. 2) Strong affective bonds formed through their experience in the African American community, which provided a supportive context for the transformative process among participants. 3) The religious-spiritual dimension was an important factor in facilitating this transformative process. 4) These learning experiences in SIM are best understood as part of a long-term process. 5) An in-depth immersion experience in a setting that was either racially or culturally different was central to this long-term transformative process. Conclusions and implications were drawn for both theory and practice.
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PART ONE

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

Part I of this dissertation is made up of Chapters One, Two, Three, and Four, which introduce the study, provide historical background, review the literature, and describe the methodology. Chapter One introduces the study by laying out the central issues in the study, including the problem statement, purpose and research questions. It also provides an initial discussion of the theoretical framework, which in this study includes transformative learning theory, intergroup contact theory, and faith development theory. It then continues with an overview of the oral history methodology used in this study, along with a discussion of the significance, assumption, limitations, and strengths, as well as providing definition of terms.

Chapter Two provides detailed historical background on the history of activism at Union Theological Seminary, which provides an important context for understanding the development of the Student Interracial Ministry. This chapter includes a discussion of the relevance of this history to the field of adult education and a brief history of involvement by Union faculty, students, and alumni in many of the major social movements of the 20th century, with a specific look at Union’s contribution to the civil rights movement, including the Student Interracial Ministry (1960-1968).

Chapter Three reviews the literature from adult education and related fields that is most relevant to the study. The first section covers the literature on Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), which is the primary theoretical framework of this study, as well as the research on Intergroup Contact Theory (ICT) and Faith Development Theory (FDT). This chapter also includes a review of the literature on learning in social movement.
Part One concludes with Chapter Four, which introduces and describes the methodology of the study. It begins with a review of qualitative research, discusses the nature of oral history research, and makes the case for using oral history as an appropriate methodology for this study. It also examines the relevant factors in the background of the researcher. The chapter concludes by describing participant selection, data collection methods, data analysis approach, and the methods of verification.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

On a spring evening in early 1960, Jane Stembridge made her way up Salem Methodist Church in nearby Harlem to hear an exciting young preacher talk about the civil rights movement. Following the captivating speech she finally got her chance to ask the speaker how she could get involved with the student sit-in movement that he had just described. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. urged Jane to get in contact with Ella Baker, who was currently the executive secretary of King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Baker was also the informal advisor to a brand new group of student activists who were soon to become the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Later that spring, Jane Stembridge and a group of fellow students from Union Theological Seminary in New York drove down to attend a conference organized by Baker, at which the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was first organized. Stembridge fondly remembers the time at Raleigh:

The most inspiring moment for me was the first time I heard the students sing ‘We Shall Overcome’…There was no SNCC, no ad hoc committees, no funds, just people who did not know what to expect but who came and released the common vision in that song.

(Zinn, 1965, p. 33)

Following the conference, Ella Baker invited Jane Stembridge to join the staff of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee as its first paid staff member. When the 1960 spring semester at the Union Seminary was over, she travelled to Atlanta to take up her post at SNCC (Carson, 1981; Daniel, 2000; Hogan, 2007; Olson, 2001; Zinn, 1965). Over the course of the next four years, Stembridge would become an important participant in the civil rights movement. She was among a small group of early leaders of SNCC who helped to shape the
young organization’s plans and policies. During the following six months, she would be involved in all the chaotic activity of the nascent SNCC: late night planning sessions; talking theology and philosophy with Bob Moses, who would be a major SNCC pioneer in Mississippi; organizing the first major SNCC conference; keeping small groups of sit-in demonstrators and other protesters around the country in touch with each other.

Jane Stembridge had travelled south as part of a pilot project set up by students from Union Seminary. Since the Greensboro student sit-in that began on Feb. 1, 1960, followed by the rapid spread of protests throughout the South, Union students had been participating in a range of protest activities in support of the sit-ins. The semester culminated with the decision to send four students south in an interracial pilot project. Although Jane Stembridge did not return to school, the three other students did. During Fall 1960 semester, students at Union Theological Seminary decided to keep the vision alive by forming the Student Interracial Ministry (SIM) (Handy, 1987; Harvey, 2005; Marsh, 2005; Findlay, 1993; Hawkins, 1997). SIM started as a summer program in which seminarians went South for the summer – white students to serve in Black parishes and Black students in white parishes (although SIM students, predominantly, were white). From the very beginning, Union decided to make the Student Interracial Ministry a formal student organization, with Roger Shinn serving as the faculty advisor. Shinn, ethics professor at Union from 1959 to 1985, was an excellent choice for this role, due to his reputation of having great integrity concerning the social implications of Christian faith. He had been a classmate of the Union Eight, radical pacifist students in 1940 who had protested against the draft. Although Shinn was not persuaded by their stance against draft registration, he agreed with their rejection of clerical student exemption from the draft and he enlisted in the military to serve during World War II (Benedict, 1982; Knox, 2000).
From the pilot project in the summer of 1960 to its conclusion in 1968, the Student Interracial Ministry placed some 234 students in (mostly) Southern churches and communities, with as many as 72 students participating in 1966. Following the summer of 1965, some 20 students stayed on and spent the year as interns, earning academic credit (Harvey, 2005; Handy, 1987). One of the main centers of SIM activity was the Southwest Georgia Project, led by Charles Sherrod. Sherrod is an African American Baptist Minister who, as one of SNCC’s early field secretaries, did pioneering work in Albany and surrounding areas of Southwest Georgia. This work coalesced into a more permanent community-based civil rights project, committed to interracial participation. Sherrod had the SIM students participate in a wide range of service activities including work in social service agencies, education, Head Start, tenant farmer’s groups and voter registration (Branch, 1988; Harvey, 2005; Tuck, 2001).

These interracial experiences made a powerful impression on many of the participants. Douglas Renick (UTS ’67) describes it as a:

This dawning realization that we are all alike and essentially one people has made me more and more sensitive to the daily injustices in which we participate. …I am convinced that the reconciliation that occurs within the Christian community is the deepest and most permanent of reconciliations. (Renick, 1962)

This event had a profound effect on Renick, opening him up to new definitions of ministry. Following graduation from Union, Renick joined the staff of the Metropolitan Urban Service Training Center (MUST) in New York, an innovative program to train clergy for urban ministry. MUST was led by Bill Webber (UTS ’48) who had been one of the founders of the East Harlem Protestant Parish (EHPP). EHPP was a ground-breaking experiment in urban ministry which had been founded in 1948 by deeply committed Union Seminary students and recent alumni who
were dedicated to putting theological education into practice. In many ways it was a precursor of the Student Interracial Ministry.

Another example is that of Ashley Wiltshire (UTS ’67). In the summer of 1966 he went with SIM to Albany, Georgia. His experience working with the poor led him to a major shift in his plans. While in Georgia, he observed that the lawyers seemed to be getting more done than the seminarians. After graduation from seminary, he went to law school, and then worked for, and soon headed the Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberlands, serving the poorest of the poor – “The impetus of the message of the Hebrew Prophets and Jesus’ whole concern for the poor – that’s entirely why I’m here” (Burke, 2007, July 2).

Perhaps the person who served with SIM in the most famous location was Gurdon Brewster (UTS ’62). Brewster was one of the first group of SIM students who went south in 1961, during the first summer following Jane Stembridge’s initial project. He published a memoir of his experience as a summer assistant pastor to Martin Luther King, Sr. at the Ebenezer Baptist Church – *No Turning Back: My Summer with Daddy King* (Brewster, 2007). He began his book this way:

> I entered the room, full of excitement, and sat down near the front. Soon one of the leaders of the Student Interracial Ministry at Union Theological Seminary in New York City called to order those of us who were interested in the program…When the name “Ebenezer” was called out, I shot my hand into the air… “Okay,” the leader broke the silence. “Brewster gets Ebenezer.” I nodded quietly while my heart exploded inside me. I had been assigned to the Ebenezer Baptist Church! (p. 1)
For Gurdon Brewster, his experience in SIM was a life transforming one that called on him to reflect on the meaning of his faith, his theological education, and the grim realities of racial discrimination in America. Brewster recalled the shocking power of his first encounter with southern Jim Crow laws, when he saw the “For Whites Only” and “Colored People Only” signs on public restrooms:

I was shaken. This experience would change my life. Other experiences of the summer that followed would build upon it, but this day was the first time I had come face-to-face with such blatant discrimination. (p.17)

A central aspect of Brewster’s experience was sense of disconnect that he felt between his classroom and book learning, and the life of faith, hope, and love that he was experiencing that summer:

I was in a kind of shock. I felt inadequate to meet the great challenges ahead. I had studied Christianity for years, and yet I knew nothing about the most basic things. All this talk about justice, and I knew nothing about what is involved in bringing justice about. All this study of love, and I knew nothing about loving enemies…while the Christianity I was learning at seminary was infinitely fascinating intellectually, it seemed to make little difference in the actual world…I felt that a voice had reached deep into my soul, calling me toward a transformation and toward a way of life that would bring out the best in me and hopefully the best in others. (p. 69-70)

These four Union students demonstrate some of the variety of powerful responses that Student Interracial Ministry participants had to their experience. Jane Stembridge’s response was the most radical. She left her formal theological education and became a full-time participant in
the civil rights movement. Ashley Wiltshire, inspired by his SIM experience, moved from formal ministry to the practice of law, yet his law career focused on the needs of the poor and he found his motivation in the Bible’s teachings about justice. Douglas Renick completed his theological education, but upon graduation, he embarked on a ministry dedicated to the needs of urban America. Gurdon Brewster was deeply changed by his SIM experience. Upon graduation, he went for two years to India, and was moved by the suffering he encountered there. He then spent his whole career as the chaplain of Cornell University, helping to form young hearts and minds. Brewster has also given artistic expression to his faith experiences as a sculptor.

In each of these cases, these young adult seminarians rejected the traditional pastoral role and changed their career paths based on their transformative experiences in SIM. In two cases, this meant pursuing social justice concerns through secular approaches (political activist, attorney) rather than through the ministerial roles for which they had been trained. In the other two cases it involved a transformed perspective on the ministry which integrated the new learning into new types of clerical roles.

Problem Statement

One might wonder what brought Jane Stembridge and the other SIM members to involvement in activism and the civil rights movement. Part of the answer lies in understanding the compelling history of social activism on the part of the faculty, students, and alumni of Union Theological Seminary in New York (founded in 1836) that was part of the lives of these students. Union Seminary’s modern history can be dated from the time of a famous heresy trial in 1893 involving Prof. Charles Briggs, with Union arising as a champion of the Christian scholar’s right to the free expression of ideas. Union became one of the primary places in the protestant theological world for the training of activist ministers who would explore the
intersections of the Christian gospel and social issues. The activities of the Student Interracial Ministry should be understood in the context of this history of activism, which can be examined in terms of the influence of activist faculty, the varied roles of activist alumni/nae, and a rich tradition of student innovation, protest, and activism. This activist history of Union Theological Seminary will be described in detail in Chapter 2, but as an introduction, suffice it to say, that under the influence of a variety of well known Christian social activist faculty, such as Reinhold Niebuhr, many students and alumni/nae became involved in social action movements including the Civil Rights Movement.

This history of student activism at Union in the years leading up to and following the Civil Rights Movement was based on a running discontent with classroom and book-based theological education that seemed to be abstracted from the concerns of daily life. When SIM participant Gurdon Brewster faced harsh criticism concerning Christianity’s relevance to life, he reflected on his own lack of preparation:

I had never really heard such rage joined up and connected to Jesus. And I had read about, but never seen right in front of me, such outrage against the church for making the heaven of the future so desirable that it could render people who yearned for justice absolutely powerless…Where were my high school teachers, my college teachers, and my seminary teachers? Why had all the preachers I had ever heard watered down the teaching of Jesus so much that his moral outrage was lost? Why had I been kept in the dark, and why is this message kept hidden from people? (Brewster, 2007, p. 145)

While Brewster had a strong critique of the weaknesses of his education, he also reflected on the importance of connecting experience with book and classroom knowledge. He describes a conversation that he had with Martin Luther King, Jr. in which he asked Dr. King about how he
could learn to make the deep connections between the realities of people’s suffering and the committed Christian life of justice. Brewster (2007) recalled their conversation:

> Action for justice has to be grounded in philosophical and theological reasoning,”

> Dr. King had said. “Resistance to moral injustice has to come from deep inner conviction.” We had talked about Reinhold Niebuhr and Gandhi and their influence on him when his thoughts were taking shape during the Montgomery resistance movement. I realized that the great struggle for justice needed to come from a deep place in one’s heart, and I wondered if I was prepared. (p. 171)

Based on Brewster’s remarks, it appears that the disconnect between his experiences in the classroom at Union and his activist experience in SIM presented him with what adult education transformative learning theorists might call a “disorienting dilemma,” preparing the way for a transformative learning experience.

Up to this point there has been no research on the Student Interracial Ministry. David Cline (personal communication, January 7, 2009), recent graduate from the history department of the University of North Carolina, has just completed his dissertation (2010), an historical study of SIM, exploring the role of the liberal protestant church in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. On the history of Union, there have been a series of general histories (Handy, 1987; Coffin, 1954; Prentiss, 1889), as well as some specialized studies on particular time periods (Kim, 1997), programs in religious education (Hicks, 2000; Little, 1993; Tippen, 1993), Biblical studies (Sanders, 1998), social ethics (Dorrien, 2007, 2009), specific projects, such as the East Harlem Protestant Parish (Alicea, 1989; Leech, 2005), and specific faculty from the time period of SIM (Glenn, 1988; Knox, 2000). Yet there has been no detailed research on the history of
activism at UTS, although some coverage in broader works (Tracy, 1996), or the role of Union in training activist clergy. This research will start to fill this gap in the literature.

There has been extensive study on transformative learning in many contexts (see Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion) but few empirical studies related to racial perspectives. Currently, the empirically-based studies have involved the experience of adult educators and graduate students (Dass-Brailsford, 2007; Manglitz, Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2005; Tisdell, 2003; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006), including two autobiographical studies by white educators (Boyd, 2008; D’Andrea, 1999), and autobiographical accounts by two Black women educators (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006). There have been no detailed studies concerning the role of TL in racial perspective change. Although there continues to be increased study of diversity in theological education (Aleshire, 2002; Cascante-Gómez, 2008; Hess, 1998), there has been very little empirical research on the relationship of theological education and racial perspectives. This study will also attempt to begin to fill these gaps in relation to TL and theological education research.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to study the learning experiences of participants in the Student Interracial Ministry. SIM provided the seminarians with an intense learning environment in which they crossed borders including race, gender, class, and culture. For many of these participants, this experience offered them rich opportunities for transformative learning. This study will investigated the ways in which participation in SIM affected the racial perspectives of the participants, with special attention to the interplay between religious background, theological education, and faith development.

The specific research questions that guided this study are as follows:
1. How did participants’ experience in the Student Interracial Ministry affect their learning concerning race, including its cognitive, affective, and theological or spiritual dimensions?

2. How does Transformative Learning theory help us to understand their learning?

3. How do participants understand the relationship between their activist experiences and their religious background and theological education?

4. How have participants integrated their learning experiences from SIM into their faith development and careers?

Theoretical Framework

This study will used three intersecting theoretical frameworks to help understand the learning of SIM participants: Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), Intergroup Contact Theory (ICT), and Faith Development Theory (FDT). TLT is the fundamental theoretical approach that will be used, as formulated by Jack Mezirow. Yet, this foundational approach to TLT was limited by its focus on individual cognition, with insufficient attention given to the roles of social context, social perspectives and groups, affective dimensions, interpersonal relations, spiritual factors, and developmental processes, which has resulted in several modifications to the theory to take these factors into account. Careful appraisal of this complex array of factors was essential to understanding more fully the process of racial perspective change. In order to better understand the social dimension of transformative learning (TL), Paolo Freire’s approach to emancipatory education was considered in some detail, along with an array of scholarship that has examined the social dimensions of transformation. In particular, this included an in-depth look at Intergroup Contact Theory, the major social psychological approach to understanding racial attitude change. Since relatively little research has been conducted on TLT and racial
perspective change, Intergroup Contact Theory was added to the theoretical framework and was used to better understand the importance of social groups, as well as affective factors in transformative learning. This study also interacted in detail with the research which investigates TLT in terms of developmental theory. Here, consideration was given to important work that explicates specific developmental aspects of the theory, while calling for an understanding of transformative learning throughout the lifespan. In order to take account of the developmental perspective more fully, Faith Development theory was added to the theoretical framework. Faith Development Theory, the major approach to understanding spiritual and religious development, provided a lens for understanding the developmental and spiritual dimensions of racial perspective transformation among the group of theological students who made up the membership of the Student Interracial Ministry.

*Transformative Learning*

Transformative learning theory as initially developed by Mezirow (Mezirow, 1991b, 1997, 2000, 2003) and critiqued and expanded on by others (Cranton, 2006; Taylor, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2007) was used to examine the ways in which the SIM participants’ racial perspectives changed as a result of their experiences in civil rights activities. Transformative learning theory asserts that meaning making is the fundamental human activity. People view the world through a matrix of values, beliefs and assumptions called a frame of reference or meaning perspective. By means of critical self-reflection, people can learn to see these fundamental assumptions as things that can be changed, rather than as fixed realities. This involves a process of learning steps, people wrestle with ideas that can’t be explained or understood through their meaning perspectives.
Based on his research concerning women returning to college after a hiatus from schooling, Mezirow (1975) inductively developed a series of ten phases of transformation that are powered by a dynamic process of reflective action (1991). These phases should not be understood as a rigid structure of development that needs to be followed, but rather as “sequential moments” in which “meaning is clarified” (1991, p. 193). They begin with a disorienting dilemma which enables them to examine other ways of understanding a situation – ways which challenge some assumptions in one’s frame of reference. This process involves self examination, often dealing with a sense of guilt or shame, continuing with the vital process of critical reflection on these assumptions, with awareness that others share this same transformative process. This leads to exploration of new options and planning for ways to act on these new ideas. This action may include acquiring new skills, trying on new roles, leading to new feelings of confidence as one begins to integrate this new perspective into one’s own life.

As is discussed in chapter 3, there are many critiques of Mezirow’s theory, including the fact that it has not focused enough on the social context, and that unlike Paulo Freire’s (2000) critical pedagogy approach, it is not a theory of social action. Mezirow also frames TL almost exclusively in terms of rationality, to the neglect of affective and interpersonal factors. These elements of critique are important components for understanding the SIM processes of change, which is why it is important to draw on additional theoretical insights.

*Intergroup Contact Theory*

The field of social psychology is the disciplinary home of the most important research concerning racial perspective change. It provides the second theoretical framework, intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954, 1979; Brewer & Miller, 1984; Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003; Miller, 2002; Pettigrew, 1998, 2008
May; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005), which will be used to better understand the intergroup processes that mediate or moderate transformative learning about race. This theory arose as social scientists focused study on intergroup contact following World War II and had its classic formulation by Gordon Allport (1954, 1979).

Intergroup contact theory hypothesizes that under certain conditions (equal group status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support of authorities, law or custom) intergroup contact will reduce prejudice (Allport, 1954, 1979). Subsequent research has developed this hypothesis into a full-blown theoretical model. An important part of this model involves a group of interrelated processes that mediates intergroup contact’s effects on prejudice. These include learning about the outgroup, changing behavior, generating affective ties, and ingroup reappraisal (Pettigrew, 1998). Recent scholarship has moved away from the strict cognitive model that was held by Allport and has explored the importance of affective factors (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Eller & Abrams, 2003, 2004; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2004). Factors such as friendship (Eller & Abrams, 2003, 2004; Hamberger & Hewstone, 1997; Pettigrew, 1997) and empathy (Batson, Lishner, Cook & Sawyer, 2005; Batson, Polycarpou, Harmon-Jones, Imhoff, Mitchener, Bednar, et al., 1997) have been demonstrated to be mediators of prejudice reduction. Other factors have also been studied, in particular, the role of intergroup anxiety and group salience.

Intergroup contact theory was very helpful in understanding the experience of Student Interracial Ministry students. As white students who served in all-black parishes and typically living with black families, intergroup contact was extensive. Students served in appointments which lasted for either a summer or a year. This provided them with many opportunities for close contact and in some cases deep friendship. Group salience was an important factor, as was, to a
degree, intergroup anxiety. Both intergroup contact theory and transformative learning theory come from strong cognitive orientations in which affective factors are important areas of current research. Intergroup contact theory provided a powerful framework for relating these affective (and other) factors to instances of transformative learning.

*Faith Development Theory*

A part of the purpose of this study was to explore how the spirituality or faith perspectives informed the thinking and actions of these SIM students, which neither transformative learning theory nor intergroup contact theory speak to directly. This led to the use of faith development theory in this study. Since the participants were graduate students at a theological seminary, this study provided an excellent opportunity to examine the ways in which transformative learning intersects with faith development. Clearly, SIM participants had powerful experiences that they understood in religious and spiritual terms. Are these just fleeting insights that leave one’s basic religious and spiritual perspective untouched, or do the transformative experiences lead to progressive religious and spiritual development?

Transformative learning theory, as developed by Mezirow, is largely understood as a cognitive approach that is not generally amenable to affective learning or to spiritual and religious experience in particular. Yet a growing number of scholars have called into question this restrictive view of transformative learning. These include works that explore the transformational dimensions of religious convictional experiences (Loder, 1981, 1998), imaginative ways of knowing (Dirkx, 1997, 2001a, 2001b) and the role of spirituality (Tisdell, 2003; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006).

In order to understand this intersection between racial meaning perspective change, spiritual and religious perspective, and adult development, the Faith Development Theory (FDT)
of James Fowler (1981, 1996, 2000, 2003, 2004) was used to better understand the faith development of SIM participants. As with other constructivist-developmental models, FDT attempts to describe the various characteristics of different stages of human development – in this case involving spiritual/faith development. We have already seen how understanding developmental stages may be important for understanding the nature of transformative learning. As with Mezirow’s theory, FDT, as originally conceived by Fowler, has needed very significant critique and modification. Some of the areas of concern are ones that have been seen before, for example, a lack of attention to affective factors (Parks, 1986, 1991; Tisdell, 2003), a static view of the self (Kegan, 1980, 1982, 1994; Parks, 1986), an overly linear model of development (Parks, 2003; Tisdell, 2002, 2003; Kegan, 1982), inattention to the role of conflict (Loder, 1981; Parks, 1986, 1991), and a gendered structure of development (Tisdell, 2003; Parks, 1991, 2003).

Methodology Overview

This dissertation is a historically-based study of the way in which a group of adult graduate theological students in the 1960s made meaning of their experience as participants in the civil rights movement through the Student Interracial Ministry. In particular, it is an examination of the complex ways in which their racial perspectives may have transformed in relation to their faith development. As a project in understanding how other people make meaning, it is almost by definition a qualitative research project, as it seeks to understand, describe and interpret the perspective of the other. Qualitative research is essential when trying to understand the interrelationships between the social and religious ideas of people. It assumes a complex social reality in which numerous factors come to play for which no simple answers are readily available (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).
The following are some key assumptions of the qualitative approach to research. Qualitative research is an interpretive process in which one cannot just “uncover the facts” but it is a process of social construction in which the researcher seeks to comprehend how other people have acted and perceived their own actions in the world. It is based on careful observation, detailed description and explication of specific people in specific contexts, seeking to understand and clarify what is going on in a given setting (Geertz, 1973). Qualitative research also takes place in relation to a natural setting. It seeks to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them in their own settings. It uses a variety of methods and types of approach to make the world visible in different ways. This may be through direct observation, or, as is the case in this study, through the recreation of that setting through the perspectives of the participants and historical research. Qualitative research is also inherently interdisciplinary, bringing together the various fields of inquiry necessary to understand any human phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

This study used oral history as its primary qualitative methodology. The goal of oral history methodology is to give voice to the everyday participants in historical events through in-depth interviews. Oral history projects are structured in four main ways: subject-oriented projects, life-histories, community histories, and family histories (Larson, 2006). This research project combined elements of subject-oriented projects, with its investigation of the activities of the Student Interracial Ministry; and life histories, through its examination of the role of participants’ experiences in SIM in relation to their religious background and development.

The design of this study featured two main stages of data collection and interpretation. Participants in SIM were required to write a report of their experience in SIM at the conclusion of their time. The archives at Union Theological Seminary contain a collection of these
participant reports and lists of participants, as well as other documentation. These reports provided a broad perspective on the experience of SIM participants, in the whole range of settings and throughout the seven years of the project. The second phase of the design involves in-depth interviews with twelve SIM participants. In a few cases, participants were provided with copies of their SIM reports in advance, to serve as memory prompts for the interviews (the inability to easily have archival materials copied hindered a fuller use of this technique). The use of an interview guide or framework, provided a powerful research tool that gave sufficient structure to gather data on a core group of questions focusing on the participants learning experiences. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify important commonalities of participants’ experiences in SIM as well as unique aspects of individual narratives. In line with international standards of oral history projects, oral history transcripts will be produced and deposited in an appropriate archive, along with video recordings of the interviews. Finally, a number of methods will be used to ensure the trustworthiness of the data.

Significance

This study has three main areas of significance. The first area is the most personal. As a committed member of a mainline Christian church, I am deeply concerned about the way in which the religious right has dominated the discourse concerning religion and politics. The religious left, which a generation ago played a much more important role, is now characterized by “relative silence and invisibility” (Henderson, 2006, p.8). This study is an opportunity to explore the ways in which young liberal Christian leaders had an impact on the society of the 1960s through their participation in the civil rights movement. Through this exploration of their learning about race, it is hoped that some insight has been given concerning the way in which religious and spiritual commitments may have a positive effect on social issues.
The second contribution that this study makes is to the resurgent interest among historians and religious scholars concerning the role of religion in the civil rights movement (Chappell, 2004; Marsh, 1997, 2005; Murray, 2004; Newman, 2004). While scholars have broadly and deeply investigated many aspects of the civil rights movement, the tendency has been to underplay the role of religion. This may be partially due to the way in which the later leadership of the movement was dominated by adherents of the more secular black power approach, while the early period was dominated by religiously-oriented participants.

Third, this study makes a significant contribution to the literature of adult education. It provided an opportunity for understanding the learning experiences of young adults in the civil right movement through the lens of transformative learning theory. Participation in civil rights activities in the 1960s was a powerful experience for many participants. Oral history narratives of participants:

Frequently reveal the changes of heart and mind that movement participation produces.

Narratives describe the changing consciousness that accompanies movement activity as they relate their own journeys from alienation to resistance, from a passive anger or fatalism to political action. (Rogers, 1988, p. 568)

More specifically, it adds to the research base on transformative learning in the areas of racial perspective change. It specifically examined the role of in-depth intergroup contact and the importance of affective factors, through the use of Intergroup Contact Theory. This study explored the role of religion and spirituality in relation to transformation of racial perspectives, including the relationship between transformative learning experiences and the students’ sense of call or vocation.
Another contribution to the adult education literature involved the role of social activism in adult learning. This study explored how participation in civil rights activities enhanced the learning of the SIM participants. It provided an opportunity to explore the connections between theoretical learning about race in the classroom, and participatory learning through social activism. Since participants reflected on learning experiences at the beginning of their careers, it was also possible to examine the role played by these learning experiences in shaping careers that have had strong social activist components. It also brought new attention to the role of religious and spiritual factors in adult learning in social activism, an issue which is sometimes largely ignored (i.e. in Brookfield & Preskill, 2009).

It also has significance to adult education literature by exploring the interconnections between adult faith development and transformative learning. The students’ experiences in the Student Interracial Ministry (SIM) were examined in terms of their faith development. This involved exploration of students’ religious background, the way in which they integrated SIM experiences into their faith experience, and the continuing ways in which SIM participants have made meaning of SIM experiences and the ongoing role these experiences have played in their faith development. This study also provided an opportunity to examine the role that transformative learning experiences have in religious development stage transitions.
Assumptions, Limitations and Strengths

Assumptions

There are several assumptions that informed this study. The main assumptions were as follows:

1. The student experience of crossing borders likely served as a disorienting dilemma. This experience, which challenges the meaning perspectives of the participants, may form the basis of transformative learning.

2. Transformative learning experiences of theological seminary students will be understood with reference to their religious and spiritual experience and perspective. It is assumed that theological seminary students will attempt to integrate their SIM experiences into their religious and spiritual perspective.

3. Increased involvement in actions to enhance respect for all persons will lead to transformative learning and religious development.

Limitations and Strengths

Oral history methodology has certain limitations and strengths that involve both those being interviewed and the interviewer:

1. Most fundamental are limitations related to memory. Participants will vary in their ability to accurately recall events from forty years ago. This limitation will be able to be reduced through the use of contemporary reports by the SIM participants as memory prompts, and through careful comparative analysis with these reports and other research data.

2. Participants in civil rights activities often have a self-consciousness concerning their role in history. This tends to encourage their focus on dramatic events rather than day to day
activities (Rogers, 1988). This can result in a devaluing of the importance of everyday events.

3. Participants tend to enhance their own role at the center of an event (Rogers, 1988). This will require that the interviewer pay special attention to understanding the contributions of all participants in an event.

4. Participants often enhance the role of transformative experiences and religious interpretation in their interviews (Rogers, 1987). This means that the interviewer will need to probe, with sensitivity, to see what depth and lasting significance there is to such experiences in the lives of the participants.

5. Participants may “objectify” their account of events in the interviews which may conflict with the researcher’s own construction of their selves: “What an activist has experienced as transformative might be flattened into an orderly typology or into predictable relationships. In this instance, any interpretive framework may be experienced as misrepresentation by those interviewed” (Rogers, 1987, p. 183).

6. Generalizability may be limited by the makeup of SIM participants: mostly well-educated, white, middle class participants. Yet, as many other student participants within the civil rights movement came from similar backgrounds, it is hoped that this study will help shed light on the ways in which such participants made meaning of their experiences, especially in relation to the development of racial perspectives in the context of faith development.

In spite of these limitations, the following are strengths:

1. Oral history methodology preserves the voices of “everyday” participants in the civil rights movement, rather than focusing only on the major players. By having participants
in a wide variety of southern church locations in a number of states, a variety of perspectives will be recorded.

2. Oral history interviews will be a rich source of the ways in which the participants are currently making meaning of their SIM experience, as well as their interpretation of how they made meaning of the experience in the past.

Definition of terms

1. Transformative learning – is the process by which adults come to question their frames of reference for understanding the world and revise these frames of reference “to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow, cited in Cranton, 2006, p. 23).

2. Frames of reference (Meaning perspectives) – are the “web of assumptions and expectation through which we filter the way we see the world” (Cranton, 2006, p. 22). Mezirow originally called these meaning perspectives.

3. Habits of mind, points of view, and meaning schemes – In transformative learning theory, “a frame of reference has two dimensions”: Habits of mind are “the broad dispositions that we use to interpret experience. A habit of mind is expressed as a point of view. A point of view is a cluster of meaning schemes, and meaning schemes are habitual, implicit rules for interpreting experiences.” (Cranton, 2006, p. 22).

4. Critical self-reflection – is the process of meaning making by which adults consider experience in relation to their own frames of reference.

5. Disorienting dilemmas – are identified in transformative learning theory as events and perceptions of the world which adults come to see as being in conflict with important elements of their frames of reference and which may lead to transformative learning.
6. Intergroup contact theory – the leading theory in social psychology that attempts to explain the process of racial attitude change. Racial attitude change is positively influenced by equal status contact between members of different racial groups. Recent research pays particular attention to the influence of affective factors.

7. Faith – is understood in Faith Development theory as a “comprehensive frame of meaning” that develops in relation to a person’s “transcendent center of value and power” (Fowler, 1981, p. 28) which may be understood in traditional religious ways or through broader spiritual approaches.

8. Faith development – the developmental process by which people develop their faith perspective.

9. Faith development theory – a developmental approach to faith, initially propounded by James Fowler, in which people progress through multiple stages of faith, which include three main adult stages: Synthetic Conventional Faith, Individuative-Reflective Faith, and Conjunctive Faith.

10. Spiritual experience – refers to the ways in which adults make meaning of the world in relation to their understanding of transcendent or ultimate values.

11. Religious experience – refers to the way in which adults make meaning of the world through complex, usually theistic, systems of belief, ritual, and community in relation to their understanding of transcendent or ultimate values.

12. Extrarational ways of knowing – refers to the ways in which people know that go beyond cognitive rationality, including ways that use imagination, narrative, emotion, body, and spirituality.
Organization of Part One

Part I is organized in the following way. This chapter provided an overview of the whole study; chapter 2 provides a brief history of Union Theological Seminary and its role in social activism; chapter 3 is a literature review which details the theoretical framework and reviews the research that is most relevant to this study; it concludes with chapter 4 covering the methodology.
CHAPTER TWO

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, SOCIAL ACTION,
AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT: A SHORT HISTORY

This chapter sets the historical background for understanding the development of the Student Interracial Ministry. The immediate background for this movement is the history of Union Theological Seminary in New York and its long role in social activism. The first section will make the case that this history is relevant to the field of adult education as it describes the shared history, values and commitments between Union and adult education. The second section provides a brief 20th century history of Union faculty, students, and alumni in many of the major social movements of the time. The final section examines Union’s specific contribution to the civil rights movement, including the Student Interracial Ministry (1960-1968).

Union Theological Seminary and Adult Education

Union Theological Seminary in New York was founded in 1836 and played a central role in the development of social activism in the United States during the 20th Century. In relating how this connects to the field of adult education, the first part of this section will first provide a discussion of the overall context of Union, and then consider the adult education aspect of Union’s mission.

The General Context of Union

Union’s role in social activism in the US in the 20th century has been a multifaceted one, including the participation of faculty, students, and alumni, through education, direct action, and publication. Attention needs to be paid to the unique role of Union in theological education. As described by Gary Dorrien (2001, 2003, 2006), the preeminent historian of American Protestant theology, in his inaugural address as the Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Social Ethics: “Union
has a special place and mission in theological education. When you think of black liberation theology, feminist social ethics, and womanist theology and social ethics, no seminary comes close to the significance of this one…” (Dorrien, 2007, p. 21). Dorrien also highlights the two main reasons for this: cutting edge faculty and highly qualified students.

One may wonder why Union has drawn such highly qualified people. It is likely due to the three main commitments of the seminary: “a combination of freedom and involvement, a commitment to being both a professional school to educate ministers and a graduate school to equip scholars, and a relationship with churches in many countries and with the ecumenical movement” (Handy, 1987, p. 261). Throughout its history, Union has been a place that championed the free exploration of ideas. This trait grew even more predominant during the decades following the Briggs heresy trial of the 1890s, as Union moved from being a Presbyterian denominational seminary to an independent one. Robert Handy quotes the 16 year-old Henry Sloane Coffin, future president of Union (1926-1945), after he had observed the famous Briggs trial with his father. Coffin remembered the trial as the time when Union accepted “a mission under God to champion the freedom of Christian scholars” (Handy, 1987, p. 92). This mission of freedom extended beyond theological ideas into the whole area of championing the involvement of young Christian leaders in the social issues of the world surrounding them.

Students at Union have always felt a duty to apply their learning in the world around them, rejecting the stereotypical “ivory tower” image. This meant bringing the free discussion of issues from the classroom into the world. This is the kind of vision that motivated SIM participants.

**Union’s History of Activism and Adult Education**

One might ask at this point, why is this history important to the field of adult education? How will it help us to understand the adult learning around race that occurred among participants
in the Student Interracial Ministry? Union and the field of adult education have many elements of shared history, ideas, and basic commitments. As a graduate institution of higher education, Union is an adult education institution, primarily training future adult educators – students who serve as pastors, professors, social service professionals, teachers, and as other kinds of professionals who often have a strong adult educational component to their work.

Union has been one of the primary centers of protestant thought that advocates the indissoluble connection between learning and social action; a commitment shared by many sectors of adult education (Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Elias, 1994; Elias & Merriam, 2005; English, 2005; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009; Tisdell, 2003). Elements of this commitment were forged in the same environment, the progressive, left-leaning, intellectual circles of New York City in the first half of the 20th century. Union Seminary flanking the west side of Broadway and Columbia University the east, with their two towering intellectual figures, Reinhold Niebuhr and John Dewey, helping to chart different paths through the American landscape of education, politics, church, and society. In this rich environment, we also find Eduard Lindeman, a central figure in the development of the field of adult education, who blends the social critique of the Christian social gospel tradition with Dewey’s pragmatism (Fisher, 1996; Lander, 2004). Although Niebuhr and Dewey would become embroiled in a controversy started by Niebuhr’s attack on Dewey’s liberalism, the two would continue to share nearly equal political positions, participate in and support the same progressive social and political movements, sponsor and support major adult education institutions (i.e. Highlander Folk School and Brookwood Labor College), and would be the driving forces behind broad, parallel movements in American intellectual and social history. Both movements work toward the creation of a more just and equitable world; an authentic democracy in which all people are free to live a good life –
Niebuhr’s movement was one based on a religious vision of social action, while Dewey’s was based on a secular educational vision.

As we have seen, some adult educators like Eduard Lindeman looked for a middle way – to bring together the power of a religious vision with progressive educational ideas (English, 2005). Union and adult education would be deeply influenced by the liberation movements of the 1960s, including liberation theology (also a major influence on Paolo Freire’s emancipatory education ideas as seen in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, originally published in 1967) and Union would become a leading force in the development of black theology, womanist theology, and feminist theology. The kind of critical reflection that is at the heart of these various liberation movements is also the trademark of theological education at Union Theological Seminary. In speaking of the training of seminary students, here are the words of two Union students, David Hornbeck and Charles Powers, who led anti-apartheid protests in 1966 and one of whom (Powers) served as the alumni head of a major institutional reorganization committee at the seminary during 1969-1970:

The character of the theological training which these 10 seminary students had received played a crucial role in informing both the decision to initiate this protest and the decision to implement it in the way that they did. Union’s emphasis on the complex nature of the self in ethical action and on adequate theological reflection on the nature of society had a decisive influence… (Powers & Hornbeck, 1968, p. 617)

Further, in speaking to the point of theological education at Union, Dittes and Powers (1970) note that education at Union is “a process of theological education in which teachers and students together practice and thereby refine the intellectual skills of perception, reflection and mobilization which characterize the profession (p. 494).
These two statements represent the views of activist students at Union that might well have been shared by participants in SIM (1960-1968). Here in Union’s approach to theological education, we find core values of adult education: critical reflection, social action, democratic vs. hierarchical structure of the classroom, and a process vs. content-oriented approach. These values also carried over into the social activism and experiments in ministry that were carried on by Union students and alumni. The social action of Union activists has often had a strong educational component. This is seen in two historical examples that greatly influenced the civil rights movement: The first, as noted by Leona English (2005), was the founding of the Highlander Folk School by Myles Horton and other former Union students; Highlander was a primary interracial educational site that played a critical role in mediating non-violent strategies to movement participants. The second was the formative role played by Union graduate Abraham Muste, through his long leadership in the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Muste and his staff played a tireless role teaching about pacifism and training personnel in all the major civil rights groups, especially in regard to non-violent philosophy and methods of resistance.

Student experiments in ministry extended these core values into ministerial activities. The minister was not the primary focus but largely played a facilitating role, with the needs of the local leaders and people central. These activities were vital supplement to classroom learning, with the ministers enriching their theological education through supportive, experiential learning. These qualities are seen in the pioneering urban ministry of the East Harlem Protestant Parish, and in the example of the participation by Jane Stembridge in the Student Interracial Ministry and as an important participant in the civil rights movement.
Union Seminary Involvement in Social Movements

At the beginning of the 20th Century, Union was a bastion of the social gospel, a liberal movement within Christianity focusing less on dogmatic concerns and more on the application of the faith to contemporary society, with particular focus on the underprivileged. As such, historically it has had significant involvement in social movements. Many professors, especially in the disillusionment that followed World War I, embraced more radical social visions such as pacifism and socialism. These spokespersons for the far left at Union had profound effects on social activism in the United States, by teaching this post-war generation of activist students. Thus, this section will first explore Union’s role as a training ground for social activist educators; and then some of its experiments in ministry.

A Training Ground for Social Activist Educators

An incredible group of students were attracted to attend Union between 1908 and 1913. Norman Thomas (UTS, ’11) became one of the most important socialist figures in America, with an active career lasting until his death in 1968. Beyond running as the Socialist Party candidate for president from 1928 to 1948, Thomas was an active leader, working to keep socialist concerns alive amidst splintering groups and defections to the Democratic Party (Buhle, 1990). Thomas was a major leader in labor, civil rights, and anti-war causes (Fleischman, 1969). Of similar national stature was A.J. Muste (UTS ’13), the leading proponent of pacifism and a consistent philosophy of non-violence (Robinson, 1981). He was the first director of Brookwood Labor College, a pacifist labor school founded by Helen and William Fincke (UTS ’11). He was a central figure throughout the history of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), the major pacifist organization in the U.S. He championed a great array of pacifist and civil rights causes throughout his long career, remaining very active until his death in 1967, being in many ways
one of the few constants that held together the fragile pacifist movements through oppressive and fractious times (Tracy, 1996).

His greatest influence was as a movement teacher, administrator, and advisor. His young protégés played vital educational roles in the promulgation of non-violent philosophy and methods, in the founding and support of three of the most important civil rights organizations: CORE, SCLC, and SNCC. Fellowship of Reconciliation field staffers, James Farmer and George Houser (UTS, 38-40) founded the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1942. CORE’s use of pacifist non-violent protest techniques (and Houser’s pamphlet Erasing the Color Line) was an important influence on the student sit-in movement of the 1960s (Tracy, 1996; Danielson, 2003; Flacks, 1999). In the weeks following Rosa Park’s civil disobedience in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955, Muste sent two FOR people, Bayard Rustin and Glenn Smiley to teach the techniques of non-violent resistance to the emerging movement around Martin Luther King; these techniques which would become the hallmark of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)’s approach. Finally, it was a lecture that Muste gave to Jim Lawson’s first year college history class that introduced Lawson to the non-violent resistance strategies of Mahatma Gandhi (Robinson, 1981). Lawson became the teacher to the band of students in Nashville who would become the founders of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); he was a frequent teacher at many activist workshops, and a major leader of the civil rights movement (Branch, 1988; Halberstam, 1998; Hogan, 2007). The effects of Lawson’s work of adult education in Nashville alone is difficult to overestimate – student leaders John Lewis, James Bevel, Diane Nash, Bernard Lafayette, and Marion Barry would become major movement leaders and “models for thousands of young people in the burgeoning Southern civil rights movement” (Olson, 2001, p. 159).
In years following World War I, many students came to Union to study with two towering figures: Harry Ward and Reinhold Niebuhr. Though both Ward and Niebuhr began as ardent Christian Socialists and pacifists, Niebuhr moved toward the middle of the political spectrum, by developing his own unique approach called Christian Realism. This will be explored in more detail below.

Of the Union professors that stayed on the left side of the political equation, Harry Ward was the most radical and influential (Rossinow, 2005; Link, 1984). Among his many accomplishments, three stand out. Early in his career Ward (1908) wrote what came to be known as the “Social Creed of the Churches”, demanding such social essentials as higher wages, one day a week to rest, protection of women and children, and equal rights for all people. This creed was adopted by the Federal Council of Churches and most major protestant denominations, including the YWCA and YMCA (Rossinow, 2005). Ward was also an early leader of two important organizations. In 1920, with Roger Baldwin, he formed the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and served as the chairperson of its board for the first two decades. Ward was also the national chairperson of the American League Against War and Fascism, an organization founded in 1933 to try and unite the wide array of leftist groups, including socialists, communists, feminists, pacifists, and labor groups. Throughout his long life, Ward was a consistently committed Christian pacifist and socialist, who steadfastly remained open to participation in the cause by all faithful participants. His refusal to abandon his connections with Communists and Communist sympathizers (even when he was abjectly opposed to their positions) led to his begin marginalized (Rossinow, 2005; Link, 1984).

Myles Horton, along with the circle of students around him, was a powerful example of the importance of Harry Ward’s teaching. Horton went to study at Union, based on the
recommendation of an Appalachian minister friend of his who had urged Horton to read Harry Ward’s book, *Our Economic Morality & the Ethic of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1929) and encouraged him to study at Union (Glen, 1996; Horton, Kohl & Kohl, 1990). Horton went to Union (1929-1930) in an attempt to reconcile his religious background with the harsh economic conditions that he saw in society. He also hoped to discover ideas that would assist him in setting up a school in Appalachia that would help people to solve their own problems. Once at Union, Horton connected deeply with the Christian Realism approach of Reinhold Niebuhr, as well as to the power of his brilliant mind. He was also struck by Niebuhr’s willingness to engage someone like Horton, who had come to Union with very inadequate academic preparation. At the seminary, Horton met Christian faculty and students who were deeply committed to social activism (Horton, Kohl & Kohl, 1990). He also was introduced to the wide world of social activism and ideas available in New York City. He participated in labor rallies, distributed strike pamphlets, visited settlement houses and other service agencies (Glen, 1996). With access to good libraries, he threw himself into learning the analytical techniques of Marx and Lenin and was extremely impressed with the writings of John Dewey. For Myles Horton, Dewey was “one of the few people who had progressive ideas about education” in the 1920s and 1930s (Horton, Kohl & Kohl, 1990).

Horton formed a close friendship with Niebuhr, who would be instrumental in getting Highlander Folk School started. Highlander was one of the very few places in the South in which interracial groups could meet to learn from each other and about the philosophy and methods of non-violent protest. It would become a center of social activism. He also drew on the talents of like-minded classmates to form the early leadership at Highlander. Most important was a protégé of Harry Ward named James Dombrowski (F. T. Adams, 1992; Horton, Kohl & Kohl, 1990;
Rossinow, 2005). Dombrowski (UTS, 1928-1933) was a brilliant student who formed a deep personal and intellectual connection with Ward. He absorbed Ward’s conviction, here summarized by Frank Adams: “There was no social gospel…only one gospel derived from the life and work of Christ and the Prophets. The key to salvation…was active involvement in reform and social change” (1992, p. 38). Horton’s Union classmate Dombrowski would serve as the executive director of Highlander from 1933-1942 (Horton, Kohl & Kohl, 1990; Union Theological Seminary, 1970) then leave Highlander to found and lead what would become the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF) (1942-1965), the first interracial organization in the South dedicated to the eradication of segregation. SCEF was a critical organization in supporting civil rights activities in the South, although, like Highlander, it also became a prime target of Cold War anti-communist propaganda and persecution. SCEF was one of the very few organizations (i.e. National Lawyers Guild, Progressive Citizens of America, and the Highlander Folk School) who “did not reject supporters because of past or present political affiliations. Enlistment in the cause at hand…became their primary litmus test” (S. H. Brown, 1998, p. xiv). Clearly, Dombrowski’s SCEF held to the example set by his mentor Harry Ward (F. T. Adams, 1992).

**Experiments in Ministry**

The story of Union Theological Seminary’s role in social activism can be continued through a look at the way in which Union encourages students to apply their seminary learning in society. This has often taken the form of innovative experimental projects that had a significant influence in society. We can place the story of the Union Eight, a pacifist group, in this category of experimental ministry. The year 1940 was one of extraordinary challenges for a group of some 20 pacifist students and for the theological seminary that was their home. This movement
occurred due to the prospect of American involvement in World War II, which loomed over the
seminary, and the arrival, from 1938 to 1940, of another extraordinary group of students. Four of
these students, David Dellinger, Don Benedict, Meredith Dallas, and George Houser had spent a
good deal of the 1939-1940 school year experimenting in urban ministry (Benedict, 1982;
Dellinger, 1993; Hunt, 2006; Tracy, 1996; Houser, 1989, 1995). Dellinger, Benedict and Dallas
rented a dilapidated apartment in nearby Harlem, much to the consternation of Union president
Henry Sloan Coffin, and gained first-hand experience interacting with poor African Americans.
In the Spring of 1940, they mobilized to try to be more effective in meeting the needs of their
poor neighbors by moving to a similar neighborhood in Newark, NJ, where they could work with
the support of a local Congregational church. Houser, rather than commuting to a suburban
church for field work, moved out of seminary housing into a Lower East Side tenement and
served at Church of All Nations, where he worked with street gangs. All of these were powerful
examples of the expansion of adult theological education beyond the classroom through
experiential learning in non-hierarchical, experiential settings of service.

These experiences moved each of the students deeply and encouraged them in the
increasing radicalization of their beliefs. In particular, they became even more resolved to resist
registering for the draft as required by the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940. They did
this on two main grounds: that the exemption for theological students and clergy was an elitist
and immoral provision of the law (Benedict, 1982; Dellinger, 1993; Conscientious Objectors,
1940) and that they were unwilling to serve in a segregated military (Benedict, 1982). Twenty
students signed a manifesto that they had published in the Christian Century, the leading
Protestant weekly magazine. The seminary, led by President Coffin and Reinhold Niebuhr,
attempted to dissuade the students from taking this precipitous action. The seminary leaders
argued that the Conscientious Objection clauses in the Act covered their legitimate moral objections. In the end, eight students, who became known as the Union Eight, remained steadfast and ended up going to prison. While strong pressure had been placed on the students, including family pressure, Union also recognized the students’ right to disagree on moral grounds (Roberts, 1940) and recognized their unity in Christ through, what George Houser described as, the “most meaningful worship experience of my life” held in the Union chapel on the eve of their sentencing (Houser, 1989, p. 7).

At least three of the Union Eight went on to have careers of significant social activism. David Dellinger continued throughout his life protesting from a pacifist position, against racism, the Vietnam War, nuclear arms, and many other causes. He was well known for bringing a sense of drama to protest while consistently maintaining a non-violent approach. He was a central figure in the Vietnam War protest movements, and famous for being a member of the Chicago Seven (Dellinger, 1993; Hunt, 2006; Tracy, 1996). As we have already seen above, George Houser became an important staff member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and was a central player in the formation of CORE. He went on to have an important leadership role in relation to raising American consciousness concerning African affairs, especially through his work with the American Committee on Africa, of which he was a founder (Houser, 1976, 1989, 1995; Tracy, 1996). Don Benedict had a vital role in our next experimental ministry.

Don Benedict, while serving his second prison term for draft resistance, came to doubt his absolutist stand. While remaining pacifist at heart, he reflected on the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the reports of the absolute tyranny of Hitler’s Germany. As he read Niebuhr’s *Nature and Destiny of Man*, he came to the conclusion that some kinds of violence needed to be put down with violent force. Upon his release from prison, he decided to enlist in the military.
Following his service in various non-combatant roles, he met and married Ann Cnare, a like-minded pacifist-oriented woman, and returned to Union Seminary. Along with other radical couples, they designed a group ministry project called the East Harlem Protestant Parish (EHPP) (Benedict, 1982). In many ways, it was an outgrowth of the urban ministry projects that Benedict and Dellinger had undertaken in Harlem and Newark before the war. It was an attempt to address the severity of urban problems, respond to Protestant white flight, and develop new models of ministry that would be relevant to urban people’s needs, as well as faithful to the Christian tradition (Alicea, 1989). EHPP became a model for many other churches and seminaries as to what authentic urban ministry might look like (Younger, 1987). Although some were critical that EHPP had simply equated Christian ministry with social services (Stringfellow, 2005; Leech, 2005), others were deeply impressed with the new vision of what ministry could be like and by the extreme dedication of those involved (D. Brown, 2007; Kenrick, 1962).

**Union and the Civil Rights Movement**

Of specific importance to the background of the Student Interracial Ministry is Union Theological Seminary’s involvement in the civil rights movement. This section will consider three key players in this involvement, two faculty members, Reinhold Niebuhr and Robert McAfee Brown; and Jane Stembridge, one of the students who founded the Student Interracial Ministry. Along with Jane’s story, this section will describe the formation of SIM.

**Reinhold Niebuhr**

Reinhold Niebuhr was one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century. His writings cover an immense array of topics and issues - consider the fact that the primary source bibliography covering just the period 1953-1971, identifies almost 700 individual writings by Niebuhr (Stone & Stone, 1971). Due to the immense scope of his theological, ethical, and political writings, as well as the ongoing development of his political perspective throughout his
long public career, it should be kept in mind that aspects of Niebuhr’s legacy have been claimed by intellectuals from a broad political spectrum (McClay, 2002). Wilfred McClay’s entry on Niebuhr in *American Conservatism: an Encyclopedia* (2006) gives a feel for this issue:

Reinhold Niebuhr would protest his inclusion in an encyclopedia of conservatism. And indeed, a man active in liberal causes and organizations throughout his career would seem an unlikely candidate for these pages…Though Niebuhr disdained the Right, his critique of liberalism echoed characteristic themes of twentieth-century American conservatism; and such important present-day conservatives as Michael Novak and Richard John Neuhaus count him an indispensable influence. (p. 630)

This section will focus on the effect of Niebuhr’s scholarship on the civil rights movement - in particular, the role played by his classic book, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932). This work has been extremely influential; being read by generations of theology students, even up to the present day - Amazon.com indicates that *Moral Man* is still a bestseller in the Theology - Ethics category. Yet the importance of this influence can be seen in the life of one specific theology student, Martin Luther King, Jr. (Branch, 1988; Garrow, 1986).

Martin Luther King read *Moral Man and Immoral Society* for the first time while in his final year at Crozer Theological Seminary, in two courses he took with Prof. Kenneth Smith (Garrow, 1986). King had been a strong proponent of the social gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, and he was “absolutely convinced of the natural goodness of man and the natural power of human reason” (Garrow, 1986, p. 12). Reading Niebuhr opened King’s eyes to see “the complexity of human motives and the reality of sin on every level of man’s existence” (Garrow, 1986, p. 12). Consequently, “the Social Gospel lost a good deal of its glow for him almost overnight” (Branch, 1988, p. 81) as Niebuhr “affected him more deeply than did any
modern figure, including Gandhi” (p. 81). This is the most important thing that Niebuhr does for King – it shatters the idealist illusions of inevitable social progress that were the major assumptions of social gospel advocates. In *Stride toward Freedom*, King describes the importance of Niebuhr in this regard:

> These elements in Niebuhr’s thinking helped me to recognize the illusions of a superficial optimism concerning human nature and the dangers of a false idealism. While I still believed in man’s potential for good, Niebuhr made me realize his potential for evil as well. (King, 1964, c.1958, p. 81)

Niebuhr’s emphasis on sin and a permanent presence of evil in the world came like a thunderbolt to his liberal contemporaries. Yet this Biblical concept of sin and the tension between good and evil, black and white, church and state, reverberated deeply with King and was always reflected in “his most heartfelt speeches” (Branch, 1988, p. 87). Garrow and Branch both argue persuasively that King never adopted a naïve form of Gandhian non-resistance, but viewed non-violence much more in Niebuhrian terms. After extensive analysis of hundreds of King’s unpublished sermons and speeches (a much better source, Garrow argues, than his published, sometimes ghost-edited writings), Garrow describes King’s “growing realization of Black America’s need to pursue an aggressively coercive, Niebuhrian political strategy” (Garrow, 1986, p. 12). Branch relates that in private correspondence, King acknowledged that Gandhian nonviolence was “merely a Niebuhrian stratagem of power” (Branch, 1988, p.87).

While Reinhold Niebuhr provided tremendous intellectual and political support for the civil rights movement, one of his students, Robert McAfee Brown, would become an important example for Union students of direct action participation.
Robert McAfee Brown

Robert McAfee Brown (UTS 1943-1945, BD; 1948-1950, Ph.D., 1953-1962, 1976-1979, Professor) was one of Union Seminary’s most accomplished social activists, who not only wrote extensively on social issues, but took a direct role in protest activities. In particular he was well-known for the critical role he played in the promotion of the ecumenical movement between Protestants and both Catholics and Jews, opposition to the Vietnam War, and his advocacy of liberation theology and the needs of Third World nations. Like his mentor Reinhold Niebuhr, he wrote about these issues in many books and in the major religious magazines of the day, although race issues were not a major theme his writing, compared to his output on other issues (1956, 9 July; 1957, 28 October; 1961, 7 August; 1961, 16 October; 1961, 1 August; 1963, 11 October). Yet concern over civil rights went to the core of who Brown was. These core commitments are the causes for which Brown was willing to put his body on the line. In a 1971 interview, Brown calls this his “reluctant radicalization…where on certain occasions I opt for selective civil disobedience” (Herhold, 1971, p. 745). He does this “as an attempt to communicate in a more dramatic way, because people don’t seem to hear the more muted tones of the spoken word” in order to reach out to folks in the political center “who sometimes can have their perceptions sensitized when a middle-aged, middle-class square does something a little bit out of such people’s ordinary routine” (p. 745). Brown did acts of non-violent civil disobedience as a freedom rider, in the Selma civil rights march, by blocking the entrances to several draft boards, and by providing sanctuary for AWOL soldiers whose consciences would not let them return to fighting.

In his memoir, Reflections over the Long Haul (2005), Robert McAfee Brown gives vivid descriptions of his participation in the Freedom Rides of 1961 and the Selma march of 1963. As
we shall see, these events are powerful transformative experiences for Brown as he puts his belief and professional expertise into action. The freedom ride occurs during the summer of 1961, the year before he left Union to teach religion at Stanford. Bill Coffin (UTS ’49-50; EHPP; nephew of Henry Sloane Coffin, president of UTS 1926-1945), a classmate of Brown’s and then chaplain of Yale University and later pastor of Riverside Church, had preceded Brown as a freedom rider. Brown vividly recalls how Coffin’s bus had ended up being torched by white supremacists (R. M. Brown, 2005). Brown was joined on the ride by at least two other Union people: one of his former students, Chris Hartmire, who was then working for the EHPP (and would head up the California Migrant Ministry); and Ralph Roy (UTS ’51-52, MA, Columbia University), pastor of Grace Methodist Church in New York and a longtime CORE member (Arsenault, 2006). These three were part of the group of ten riders on their bus who ended up getting arrested in Tallahassee, Florida (out of an original group of eighteen).

The meaning of Brown’s participation in the freedom rides and his later participation in the march on Selma can be understood in three ways. It was a profound transformative experience for Brown, it was a catalyst for change at Union seminary, and its role in encouraging support for the civil rights movement within the Church. The freedom ride was the first time that Brown had really put his physical well-being on the line for his activist faith. To do this, he had to overcome significant obstacles within the culture of Union. Brown was virtually alone on the faculty as a practical activist. While almost the entire faculty were deeply supportive of the civil rights cause (Parker, 1963), most were cautious about the wisdom of Brown taking this activist approach. Sydney Brown relates how several faculty and families, such as John Bennett and Dan and Eulalia Williams took particular care of her, including Betty Van Dusen, the president’s wife, who said to her “Sydney, thank God for Bob and what he is doing! At last somebody from
the Union Seminary faculty is taking action on his beliefs. Thank God for Bob!” (R. M. Brown, 2005, p. 109).

It was also a transformative experience for Brown as he learned more deeply about his own racial identity. The shared experience of the freedom rides was a moving event in which he had an intense experience with an interracial group of like-minded believers. He also gained an inside perspective on the dimensions of racial hatred, as he faced angry white mobs and individual hate-filled whites who wanted to do him harm based on his racial convictions. He got a first-hand look at how local government authorities can act in deeply biased and unjust ways. The interpersonal dimensions of this learning were evident as Brown experienced the grateful feeling of seeing other people act courageously on his behalf (R. M. Brown, 2005). Brown also gained new perspectives on how his actions affected his whole family.

Brown’s participation in the freedom rides helped to set an activist precedent that would encourage greater support of student activism (such as the Student Interracial Ministry that had just sent its first group of students south), a bolder position by faculty, such as that found in their 1963 “Declaration of Civil Rights” (Parker, 1963), and a more activist role for the Union administration, that was cautiously embraced by the next president, John Bennett (1963-1975) (Handy, 1987).

The participation by Brown, other clergy, and many white and black Americans from outside the South in the Freedom Rides, and especially marches such as Selma, was also an important factor in raising awareness of the crisis of racial justice throughout the nation, and by encouraging federal intervention (Findlay, 1993). These actions were “a sign of stirrings in the mainline churches, which would soon lead to much deeper and more direct involvement of the
National Council of Churches, and other denominations, in the racial struggle” (Findlay, 1993, p. 32).

From this look at two key faculty participants in the cause of civil rights, the focus now turns to Jane Stembridge, a student who was at the heart of the formation of the Student Interracial Ministry.

Jane Stembridge and the Formation of the Student Interracial Ministry

Jane Stembridge is the most influential direct connection that Union Seminary had with the Civil Rights Movement. Stembridge was a student during the 1959-1960 academic year, went south to Atlanta as a part of a pilot project in interracial ministry, and became an early participant in SNCC. Although she ended up staying involved in the movement and did not return to Union, she worked with the other participants in the summer pilot project to establish plans for the Student Interracial Ministry.

Jane was born in Cedartown, Georgia in 1936, the child of progressively-minded Southern Baptist parents. Her father, H. Hansel Stembridge, Jr., was the rare, white Southern Baptist parish minister who was vocal about his pro-integration point of view. This caused him many controversies and necessitated many parish changes from state to state. Both of her parents encouraged Jane to explore the social dimensions of faith (Marsh, 1997), which led her to Meredith College, a Baptist’s women’s college in Raleigh, where the faculty encouraged the development of women’s “intellectual and leadership potential” and then to Union Seminary (Daniel, 2000, p. 289).

At Union, Jane got involved in the life of the community, including debates over the conduct of community worship (a standard ‘concern’ of life at a theological seminary), and even publishing a humorous poem in the student newspaper, The Grain of Salt, about a legendary
project in Hebrew Bible class (1959, October 1). According to the paper, a number of social issues got general attention in the fall semester, including a petition for a nuclear test ban treaty, labor union concerns, and South African apartheid. But the dominant issue for the year was to arise in the Spring semester. On Feb. 1, four North Carolina A & T students sat down at the segregated Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, launching the national phase of the student lunch counter sit-in movement, which rapidly spread throughout cities in the South, with sit-ins taking place in approximately 70 cities by April 1 (Branch, 1988; Gitlin, 1993; Halberstam, 1998; Hogan, 2007; Morris, 1984; Report for action, 1960). Word quickly spread to Nashville where, for the last two years, James Lawson had been teaching a substantial group of students the principles of non-violent philosophy and the methods of non-violent resistance. He launched a series of well organized, highly successful protests against segregated facilities throughout Nashville. Within a few short weeks lunch counters in Nashville were integrated (Branch, 1988; Halberstam, 1998; Hogan, 2007; Morris, 1984).

One immediate repercussion of these protests was that the administration of Vanderbilt University expelled James Lawson from the Divinity School. The Union Seminary community quickly became aware of this and began to mobilize in protest. A group of seminarians had already begun to join the CORE demonstrations being held at the local Woolworth’s in order to bring pressure on the national chain to change its Southern segregationist policies (see The Grain of Salt, 2/23/60, 3/09/60, 4/6/60). Five Southern student lunch counter demonstrators attended a community gathering on March 6, and the next evening, the Union Student Cabinet unanimously voted to send a letter of protest to the Board of Trustees of Vanderbilt University, as well as to hold an open meeting of the Seminary Community on March 9 to fully discuss the matter (Grain of Salt, 3/9/60).
Enthusiasm for civil rights involvement continued to build. Student committees were formed under the leadership of Chris Hartmire (UTS ’60), who would go on to be a freedom rider, and, as the head of the California Migrant Ministry, would emerge as a leading supporter and confidant of Cesar Chavez (Brown, 2005; Levy, 1975; Shaw, 2008). The committees planned picketing activities and worship, researched Woolworth’s policies, and began to plan for deeper involvement – “the possibility of summer field work jobs in troubled areas is being considered” (Followup, 1960, March 23, p. 1).

Jane was involved in three significant events in April 1960 that led to her involvement in what would become the Student Interracial Ministry. On April 1 she heard Martin Luther King, Jr. speak at Salem Methodist Church in nearby Harlem. When Jane expressed interest in working for the SCLC, King urged her to contact Ella Baker (Daniel, 2000; The Grain of Salt, 3/31/60). Jane met Baker when she drove down to Raleigh with thirteen Union students (and four spouses) to attend a conference at Shaw University organized by Baker, at which the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was first organized. James Lawson’s keynote speech made a deep and lasting impression on Stembridge. The student sit-in movement was more than just a battle for integration vs. segregation. It was a spiritual issue:

He is speaking of the Much to be done because the lynching of personhood still continues, requesting a new structure that goes beyond all structures…that both the white and the negro have been playing make-believe, now the middle-class, half way efforts stand under judgment. He is standing there appealing to the nation, and to the white man to respond to the deepest that is within him. (Stembridge, 1960, April 26a, p. 4)

Several years later, after intense experiences in the field and behind the scenes in the movement, Stembridge would fondly remember the time at Raleigh, “The most inspiring moment for me
was the first time I heard the students sing ‘We Shall Overcome’…There was no SNCC, no *ad hoc* committees, no funds, just people who did not know what to expect but who came and released the common vision in that song” (Zinn, 1965, p. 33).

Jane Stembridge also attended the meeting of the United States National Student Association Conference on the Sit-In Movement, as an observer for Union. What she found so powerful at the Shaw conference, was lacking at this conference dominated by Northern schools. In contrast to the African American students present at the conference who insisted on the spiritual and moral nature of the movement, she found “the Northern student, who came in with a ‘look what we’ve done-now-let’s educate the-Southerner’” attitude. Most of the participants who “supported the ‘spirit of nonviolence,’ were glad that the southern Negro is ‘religious,’ but desired to work out their participation on their ‘own philosophy’ (Stembridge, 1960, April 26b). Here Stembridge perceived what would be a major issue concerning white participation in the movement – a reluctance to accept the movement on the terms of those it most affected and a readiness to want to impose their own perspectives and leadership (Branch, 1988, 1998, 2006; Dittmer, 1994; Evans, 1980).

As Union continued to wrestle with the issues involved, they held another community wide meeting and passed a resolution supporting the sit-in protest movements (125 yes, 16 no) (*The Grain of Salt*, 1960, [May]). Yet in a letter to the editor, Jane took back some of her highly critical comments that she had made about the National Student Association conference attitudes, when she found some of the same problems in “another conference – ours” (Stembridge, 1960, [May], p. 5). She was put off by the hours of fighting and discussion over wording and found that they were also missing the point:
We are the ones who are segregated because we are still far from where the hurt is. We’re not going to get there until we care enough to risk everything and until we believe that it is not man’s caution nor sentence structure that protects our now and our then…but that it is unamended Grace… (Stembridge, 1960, [May], p. 5)

As the semester came to a close, the various special and standing student committees worked to begin a pilot project in the South. Four students were selected to participate: Jane Stembridge, John Collins, Charlie Helms, and Chris Gamwell. Three African American seminarians from Gammon Seminary in Atlanta, Maurice King, Willis Goodwin, and John Watts, were enlisted to participate as host pastors, with Collins, Helms, and Gamwell serving as their summer assistant pastors. The three white students from Union who served in these church placements each had experiences that would be core elements of the mission of the Student Interracial Ministry. They had a challenging personal experience that encouraged the transformation of their attitudes concerning race and their own racial identity; they gained experience living each day as a racial minority in a community; they had valuable experience serving as ministers, learning a great deal from their parishioners; and they attempted to make contact with the white churches and encouraged interracial activities and projects (Collins, 1960; Gamwell, 1960; Helms, 1960).

Jane Stembridge made summer arrangements that were a bit different from the others. Rather than working in a local church, she accepted Ella Baker’s invitation to be the first SNCC paid staff member (Carson, 1981; Daniel, 2000; Hogan, 2007; Lewis, 2009; Olson, 2001; Zinn, 1965). Ella Baker, who worked for the SCLC, encouraged SNCC to use a section of the small SCLC office in Atlanta as the SNCC headquarters. Stembridge’s main job was as an office secretary or manager, working under the general, although quite informal supervision of Ella
Baker (Stoper, 1989). Yet, due to the very fluid nature of the organization at this point, Stembridge was also involved in a wide range of planning and policy-making activities. The two main tasks that faced the nascent organization were to keep the various student protestors, that were popping up all over, in contact with each other, and to begin to find funding to support these various protest actions (for bail money, legal fees, etc.) (Murphree, 2006; Stoper, 1989).

Jane was soon joined by Bob Moses, a brilliant Harvard graduate from Harlem, who had heard Bayard Rustin speak about the sit-in movement and been directed to Atlanta by Rustin. At first there wasn’t much for Moses to do except help with the office paperwork. It made an almost comical scene, with Jane and Bob crammed into a little corner of the office, licking envelopes and discussing, into the wee hours, Tillich, Camus, and other theological and philosophical writers they had read (Chappell, 2004; Marsh, 2005; Moses, 2001; Zinn, 1965). A large project that Stembridge organized was the major SNCC conference to be held in October, 2000. Stembridge realized that his conference would be well attended by students in Nashville, Atlanta, and other big cities where the sit-ins had taken hold, but the Deep South would not be well represented. She suggested that Moses be sent South by SNCC to identify leaders of nascent groups in Mississippi and recruit them to participate in the conference (Moses, 2001; Dittmer, 1993). This decision led to a whole new direction for SNCC. As Moses met with leaders in towns throughout Mississippi, he came to realize that what was needed there were not dramatic direct action projects, like sit-ins, but a strong movement of grassroots organizing (Moses, 2001). This would lay the foundation for person-to-person empowerment strategies that would become SNCC’s trademark.

Jane herself was a very impressive person. Pete Daniel (2000) describes her as one of a new generation of southern women who naturally “associated with African-Americans as
equals” (p. 289). She also had strong ideas about what was right, but at the same time was extremely sensitive of the need for white activists to not try and take charge of things. Yet, when she felt that other SNCC leaders had made a huge moral mistake by withdrawing the invitation to Bayard Rustin to speak at the October SNCC conference, due to fears of funding withdrawal based on Rustin’s homosexuality and suspected communist connections, Jane resigned from her SNCC office position (Branch, 1988).

Stembridge remained in the South following her departure from the SNCC office. She seems to have done some work with Dorothy Dawson, who had been hired by Connie Curry to run a National Student Association voter registration project in Raleigh. She returned to SNCC staff work in early 1963. As the first full-time white SNCC staff member in Mississippi, Jane worked to open a field office in Greenwood, MS (Dittmer, 1993; Daniel, 2000; Olson, 2001; Marsh, 1997). SNCC projects in Greenwood and other towns in Mississippi were the first places in which SNCC deployed white field workers (Dittmer, 1993). Stembridge, along with a number of other long-time white SNCC workers, got the opportunity to experience some of the more dangerous work of the field staff (Dittmer, 1993). Jane worked actively with the Freedom Schools, helping to train volunteer teachers and rewrote some sections of the curriculum to better describe the situation of white southerners (Perlstein, 1990). Stembridge was also deeply involved in the planning of the Freedom Summer of 1964, which brought thousands of (mostly) white college students and other volunteers to work in the movement for the summer. This summer experience was beneficial for the movement, in that it greatly helped to expand awareness of the plight of Black Americans in the south, while it also accelerated the rise to authority of the people within the movement favoring a Black Power approach. This rather quickly led to widespread exclusion of white workers from the movement. Some people simply
“burned out”, some went to other organizations, while a number of veteran workers like Casey Hayden and Mary King attempted to fight for white (and women’s) participation in SNCC – and eventually became leaders in the women’s movement. Jane Stembridge quietly withdrew to write poetry, probably remaining in the south (Evans, 1980; Stembridge, 1966).

Conclusion

Union Theological Seminary, as an institution of adult education, through its commitment to social activist teaching and progressive educational ideas, has deep connections with the field of adult education. At the heart of the institution is high quality scholarship with a keen eye to its application in society. Union has a long history of training activist ministers who played key educational roles in influencing major social movements in the twentieth century. Yet Union also has an important history of student innovation and experimentation. Since the resistance of the Union Eight to World War II draft registration, students have created significant experimental organizations and movements, in the areas of pacifism, urban ministry, civil rights, migrant labor, and anti-apartheid protest.

The most far-reaching of these organizations was the Student Interracial Ministry (1960-1968). Jane Stembridge and the other founders envisioned a movement that would give Union Seminary (and other seminary) students the opportunity to participate in the powerful student movement for civil rights that was sweeping the nation. This study of participants in SIM focuses on the transformative experiences that these activist seminarians may have had as they sought to apply their theological education and training in the midst of situations of interracial strife. It investigates how these students applied their commitments to racial justice, critical reflection, non-hierarchical education, and person-centered ministry in their work with SIM. The literature
review that follows explores the adult education research necessary to understand the adult learning dimensions of their experience.
CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to investigate the history the Student Interracial Ministry of Union Theological Seminary and to understand the ways in which participants in this program may have had their racial perspectives transformed through their participation in this civil rights organization, with particular attention given to the role that their religious background and theological education had in fostering their learning about race.

This chapter will review the adult education and related literature that is most relevant to the study. The first section will cover Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), which is the primary theoretical framework of this study. This will include the classic formulation by Mezirow and a range of important additional perspectives, including social perspective change, racial perspective change, cross-cultural learning, and holistic and developmental factors. Due to the fact that research on the role of transformative learning (TL) in racial perspective change is limited, a second theoretical framework is introduced in the second section: Intergroup Contact Theory (ICT). This theory is the dominant social psychological research method for investigating racial perspective change. This highly established field of research can make significant contributions to understanding transformative learning in this area. The third section of the review discusses the literature concerning the social setting in which this learning is taking place – learning in social movements, which is a significant area of adult education. Finally, the last section of this review examines the literature and research related to faith development. This literature might help explain some of the developmental aspects of transformation within the life contexts of a group of theological students, such as those in the Student Interracial Ministry, who are the participants in this study.
Transformative Learning Theory

This review begins with Jack Mezirow’s classic formulation of TLT, which serves as the foundation for so much research in adult education. Some of the most serious criticism of Mezirow concerns his lack of attention to the social context of TL. In order to address this issue the work of Paolo Freire will be discussed. This is followed by a look at studies that specifically address TL and racial perspective change. This will be supplemented by the related literature on cross-cultural learning and TL. Finally, detailed consideration will be given to holistic and developmental factors that are important in TL.

Classic Formulation (Mezirow)

Transformative learning theory as initially conceptualized by Mezirow (1991b, 1997, 2000, 2003) and critiqued and revised by other scholars (Cranton, 2006; Taylor, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2007) will be used to examine the ways in which the Student Interracial Ministry (SIM) participants’ racial perspectives changed as a result of their experiences working in church and civil rights activities, in settings in which they were immersed in a racially-different environment. A central premise of TLT is that meaning making is a fundamental human activity. Mezirow has argued that people view the world through a matrix of values, beliefs and assumptions called a frame of reference or meaning perspective. By means of critical self-reflection, people can learn to see these fundamental assumptions as things that can be changed, rather than as fixed realities. This involves a process of learning steps by which people wrestle with ideas that can’t be explained or understood through their meaning perspectives. A “disorienting dilemma” enables them to examine other ways of understanding a situation – ways which challenge some of these assumptions. Through an imaginative process of construal, new assumptions are integrated into frames of reference and new meaning perspectives are formed.
This should not be understood as a rigid structure of development that needs to be followed, but rather as “sequential moments” in which “meaning is clarified” (Mezirow, 1991a, p. 193).

Now over thirty years after the initial publication of Mezirow’s research (1975), transformative learning theory continues to be “the most researched and discussed theory in the field of adult education” (Taylor, 2007, p. 173). A number of important critiques and modifications to TL have been proposed and several of these research areas are important to this research project, and will be discussed in detail in the remainder of this review. These areas of critique can be best understood when seen in relation to the major assumptions of Mezirow’s theory. What follows is an overview of major assumptions in Mezirow’s theory and the identification of important areas of critique relevant to this research project.

**Who and what transforms.** Transformative learning theory according to Mezirow (1991b, 1997, 2000, 2003) is primarily concerned with the transformation of the individual self through rational processes (Clark & Wilson, 1991). While other people may be involved in transformative learning, their role is largely supportive to the process of individual transformation. Transformation is necessary and difficult because individuals don’t have true knowledge but are subject to distorted views of reality. These distortions are connected to the socialization and psychological background of each individual (Mezirow, 1991b). Normal human development has a powerful system of socialization by which individuals uncritically absorb the perspective on the world of their parents, friends, and society at large (Mezirow, 2000). Strong emotions also lead to distortions as they often inhibit normal development. Central to adult learning is the transformative process by which individuals begin to examine their life assumptions and logically consider their validity. Truth is not a fixed reality that can be found in
any external authorities, but it is socially constructed as individuals critically reflect on their assumptions based on evidence and experience rather than external authority (Mezirow, 2000).

In this aspect of transformative learning, there have been two major areas of critique of Mezirow (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Dirkx, 2001a, 2006, 2008; Gorton, 2007). He has overemphasized the individual autonomous learner as the subject of transformative learning, at the expense of more connected ways of knowing and the role interpersonal relationships. He has also focused on cognition and rationality, combined with a largely negative view of the role of emotions, at the expense of seeing the large positive role played by affective and other extrarational factors in the transformative process. Recently, Mezirow has been open to his critics in both of these areas (2000), yet, these topics remain major areas of criticism that will be reviewed below.

**Transformation and adult development.** Mezirow assumes that transformative learning is a central process of adult development – the catalyst that moves adult development forward on its positive track (Mezirow, 1994b). The self is not a static product but is always in a state of becoming. Critical self reflection on one’s assumptions about the world and the self is the key element in this developmental learning process. Adults are slowed in their development by the constraints placed on them by their distorted assumptions about reality (Mezirow, 1991b). Rather than being the authors of their own perspectives, instead, they are shaped by their social world - by the ideas, values, and perspectives of the society in which they were socialized. Critical reflection is an emancipatory process that helps them to understand their condition and replace their distorted perspectives with more authentic, open, integrative perspectives (Mezirow, 2000). This process happens most effectively when individuals can engage in critical dialogue with others (Mezirow, 1991b).
Critique in this area has concerned two factors. Mezirow has based his theory of transformative learning on the development of the critically reflective, self-authoring perspective (Kegan, 2000; Merriam, 2004). Critics, while appreciative of the sharp analysis that Mezirow has provided to this aspect of adult learning, point out that he has unduly “privileged” this particular learning stage in the developmental process (Kegan, 2000). Related to this, Kegan also questions Mezirow’s assertion that transformative learning is restricted to adults. He and other scholars call for a broader, more inclusive approach to transformative learning that applies to the full range of adult development (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Erickson, 2002, 2007; Kegan, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Merriam, 2004).

**Purpose of transformation and social action.** Transformation leads to a frame of reference that is “more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative of experience” (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 78), open to the perspectives of others, free from coercion, open to critical discussion on an equal footing with others, committed to seeking and accepting as valid conclusions based on rational weighing of evidence. Perspective transformation brings individuals to see that what they may have thought was their own personal problem, is in fact a broad based problem requiring social change. While social change is necessary to attack the root causes of oppression, the educator’s role is limited to fostering critical awareness of oppression, assisting with the identification of options for action and strategy, building supportive connections with others, and helping build confidence in learners (Mezirow, 1991b). Participation in social action, including a wide range of activities from relationship building to political activism, must be a free choice, not the result of ideological or coercive actions of the educator. Freedom is at the center of transformative learning and emancipatory education should not be tied to a particular understanding of social action.
Considerable critique addresses the social dimensions of Mezirow’s conception of TL. Stephen Brookfield (2000) examines the relationship between Mezirow’s conception of TL and critical reflection. For Brookfield, critical reflection by nature involves examination of power relationships and challenging hegemonic assumptions. He understands Mezirow to have a broader definition of critical reflection. Critical reflection is not limited to social critique but is involved at the heart of all kinds of TL:

We transform frames of reference through critical reflection on assumptions supporting the content and/or process of problem solving. We transform our habits of mind by becoming critically reflective of the premises defining the problem…the two central elements of transformative learning - objective and subjective reframing - involve either critical reflection on the assumptions of others (objective reframing) or on one’s own assumptions (subjective reframing)…the overall purpose of adult development is to realize one’s agency through increasingly expanding awareness and critical reflection. (Brookfield, 2000, p.142).

When the scope of critical reflection is broadened in this manner, the notion of action expands beyond the “social”. For Mezirow, developing a new understanding about the world and one’s place in it is a significant form of action (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 1998). He makes a careful distinction between

the educational tasks of critical reflection – helping adults become aware of oppressive structures and practices, developing tactical awareness of how they might change these, and building the confidence and ability to work for collective change – and the broader scale political mobilization needed to force economic change. (Brookfield, 2000, p. 144)
Brookfield states that Mezirow is in good company in making such distinctions, citing Myles Horton’s perspective in support (Brookfield, 2000). Other scholars are less happy with this understanding of the relationship between TL and social action.

Fundamentally, Mezirow removes perspective transformation from its social context. Even in his groundbreaking study of adult women returning to college (1975) he gives very little attention to the social contexts of this learning (i.e. the women’s movement). The critique of Mezirow in regard to social action is largely three-fold. First, Mezirow has decontextualized TL from its social context (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Cunningham, 1998; Scott, 2003; Merriam, 2008), by his attempt to provide a model of learning based on “universal principles that apply across all contexts” (Clark & Wilson, 1991, p. 76; see also McDonald, Cervero, & Courtenay, 1999). Second, critics object to the way in which he uses concepts from critical theory, for example Habermas’ communicative categories, while severing them from Habermas radical critique of society (Collard & Law, 1989; Hart, 1990). These categories, the sociocultural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal, must be critiqued in an integrated fashion, never being completely separated from each other (Hart). One needs to resist dichotomizing “the social and the individual” by keeping “intact the dialectical tension between these two realities” (Hart, p. 133, see also Cunningham, 1998). While Mezirow accounts for the differing roles of socio-cultural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors, his critics assert that his theory cannot do this adequately if it does not have critical theory’s focus on power at the center (Hart, 1990; McDonald et al., 1999). Third, because this social perspective does not pervade his theory (Collard & Law, 1989), Mezirow underestimates the ongoing struggle against hegemonic forces (Hart, 1990; McDonald et al., 1999); action based on transformed perspectives “must be sustained over time in the face of formidable cultural and interpersonal odds” (McDonald et al., 1999, p. 20). Some of this
criticism (McDonald et al., 1999) misses that mark concerning Mezirow’s approach, by wrongly viewing his model as a largely static process. They also sometimes allow their own political point of view to lean toward the judgmental (McDonald et al., 1999) or toward the ideologically proscriptive (Collard & Law, 1989).

Two final criticisms of Mezirow relate to this context-free aspect of his theory. Mezirow appears to largely ignore the contextual development of his own theory and its implications. Maturity is defined by Mezirow in terms of individualism, rationality, and autonomy (Clark & Wilson, 1991). Mezirow’s response to this criticism fails to address these concerns adequately (1991). Finally, some institutions have succumbed to the allure of a “context-free” approach to transformative learning, designing curricula and learning outcomes based on expected transformation of learners, who are not ready for transformation. Trying to teach for transformation with people who are in crisis, many with fragile selves (i.e. in prison and welfare to work education programs), is evidence of the truth of Mezirow’s assumption of the necessity of a unified self (Kilgore & Bloom, 2002).

Social context will be important in understanding the transformative experiences of SIM students. They crossed lines of race, class, sometimes gender, and were deeply involved in issues of power and social change. The role of social context can be seen in a number of areas including: social perspective change, racial perspective change, cross-cultural learning, and the role of relationships. In order to examine more deeply the importance of social context and action, the contribution of Paolo Freire will now be examined.

Social Perspective Change (Freire)

The classic work on social perspective change is Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 2000). This is the most important work for understanding Paulo Freire’s approach to
emancipatory education. It was first published in Spanish in the 1960s and then translated into English in 1970. At the heart of Freire’s approach is a central problem – the reality of dehumanization. The masses of the world’s people are trapped in oppression, having no true knowledge of their oppressive condition or of the socially constructed reality which has caused their plight. They cannot see clearly because they have internalized the consciousness of the oppressor who views them as less than human, and treats the oppressed like objects or animals. Oppression is a violent system which keeps the status quo intact, privileging the right of the oppressor to live in peace over the right of the oppressed to survive. The oppressor’s “privilege” to have “more” dehumanizes others as well as dehumanizing themselves. Unless the oppressed can realize the social causes of their oppression, they will remain fatalistically trapped to accept their exploitation by the oppressor.

True liberation means to come to see oneself as fully human, rather than as an object or animal, as oppressive conditions encourage. It can happen when people come to see their situation, not as a static reality, but as a limit situation that can be changed by them (Freire, 2000). This awareness comes from critical reflection which leads to action; it is not enough to perceive the reality of one’s oppression, one must act for one’s own liberation This liberating experience is described as a conversion experience, a transformation, a total rebirth of consciousness, what Freire calls “conscientизация” (p. 61-67), which is commonly translated into English as conscientization. This liberation is brought about through praxis, a key term that Freire appropriates from Marx (Marx & Engels, 1959), meaning “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (p. 79).

Political action on behalf of the oppressed is at heart pedagogical action. It is action with the oppressed. They should not simply be won over by promises of material things (although it
must include these). They have been oppressed as things already. “In order to regain their humanity, they must cease to be things and fight as men and women. This is a radical requirement. They cannot enter the struggle as objects in order later to become human beings” (p. 68). Five educational/pedagogical principles can be distilled from Freire’s approach: the human-world relationship is central; liberation is the objective of education; education is person-to-person (non-hierarchical); education is characterized by critical reflection on the world in dialogue with others; and the curriculum of education is derived from the situation of the people.

In considering the connection with Mezirow’s view of transformative learning, it is important to remember that Freire was an important source of Mezirow’s understanding. Indeed, it is possible to view Mezirow as an attempt to “explicate the cognitive process that Freire more generally describes as a deepening of critical consciousness” (Scott, 1991, p. 49). Yet, we will see how in some of his educational principles, Freire brings out important dimensions of learning that are not adequately addressed in Mezirow’s approach.

The human-world relationship. “People do not exist apart from the world”; at the heart of education is the “human-world relationship” (Freire, 2000, p.85). Emancipatory education demythologizes the false perception of humanity and the world that is promoted or assumed by traditional education (what Freire terms “banking education”), which indicates that the world and humanity are static realities that cannot be changed. As perception of their oppressed situation in the world is deepened, it leads to a new awareness that their situation is an historical reality that is open to transformation (Freire, 2000). This recognition is fundamental to transformative education, whether it is with the poor or with the privileged (Van Gorder, 2007). Traditional education for the privileged (as with the oppressed) encourages the status quo and fails to raise awareness of the situation of the oppressed or the true situation of their own privileged status. It
encourages paternalism (often supported by religious or political zeal). Pedagogy for the privileged must move away from an individualist approach, avoiding any attempt to "decomplexify" the world and center its concerns on critical reflection and knowledge of how things really are. These are necessary requirements for conscientization for the privileged. This new perspective involves hearing the voices of the oppressed, recognizing one’s shared humanity, and true self-sacrifice. The privileged must eventually be "traitors to your own self-interests" (Van Gorder, p. 17).

An empirical study indicates that in work with the privileged, learners are less likely to easily see themselves as “oppressors” than the poor are to see themselves as oppressed. It is necessary to start with raising awareness of oppression and its hegemonic qualities before locating oneself as privileged (Curry-Stevens, 2007; see also McClelland & Linnander, 2006). It is also described in a very personal narrative in which the author calls on white, heterosexual males to make their privilege visible and warns of the difficult task of making the privileged aware of this unseen advantage (Kimmel, 2002). Two historical studies of social movements illustrate this as well: one in which an African American civil rights worker comes to challenge internalized oppression by realizing that “white is not always right” (Baumgartner, 2005b), and a group of nascent women activists who come to realize that “supposedly objective scientific works” are the product of a gendered, market-driven system (Birden, 2004).

**Liberation is the objective of education.** Recognition that the world is not static but can be changed through praxis, which leads to liberation – conscientization. It is not enough to simply come to awareness that humanity and the world can be changed, but this knowledge must lead to action (Marx & Engels, 1959). “This perception is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for liberation; it must become the motivating force for liberating action” (Freire, 2000,
p. 49). This dual relationship of perception and action applies to the oppressed and to the oppressor. It is not enough for the oppressor to feel guilty about the oppression of the poor, while leaving the relationship of dependency intact. The oppressor must act on the side of the oppressed. This emphasis on practice is central, with its ongoing dialectic between reflection and action (Lloyd, 1972).

Mezirow equates perspective transformation with conscientization, but Mezirow undercuts this equation by removing conscientization from (according to Freire) its necessarily socio-political setting (Collard & Law, 1989). Much of the history of adult education in the United States reflects this approach, aiming toward personal fulfillment rather than radical social change (Lloyd, 1972). To truly reclaim Freire’s approach of conscientization, especially in a North American context, “entails a model of social analysis and social change that challenges most of the articulating principles of capitalism” (Torres, 2003, p. 445).

Freire’s approach has much in common with the notion of the development of “organic intellectuals” (Gramsci, 1996) – people who come to understand that knowledge is not something to be consumed, but socially produced, through which people can collectively struggle to build more democratic and participatory societies (Cunningham, 1998). Mezirow rejects this close equation of Freire and others with social action based on his concern that it may be reduced to indoctrination rather than transformation (Mezirow, 1989).

Two historical studies illustrate the close connection between transformative experience and social action (Baumgartner, 2005b; Birden, 2004), and participants in a community development project reported that transformation was fostered by action (Clark, 1992). The power of this liberating transformation is found in the recollections of one teacher in the Citizenship Schools (the same program reported on by Baumgartner):
People would speak. They would unburden themselves, talk about what they had lost, about what they wanted, about how they had come to be there... One woman said, ‘The cobwebs are moving from my brain.’ That’s how it felt to all of us... People stayed in these workshops five days and returned home doing things they had never dreamt they would do. (Olson, 2001, p. 214).

Other empirical studies indicate that having sufficient time for learning social analysis and critical thinking is sometimes a problem (Clare, 2006; Curry-Stevens, 2007). In one study, the educators did not describe their work as transformative, but more "destabilizing, confidence-shaking, and intimately challenging" (Curry-Stevens, p. 40). They believed that transformation would need longer programs - the training classes conducted by these educators really only began to scratch the surface - "the initial unraveling of the first thread or two of their hegemonic experience" (p.40). This argues that an ongoing community setting may be important to foster transformative learning which leads to action (Clare, 2006). Other studies using Mezirow’s model point to the need for additional time to foster perspective transformation, but still found that considerable subject reframing was experienced (Feinstein, 2004; K. P. King, 2004; MacLeod, Parkin, Pullon & Robertson, 2003). Another empirical study using Freire’s approach to liberation looks at racial identity development among white graduate students. She found that an understanding of the social construction of racial perspectives was important along with an emphasis on praxis. Yet this study also had close affinities with Mezirow as it traced a process from disintegration to autonomy, which is parallel to Mezirow’s movement from disorienting dilemma to reintegration (Dass-Brailsford, 2007).

**Education is person-to-person (non-hierarchical).** Education is a horizontal dialogue – student-teacher, teacher-student; “Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People...
teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are ‘owned’ by the teacher” (Freire, 2000, p. 80). This element is central to Freire’s notion of problem posing education. The teacher, rather than providing information, helps the students to pose problems raised by their oppressed situation. The students, through a process of critical reflection, now become “co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher” (p. 81). This dimension is important to break the relations of dependency that is created by hierarchical education, in which authoritative knowledge is passed on to passive learners (Lloyd, 1972). Education should not be like medicine distributed to sick people, rather it is like opening up possibilities to people who have been robbed of their own words (Lloyd, 1972). It must be aware of this condition of dependence and refuse to take advantage of it, but “through reflection and action to transform it into independence” (Freire, p.66).

Empirical studies indicate that it is important to avoid indoctrination (Clare, 2006). Two historical studies demonstrate how transformative learning in social movements can effectively have this non-hierarchical character. In one study, women challenging medical control over women’s bodies taught themselves in dialogue groups and developed a revolutionary approach. In the other study, poor African American women in the Citizenship Schools taught literacy education techniques to newly literate women, who then taught others (Baumgartner, 2005b, see also Olson, 2001).

**Critical reflection on the world in dialogue with others.** As seen in the section above, this is closely linked with a non-hierarchical view of education. Together with their teachers and fellow students, people can critically reflect on their world in an active way. No longer viewing their situation as a reality that cannot be changed, their condition poses problems that can be solved. It is a creative approach which stimulates true reflection and action. Conscientization is
the social process among people as they “unite in common reflection and action upon their world” (Lloyd, 1972).

Empirical studies indicate that dialogue is of critical importance in the transformative process (Clare, 2006). Citizenship schools in the civil rights movement were found on this principle, with basic questions about voting rights techniques leading all the way to asking very practical questions about their own local situations, such as “How come the pavement stops where the black section begins?” (Baumgartner, 2005b).

**Curriculum is derived from the situation of the people.** Educational programs must be designed based on the situation of the people – their “thematic universe” – through the development of generative themes. Meaning structures are seen in terms of broad, societal epochs, or networks of generative themes. “Domination” is the “fundamental theme of our epoch”, with “liberation, as the objective to be achieved” (Freire, 2000, p. 103). The task of teachers in an interdisciplinary team is to “re-present” the thematic universe of the students as a “problem”, not a lecture (p. 109).

This principle is graphically illustrated in the two historical studies. In one study, voting rights materials become the very texts for literacy education (Baumgartner, 2005b, see also Olson, 2001). In the other study, the women activists come to trust their own bodies and feelings as true sources of information, in contrast to the supposedly objective scientific information found in medical sources and used in paternalistic fashion by the medical profession (Birden, 2004).

It is clear from this review of Freire’s educational thought, that he has much in common with Mezirow, including the centrality of critical reflection, the emphasis on the distorting quality of status quo society, and the importance of dialogue. What Freire, influenced by Marx,
brings into focus is the pervasive quality of the socio-cultural reality in shaping our thinking – oppressed and oppressor alike. He also demonstrates the necessity of understanding our personal transformation in a continually dialectical fashion with our action in the world. The importance of the socio-cultural is clear as we now move to look specifically at transformation of racial and cultural perspectives.

**Transformative Learning and Racial Perspective Change**

While a few scholars have begun to address the important topic of transformative learning and race (Taylor, 2005), little work has yet been done on how transformative learning theory can help to understand the way in which racial attitudes and perspectives change. Before reviewing this literature, it is important to consider how transformative learning theory appears to be useful in understanding such change. An adaptation of Mezirow’s example of “John” (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 107-109) will help to illustrate how transformative learning theory applies to a process of racial perspective transformation.

1. **Interpretation (Problem Posing):** You have a colleague named John who is black.
   
   John upsets Harry and Harry starts complaining to everyone about John that John is a troublemaker.

2. **Scanning:** You consider that Harry and other whites have often had trouble with John.

3. **Propositional Construal**
   a. **Thoughtful action:** Based on your current premise, you reflect that John is causing trouble again, because blacks are always causing trouble and conclude that John is a troublemaker.
b. **Content and process reflection**: As you hear more about the conflict between Harry and John, you think that Harry was not behaving properly and that maybe it really wasn’t John’s fault after all.

c. **Premise reflection**: As you think about the ramifications of this situation, you begin to rethink your premise that blacks are the ones who are always causing trouble.

4. You then cycle back in the process:

5. **Interpretation (Problem Posing)**: Is John really a troublemaker?

6. **Scanning**: You rethink some of the different times when John has been blamed and see that he probably wasn’t at fault then either.

7. **Propositional Construal**: You now reframe your thinking and consider that maybe John isn’t a troublemaker after all.

8. **Imaginative Insight**: Connecting this new evidence with your previous premise, that blacks are always causing trouble, you intuitively conclude that “Maybe I can’t judge how people will act by the color of their skin?”

9. **Reflective Learning**: This imaginative insight leads to the revision of important beliefs (schemes) – Blacks aren’t always at fault when there is trouble with whites.

10. **Transformative Learning**: This occurs when the reflective process involves a reframing of the basic racial perspective underlying the individual schemes – “Maybe white people aren’t naturally superior to Black people?”

11. **Remembering**: As you now face new situations, you remember that you have to judge people based on their actions not on their skin color.
12. **Action:** The next time Harry accuses John of being a troublemaker, you will help defend John against Harry’s attacks.

The available research literature has begun to explore the relevance of TLT to understanding racial perspective change. Currently, the empirical studies have involved the experience of adult educators and graduates students (Dass-Brailsford, 2007; Manglitz, Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2005; Tisdell, 2003), including two autobiographical studies by white educators (Boyd, 2008; D’Andrea, 1999), although D’Andrea’s account does not make explicit connections to TLT, and autobiographical accounts by two Black women educators (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006).

**Reflection and the disorienting dilemma.** Central to these studies is the importance of critical self-reflection. An honest examination of one’s own life and racist aspects of society is important in the transformative process (D’Andrea, 1999; Boyd, 2008). Techniques such as journal writing may foster critical self-reflection (Dass-Brailsford, 2007). A key element seen as necessary by white anti-racist adult educators is to understand the systemic nature of racism and through reflection to recognize one’s continuing participation in that racist system (Manglitz et al., 2005).

Developing African-American friendships served as a source of disorienting dilemmas, both through their stereotype-breaking examples and through dialogue (D’Andrea, 1999; Tisdell, 2003). Developing awareness of one’s own privilege may be a powerful experience of dissonance (Dass-Brailsford, 2007). Tisdell found support among her study participants for Helms’ (1994) and others’ models of white identity development:

One might experience a disorienting dilemma that makes white privilege visible. This usually happens in light of an experience in a personal relationship with a person of color,
where one might witness or experience differential treatment that appears to be based on race. Over time, many who first become aware of the pervasiveness of white privilege may then begin to explore the assumptions they have unconsciously absorbed from their own culture of origin… (Tisdell, 2003, p. 170).

The disorienting dilemma may take the form of a disconnect between one’s progressive, non-racist ideas, and words and actions that continue to communicate a racist perspective (Boyd, 2008; see also Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006; Manglitz et al., 2005). “It is when whites are working closely with People of Color that internalized superiority often emerges and conflicts surface: Scratch a liberal hard enough and one may find a conservative” (Manglitz, et al., 2005, p. 1269).

**Friendship and professional relationships.** Relationships with people of other races are a powerful part of transformative experience. Among these studies, this includes ongoing professional relationships with colleagues and clients, in which the participant learned the most about racism and the role that white people can play in fighting racism (D’Andrea, 1999), as well as interracial adult education classes in the community (Boyd, 2008). Ongoing relationships can be a powerful source of support and opportunity to continue the transformative process, through a dynamic of continual reflection and new action (Boyd, 2008; D’Andrea, 1999; Manglitz et al., 2005). Close relationships can provide the supportive context in which white educators can admit to their ongoing internalized racism and “stay with the difficult experiences and, more importantly, learn from them” (Manglitz, Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2005). Developing strong listening skills is vital to this process (Boyd, 2008; Manglitz et al., 2005).

**White privilege.** An important feature of participants’ transformative experience in these studies was the coming to awareness of the role of white privilege (Boyd, 2008; D’Andrea, 1999;
Dass-Brailsford, 2007; Manglitz et al., 2005; Tisdell, 2003). In one study, each of the anti-racist educators “could immediately recall when they became aware of racial differences and their White privilege” (Manglitz et al., 2005, p. 1256). They note that these learning events were:

Points of transformational learning where a new understanding was developed and a new point of fresh understanding would be used to assess their life experiences. The understandings that have come from their recognition and struggle with their own and other Whites’ privilege are a big part of what enables them to continue to challenge racism (p. 1256).

This realization was an ongoing process of transforming a deeply hegemonic perspective that serves as a lens for viewing all of life. In the words of one anti-racist educator:

It was a sort of the beginning of you know kind of scraping away stuff that had build up around my eyes and to see that I did indeed have privilege and I had some learning to do (p. 1256).

**Cultural support.** Participation in social movements provided a supportive context in which racial perspective transformation was fostered (D’Andrea, 1999; Manglitz et al., 2005), although a transformed perspective on racism can distance the learner from other whites, who expect one to participate in their white perspective, and from people of color, for whom one’s whiteness will often be a continuing obstacle (Manglitz et al., 2005). Spiritual development may serve as a stimulus to expand one’s experience to encounter diverse cultural and spiritual traditions among diverse people (Tisdell, 2003) and spiritual and religious communities and commitments may help to support the ongoing transformative process (Manglitz et al., 2005). The Black experience of overcoming oppression and which is fostered in safe and supportive communities is identified closely with transformative learning (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006).
Transformative Learning and Cross-Cultural Learning

Since there are not yet many studies of people crossing racial boundaries, which are available for consideration in relation to TLT, studies in the broader area of cross-cultural learning may well be helpful in this study of SIM participants. In a detailed qualitative study of 12 people who had significant cross-cultural learning experiences, Taylor (1994) found that all the participants shared a pattern of learning despite their diversity. The process of learning that emerged was partially explained by Mezirow’s theory, and it also contributed to the growth and development of the theory. The process contained the following aspects:

Setting the stage - different aspects of the participants’ background prepared them for the intercultural learning process. Since Mezirow starts with a disorienting dilemma, he doesn’t account for differing levels of readiness; Cultural disequilibrium - this aspect has a strong connection with the disorienting dilemma. In this study, it was found to be deeply connected to strong emotions, while the overly cognitive approach of Mezirow downplays emotions; Reflective/NonReflective Orientation - this aspect also has a strong connection with Mezirow’s premise reflection and thoughtful action. Yet this study, unlike Mezirow’s, found that premise reflection/critical reflection was not always necessary for transformative learning to occur, as many of the participants were only engaged in non-reflective, thoughtful reflection; Learning Strategies - These were the strongest findings of the study. Three categories we found: observer, participant, and friend. In previous studies, these types of categories were understood as traits and abilities. Taylor sees these as broad learning strategies that are similar to Mezirow's exploration of options for new roles, new acquisition strategies, etc., but not found to be sequential in this study. Strategy was largely determined by the context, with few participants making any connections to a sense of a plan; finally, Evolving Intercultural Identity - all
participants felt that their world view had changed, which supported the idea of a more inclusive worldview central to intercultural competency. This relates directly to Mezirow's "more inclusive" perspective.

Some additional studies look at the role of transformative learning in other cross-cultural settings (Feinstein, 2004; Lyon, 2001; Velde, Wittman, & Mott, 2007). In a study of twelve women in adult and higher education programs who participated in a six month overseas teaching program, significant disorienting events were identified ("triggers") which helped drive the transformative process, especially in terms of forming relationships; the extent of transformation among participants was not clarified in the study (Lyon, 2001). Other studies that were not true immersion experiences found that the participatory quality of the learning experience was important in transforming ideas and attitudes (Feinstein, 2004; Velde, et al., 2007). In particular, coming in personal contact with people from the other culture was key (Feinstein, 2004), even in cases when these contacts were with people about whom many of the participants had negative stereotypes (Velde et al., 2007). Time of exposure was also an important feature. Students in a cross-cultural environmental class mostly experienced reframing of specific meaning perspectives rather than transformation of broad frames of reference (Feinstein, 2004).

While these studies which have explored the relevance of TL to cross-cultural learning and begun to explore the role that race plays in transformative learning, the issue of the nature of racial perspective change will be discussed in more detail below through a consideration of Intergroup Contact Theory, the field of social psychology which has made racial attitude change a major research topic during the past 50 years. Before turning to this matter, consideration must
be given to a final area of critique of TL, concerning the importance of holistic and
developmental factors.

**Transformative Learning in Holistic and Developmental Contexts**

Many adult education scholars have critiqued Mezirow’s theory of transformative
learning for its focus on individual cognition (Clark & Wilson, 1991) with insufficient attention
paid to a more holistic approach that incorporates the role of interpersonal relationships and
emotional dimensions of learning. Rather than being understood primarily as a marginal factor,
indeed, often seen as a barrier or disruption to transformative learning (Dirkx, 2006, 2008),
emotions play a central role in adult ways of knowing. Our emotions are integral to everything
about us – “our actions are guided not just by what we think but also how we feel and our bodily
responses to feelings” (Gorton, 2007, p. 345).

This approach represents a rejection of a Freudian pathological approach to emotions,
remnants of which remain in Mezirow’s approach (Dirkx, 2006). The emotions act as
“gateways” to “deep-seated issues and concerns that may be evoked through our experiences of
the world” (Dirkx, 2001a, p. 66). This leads to the development of an emotional image that may
act as a lens for the way in which one views the world (Dirkx, 2001a). A key part of
transformative learning is the “embrace” of these images to “reclaim these images as our own”.
This process redirects psychic energy toward “potentially transformative activities” (Dirkx,
2006, p. 19). The affective dimension calls for a range of ways of knowing beyond the cognitive,
including the creative, intuitive, and the spiritual.

Journal writing, literature, poetry, art, movies, story-telling, dance, and ritual are specific
methods that can be used to help foster the life of the image…By approaching
emotionally charged experiences imaginatively rather than merely conceptually, learners
locate and construct, through enduring mythological motifs, themes, and images, deep meaning, value, and quality in the relationship between the text and their own life experiences. (Dirkx, 2001a, p. 70)

The critique of Mezirow concerning the role of interpersonal relationships began with Clark and Wilson’s analysis that Mezirow focused too much on the individual and the development of personal autonomy. They found that Mezirow had abstracted the experiences of individual women from their natural and historical setting within a network of middle class women’s relationships, a particular educational organization, and the women’s movement itself (1991). Mezirow’s approach is also characterized as a kind of “Separate Knowing”, in which the focus is on critical analysis of one’s own and other’s ideas, looking for weaknesses that can be reduced or removed and replaced with better understandings. This is contrasted with “Connected Knowing” which stresses an empathetic approach which looks for the strengths of other positions and attempts to try on other perspectives in order to better understand the world from another person’s perspective (Belenky & Stanton, 2000; Cranton, 2006).

A broad range of empirical studies have added greatly to our knowledge of these dimensions of transformative learning:

**Interpersonal.** Many studies have uncovered the importance of interpersonal relationships in TL (Baumgartner, 2002; Carter, 2002; Eisen, 2001; K. P. King, 2004; MacLeod, Parkin, Pullon & Robertson, 2003). Relationships that foster TL are characterized by trust and safety (Baumgartner, 2002; Carter, 2002; Eisen, 2001), as well as by equal power relations (Eisen, 2001). A study of transformative experiences in Botswana (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008) demonstrates how culture is critical in determining the shape of the transformative experience as well as factors that foster it. In this culture in which “the individual has little if any identity
separate from the larger community” (p. 191), interpersonal relationships and responsibilities were a predominant factor. While interpersonal relations often function as a powerful source of support to the transformative process, they can also be a strong, negative factor, as in the case of TL in ethical vegans (McDonald et al., 1999). Group support has also been found to play a critical role in the maintenance of a perspective change, or in support of the ongoing transformative process (Baumgartner, 2002; McDonald et al., 1999).

**Affective/friendship.** The role of interpersonal relations and group support in TL is often closely connected to the emotional needs of those undergoing the transformation (Baumgartner, 2002). Speaking of study participants who are HIV positive, Baumgartner reports:

The social interaction satisfied affective needs. Participants found support and encouragement in the group that helped them make new meaning of their situation and solidify this meaning in a comfortable, emotional safe environment…The group…gave people a chance to try out their new perspectives…gain confidence in new roles. It gave participants a sense of belonging and decreased their feelings of marginality. (2002, p. 57)

The realization that other likeminded people can be trusted for help and support can be part of both the process and content of transformative learning (Carter, 2002). In a study of mid-career women’s development, Carter found that participants used relational communication that was often highly personal and self-disclosing. When they occurred in an atmosphere of safety and trust, these dialogues permitted the women to reach deeper levels of understanding than could be found on a solely analytical plane. (2002, p. 82)
In cases of ethical decision-making in the transformative process, frequently emotions were important factors (McDonald et al., 1999).

The strength of these affective factors is enhanced through interpersonal contact. The power of these dual factors is demonstrated in the case of medical students learning to care for dying patients. Through interpersonal contact with patients and care-givers, transformative processes were begun, as the students began to develop more caring perspectives, overcoming formidable barriers, such as negative role models, ward culture, and “cure” expectations (MacLeod, Parkin, Pullon & Robertson, 2003; Janssen, MacLeod & Walker, 2008). This new perspective was one of personalized care, in which the students’ distorted images “of someone on their deathbed, helpless and hopeless, is transformed to a person living with a terminal illness, and in many cases, making the most of life” (MacLeod et al., 2003, p. 56). A similar study with nursing students showed weaker transformative results, but interpersonal contact was limited to role play and observation, rather than direct contact with patients and caregivers (Mallory, 2003).

Strong emotions can be the catalyst for critical reflection on the stressful situation or disorienting dilemma that leads to perspective change (Taylor, 1994). When interpersonal relationships become deeper, they may have increased impact on the process of transformation (Baumgartner, 2002; Carter, 2002; Eisen, 2001; Taylor, 1994), with long-term friendships being particularly important (Baumgartner, 2002; Taylor, 1994).

Developmental Perspective. Criticism of Mezirow in relation to adult development is really an “in-house affair”. Clearly, Mezirow understands his theory in terms of adult development. In this section, adult development in general will be considered first. The transformation of meaning structures is a central process of adult development. This includes the more common everyday transformation of meaning schemes, as well as frames of reference.
Mezirow sums up his view by saying that “Perspective transformation is the engine of adult development” (Mezirow, 1994b, p. 228). The two major developmental critiques of Mezirow involve the way in which he has identified the process of critical reflection as the central transformative dynamic. One critique focuses on the way in which the transition to a self-authoring developmental stage has been “privileged” (Kegan, 2000); and the other criticism concerns whether or not transformative learning is limited to adult experience at the self-authoring stage or above. Might not transformation have different characteristics at different stages of human development?

We can say with certainty that transformative learning corresponds with characteristics of adult development, even when seen from a variety of models based on extensive empirical study (Baxter Magolda, 2004; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; King & Kitchener, 2004; Merriam, 2004). Kegan asserts that transformative learning theory privileges a very specific developmental-epistemological shift – “the move from the socialized to the self-authoring mind” (2000). While this is a very important type of transformative learning, Kegan contends that it can only occur among adults who are developmentally ready for it. There is considerable evidence that many adults never reach a high enough level of cognitive functioning to fit Mezirow’s description of transformative learning, and for those who do, it is often in their 40s and beyond (Merriam, 2004). Yet we intuitively know that transformative learning experiences are available to a wider range of people than would seem possible, based on the current definition (Merriam, 2004).

If transformative learning is more widely experienced, then critical self reflection of assumptions may not be a necessary feature of transformative learning. What evidence is there for alternative approaches? While the necessity of reflection has been substantiated in many
studies (Taylor, 1998, 2007), there are some examples, such as cross-cultural learning (Taylor, 1994), in which perspective transformation sometimes occurred without reflection. It also appears that reflection may be part of a matrix of factors that can lead to transformation, including factors from the affective, interpersonal, and spiritual dimensions (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Merriam, 2004). A very interesting study may shed light on this. Marcia Baxter Magolda has conducted a 16 year longitudinal study of the adult development of college students from age 18 to 34 (Baxter Magolda, 2004). In an article in which she looked back and examined the progression of her research in the context of her own personal development as a researcher, Baxter Magolda was puzzled by what appears to be developmental regression among some students in the years following college graduation. She came to realize that “interviewees who developed complex ways of knowing often could not live those ways of knowing until they had developed complex ways of seeing themselves and their relations with others” (p. 39). Baxter Magolda indicated that the stories of the people in her study resonated with “Kegan’s (1994) portrayal of holistic development as the intertwining of cognitive (i.e. how do I know?), intrapersonal (i.e. who am I?), and interpersonal (i.e. what kind of relationships do I want?) dimensions” (p. 39).

Kegan’s approach brings together these two important threads of critique: broadening transformation beyond the cognitive and expanding it beyond one phase of adult development. It respects and engages the whole person in understanding transformation: the cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. It “entails ‘thinking about our feelings’ and ‘feeling our way into new ways of thinking’” (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Kegan takes very seriously the full range and interplay among these aspects, yet still insists that epistemological transformation is at the heart of transformation – for it to be transformation, the “form” must transform. But this process
never reverts to simply being a cognitive change. The epistemological change must involve the whole person (Kegan, 2000).

Kegan also expands the definition of transformation to “include the whole life span” (Kegan, 2000, p. 48). The transformation to the self-authoring self, which is highlighted in Mezirow’s approach, is “but one of several gradual, epochal transformations in knowing of which persons are shown to be capable throughout life” (Kegan, 2000, p. 59). Kegan’s model describes transformation with the metaphor of a bridge – for adults, there are two main transformative epistemological bridges: between the socialized mind and the self-authoring mind, and between the self-authoring mind and the self-transforming mind. This raises three important questions in transformative learning: What bridge is the learner on?; How far along the bridge is she or he?; What are the epistemological complexities of the learning challenges which face the learner? (2000). If the learning challenges call for the capabilities of the self-authoring perspective but the learner is on the distant edge of the bridge to that perspective, then the learner is in need of transformation to adequately address the learning challenges. No amount of technical/skill/instrumental solutions will really help the learner make the necessary changes. Without a frame of reference transformation, learners like this are “In Over our Heads”, to quote the title of Kegan’s 1994 book (1994, Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

Other scholars have also critiqued transformative learning theory for being limited to one phase of adult development. From the perspective of analytical psychology, transformative education is understood as a lifelong process. In the first half of life, “it helps to facilitate the processes of differentiation by assisting in the exchanges over the bridge between the developing ego world of the individual and their inner world of the Self”; in the second half of life, the goal
is “helping individuals to develop integration and wholeness in their lives” requiring “the ego to seek to open…dialogue with other parts of the Self” (Boyd & Myers, 1988, p. 266-267).

In a recent article (2007), based on her doctoral research (2002), Diane Erickson empirically explored the connections between Mezirow’s transformative learning theory and Kegan’s constructivist-developmental approach. The purpose of her research was to empirically test the idea that transformative learning, as delineated by Mezirow, privileges learning related to specific developmental phases – the transition from the socialized to the self-authoring mind. Secondly, to test whether the process of transformative learning should be limited to this aspect of adult development, or whether TL has different characteristics based on the developmental level of the participants.

Erickson’s study used the subject-object interview (SOI) format that was designed to measure a person’s “order of meaning construction” according to Kegan’s typology. Based on analysis of these interviews, the 20 participants were grouped into categories in Kegan’s typology, for example, a score of 3 would indicate that characteristics of the socialized self were dominant in meaning making; a score of 3/4 would indicate the non-dominant presence of self-authorizing self characteristics. Assignment of scores was checked for reliability by an experienced SOI rater.

Through a method of analytic induction (which Erickson mistakenly called analytic deduction), Mezirow’s ten phases of meaning in transformative learning were used to code the data. Through this process, the previous hypothesis (Mezirow’s ten phases) were refined, based on the new data, with revised coding categories produced. Results were checked for reliability through interrater checks. This form of modified analytic induction is a very useful approach for exploring the linkages between related phenomena. An assumption of this study was that
Kegan’s typology and Mezirow’s theory are describing the same thing. By using Mezirow’s phases to interpret the data, it was then possible to refine these phases, based on the data which was not accounted for by the original phases.

Erickson’s study indicated that Mezirow’s phases are particularly applicable to participants who are in the socialized self stage, featuring critical reflection involving objective reframing. Critical self-reflection, with subjective reframing, was not found among these participants, but was limited to participants in the self-authoring stage. Through the process of analytical induction Erickson revises Mezirow’s model of transformative learning phases. It includes two sets of phases, with the socialized self set describing TL based on objective reframing, and the self-authoring self set describing TL based on subjective reframing. At first it seemed surprising that Mezirow’s original categories had a better fit with the socialized self participants, rather than with the self-authoring self participants. Yet, if as Kegan has stated, the transition from the socialized self to the self-authoring self is privileged – or we might say, best described by Mezirow’s phases, then this begins to make sense. Mezirow’s phases would fit best with socialized self participants as they move toward a self-authoring perspective. It also makes sense that the socialized self participants didn’t show any evidence of critical self reflection. In this element, they didn’t match Mezirow’s phases because critical self reflection would only be evident in those who were transitioning to the next stage or were in it already. Mezirow’s phases also wouldn’t fit as well for participants already at the self-authoring stage, because the process of TL is natural for people at this stage. The dilemma’s are less disorienting, because these participants have habits of mind that approach dilemma’s in a more open and integrative fashion.

This review of research on the relationship of developmental thought to transformative learning demonstrates that researchers using transformative learning theory must pay close
attention to developmental factors. This developmental perspective should also be a holistic one, taking account of affective, interpersonal and intrapersonal factors along with cognitive ones. Due to the importance of this perspective, attention will be given later to a developmental theory that is oriented toward many of the kinds of issues that are important in this study of theological students – faith development theory.

This section on transformative learning theory has demonstrated the importance of TL as formulated by Jack Mezirow for understanding adult learning and has highlighted the necessity of understanding TL in its social context and in dialogue with social action, with special attention given to the approach of Paolo Freire to social perspective change. While some research has been conducted concerning the role of TL in racial perspective change and cross-cultural learning, significantly more research needs to be carried on in this area, such as in this study of SIM. Careful attention will also need to be paid to holistic and developmental factors in TL among SIM participants. As the research review above has shown, affective and interpersonal factors have been shown to play a very significant role in TL. Furthermore, attention will also need to be paid to developmental concerns, with particular attention to the ways in which TL might be understood differently among people at differing developmental levels. This review will now continue with attention specifically on the issue of racial perspective change. Consideration of the research on Intergroup Contact Theory will be useful in this regard.

**Intergroup Contact Theory**

This section of the literature review considers the literature on Intergroup Contact Theory, which is the major approach of social psychology and related fields to the issue of racial perspective change. This section begins by providing an overview of intergroup contact theory, followed by consideration of several different models of contact theory. Then it will examine
some of the mostly quantitative research on the role of affective factors. Finally, there will be a consideration of qualitative research studies on intergroup contact theory.

A Theoretical Overview

Along with the growth of the new discipline of social psychology came the social-scientific study of prejudice and racial attitudes (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2004). At the center of this movement was Gordon Allport’s 1954 book, *The Nature of Prejudice*. This work, one of the more heavily cited studies in the social sciences, laid out a systematic outline for the study of prejudice. This work was so important that it could be confidently asserted 25 years after its publication that it had “delineated the area of study, set up its basic categories and problems and cast it in a broad, eclectic framework that remains today” (Allport, 1979, p. xiii). This book provided a great service by effectively changing our thinking concerning prejudice – no longer would prejudice and stereotypes be seen as the products of distorted personalities, but would now be understood as the “natural extension of normal cognitive processes” (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2004, p. 247). Allport accomplishes this through several means. First he describes prejudice with everyday examples from a wide variety of cultures and types of people. Second, he identifies the normal social psychological processes that lead to prejudice – generalizations, prejudgment, in- and out-group formation, and the way in which group relations lead to the development of prejudiced attitudes (Allport, 1979, pt.1). The sheer normality of these processes is also demonstrated in another classic known as the Robbers Cave study, in which young boys at a summer camp were the subject of experiments in intergroup relations. Muzafer Sherif found that “neither cultural, physical, nor economic differences are necessary for the rise of intergroup conflict” but that competition “for goals that only one group could attain” was a sufficient condition (Sherif, 1966, p. 85).
One of the most influential sections in *The Nature of Prejudice* is chapter 16, “The Effect of Contact”. Here, Allport sets forth the classic articulation of what becomes known as the contact or intergroup contact hypothesis. Concerning a population of “ordinary people with a normal degree of prejudice”, he says:

> Prejudice (unless deeply rooted in the character structure of the individual) may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports (i.e., by law, custom or local atmosphere), and provided it is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups. (p. 281)

Almost all social psychological studies of intergroup contact take these four conditions (equal group status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, support of authorities, law or custom) as a starting point for studying the effects of contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005).

**Overview of Models**

The literature on the intergroup contact hypothesis or theory is extensive (Kenworthy, Turner, Hewstone & Voci, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998, 2008; see also Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, for a history of the past efforts to review the literature). As of 2000, there were 515 empirical studies conducted on the hypothesis (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005, 2006). Thomas Pettigrew and Linda Tropp performed an extensive meta-analysis on this literature in order to reach some broad conclusions about the effectiveness of intergroup contact in facilitating positive change in relation to prejudice. Overall, they found that the studies indicated that intergroup contact had a small to medium, yet highly significant, effect on prejudice (mean Pearson’s r = -.205 to -.214, p < .0001), with highly rigorous studies showing considerably higher means (true experimental
studies had mean $r=-.336$). The studies were highly heterogeneous, yielding a wide array of potential moderating variables. Much of the research discussed below explores the roles of these moderating variables.

Building on the work done since Allport, numerous attempts have been made to develop models of intergroup contact theory. Four current models are now the most influential, with steps being taken to integrate the models (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003; Miller, 2002; Pettigrew, 1998, 2008, May, Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005).

Thomas Pettigrew, who did his doctoral research at Harvard in the 1950s with Gordon Allport, has been a leading researcher in the area of intergroup contact (Cherry, 2008). He has made a number of important contributions to the growing models of intergroup contact theory. Central to Pettigrew’s model is the role played by four interrelated processes that mediate between contact and attitude change: learning about the out-group, changing behavior, generating affective ties, and in-group reappraisal (Pettigrew, 1998). This has led particularly to a flourishing area of research into the affective dimensions of intergroup contact. Allport had understood contact and attitude change largely in cognitive terms. The main model was that in-group members would learn more information about out-group members – with learning equaling cognition. During the 1990s, social psychology broke out of the grip of this strictly cognitive approach and has devoted a great deal of new research to affective factors (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2004). Pettigrew has also been influential in helping to integrate the various contact models, by stressing the importance of a time sequence in understanding group process.

The other three models of intergroup contact are deeply connected to the research concerning the role of group salience and the processes by which generalization of attitudes takes place. Marilyn Brewer and Norman Miller (Brewer & Miller, 1984; Miller, 2002) emphasize the
important role of personalization in their model. Their model includes three levels of group categorization. The lowest level is *category-based* contact, in which group members have an undifferentiated view of members of other groups – one person in the out-group is much like any other. The intermediate level is that of *differentiation*. Through contact, group members begin to see people in other groups as individuals – not simply identified with their group. The borders between groups become more porous. The final stage is *personalization*. In this stage, “participants attend to information that replaces category identity as the most useful basis for categorizing each other” (Brewer & Miller, 1984, p.288). This model sees decategorization (reducing group salience) as a critical aspect of intergroup contact and attitude change. This process of personalization is the most effective way to break down categories that divide people and reinforce stereotypes (Brewer & Miller, 1984).

Miles Hewstone, Rupert Brown, and their many associates (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Brown, Vivian & Hewstone, 1999; Kenworthy, Turner, Hewstone & Voci, 2005) instead have emphasized the importance of group salience. Extensive research studies, both experimental and survey/correlational studies (Brown et al., 1999; Hamberger & Hewstone, 1997; see also Brown & Hewstone, 2005, pp. 270-283 for a thorough review) have demonstrated that group salience is a critical element in the generalization of out-group attitudes. In early articles, Brown and Hewstone were sharply critical of the Miller and Brewer personalization approach. Their concern was that attitude change in the personalization model might never generalize to the whole out-group. Their research indicated that a stronger measure of group salience was necessary to make this step from improved attitudes toward an individual out-group member to improved attitudes toward the whole out-group (Hamberger & Hewstone, 1997).
The third model is the Common Ingroup Identity Model of John Dovidio and Samuel Gaertner (Dovidio, Gaertner & Kawakami, 2003; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). This model introduces a recategorization element through the formation of superordinate groups. They suggest that rather than completely abandoning group categories, people find it helpful to redraw those boundaries to include members of both groups.

Progress has been made on many fronts to integrate these approaches. Indeed, it is recognized that one model may not fit all situations:

There appears to be a general consensus that maintaining the salience of category membership is important for generalization to occur. The question that remains involves the relative effectiveness of having positive functional group relations...maintaining a superordinate group identity...or establishing personalized relations while simultaneously having category membership be at least moderately salient...the relative effectiveness...is moderated by situational factors, temporal issues, and individual differences (Dovidio, Gaertner & Kawakami, 2003, p. 14).

**Research on Affective Factors**

Considerable attention has been devoted to studying Pettigrew’s four mediators (Eller & Abrams, 2003, 2004). In particular, the role of affective factors has dominated recent research (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2004) along with their connections with moderating factors such as intergroup anxiety (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). There is also research in social movement literature on the role of emotion as well (Jasper, 2009). A consistent subject of research has been the role played by empathy (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Swart, Hewstone, Christ & Voci, A., 2010). Studies have shown that empathy can lead to more positive feelings toward an individual,
which may lead to more positive feeling toward the out-group. Some cases may be more difficult to produce empathy for, such as in the case of murderers, but even in such cases, effects on attitudes may occur later (Batson, Polycarpou, Harmon-Jones, Imhoff, Mitchener, Bednar, et al., 1997). The effectiveness of empathy on attitude change may also be dependent on other contributing factors such as generalized nurturing tendencies, in the case of empathy for strangers (Batson, Lishner, Cook & Sawyer, 2005), and the role of situational attributions (Vescio, Sechrist & Paolucci, 2003).

The role of friendship is a significant area of current research (Eller & Abrams, 2003, 2004; Hamberger & Hewstone, 1997; Pettigrew, 1997). Extensive analysis of transnational European surveys provides evidence of substantial correlations between out-group friendship and prejudice reduction (Pettigrew, 1997). There appears to be evidence for a cumulative effect – out-group friendships lead to prejudice reduction, which leads to new out-group friendships. As in other correlational studies, there is a need for careful analysis of selection bias issues. Friendship also helps to relieve anxiety raised by intergroup contact (Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton & Tropp, 2008). Another factor related to friendship is the perceived importance of out-group contact. These studies (Van Dick, Wagner, Pettigrew, Christ, Wolf, Petzel, et al., 2004) found that perceived importance, which was strongly connected to affective factors such as intimacy and cooperation, “acts as a key variable in the link between intergroup contact and attitudes” (p. 219).

Another type of strong affective factor is forgiveness. In a study based on a representative sample of the Northern Ireland population, it was found that out-group contact positively correlated with forgiveness between Protestants and Catholics. Forgiveness had positive correlations with trust, out-group perspective taking, and out-group attitudes (Hewstone, Cairns,
Voci, Hamberger & Niens, 2006). Experience with the ongoing conflict was also a negative predictor of forgiveness (2006).

**Qualitative Research Studies**

Although the overwhelming number of studies using and testing intergroup contact theory has been done using quantitative research methods, a small but growing number of studies use qualitative approaches. These include studies with a variety of qualitative research designs including case study (Rodenborg, 2006), action research (Paluck, 2006; Rozas, 2007), ethnographies (Bekerman & Horenczyk, 2004; Britton, 2008), and historical studies (Fine, 1979). Many of these research projects use in-depth interviews as their principal data source (Bekerman & Horenczyk, 2004; Britton, 2008; Fine, 1979; Rodenborg, 2006; Rozas, 2007); some triangulate this with data from archival sources (Fine, 1979; Rodenborg, 2006); and some utilize ethnographic field observation (Bekerman & Horenczyk, 2004; Britton, 2008).

Qualitative research methods seem an ideal way to study intergroup contact due to the complexity of factors that come together in intergroup contact, the importance of a longitudinal view, and the need to carefully examine the process of group categorization. Pettigrew’s (1998, 2006) four central processes that mediate the effect of contact on attitude change are an example of this complexity. Studies of particular groups based on in-depth interviews provide the means to explore the complex interrelationship between these processes in the life of a specific group - such as the way in which affective ties are developed through friendship in a community interracial group (Rodenborg, 2006); or in-group role reappraisal (in terms of cultural, religious and national identities) in ethnographic or other kinds of studies (Bekerman & Horenczyk, 2004). In their ethnographic study of participants in a bilingual Hebrew-Arabic school in Israel, by looking at the roles of the parties over time, Bekerman and Horenczyk (2004) were able to
explore various impacts on the group categorization process. Their study gives a particularly strong base for evaluating the all-important role of group salience in relation to attitude change.

Intergroup Contact Theory provides a sophisticated set of models for helping to understand racial perspective change. It brings into focus the importance of group salience, and how this factor may vary as a mediating or moderating factor, depending on whether or not one is early or late in the change process. As was found to be significant in TL, affective factors are seen to be of critical importance. While the majority of studies using ICT are quantitative in approach, the available qualitative studies are suggestive for use in this research project.

Having now considered the role of intergroup relations on racial learning, it is time to expand this look to include adult learning more broadly in social movements, since this study focuses on the experiences of adults who were involved in Student Interracial Ministry specifically within the Civil Rights Movement.

**Learning in Social Movements**

The primary context for the learning experiences of Student Interracial Ministry (SIM) participants was the Civil Rights Movement. Like students from many colleges and universities that headed south in order to see how they could be involved and help in the civil rights struggle, Union Seminary students responded to this need. Yet in forming SIM as an extension of their graduate theological training, these young adults were seeking to deepen and contextualize their theological education that had largely been confined to the classroom. Understanding the roles that learning plays in social movements is critical to understanding the learning experience of SIM participants. The section is divided into the following categories: Types of Social Movements, in which the distinction between “old” and “new” social movements is addressed; Adult Education and Social Movements, in which the history of the role played by social
movements in the field of adult education is discussed; Adult Learning in Social Movements, in which various themes of learning, including elements of transformative learning are discussed; and Learning by Activists, in which the critical role of learning by the activist participants themselves is reviewed.

**Types of Social Movements**

Since the 1970s at least, social movements have been a major topic of research throughout the social sciences (Edelman, 2001; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Pichardo, 1997), although largely carried on independently by sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists, with little interaction between the disciplines, and infrequent engagement with the rich historical research that is available (Edelman, 2001). Adult education became involved in social movement research in the 1980s and now a considerable literature has grown that examines adult education as a social movement and adult learning dimensions of social movements (Hall & Turay, 2006).

Much current research explores what are called new social movements (NSMs). The international environmental, women’s rights, and peace/anti-nuclear movements are the most commonly cited examples of NSMs. They are distinguished from earlier progressive movements, such as the labor movement, in a number of ways. First, membership in NSMs is largely informal and unstructured, as opposed to formal membership in labor unions or political parties (Newman, 1999). Their participants are often middle class, drawn to NSMs on the basis of shared values, rather than being recruited from the working classes or the underprivileged (Dalton, 2001). The focus of NSMs is on the improvement of “the quality of life for individuals, whether it is the quality of the natural environment, the protection of human rights, or peace in an insecure world” (Dalton, 2001, p. 586), with a focus on individual control and personal
fulfillment rather than specific political/economic gains for a labor union or political party
(Dalton, 2001; Finger, 1989; Welton, 1993). They also take on a wide and creative variety of
organizational structures, which stress a decentralized, non-hierarchical approach as opposed to
the rigid hierarchical structure of many unions and political parties (Dalton, 2001). Finally,
NSMs often adopt dramatic, public protest methods to bring attention to their causes (Dalton,
2001). While these distinctions are helpful, they are broad generalizations to which many
exceptions can be found (Newman, 1999; Spencer, 1995).

The civil rights movement of the 1960s is a sort of transition movement between old and
new social movements. It is connected to earlier social movements because it is largely drawn
from the working class and underprivileged sectors of society and organized in close connection
with the hierarchy of the Black church, with its strong propensity toward male leadership. Yet
the civil rights movement still was a precursor of the full blown NSMs, due to its informal
membership, degree of middle class participation (particularly through the student movement),
participatory decision-making (esp. in the student wing) and use of dramatic protest methods
(Evans, 1980; Morris, 1984, 1999).

Adult education scholars have analyzed the relationship between old and new social
movements in several ways. The NSM focus on personal transformation is a natural connection
with adult education. Some have strongly dichotomized between the earlier emphasis on
transformation of society and the struggle for fair distribution of wealth with the focus on
personal fulfillment in NSMs (Finger, 1989). Others have argued that this incorrectly splits the
values of NSM participants “from the movements’ collective practice” (Welton, 1993, p. 155;
see also Spencer, 32). Instead, the protest actions of the NSMs should be seen as flowing from a
sense of collective identity that has developed among participants (Walter, 2007a). The
environmental movement is given as an example of an NSM that has embraced educative-activism rather than just changing behavior or raising awareness - a movement which leads people to critical consciousness, what Paulo Freire calls conscientização, “a critical understanding of society and culture within which people live… [and] a comprehension of people’s capacity to change the situation (Clover, 2002, p. 318).

**Adult Education and Social Action**

Adult education is deeply connected with social action through its commitment to democratic teaching traditions (inclusiveness, discussion, value of experience), the radical education tradition (i.e. Lindeman, 1926; Horton, Bell, et al., 1990; Horton, Kohl & Kohl, 1990; Freire, 2000; Brookfield, 2005; Foley, 1999; Newman, 1995, 2006; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009; Brookfield & Holst, 2011) and through the learning dimension of social movements (Brookfield, 2005; Hall & Turay, 2006; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009; Rachal, 1990). This importance of social action to the adult education field is demonstrated by adult education historian John Rachal. He added “Social Action” as a major branch of his adult education typology, when he revised it in 1990. By its very nature, adult education often invokes a social action dimension. This can be illustrated through the example of the attempts to fight illiteracy among African Americans in the Jim Crow South. Any work in this context came to grip with the realities of Black exclusion from white educational systems, economic oppression, and exclusion from the democratic electoral process (Levine, 2004). Adult education takes place in social action both through formal and informal means – through the day to day learning experienced in the struggles of a social movement and through formal classes promoting social action (Rachal, 1998). The informal learning is often the most powerful, in that this learning frequently challenges the status
quo. This dynamic learning stands in stark contrast to many traditional, training-oriented adult education classes (Baumgartner, 2005b; Parrish & Taylor, 2007; Rachal, 1998).

**Adult Learning in Social Movements**

This section considers a number of different issues in relation to adult learning in social movements. These include consideration of types of learning, the role of identity development, connections with transformative learning, and the role of the status quo and conflict.

**Types of learning.** A wide range of incidental and informal adult learning takes place in social movements (Foley, 1999), as seen in this description of learning in two women’s community centers:

Women gained instrumental skills and knowledge, as well as self-awareness and an understanding of the complexity of interpersonal relationships. They also became clearer about their own values and they recognized that, because people have different interests and values, conflict among them is inevitable, and that the conflict can be constructive or destructive. The women also learned that wider contextual and structural factors, like government policy and funding procedures, shaped what happened in the houses. (Foley, 2001, p.77)

Some important types of learning include: finding one’s voice, and searching for authenticity (Ebert, Burford, & Brian, 2003; Parrish & Taylor, 2007; Welton, 1993); learning to challenge assumptions through critical thinking and creativity (Ebert, Burford, & Brian, 2003; Walter, 2007b); learning to listen to others (Ebert, Burford, & Brian, 2003; Manglitz et al., 2005; Newman, 1995); solving problems through cooperative work together (Ebert, Burford, & Brian, 2003; Hale, 2007; Walter, 2007b); and experiencing a sense of personal transformation and fulfillment (Finger, 1989; Welton, 1993).
Identity development. Scholars of new social movements emphasize the importance of identity development in NSMs. This can also be understood through a learning lens in terms of the development of both individual agency and a sense of collective identity. As a participant in the Catholic Worker movement said describing her experience of the development of personal conscience in relation to the movement – “I don’t know if I shaped it or it shaped me. I think we were both shaped” (Parrish & Taylor, 2007, p. 241). There is an important sense of unity between individual and collective development. Consciousness as an actor leads to a sense of agency and purpose; this can then lead to a sense of worthiness based on this purposefulness; this then leads to confidence, which encourages one to contribute to the group (Kilgore, 1999). There is a generative movement between identity formation and action, between thought and feeling (Foley, 2001). This can lead to the growth of one’s own values in place of reliance on external authorities (Parrish & Taylor, 2007). Recognition that the self is not a static unity, but made up of many selves, can help participants in social movements to find common ground with those in whom they are in conflict (Newman, 2006).

Growth of a collective identity is crucial to learning as well. Collective action leads to increased sense of solidarity (Foley, 1999); this in turn leads to greater commitment to the collective learning process. This group process necessarily involves conflict around the diversity of perspectives in a group. Rather than being a weakness, diversity is seen as being an important strength to the group process (Kilgore, 1999). Catholic Worker participants found significant relationships to be formative to their learning, helping each other to learn and pushing the movement forward (Parrish & Taylor, 2007). A sense of collective identity may also sometimes extend to include the non-human world, as in the development of a sense of eco-selfhood in the environmental movement (Welton, 1993).
**Transformative learning and social movements.** Adult education researchers have also seen a strong connection between learning in social movements and transformative learning. A significant group of empirical and historical studies have provided evidence of the role of transformative learning in social movements, including: race-related movements (Baumgartner, 2005b; Brookfield, 2008; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009; Ebert, Burford, & Brian, 2003; Rachal, 1998), environmental movements (Foley 1999, 2001; Walter, 2007a), and women’s learning (Foley, 1999, 2001). Two studies in particular focus on the process of critical reflection. One is a detailed look at the way in which the South African rights leader Nelson Mandela critically reflected on four key assumptions of the anti-apartheid movement and modified these assumptions (Brookfield, 2008); the other is a study of incidental and informal learning in women’s community centers (Foley, 1999, 2001). In the two environmental studies, participants come to learn about the complexities of power relationships in relation to forest issues. One group learns that the forest can’t be treated as having only self-evident value, but that this value and its protection need to be struggled for (Foley 1999, 2001); another group came to learn that they had power as activists that they could exercise in the face of other powerful groups (Walter, 2007a). In a study of women’s experience in the Catholic Worker movement, Parrish and Taylor (2007) note, “[n]arrators described an awakening and the development of a framework for the rest of life, based on the values of personal responsibility, pacifism, and voluntary poverty” (pp. 237-238).

These transformative experiences were encouraged and developed through group study and action. Over a period of years the women described deepening and lasting commitment to pacifism as a way of life. Several participants also discussed how their experience of discontent with the institutional church led them to try getting involved in social action, which led to the
development of new meaning perspectives (Parrish & Taylor, 2007). Finally, two studies examine the development of educational programs of social movements designed to foster transformative learning: a study of Highlander Folk School (Ebert, Burford, & Brian, 2003) and a study of the Freedom Schools movement in the summer of 1964 in Mississippi (Rachal, 1998).

**Status quo and conflict.** Finding autonomy from the hegemonic force of the status quo is critical to learning in social movements (Foley, 1999; Newman, 1995). Many studies of adult learning in social movements stressed two important themes: overcoming the status quo and the role of conflict. Challenging the status quo has been a key element in the history of adult education and social movements. Yet contemporary educational reform movements (esp. in Europe), under the guise of “lifelong learning” are attempting to co-opt the socially transformative power of adult education and maintain the status quo (Rogers, 2006). In response to the environmental movement, powerful forces of the state and industry are aligned to maintain the status quo. Two examples of this are the case of forest protection in Thailand in which the government has worked for decades (with varying success) to try and keep Buddhist monks from upsetting the status quo and working to protect forests (Walter, 2007b). Also, in the Canadian environmental movement in the Clayoquot Sound rainforest, the Canadian government launched a severe crackdown on protestors, in an attempt to maintain the status quo. In a series of mass trials, they levied relatively severe prison sentences and fines upon the protestors. As the mass media followed this story, a shock wave went across the nation due to the severity of the response to protect the system. The result was that “No pamphlets or educational video could have done for the grassroots environmental movement what the Supreme Court of Canada and the B[ritish] C[olumbia] government did” (Walter, 2007a, p. 258).
The second theme of conflict runs through the literature as well (Foley, 1999; Newman, 1995; Piven, 2006). Conflict is fundamental to the collective learning found in adult education in social movements, due to the diversity of perspectives among participants and the issue of trying to balance between personal autonomy and collective identity of the movement (Kilgore, 1999). It is also par for the course with social movements that radically challenge the status quo, such as the environmental movement (Walter, 2007a). There is even a more fundamental conflict that is present, due to the process of memory and the social construction of experience. Different players in a situation will construct a situation differently, based on their own needs and perceptions (Newman, 1999). In the Catholic Worker movement, as the women participants followed increasingly more radical approaches, this necessitated increased conflict with the traditional church. Yet their learning in the movement had taught them to follow their convictions, even though it meant conflict. A powerful example of this is the way in which Catholic Worker soup kitchens of the 1930s challenged the Roman Catholic conventions about the proper role for the laity (Parrish & Taylor, 2007). Finally, the Highlander Folk School was designed to be a place in which parties in conflict could come to resolve their conflict, according to adult education principles (Ebert, Burford, & Brian, 2003).

**Learning by Activists**

A few studies focus specifically on the learning experience of activists themselves, including studies of eight U.S. anti-racism educators (Manglitz et al., 2005), 20 feminist and environmental activists from northern England (Searle-Chatterjee, 1999), 278 Scottish socialist party members (Kane, 2007); participants in the Catholic Worker movement (Parrish & Taylor, 2007); and activists in the U.S. civil rights movement (Rachal, 1998). We can examine these
studies in terms of the factors influencing their participation and their motivation and learning about identity.

Factors influencing participation. Classic studies of the social movements of the sixties have identified some core influences and characteristics of activists, such as they often come from upper status families, are more radical than their parents - who are more liberal than others of their status, and come from families with less traditional conceptions of "achievement, material success, sexual morality and religion" (Flacks, 1967). The activists themselves were less career driven and success-oriented than their non-activist counterparts (Flacks, 1967; Keniston, 1967), and despite the reduction in explicit activism, activists generally continued these basic commitments later in life (Whalen & Flacks, 1989). In a more recent study of the motivations of socialist party members (Kane, 2007) it was found that schooling and higher education appeared to be a more important influence than was expected, and formal adult education appears less influential than expected – this based on tentative comparisons with a European study of the influences on active citizenship. Contrasting evidence came from a study of feminist and environmental activists in which higher education was not found to play a strong role (Searle-Chatterjee, 1999). In this study, family was a strong influence, with the majority of participants having had at least one radical or activist parent. It also included several, somewhat counterintuitive influences. Environmentalists in the study came from strong religious backgrounds, but were not themselves particularly religious; feminists came from families of origin with strong humanist and egalitarian values - but those values didn't extend to include the women in the family.

Motivation and learning about identity. In several studies, motivation for involvement was deeply connected with aspects of identity. Two studies involved women as they strived for
full and authentic lives in societies that didn’t encourage full participation by women. In the study of English feminists, the participants tended to be eldest children (without older brothers) – their younger sisters were considerably less well disposed to feminism as well as being less academically successful. “Their sense of capability”, which led to their activism, was derived from birth order, gender placement in the family, school success and awareness of occupational opportunities for women in the service classes (Searle-Chatterjee, 1999, p. 274).

For women in the Catholic Worker movement study (Parrish & Taylor, 2007), there were three major learning influences on their activism. There was a strong sense of physical place that was meeting their physical and social needs – “It was an exciting step in creating an alternative social order” in which theory and practice are united (Parrish & Taylor, 2007). Relationships were essential to their activist learning as well in this “intense context within which the women were situated” and which “offered them the opportunity to seek a more complete or authentic expression of belief” (p. 244). Finally, the opportunity to participate in knowledge creation was a key aspect. The Catholic Church setting in which they grew up had not provided them with the opportunity to “learn and work” in ways that would foster their search for greater spiritual authenticity. They found this opportunity in their experience in the Catholic Worker.

White participants in antiracist organizations and the civil rights movement had learning connected with resolving their deep sense of conflict over white privilege. Through interviews with the white college students who had volunteered to work in the Citizenship schools (Rachal, 1998), a number of relevant learning experiences are described. The students typically were disturbed by the disconnect between their own upbringing and the apparent caste system and lack of democracy for Blacks in Mississippi. They reported being challenged by the new experience of living with a Black family and in dealing with their own fears. A widely felt view among the
volunteers was that they learned far more than they taught during their summer experience. The anti-racist educators who were studied all experienced a profound awareness of the time or times when they became deeply aware of their own experience of white privilege. It formed the foundation for the transformative learning experiences (Manglitz et al., 2005).

In summary, we have seen how social movements provide rich settings for significant adult learning. The research discusses many aspects of this learning. They include consideration of a wide range of types of learning, often of an informal or incidental nature; the role of identity development, both in terms of fostering individual voice and sense of agency, as well as a growing experience of collective identity with fellow activists; rich connections with transformative learning, the importance of overcoming the hegemonic dominance of the status quo, and learning in conflict situations. Finally, consideration was also given to motivating factors for participation and identity issues among activists themselves.

Having considered learning in social movements, it is now time to move to the final aspect of the theoretical framework, which will take into account the importance of the religious and spiritual context in which SIM participants learned about race.

**Faith Development Theory**

Faith development is a specialized area of research and theory within constructive developmental thought. It focuses on the spiritual and religious aspects of human development. This review will first consider the classic formulation of Faith Development Theory by James Fowler. Then it will move on to consider a range of criticism concerning Fowler’s approach, offering a variety of alternative perspectives. Finally, the results of empirical research studies using Fowler’s approach and alternative methods will be reviewed.
**Classic Formulation (Fowler)**

Faith Development Theory (FDT) is the product of research undertaken by James Fowler (1980, 1981, 1987, 1991, 1996, 2000, 2003, 2004) and his research teams at Harvard University, Boston College, and Emory University from the late 1960s to the present. The classic formulation of the theory is found in Fowler’s book, *Stages of Faith: the Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (1981). FDT emerged during an extraordinary period of developmental research at Harvard in the 1970s. At the heart of this research activity was Lawrence Kohlberg, who was doing groundbreaking work, which extended Piaget’s theories through the development of a comprehensive model of moral development. Other members in this growing circle of constructive developmental researchers included Carol Gilligan, Robert Selman, Robert Kegan, and Sharon Parks (Fowler, 1981, 2004). Each of these scholars did cutting edge research, many developing their own stage theories of development – Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* (1982) set forth a critique of Kohlberg and produced a model of women’s development; Selman’s model of social perspective taking (1980); and Kegan’s model of “self-in-motion” and meaning making (1982, 1994). Both Kegan and Parks served as members of Fowler’s research team.

This environment led Fowler to draw heavily on both Piaget and Kohlberg’s structural development paradigm and to consider extending these models to include faith development. It “provided…an impetus to try to operationalize a rich concept of faith and to begin to look more systematically at faith in a constructive developmental perspective” (Fowler, 2003, p. 230). Fowler and his students began with in-depth interviews, which included a life review, life-shaping experiences and relationships, present values and commitments, and religion (Fowler, 1981). As a result he created a model of faith stages. Each developmental stage is characterized
by distinctive types in regard to seven aspects, of which several are drawn from previous
developmental models. The seven aspects are depicted in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Aspects in Fowler’s Faith Stages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASPECT</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Form of Logic</td>
<td>Piaget</td>
<td>Role of reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Perspective Taking</td>
<td>Selman</td>
<td>Social relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Form of Moral Judgment</td>
<td>Kohlberg</td>
<td>Moral decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Bounds of Social Awareness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Openness to the ideas of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Locus of Authority</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sources of justification of beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Form of World Coherence</td>
<td></td>
<td>Images, values, and stories that shape one’s meaning world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Symbolic Function</td>
<td></td>
<td>Role of symbols in faith</td>
</tr>
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Before exploring Fowler’s stage system in detail, it is important to discuss what Fowler means by faith. For Fowler, faith is a term that encompasses everything we mean both by religion and spirituality. It is a perspective formed around some transcendent subject or value that gives meaning to a person’s life. Fowler bases his understanding of faith on the research of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a scholar of comparative religions, and in particular on his now classic, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1963). In very meticulous fashion, Smith works across the wide range of religious traditions, examining each in terms of its historical development, demonstrating that the modern categorical notion of “religions” is a largely modern construction, i.e. that Hinduism or Islam is a unified system of religion in the same way that Christianity or Buddhism might be understood in this way. Instead he proposes that these various religions are complex historical phenomena of incredible diversity that cannot simply be compared to each other through what appear to be similar ideas and practices (Smith, 1963). At the same time, the core idea of “religion” has come about, due to the secularizing forces of
modernity, which have reduced the concept to beliefs or specific religious practices and institutions. Instead, Smith argues “faith” is at the heart of the major religious traditions. He defines faith as a life encompassing idea of personal commitment to the transcendent in all aspects of life. Although this work can rightly be criticized for its movement to abstract faith from the realities of everyday life -“that his residual essentialism leads him to ignore the materialities that form religious subjects” (Asad, 2001, p. 217).

Fowler draws a number of core ideas from Smith’s writings (Fowler, 1981). Faith, rather than religion or belief is the fundamental orientation of humans to the transcendent (Fowler, 1981; 1991). The major religious traditions engender this orientation by offering their own means of encouraging faith, through “an alignment of the will, a resting of the heart” (Fowler, 1981, p. 14). Faith is not just a cognitive quality, but an orientation of the whole person to the transcendent/universal. While some might see this overall approach as relativistic, meaning that religious claims have no validity beyond their own communities, Smith views this faith conception as a rejection of relativism, in favor of a theory of faith that instead understands the faith of specific communities as “relative apprehensions of our relatedness to that which is universal” (Fowler, 1981, p. 15).

Fowler’s conception of faith is one of the most important features of his work (Parks, 1986) and its great strength is found in its broad applicability for understanding human meaning making, from the most secular perspectives to the most religious (Fowler, 1991).

We might say that faith is our way of discerning and committing ourselves to centers of value and power that exert ordering force in our lives. Faith, as imagination, grasps the ultimate conditions of our existence, unifying them into a
comprehensive image in light of which we shape our responses and initiatives, our actions. (Fowler, 1981, p. 25)

For Fowler, faith is the way in which we form a comprehensive image of the world, forming for us an “ultimate environment” or a “comprehensive frame of meaning”. Faith helps us to see these initiatives and responses, our relationships and aspirations in everyday life, by enabling us to see them against the backdrop of a more comprehensive image of what constitutes true power, true value and the meaning of life. (Fowler, 1981, p. 28)

Having described Fowler’s perspective on faith, the following is a description of his stages of adult faith development.

Stage 3 - Synthetic Conventional Faith. This stage, along with stage 4, is one of the most common for adults (Fowler, 1981, p. 161). It is conventional, in that it is “everyone’s faith system, the faith of the entire community”; and synthetic, in that it represents a “unified global wholeness” (Fowler, 1981, p. 167). The homogeneity of this stage greatly “favors” religious institutions. Fowler asserts that institutions “work best” at this level. It is largely a tacit, unexamined system with community members having little critical appraisal of their faith. At this stage people are drawn to a god “who knows, accepts and confirms the self deeply.” Authority is located external to the self, and is often found in institutional leaders. The image of God focuses on relationships, not on concrete images. Emphasis is on God’s “qualities of companionship, guidance, support, knowing and loving” (Fowler, 1981).
Stage 4 - Individuative-Reflective Faith. At the heart of this stage is self-awareness of one’s faith perspective. It involves a critical awareness of assumptions and analysis or challenge to the previous system of belief. Contradiction between authority sources is a major reason for breakdown of Stage 3 and it leads forward into transition to Stage 4. Often it involves an experience of “leaving” your old faith (Fowler, 1981) and discovering faith anew. It is a stage in which people really make faith their own.

Stage 5 - Conjunctive Faith. By Fowler’s own admission, this stage is difficult to categorize. Movement to this stage involves a “dialectical and multi-leveled approach to life truth” (p. 183). It features the ability to hold beliefs and ideas in tension, without rationally resolving the tension. It involves openness to truth of other traditions. This is based, not on a rejection of the uniqueness of one’s own tradition, but on “confidence in the reality mediated by” one’s “own tradition” (p. 187). Ideally, it involves “mutual movement toward the real and true” (p. 187). Important stories, ideas, and symbols from one’s own tradition or others may “insist on breaking in upon the neatness of previous faith” (p. 183). Yet there is a difference between Stage Three’s ‘naïve’ faith and the Stage Five’s resubmission to the “initiative of the symbolic” (p. 187). This aspect is a major aspect, and it is a central concern of many critics, which will be reviewed below.

The research for Stages of Faith involved in-depth interviews with 359 subjects ranging from age 4 to the early 80s. Adults (ages 21 and up) accounted for 246 (69%) of those interviewed (Fowler, 1981). This base has been greatly expanded through the large number of empirical studies that have followed Fowler’s work. Heinz Streib (2003) the major bibliographer of faith development research, indicates that between 1976 and 1999, 82 dissertations focused almost exclusively on FDT, with 54 of these being empirical studies. A
current search for dissertations uncovers some 18 additional empirical studies, produced between 2000 and 2010, that meet Streib’s criteria.

Although Stages has been criticized for having very limited participation by people of color (2%) and those with backgrounds outside the Judeo-Christian spectrum (4%) (Tisdell, 2002; 2003), it does a fairly good job in other areas. It includes a broad sample of Christian and Jewish Americans, with Protestants 45%, Catholics 37%, and Jews 11%. Although specific data is not included, a wide range of protestant participants appears to have been included, representing mainline, evangelical, and fundamentalist groups. Gender distribution is 50% for men and women, and the age of participants is well spread. There is some lack of age balance due to the fact that the 61+ range has 62 participants, while the 51-60 range has only 17 participants.

Another strength of Fowler’s work is that it brings the investigation of faith development into the heart of the modern study of human development (Parks, 1986). In particular, it complements the other studies flowing from Piaget that explicate the way in which humans are natural philosophers. In an early work of Robert Kegan, he describes this array of studies that have followed Piaget:

The research…has articulated this perception of personality as natural philosophy, and it has extended the history of this career throughout the life-cycle. Kohlberg’s and Gilligan’s work suggest that the person is a natural ethicist; Perry’s, Selman’s and Broughton’s, that he or she is a natural epistemologist; Fowler’s, a natural theologian. (Kegan, 1980, p. 436)

This integration of Faith Development Theory with the other perspectives has led to the extremely interesting work of Robert Kegan to describe not only one facet of human
development, but to propose a comprehensive model of the emerging human self (Kegan, 1982, 1994).

**Alternative Perspectives**

While Fowler’s *Faith Development Theory* (FDT) is still the principal conception of faith development, a range of scholars have identified a number of important areas of critique. In particular, two scholars who worked closely with Fowler on the development of FDT, as members of his research team at Harvard: Sharon Daloz Parks and Robert Kegan. Parks brings important analysis to Fowler’s model concerning the role of the self and the gendered aspects of the model; Kegan’s major contribution involves his articulation of a dynamic model of the self.

**Dynamic Identity of the Self.** Due to Fowler’s emphasis on the formal, structural aspects of his stages of faith development, a number of scholars argue that Fowler ‘can’t see the trees for the forest’ – that he underplays the central role of the self (Parks, 1986; 1991; 2003; Kegan, 1980; 1982; 1994; Wallace & Bergeman, 2002; Wheeler, Ampadu, & Wangari, 2002). They push Fowler toward an more dynamic view of faith (Parks, 1986; 2003), which sees faith as a central human construct at the heart of the self, “as the activity of composing meaning at the level of ultimacy” (Parks, 1986, p. 140), a process encompassing all aspects of the complex human self in relation to others, the world, and ultimate being. Parks has a clear vision of how FDT helps us to better understand faith:

> The central insight of faith development theory is that the composing of meaning at the level of ultimacy undergoes predictable patterns of development in the direction of an enlarged capacity to embrace and discern complexity – and thus compose a more adequate faith (a more adequate and trustworthy perception of a fitting composition of self, world, and “God”). (Parks, 1986, p. 140)
At the heart of this approach is a more dynamic understanding of the self - the “self-in-motion” (Kegan, 1980; 1982; 1994). The static, linear caste of the traditional framework of Piaget and Kohlberg, comes from a “succession of self-object, self-other differentiations” (1980, p. 407). Instead, there is even something more fundamental than this. Self-object relations must take place in a context, which Kegan calls the “meaning-constitutive evolutionary activity” - the “restless creative motion of life itself (p. 407), which is equated with Fowler’s “ultimate environment.” Kegan says:

That when meaning-constitutive evolutionary activity is taken as the basic context of development, then cognition, the individual, the epistemological, the stage, the present organization of the person, all get integrated into a bigger conception which includes the emotions, the social, the ontological, the process, the person who is doing the developing. (1980, p. 407)

This leads to a second major area of critique. As we saw in Mezirow’s model of transformative learning and Allport’s model of intergroup contact, Fowler’s approach also suffers from too much emphasis on the cognitive, to the exclusion of the affective dimension.

**Role of Affective Thought.** Although Fowler pays some attention to the role of the imagination and the symbolic, these scholars see that a major shift needs to be made – to a perspective that is more connected to a process-model rather than to a stage-oriented model; one more able to consider the content of faith comprehensively and not just the structure (Parks, 1980; 1991). Spirituality itself is a very broad phenomenon encompassing an array of artistic and supra-rational ways of knowing, including the arts, literature, spirituality and religion. These largely affective ways of knowing form the meeting place for these disparate fields of endeavor (Tisdell, 2003, p. 55). Spiritual experiences and reflection point towards the limits of
the cognitive and the linguistic as image and symbol are often much better suited to giving
expression to spiritual experience (p. 58). Spiritual practice and experience may also enhance
the importance of the affective dimensions of personality (Mattis, et al., 2001).

The most comprehensive approach to this concern is found in Robert Kegan’s work, in
which he proposes a comprehensive model to explain all of human development, drawing from
many other developmental models and approaches, creating a model to deal with cognitive,
affective, social, and moral development. Fowler (2003) sees the power of this model and has
worked to integrate some of these ideas into his own approach:

Kegan’s genius lies, I believe, in his moving beyond older dichotomies of
cognition and emotion, and of structure and content, to disclose the
developmentally emergent patterns of the self’s constitutive meaning-making.
(p.234).

Role of Conflict. As a more dynamic model of the self is posited, with its complex
interaction of various ways of knowing, there is naturally a bigger role for embracing conflict in
the model. The in-motion quality of the self involves a dialectical tension between several
central concerns: such as the longing to be included held in tension with the desire for
autonomy; losing and recovering a sense of meaning and order; and the need to be recognized
(Kegan, 1980). In reference to the first tension, inclusion/autonomy, Kegan suggests that what
biologists describe as differentiation and integration, is “the same phenomena we experience as
the yearnings for autonomy and inclusion” - “their tension [between autonomy and inclusion] is
our experience of the single, underlying ground of being which gives rise to, and resolves the
tension in the first place” (p. 413). These fundamental tensions, rooted in our very existence, are
the dialectic between limit and possibility (p. 414). This also raises the important possibility of
not-being, of the void, of existential conflict. Several scholars contend that this concept of negation is a vital aspect largely missing from Fowler’s model (Loder, 1981; Parks, 1980; 1991). This theme is also a core aspect of transformative learning, with its disorienting dilemma – one that connects faith development and transformative learning in a powerful way.

Mezirow’s approach to transformative learning has not been open to any role for religious or spiritual experience, and few TL scholars take a developmental approach. An ideal candidate to unite these fields is a theologian and educational psychologist, James Loder. Loder’s theological and psychological approach is a close match with Kegan’s. Both of them share an understanding that humans have a fundamental spiritual orientation to the transcendent that is experienced through those basic yearnings for inclusion/autonomy, loss/recovery, and the need to be recognized. Loder’s thinking involves a four-fold way of knowing: the lived world, the self, the void, and the holy. His approach is described in his major work, *The Transforming Moment* (1981, 1998), in which he articulates a five step process of transformational logic/learning involving: Conflict, Interlude for scanning, Constructive act of imagination, Release and openness (aha experience), and Interpretation. This approach is similar to the movement with transformative learning theory with its disorienting dilemma and imaginative process of construal leading to a new perspective. Loder’s development of this transformational logic was an important source for Jack Mezirow’s development of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991, p. 26-27, 163-164).

**Gendered Concept.** Although Fowler’s participant group was well-balanced between men and women, several scholars have made a strong case that the very structure of his model is male oriented; this approach can be seen as an indictment of the authoritarian role often played by male dominated, objectivist scientific ways of knowing (Tisdell, 2003; Parks, 1991; 2003).
Three additional areas of concern relate specifically to gender: an individuative vs. connective view of the human self; the metaphor of the journey vs. that of dwelling; and the linear vs. spiral nature of the faith development model.

Despite important developments in the field, Fowler continues to use his model of the individuative self. This seems strange because Fowler (2000, c.1984) has entered into fairly substantive dialogue with Carol Gilligan, whose *In a Different Voice* was the first major critique of the new structural developmental approach from a feminist perspective. Fowler gives a new account of his stages of faith theory, yet fails to integrate the new learning from Gilligan’s perspective, continuing to have the “dynamics of the individuating self (in contrast to the connective self)” dominate the model (Parks, 1991, p. 113-114). Research into multicultural approaches to learning has revealed that many women and racial minorities have strong resonance with approaches that emphasize affective and connective ways of knowing (Tisdell, 2002, 2003), and research specifically focused on African American spirituality has consistently noted the importance of community-centered approaches (Wheeler, Ampadu, & Wangari, 2002; Wallace & Bergeman, 2002; Mattis, et al., 2001). Spirituality is a “fundamentally about meaning making”, with spiritual development seen as a movement toward “greater authenticity or to a more authentic self” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 29). Spiritual experiences frequently involve important community dimensions, including involvement in social action, yet they also go beyond this to a sense of the interconnectedness of all things and often are experienced in common human events of birth, death, near-death, dreams and other synchronistic experiences (Tisdell, 2003).

Another concern is the male dominated perspective of the developmental model, with its heroic development-journey image (Parks, 1991; 2003; Ray & McFadden, 2001). It is important
to balance “the recognition of the necessary relationship of the metaphors of home and journey, dwelling and pilgrimage” in order to include the story of female development and to complete the story of male development (with its heroic journey imagery) (Parks, 1991, p. 113). Parks understands the largely linear stage progression of Fowler’s model as akin to the traditional pilgrimage metaphor of the developmental journey. Parks offers the metaphor of the home as an alternative to this. Based on her classroom experience in which she had people draw pictures of their various homes, she was impressed with the spiraling, rather than linear, quality of their drawings. From this she developed a concentric circle model to represent the “stages.” In this approach, the concept of “home” expands with each stage, from immediate family and home in stage 1, to family, home, and neighborhood in stage 2, and to family, home, neighborhood, and beyond in stage 3 – the person in each developmental stage can venture forth within each stage, always having a home to which they can return and abide. Her various research studies with youth have indicated the importance of this for deepening trust (Parks, 2003).

The spiral alternative to Fowler’s linear model is an important one (Parks, 2003; Tisdell, 2002; 2003; Kegan, 1982). While more linear approaches account for adolescent and post-adolescent moving away from their faith traditions (Tisdell, 2003, p. 100-101), a spiral approach helps describe the dynamic quality of return common to many adults. This return is a part of the process of meaning making and often involves a “remembering” of “the life-enhancing elements of their religious traditions” as well as the integration of paradoxical elements that may have caused their initial moving away (p. 104-105). This is more than just remembering, it “connotes a reevaluation process, a reworking of such childhood symbols and traditions and a reshaping to be more relevant to an adult spirituality” (p. 104). Yet this is not some narcissistic focus on the
inner self, but it also involves an outward spiraling into more authentic living, propelling one into the future (p. 108).

Fowler’s approach is not closed to these modification, as he dedicated a small section of *Stages of Faith* (1981, pp. 286-291) to exploring the concept of a spiraling recapitulation of previous stages of development – in this case, in response to a conversion experience. While not directly relevant to the concerns of Tisdell and others, it is at least a break by Fowler with unidirectional approaches of Piaget and Kohlberg.

Faith Development Theory may be able to provide an important perspective for understanding racial attitude change among SIM participants. A strong feature of Fowler’s basic conception of FD is his understanding of faith as a comprehensive frame of meaning, not a separate category but one that is integrated into an understanding of all of human development. Because SIM students may well use faith as a major component of their meaning making, it is important to be aware of the types of predictable patterns of development that research on FD has uncovered. Alternate perspectives add greatly to Fowler’s approach by embracing a more dynamic understanding of the self, more fully taking account of the important role of affect, highlighting the importance of conflict and by identifying gendered aspects of Fowler’s approach. These alternative perspectives offer helpful models to expand the basic conception of faith development.
CHAPTER FOUR
METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodological approach and procedures of this study. It begins by reviewing the most salient aspects of qualitative research, discusses the nature of oral history research, sets out the case for using oral history as an appropriate methodology for this study, and examines the relevant factors in the background of the researcher. The chapter continues by describing the particular stages of the research process including the participant selection, data collection methods, data analysis approach, and methods of verification.

Qualitative Research and Oral History

This dissertation is a historically-based study of the way in which a group of adult graduate theological students in the 1960s made meaning of their experience as participants in the civil rights movement, through the Student Interracial Ministry. In particular, it is an examination of the complex ways in which their racial perspectives may have been transformed in relation to their faith development. As a project in understanding how other people make meaning, it is a qualitative research project. Research that seeks to understand, describe and interpret the perspective of other people is at the heart of the qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative investigation is absolutely essential when trying to understand the complex interrelationships between the social and religious ideas of people.

Central to any definition of qualitative research is the understanding that research is an interpretive process. Qualitative research is “not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). It is an attempt to enter into the “imaginative universe” (p. 7) of other people, realizing that we do not have direct access to the “facts” of a situation, but that research is a process of constructing the world in a way that we
imagine other people perceive themselves and the world about them (p. 15). This interpretive process is not simply a set of techniques or methods, but an intellectual approach – an attempt to provide, using the term that Clifford Geertz popularized, a “thick description” (p. 6). It recognizes that the researcher cannot recreate the past, just as it was, but that the researcher must recognize and take into account the complexity of interpretation – “analysis penetrates into the very body of the object – that is we begin with our own interpretations of what our informants are up to, or think they are up to, and then systematize those” (p. 15). Qualitative research embraces the subjective, recognizing it as its own domain (Gubrium & Holstein, 1999). It is based on careful observation, detailed description and explication of specific people in specific contexts, seeking to understand and clarify what is going on in a given setting (Geertz, 1973).

In this study, participants were asked to remember events from over 40 years ago. It important to keep in mind, especially with some of the limitations regarding memory discussed below, that a precise recreation of the events in SIM is not possible, but that the interpretation and meaning that the participants have brought and bring to the experience is central. It is important to share this “feel” for the process with the participants, so that they understand that their interpretation and understanding of the significance of the events for them is highly valued.

“Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). They seek to describe, in rich detail, people and the interactions they have in their own settings (Gubrium & Holstein, 1999). This can either be through direct observation, or, as in the current study, through the recreation of that setting from the perspective of the participants. Context is vitally important in qualitative research, and the methods of study themselves are
determined by the context – one uses what is necessary to understand a given context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Qualitative research employs a variety of empirical methods – a wide range of interpretive practices – in order to “make the world visible” in different ways (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Fundamental to this perspective is the concept of triangulation. Broadly understood, triangulation is an approach which systematically examines a given research situation from a number of perspectives. It can involve the use of multiple methods, materials, perspectives, observers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) in order to add “rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry” (p. 5). It is the recognition that no single perspective will provide an adequate basis for a description and analysis that will effectively clarify the understanding of a situation.

Qualitative research is designed to deal with the complexity of the attempt to understand human culture. By nature, it is open to the perspectives of other disciplines and research traditions, in so far as they can be of help in understanding a given research setting. This means that there is a certain degree of built-in tension, which flows from the complexity of intersecting approaches and perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research’s embrace of complexity flows from its “close scrutiny of social action, the recognition of variety and detail, the focus on process, and the appreciation of subjectivity” and “militates against the impulse to gloss over troublesome uncertainties, anomalies, irregularities, and inconsistencies” (Gubrium & Holstein, 1999, p. 131). The people in SIM that were interviewed for this study were participants in just such a highly complex process which calls for an interdisciplinary approach. By nature of their participation in SIM, they had become involved in a broad movement of students organizing to protest the continuation of segregation in America (the historical approach); they
were choosing and creating ways in which to make their theological education relevant in society
and to themselves (the educational approach); by crossing boundaries and entering situations of
conflict, they were experiencing the realities of racial discrimination and prejudice first hand (the
social psychological approach); and as adults in their middle 20s they were struggling to come to
new understandings of their faith and how it relates to these issues of race (the theological and
developmental psychology approach). This study will bring together the perspectives of
historical, educational, psychological and theological research traditions, in order to better
understand the meaning which the participants gave to their experiences in the Student
Interracial Ministry.

Oral History as Qualitative Research

Oral history is the qualitative methodology for this study. The goal of oral history
methodology is to give voice to the everyday participants in historical events, especially voices
that have been marginalized (Maynes, Pierce & Laslett, 2008). Oral history projects are
structured in four main ways: subject-oriented projects, life-histories, community histories, and
family histories (Larson, 2006). This research project combines elements of subject-oriented
projects and life histories. The primary focus of the research is on the events surrounding the
seminary students’ participation in the student interracial ministry and the learning that they
experienced through these activities. Yet to more fully understand these experiences, this study
brought a strong life history perspective to the study, as is recommended for most subject
oriented projects (Ritchie, 2003). A full life history typically attempts to provide a
comprehensive biography of the participants (Larson, 2006; Yow, 2005). Participants in this
study were encouraged to reflect on the way in which their SIM experience connected with their
religious background, theological training, and later life experiences.
The following are four central issues related to oral history research: evidence, interviews, shared authority, and memory.

**Evidence.** Oral history as evidence needs to be treated like any other historical sources, such as letters, correspondence, diaries, contemporary records, or other documents. It is now understood, although not always practiced carefully by historians, that these more common historical sources are socially constructed documents, open to the same concerns of bias that are often charged against oral history records (Thompson, 2000).

There are some distinctive advantages to oral history as evidence. The oral form itself has advantages, as it provides fuller record than a plain written text, giving the hearer (or reader of a transcript) a better sense of the person and the confidence or tentativeness of statements (p. 126). It is also a living record of an event – letters and journals cannot be queried for clarifications or questioned about possible inaccuracies – interviewers can effectively engage in conversation with the participants, leading to better or more complete understandings of the events of the past and their meaning to the participants (p. 172). Most importantly, oral history interviews allow one to interact with participants in such a way as to tap into their own “retrospective insights”, to give them an opportunity to assess their own history (p. 172). The study of memory and history Teaches us that all historical sources are suffused by subjectivity right from the start’, the living presence of those subjective voices from the past also constrains us in our interpretations, allows us, indeed obliges us, to test them against the opinion of those who will always, in essential ways, know more than ourselves. (Thompson, 2000, p. 172)

**Interviews.** In all their complexity, fraught with problems of memory and personal considerations, interviews with the participants of historical events are the essence of oral
history. Interviews bring a living, human dimension to the cold sources of traditional history. There is a “sense of discovery in interviews, a vivid historical dimension: an awareness of the past which is not just known, but personally felt…it is quite different to have received from the remembered past, still alive in the minds of older people of the place (Thompson, 2000, p. 11).

Interviews are a testing ground for theory that has developed from initial historical study. Researchers formulate an interpretation or theory and then find exceptional facts which are difficult to explain away. They find that the people whom they interview do not fit easily into the social types presenting by the preliminary reading. They need facts, or people, or records which prove tantalizingly elusive. They encounter problems of bias, contradiction, and interpretation of evidence. Above all, they are brought back from the grand patterns of written history to the awkwardly individual human lives which are its basis. (Thompson, 2000, p. 12)

Interviews are the idiographic heart of oral history research, grounding all that is done in the particular. Any interpretive movement to generalize must be firmly rooted in the lives of those who are interviewed. **A shared authority.** A strong commitment to a certain sense of shared authority flows from this understanding of the importance of recording the voices of the participants and bringing them to a place in the historical record. Michael Frisch (2003) the scholar who coined the phrase in the title of his book, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, emphasizes certain fundamental aspects:

In an important sense, authority is shared in oral history by definition – in the dialogic nature of the interview, in the history-making offered by both interviewer
and narrator, in the answer to the always appropriate question ‘who is the author of an oral history?’, in the faintly implicit hyphen that reminds us of the connection between the very words author and authority. (p. 113)

This concept has been taken in new directions as a major focus of the study of oral history (Maynes, Pierce & Laslett, 2008). A recent issue of *Oral History Review* featured four articles and two commentaries which reflect on the collaborative dimension of oral history, between researcher and participant. The four articles, neatly reviewed by Linda Shopes (2003), point toward a shared responsibility for social change inherent in the oral history process.

**Memory.** Memory is a central feature of oral history research and one of the areas of concern that calls for careful treatment (Norrick, 2005; Rogers, 1987, 1988; Thompson, 2000; Thomson, 2006; Yow, 2005). The problematic nature of memory is a source of criticism of oral history as an historical research methodology. It is argued that faulty memory leads to inaccurate recollections of events. While studies show memory is “fallible”, there is also considerable evidence that it is “critically - trustworthy” (Yow, 2005, p. 36). In a review of the psychological, anthropological, and historical literature, Valerie Yow (2005) identifies a wide range of factors supporting this thesis, including: the consistency of the factual content of long-held memories, the consistency of feelings and meaning over time, and the role of emotional need, powerful events, and vivid imagery in sustaining memory over time (pp. 35-67).

It is also argued that with the passage of time, accurate recollection is replaced by a more biased account. Yet it has been rather conclusively shown that the concerns around interpretive bias, which afflict all forms of qualitative interviewing, also are present in more traditional historical sources from the very beginning. Documents such as letters, journals, and diaries all have contexts and purposes which influence the way in which events are recorded in them.
(Thompson, 2000). As demonstrated in the evidence section above, it is clear that all historical sources must be weighed carefully. Oral history sources have an important role to play enhancing the historical record (Thompson, 2000).

As has been detailed in the limitations section, studies of civil rights movement activists (Rogers, 1987, 1988) identify a number of memory concerns that must be taken into account, including a tendency to emphasize their own role at the center of dramatic events, rather than describing their more typical daily experiences, and enhancing the religious quality of their experience. Careful probing by the interviewer will be needed to encourage their description of normal activities as well as the more dramatic ones, and to connect the religious dimension of these events with an understanding of their own religious development, as they describe it in relation to their later lives.

**Conflict between Historical Research and Qualitative Approaches**

While oral history methodology shares much in common with other qualitative approaches, it is important to discuss the degree of tension that exists within this research project between the oral history goal of understanding, and to some degree reconstructing, the past, and the qualitative objective of understanding the meaning that participants make of their experiences – both past and present. To appreciate this inherent tension, it is useful to recount briefly the development of oral history. The beginnings of oral history were deeply rooted in an empiricist view of history. In the 1948, Allan Nevins from Columbia University started the first modern oral history archive. He was deeply concerned that the advent of modern means of transportation and communication were eliminating the need for the major participants in the important events of the era to record their thoughts in what had always been the staple sources of historical research – diaries, journals, and extensive correspondence. The goal of oral history was to
produce new textual sources, through the transcription of oral history interviews, in order to capture this source material for future research (Ritchie, 2003; Sharpless, 2006; Grele, 2006).

From fairly early on it was realized that sources resulting from oral history were unique as historical sources in several ways: they relied on the memory of the participants at some distance from the events; they were the product of the “social relations of the interview”; and they were the result of the direct involvement of historians in the creation of texts, yielding sources that the historians (or others) would later analyze (Grele, 2006, p.54). Yet it was still rather naively assumed that, through proper interview techniques, the effects of these “problems” could be minimized (Grele, 2006).

In contrast to this empiricist-oriented archival approach to oral history, an “activist” approach also emerged, primarily in Europe. It was deeply connected to the new social history, with its concern to document the voices of underrepresented groups – the working class and the poor, ethnic and racial minorities, women, and others. The vision of this approach was to be able to gather history in its “pure” form, “directly from the people without the intervening ideology of the professional caste of historians and sociologists. The radicalism of oral history lay in the fact that it gave a voice to the people themselves” (Grele, 2006, p. 55). Rather than attempting to neutralize the impact of the interviewer-participant relationship, it celebrated this role, with an emphasis on consciousness-raising and political mobilization (Grele, 2006).

In an essay reviewing the popular and influential book *Hard Times* by Studs Terkel, historian Michael Frisch (1979) critiques these two points of view and points the way toward a third approach. He argues that neither of these approaches adequately addresses the complexity of oral history. As Terkel himself states “This is a memory book, rather than one of hard fact and precise statistic” (Frisch, 1979, p. 74). Oral historians cannot create new sources of *objective*
history, nor can they subjectively promote the remembering of past events just as they were. Instead, oral history should bring memory to the center of investigation, with its complex intersecting relationship to experience and history (Frisch, 1979; Grele, 2006). Frisch (1979) raises several questions that help researchers approach this complex relationship:

What happens to experience on the way to becoming memory? What happens to experience on the way to becoming history? As an era of intense collective experience recedes into the past, what is the relationship of memory to historical generalization? These questions, so basic to thinking about how culture and individuality interact over time, are the sort of questions which oral history is peculiarly, perhaps uniquely, able to penetrate. (p. 75)

Borrowing from the social sciences, oral historians now refer to this complex situation with the term intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity recognizes the creative role of both the interviewer and participant in shaping the narrative of the oral history, as well as the different hermeneutical or interpretive dimensions. The participant is describing a time and place removed from the setting of the interview – yet the participants’ retelling is also shaped by the concerns of the present setting, their life experiences, and the way in which the culture more broadly remembers the events that are being narrated (Grele, 2006; Maynes, Pierce & Laslett, 2008).

**Background of the Researcher**

In doing qualitative research or oral history, it is important to consider the background of the researcher in relation to the project. I came to this project with a number of important connections with this subject. First, I worked for 5 years in the library at Union Theological Seminary, making me well aware of the history, context, and the importance of the institution. This experience helps me to imagine the setting in which SIM students studied and the
environment that nurtured their activism. Second, I approached this research with a deep interest in exploring the positive connections between religious and theological education and social activism. A major motivation for my study was to explore the relevance of such education in the face of a contemporary society dominated by notions of the clash between conservative or fundamentalist religion and modern society. Third, I was raised in an almost exclusively white, middle and working class environment. The city I grew up in – Clifton, New Jersey – was situated thirteen miles west of New York City, wedged between a larger industrial city, Paterson, with large African American, Middle Eastern, and Hispanic populations, and Passaic, a smaller city with significant populations of Black and Hispanic residents. Yet, my high school graduating class of 1,000 had one African American student. It was only after leaving Clifton that I came to realize that restrictive housing policies had kept the city’s population homogenous. Fourth, as a practicing Christian with a theological education, I am predisposed to understand the religious motivations behind the social activism of SIM participants. Indeed, some of my own motivation in doing this study has been to give voice to the positive contribution that more liberally-oriented Christians can make to the religion-politics dialogue which I described above. Also, my theological training in liberation theology, such as Gustavo Gutierrez’ *Theology of Liberation*, and in Biblical scholarship influenced by radical Christian traditions, such as John Howard Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus*, prepared me to analyze the interactions between Christianity and politics.

**Participant Selection**

Central to most qualitative research is the use of purposive samples. A purposive sample is one that is chosen on its “relevance to the research question, analytical framework, and explanation or account being developed in the research” (Schwandt, 2007). This enables the researcher to select information-rich cases for the purpose of in-depth, idiographic learning. This
sampling method enables the researcher to help participants to explore events, ideas, and themes in depth, in order to understand how the participant has made meaning of their experiences (Patton, 2002). In this research project, purposive sampling enabled me to select participants whose experiences in the Student Interracial Ministry appeared to have had a powerful impact upon their thinking. It also allowed me to attempt to locate participants who have reflected on the interactions between their theological education and their civil rights work.

The pool of potential participants was limited to the surviving members of the group of students who were participants in the Student Interracial Ministry. In order for the participants to have a shared educational context, it was decided to limit participants in the study to SIM members who attended Union Theological Seminary. This group was identified through a number of steps. First, the total group of participants was identified from records in the Student Interracial Ministry archive in the Burke Library of Union Theological Seminary in New York and a database of these participants was created, including access points for gender, denomination, place of birth, age, degree program, year(s) of participation in SIM, and other factors. This information was gathered and input from the Alumni Directory, 1836-1970 of Union Theological Seminary, and other sources. It was determined that 234 individuals participated in SIM from 1960 to 1968, with 81 attending Union Seminary.

Once this broad group had been preliminarily determined, the next stage of the selection process could begin. Participants in SIM were required to write reports of their experience. The SIM archives have a large collection of these research reports (although many students did not complete this requirement), providing this study with an important source for identifying information-rich cases. Extensive investigation of historical studies of the civil rights movement and broad internet searching, also led to the identification of a strong group of interview
candidates. Initial analysis of these varied sources yielded a group of some 30 people who looked like they would be good interview candidates. The next step was to obtain current contact information for as many participants in the list as possible.

Rather than just contact candidates from this initial group of 30, it was decided to send a brief survey to as many Union SIM participants as possible. Arrangements were made with the seminary alumni/alumnae office to prepare a mailing. In order to protect the privacy of people in the Union database, the seminary simply verified the names for which they had current addresses and then put mailing labels on packets that were prepared by the researcher and mailed them to SIM participants. Of the 81 possible names, 6 were deceased, twelve lacked current address information, 38 surveys were returned (including 3 by email), and 25 did not respond. This gave a wonderful return rate of 60% for the 63 surveys that were successfully mailed.

All but a very few of the people returning surveys were willing to be interviewed, providing the study with a rich pool of possible participants. In developing the sample for this study, the following criteria were used, with a target goal of selecting ten participants. It should consist of a diverse group of participants based on race, gender, regional background, Christian denominational affiliation, and the time at which participants were involved in the movement. Having both black and white participants is important, in order to see if SIM was a valuable experience for African American and white students. Having a degree of gender balance is important, because it is well established that the experiences of white women in the civil rights movement often were quite different than that of white or black men (Evans, 1980; Curry, et al., 2000). Including participants from both the South and North is important, as attitudes toward student participants were influenced by resentment of northern intrusion into southern affairs (Evans, 1980; Dittmer, 1994). The wide array of Christian denominations has a complex and
varied history in regard to race relations in America, so including participants from a variety of denominations across the spectrum was an important consideration. Finally, the study sought to include participants from the full range of years that SIM existed. This is important because of the way in which the civil rights movement’s attitudes toward white participation, along with the role played by explicitly religious values, changed as the sixties progressed. With the increasing influence of Black Power advocates, white and explicitly religious participation became more marginalized (Evans, 1980).

In the end, almost all of the selection criteria were able to be met. As the returned surveys came in, it soon became clear that a significant number of people now lived in three contiguous states (North Carolina, Tennessee, and Ohio) that were close enough to the researcher’s home in Pennsylvania to facilitate an interview trip during Spring Break in March 2010. These possibilities could be supplemented with several additional candidates in New York State. In the end, twelve participants agreed to be interviewed with the following demographic characteristics: 2 women and 10 men; 5 Methodists, 2 Southern Baptists, 2 United Church of Christ, 2 Presbyterians, and 1 Evangelical United Brethren; 6 from Northern or Midwestern states and 6 from the South; and a good proportional representation by year of participation, more heavily weighted to the later years. Six of the respondents had been on the initial list of 30 prospective participants, based on review of the archival documents. All but one (for whom no documents were available) had been identified as a potential interviewee in a broader list. The only disappointing issue was that no African Americans responded to the survey. As far as can be determined, only four of the 75 surviving Union participants in SIM were African Americans. Through the mediation of one of the first interviewees, additional attempts were made to contact two of the four participants, but unfortunately this was unsuccessful.
Data Collection Procedures

There were three primary data collection methods that were used in the study: background research and documents, a brief survey, and the interviews with the participants themselves.

Background Research and Documents

Before data collection could begin, an extensive period of research was necessary in order to understand the settings in which participants in SIM were involved. This included detailed background research into the civil rights movement, with a particular focus on church and student involvement. This research included in-depth study of the relevant documents in the archives of the Student Interracial Ministry, which are located in the Burke Library of Union Theological Seminary in New York, Columbia University Libraries. They include 13.5 linear feet of archival materials, which include student and organizational reports, correspondence, publications, minutes, and other documentation. Central to the collection are the student field reports. Upon completion of her or his SIM experience, the student participant was required to write up a field report describing their experience. While a substantial number of students did not complete the required reports, many did and they provided an essential collection of primary source materials for this research. They were essential to the process of identifying broad themes across the diverse experiences of the participants, as well as serving as valuable sources for identifying participants who would be good interview candidates.

In addition to the archives of SIM, the microfilm of the weekly student newspaper, The Grain of Salt, proved to be an invaluable source for reconstructing the history of SIM and for identifying additional primary source material written by a number of participants. It also served as an important source of triangulation to verify the events described by the participants. In
addition, several SIM participants lent me their own personal archival documents from their time in SIM. The most significant of these collections were an extensive collection of photographs taken by Don Steffa and an extensive collection of personal notes and other items lent by George McClain. Additionally, through the assistance of Larry Blackman, I learned about an extensive diary transcript that had been done by Joseph and Embry Howell from their time in Southwest Georgia, who also graciously sent me a copy of the diary. This, along with Gurdon Brewster’s published memoir, *No Turning Back* (2007), provided invaluable assistance in filling out the picture of the SIM experience.

These collections from the time period provided a rich record of the students’ participation in the Student Interracial Ministry (SIM). Yet to get a full understanding of the participants experiences in SIM, more information would need to be gathered in the form of a survey and the in-depth qualitative interviews that would form the foundation for the “thick description” that provides the reader with “rich, detailed, and concrete descriptions of people and places” (Patton, 2002, 438).

**Surveys**

A brief two-side survey was sent to the whole participant pool. The survey (see Appendix B) covered basic demographic information (including race, gender, denomination, home town), details about their SIM placement, brief description of their SIM activities; brief description of their occupations/positions since SIM, willingness to participate in the study and be contacted, and willingness to share documentation from their time in SIM. This provided an invaluable overview, increased the detail and accuracy of the participant database, and helped in participant selection.
Oral History Interviews

Oral history interviews are recorded “memories and personal commentaries of historical significance” (Ritchie, 2003, p. 19) that are the result of in-depth interviewing by a well-prepared interviewer (Yow, 2005; Ritchie, 2003). They take the form of personal autobiographical narratives, setting particular events in the context of the participants’ lives. They were appropriate for this study because they gave the participants the opportunity to talk about the significance of their experiences in the Student Interracial Ministry in relation to their religious upbringing, theological education, and later life development.

While the student reports provided some indications of the kinds of potentially transformative learning experiences that students had, in-depth, oral history interviews are the main source of information concerning these learning experiences. The interviews used an interview guide (see Appendix B) to provide sufficient structure to gather data on a core group of questions, yet served as a flexible method that will permitted one to probe more deeply in relation to specific topics of interest to each interviewee. In a few cases, the interviewer shared copies of participants SIM report with them to serve as a memory prompt. It had been hoped to do this with all participants, but the logistics of getting copies made of the appropriate archival materials proved to be a barrier that discouraged this idea.

The in-depth interviews that are appropriate to oral history methodology have a number of features that are relevant to this study.

Interactivity. The oral history interview is an interactive format in which the interviewer can carefully examine an issue in dialogue with the participant. Rather than being limited to the inferences which can be drawn by the interviewer from the historical record, the oral history
interview is an opportunity to explore those ideas directly with the participant. This allows the story to be shaped by the interviewee rather than by the researcher alone (Yow, 2005).

Making the documentation understandable. This interactivity is the mechanism through which the participants bring the historical documents to life, infusing them with the participant’s meaning and understanding. This provides the researcher with the vital perspective of the way in which the participant viewed the events that are being studied - from the current perspective of the participants. Like any other historical evidence, these in-depth interviews must be critically evaluated from a historical perspective (Yow, 2005).

Understanding personal relationships. One of the most difficult tasks of historical research is that of understanding personal relationships. How does a particular document fit into a web of relationships and community? The in-depth interview is an ideal vehicle for exploring this personal nexus. Through detailed preparation and careful listening, the interviewer can encourage the interviewee to explore these relational dimensions. As trust builds between the interviewer and participant, the interviewer can skillfully help the participant to paint a narrative picture of the relationships important to the events being described, making understanding of the events much richer (Yow, 2005).

In the specific case of the Student Interracial Ministry, this provided an excellent opportunity to better understand the connections between the field experience in the South and the seminary community back in New York City. It was a chance to explore how these ongoing relationships supported or failed to support the participants.

Seeing change over time. The oral history interview enables the researcher to see how participants’ ideas have developed over time. By combining preliminary research with in-depth interviews, it is possible to compare the participants’ perspectives at different points in their
lives. This study is particularly fortunate to have access to rich personal narratives that were written by the participants following their field experience. These served both as historical sources for the interviewer and, when available, as excellent memory prompts for the interviewee – who was able to read these narratives in preparation for the interviews as well as dialogue with them during the interview process itself.

**Interpreting the historical record.** This technique of using the historical record in combination with the interview process is an excellent example of the way in which oral history interviews can aid in the interpretation of the historical record. Although it is not always literally so true as in this case, in-depth interviews can bring life to otherwise lifeless documents. They provide the rich human context for understanding the documentation more completely (Yow, 2005).

**Providing psychological depth.** An oral history interview that takes a life-history perspective provides an important avenue for evaluating the participants’ experience in the context of their life history and psychological development. This is vital for the current study in that it strives to examine the role that the experiences in the Student Interracial Ministry played in relation to the participant’s faith development.

Several factors make the oral history approach different from other in-depth interview methodologies. The first involves the necessity of combining the interview with historical research (Yow, 2005; Ritchie, 2003). The interview needs to be set in its historical context and compared with the available historical data. Indeed, oral historians view the creation of an oral history as the production of a kind of primary source – one that needs to be evaluated as one would evaluate any historical source. This study is particularly well suited to combine standard historical sources with the interview content. The most important archival materials are the field
reports written by participants following their participation in SIM. These provide essential historical context for conducting and understanding the content of the interviews themselves.

Another unique feature of oral history interviews is that the text of the interviews, whether transcriptions, audio recordings, video recordings, or a combination of these, must be placed in an archive to make them accessible to other researchers (Yow, 2005; Ritchie, 2003). This involves negotiating release statements and permissions with interviewees, and locating an archive that is interested in taking and maintaining the oral histories that you have produced. The video recordings of the interviews, along with written transcripts of the interviews, will be placed in the SIM archives at Union.

**Data Analysis**

Oral history interpretation involves a basic decision about what form the interpretation will take. Will the oral histories be approached as collections of personal testimonies or will they be analyzed in broader biographical, historical, and social contexts (Thompson, 2000)? This study will analyze the oral histories in the context of the life and faith development of the participants as well as in the setting of the civil rights movement.

There are four major forms in which oral history interpretation takes place: the single life-story narrative, a collection of stories, narrative analysis, and reconstructive cross analysis (Thompson, 2000; see also, Yow, 2005). These approaches, while having separate features, are often used in a complementary fashion within a study (Thompson, 2000). This research project has two interpretive focuses – on the individual life-stories and cross-analysis between the stories. The central unit of analysis in this study is the individual. These oral histories explore, in-depth, the meaning that the SIM experience had in the lives of the individuals in the study. Interpretation of the individual interviews takes the form of narrative analysis:
The focus of this approach is on the interview itself as an oral text, and what can be learnt from the language, its themes and repetitions, and its silences. It is above all concerned with how the narrator experienced, remembered, and retold his or her life-story, and what light this may throw on the consciousness of wider society. (Thompson, 2000, p. 270)

Cross analysis was employed in order to try to understand the commonalities and differences between the experiences of the different participants. This analysis is based on the use of a well produced interview guide. Each interview transcript was read carefully, with interview questions serving as an initial common structure for comparing the narratives. New topics headings were created as common themes and sub-themes were identified (Yow, 2005). Detailed cross-analysis compared the varieties of kinds of responses to each theme. Careful attention was given to the roles that those themes played in the individual life stories. Important insight was gleaned from skillful application of these two movements – within and between individual narratives.

Data analysis focused on study of the interview transcripts in relation to the student reports and other historical data. At the heart of such analysis was the attempt to understand the perspectives of the participants – the ways in which they made meaning of their experience. This perspective, with interpretation flowing from the data rather than being artificially imposed on it by too rigid a structure of questions or theories (Patton, 2002) assisted me as the researcher to keep in check any interpretive theories that I brought to the data. This fundamental orientation to the data was expertly modeled by Mitchell Duneier, in his study *Sidewalk*, when he used his in-depth experience living and working with street vendors to question the established “broken window” theory of previous researchers (Duneier, 1999).
Considerable attention was given to how the participants understood their experience in SIM. In particular, they were encouraged to discuss the ways in which these experiences affected their meaning perspectives concerning race. Aspects of transformative learning theory were applied and tested to see if it helped to understand the participants’ experience. Particular attention was given to the ways in which the participants understand their experiences in relation to their theological education. Were there aspects of the education settings in SIM that aided learning? How did they understand this in relation to their classroom experience?

Participants were also asked to talk about their religious and spiritual background and development. When appropriate, Fowler’s Stages of Faith Development theory was used to help understand these connections between their SIM experience and their lives. Did the participants understand their SIM experiences as furthering their faith development? If so, in what ways? Has the experience continued to play a role in their ongoing faith development?

**Verification**

Qualitative oral history methods call for strong measures to provide verification of the study and to ensure the overall trustworthiness of the research. This verification and trustworthiness is based on four qualities of the research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It should be noted that this specific terminology is not used generally in oral history research. Since primarily this study is an educational and social science research project which is using oral history methodology, it seems appropriate to translate the oral history approach into the standard qualitative research categories. While there is not a specific oral history source that approaches verification in this way, several general ones are helpful (Charlton, Myers, & Sharpless, 2006; Maynes, Pierce & Laslett, 2008; McMahan & Rogers, 1994; Oral History Association, 2000; Thompson, 2000). Each of these qualitative categories will be connected with oral history research sources below.
Credibility

Credibility is the fundamental criterion of trustworthiness, from which all the others flow. It testifies as to whether or not a research study adequately represents the complex human situations that it seeks to describe and understand (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is most important that the study makes sense of this reality for the participants who are being studied. Qualitative research recognizes that such participants are co-constructors of this multi-layered reality through their own participation, perceptions and retelling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A credible study will also be believable to a broader readership, based on its accurate representation to the participants.

Implementation of the credibility criterion involves a two-fold task: designing the study in such a way as to enhance the likelihood of producing a credible study, and demonstrating this credibility to the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Three important techniques are used to strengthen the credibility of the study: prolonged engagement, source triangulation, and peer debriefing. Typically, prolonged engagement involves extensive time spent in a community that is being studied. In this study, that emersion in a community happened through in-depth historical research (Morrissey, 2006; Ritchie, 2003). By means of extensive preparatory study, the researcher became knowledgeable about the various worlds which the Student Interracial Ministry participants inhabited, including the theological seminary setting, student civil rights activities, African American churches, and life in the Jim Crow South.

This deep engagement in the world of the participants was enhanced through rich source triangulation. Source triangulation involves the use of multiple types of sources in order to confirm that the data from one type of source is providing reliable information – testing for consistency between results (Patton, 2002; Okihiro, 1981). In this study, the principal type of
source is oral history interviews. The others types of sources used for triangulation include a wide range of documentary evidence. The most important of these are research reports that were written by the participants following their experience in SIM. Other sources that provide triangulation include additional materials from institutional archives (i.e. Union Theological Seminary) such as SIM records, diaries and correspondence, other oral history interviews, contemporary news and other accounts, and photographs. These sources are used in several ways. The most important one is found in the preparation for interviews (Larson, 2006). The researcher thoroughly read the available primary and secondary documentation in order to ask intelligent and probing questions, as well as to be able to evaluate inconsistencies in interviewees’ statements. Thorough familiarity with the sources also allowed the researcher to make accurate connections between the interviewees’ experience and other events happening in SIM, the broader civil rights movement, and the larger historical context.

The principal means of demonstrating the credibility of the study to participants is through member checks. Member checks are a fundamental component of oral history methodology, with their insistence on understanding oral history interviews as co-creations of the participants and researcher. For many oral historians, this involves a commitment to a basic form of member check – the ethical right that interview participants have to review interview transcripts (Mazé, 2006; Shopes, 2006; Yow, 2005). When the researcher transcribes an oral history interview, moving it from an oral to written format, the participant has right to review the material. This is an important opportunity for the participant to address problems in transcription, clarify unclear ideas, and potentially expand on aspects that were not addressed adequately in the interview (Shopes, 2006; Yow, 2005). This review process is particularly important due to the
permanent nature of oral history transcripts and the commitment involved in adding to the historical record.

While transcripts of each interview have been produced and were used for thematic analysis, the formal stage of oral history transcript production, for deposit in the SIM archives, will follow the completion of the dissertation. As part of that process, transcripts will be shared with participants for their feedback. Video copies of their interviews will also be provided to each participant.

A key stage in this study was the opportunity to share the biographical accounts found in chapters five through seven. The research shared drafts of these chapters with participants and received extremely useful feedback which was incorporated into the biographies. This process was important in order to ensure that the growing understanding of the experience of the participants is a credible description and construction of that experience. While participants may not always agree with every aspect of what is written, getting their feedback is an essential step in articulating their experience in a credible fashion.

Transferability

While credibility addresses that degree to which the study adequately represents the specific experience and understanding of the participants, transferability addresses the question of the applicability of this study to other relevant participants and settings. Fundamentally, qualitative research answers this question by asserting, in a somewhat counterintuitive fashion, that the transferability of the study to other situations outside the study lies in deeper and more comprehensive attention to the current situation being studied. The richer and more complex the description of the specific situation, the more opportunities there may be to consider the application of this learning to other situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
At the heart of this complex, idiographic description is purposeful sampling (Yow, 2005). It is very important for the researcher to select participants that will represent the breadth of background and experience. In the current study, this meant selecting SIM participants who served in a variety of settings, from urban churches to rural social service agencies. It was important to include male and female participants from a variety of denominational and social backgrounds. At the heart of this process was the careful description of the specific contexts of their SIM experience, and the articulation of their own background and story. This rich description can then form the basis of later attempts to make connections between this study and new research contexts.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Having established criteria for demonstrating the internal credibility of the study and its potential for external applicability, the final two criteria address the way in which careful procedures and logical approaches have been followed (dependability), and how provision has been made for other researchers to be able to test the interpretations and conclusions that have been drawn from the data (confirmability).

Oral history research is well suited to produce dependable studies. Careful oral history procedures provide for very rigorous documentation of each step in the research process. The various documents include research files – which document the exploration of the historical context of each interview; narrator files – which document the relationships with each interview participant; donor contracts and consent forms – which establish the terms of permanent ownership and deposit of materials in an archive; photographic files – which may be available to enhance the understanding of the participants experience; and interview transcripts – which form the primary data source for the research (Fogerty, 2006).
The basic provision for confirmability resides in the creation of a permanent archive of the interview materials. This is a feature that distinguishes oral history interviews from other forms of in-depth qualitative interviews. Since its inception as a field, oral history has sought to enhance the permanent historical record through the recording and transcription of the oral testimony of historical participants. Key to the permanence and accessibility to other researchers is the deposit of the materials in a publically accessible archive (Mazé, 2006; Ritchie, 2003; Shopes, 2006; Yow, 2005).

Confirmability is also strengthened through the triangulation of theoretical perspectives. In this study, the use of transformative learning theory, with its usefulness in understanding individual learning experiences in specific contexts; intergroup contact theory, with its emphasis on intergroup and interpersonal relations; and the use faith development theory, with its emphasis on transformative experience over the course of a life-time, help to keep a balance between individual experiences, group experiences, and their context in a person’s ongoing development. This also involves a constant recognition that the theoretical perspectives which a scholar brings to oral history interviews will influence the interviews and the way in which the interviews are interpreted (Larson, 2006). Both dependability and confirmability are enhanced through source triangulation, which is a regular feature of this study. In particular, use of the reports written by the participants at the time of their SIM experiences adds greatly to these features of the study.
PART TWO

PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR CONTEXTS

Part II of this dissertation is made up of Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, which introduce the participants, provide biographical sketches, and explore the significance of the different types of setting in which the Student Interracial Ministry (SIM) took place. The sketches describe the participant’s upbringing, education, religious background, racial attitude development, and sense of vocation. They detail their experience at Union, including participation in social activism. Since their experiences in the Student Interracial Ministry will be the subject of Part III, which is made up of Chapters Eight and Nine, only fairly brief descriptions will be given concerning their placements in SIM. Finally the sketches will overview the work, activities and interests of the participants from the time they left Union to the present.

In order to give you a nuanced feel for role that the Student Interracial Ministry played in the life experience of the participants, Chapter Five begins this section by providing detailed biographies for two participants, George McClain and Ruth Brandon. McClain simultaneously served with the Alabama Council on Human Rights and in a church setting, and Ruth Brandon was in a church setting during her first SIM placement (1964) and in the Southwest Georgia Project (1965).

Chapter Six discusses the importance of the individual church setting for SIM. Six participants in this study served in SIM placements in individual churches. This chapter provides biographies for four of these participants (John Collins, Charles Helms, Bud Walker, and Tom Boomershine). Chapter Seven explores SIM placements in settings outside the individual church, and provides a brief history of the Southwest Georgia Project (SWGP), the Delta Ministry (DM),
and the role of the Ecumenical Institute (EI). It includes biographies for six participants (Larry Blackman, Barbara Cox, Mac Hulslander, Don Steffa, Bill Troy, and Ashley Wiltshire).

Throughout the eight years of the Student Interracial Ministry, 234 different seminary students served in some 263 placements, with some students serving in multiple summer positions (i.e. 1965 and 1966) or in various intern year-summer combinations. These SIM locations can be divided into four types: individual assistant minister positions in churches, placements in civil rights organizations or other activist groups, team ministry projects, and teaching positions in historically black colleges. Eighty-percent of these positions were summer assignments, while 20% were year-long internships. Table 5.1 provides a useful summary of placements by type.

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<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team Project</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td>263</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>72</td>
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The twelve Student Interracial Ministry students interviewed for this study served in several church settings, a team ministry project, a civil rights advocacy organization – the Alabama Council on Human Relations (ACHR), two direct action civil rights programs: the Southwest Georgia Project (SWGP) and the Delta Ministry (DM) in Mississippi, and an intern year as a professor at historically black Spelman College in Atlanta. Their participation in SIM ranged from the founding of SIM in the summer of 1960 to being part of the largest number of SIM students in the summer of 1966. These twelve students served in six states: Georgia (5),
Mississippi (2), Alabama (2), North Carolina (2), South Carolina (1), and New York (1). One student, Ruth Brandon, did summer stints with SIM in two states.

The major source for the substance of these biographies is the individual’s oral history interview. This source is cited only when quoted – it is otherwise assumed; when cited, it takes the format of the interviewee’s last name, for example: (Brandon). In some cases, additional primary and secondary sources have been used; these are cited as appropriate throughout, i.e. (Brandon, 1997). When additions or corrections have been made to the biographies in consultation with the interviewee, these are cited as personal communications, i.e. (B. Walker, personal communication, August 22, 2010); if a particular sentence or paragraph of the biography draws on the interview and additional sources, both the interview and additional sources will be cited, i.e. (Cox; Murray, 2004).
CHAPTER FIVE

PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES – IN-DEPTH

Chapter Five provides a nuanced feel for the role that the Student Interracial Ministry played in the lives of those participated in its programs. It does this through a detailed look at the lives of two participants, George McClain and Ruth Brandon. These participants were selected because their involvement in SIM had the most breadth and represents the different types and periods of involvement in SIM, as well as providing a female and male perspective on SIM participation. George McClain (1963) served in an early direct action project with the Alabama Council on Human Rights, but created his own church-based experience as well; Ruth Brandon served two summers in SIM, in a church setting during her first summer (1964) and in the first year of SIM participation in the Southwest Georgia Project (SWGP), in 1965. For both Ruth and George, the Student Interracial Ministry had a very significant part in the development of their racial attitudes and their life-long commitment to social justice concerns.

George McClain (Birmingham, Alabama – Summer 1963)

This extended biography of George McClain is divided is organized with the following sections: Upbringing and School Days, Union Theological Seminary, Student Interracial Ministry, Back at Union, and After Union.

Upbringing and School Days

George McClain was born in Berne, Indiana; then by the time he was ready for school, his family moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana, 120 miles northeast of Indianapolis. His father was a school teacher (who taught George geometry) and who later became a principal at several schools. His mother raised George and his younger sister, not working outside the home until after he had left for college. He lived in a modest middle-class home and his family modeled a
strong work ethic – his father had extra jobs in the summer and, George remembers, in a hat shop on Monday evenings when he was young, though his father’s work during the academic year was with the school. “Firm, fair, and consistent” summarizes his father’s approach to teaching or administration and was part of the strong conservative Midwestern Republicanism in which George was raised. A self-confessed political junkie from a young age, as well as a devout Methodist, George actively participating in youth groups and youth choir and had decided by his sophomore year in high school to go into the ministry. With the advent of McCarthyism, these interests came into tension. As he followed hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), as report in U.S. News and World Report, he was disconcerted by the interrogation of a major Methodist figure, Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, wondering why they were going after him.

In terms of racial experience, McClain had very little exposure to African Americans growing up. All the black students attended a different high school, with the exception of a few young people – George remembers a black family who had several successful athletes, one of whom later became a teacher, but was unable to find work in the Fort Wayne school system, due to racial discrimination.

George graduated second in his class and got a scholarship to attend Yale University (1956-1960). He was very active in the Wesley Foundation (Methodist Student Movement) and enjoyed reading the provocative articles in Motive Magazine, the leading student Christian magazine of its day (Powers, 2003), and attending lectures and chapel talks by prominent figures such as the ethicist James Gustafson and the theologian Paul Tillich. The Methodist Student Movement (MSM) was an important source of information about “the major social issues of the day, especially race” (McClain). In 1957 (or 1958), George attended the 6th quadrennial
convention of the MSM at which he remembers hearing speakers addressing racial issues (G. McClain, personal communication, August 30, 2010). As the delegate for the New England MSM, he attended the Christian Citizenship Seminar at the United Nations and in Washington. This was a powerful program in which he was “profoundly impressed by speakers such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Hubert Humphrey, and Eduardo Mondlane, future leader of the Mozambican liberation movement” (G. McClain, personal communication, August 30, 2010).

Finally, William Sloane Coffin, one of most significant protestant activists of the second half of the twentieth century, came to Yale as chaplain in 1958. Coffin would use this position as a pulpit for his civil rights and anti-war activism (Obituary, 2006), and it is clear that Coffin began right away to train a new generation of leaders, by once a month inviting the student leaders to his house for conversation.

As a junior at Yale, McClain began to develop a more active political presence. He travelled from being a bystander in the Fall of 1956, when Richard Nixon and Adlai Stevenson gave speeches on campus, to an active participant in 1959, working to encourage Adlai Stevenson to run again for president. In the summer of 1959, George began to get involved in the movement to push the General Conference of the Methodist Church to abolish the Central Jurisdiction. For his senior thesis, he had Sydney Ahlstrom as an advisor (Ahlstrom would become the leading American church historian) and he wrote on the topic “The Negro in the Methodist Church, 1939-1960”, an in-depth study of the Central Jurisdiction – “our own internal apartheid” (McClain). McClain also took other coursework that was influential to his thinking, including a course in African History (unusual at the time), as well as a course in post-Civil War American history, in which he read C. Vann Woodward’s now classic book, *The Strange Career*
of Jim Crow (1955). This course led him to a new personal identification with progressivism and the New Deal rather than Midwest Republicanism.

Between junior and senior years at college, George McClain was an intern at the Social Security Administration in Baltimore. While doing this job, he participated in a Methodist summer college fellowship group. This would provide a model for later action that he took in Alabama. As McClain was now ready to go off to Union Seminary, he had firmly established the patterns that would hold for his whole career, patterns that he found in his mentor Richard Celeste, who was president of the Wesley Foundation at Yale the year before George held the same position, and who would become the Governor of Ohio and Director of the Peace Corps:

what he (Celeste) represented was somebody deeply involved in the Methodist church … as a religious person and deeply involved in progressive politics, and this [was] the late ‘50s - so this was not the usual kind of thing. (McClain)

Union Theological Seminary

George McClain chose to come to Union for seminary, largely because of George W. “Bill” Webber’s book God’s Colony in Man’s World (1960), which was about the pioneering urban ministry of the East Harlem Protestant Parish. Being an avid reader of Motive Magazine, McClain was aware of the big trend toward urban ministry. During his first year at Union (1960-61), he applied to work at Webber’s East Harlem Protestant Parish, but wasn’t selected. Instead he ended up working with African American youth for a parish in Hoboken, N.J. that wouldn’t even permit the youth to use the church building – in his next fieldwork assignment, he worked in white suburbia.

In 1961-62, he spent the academic year in Switzerland, studying with Karl Barth and Oscar Cullmann. In his earlier days, Barth had been more radical in political matters – McClain
was struck by Barth’s evenhandedness, refusing to be too harsh on Communism in East Germany. On his return to Union from Switzerland for his Middler year, McClain remembers hanging out at Union with foreign students who were all keenly aware of the civil rights movement. A number of professors made important contributions to this thinking: Robert Lynn in education, John Bennett and Robert McAfee Brown in theology; James Muilenburg and Louis Martyn in Bible. Yet McClain wasn’t active in SIM activities at Union, outside of awareness of SIM through Jim Hartley, who was a hall-mate. But he remained an avid reader of the *New York Times*, and followed things as Union began to respond to the brutal attacks on civil rights protesters in Birmingham in Spring 1963 – with the dogs and fire hoses set on children. A Yale student was supposed to go to Birmingham to work with the Alabama Council on Human Relations, but for some reason backed out. Jim Hartley asked George to go instead:

> But I do look back upon that decision, my being asked by Jim to go – I must have thought about it over night…realizing that that was God’s hand on my shoulder. That was really a very, very, key experience in my life - one that charted my life from there on in ways that I could not have known at that point. (McClain)

**Student Interracial Ministry**

George’s SIM experience (Summer 1963) began with an orientation conference that was held at Oscar McCloud’s (UTS ’61) church in Raleigh. Oscar had been a SIM student (1961) and pastoral supervisor (1962) previously, so he was able to orient students – “learning about crossing the racial divide”. Following the orientation McClain set off for racially-charged Birmingham. His primary responsibility was to work with the Rev. Norman Jimerson at the Alabama Council on Human Relations (ACHR). In this work with ACHR, McClain did bridge-building work with white clergy in the area, including a Presbyterian minister who had signed
the famous letter to Martin Luther King, Jr., which elicited King’s response in his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. This minister was eventually kicked out of his church for insisting that the church be open to all people for worship, including Blacks. McClain explains how this man felt caught between the slow progress happening and the more conservative views of his parishioners. (McClain has a marvelous archive of materials from his summer experience – his notes that he kept from his meetings with white clergy indicate that many clergy, especially the younger ones, felt torn between their own, somewhat liberal, ideas and the opinions of their congregations. Many felt that change would keep coming, if given time.)

George also decided to add another dimension to his work in Birmingham. Since most SIM students were working in local parishes, McClain made arrangements, through Jimerson’s contacts, to serve as an assistant minister to the Rev. Nathaniel Linsey, African American pastor of the Thirgood Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church (and later, senior bishop of the C.M.E. Church). (The C.M.E. Church was established as the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in 1866, when the southern Methodist church “released” its African American members to form their own denomination. This was the southern counterpart to the Negro Conference that was created within the northern Methodist church in 1866, which would become the controversial Central Jurisdiction, when the main southern and northern branches of Methodism reunited in 1939 (Ahlstrom, 1972, p. 708). McClain also lived with Linsey and his family. These arrangements gave McClain a similar experience to that of the other SIM students who were working in churches.

George assisted in worship every Sunday and preached when Rev. Linsey was away on vacation. He also led the Saturday morning high school group, ran the vacation church school, and went with the pastor to visit parishioners in their homes and hospitals. The most innovative
activity that McClain undertook was the creation of a summer interracial group, made up of college students from the area. He wrote to regional Wesley Foundation directors to identify names of potential students. He modeled this after the summer fellowship group in which he participated in Baltimore. In essence, McClain created his own SIM experience for local college students, which even included some Black Muslim participants.

Throughout the summer, McClain had a very powerful experience of being warmly accepted, which put to rest his own sense of anxiety – both from “inherited absorbed racial prejudice from the culture” as well from a general sense of not knowing how he would be received among those who were different from him. George described how the effect of his own presence as a white man in this Black church community was

a phenomenon for many of those people, who…had not had relationships with white people on any kind of egalitarian basis. And that was kind of awesome to experience. To be this ambassador of what ought to be reality. (McClain)

McClain also had some fearful moments as he literally got a close-up look at the violence of segregation, by going with Rev. Linsey to visit the bombed home of Arthur Shores. Shores’ home was the target of bombers in August and September 1963 due to his work to desegregate Alabama schools. The second bombing on Sept. 4 followed the admission of two black children to a formerly all-white elementary school.

George was powerfully impressed by the civil rights mass meetings. He still sees them as model of what the New Testament church was like and what the contemporary church ought to be like.

it was…the Church gathering…for inspiration by the Word, spoken and in song and in prayer and then preparing to move out of the church to witness in whatever way. And
then…gathering back and having your wounds salved and receiving encouragement again that this is the way, this is the truth, this is the life that matters, and we’re doing what God wants, and [even though] it’s risky…we’re together in it. It makes New Testament church language make sense in a way that…you just don’t experience otherwise.

A highlight for McClain was when he had the opportunity to give the main 45 minute talk at one of the mass meetings, with civil rights leader James Bevel and attorney C.B. King in attendance.

McClain also travelled to the March on Washington as one of two white people on the six buses from Birmingham. George poignantly remembers hearing Martin Luther King, Jr.’s message:

> And the part that still brings tears to my eyes is when he even talks about his dream that one day in Alabama…little white boys and girls and black boys and girls would walk hand in hand. Of course, I…[myself had] organized the vacation church school and [had been] rolling on the lawn with Linsey’s little kids. (McClain; G. McClain, personal communication, August 30, 2010)

While moved by that glorious vision, he also knew that, coming soon, there would be challenges to the attempt to integrate schools:

> and you knew…the barriers that would have to fall for that to take place. They shut down the playgrounds rather than integrate them under court order. Or libraries. It’s the same way…there was the whole thing about school integration coming up for that fall under court order…Was it going to work, would the kids be safe? (McClain)

George had a number of learning experiences that helped him to understand in a better way the reality of segregation and African Americans’ experiences of segregation and prejudice. The process of seeing in person the symbols of segregation, such as “Men”, “Women”, 
“Colored” signs, or requirements to sit in the balcony to watch a movie in the theater, brought clear insight into the absurd reality of segregation, in a way that just reading about it could not convey. Mae Linsey, the minister’s wife, helped George come to grips with the fact that police intimidation, such as that which McClain had seen on television, when the Birmingham police turned the fire hoses on the child protesters, was:

not just an aberration but…[symbolic of] the relationship between blacks and whites in terms of justice and police relations. And I didn’t get it at first. And she – at one point she got mad at me and told me in no uncertain terms…that I was just not getting it and that it was really that way for them and that if I wanted to know what things were really like, then I needed to understand that. (McClain; G. McClain, personal communication, August 30, 2010)

From this McClain learned that the experience of the African Americans he met in Birmingham - “that their experience was just different from mine and that…I brought…a whole raft of experiences and expectations to life that were not true for them. (McClain)”

**Back at Union**

George returned to Union for his senior year (1963-64) to be faced with the horrific news of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church on Sept. 15, and the murder of four girls inside the church. Just a few weeks earlier, Chris McNair, the father of one of the murdered children had taken a commemorative photograph of McClain’s vacation bible school. George attended a memorial service for the girls held in New York City, and was deeply moved when he met Chris McNair again, and heard from McNair a reaffirmation “that we need to be a people of love”.

Following his SIM experience, McClain got much more involved by serving on the SIM committee and working on the process of matching up churches with participants. He was also
part of an innovative academic class. Upon his return from the South, McClain and some other SIM participants approached church history professor Robert Handy and asked him to teach a course on Black Church History. Handy responded by telling them that they probably knew about as much as he did, but he would be willing to have a reading course with them and they would learn together. McClain fondly recalls that “we [were]…assisting a really great historian to integrate that [Black Church history] into his own reading of American church history” (McClain).

**After Union**

Following graduation from Union in the Spring of 1964, George was hired by the Board of Global Ministries of The Methodist Church to be part of a two-person, biracial team that would travel through the South working to integrate the Methodist Student Movement (MSM). When McClain heard about the voter registration project happening in Mississippi that summer, and learned that the National Council of Churches was looking for clergy to be involved, he was able to go, as his MSM position didn’t begin until the fall. So he went to Freedom Summer and was involved in two main activities – he connected with local white clergy to combat the disinformation about Freedom Summer that was being spread, and worked to get African Americans to register for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. In the fall, George and an African American colleague (a different person each semester) travelled for MSM throughout the South and border states in order to get conversation going across racial lines between Methodist student groups and/or other student Christian groups. They worked with the state and local Methodist campus ministry leadership to encourage interracial meetings and events between the Methodist/Christian groups at white and black schools.
After finishing with MSM in 1965, McClain became the pastor of a church in Staten Island. He pushed the congregation to become more deeply involved in the community, working to develop neighborhood drug and action programs, while his wife worked to develop a youth program. He invited an African-American young man he had met in Mississippi and his brother to live with him in the parsonage. The church was largely resistant to these changes. He also became deeply involved in the anti-war movement, starting a chapter of Clergy and Laity Concerned About Vietnam. He sought to share a pastorate with his wife Tilda, an ordained pastor in the UCC, but they were unable to find church support for that. So they began “what was being called a tent-making ministry”. They moved into a poor section of Staten Island, started interracial dialogues, a coffeehouse, and George became the coordinator of the Staten Island Peace Coalition. After three years, upon the recommendation of SIM alum John Collins, McClain became an executive with the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA), and served as its director from 1974 to his retirement in 1998.

The MFSA had deep roots at Union Seminary. Harry Ward was one of its founders in 1907 and led the organization for some 40 years. The MFSA suffered during the Cold War years of the 1950s and only had two active chapters when George arrived. When he retired, there were 30 active chapters across the country. The MFSA serves as an independent, more progressive, social activist wing of the United Methodist Church, whose official social action agency is the General Board of Church and Society in Washington. McClain describes how the major issues that MFSA took up while he was at the helm, naturally flowed out of his SIM experiences, especially MFSA’s deep involvement in the anti-apartheid / disinvestment campaign related to South Africa (1980s) and the gay rights movement (1976 to present). The civil rights movement itself flowed chronologically from African American rights to women’s rights to Latino and
worker rights and to gay rights. The power and the logic of this movement in his life stems from George’s exposure to radically egalitarian ideals – “what the civil rights movement taught American culture was a sense of fairness that had never permeated so deeply into the culture” – here echoing Gail Collins from her book *When Everything Changed* (2009).

Currently, in his “retirement”, he is an organizer and teacher in an innovative theological education program in prisons. He sees this service, 45-50 years later, as a continuation of his work in the civil rights movement, as 85% of the participants in the prison program are young men of color – many who never got the legal representation that most Americans would expect or had a healthy environment in which to grow up.

**Ruth Brandon (Raleigh, North Carolina – Summer 1964)**

*(Southwest Georgia Project – Summer 1965)*

This extended biography of Ruth Brandon is organized with the following sections: Upbringing and School Days, Union Theological Seminary, Student Interracial Ministry, Back at Union, and After Union.

**Upbringing and School Days**

Ruth Brandon was born in 1942 into a church family – her father, uncle and grandfather were ministers in the Christian Churches, a denomination which would eventually be part of the merger that would form the United Church of Christ. Ruth’s father, a pastor in Ohio, had died six months before Ruth was born, which had left her pregnant mother to raise two sons (Brauninger, 2006). Following Ruth’s birth, the family relocated to Vermont, where Ruth’s mother took a position as a nurse, working in a residential home for underprivileged boys - so Ruth grew up living in the infirmary of a home with 87 grade school boys. In junior high school, she “became a thinker and questioner and reached an age where I needed to be needed, and respected, and given responsibility” (Brandon, 1997, p. 2). Ruth found these needs met in her local church, where she
got involved as a “choir member, Sunday School pianist and teacher, and youth member of the church council” (Brandon, 1997, p. 2) as well as a youth group leader. This included positions as the president of the Vermont Pilgrim fellowship and Ruth was one of four delegates representing Vermont at “the youth component of the series of meeting that brought into being the United Church of Christ” (R. Brandon, personal communication, August 20, 2010).

Ruth had always had a strong faith in God – “I have no memory of a time when I ever doubted or questioned God” - it was in these school days that she began to consider the ministry as a way to serve God. Fortunately, the Christian Churches had a strong tradition of women preachers, so that Ruth would always feel confident in her role as a woman minister (Brauninger, 2006). She was baptized at age fourteen and preached her first sermon at fifteen, during the annual Youth Sunday.

Ruth was raised in an egalitarian environment. Her relatives were pacifists and progressives in their thinking, but she had virtually no exposure to racially different people until college. As Ruth says, people in her area of Vermont were prejudiced against Canadians and rich tourists, not Black people. Ruth does have a few strong memories of her family’s connections with the diversity of the world and struggle for justice: “My uncle showed me the places in his Topsfield, Massachusetts parsonage where there were secret panels and hidden spaces where runaway slaves had been kept safe a century earlier” (Brandon, 1997, p. 2). Some activist examples were her brother who was a conscientious objector during the Korean War and her grandfather who was deeply involved in the Prohibition movement (Brandon, 1997). Ruth also recalls that her mother “had best friends from college who were missionaries in Angola…so I knew about Africa, specifically Angola, a Portuguese colony, from deep in my childhood” (Brandon).
For college, Ruth attended Oberlin College in Ohio (1959-1963). Although Oberlin had a strong activist tradition, financially she could not afford to get involved more broadly in the emerging civil rights movement, as she had to work during the year and summers to be able to afford her books and living expenses (she had received a generous scholarship to fund her tuition, room, and board). Brandon volunteered in an inner city Cleveland parish and took advantage of activities that happened on campus.

**Union Theological Seminary**

Ruth Brandon ended up going to Union Seminary in order to learn to speak intelligently about her faith to people skeptical about religion. Ruth was now really on her own, as her mother had taken up her long delayed dream and gone into the missionary field as nurse in Turkey. Ruth describes her perspective on choosing to come to Union:

Union was a wonderful experience. It broadened my world even further. It was urban, which I hadn’t been yet. It was international, which Oberlin had been to some extent, but New York City and Union Seminary were more so…Oberlin had also begun to open my mind and help me to see a bigger world. Union just built right on that very nicely.

(Brandon)

At Union, Ruth was a Church and Community major, taking courses with John Bennett and Roger Shinn. Her track focused on ethics and world issues, rather than the more traditional approach to seminary, which would have included study of Greek and Hebrew. She also got involved in social issues, such as welfare rights, and participated at a polling place in the New York mayoral election. Civil rights was beginning to be active at Union, but “women’s rights, the seminary was nowhere near” (Brandon). She was one of 12 women in her seminary class, more than any other seminary at the time, yet she also had her scholarship taken from her when
she decided to marry (Bill Minter) at the beginning of her second year! “And I didn’t know enough to protest.” (Essentially the seminary had told her that all she had wanted to do was marry a seminarian – ironically, she notes that “So I’m the one . . . overseeing 87 churches, and the man I married at that time never became a minister or a professor of theology. He did other valuable things, but you know, they were bad predictors” (Brandon).

During her second and third year of seminary, Brandon got actively involved in running SIM. She promoted the SIM program by contacting seminaries throughout the country, sent out information, and screened applications of students who wanted to participate; she did the same tasks contacting potential churches to host students – and then worked with the process to match students with churches. She and her fellow students had a strong sense of the importance of giving white and black communities the opportunity to be in dialogue and know each other better:

we were very organized in terms of trying to make it be something that was useful and that would reach many seminarians. We had to reach a lot more because we knew not everybody would be interested, but we wanted to find the ones that would be right.

(Brandon)

**Student Interracial Ministry**

In the summer of 1964, Ruth took the first of two SIM placements. This position was in what was a typical SIM situation – a white student placed in a Black southern church. She was assigned to work with the Rev. Howard Cunningham, pastor of a Black Congregational Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. For the first part of the summer, she helped to run a vacation bible school in a partnership between Cunningham’s church and the white, United Church, in Raleigh (where Collins Kilburn was pastor, who had supervised black SIM students, 1961-1963). They
ran an interracial bible school program, with about an equal proportion of white and black students and teachers (Brandon, 1964, July). Brandon also attended church group meetings, participated in worship services, preached a sermon, and ran youth programs. The more formidable responsibility came when she was called on to run all the church programs while the pastor was on vacation for a month. With only one year of seminary completed, this was rather scary, but the church was a very friendly and welcoming place for a “rather shy woman” and she made it through okay.

In many ways this was, as Ruth Brandon puts it, an experience of the “relatively easy South” – she lived in a nice home with a middle class African American family. Staying in the Black community, she wasn’t faced with as many of the overt signs of segregation, although she did participate “on the fringes” of an effort to integrate the city pool. Her main learning around race involved getting personal experience with Black people in their own community and learning about the diversity of Black churches and people. She also experienced the way in which the system of racist segregation makes African Americans be overly deferential to white people, even to a young white girl visiting them. She did experience some “breaks” in this system, when she felt great relief at hearing the responses from two boys who told her directly “No, I don’t want to go to camp this year” – which stood out in stark contrast with the polite “Yes ma’am” and the dropping of the eyes that she usually received” (Brandon, 1964, July).

Returning to Union for the Fall 1964 semester, she and the rest of Union met Charles Sherrod (UTS, ’66, STM). As a major leader in SNCC, a freedom rider, and someone with tremendous experience in the movement, Charles greatly impressed the students who were running SIM as well as the Social Action Committee. He persuaded them to begin (in Summer 1965) sending a group of white Union students to work with him in Southwest Georgia. Ruth
and her husband Bill Minter were in the first group of SIM students to work in the SWGP. In Albany, Georgia, they worked in a freedom school, participated in voter registration, and were involved in SNCC demonstrations. While uncertain whether the teaching she did in the freedom school was effective or not, Brandon did learn some deep things about the nature of education through the Movement’s mass meetings. She had grown up her whole life having the importance of education stressed to her – in these meetings she came to understand that education and intelligence weren’t the same thing:

I learned that education really was just a luck of the draw and that there were very smart people, very intelligent people about what was good for the future, who had not had that luck. Hadn’t happened to go to school, but they were very bright, and they knew exactly what was good for their futures. And so I think forever and ever after that, I saw education as important as related to what you want to do, but not important as to who you were and what your value was. That everybody is intelligent about what they need and about what their families need… (Brandon)

One of the other great factors of the mass meetings for Brandon was the music – and even though she had only heard it for two summers

it began to feel more and more like mine too. Grafted on perhaps, but still became part of me. And the time in prison even more so. The freedom songs we sang all the time. There were 50 of us – in the women’s part I think there were probably only 16 of us, but we kept singing and singing and singing and singing, and … the sense of solidarity there in a rural county where the sheriff showed up with his buddies and shot guns off outside the jail to see if he could scare us. (Brandon)
Coming to feel a part of the community was a very important aspect of Ruth’s experience in Southwest Georgia, even under the severe conditions of being in jail under the authority of racist law enforcement officials: “that was an experience of solidarity that was very deep, and we were there six days until they let us out on bond, and we never went to trial as far as I know” (Brandon). For Ruth, this was the first of a series of experiences that would deeply connect her with African and African American communities:

Anyway I felt that the SIM experience…coming from no exposure to anybody black…Then immersion in a black American experience. Then immersion three times in an African experience. It’s always been related…being involved in the SIM experience made it easier to be involved in the African experience, particularly in an African liberation experience because the SIM experience with SNCC was an American … liberation experience. And being involved with a people who are intensely organizing and singing and building morale around a common purpose. (Brandon)

Ruth also had a strong sense of the need for the white SIM students to play a support role in the movement. They left it in the hands of the SNCC leaders and Charles Sherrod to decide, in any given situation, whether it was useful or not to have white workers involved. But there was a sense of satisfaction in the work:

life comes and goes. What’s important is how you live it. And so I was busy doing something that felt like it was worth doing and with people that it was important to be with, and that’s all that mattered. It felt like that’s where God had needed us to be; that the black community was willing to have and needed to have some white folks there. And we understood perfectly well that they might get better news coverage, they might get more attention if there were white folks involved in an incident or in even a
demonstration, and that was not right, but if it was a role we could play that would help them, we could be their white folks. So, you know, we were there in solidarity. We weren’t there to run anything. We were there for them to say where we would be useful, and then we’d do it. (Brandon)

**Back at Union**

Upon return to Union, Ruth would become involved in activism that would continue to shape her life’s work. Eduardo Mondlane, who was then the President of the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique in Southern Africa (Frelimo), travelled to New York for a meeting at the United Nations. While in New York, he came to Union to speak about colonialism in Mozambique, and mentioned a school that Frelimo was building in neighboring Tanzania. Ruth and Bill Minter applied to become teachers in the school. Frelimo was engaged in a civil war with the ruling Portuguese in Mozambique, and the U.S. was supportive of Portugal. So the Minters’ application was met with skepticism, but they were eventually approved based on their participation in the civil rights movement. They went to Mozambique under the sponsorship of the Frontier Internship in Mission (at that time it was a program of the Methodists, Presbyterians, and United Church of Christ).

Before leaving for Mozambique, Ruth was also involved in the emerging anti-apartheid and anti-war movements. She became frustrated with her fellow students and faculty at Union for their hesitancy to actively oppose the Vietnam War. What caused her the most anger was not direct opposition but apathy and a willingness to hide behind the indecision of others:

> You could go home, or study, or do fieldwork, or go to a show – ignoring the fact that what happens outside New York City or the United States could be of significance in your own life, ignoring the possibility that anything could change the course of events,
ignoring the possibility that God might be at work somewhere in this mess too and that he might be calling for response or cooperation, not from somebody else alone but from you also. (Brandon, 1965, May 3, p. 6)

After Union

Ruth would live in Mozambique for between five and six of the next ten years, teaching in a Portuguese-speaking school, first in Tanzania (1966-69) and then assisting with the move to set up the school in a liberated Mozambique (1973-76). Finally, she would return to Mozambique (1990-93) to pastor a new church and teach in a theological seminary (Brauninger, 2006). During each of these visits, Ruth was totally immersed in African society. She viewed her two summer positions in the American South as preparation for her work in Africa – living immersed in a southern Black community made it easier to adapt to an immersion experience in Africa. They faced many obstacles in their work in the school, from learning Portuguese (they got a grant for some intensive training), to writing curriculum in Portuguese, to dealing with teaching students who were learning in a second language. Yet she came away deeply impressed with the seriousness with which education was treated. Ruth sensed that everyone realized that overcoming incredibly low literacy rates was essential for success as a nation.

Her time teaching in the seminary in Mozambique was quite an amazing experience. Ruth taught ethics at the seminary, and translated a standard ethics textbook into Portuguese in order to use it in her class. At the seminary, the array of languages was incredible - students were being instructed in Portuguese but were also learning French and English, as well as ancient Greek and Hebrew. Ruth was teaching these students and helping them to navigate the sometimes conflicting ideas and values that they had learned in their education - which started as
Marxist and moved to Democratic Socialism - in church, and in their various families, which came from seven different language groupings:

And there’s what they had just observed from living and seeing what worked and what didn’t work. The practical forces upon them. And they had to sort through all of that…What’s the Bible teach as well? That was another force. Not just ‘what did I hear in church’, but now that I’m…studying the Bible myself, reading it myself… (Brandon)

Throughout her experiences in Mozambique, Ruth learned to respect the deep spirituality and faith of the everyday church people that she met, even when it took forms that she didn’t agree with personally – “their theology was Victorian protestant theology learned a century ago from missionaries” (Brandon, 1997). She felt that it would be arrogant to try to challenge their form of faith which was such a powerful life-giving source for them (Brandon, 1997). She came away from Africa with new deep appreciation for the life-giving power and necessity of faith in Jesus, in the midst of a world with great suffering:

Virtually everyone I knew had personal experience of atrocities and war, running from an attack, watching houses or buses burn, sleeping in holes in the bush to keep their family camouflaged at night, violent deaths of friends and relatives. The seminary where I taught three years was in a war zone and we evacuated every night, returning every day. For the first time in my life, I had to come face to face with the living reality of Evil, palpable fearsome force that was very present and could not be avoided or ignored.

In such a place, God’s presence also became palpable and awesomely strong and life-giving. Grace came daily for my Mozambican neighbors and friends when the new day dawned and they opened their eyes and knew they were alive. (Brandon, 1997)
In ways reminiscent of her learning in the mass meetings in Georgia, these Mozambican faithful, only a few with even minimal formal education became her mentors in faith.

In between her first two times in Africa, Ruth served as the executive director of the campus YWCA at the University of Wisconsin (1969-1973), where she was ordained by the United Church of Christ. Madison in that time period was an intense center of student activism, particularly in the anti-war and women’s movements. Next, Ruth returned to North Carolina to join the staff of the Africa News Service, during its founding year, 1973. The Africa News Service was an important early source for accurate and timely news from Africa. From 1981 to 1983, she was the Resettlement Coordinator for Church World Service in the state of North Carolina. In 1984, she earned a Masters in Sacred Theology from Christian Theological Seminary (CTS) in Indianapolis, having been nominated for the Chrysalis Program, a special one year program on faith and world issues and received a full tuition grant. While at CTS she also worked for the Disciples of Christ national office on refugee resettlement.

Since that time, Ruth has served for 12 years in judicatory work for the United Church of Christ and 13 years as a local pastor. Her current position is as the Association Minister for the Southwest Ohio Northern Kentucky Association (SONKA). In this role, she is the supervising pastor for 87 churches. Her same basic commitments and values remain, although they take somewhat different form when she is so deeply involved in the life of the churches.

There is a lot still of work to do in areas of justice and jobs and housing and education, and all those good old issues are right here in southwest Ohio. And these current economic times make them more visible, all of them. (Brandon).

Yet still she uses the lessons she learned in the South and in Africa:
I don’t start with my agenda…I start where they are. I still believe that people are capable of figuring out what they need and what they need to learn, and you plant seeds. And you organize at the right time, and then you have some people out front, and you have some people who are bridge-holders who can interpret to the ones back here what those up there are doing because all of us are needed. And I’ve been pretty much a bridge kind of person. (Brandon)

And so, Ruth Brandon has brought together the diverse learning of so many different service opportunities – and brought them together to benefit the people she works with now:

I have never seen ministry as following a career path. I have not set concrete goals that I must achieve in order to be a success. For me ministry is possible only as a responsiveness to the moving of God among the people, and a willingness to be used by God, often in surprising ways. Therefore my ministry has been very diverse. God has given me many marvelous opportunities, very little security, but an abundance of blessing. For the rich diversity of my life I am truly grateful. (Brandon, 1997)

These accounts have given a detailed description of the importance of SIM in the life and careers of two SIM participants. The following two chapters now briefly describe the lives of each of the remaining participants in the varied contexts in which they served in SIM. Chapter Six will describe the participants in church settings, while Chapter Seven will continue with participation in other settings.
CHAPTER SIX

PARTICIPANTS IN CHURCH SETTINGS

When the Student Interracial Ministry was conceived in the Spring semester of 1960, the main focus of the project was on placing white seminarians in summer field placements in Black southern churches. This purpose was spelled out in a Statement of Purpose (1961), written after the summer pilot project was completed. The document was written by the four white seminarians from Union who were the SIM students in the pilot project (John Collins, Charles Helms, Jane Stembridge, and Chris Gamwell) and the three African American students from Gammon Seminary who were the local pastors for the pilot project (Willis Goodwin, John Watts, and Maurice King). There were six goals: to provide students and churches with helpful summer placements; to help white students learn about the civil rights issues of the South; to provide students with an opportunity to live and work with a person of another race for an entire summer in order to stimulate personal growth; to foster improved communication between white and black communities; to engage in community service, including civil rights work as appropriate; and finally, the overarching goal of providing communities with the reconciling witness of interracial team ministries (“Statement of Purpose”, 1961).

During the first few years, SIM took place almost exclusively in church settings, in which the seminarian served as a summer assistant minister. From 1960 to 1964, there were 91 placements, with all but four of these being individual placements in church positions (4 were in various organizations). Yet still one should keep in mind that SIM always had a certain activist tension built into it. It started as response to the student sit-ins during the winter and spring of 1960; enthusiasm was built at Union through direct participation in CORE picket lines at the Harlem Woolworths; 17 Union students attended the Shaw University conference in which
SNCC was organized; and Jane Stembridge left Union and became a full-time SNCC activist. Yet in these early years, most SIM placements focused on the original goals, and activist work played a subordinate, though significant role for most participants.

By the first official summer, the student group was expanded to include two African American students who were placed in white churches in North Carolina. African American placements would average about 18% of the total, but almost all placements were in northern, western, and border states. About 75% of white students were placed in African American churches in North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia, with North Carolina having the most at 27%. Although gender was not recorded in the various SIM lists, about 20% of participants were women. While this study includes only Union Seminary student participants, from the beginning SIM was ecumenical, including students from 45 different protestant seminaries, along with one Catholic seminary, and group of colleges and universities - Union participants made up about 40% of the total placements. Six of the participants in this study worked primarily in church settings - four will be profiled here (John Collins, Charles Helms, Bud Walker, and Tom Boomershine), and two will be covered in Chapter 7 (George McClain, and Ruth Brandon).

John Collins (Talladega, Alabama - Summer 1960)

John Collins was born (1929) and raised in Chicago, living in a variety of places throughout the South Side. His grandfather was a circuit riding Methodist preacher along the Canadian border in North Dakota. Collins’ grandfather lost his sight and had to leave the ministry, leaving Collins’ father, although still in high school, to struggle largely on his own. John remembers that his father became somewhat embittered against the church because Hamline University had refused to give him the scholarship support available to the children of
Methodist ministers. (Later, John’s father only reluctantly supported John’s decision to enter the ministry, although his mother favored it.) Collins’ father moved to Chicago, where he worked for the Chicago Park District for forty years, and got involved in Chicago democratic politics. John learned some of his commitment to social service work from his father - while in college, his father had spent an intern year living at Jane Addams’ Hull House – as well as through his father’s work for the Park District which had brought him in contact with many young men from the Irish and German slums in the neighborhood.

John attended college (1946-50) and law school (1950-51, 54-56) at Northwestern University, just north in Evanston, IL. Following his first year of law school, John served for three years in the Navy during the Korean War, then completed law school upon his return, and practiced law in Chicago until his move to Union in the Fall of 1958.

John had grown up in a family that was free from overt racism (although his parents did not favor integrated dating or marriage) – his father was a New Deal democrat and outspoken opponent of Hitler, and his mother had a strong egalitarian spirit, having taught school to a wide range of immigrant children on the Northern Minnesota iron range. John began to explore racial issues before coming to Union. While an attorney in Chicago he ran a Boy Scout troop whose members mostly were African American boys and he got involved in the movement within the Methodist Church to end the segregationist practice of the Methodist church, which organized Black churches in a separate Central Jurisdiction.

Coming to Union was a very powerful “religious experience” for John Collins (J. Collins, personal communication, August 20, 2010) opening him up to a plethora of ways in which Christian faith could be related to the social issues of the day. Fifty years later, he still remembers vividly the opening orientation program, sponsored by the Social Action Committee
of the seminary, in which new students were taken up to Harlem and had an hour-long session with A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, followed by another hour with Bayard Rustin, met with local union officials, and then went to East Harlem and heard Bill Webber talk about the innovative programs of the East Harlem Protestant Parish. Collins reflected on the significance of this experience for him: “I just felt like I finally found my role in life…This is where I’m meant to be” (Collins). Collins went on to be a very socially active student at union, chairing the social action committee during his second year at the seminary (1959-1960). He was one of a group of seminarians who picketed outside the Woolworth store in Harlem - in support of the lunch counter sit-ins emerging throughout the South. He was one of the founders of the Student Interracial Ministry, along with Jane Stembridge, Charles Helms, and Chris Gamwell. Following the summer SIM pilot project (Summer 1960), John was a crucial leader in the process of turning the project into a full-fledged, ongoing organization.

John spent had his SIM placement in Talladega, Alabama, at the Star of Zion AME Zion Church, as an assistant minister to the Rev. John Watts, who was also a seminary student at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta. John lived in the parsonage with Rev. Watts. He participated in worship, preaching several times, and was deeply impressed by the rich music and generosity of spirit among the people. With a young woman named Beverly Gray, he also ran the Vacation Church School for about 100 African American children. Collins was struck by the dedication of the children and the families, many of whom had to walk several miles each day to the program. This contrasted with the impression that he had of the way in which fear kept well intentioned white people, like a Presbyterian minister with whom he met in Talladega, from doing anything to challenge the system of segregation.
Collins also participated in some small ways in civil rights activities. He took a group of youth to a segregated State Park and had a picnic there. He would also step up to be served at the “colored” window when taking the kids for ice cream. The way in which segregation controlled so many aspects of daily life, gave him a new sense of what it meant for the Black college students to challenge it in the on-going sit-in movement. He also brought the youth to a rally at Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth’s church, soon after Shuttlesworth’s home had been bombed. (Shuttlesworth was a major leader in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.) Collins and his youth group had to be hustled and escorted out of the rally to protect them from being attacked by white onlookers.

After graduating from Union, Collins was ordained in the Methodist Church. While he considered going into a black denomination as a pastor, instead, he chose to stay within the mainstream Methodist Church and organized a black congregation in East Harlem. Throughout his career, Collins has maintained a strong activist commitment – in East Harlem, he was involved in the struggle for community control of the schools and was arrested in the process (J. Collins, personal communication, August 21, 2010). Later John was pastor of a Black church in the South Bronx. In between, he was a leading activist minister, heading up Clergy and Laity Concerned (Livezey, 1989), a major group that organized religious leaders in their opposition to the Vietnam War and in support of a wide range of peace and social justice issues. He also served as a staff member for the New York Conference of the Methodist Church. He has been a strong advocate for impoverished, at-risk young people, including controversial support for the Puerto Rican Young Lords, and he and his wife Sheila were advisors to the Jesse Jackson presidential campaign of 1984. In Latin America during the 1980s, John had what he describes as a religious experience similar to the one he had had as he entered Union, in which he had
found his “role in life”. Following the overthrow of the Somoza government in Nicaragua, Collins visited the country and saw the

new society being built by the Sandinistas (later destroyed by the US-led contra war). This persuaded me that the next great revolution (after the civil rights struggle) would come out of Latin America and would offer the best hope for the future. Later visits to Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia confirmed this conviction. (J. Collins, personal communication, August 21, 2010)

Collins retired in 1994 and has kept very active in support of the church and social justice issues, including work teaching ethics in an innovative theological education program in prisons called Rising Hope. George McClain is a coordinator in the same program (Stern, 2008). John and Sheila Collins’ “daughters carry on our justice work, one as a doctor in a public hospital and the other as a political science professor of Latin American politics” (J. Collins, personal communication, August 21, 2010).

Charles Helms (Greenville, South Carolina - Summer 1960)

Charles Helms was born in 1936 in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. He describes the Florida environment in which he was raised as “a very typical deep South state” (Helms). Fairly early on his family moved to rural Georgia, outside Atlanta. Helms describes his family as not having had any intense racial hatred, but that they did totally accept the racial caste system that was segregation, and the assumption that Black people were an inferior race. In the context of a discussion about school desegregation, he does remember some amount of skepticism, on the part of his parents, about this presumption of white racial superiority. But this was simply a small crack in the edifice of segregation.
For his own part, Helms recognizes that sympathy for the underdog is a part of his psychological makeup, and that this gave him some advantage in overcoming the prejudices inherent in his upbringing. Following high school, he went to Davidson College (1954-58), a Presbyterian school north of Charlotte, NC. Helms had been raised in a Presbyterian family, but had no sense of a strong connection between the Church and social issues. He found that same perspective at college, although he experienced some glimmers of a more progressive approach. He organized a small group of students who got together informally to discuss how to get Davidson integrated. He ended up going to Union seminary based on the influence and recommendation of his philosophy professor, an admirer of Reinhold Niebuhr, named George Abernethy – who, incidentally, was just about to publish *The Idea of Equality* (John Knox Press, 1959), which includes a selection of essays supportive of civil rights for African Americans.

At Union, Charles Helms would get a full dose of “this whole tradition and ethos of the social and political dimensions of the Gospel” (Helms). At Union he would meet people like John Collins and Jane Stembridge who were actively putting their faith into public action. Helms didn’t naturally gravitate to activism – as a Southerner, he was really nervous when he saw the first reports of the student sit-ins in the South, because he knew how deeply entrenched the attitudes were and how dangerous it was for the students who were participating. While he did not take part in the student protests at Woolworth’s in Harlem, he did work with John Collins to come up with the core idea in SIM – the exchange of white seminary students in black churches and black seminary students in white. During the school year and summer, Charles did field work in a church in an African-American and Puerto Rican neighborhood in Hell’s Kitchen. Helms describes his racial attitude at this time:
I would describe myself as believing very strongly in racial equality, believing that segregation was wrong, believing that the caste system in the Deep South was worse, and wanting to see more justice and more integration of the races, not having much sense about how to go about doing that. (Helms)

Charlie Helms had his SIM placement in a “two-point” charge (one church in town, the other “very rural”) in an African American Methodist Church in Greenville, South Carolina, where he served as an assistant minister to the Rev. Willis Goodwin – Goodwin was also a seminary student at ITC in Atlanta. Helms lived with Willis and his family in the parsonage for most of the summer. Charlie participated in the worship services, went with Rev. Goodwin to visit parishioners, and was involved in other church activities. Helms and Goodwin were asked if they would be joint adult advisors to the youth division of the NAACP in Greenville. Many of the youth had been arrested for trying to use the white public library, and Helms and Goodwin joined the other NAACP leaders as they attended the arraignment of the youth. Following the court proceedings, a spontaneous sit-in occurred at a local white restaurant. In the confusion, Helms was beaten by white thugs, causing him to go home for awhile. Upon his return to Greenville, he did not stay with the Goodwin family, out of concern for their safety and his own, but stayed, instead, in the parsonages of several different, mostly white, ministers.

Following his SIM experiences, Charles was to spend an intern year at the Presbyterian University Center at Tulane University in New Orleans, serving as a campus minister. After starting at Tulane, he began some plans for an interracial study group between white Tulane students and African American students from Dillard University in New Orleans. He had also observed several sit-ins, as well as a couple meetings of the White Citizens Council. These small attempts at increasing racial understanding and communication were too much for the head of
the Center and he dismissed Helms from his position. This taught Helms about the power that fear has to intimidate people so that even small steps are not seen as possible. Fortunately, the Presbyterian Department of Campus Christian Life was willing and able to place Helms in a position in Florida for the spring semester of his intern year.

Helms then returned to Union for his senior year, and assisted the SIM committee in making plans for the future. Upon graduation, he served in several churches in rural Georgia and then, in the 1970s, while he was the pastor of a poor inner-city church, he became a community organizer in inner-city Atlanta. In order to keep a diversity of socioeconomic levels in the neighborhood, Charles helped to organize a grass-roots community development organization that worked for fair housing, including assisting with efforts to bring in a church-sponsored housing project for low income people. Helms then went to work for an ecumenical organization and kept involved in these community activities, attempting to link up poor neighborhoods with more affluent, middle class ones. In particular, he worked to build coalitions between various civic organizations in poor black communities. This period of his life culminated with Helms being elected, in a 70% black district, to a four-year term on the Atlanta City Council.

In terms of his ministry, Helms had been moving toward a focus on pastoral counseling. He got a doctorate in pastoral counseling (1978) and moved to Jacksonville, Florida, where he served in a pastoral counseling center, and later became the executive director of the Presbyterian counseling center in Charlotte, from which he retired in 2001 - and has “been retiring ever since” (Helms). Along with his wife, he has enjoyed returning to political work, working for the local Democratic Party during the election of Barack Obama in 2008.
Bud Walker (Atlanta, Georgia - Summer 1963)

Rinaldo Addison Lansdell “Bud” Walker was born in Augusta, Georgia in 1934, raised in Missouri, and moved to Mississippi in 1948 - he considers Clinton, Mississippi to be his hometown. He was raised in a family of Southern Baptist ministers – his family also includes an aunt who was a missionary to China. He attended an all-white and staunchly segregationist Southern Baptist school - Mississippi College, where he was the class president and voted “most influential and most versatile” as well as ‘Mr. Mississippi College’. Bud attempted at least one public challenge to the racial mores of the school. At a Friday chapel service, for which Bud was normally the student leader, Ross Barnett (soon to be Governor of Mississippi) gave a “45 minute segregationist harangue and defamation of Gunnar Myrdal” (B. Walker, personal communication, August 22, 2010), author of *An American dilemma: The Negro Problem and modern democracy* (1944). Following this message, Bud went to the pulpit:

> the motto of our school, Mississippi College was Truth and Virtue. And so I didn’t call on the dean to close it with prayer that day. I simply said, “Oh, God, in this institution devoted to truth and virtue, help us to see ALL of your truth. Amen.” (Walker)

One faculty member told him after chapel, "that was the shortest rebuttal I could imagine to a 45 minute speech" (B. Walker, personal communication, August 27, 2010).

Despite the difficult environment, Walker grew up with a strong sensitivity to the needs of others, in the midst of what he calls “Mississippi, the dark and bloody land, our approximation of South Africa” (Walker). In particular, Bud describes two encounters with African Americans during his years growing up that were especially important to him. One experience was with the ‘yard man’ who worked at a neighbor’s house. When five year old Bud addressed him with “Hello, Nigger Jim”, the man gently taught him that using the term *nigger* was disrespectful – a
lesson that Bud describes as transforming his outlook forever (Walker; B. Walker, personal communication, August 25, 2010). A second encounter was with Floyd, a college janitor. Bud had worked with Floyd while serving as the athletic stock room manager and they had become friends. Bud also lived for three years in the building where Floyd was a janitor. Bud was dismayed when he discovered that Floyd was being treated as a scapegoat for a white coach’s misdeeds.

In high school, as the “new kid from Missouri”, he was selected to be Harry Truman, running against Dixicrat Strom Thurmond in a school-wide mock election. Bud remembers the school election speeches:

I said, "the issue in this election is whether we want to be the Republic of South Carolina, the Republic of Alabama, the Republic of Mississippi OR the United States of America."

The students gave Harry Truman and me a winning majority in spite of civil rights. Their parents voted quite differently. (B. Walker, personal communication, August 25, 2010)

At Mississippi College, although there were very few progressive faculty or organizations on campus, more liberally-minded students like Bud were deeply affected by the daily reports in the newspapers of racist actions and the exploits of the White Citizens’ Council – including the horrific murder of Emmett Till in Money, MS, just 100 miles from the campus.

Probably the biggest direct shock to his system came following college when he was on active duty with the Marines (1956-58). Walker describes how the Marine Corps had been slow to integrate, due to the predominance of Southerners and Irish Catholics. Concerning a meeting of his reserve unit, Bud remembers how the anti-integration intent of the Commanding Officer’s message was clear - “that all of us better recruit to bring the unit up to full strength or we might have some new Marines we don't want.” (B. Walker, personal communication, August 25, 2010).
Walker was stationed in Japan and Okinawa and visited the Philippines and Korea. This time in the Far East “had the wonderful result of turning my whole world upside down. It became very clear that God was not a Southern Baptist” (Walker). Bud got to meet professional black soldiers who broke the stereotypes with which he grew up. Also, as a counsel for the defense in special courts martial, he witnessed how many of the white officers involved made remarks that were prejudicial against African American defendants. Walker was able to use this to get their cases dismissed on review.

On return from his two years with the Marines, Bud moved to North Carolina and, on a Woodrow Wilson scholarship, he enrolled at the University of North Carolina, as a master’s student studying 16th Century English prosody. While there, a church member told him about Rockefeller Scholarships which would pay for a “trial year” of seminary. He chose to not follow his father and grandfather to Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, because he was very disappointed with the complicity of the Southern Baptist Church in segregation and its focus on “personal sins of dancing and smoking” (Walker) rather than on real world concerns. Another influence on Walker was his Aunt, Emily Lansdell. Lansdell was a fascinating person – her mother, R. A. Lansdell, had been one of the early Southern Baptist women to attend theological classes at Southern Seminary, and Emily had been a missionary in China and the president (1951-1957) of the Carver School of Missions and Social Work, the training school of the Women’s Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Church (Scales, 2000; Walker). When Bud was considering going to Union Seminary, which “in the South was a pinko place” (Walker), his aunt gave Bud her blessing on the choice, having spent some time at Union. (Union was home to the world-famous Missionary Research Library.)
Union Seminary was a tremendous experience for Bud, enabling him to interact with African Americans in ways he had never done before. Like John Collins, Bud was deeply impressed by Bayard Rustin, whom he heard give a Monday talk at the seminary in the Fall of 1959. Here are some of the impressions that Rustin made on Walker: “to hear him talk, I felt a sense of calling…Bayard Rustin was so impressive. He was in a word clearly prophetic…and you know he was brilliant also” (Walker). Walker also did field work for two years in East Harlem, helping to run summer programs that took kids on trips throughout the city. He also formed friendships with African American students from the South, like Oscar McCloud and James Forbes (as well as Forbes’ brother David).

Walker played a significant role at the seminary with his effort to put a face and voice on the image of the white Southerner. He was offended by self-righteous attitudes on the part of many Union students, and sought to remind them that the only way to reach true understanding, was to build on a foundation of respect of persons – even of segregationists.

There is little or no chance for meeting, much less of reconciliation, between abstracted persons who are nothing more than walking sets of opposed premises and principles making noise at each other. (Walker, 1962, Fall, p. 10; see also Walker, 1960, April 26) By the end of his time at the seminary, and just before his SIM experience, Walker remembers making an important decision:

by the time of the Birmingham bombing – of the four girls, a number of us Union students made a pledge that racial justice and reconciliation would be an important part of our ministry for the rest of our lives. And I’ve taken that seriously. (Walker)

A first step in this commitment was his decision to participate in the Student Interracial Ministry. During the Summer of 1963, following graduation, Bud had his SIM placement in
Ralph Abernathy’s church in Atlanta, Georgia. (Ralph Abernathy was a founder of the SCLC and one of the most important civil rights leaders in the country). Bud lived with the pastor and his wife Juanita, and a very generous church family graciously loaned Bud the use of a ’55 Ford sedan for the summer. Walker participated in worship services and his main responsibilities were with the youth group. The greatest learning for Bud involved first hand experiences of the arbitrary quality of segregation laws. He “personally experienced the daily put downs and necessary accommodations that had to be made with segregation at a time when Gov. Maddox was issuing axe handles to resist integration” (B. Walker, personal communication, August 22, 2010). On one occasion, he took a group of church people on a work retreat, and they had to try four different stopping places before they found one that would let them spread out their picnic lunch. At another time, Walker took the youth group on a hike and they stopped at a Burger King to pick up some food. There was a long line, so Bud had some of the kids sit and wait for the others – the police ended up being called. In the end, upon their arrival back at the church, Rev. Abernathy gave them an impromptu talk on the importance of planning and, if necessary, going to jail “on my terms” (Walker).

Following seminary and his SIM experience, Bud Walker became the Director of Religious Activities (1963-67) at Meredith College, a women’s school in Raleigh, North Carolina. At Meredith, he was involved with a number of civil rights activities, including voter registration, and he accompanied a small group of students to the March of Washington (August, 1963). After four years at Meredith College, he returned to theological study, using the GI Bill to study in the Masters in Sacred Theology program at Harvard Divinity School. In Cambridge, he was active in civil rights activities, making close friends with blacks from South Africa and in the local African American community, becoming an informal liaison – “I learned pretty quickly
for all the good will, and right thinking of my colleagues they weren't very comfortable dealing with local blacks so I became the ‘point man’ with the community” (B. Walker, personal communication, August 25, 2010).

In 1971, he returned to Raleigh, North Carolina and worked for the Human Relations Commissions of North Carolina and the City of Durham, placing a major focus on school desegregation. While in Raleigh, he and his family lived in Raleigh Interchurch Housing, an 85% African American community. Bud notes that his daughter was the only white child there – an “experience [that] has shaped her values quite positively” (B. Walker, personal communication, August 25, 2010). Yet the stress of working with politicians, burnout, and illness caused him to leave this position. He then decided that “I think I need to be back into my original calling, which is ministry” (Walker), and found what would be his major life work - prison ministry.

When he began work in North Carolina prisons as the Coordinator of Chaplaincy Services and Religious Ministry in 1975, there were only two employed chaplains serving a prison population of 13,000 inmates in 77 different units – so his main task was to be a developer of chaplaincy services. He warmly recalls working with a terrific interdenominational, interracial committee in order to grow the program, through strong advocacy on the part of committee members. He worked hard to make positive connections between African American churches and the prison ministry. Bud “helped lead a volunteer push that grew to be 6000 at one point. Many, of course, were dedicated church members, with a goodly Islamic representation” (B. Walker, personal communication, August 25, 2010). When he retired, 19 years later, there were 80 full-time chaplains and 125 part-time or church-funded chaplains, 40% of whom were men or women of color. He is also proud of the fact that he helped lead the effort to hire Muslim
chaplains, probably one of the first of its kind in the country (R. Walker, personal communication, August 22, 2010).

**Tom Boomershine (East Harlem, New York City – Intern Year 1964-65)**

Tom Boomershine was born in 1940 in Clayton, Ohio, a little town outside Dayton. His father worked at Frigidaire, a major factory in Dayton, and his father had a brother and four sisters, with two of the sisters marrying World War II veterans. Tom grew up in the Evangelical United Brethren Church (EUB), an almost completely white denomination that would merge with the Methodist Church in 1968, becoming part of the United Methodist Church. Tom had great musical talents and interest from an early age, and, starting in his junior and senior year in high school, he played the organ at a local Methodist church. His faith deepened and he decided to pursue a career as a minister.

Looking back, Tom describes Dayton - both the city near which he grew up, as well as the Dayton in which he lives today - as a deeply racist city. He describes his upbringing as being very segregated, attending an all-white high school, and virtually never seeing a black person in his little town. He remembers that when his school played the one school in their league that had black football players on their team, the games had a different dynamic to them, due to race. Although his parents weren’t “explicitly racist”, he remembers his father making derogatory remarks about black co-workers at the factory, and for the most part being negative about them. He characterizes his military uncles as being “extremely conservative and … very prejudiced” (Boomershine), which led to major conflicts with him over social issues.

Tom attended college at Earlham College, a Quaker school in Richmond, Indiana. At Earlham he met black students – coincidentally, the football team at Earlham had just had its first black players, many of whom were from Dayton - although he didn’t become close friends with
any African American students. He was also exposed to the civil rights movement when Martin Luther King came and spoke on campus (probably on April 23, 1959) and when Earlham students attempted to integrate the Richmond, Indiana bowling alley in the Spring of 1960 (in response to the student-sit in movement begun in Greensboro, NC). At this point in his life, Boomershine didn’t have any interest in getting involved in the protests, and remembers with a sense of shame that he was kind of making fun of the civil rights movement…when Dr. King came…I had some racial prejudice…it wasn’t deeply felt…but it was reflective of the place where I’d grown up. (Boomershine)

At Earlham, Tom was deeply concerned with his own growing skepticism about the Christian faith. As he learned more about the history of Christianity, he became disillusioned, specifically around the issue of the problem of evil. He was an English major and did his senior thesis on *Paradise Lost*, yet he also read widely in Russian literature (including *The Brothers Karamazov*), history and politics – wrestling with Christianity’s interaction with politics and history. Boomershine arrived at Union seminary as a skeptic. He chose Union to continue his journey because of two factors. First, he had become close friends with Bob Childs, the pastor of the church at which he played the organ – Bob had been a Ph.D. student at Union and was finishing his dissertation in Dayton; second, Union had a joint program with Columbia University in religion and literature.

At Union, Tom did his first field work leading the choir and playing the organ at a church in East Harlem, Chambers Memorial Baptist. The love and dedication that he found among the people of this church – the way in which Christianity made a difference in the lives of the poor, providing “hope, energy, dignity” – this was a faith he “could believe in” (Boomershine). Union
also gave him the opportunity to study the Bible in depth, giving him a personal encounter with the power of biblical stories. He describes James Muilenburg, who another participant, George McClain, called “the Old Testament prophet himself”, as the first person Tom ever heard tell a biblical story. This launched a lifelong interest for Boomershine concerning Biblical storytelling.

This experience at Chambers, along with other field work and participation in some local civil rights activism, had helped to alter Tom’s attitudes:

by that point, you know, I was a wholly committed…advocate of the civil rights movement and of the church’s involvement in that, and so my whole perspective on all of that had completely changed out of my experience in New York. (Boomershine)

Tom’s SIM placement was a little out of the ordinary. Through some grant money, he was able to fund a split internship, in which half of his time was spent in administrative work for SIM and the other half as an intern at Chambers Memorial Baptist, working with the Rev. Mel Schoonover. Unlike other SIM placements, Schoonover was white, although much of Tom’s work was with Black and Hispanic parishioners. One of the major events of his intern year occurred when the pastor was away on vacation. Word came down that there was going to be a meeting that evening to inform churches that ‘War on Poverty’ money was being made available for a new program in early childhood education called Head Start. Tom attended the meeting and found out that the application (in 15 copies) was due the next day. After consulting with the pastor, Tom stayed up all night, with the final result that Chambers got a Head Start program – one which it would run for the next 20 years. Boomershine also worked with the local public elementary school and developed a training program for parents, to assist them to develop more skills to help their kids in school.
Tom’s other major accomplishment involved the arts. In his previous work at Chambers, he had written a dramatic passion play. During his intern year he wrote a Christmas pageant that was performed by the youth. He then got a grant for a neighborhood youth project in urban drama and wrote a revue called *East Harlem Swings*, for which he then recruited actors and actresses to perform as a summer drama all over East Harlem.

Following his SIM intern year, Tom returned to Union, and worked hard to help with the transition to new SIM leadership. After graduation in 1966, Tom went to Chicago in a quest to find out how a ministry for African Americans could fit into his calling as a white ordained minister. After ordination, he didn’t accept an appointment in the EUB church because there were virtually no EUB churches with any sizeable African American presence. Instead, he took a position working with the First Congregational Church in Chicago. Suffice it to say that First Church was a politically complicated place, with progressive programs but a checkered history on race. Tom came into this mix, already sensitive to the issue of white leadership in the black community. Based on his experience at First Church, and more tangentially with the rise of the Black Power movement in Chicago and Martin Luther King’s work there, Boomershine made a major vocational decision. He decided to become a seminary professor - one who could help to educate Black clergy, who would, in turn, be able to more effectively serve the needs of the inner city.

He then returned to New York (1968), got his Ph.D. from Union (1974) and taught Biblical Studies at New York Theological Seminary (1972-1979). Boomershine played an important part in President Bill Webber’s efforts to restructure the old Biblical Theological Seminary into New York Theological Seminary (NYTS), with its innovative and pioneering programs to train leaders for urban ministry. He had an important part in developing theological
education programs in New York City, customized to the needs of black urban pastors. What started as a program based in local churches, then moved to NYTS and became a “major center of theological education for black, Hispanic, Korean” and other ministers (Boomershine).

Following a terrible car accident in which his legs were severely injured, Tom decided to move to a position that would have less physical stress. He joined the seminary faculty at United Theological Seminary in his hometown of Dayton, Ohio. He served there as Professor of New Testament (1979-2000) and as the G. Ernest Thomas Distinguished Professor of Christianity and Communication (2004-2006). At United, he continued some of the commitments he learned in SIM. He became a strong advocate for United’s requirement for students to have significant cross-cultural experiences as a part of their required theological education, and for United’s Doctor of Ministry degree, a major national theological program for African American and Hispanic American pastors.

Two continuing scholarly and professional passions have been the focus of much of Boomershine’s career – the role of communication and media in Christianity and understanding the central role of storytelling in Biblical narratives. Boomershine connects these concerns with his own transformative experiences in SIM. He understands SIM as having provided students with a powerful cross-cultural experience and encounter with the transformative power of the gospel that helped them to mature as Christian leaders. For Boomershine, the heart of that gospel experience is engagement with the powerful narrative stories of the Bible. In order to promote this experience, Boomershine founded the Network of Biblical Storytellers (1977), an international network to promote the learning of biblical stories by heart and the telling and hearing of these stories as a source of spiritual renewal and empowerment.
Based on his experience working administratively for SIM, Tom learned the power of an organization to effectively use media to tell its story. Tom’s doctoral research on Mark’s Gospel led him to understand that the primary way in which the early church learned was through aural performance rather than written text. Tom was a founder (1982) and past chair (1982-89) of the Bible in Ancient and Modern Media group of the Society of Biblical Literature. He also worked for four years (2000-2004) as the dean of Lumicon Institute, leading a team that developed an innovative continuing education certificate program in digital culture, and created multi-media resources for the entire lectionary cycle. He is currently at work on the first performance commentary on the passion narrative in Mark.

In conclusion, the original plan of SIM to place white seminary students in African American southern churches and black seminary students in white (mostly northern) churches was a success - although in terms of numbers, a modest one, growing from 14 church placements in its first full year to 28 church placements in 1964. Yet changes were on the horizon that would dramatically reshape the program. Although church placements would remain steady for two more years, the opportunity to participate in direct action civil rights groups (SWGP, Delta Ministry, and others) and the growing preference for team-based ministry, would dominate the energies of the Student Interracial Ministry and reshape the structure of the organization.
CHAPTER SEVEN

PARTICIPANTS IN OTHER SETTINGS

Chapter Seven continues to explore the settings for the Student Interracial Ministry and provides biographies for six additional participants – those who were not situated in individual church-based settings. Particularly in its last few years (1965-68), SIM experimented with new types of interracial ministries: placements in civil rights or other activist groups, team ministry projects, and teaching positions in historically black colleges. This chapter examines two civil right groups, the Delta Ministry and the Southwest Georgia Project; explores the development of team ministry projects, the role of the Ecumenical Institute, and looks at one example, the Charlotte Urban Ministry; and it examines one instance of a teaching position in a historically black college setting, at Spelman College.

Participants in the Delta Ministry

The Delta Ministry was an organization formed by the National Council of Churches in response to the growing awareness of the needs of African Americans in rural Mississippi. It was built on a deep tradition of the NCC’s ministry in Mississippi, dating back to Sherwood Eddy (UTS, 1891-1893) and Sam Franklin (UTS ‘1935), who founded a revolutionary agricultural enterprise in Mississippi to aid poor African Americans, which became Providence Farms (Findlay, 1993; Nutt, 1997; Sparks, 2001). The Delta Ministry (DM) was the NCC’s direct response to the civil rights movement in Mississippi. Almost all the original full-time staff of DM was made up of ministers who had participated in Freedom Summer (1964) (Findlay, 1993). The organization became a major force in the civil rights movement in Mississippi, having as many as 55 staff and volunteers at one point in the mid-1960s. By 1967, it had the largest civil rights staff in the state, filling the gap when SNCC and CORE “imploded in the second half of
the 1960s” (Newman, 2004, p. x) and SCLC’s attention was focused elsewhere. The DM embraced a “servant” model for their work, rejecting traditional patriarchal missionary models (Findlay, 1993). A major aspect of DM’s work was political. Throughout their history, they were closely aligned with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and various civil rights groups (SNCC, COFO, CORE, SCLC, NAACP). Their vital role in the development of the Child Development Group of Mississippi, which was formed to secure Head Start programs for Mississippi and to give African Americans an important stake in the management of these programs, included extensive political networking and fighting against the reactionary white political forces that tried to stop it (Findlay, 1993). In all its activities, the Delta Ministry was known for its commitment to empowering the poor to be more involved in their own decision making.

The Delta Ministry may be best known for Freedom City, an attempt, starting in July 1966, to form a “self-sustaining agricultural and industrial cooperative” (Newman, 2004, p. 127), a project very substantially supported by the Delta Ministry, and which would last well over ten years. This project had its roots in a number of historical factors, such as ongoing discrimination against Black farmers and workers; massive out-migration to the urban North; and decreased need for unskilled farm workers due to increased reliance on automation. The DM had already begun to fund startup cooperative ventures that led to Freedomcrafts, an entrepreneurial program that produced wooden nativity sets and other products – which soon spread to a variety of communities including Freedom City (Newman, 2004).

The Delta Ministry had also supported farm workers getting organized in unions. The newly formed Mississippi Freedom Labor Union called a strike in April and May, 1965 against major plantations. On one of the largest plantations, striking workers were evicted from their
homes on the plantation. Many took temporary refuge at Mt. Beulah, a disused college site that
the DM had leased from the Disciples of Christ Church for their headquarters. Eventually, these
families took up residence on five acres of land on Roosevelt Adams’ dairy farm (a local black
farmer and grocery store owner). The DM set up tents on this land and supplied food and
clothing. The strikers and their families called it “Strike City”. New economic pressures were
bearing down on the state, especially when political disputes between Washington and the white
leadership in Mississippi blocked shipments of federal food aid. The DM invited interested
persons to attend a conference in January 1966 to try and work out a strategy to resolve the
situation. The conference was held at Mt. Beulah (Newman, 2004). The conference formed the
Poor People’s Conference, which occupied the deactivated Greenville Air Force Base “to protest
their conditions and demand the base for housing” (Newman, 2004, p. 104). In February, the 100
or so protesters were evicted from the base and many of them came to take refuge at Mt. Beulah,
where they were housed in the old college buildings. The DM then worked to make
arrangements to purchase some 300 acres of land outside of Greenville, and began to start
moving them there – to “the Land” - into prefabricated housing, in the Summer of 1966. This
was the beginning of Freedom City (Troy; Newman, 2004).

This brief history of the Delta Ministry provides the setting for understanding the
experience of the two participants in this study, Mac Hulslander and Bill Troy, as they were
involved in a wide range of activities during their summer with the Delta Ministry. A published
description of events happening during this transition from Mt. Beulah to Freedom City can be
Mac Hulslander (Summer 1966)

The son of a Methodist minister, Malcolm (Mac) Hulslander was born in 1939 in Waverly, New York. His parents moved frequently (as ministerial families will) and he grew up in church parsonages in towns along the New York-Pennsylvania state line, spending his longest period in Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania, in the northeastern part of the state. He attended his last two years of high school at a Methodist-related prep school called Wyoming Seminary, then went on to college at Drew University (1957-61) where he majored in psychology and sociology.

Although his growing up was almost entirely in rural white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant communities, he was very open to new learning about race. He can’t recall the specific motivation, but he remembers writing some articles in high school about race relations. At college, the head of the sociology department took Mac aside to see if he would consider spending a semester in a new exchange program with Howard University, a historically black college in the major urban center, Washington, D.C – “you can well imagine, it…just kind of exploded my world…it was consciousness raising par excellence. It was a wonderful experience” (Hulslander). At Howard University, Mac had the experience of being a racial minority; following college, he had the experience of being a religious minority, when he spent three years in Japan on a Methodist short-term mission program (1961-1964) - “the two experiences together really…fostered in me a sensitivity to being a minority and understanding that” (Hulslander).

Following his time in Japan, he spent a year working as a staff person for the same Methodist mission program, promoting the overseas opportunity on college campuses – particularly in the South. As he did this work, he identified an interest and curiosity on the part of students on one campus about their student counterparts at the black or white campus across
town, so he developed activities to bring the groups together. As he experienced success with this small but significant interracial work, he began to make those connections more intentionally, and imagined that interracial work might be a compelling vocation. In 1965, during the summer before coming to Union, he had his first formal experience in civil rights work, as he responded to the National Council of Churches effort to support striking Mississippi tractor drivers through the Delta Ministry. He spent a month with the Delta Ministry, a bit overwhelmed with the poverty, yet somewhat hopeful at the new sense of identity that he saw developing in African American workers who were standing up for their rights (Donovan, 1965; “Enriched by Work”, 1965).

He chose to go to Union seminary based on the recommendation of his future wife who had done a religious education degree there. He also knew of Union’s cutting edge reputation in terms of the social gospel, liberalism, and race relations. His father had wanted him to go to his alma mater, Boston Theological Seminary, with an eye toward the ordained ministry, but Mac was already considering a different kind of ministry. Mac was deeply influenced at Union by Prof. Johannes Hoekendijk, author of *The Church Inside Out* (1966). Hulslander learned to see the city as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that had to be approached in a multilateral way, potentially through forms of group ministry:

…you had to deal with housing and education and employment and transportation and all of these societal factors somehow in relationship to each other. And so the idea of a group of people committed to a new form of ministry that would bring together different disciplines – theology, sociology, understandings about housing and urban development…It just made a lot of sense to me… (Hulslander)
Since by this point Hulslander was looking for alternatives to the traditional ministry, the
direct action approaches of SIM work with the Southwest Georgia Project or the Delta Ministry
were more appealing to him than church-based placements. Since he already had some
experience with the DM, Mac had his SIM placement in a second tour of duty with the Delta
Ministry. Hulslander was involved in three main activities during his time in the Delta Ministry
in the summer of 1966: he helped to construct the prefabricated temporary homes (“plydom”
structures – found to be less than desirable for temporary housing in Mississippi and California
(Newman, 2004; Gunderson, 1967)), taught in Freedom Schools at Mt. Beulah and then in
Freedom City, and participated in civil rights activities. Probably the most powerful impression
on Mac was made in the experience teaching school. When he and Bill Troy started teaching at
Mt. Beulah, the children were highly resistant and uninterested in being taught. When they
moved to Freedom City, Mac requested permission from Isaac Foster, the director of Freedom
City, to turn an old shack into a school. The kids worked extremely hard in cooperation with
Mac and Bill and transformed the place into a nice school house. Mac also discovered a book
called Teacher (Ashton-Warner, 1963) and adapted the author’s methods, which she had used
with minority peoples in New Zealand, to the learning situation in the Freedom School. The kids
chose the words they wanted to learn, and each child would develop and keep their own card
deck of words. Mac also had the students tell him stories of their life in Mississippi, and he
would write them down and use them as stories through which the children could learn to read.

Upon his return to Union, Hulslander was deeply involved in activism as chair of the
Social Action Committee, with the main focus being on protests against the Vietnam War and
apartheid in South Africa. Union students were some of the first in the country to protest
investments in banks that were, in turn, heavily invested in companies doing business in South
Africa (Carstens, 1967). In relation to Vietnam protests, he has a powerful memory of Union President John Bennett’s wife Anna being seated on the dais when Hubert Humphrey spoke at Riverside Church. She was dressed all in black, but wore a large white dove on her breast, just in case she didn’t get the chance to speak to him about her opposition to the war. Mac also was present at Riverside Church when Martin Luther King, Jr. made his famous speech against the war.

After graduation, in cooperation with two other couples, Mac and his wife explored the possibility of a group ministry. After his experience in SIM, this group ministry approach seemed even more important, because he had learned how deeply entrenched racism is in American society. The complex way in which racism is integrated in all aspects of society necessitated dealing with problems on several different levels. Mac and his wife did a feasibility study of thirteen, mostly southern cities, and decided on Raleigh, North Carolina as having the greatest potential for this approach. They formed the Experimental Ministry of Raleigh, which eventually became the Raleigh Area Ministries. Mac coordinated this program for many years and attempted to engage leaders in Raleigh to see beyond a “Band-Aid kind of mentality” to look at the structural causes of urban problems. The program provided crisis intervention for the poor, furnishing food and services. Though largely a success, the program was unable to move far beyond the social service orientation. While working with Raleigh Area Ministries, Mac also was involved heavily in anti-racist teaching. In this work, he was deeply influenced by the “new white consciousness”, stemming from the Black Power call for whites to work in their own communities, addressing the deep seated nature of white prejudice and the way in which prejudiced is linked with power in racism. Hulslander went on to develop a new curriculum and
approach to teaching about racism which he called *Ethetics - The Dynamics of Race Relations* (Washington, 1981).

Following four years of work in city government, Mac and several other people with a shared interest in lay ministry, got together and formed CLAY – Clergy and Laity Together in Ministry (1978). Mac served as the director of CLAY for the next 18 years. CLAY’s main purpose was “consulting and training with local congregations on how to help lay people discern their own sense of call, their own sense of ministry, and how to be about that” (Hulslander). CLAY successfully helped and supported church leaders and potential leaders in their discernment process about how to best use their gifts. Sometimes this meant that people on a track for seminary realized that they didn’t need seminary and ordination to use their gifts; in other instances it meant that clergy reevaluated the kind of ministry in which they were involved. On the individual level, CLAY was successful, helping many people in the discernment process. What was disappointing to Mac was its inability to affect the institutional church very much – they got support from local churches in the discernment aspect, but found the churches largely unwilling to change how they supported lay ministries in responsible ways or how they integrated support and accountability for these ministries into institutional structures.

Following these two positions, in which he was somewhat frustrated with his ability to make change in the institutional church, Mac took a different path. He and his wife became staff associates at the Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center in Pennsylvania. In a very beautiful and peaceful setting at Kirkridge, Hulslander found time for his own discernment process. Doing physical work on the landscaping of the house in which they lived at Kirkridge, Hulslander found deep enjoyment in the immediate satisfaction of accomplishing tangible results – after a career in adult education with its focus on long term aims. Coupled with an interest in Japanese
gardens, which dated back to his years in Japan, this spurred his decision to become a landscape gardener and open his own business. Hulslander has continued (since 1985) to be deeply involved in “an alternative congregation…that is very lay oriented…called the Covenant Community Church” (Hulslander). One of his responsibilities in the church has been to be involved with their retreat ministry at a center called Cedar Cross. This church community has allowed him to combine his interests in lay ministry, social action, spirituality and nature.

**Bill Troy (Summer 1966)**

John William (Bill) Troy was born in the town of Pennington Gap, Virginia, about 100 miles northeast of Knoxville, Tennessee. Since his father was a Methodist minister and they moved every few years to a new church, Bill lived in a variety of communities in Eastern Tennessee and across the border in Virginia. Not only was his father a minister, but so were both of his grandfathers, an uncle, and some cousins, and his mother was born in China, the daughter of missionaries – as Bill puts it: “I was sort of surrounded by Methodism”. So it was virtually pre-determined that he would be a minister as well. He attended Emory and Henry College, a Methodist school in southwestern Virginia. As a history and philosophy student at college, he struggled with questions of ‘what to believe’ and ‘what to do with his life’. He decided to try out seminary and received a Rockefeller Brothers scholarship that gave him a full ride for a year at the seminary of his choice. He chose Union Seminary because of a seminary professor’s recommendation and the lure of New York City.

Bill had very little experience with people of color during his school and college days. In later years he met an African American man who had gone to the black high school in Bristol, Virginia, the same town in which Bill had attended the white school. The man told him how the basketball team from the black school would come and use the white school’s gymnasium after
the white team, of which Bill was a member, was finished practicing – “the world was that separate”. Yet Troy grew up with what he characterizes as a “generalized progressive liberal kind of perspective on things, primarily through my mother” (Troy) – an openness to people who were different, that was nurtured through his mother’s missionary experience in China.

My mother – her father, my grandfather on my mother’s side came from up here in east Tennessee in the country and went to China with my grandmother as missionaries in 1904 and stayed until 1946. And so my mother was born there, and her experience in China had just a whole lot to do, I think, with the perspective that my brothers and I grew up with about the world, about race to some degree, about international affairs and so forth. (Troy)

Right before leaving for seminary in the late summer of 1963, Bill vividly remembers watching coverage of the March on Washington on television:

And I’m sitting there watching it and just being totally moved by it, and I said to myself, “What am I doing here?” You know? … But I felt cheated because there was no way I would even know that that was planned or was going to go on. (Troy)

Union and New York City were a kind of revelation to Bill. The “first overt thing I ever did around race” came when he attended a memorial service for the four slain African American girls who were killed in the bombing of the 16th St. Baptist Church in Birmingham. The whole seminary emptied out and went down to City Hall for a massive rally, where Bill remembers hearing James Farmer of CORE speak. (B. Troy, personal communication, August 26, 2010). This experience was typical of his whole first year in New York: “It was so stimulating and so exciting, and I was learning so much including about social and racial issues…very vivid even to this day” (Troy).
At Union, Bill got deeply involved in social issues, including his first experience at a demonstration, in which he joined together with many other students from Union in support of a teacher boycott in Harlem (Hesser, 1964). Bill also worked hard for the passage of the Civil Rights Bill of 1964. He urged participation in a letter writing campaign to ‘swing senators’ (Troy, 1964) and shared in the leadership of the theological students’ vigil at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. This was a 24 hours a day, seven days a week vigil, which lasted 63 days, from April to the passage of the Civil Rights Act in June. Members of the Social Action Committee of Union telephoned students at seminaries throughout the country to join them in the vigil, and from April 27 on, three seminary students at a time, one Protestant, one Catholic, and one Jew, kept vigil - and the sign before them read “Civil rights is a moral issue. We are all brothers before God.” (Franklin, 1964; Leatherwood, 1964; Ross, 1964; “A visit”, 1964).

Troy was involved in many activist projects at Union and worked with leaders at the National Council of Churches’ Commission on Religion and Race, who were deeply involved in the civil rights movement, such as Robert Spike (UTS, 48-50, CU, 54 Ed.D.) and Jack Pratt (UTS, ’59). Troy attended two big events in Atlantic City in 1964 - an AFL-CIO convention, as well as the Democratic National Convention. Following the passage of the Civil Rights Act, he got involved in the leadership of the Student Interracial Ministry, gaining important fund-raising experience that he would put to use in later years. He was also deeply influenced by Charles Sherrod who arrived at Union in the Fall of 1964 – “We didn’t know he was coming or who he was or anything” – yet Sherrod had a huge impact on Union students, redirecting a lot of SIM’s energy to the Southwest Georgia Project (see below) and recruiting many students.

Bill also had very significant parish experience while at Union. For three years he worked in an upper middle class parish in Westchester County, Scarsdale Congregational Church – for
field work during his Middler (1964-65) and Senior years (1966-67) and during an intern year (1965-1966). Under the socially progressive leadership of Avery Post (who would become the 4th president of the United Church of Christ, 1977-1989), Troy was able to work with the church social action committee and establish progressive programs, such as taking kids and adults to the East Harlem Protestant Parish, exchange programs, and many other activities.

For his SIM placement, Bill spent a summer working with the Delta Ministry in Mississippi. Like Mac Hulslander, Bill was also involved in the construction of the temporary housing, and teaching in the Freedom School. Yet it was the political work that probably made the greatest impression on Troy. He remembers how, on his very first day in Mississippi, that he and Curtis, a 14 year old African American young man were dropped off at a polling place in Crystal Springs, Mississippi – a town which had never been visited by civil rights workers. They were assigned to be poll watchers for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, whose candidate, Ed King, was running for the House of Representatives in the primary election. After standing all day at the polling place, Bill and Curtis narrowly escaped from trouble - they were followed by police cars through town as they wove their way through yards and side streets to take refuge at the home of African Americans whom Curtis had met during the day.

Another important experience occurred on the March Against Fear, also known as the Meredith March. James Meredith had begun in Memphis with the intention of walking the 220 miles to Jackson, Mississippi, in order to protest the continuing racism in Mississippi. It became a national gathering of civil rights groups when Meredith was shot and had to be hospitalized on the second day of the trip. The March reached its climax when Stokely Carmichael, the new head of SNCC, unveiled the Black Power slogan that would become iconic of the new-found radicalism of the movement. Bill Troy was a witness to this while participating in the march and
was shocked by the way in which the national television news coverage switched, almost overnight, to a negative appraisal of civil rights demonstrators in the South.

Yet it was a more subtle experience that was even more telling for Troy – as they were marching through the little town of Belzoni, Bill realized that the white people sitting on their porches watching the marchers could well be his own family – all of a sudden he realized that you can’t live in two worlds, and that the black world was accepting him and the white world from which he came was not. He experienced the same kind of dynamic when he was arrested along with other demonstrators. While he was being “processed”, the jailer asked Bill to provide his personal information. The jailer refused to accept that Troy was from Chattanooga, Tennessee, and refused to let him into jail until he admitted that he was a student in New York City.

When Bill returned to Union from his SIM placement with the Delta Ministry, he was deeply reflective about his experiences. It was vital that he had had his extensive involvement with the Scarsdale church, because it gave Bill a context of ‘real privilege’ from which to view the developments within the civil rights movement. After Troy had witnessed the birth of the Black Power movement while with the Delta Ministry in Mississippi, he got many questions from his supporters back in Scarsdale. Troy tried to explain how African Americans needed to be leaders in the movement and how whites need to find their proper role; but he found that the church people could never go this far. This experience in Scarsdale was a critical turning point for Troy, in terms of his own vocation. While he loved parish work, he realized that he had to find his own calling in a broader community setting.

Following seminary, Bill went overseas, for what was to be a two year stint in Japan and the Far East with the Frontier Internship in Mission program – “the Protestant Churches answer
to the Peace Corps...you lived at a subsistence level and did unconventional kind of mission work” (Troy). He returned about six months early from this trip, following the assassination of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. He then spent a half year in New York doing church-based anti-war work, then followed this with three years in Boston with an ecumenical campus ministry, doing community organizing and anti-war work. In Boston, he met Jim Sessions (UTS, ’68 STM, who would go on to be the director of Highlander) with whom he would found the Southern Appalachian Ministry in Higher Education (SAM). This was a community development and activism ministry, seeking to connect people at community and technical colleges with activists and development groups in the community. They dealt with issues of workers’ rights, workers’ health, and natural resource issues. In 1979, Troy joined with a few other people to organize the Tennessee Valley Energy Coalition – “a coalition of working people and senior citizens and church people and students to stop the nuclear power program at TVA” (Troy). After his work on nuclear power, Bill was reunited with Jim Sessions at a regional ecumenical organization which Jim had led since 1979, called the Commission on Religion in Appalachia (CORA). CORA had been formed during the Johnson administration’s War on Poverty, as an organization to seek justice for the needy in Appalachia:

   Being successful as a prophetic voice, working with the disadvantaged, creating anti-racism teams to dismantle racism and providing grants to a wide array of Appalachian ministries are just a few of CORA’s successes. (“40 year-old ecumenical”, 2006)

They worked to reshape CORA to address the broad economic conditions that were hitting the region during the tough economic times of the Reagan years. Building on this seven years’ work with CORA, Bill formed one more group, the Tennessee Industrial Renewal Network, a
statewide coalition of labor and community and church people trying to deal with plant closings, living wage issues, and the global economy. Fair trade. And I did that from 1990 until 2001 when I retired.

The lessons of that whole experience [SIM] got much broader…you can tell, than race…But just race doesn’t go away…I think it’s still the critical issue in the country. Race and class, in general together…so the understandings that I got in Mississippi, you know, that summer. Enabled me to be there really in those settings…and the issues had intensified, if that were possible…and become more difficult to break through and so forth. But the realities were the same. They still are…I think we’ll be dealing with them for a long time. So I think back now, and so much of my personal and political awareness about everything took shape in those years at Union mostly around the question of race…It’s a big deal to me. (Troy)

Having examined the experience of two SIM participants in the Delta Ministry, we will now consider an even more significant site for participants in SIM – the Southwest Georgia Project, led by Charles Sherrod, the well-known SNCC leader who attended Union from 1964-1966, earning a Master in Sacred Theology.

Participants in the Southwest Georgia Project

The Southwest Georgia Project began as an endeavor of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), led by Charles Sherrod, the beginning of which can be traced to the formation of the Albany Movement during civil rights protests in Albany, Georgia in 1961-1962. Following the largely unsuccessful demonstrations of those years, which featured participation by the major civil rights groups such as the SCLC, NAACP, and CORE, SNCC took on a long-term project based on direct action and community development. Although the
SWGP would officially sever its relationship with SNCC in July 1966, Sherrod would form a series of new organizations that would maintain the work, in one fashion or another, into the 21st century.

There has not been a major historical study of the Southwest Georgia Project. A chapter in Stephen Tuck’s book on the modern civil rights movement in Georgia (2001) is the most systematic treatment. David Cline’s forthcoming history dissertation (2010), which will have extensive coverage of SWGP, will help to fill this gap. Most of the major comprehensive works, such as Taylor Branch’s three-volume set (1988, 1998, 2006), as well as the studies focusing on SNCC (Carson, 1981; Hogan, 2007) only substantially treat the early period in Albany. Yet there is tremendous primary source material available in the various SNCC-related collections, and the SIM Papers in the archives at Union is an important collection of sources for the 1964-1968 period. The oral histories in this study with SWGP participants (Blackman, Brandon, Steffa, Wiltshire) and the unpublished diary of Joseph Howell (2009), add to this collection of source material.

Any brief overview of the history of the SWGP must begin with Charles Sherrod. Sherrod was born in 1937 in Petersburg, Virginia. His activism and interracial contacts with white adults began during his high school and college years. He attended Virginia Union for his undergraduate (1954-58) and theological education (1958-61). Around 1955 he began attending meetings of the Richmond Human Relations Council, largely made up of white liberals. Here Sherrod began to break with his stereotypical notions of white and black abilities – he saw that he could think and speak at a level equal to these white people. Also, he was a leader in the student lunch counter/restaurant sit-in at the Thalhimer’s Department Store in February 1960. (Sherrod, 1985; Wallenstein, 2004). Charles would go on to be a major staff person in SNCC,
first in Mississippi, and then in Georgia. He would be a leader of the Albany Movement and the
in the subsequent Southwest Georgia Project of SNCC. Sherrod and Robert Moses came to play
similar roles in the movement, in Georgia and Mississippi, respectively, sharing a deep
commitment to non-violence and a belief in an interracial vision. Sherrod pioneered the regular
use of white student volunteers from 1963 on. So when Sherrod decided to attend Union
Theological Seminary (1964-66) for an advanced degree, it was natural that he used the
opportunity to create a major recruiting network for the SWGP. Sherrod would dazzle Union
students and faculty with his knowledge and experience in the movement and end up convincing
the SIM committee to rethink its mission and put a serious commitment to placing students
outside the established church (Minutes, 1964, Nov. 12). Over three years, 33 different SIM
students participated in 37 placements in the SWGP – 23 of these students were from Union,
representing 27 placements. 10 SIM students went for year-long internships and nine of these
were from Union.

To understand some of the differences in summer activities, a brief summary of the
different locations in which SIM students were placed will be helpful. In the Summer 1965, Ruth
Brandon and her husband Bill Minter were part of a team of 5 SIM students who worked out of
the SNCC office in Albany (Dougherty County). In the Summer 1966, the 20 SIM students were
spread over several counties. Larry Blackman and his wife and Ashley Wiltshire were assigned
to Baker County (south of Albany) and the work focused on teaching in the Head Start program,
with only a little time spent on voter registration work and other activities (these accounts are
reinforced by the detailed account of Joe and Embry (Mimy) Howell (2009)). Don and Meredith
Steffa were placed in Dougherty County, and were more actively involved in voter registration
activities throughout the summer. Other counties had greater degrees of activism – Ed Feaver,
Jim Romberg, and Joe Pfister were in Worth County, east of Albany (Newsletter, 1966, August 2), where there was more activism (Howell, 2009). Ruth Brandon’s biography has already been discussed in detail in Chapter 7, so the remainder of this section focuses on the biographies of Larry Blackman, Don Steffa, and Ashley Wiltshire.

**Larry Blackman (Summer 1966)**

Larry Blackman was born in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1941 and, until he went to college, lived in Leavenworth, Kansas, a fairly conservative enclave of some 22,000 people. He describes the family he grew up in as Midwestern Republicans – his mother worked for the registrar of deeds in Leavenworth County. He attended the Leavenworth High School and the local Presbyterian Church. During his senior year in high school, he announced that he intended to become a Presbyterian minister. Larry had some experience with people of other races during his years growing up – he estimates that 20% of the student body of his high school was black (L. Blackman, personal communication, August 21, 2010). His family embraced egalitarian values: “they would tell us things; that people are equal. I really believed it. I believed that they meant it. And so I’d always been sympathetic to racial and social causes” (Blackman).

In actual practice, Blackman remembers that his parents sometimes made disparaging comments about African Americans. For example, he recalls their insulting remarks about the intelligence of a black maid who periodically cleaned their house as well as derogatory comments made by his father about black soldiers whom he trained in World War II. Larry also vividly remembers his parents' refusal to let a rental property to a black couple, who, ironically, were associated with the U.S. Army (L. Blackman, personal communication, August 21, 2010). He attended college at Kansas University, where he was a philosophy major and German minor. In preparation for seminary, he also took 15 hours of classical Greek as well as history and
religion courses. Following his graduation from the university, he received a German
government fellowship to study for a year in the theological faculty of the University of
Marburg. After his studies in Germany, he came to Union Theological Seminary in New York.
He chose Union primarily based on the recommendation of his campus minister at Kansas,
Maynard Strothmann (UTS ’49).

At Union, his primary academic interests were in the philosophy of religion and
systematic theology. He enjoyed the openness and diversity of the school and its intellectual
atmosphere. Both Germany and New York were broadening experiences through which he began
to be politically aware. In 1964, to the great consternation of his family, he registered to vote as a
Democrat. He keenly followed the news of the civil rights movement, especially the 1964
murders of Goodman, Cheney, and Schwerner, and began to consider getting involved
politically. In the Fall 1965, he met Charles Sherrod, who recruited him to participate in the
Southwest Georgia Project in Summer 1966. This was a fairly radical step for Larry, because,
before this, he had chosen field work assignments at very established churches such as the
Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, rather than selecting those of a more activist bent,
although he did get some experience tutoring black kids in Harlem through the influence of his
roommate, Larry Mamiya.

Larry Blackman did the summer section of his SIM placement with the Southwest
Georgia Project in Baker County, a county immediately to the south of Dougherty County, where
Albany is located. Southwest Georgia was a powerful and challenging experience for Blackman.
The SIM students had arrived just at the moment of transition to Black Power and its
exclusionary policies toward white civil rights workers. Due to the skills of Charles Sherrod, a
compromise was reached, and the white SIM students were allowed to be involved in support
roles. There was also significant cultural shock from the experience of living and working in what seemed to be chaotic conditions, with sometimes seven or eight people sleeping on the floor when traveling from one movement location to another. Yet Larry also had the experience of great generosity on the part of an African American woman, Ethel Lee Parks, who provided housing for Larry and his fiancée, Michaelyn ("Mickey") Brenton (whom he married that following September). Instead of the expected involvement in voter registration and other fieldwork, Blackman’s main responsibilities were teaching in the Head Start Program and promoting civil rights activities through giving talks in black churches and attending social activities.

Although the lack of direct involvement was disappointing, Blackman had important learning experiences in the SWGP, such as in the following two incidents. Due to the substantial number of workers that summer, he was able to give considerable individual attention to one of the really troubled young boys, Isaac Eady. He found the experience of being able to make a small difference in the boy’s life to be satisfying. Larry also learned to see race issues in a new perspective – he had the powerful experience of distrusting people simply because they were white and trusting people simply because they were black. He recalled:

Since I was associated with SNCC and SIM, I was automatically branded as one of these outsiders, and so you’d view every white person you’d meet in a somewhat different way. I had never distrusted white people simply on the basis of the fact they were white before.

(Blackman)

Following his summer with the SWGP, Larry Blackman continued in Georgia, spending and intern year (1966-1967) teaching beginning and intermediate German and one course in philosophy at Spelman College, a historically black college for women in Atlanta. As part of its
work experimenting with different kinds of ministries, SIM had initiated a small program in which participants worked as instructors at historically black colleges. Four students, including Larry Blackman, participated in the Atlanta College Project, teaching at Clark (2), Morehouse, and Spelman Colleges (1966-67), and four more students the following year (1967-68) at Lincoln University, Tuskegee and Hampton Institutes, and Spelman.

Spelman didn’t supply housing for faculty, so Larry and his wife Mickey needed to secure an off-campus apartment. They ended up getting one on Angier Avenue in an African American neighborhood rather far from campus, but they did so of their own volition, because by this time they identified to a greater extent with the black community (Blackman, 1966). Larry’s major learning at Spelman concerned class and socioeconomic distinctions between African Americans. He recognized that “for many of us white people” we “stereotype all blacks as being the same” (Blackman). “It was a surprise to Larry to learn that many middle class black people wanted little or nothing to do with their black brethren in the ghetto” (L. Blackman, personal communication, August 21, 2010). At Spelman he met a wide array of students across the socioeconomic and political spectrum. Just like the students at most colleges, he found them generally apathetic and needing to be stirred into action by a “healthy dose of activism” (Blackman, 1966, p. 76).

Larry Blackman’s time in Georgia, especially his intern year teaching at Spelman College, helped him to clarify his sense of life vocation. He came to the conclusion that “I wasn’t a very good community organizer, and my place really was in the academic world” (Blackman). After graduating from Union in 1968, Blackman went on to do a doctoral program in philosophy at the University of Minnesota, and has been a professor of philosophy at the State University of
New York at Geneseo since 1973. Although his activist days are behind him, he still maintains commitments that were strengthened in SIM:

I have become primarily a philosopher, although I still am still keenly aware and interested in race relations and politics, social issues. I’m not an activist…If people ask me on campus to give a talk [about civil rights], I will, but, I’m more of an academic person. (Blackman)

**Don Steffa (Summer 1966)**

Don Steffa was born in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania in 1938. The family moved frequently, due to his father’s position with the Federal Bureau of Prisons, including stops in Indiana, California and Texas. In 1948, they moved to Mesquite, Texas, twelve miles outside of Dallas, where Don was raised. Although, as he grew up, his parents were not deeply religious, “Don was baptized in the Episcopal tradition of his mother who continued to take him and his brother to first the Baptist Church and eventually to the Presbyterian Church in Mesquite” (D. Steffa, personal communication, August 27, 2010). Later in life his father became a deacon and elder in the Presbyterian Church in Mesquite. Don was a student leader in his school and was selected to be the charter president of the Kiwanis-sponsored Key Club. He started college at Trinity University in San Antonio, but transferred to the University of Texas at Austin.

From his father, Don got a deep sense of the importance of treating “every man as an equal” regardless of color (Steffa; D. Steffa, personal communication, August 27, 2010). During his time growing up, his only memory of Black people was seeing them come to town on Saturday to do their shopping. He also remembers a black school outside of Mesquite on the road to Dallas. Despite his egalitarian principles, Don’s father was not an activist of any sort. Don describes how, after his own mother died in 1958, his father had remarried three years later into a
traditional Texas family. In the early 1970s, due to objections by his father’s new family to Don’s civil rights activities, the two families separated (D. Steffa, personal communication, August 27, 2010). Reconciliation came in 1983 at the time of Don’s second marriage (D. Steffa, personal communication, August 31, 2010).

At the University of Texas, Steffa got involved in the dynamic student ministry found at the Christian Faith and Life Community (CFLC) (Hogan, 2007; Rossinow, 1994; “The Thereness of it All”, 1962). The CFLC had been formed by Presbyterian campus minister Jack Lewis in 1952. CFLC developed into a place in which students found a very powerful experience of Christian existentialism in a tight knit community. Lewis hired Joe Mathews in 1956 as the head of curriculum. Mathews instituted a program of study which introduced students to the most powerful post-war protestant intellectuals – and when Dietrich Bonhoeffer was introduced into the curriculum, the political implications became obvious. (Mathews would leave the CFLC in 1962, due to a disagreement with Lewis over the importance of the political dimension – Mathews then went to Chicago and headed the Ecumenical Institute.) (Rossinow, 1994).

The CFLC and the University YMCA and YWCA became important centers of early interracial activities and housing at the University of Austin and the centers of student civil rights protest. Through his involvement in the college student fellowship group of the University Presbyterian Church, Don Steffa participated in his first demonstration - a famous “stand-in” protest conducted at a local Austin movie theater that went on for about year (Rossinow, 1994). Don also had his first personal contact with African Americans through interracial activities with students at Huston Tillotson, a historically black college in Austin (Steffa; Rossinow, 1994). Steffa graduated from UT Austin with a BS Degree in Mechanical Engineering and then he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Air Force. He then was
studying and receiving a degree in meteorology from the University of Utah. After graduation he was assigned to a post in western Massachusetts as a weather forecaster. He served 2 ½ years, receiving an honorable discharge as a First Lieutenant in 1965. (D. Steffa, personal communication, August 27, 2010).

Don had been considering the possibility of going to seminary and he now decided to apply. When considering a few schools, he travelled to Union and found that the dorm room he had been assigned to share during orientation was occupied by Ken Carstens, a Methodist minister from South Africa, who had had to leave the country due to his anti-apartheid views and activities. Don had met Carstens previously while he was studying at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Don was at the University of Texas (D. Steffa, personal communication, August 31, 2010). Steffa remembers this encounter with Carstens at Union: “I knew I had gone to the right seminary.”

Don arrived at Union in the Fall of 1965, and brought with him a very experiential and pragmatic approach to theology, which certainly had been strengthened by his experience with CFLC in Austin (see also activist Casey Hayden’s experience at CFLC as described in Hogan, 2007). At Union, he found some professors who were supportive of this, such as Daniel Day Williams in his process theology class. Another professor was Bill Webber, who taught Steffa in an innovative seminar in which 12 students were placed in secular jobs throughout New York City – Don worked in the city planning department – and every week or so they would come together as a group to discuss and reflect on the theological implications. Yet Steffa found other professors, like Roger Shinn, to be more disconnected from the real world. In a paper for a class with Shinn, Steffa argued that “doing ethics was one of tension” while for Shinn “ethics was the
ethics of balance”. Stemming from his experience in Southwest Georgia, Don argued that ethics needed to be experienced “through the political events that were going on” (Steffa).

It was sort of the experience of the cross of Jesus, who was hung on the cross, nailed between the good and the bad. Doing ethics was the experience of crucifixion. Then, it was a confusing image to be sure, but one I think we can well understand today. (D. Steffa, personal communication, August 27, 2010)

In his first year at Union, Don was recruited by Bill Minter to participate in SIM through the Southwest Georgia Project. Don spent the summer of 1966 and then an intern year, 1966-1967, with the SWGP in Newton, Baker County, about 20 miles south of Albany, and was completely immersed in the African American community. While Don was involved in movement activities, Meredith taught in the local black public school. Don explains that otherwise the black schools would lose their Federal Government funds, because there were no white teachers in the Black School. Meredith’s income was given to support movement activities. Everyone received only a $5 weekly stipend for personal needs. (D. Steffa, personal communication, August 27, 2010).

Initially, Don and his wife Meredith lived in Albany, but for the internship year they moved to “Hill’s Farm”. Mr. Hill was a local African American farmer who let SWGP use an abandoned farm house on his property. Don often put to use his construction and mechanical skills by converted the old farmhouse into a place that could be used as a movement house.

I added a bath room, kitchen, photographic darkroom, a septic system and reactivated the water well and pump. It served as our dwelling and a place for the Southwest Georgia staff to meet and crash. (D. Steffa, personal communication, August 31, 2010)
In terms of movement work, the SWGP staff would come to a new area and hold a mass meeting in which Charles Sherrod would talk and learn about the community needs and explain how SWGP might be able to help. The major activity that Don got involved in was voter registration - calling on people in their homes and accompanying them to the courthouse to register. They also helped farmers with loan applications. Don describes the SWGP workers role as being a presence of hope in the community – a sign that things could get better.

Don greatly enjoyed meeting people throughout the community, and very soon felt comfortable traveling to people’s homes and throughout the rural black community. He also took many photographs, developing his skills as an amateur photographer. This care and interest in people shines through in his photography. On weekends, the staff would come together to meet in various places: Baker County, Albany, Cordele, and Americus. Meetings of the staff were typically half white students and half SNCC workers, along with Sherrod as the leader. Much like that of his fellow SIM participants’, Don’s previous exposure to African Americans was very limited. His growth involved coming to terms with his own white identity, particularly in the context of tense staff meetings in which he sometimes clashed with the SNCC leaders.

Charles Sherrod’s advice was key for Don - “Look. Observe. Participate. Pay Attention. Listen” (Steffa). Indeed, “the white person’s job was to encourage and support the development of black leadership in the presence of white people” (D. Steffa, personal communication, August 27, 2010). This meant learning to be more sensitive, especially to the racial dynamics of situations.

When he returned to Union for his final year at the seminary, Don Steffa kept his hand in SIM activities by editing Skandalon, SIM’s magazine. He also participated in the anti-war protests that exploded on the Columbia campus, being a friend of Vinnie McGee, the union student who ended up in Lewisburg Penitentiary for burning his draft card. In summer of 1969,
Don and Meredith were co-directors of a YM/YWCA summer camp, which placed 40 college men and women from across the country in inner city summer programs. They also provided the students with “social activities and exposure” to a wide range of city leaders and urban issues. (D. Steffa, personal communication, August 27, 2010). Don and his wife then moved to Cleveland, where Meredith had been accepted as one of a very small group of women medical students at Case Western Reserve University. He was employed with the City of Cleveland (1969-1974) in community development and city planning, doing work with model cities, and was active in an Ecumenical Institute group there for two years. Later (1978-1981), he worked for the Council on Economic Opportunity in Cleveland, as the Training Director for the Home Weatherization Program. The main goal of the program was to help inner city youth to develop “good working skills and habits leading toward careers” as “home weatherization entrepreneurs” (D. Steffa, personal communication, August 27, 2010). With the economic troubles of the late 70s and early 80s, he returned to Texas to work for Foster Cathead, an oilfield equipment company in Wichita Falls.

Here he met and married the Rev. Carol Wells Gibbs, a Disciples of Christ minister in December, 1983. It was during the four years in Wichita Falls that Don joined the Disciples of Christ Church, their son Ian was born, and reconciliation with Don’s Father and his family took place. (D. Steffa, personal communication, August 27, 2010)

He also volunteered in his church, working in a community resource center and rehabbing homes in 1987. Don was ordained in the Disciples of Christ Church in 1991, and served in variety of parishes until his retirement in 2008.
Ashley Wiltshire (Summer 1966)

Ashley Wiltshire was born in 1941 in Richmond, Virginia. He grew up in a conservative family and attended a little Baptist church in the suburbs of Richmond. He notes that:

the Virginia Baptists were a little different from what the Southern Baptists are today, but it’s still a conservative setting. And my parents were very traditional southern. I never questioned the segregated society I grew up on. (Wiltshire)

He attended an all white high school and had no exposure to black students, except for the experience he had when he was selected to attend an interracial conference. The conference was sponsored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and it was held at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond – probably in 1955 or 1956, following Brown v. Board of Education.

And I just remember it as the first time I had ever been in a setting that was multiracial, where people were treating each other with any kind of respect and communicating in any significant way. I don’t remember anything else about it except that it was a real shock to my system. (Wiltshire)

Wiltshire went on to attend Washington and Lee University (1959-63) in Lexington, Virginia, a segregated, all-male school. Ashley was unsure of his vocational direction. He had an interest in civil engineering, he thought about being a lawyer and he considered being a minister. A sense of ministerial calling had been with him since his time in youth groups in his church, and at that time he was considering going to a Baptist Seminary and becoming a minister. At Washington and Lee, he was the president of the University Christian Association, which had been the Student YMCA until it disaffiliated from the national association over integration policy in the 1950s. But during his sophomore year, Louis Hodges, a new professor, fresh from studying
ethics with Waldo Beach at Duke, challenged the somewhat hesitant Wiltshire to attend a
YMCA-sponsored, month-long summer program at Union Theological Seminary in New York –
“You really ought to go to this…you’ll never get to go to a school this good” (Wiltshire). Ashley
went and was hooked by the quality of the teaching from Daniel Day Williams of Union and
Charles West of Princeton, as well as by New York City itself. Wiltshire met his future Union
roommate, Rafael Ruiz (from Mexico), whom he roomed with that summer at Union.

In the summer of 1960, Wiltshire had another experience that broadened his horizons. He
was sent by the Virginia Baptist Convention as a summer missionary to Jamaica. Although he
probably stayed with white missionaries while in Jamaica, he profoundly remembers the
experience of going swimming with a Black preacher and his children – a practice that was taboo
in white southern culture. He also attended conventions of the Baptist Student Union for
Virginia, in which he remembers listening to black speakers – not that they would address race
issues, but – “It was just the presence of this, you know, wonderful, warm guy who…was just as
bright and just as articulate as…anybody else that came…I think there was a lot of message in
that” (Wiltshire).

Ashley arrived at Union for seminary in Fall 1963. Union was a very exciting place for
him, both academically and socially, although he was not particularly involved in social action
issues. He found the classes engaging, particularly Old Testament with Samuel Terrien and
James Muilenburg. He also was intrigued by the conflicting approaches of Daniel Day Williams’
process theology and Paul Lehman’s Barthian perspective. Socially, the diverse environment was
exciting, both racially and gender-wise – while talking with each other one day, several of the
Union men realized that they had all gone to male-only colleges.
His involvement in the Student Interracial Ministry started while he was on his intern year as an assistant chaplain at Blair Academy, a prep school in northwestern New Jersey. Ashley had heard that two Southwest Georgia Project alums, Joe Pfister and Ed Feaver, had developed a folk music service concerning the civil rights movement, and he invited them to lead a chapel service at Blair. While at Blair, they challenged Wiltshire to come with them to Georgia in the Summer of 1966. When Ashley accepted their offer, it was a huge step for him as he moved past his comfort zone - all his field placements up to then, as he describes, had been conventional, for example, in his first year he chose Madison Avenue Presbyterian rather than East Harlem or the Bronx.

Ashley Wiltshire did his summer placement with the SWGP in Baker County, south of Albany. He, along with Joe and Mimy Howell, lived with the Holt Family. Ashley shared very tight quarters with the two Holt boys, Nathan and Jackie. Ashley was deeply impressed by Jack and Dovana (Dovie) Holt, and became very fond of them and their children (as did Joe and Mimy (Howell, 2009). Ashley’s main responsibility was teaching in the Head Start program with Larry, Joe and Mimy. He doesn’t remember a lot of particulars about the experience, be he does remember a sense of doing something helpful with the kids. (In his diary, Joe Howell also found great satisfaction in helping the kids, and he details the signs of progress he saw in many of them (2009)). Another special project that Ashley had, showing interest in what would be his career, was doing legal research on how peanut allotments were distributed - Jack Holt and his neighbors raised peanuts, but were short-changed in the allotment process.

Ashley was profoundly affected by the affirmation and generosity of the Holt family and the small Black neighborhood in which they lived. Yet he also found himself in some conflict with SNCC workers over white southerners. In a staff meeting that was held at Koinonia Farm
(like Highlander, one of the few places that dared to host interracial meetings in the south), Ashley remembers people talking about “crackers” and he found it important to say that he was a cracker too. Ashley learned that he was uncomfortable with radical approaches that wanted to too easily divide groups into warring camps – instead he learned that it was important for him to assert the all embracing love of God for African Americans, while at the same time recognizing his identity as a white southerner – “it just seemed pretty important to understand that we’re all God’s children” (Wiltshire).

Following his time in Georgia, Ashley returned to Union for his senior year (1966-67). His major academic task was his senior thesis, which he did on the history of social action among Southern Baptists, arguing “that given the radical origin of the Baptist movement, the Baptists ought to be sympathetic to groups that are mistreated or subject to prejudice” (Wiltshire).

Following seminary, he served with the Journeyman Missionary Program of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in Bangkok, Thailand for two years, teaching English at a student center, and also working in hospitals, churches, and teaching bible classes. He studied very hard to learn to write and speak Thai and strove to learn as much as he could about Thai culture, accepting invitations to share holidays, celebrations, and events with the families of some of his students. He also needed to make a vocational decision. He corresponded with the leading “liberal” Southern Baptist, Carlyle Marney, and asked his advice on taking a parish in the South. Marney was very discouraging, so he decided to apply to law school instead, and ended up studying at Vanderbilt University. One of the attractions of Vanderbilt was that it had recently begun to publish the Race Relations Reporter, which provided a weekly chronicle of race-related incidents around the country. Based on his experience in Georgia, Ashley thought
that he would go to Appalachia and work in poverty law with white southerners. He applied to work with some organizations specifically doing this, but in the end he stayed closer to home and got connected with the fledgling legal aid society in Nashville. Wiltshire would go on to have a long career in poverty law as the director of the Middle Tennessee Legal Aid Society (37 years, 31 as director), assisting with the health, housing, benefits, domestic violence, and consumer problems of poor people.

The direct action settings of the SWGP and the Delta Ministry enabled SIM participants to have a rich interracial experience in the South. Yet the growing racial tensions in the civil rights movement and a growing interest in urban ministry helped to urge SIM leaders to consider other interracial ministry possibilities. The most extensive of these were the urban ministry team projects during 1966-1968.

**Urban Ministry Team Projects Participant:**

**Barbara Cox**

In the last two years of SIM (1966-1968), a new model of church-based ministry came to the fore in SIM – urban ministry team projects. In 1966-1967, there were 12 participants in Charlotte, Buffalo, and New York City; in 1967-1968, there were 40 participants in major programs in Atlanta and Chicago, as well as a number of participants each in Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New York, Richmond, CA, St. Louis, and Washington, DC. For 1967-1968, these projects virtually replaced the individual church based approach, in which only two participants were placed. These were programs that brought together the resources of several different churches in each area, and strove to take an integrated, community development approach to urban ministry. There were a number of factors influencing this move. First, the importance of urban ministry was growing in theological circles, especially at places like Union,
which already had a significant history in this area (i.e. the East Harlem Protestant Parish).

George Webber, one of the founders of EHPP, was continuing to develop his ideas – an example of this is the innovative community development based class that Webber taught in 1966-1967, in which Don Steffa, and probably Bill Troy, participated (Steffa; Troy).

The second factor was the growing influence of the Ecumenical Institute at Union and in SIM. The Ecumenical Institute (EI) was founded in Chicago in 1956, following a resolution at the Evanston, IL meeting of the World Council of Churches (1954) to develop a lay training center modeled after the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland. In 1962, the Rev. Joe Mathews left his innovative work at the Christian Faith and Life Center in Austin, TX to head the EI. The EI was a radical experiment in revisioning the life of the church in the inner city, focused around a tight-knit, family-centered worshipping community (with some monastic elements), a spirituality deeply grounded in recent European theological thought, such as the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and committed to broad-based community development. In relation to community development, EI was heavily influenced by Saul Alinsky and his organizing work in Chicago (“Churches: Laboratory for the future, 1967; Rose, 1968).

The Ecumenical Institute had a significant influence at Union – Joe Mathews spoke at Union (Boomershine) and an EI cadre (study group) was formed, probably in Fall 1965 (Hulslander). The effort to bring the EI approach into SIM was led by Malcolm George Walters. George was a Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary student and participated in SIM in 1964, serving at the Davie Street Presbyterian Church in Raleigh, North Carolina with J. Oscar McCloud (UTS ’61; SIM student ’61; SIM supervisor ’62-64). Walters was active in SIM leadership and transferred to Union in Fall 1965. During that year, Walters transitioned into the
leadership position formerly held by Tom Boomershine. Walters was deeply committed to the EI model and would work on the staff of the EI following graduation from Union in 1967.

It is worth mentioning here that the Ecumenical Institute approach ended up being a divisive force in SIM, although maybe a necessary development of sorts. The archival records for the SIM Orientation Conference Committee indicate that it met frequently from January to April, 1966, planning the conference in which SIM Summer 1966 participants would receive training. In January and February meetings, the ideas for the conference centered around context, diversity, the state of the civil rights movement today, and bringing in speakers with considerable experience in the southern civil rights movement, such as Robert Spike, Art Thomas, and Charles Sherrod. Ruth Brandon urged a balance between the practical and the theoretical, as well as making the orientation mandatory only for the church-based SIM projects, in that direct action groups like the SWGP would have their own training (Minter, 1966, January 31). Charles Sherrod also urged this kind of perspective. By March and April, the plans were clearly much more theologically and theoretically focused and bringing in the EI to participate in the orientation was a likely possibility. In late March, the location had not yet been finalized, and a handwritten note indicates that the Ecumenical Institute was being considered as a site, with the note “do not mention”. Clearly, the EI approach was a controversial factor.

In the end, Ecumenical Institute staff was brought in to lead the program, which was organized around major theoretical sessions throughout the three days (Cultural Revolution, Religious Revolution, Racial Revolution). The orientation conference was held at Walter’s former school, on the campus of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. After the first session or so, an uprising took place in the meeting. Several of the Union students who were going to SWGP objected to what they considered the authoritarian and dogmatic approach taken
by the EI leader, and most of the participants ended up leaving that session and putting together their own program during various parts of the remaining days (Howell, 2009; Steffa; Troy). In the end some resolution was found but it was clearly a very conflictual situation (Howell, 2009).

In retrospect, this move toward bringing an Ecumenical Institute approach into SIM may be an inevitable development, as the mostly white leadership of SIM sought to find ways in which white seminarians could keep active in the civil rights movement in the face of a growing nationalist approach. The summer of 1966 witnessed the emergence of Black Power in the movement, centered in the emergence of the Stokely Carmichael’s more radical leadership of SNCC. This move would largely exclude white participation in the movement – the participants in Southwest Georgia Project and the Delta Ministry were first hand observers of this development. The move to urban-centered, team based projects, mostly in cities outside the South, seems to have been an attempt to have direct action, community based projects that are more conducive to white leadership participations.

Although the summer started in some turmoil at the orientation conference, the Charlotte Urban Ministry in which Barbara Cox participated was a good model of the new team ministry approach. It brought together interracial teams of students and ministers in a multi-site program in Charlotte, with the support of several area church bodies.

**Barbara Cox (Charlotte, North Carolina – Summer 1966)**

Barbara Cox was born in Asheville, North Carolina in 1932 and moved to Raleigh when she was about four or five, to be nearer the coast where her father was from. She started school there and eventually the family bought a farm and moved to Charlotte – nearer to her mother’s family. Barbara went to school in Charlotte and upon graduating from high school, attended Pfeiffer College (now University) in Misenheimer, North Carolina, about 40 miles northeast of
Charlotte. After two years (it was a junior college) she transferred to Greensboro College (1953-1955), a Methodist women’s college in Greensboro, North Carolina, another 50-60 miles northeast.

Her father appears to have had fairly racist views during her upbringing, although her mother did not. Barbara’s progressive ideas about race drew on the more progressive views of her mother and were shaped by her experience at Greensboro College. She remembers the role played by her courses in Old and New Testament and Social Ethics in changing her racial attitudes. Cox also remembers that faculty largely took for granted that students would have more progressive views about race. Even more clearly, she remembers the way in which her professors expected Christian education students to make an impact:

“You’re going to be a Christian educator, and your witness and your work is going to make a difference in the world.” And they expected it, and they trained for it – because we did go directly from the college, most of us, into church jobs. (Cox)

At Greensboro, Cox got involved in her first interracial group, an intercollegiate committee made up of representatives from North Carolina A. & T., Bennett College, Woman’s College at UNC, and Greensboro College (Cox). Such meetings of inter-racial committees had been occurring since the mid-1940s, in an effort to promote contact between the races at the different schools (“Inter-racial Club”, 1946). Even more important for Cox was her participation in the Methodist Student Movement (MSM), through the local Student Christian Fellowship. The Methodist Student Movement was an important factor that encouraged students to have more progressive racial attitudes, as well as broader perspectives in general (Evans, 2003; Murray, 2004). Cox remembers that there was interracial cooperation between the student Christian groups at Greensboro College, Bennett College, and Guilford College, in which she met African
American students from Bennett. This included an event sponsored by MSM and held at the white Myers Park Methodist Church in Charlotte. She also remembers the role played by the MSM protesting segregation at Lake Junaluska retreat center – they refused to have meeting there until it was integrated (Cox; Murray, 2004).

After graduation from Greensboro with a degree in Christian education, she went to work at Wesley Methodist Church in Hartsville, South Carolina. Barbara recalls that Isabelle Griffith, the pastor’s wife and a high school teacher, was actively involved in the process of desegregation following Brown v. Board of Education in 1954. Following this Cox returned to North Carolina, first to Shelby and then to Hawthorne Lane Methodist in Charlotte, from 1960 to 1965. In the fall of 1965 she went to Union seminary to do a graduate degree in Christian education. She chose Union largely based on the recommendation of a fellow Christian educator and the opportunity to be in New York. At Union she had influential classes with Roger Shinn in ethics, Hans Hoekendijk in missions, and others. Her participation in SIM, specifically in Charlotte, stemmed from her need to be at home to help with her ailing father – so the opportunity to work in Charlotte for the summer was a great opportunity for Barbara.

For her SIM placement, Barbara Cox participated in the Charlotte Urban Ministry. This was a team ministry, involving five SIM participants, including Cox and C. Tom Ross from Union, two students from Johnson C. Smith, a historically black college in Charlotte, and a seminarian from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. The group had three pastor-supervisors and the students were assigned to three inner city churches. They set up a day camp program, took the young people to the swimming pool, and did visitation with the families of the children (Cox; “SIM summer team ministries”, 1966). Local people also helped staff the different church locations – Cox commuted from home each day with Janet Hunter, a fellow
Charlotte native. She remembers Rev. Robert Shirley, one of the supervisors, as a personable African American minister who was a resource person for the group ministry. Shirley was an important advocate for the educational needs of African American children in Charlotte, fighting for their rights in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education* (Bundy, 2008). Barbara Cox describes how her SIM experience “puts all those lofty concepts on legs. It makes them real” (Cox).

Following SIM, Barbara Cox returned to Union. Her year at Union was dominated by writing her thesis. After seminary, she returned to Charlotte and worked as a Christian educator from 1968 to 1976. A lay person in her church was interviewing her recently, and he remembered her sitting on his back porch leading the young people in *We Shall Overcome*. Her future work was largely dictated by the needs of her family. Her father was killed by a car in 1976, so Barbara left church work in order to be able to take care of her mother, who had also come down with cancer. After her mother’s death in 1982, she sold the family farm and started work at the Methodist Conference Office media center, and retired from there in 1992.
PART III

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING IN CONTEXT

Part III of this dissertation consists of Chapters Eight and Nine, which present a thematic analysis of the results of this study and then analyzes and interprets the findings. Chapter Eight focuses specifically on the Student Interracial Ministry as a context for transformative learning concerning race. Particular emphasis is placed on the role in which the participants’ experience of racism served as a disorienting dilemma, which in turn played a key role in their transformative learning. The central role of community and many of its affective components will be examined. The contribution of holistic factors, such as the influence of religious perspectives and the role of the creative arts will also be discussed. Finally, considerable attention will be given to the way in which participants in this study integrated that learning into their lives and used this learning to forge new conceptions of faith and ministry.

Chapter Nine draws some conclusions to the study, by exploring the findings of the study in light of transformative learning theory, intergroup contact theory and faith development theory. It also offers suggestion for theory development, research and practice.
CHAPTER EIGHT

LEARNING ABOUT RACE IN THE STUDENT INTERRACIAL MINISTRY

In order to understand the learning about race that took place among these participants in the Student Interracial Ministry, it is important to identify the factors in their lives that prepared them for this learning, the shape that learning took during their time at Union Seminary and in the Student Interracial Ministry, and the ways they integrated that learning into their lives as they left Union. Since the previous three chapters have provided fairly extensive biographical background on the participants, it will only be necessary to summarize and synthesize much of their experience before and after their time in the Student Interracial Ministry.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section highlights the orienting context for their learning about racism. In order to reduce the length and redundancy of this section, reference will be made in the first section, as often as appropriate, to quotations and descriptions in the earlier biographical chapters. In essence this first section serves as an introduction to understanding their learning experiences in SIM. The bulk of this chapter focuses on the learning in the Student Interracial Ministry itself, the second section of this chapter, and follows the standard protocol of qualitative data analysis of putting the findings into themes. The third and final section provides important consideration to the ways in which SIM participants integrated their learning into their lives and the connections that this had with their faith development and sense of vocation. A strong sense of a movement toward openness pervaded the interviews, and this chapter will help to provide a feel for this journey. In order to help the reader more easily follow the discussion a data display appears on the next page.
DATA DISPLAY: TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING IN SIM

The Orienting Context: Upbringing, Schooling, and Early Career

Experience with Racism
Cross-Cultural and Interracial Experiences in Overseas Programs and College Groups

Learning in the Student Interracial Ministry

Racism as a Disorienting Dilemma
- Praxis: From Reading to Reality – Learning in Action
- Changing Perspectives on Race and Class
Relating to the African American Community: From Affect to Action
- Welcoming into a Rich Communal Life
- Respect
- Development of Empathy and a Common Sense of Purpose
- Movement toward Social Justice Action
- Fear and Conflict with the White Community
- Dealing with Exclusion from the Civil Rights Movement

The Spiritual and Symbolic Process Dimensions of SIM
- Spiritual/Religious Dimension
- Songs, Music, and Art

SIM and the Transformative Development of Vocation

- Movement from Inherited Faith to One’s Own Faith
- Movement Away from an Institutional View of Faith and Ministry
- Community-Centered Understanding of Faith and Ministry
- Role of Conflict
- A Continuous, Ongoing Process

The Orienting Context: Upbringing, Schooling, and Early Career Prior to Union

A major factor in the potential for transformative learning to take place is the context of that learning. A key part of the context for the learning about race that took place in the Student Interracial Ministry is the experience that the participants had with race during their upbringing, schooling, and other events proceeding seminary. This section will explore their varied experiences with racism, as well as analyze other common factors such as cross-cultural and interracial experiences, which helped to prepare them for learning in SIM.
Experience with Racism

In order to understand the ways in which the Student Interracial Ministry experience may have been transformative for its participants in relation to their racial attitudes, it is necessary to understand the experience that the participants had with racism. It should be said that all twelve of the participants had progressive racial attitudes at least by the time that they left Union Seminary. Yet, it is very important to explore the settings in which they grew up and the processes by which their racial attitudes were shaped. Consideration will be given to experiences in the home, school, college, military service and work, overseas experience, seminary, SIM, other activism, and their life setting following seminary.

All of the participants had very limited experience with people of other races during their times growing up. Two participants had virtually no contact with African Americans before higher education (Mac Hulslander in rural N.E. Pennsylvania and Ruth Brandon in rural Vermont); the Southerners had some exposure to African Americans, but had no or few real relationships or shared institutions, as they lived in highly segregated societies (Don Steffa in rural Texas; Barbara Cox in Asheville, North Carolina; Bud Walker in rural Missouri and Mississippi; Ashley Wiltshire in Richmond, VA; and Bill Troy in Appalachia); three Northerners went to integrated high schools, but had no friendships with African Americans (Larry Blackman in Leavenworth, Kansas; Tom Boomershine in a small town outside Dayton, Ohio; and George McClain in rural Indiana); only John Collins had any deeper experience, growing up and working in Chicago.

SIM participants came from a wide range of backgrounds concerning the degree to which racism permeated the environment in which they grew up. In some situations, acceptance of segregation and racist values was assumed as a natural part of life. As Charles Helms stated:
All my family on both sides were southerners, and there was no question that I ever heard about the racial system in the South. Nobody ever questioned it or expressed any concern…about it at any rate. Everybody accepted it as right…nobody had this intense hatred toward black people. Everybody just assumed that they [African Americans] were an inferior race and a servant caste, and, of course, back in those days when I was growing up, I mean, we really had a caste system. (Helms)

Disrespectful treatment of African Americans and the use of disrespectful language toward them were just a given in some environments. This was made clear in the stories that Bud Walker recounted about his early encounters with African Americans who gently corrected his language and sought his help when being blamed for the actions of others. In some of the families, there were particular individuals who sometimes spoke in a more respectful manner, yet the many voices of a family and an environment come together in a powerful way. As Boomershine explained:

My father worked at Frigidaire, which was a major factory in Dayton, and I remember him talking in ways that were not wholly complimentary about the blacks that he worked with. Now he also at times talked about some of them with respect, but for the most part, he was pretty negative about them. And so I remember that, and that was also then even more so [for] the rest of my family…They [my uncles] were extremely conservative and were very prejudiced, and so I grew up having major conflicts with my uncles around social issues.

While racism was blatant and a given in some situations, in others the racism was below the surface, finding expression in the occasional use of derogatory language toward African Americans or ill-treatment of them. Participants had often been taught according to more
progressive standards, even though they sometimes witnessed their families’ ideals falling short of these standards:

I think they [my family members] were just very much people of their culture…they didn’t do ugly things…and they didn’t do any particularly nice things…I probably did hear the word nigger growing up... I know that…the nice thing to say and the proper thing to say was colored people. (Wiltshire)

Sometimes the language was joined with demeaning speech and discriminatory behavior. Larry Blackman provided this example from memories of his parents:

I remember clearly we had a black maid that would come in and do the cleaning and ironing… And I recall their having made disparaging remarks about her and her intelligence when she wasn’t around. That’s one sign. But even more disconcerting I recall that after my father came home from the Second World War, after my grandmother died, so we had a house which they were renting out, and a black couple from the fort wanted to rent it, and my father said “no” on no other grounds than racial.

While some of the participants’ families would behave in ways that were racist, many of their families also preached a message of equality. Their behavior would seem to undercut the message being taught, yet somehow that message still had value to the participants. As Blackman explained:

Although nominally they [my parents] were not racist, but as a matter of fact, I think in a very deep way they were. But I always – and they would tell us things; that people are equal. I really believed it. I believed that they meant it. And so I’d always been sympathetic to racial and social causes.
In the families of Barbara Cox and Bill Troy, their mothers and fathers had differing views on race, and it seems that their mothers’ attitudes played an important role in shaping their own views. As Barbara Cox explained:

He [Father] was a down east fellow. Mother was a mountain Republican really...But there was quite the difference... in the background going back to the Civil War...And interestingly enough, my mother never had those. Never had those, you know, racial overtones. But anyway I remember her saying that she only – there was only one black person in their community. She called her Aunt Sally and that she had been with a family for -- one family her whole life, and she walked behind that family when they went out with her hands folded like this (indicating)...But that was the only one [black person] Mother was ever around.

When Barbara returned from college, however, she found that her father’s views were changing: “It didn’t happen overnight by any means. I think a lot of it was...as his church changed, and his daughter changed, and his party changed...he changed” (Cox).

In the case of Bill Troy, his mother’s influence won the day and influenced his family as well, as Bill noted:

I also had this kind of generalized progressive liberal kind of perspective on things, I think primarily through my mother, who also influenced my father a lot that way. So it was far and away not a radical perspective, but it was more open-minded than most folks.

Although his mother passed on more progressive views to him, his deep sense of egalitarianism, largely stemming from his mother’s time being raised in China in a missionary family, stands in stark contrast to Troy’s striking isolation and detachment from the lives of those around him who were different. This isolation was shown in the shock he felt (after seminary)
when meeting a member of the black high school that had used Troy’s high school gymnasium after the white teams were finished practicing for the day. His extended family also appears to have been very resistant to any changes to the status quo. We get a feel for this resistance in Bill’s description, from his SIM experience, of how he became aware that the white southern families, who were so deeply opposed to civil rights activism, could well have been members of his own family.

Some other SIM participants grew up in environments that generally exhibited more progressive racial attitudes and behaviors. The two participants (Ruth Brandon and Mac Hulslander) who seem to have grown up in the most progressive environments are also the participants with the least experience interacting with people who are racially or ethnically different. Yet their families played an important part in shaping a progressive environment. Mac grew up in a Methodist parsonage where people like James Farmer (who was a co-founder of CORE) came to visit and socially progressive publications like Christianity and Crisis were available for reading by the curious young man. In Ruth’s case, she had activist family members who influenced her. She stated:

The role of church people in abolition and the underground railway and in peace issues over the years [was] normative for me. That is what Christians did. That is how we lived out our faith. (Brandon, 1997)

Moving from passive acceptance of segregation to a more active role, as in Ruth’s family, was a key element in more progressive racial attitudes. John Collins’ parents, although not completely free from racist perspectives, are a case in point. John believed that even though they reflected some of the attitudes of their times, their core belief in equality generally guided their actions. He stated:
And anyway when [Martin Luther King] led the march [in Chicago], the minister of our church, Don Walden, opened the church so that the marchers could come in to go to the bathroom or get a drink of water…For that, the church ran him out. The congregation turned on him. He was a wonderful man. And my parents were one of the only – very, very few that stood up for him…So I always felt like even though they had issues with this …their hearts were in the right place, you know; they were…there. They might not even have agreed with everything King was doing, but…they knew Don Walden. (Collins)

Early in their lives, the movement toward more progressive racial attitudes involved taking small steps that directed them toward a deeper commitment to living in a way that was more open to the diversity of people around them. For John Collins, those small steps involved his attempts to improve the lives of people or resist injustice. He stated:

Even though I grew up in a very segregated neighborhood on the south side, I did, while I was practicing law, organize a Boy Scout – or took over a Boy Scout troop, that was mostly black kids. That was my first experience, you know. So I had an openness to that kind of thing all along. I was very upset with my fraternity – [when they] didn’t accept…a black student, one of the few on campus, into membership. And so I had a lot of conflicts like that with myself. (Collins)

Most of the participants would continue these steps toward openness, during their time prior to SIM, by either having a significant cross-cultural experience or through participation in campus college groups – both of which will be explored in the next section.
Cross-Cultural and Interracial Experiences in Overseas Programs and College Groups

Cross-cultural and interracial experiences often helped to drive this movement toward openness. These experiences were part of a learning process, which provided vital preparation for the learning they would experience in SIM. Having the experience of being a white minority in terms of numbers, though not always in terms of who had the most power, in another culture, be it in an African-American community or an overseas experience, was very important to SIM participants. For Mac Hulslander, we have seen how his longstanding interest in race relations was stimulated through his own kind of pre-SIM experience when he participated in an exchange program between Drew University and historically black Howard University in Washington, which “set me on the path of interest in doing more with this. It was kind of the prelude as it were for what was to come later” (Hulslander).

In many cases, this cross-cultural exposure took the form of overseas experiences. Nine of twelve participants had significant overseas experiences, and two participants had more than one experience (Wiltshire and Brandon). Six happened before seminary (Blackman, Boomershine, Collins, Hulslander, Walker, Wiltshire), one after a year at Union (McClain), and three immediately following seminary (Brandon, Troy, Wiltshire). These three after seminary, although following SIM, were deeply connected with the racial learning that took place in SIM previously. Three were academic semesters or years in Europe (Boomershine in England, Blackman in Germany, and McClain in Switzerland); two were in the military in the Far East (Collins and Walker); one was a summer missionary program in Jamaica (Wiltshire) and four were church-sponsored programs modeled after the peace corps (Hulslander and Troy in Japan and the Far East, Wiltshire in Thailand, and Brandon in Mozambique, to which she would return two more times). In at least three cases (Brandon, Hulslander, and Walker), overseas cross-
cultural experiences played a key role in their movement toward a more open, inclusive, broader perspective on the human experience. For Bud Walker, we have seen how his experience in the Marine Corps while in the Far East, was a world expanding one for him. In conjunction with this move toward openness came significant learning about race. In the marines, he met professional African American soldiers, which broke open stereotypical views for Bud:

I was a United States Marine. And I remember the first time I met this black sergeant-major who was so squared away and so effective he was just an impressive human being, and I said, “Wow. I don’t see many people like that in Mississippi.”

For Mac Hulslander, his years in Japan gave him the perspective of being a member of a small Christian religious minority, which formed a kind of counterpoint to the broadening experience he had as a racial minority at historically black Howard University:

I was in the country [Japan], so not only racially was I very much a minority, I was in a city of 60,000, and there were five Americans in that city. So there was that aspect of being a minority but also because of being a Christian in a predominantly non-Christian country. So I guess the two experiences together really kind of fostered in me a sensitivity to being a minority and understanding.

For Ruth Brandon, her ongoing experiences in Africa, through which she came to think of Mozambique as her second home, built on her immersion experiences during SIM.

College Christian groups were also an important influence in many SIM participants’ movement toward greater openness. These groups were typically local chapters of campus ministry organizations affiliated with specific protestant denominations (Methodist, Presbyterian) or non-denominational groups (YM/YWCA) that provided opportunities for fellowship, worship, study, and witness. At least ten of the twelve participants had involvement
with campus Christian groups, either during college (Blackman, McClain, Steffa, Cox, Wiltshire, and Brandon), working in a regional staff position after college (Hulslander) or after seminary (McClain), or as a local campus minister following seminary (Troy, Walker). For at least half of the participants (McClain, Steffa, Cox, Wiltshire, Brandon, and Hulslander), this involvement played an important part in their movement toward greater racial sensitivity and openness.

For George McClain, this was largely still at the cognitive level, as the Methodist Student Movement was for him a tremendous source for learning about “the major social issues of the day, especially race”. For Ashley Wiltshire, his participation as a leader in his university Christian group connected him with progressive networks, as he attended a summer leadership training program at Union Seminary in New York, where he had the experience of having a Mexican roommate and overall “just this wonderful eye-opening experience for me” (Wiltshire). For others, like Don Steffa and Barbara Cox, their involvement in campus Christian groups at college gave them what amounted to their first chance to make personal acquaintances with African Americans and to be involved with or exposed to activism. For Mac Hulslander, his experience working with student Christian groups, which came following his three years in Japan, gave him the opportunity to make unique, interracial connections between segregated schools, bringing together black and white Methodist students – in most cases probably meeting for the first time. As he came to campus, he would find that, for example, white students were curious about their counterparts on a nearby black campus. He stated:

So I began to use that as an excuse for beginning to get students from white campuses and black campuses together…It was such a novel thing, believe it or not, to go…take a carload of white students over to a black campus like Grambling University… And it was just a very exciting, exhilarating time. And after that one year of experience on the staff,
I began to think in terms of “Boy, you know, I would really enjoy doing something like this.” You know, as a career or somehow working in it. (Hulslander)

It has been demonstrated how a diverse array of experiences with racism, formed part of the context for the students future learning in SIM. For many, significant cross-cultural and interracial experiences in student Christian groups were also part of a transformative process toward greater openness that would include their learning in SIM. Having described this orienting context, it is now time to move to an examination of their multi-faceted learning experience in the Student Interracial Ministry.

**Learning in the Student Interracial Ministry**

This section will focus on the learning that took place in the Student Interracial Ministry. It will begin by considering one more aspect of preparation for this learning – the participants’ experience at Union Theological Seminary itself. The challenging curriculum and powerful and diverse experience of studying at Union Seminary greatly fostered the movement toward openness and new learning, which led to their involvement in the Student Interracial Ministry. In SIM itself, they had a rich learning experience which can be understood in four main areas: First, SIM gave participants a realistic understanding of racism and segregation, moving them from learning based on reading to learning stemming from experience and action, and served as a disorienting dilemma concerning race. Second, the African American community, with its welcoming community, provided a rich affective environment which served as the central context for the learning of SIM participants. Third, the significant role of the spiritual and symbolic processes dimensions will be described, and fourth, the way in which the learning in SIM played an important role in the vocational decision-making and faith development of SIM participants will be detailed.
Experience at Union Theological Seminary

Some students had little exposure to the social dimension of Christianity before coming to seminary. Charles Helms, for example, in speaking to this point, noted what was significant about Union:

I think it was just the overall emphasis that there were social and political implications to the Christian ethic. And I also know, of course – knew that these guys [professors] had themselves been activists. They had been very active in social and political affairs.

A wide range of professors were mentioned by SIM participants as being influential to them in the development of progressive social perspectives, with those who taught theology and ethics being mentioned the most. Programs outside the classroom were also important, such as orientation programs, guest speakers, symposiums, and chapel speakers, as Union brought students into contact with a whole range of people and ideas that they may never have considered before. This included the interaction with civil rights workers such as Bayard Rustin, that so impressed John Collins and Bud Walker.

Many SIM participants also took field work positions that gave them exposure to radically different environments. Union’s proximity to Harlem and its many-year history with the experimental East Harlem Protestant Parish, as well as arrangements with churches and service agencies in a variety of areas of New York, provided ideal opportunities to students seeking such an experience. For example, Helms noted:

Well, I did my field work in an inner city church in Hell’s Kitchen, and it was in an African-American and Puerto Rican neighborhood, and, of course, there was poverty, and there was racial alienation between the Puerto Ricans and the Blacks and so forth. So that – you know, that was also an influence. (Helms)
For several of the participants in particular, Union was a place that opened them up to alternatives to traditional pastoral ministry. For example, Bill Troy and Mac Hulslander, both sons of Methodist ministers, shared in common a deeply Methodist background that might well have pushed them into the pastoral ministry. At Union, they met professors like J.C. Hoekendijk (Missions), Bill Webber (Urban Ministry), and Robert Lynn (Practical Theology), who had a broad vision of the nature of the church, and the forms that leadership within the church might take. They envisioned a church that empowered the laity to use their rich skills in a vision of ministry that transcended the traditional church, uniting the church with government, business, social service, and other agencies that could meet the needs of a diverse community, especially in urban settings.

These experiences at Union with professors and students paved the way for their participation in the Student Interracial Ministry, which was a powerful learning experience for all the participants. For some, it deepened commitments in support of civil rights and led to more fully progressive racial attitudes. For many, it involved powerful new learning about race, which they integrated into their faith development and vocation in highly significant ways. For all the participants, SIM made their experience of racism and understanding of racial issues more vivid, in their movement from what was largely a conceptual understanding to a more realistic, experience-based perspective. But the three most significant elements that appeared to facilitate this process were: a) experiencing the reality of racism as a disorienting dilemma; b) relating to the African American community in affect and action; and d) the spiritual and symbolic process dimensions of the SIM experience.
**Racism as a Disorienting Dilemma**

Throughout the interviews, race acted as a disorienting dilemma to the SIM participants, as they were shocked, disturbed, and challenged by the pervasive presence and reality of racism in the lives of the African Americans they met in SIM and within themselves. As has been noted, SIM participants largely had progressive attitudes toward race, but the personal involvement in a community and society in which racism was so blatant and ubiquitous provided the participants with many forms of disorienting dilemmas. They were deeply disturbed by the utter reality of what they had previously only conceptualized; they were scandalized by the church’s complicity in racism; they were frustrated and perplexed by the power of the status quo and the inability to bring about change. This section explores the effect of this disorienting dilemma in two specific ways: first, their learning as praxis is described, as they move through a process from classroom and book learning to learning in action which results in new understanding; second, it examines the way in which this disorienting dilemma led them to challenge their own conceptions of racial identity and begin to form new perspectives concerning race and class.

**Praxis: From reading to reality – Learning in Action.** SIM participants described their learning in SIM as a movement from merely conceptual learning focused on books and classroom instruction to learning through in-person experience. This section on learning in action describes the different aspects of this learning process as described by the participants. It moved from a sense of dissatisfaction with classroom/book learning, to a decision to participate in SIM, which provided them with personal experience, seeing the reality of segregation up close. This sense of personal learning deepened as the participants saw the effects of segregation in people’s lives, and from their own personal experience as they began to take action on the new understanding of reality that was forming. It also had the effect of encouraging them, upon their
return to the seminary, to work to reform the seminary’s approach to education, to make it more connected with reality.

Before involvement in SIM, many participants did considerable reflection and study concerning race relations. Yet they experienced a sense that something was lacking. For example, McClain stated

So I felt like I was a kind of armchair activist after writing these memorials and then about the joint conference. I mean, it was on my heart. When I wrote my – I should say I wrote my thesis in college, an honors thesis optional thing on the Negro in the Methodist church, 1939-1960, so I was chronicling the struggle against our own internal apartheid, our Central Jurisdiction. (McClain)

Although students felt that they benefited from many of their classes at Union, getting out and putting the faith into action was critical to the learning process. Steffa noted:

We went [to SIM], and we decided we’d stay. So we had a commitment to that because I mean, what choice did I have? I didn’t want to go back to school and study. I mean…it was good, but it was – there was something missing. (Steffa)

For a number of participants, this movement from reading and ideas to action was important in their decision to participate in SIM. George McClain explained how his therapist had anonymously used him in a book “as an example of how you don’t just keep people on your apron strings, but that life…is part of the therapeutic process”. For Barbara Cox, her personal experience in SIM gave a sense of reality to the book and classroom learning. She recalled:

It puts all those lofty concepts on legs. It makes them real. I remember a little boy saying to me – or maybe it was a little girl. I don’t remember…. I remember we had come back from the swimming pool, and we were standing around the church talking.
And she said, “People always come, and they don’t come back. Don’t not come back.” 

And I remember I didn’t know what to say because I knew I would be back in seminary the next year…And I think what I said was, “I hope there will always be a program.”…But there is still a Cordelia swimming pool in Charlotte. (Cox)

For many students, especially those from the North, this was their first, close-up, in-person look at segregation, and they found the reality appalling:

I couldn’t believe it. I mean, when you read about it, and you see pictures. But to see, you know, restrooms - Men, Women, Colored or the drinking fountains. I mean, just the – that absolutely absurd thing really existed and not…I mean, it was just standard. (McClain)

The sense of the reality of segregation deepened as participants began to see the deep effects that racism had on the African American community in which they were living. Larry Blackman reflected:

It’s a good thing to get out and find out what the world’s really like, especially for someone who came up, as I say, in rather sheltered environment, rather conservative, rather Republican, to find out how many people in the world actually live. The abject poverty. The fear again. The discrimination. The really extremely difficult lives that many people have. Unless you really have seen it, sometimes you really can’t understand it. (Blackman)

Often, this new learning flowed from personal relationships, hearing people talk about the real, everyday facts of segregation:

Telling all the stories…about if you go to a movie, you have to sit in the balcony…a lot of what happened in meeting[s] – people being in their homes and so forth…they would
be talking among themselves about how they coped in this world, or they would want me to know what it was like. (McClain)

Such encounters with segregation, especially when they were experienced with African-American friends or acquaintances, were particularly powerful in bringing home the everyday meaning of the segregation system in the lives of African Americans – especially to the understanding of participants from the South:

We were in three cars driving from Atlanta to Beaufort, South Carolina. There were at least three adult women, who were sort of co-sponsors or leaders with me on this trip, and they had made a lunch for us to spread and at our first meal on the road, we went to four different places before we could get permission to spread our lunch through segregation. And then even more pressing than that was a young woman, 16, who was having her period that day and desperately needed a bathroom, and we made five stops before we were finally permitted to use a bathroom. And, you know, that kind of gives you some of the everyday reality of segregation and racism. (Walker)

As SIM participants began to understand more deeply about racism, they responded in action - by exercising small acts of disobedience in relation to segregation practices:

we’d go downtown, and there were two…Dairy Queens or little tiny ice cream stands. And so we went. One of them had a sign, two windows for service, one for white and one for colored. And so I always went and ordered at the colored window with the kids. (Collins)

As their participation in the movement for change grew, white SIM participants also personally felt the sting of segregation and racism, as people treated them as if they were Black. In a few cases they shared in the physical suffering of the protesters: Charles Helms was beaten
up as he participated in support of a spontaneous lunch counter sit-in; Ruth Brandon spent time in jail under miserable physical conditions and the terror of the police. Sometimes the effects were smaller, yet still quite poignant – Bill Troy was serving with a young African American as election monitors at a polling place in rural Mississippi:

And we walked up…to introduce ourselves to this man who was in charge of the election. And I’ll never forget. We both stuck out our hands to shake his hand, and his hand came out to meet ours, before he kind of got hold of himself and realized that he couldn’t shake hands with us. He withdrew his hand. (Troy)

Ashley Wiltshire experienced the scorn of white society when they attended a local white church:

Joe and maybe Embry and I and the woman who was the head of Head Start did one time go to the local Baptist church for a Sunday morning service in Newton, and the only thing I remember is nobody spoke to us…which is sort of an aberration for a country…church, where people are generally pretty friendly. But obviously they knew who we were. (Wiltshire)

In some cases, these experiences of the harsh realities of segregation encouraged participants to look beyond or through the particular realities to the structural reality of systemic racism:

Here I was seeing a social system that was just thoroughgoing and this evil. Organized racism just permeated everything…and everybody’s consciousness…I had never seen that before up close. So it was an educational experience in the sense of fostering a hermeneutic of suspicion as we later began to call it…we are like fish swimming in the water. It doesn’t question the water. Just as I as a somewhat outsider could see that in
the South among people for whom those were axiomatic. That’s the way life is.

(McClain)

While in some cases this learning from experience did not lead to more activism, it did lead to new types of understanding:

It would be inaccurate to say I was radicalized, as so many other members of SIM were further to the left politically than I was. I was always a little more pragmatic, a little more realistic. But I did move further to the left. I think that the main benefit to me, instead of ideological, was experiential. The sorts of things I described - having experienced fear directly, viewing all white people as being suspicious, black people as automatically being friends, and understanding that in a black community – the variety of aspirations – different desires and different hopes – that we shouldn’t, I know there was a tendency for many of us, for many of us white people, to stereotype all blacks as being the same – they’re quite different from one another. (Blackman)

SIM participants also hoped that their own presence in the Black community would in some small way, be a small, yet real source of consolation and hope for the black people they met in contrast to everyday realities of segregation present in the attitudes of other whites that they knew:

They probably knew there were people like me. But for them to see someone right there, I think it was reassuring. They said, “Well, maybe they’re not all like this”…And they knew people in the white community. Probably…some were mean, and some were not, but none of them [white people] could come out. They were all locked in their cells. (Collins)
Don Steffa also reflected on this aspect of his time in SIM:

our role was just to be a presence, a sign that...there was support...you just
needed to show up and be a white face on their side. That gave them a sense of
hope... we weren’t leaders...We were a presence...We were there to provide
encouragement to the local community because we were going to be gone. We
weren’t going to be there. (Steffa)

These experiences of learning through action stimulated several SIM participants, upon
their return to the seminary, to seek out alternative approaches to classroom learning. Bill Troy
chaired a student group that worked for more experiential based learning. His field work
supervisor was Robert Lynn, who would go on from Union to the Lilly Foundation, and become
a very influential person concerning new directions in theological education. Bill describes his
dynamic meetings with Lynn as a kind of model for adult learning:

I would go in monthly, I think, or maybe more often. I had these readings...that had to
do with...the job that I was working in. And we would talk... And I would write things
and so forth. And I felt like I learned more from that than I did from almost any
class...that I took. And so that was the kind of education that we were arguing for...the
dialogical model...where you read, and you act, and you’ve reflected, and you act, and
you read, and you reflect, and you act, and all these kinds of things. And it caused a good
bit of a stir in the faculty because there were old line faculty people there who didn’t
think that was education to start with and second, were really threatened by the idea that
they would need to interact with students in that kind of way.
In summing up his understanding of what theological education is all about, Bill went on to say:

it’s not like we go to class and take notes, and then we go out here and do this and come back, and this is another experience. It’s like this is what this is about. This is what theology is about. (Troy)

Some of the participants sought to reform the seminary, because they wanted other students to know that this experience of learning had the power to make the things that the students were learning in the classroom real, in the same way as they had experienced it through SIM. For example, Mac Hulslander explained:

Just the nitty-grittiness of life in rural Mississippi and the realities of what people faced in an everyday way there, has really opened me up to experiencing a much fuller life and a much more sensitive life, a much more empathetic life, and a much more spiritual life, having had those kinds of experiences. (Hulslander)

SIM participants had very powerful and enlightening up-close experiences, seeing racism and its effects with new eyes. No longer was it just a terrible social condition that they read about, but it deeply and horrifically affected the everyday lives and aspirations of Black people like themselves, people that they had begun to know and care about. This real-life exposure to racism acted as a disorienting dilemma that would encourage SIM students to move into action to fight racism – yet first, they would need to take a closer look at themselves and their own sense of racial identity.

**Changing perspectives on race and class.** As a part of their disorienting encounter with racism and segregation, most participants experienced a sense of shifting racial identity. Categories such as white and black and societal responses to those categories, which seemed
stable and predictable in the past, now appeared to be more malleable. Two examples illustrate this experience. George McClain remembers his new fear of the police:

I had to become very leery of police. If I was in together with somebody who was black, then the police were my enemy too. To be feared. And all the capricious stuff that happened to them from time to time...And I’m sure it taught me something just in general; that their experience was just different from mine and that...I brought home a whole raft of experiences and expectations to life that were not true for them. (McClain)

Larry Blackman recalled how SIM participants in Southwest Georgia were associated with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the more radical student-led wing of the civil rights movement, with the result that SIM participants were looked upon by local whites as suspicious agitators. He described his amazement at this sense of shift in racial categories and identity:

Since I was associated with SNCC and SIM, I was automatically branded as one of these outsiders, and so you’d view every white person you’d meet in a somewhat different way. I had never distrusted white people simply on the basis of the fact they were white before...Brand new experience.

He went on to say:

The other side of the coin is that I would see a black person, and I would think, “Here’s a friend. Here’s a brother.” So it isn’t exactly that I became a black. That would be totally ridiculous and impossible. (Blackman)

In both of these cases, the participants discussed the creative tension between empathizing with what black people feel while at the same time becoming conscious of the very impossibility of really experiencing things from a black perspective.
For many SIM participants, this change process would lead to broad new perspectives about race, class, and identity. This involved coming to see that white people could not just apply their own assumptions and values to understanding the situation of African Americans, but that they needed to realize the limitations of their own experience and come to see the systematic ways in which racism and segregation affected African Americans. For George McClain, it took insistence on the part of Mae Lindsey (the minister’s wife), as she challenged George to probe beneath the surface of racist incidents, such as the use by Birmingham police of fire hoses and dogs against protesters, to see that these incidents were not just an aberration but…[symbolic of] the relationship between blacks and whites in terms of justice and police relations. And I didn’t get it at first. And she – at one point she got mad at me and told me in no uncertain terms…that I was just not getting it and that it was really that way for them and that if I wanted to know what things were really like, then I needed to understand that. (McClain; G. McClain, personal communication, August 30, 2010)

This kind of deeper look helped George to develop a new perspective that approached racism in a systemic way, not simply based on what was true from his Northern white experience.

In Bill Troy’s case, at the heart of his learning were strong clarifying experiences concerning his upbringing that led to a changed perspective. During the Meredith March, Troy had a powerful learning experience in which he came to realize that the people in the environment in which he had been raised shared the same opposition to the civil rights movement that he was observing on the march. Bill described:

There were almost no southern white civil rights workers…So it was a special kind of experience for me from that perspective…we were on the Meredith March, and we were
walking through one of these towns Belzoni or somewhere, and we took a corner and
started walking down sort of this street just outside of downtown…and there were all
these white folks…sitting on their porches watching us march by, and suddenly it hit me
that it was like my uncles and aunts, you know? And the distance just felt like
immense…And the whole – that summer was without a doubt the single most important
influential changing event of my life. And one of the reasons why was because you
couldn’t live in both worlds there. You were in one or the other, and I was in a black
world, you know? And they let me be there. And here are these people across the way,
the people that you come from…and you can’t get there. It was really, really something.
It was quite a – quite an experience. (Troy)

This new understanding of his own whiteness was honed in tension with the racist white
attitudes of those he met and sharpened by the inability of other white southerners to even
recognize that a Southerner such as himself could even exist. The following incident occurred as
he was being booked for jail after participating in a demonstration in Mississippi:

“What’s your name?” And I told them. And they said, “What’s your address?” And so I
told them I was from Chattanooga, which is where my parents lived. The guy said, “No,
you’re not. You’re not from Chattanooga.” And I said, “Why, I am.”…I showed him my
stuff, and he said, “No, you’re not.” And so there I was, and he wouldn’t let me – finally
You can go in.”…stuff like that would happen all the time. There were these
psychological things…These dynamics that would take place between white and black
people in Mississippi that summer. They wouldn’t let me into jail. They wouldn’t let me
But they wouldn’t let me in until I told them I wasn’t from the South. It was pretty amazing. (Troy)

These two experiences helped Bill Troy to see that as a white southerner, he would have to make hard choices – choices in favor of the rights of African Americans and against the predominant stance of southern society and his family. This meant a change from the way in which he had been raised. He had been taught that problems and differences can and should be smoothed over. Troy reflects on these connections:

And I grew up, I guess. I hadn’t thought about this, but I grew up in a home where…what we did was sort of ameliorate things. My mother says my father was very good as a minister at pouring oil on troubled waters…And that was sort of our job as the minister’s family, you know, by osmosis was to bring people together and so forth and not to challenge and not to choose and so forth, and suddenly in that situation I didn’t have a choice. (Troy)

As Bill Troy returned to Union, he tried to integrate his church work into his new found activist perspective. Troy found that when he returned to the church in Scarsdale, this new perspective, including his support of the emerging Black Power movement, caused him to come into tension with his white church supporters back in the North:

I was constantly writing letters and trying to raise some money from the church in Scarsdale…this is where I had just come from, and when I got back in the Fall, boy, they were just all full of questions about what is going on. They did not care for this Black Power business, and they were looking to me to explain it to them. And my feeling was that given the dynamics of the movement and the need for black leadership, that this was something that was to be expected and that the whole movement needed to work through
it and that white people needed to find our own place within that spectrum…And black people needed to run the movement. That made sense to me…From where I was in the movement and from what I was hearing, and it taught me a lot; that people in the church who had sent money and all these things and been sympathetic to civil rights, never bought that line. Couldn’t do it. You know? And we parted ways. Big learning experience. (Troy)

Bill Troy had learned that he could not minister in the South without challenging the status quo acceptance of segregation on the part of white society. Bill came to understand this as a need to choose between serving the needs of African Americans and demands of white southern society and his family. This learning continued as he came to see that not only would he need to break with white Southern society, but that the white liberal northern church did not really want to challenge the status quo either. For Bill, this meant recognizing the validity and even necessity of Black Power, as a part of the movement toward African American self-definition and leadership. From Bill’s perspective, the liberal white church was content with supporting the non-violent, church-connected civil rights movement, which for them was symbolized by Martin Luther King, Jr., but would not embrace the demands of the new, more radical wing of the civil rights movement, symbolized by Black Power. Bill Troy found that for him, support of Black Power was linked with calling into question white privilege and challenging liberal contentment with the status quo - this led to his decision to find his calling outside formal church structures, rather than within the local church.

For many, it also meant coming to grips with their own racial identity, and with the associations that racism brought for white participants. It was tempting, at some level, to forget or ignore that they were white. As has been shown in Ashley Wiltshire’s case, he found it
necessary to remind his Black and white colleagues that he was a “cracker” too. He describes how a SNCC worker was trying to insist to me that I was not a cracker. You know, that I was one of them… and I appreciated that. I found it very endearing, but I felt within myself that… he was not fully appreciating… the real differences. (Wiltshire)

For Wiltshire, the experience was less of a choice between dichotomous options, as it was for Bill Troy, than finding a way to hold the options in dialectical tension. When asked about the combination of God’s all-embracing love for African Americans and his own connections with his heritage, Ashley said:

I think, you know, at least for me, that was a pretty important both/and… I’m thankful for that… and I know that a lot of people for damned good reasons were really bitter at white people… I’m talking about white civil rights workers as well as black people – all for understandable reasons, pretty bitter about crackers and what had been done. But for me, it just seemed pretty important to understand that we’re all God’s children.

(Wiltshire)

This wrestling with racial identity was allowing Wiltshire to clarify and focus his own understanding of what it meant to be a white person concerned about the well-being of African Americans. Into this mix came his encounter with Black Power. Wiltshire found that “I never could go toward radical politics and radical political philosophies” – he objected to the dogmatism of the Ecumenical Institute as well as the separatist philosophy of Black Power. Instead, he resonated with “[Charles] Sherrod’s insistence on… including white people, and his sort of integrationist stand… and his spirit and his longevity sticking with the deal. It was really a strong influence” (Wiltshire). Wiltshire would keep working toward becoming a Southern
Baptist minister, but eventually would come to the conclusion that there were very few churches that would accept someone with his liberal views on race. Like Bill Troy, he would need to find his ministry outside the established church, in his case taking up a career in poverty law.

For Mac Hulslander and Ruth Brandon, their changing perspectives in relation to African Americans involved class issues, as they came to see that the middle class values and perspectives that they had were insufficient for understanding the African Americans that they met and came to know through their SIM experiences. For Mac Hulslander, much of his learning came about as he began to see that many of his own ideas, as well as those of other white people in the movement, for solving racial problems, were naïve. He gave an example of this:

My idea of a solution to these striking plantation workers was, “Oh. There is this little town up in Pennsylvania where I grew up where you’d really be welcome,” and, you know, “if you can all just move there, you could find work, and you know everything would just be wonderful.” Well, of course, that wasn’t how it was at all, and that wouldn’t have been the reality. (Hulslander)

He also gave an example of how the Delta Ministry had started an entrepreneurial business to provide work for displaced tractor drivers. It involved cutting out small wooden crèche set pieces to be sold through the church connections of the Delta Ministry. But the workers, who were used to hard physical labor, did not take well to this activity at all. This caused Mac to reflect:

It was these kinds of juxtapositions with my own past and my own prejudices about how things worked that I had to...kind of confront and realize that...this is a white middle class idea of how you go about solving some of the issues. (Hulslander)
This learning about class assumptions continued in relation to his work with African American families, as he, along with Bill Troy, had some remarkable success reaching the children that they were teaching through innovative pedagogy and developing a sense of ownership among the children for renovating the building that they were using for a school. They decided to have an open house to show off the school and the students’ progress to their families. Without challenging his middle class expectations about how this event would proceed, Mac was excited for the parents to see all that the children accomplished. Mac narrates an account of this open house:

So we set up this open house, and…the adults came to see the school, and it wasn’t long before I realized that something wasn’t right. There [was] no…excitement on the part of the adults. There [were] “no thank-yous for…what you’re doing with the kids,” or the things you kind of expect from parents…And I got to thinking that…what was happening was that the older adults were realizing that the kids knew more than they knew and that it became very threatening to them. That no longer were they the authorities or the ones who knew the most about something, but that the kids were learning things that they didn’t know how to do, and it really kind of threatened their own self-identity…And I realized that that was not the way to have done that. And so it was real important learning for me, in considering how to be supportive and affirming of adults in their own experience and to not compare. (Hulslander)

This learning, that focused on dealing with one’s own white, middle-class assumptions and developing new sensitivities to the perspectives of others, continued, as Mac and others dealt with the implications of the Black Power movement that was launched that summer. Hulslander recalled:
When Black Power was articulated at the Meredith March, I think pretty much for the first time, it became a real watershed for particularly for whites, who I think were vicariously experiencing a lot of excitement of, you know, being full of life, working with blacks in the struggle, and the thought of going back to the white community and trying to work with white attitudes was not readily received with welcome arms I guess I should say. And yet at some deep level we knew that that was right. That the problem was with us and with our communities, with our power structures.

This new perspective on class and race that was developing would deeply inform Mac’s thinking and approach to ministry as he returned to seminary and prepared for the future. Mac described this:

Well, certainly related to my SIM experience has been this understanding of the nature of the urban crisis in terms of being a multifaceted thing that needed to be approached that way, and that, of course, related directly to this direction of creating a group ministry that kind of took form in my senior year at Union after the SIM experience. In other words, I guess part of that was just recognizing that racism was so much a part of the culture and so much part of society, so integrated into it that in order to really continue to work with issues of racism and start this experimental ministry meant on the one hand dealing with the issues of the city on several different levels more or less simultaneously.

A central aspect of this complex approach to urban ministry was anti-racism education. As Hulslander continued to develop this dimension of his work, his perspective would continue to grow. Hulslander describes this continued learning:

When we talked about “new white consciousness,” I remember there was kind of a quick and easy formula of: Racism = Prejudice + Power. The power to institutionalize the
prejudice. That was, the essence of nature, of racism in that definition. And that was
type of a light bulb experience for me of beginning to understand racism in a much larger
context.

As for Mac Hulslander, the role of middle class values would come to the fore in Ruth
Brandon’s learning experience as well. Ruth had two SIM placements, one in Raleigh, NC and
the other in Southwest Georgia, in which the socioeconomic settings were quite different. She
started by describing the Raleigh experience:

Both the church and the family I lived with - Minnie Blakely and family were middle
class, and middle class at that time meant to some extent learning to live like the white
folks live…Be teachers in the way other people are teachers. Be pastors in the way other
people are pastors who are in the other part of the community…I’m not saying they
weren’t black…There were thoroughly black, and they were in the black community, and
they were treated like they were black…But the middle class experience was different
from being with a more diverse group of folks.

It pained Ruth to experience the way in which the children she worked with felt incredible
pressure to conform and be subservient to the expectations of white people. She wrote in a report
(1964, July) about her experience:

It seems as if the child is afraid to say what he thinks or even allow an indication that he
might have a thought. It is a great relief to have found two boys who would say outright
and without dropping their eyes, “No, I don’t want to go to camp this year. I want to play
ball.” They know what they wanted and were not ashamed of it or of themselves. I
welcome every moment like this when I can see a person stand up and be a person.
She contrasts her experience in Raleigh with her time in Southwest Georgia:

I think that that was the stronger – much stronger experience than the Raleigh experience. It was much deeper into the black community in terms of experience… Southwest Georgia also had people who were teachers or otherwise extremely competent. But they were very busily being denied their right to register to vote.

In Raleigh, Ruth described herself as largely having had an experience in a middle class African American community, and one in which there were a lot of outward signs of conformity to white middle class culture. Her experience in Southwest Georgia was quite different. She lived and worked in a rural African American community, with people that she learned were just as talented as their Raleigh counterparts, but who were in the midst of struggle for their civil rights. Ruth’s most important learning occurred in the context of the mass meetings of the Southwest Georgia Project. Here she had her eyes opened to important class assumptions on her part, especially as regards the role of education. Ruth explained:

But the mass meetings, as I said, were very, very educational for the likes of me. I learned that although my family had valued immensely education as making you able – better able to determine your future and make choices in life and be good citizens, I learned that education really was just a luck of the draw and that there were very smart people, very intelligent people about what was good for the future who had not had that luck…And so I think forever and ever after that, I saw education as important as related to what you want to do, but not important as to who you were and what your value was. That everybody is intelligent about what they need and about what their families need and about what’s bad in their community.
Her experience with African Americans in the powerful context of the mass meetings taught Ruth that intelligence is independent of education. Through what she witnessed, Ruth came to clearly understand how people had their own types of intelligence concerning what is needed in their own families and communities. While education was important to what you can do in life, it was not important in terms of your core value as a person.

In-person experience with racism and segregation served as a powerful disorienting dilemma for SIM participants. This occurred as they moved through a process of learning involving the transition from book learning to in-person learning, which deepened through learning about effects of racism and segregation in the lives of people that they met and through their own personal experience, and as they began to take action based on this new learning, both during SIM and upon their return to Union.

This learning also served as a catalyst for SIM participants to examine their own racial and class perspectives in relation to their SIM experience. Most participants reported that they experienced a shifting sense of racial identity as they were in close association with the African American community and had a sense of seeing things from another perspective. For many participants, this learning went deeper and resulted in a process that would lead them to new perspectives on race and class. Having looked at the way in which their SIM experiences stimulated learning about race, it is now time to examine the specific context of that learning in more detail – the African American community.

**Relating to the African American Community: From Affect to Action**

The learning experiences of SIM participants were deeply embedded in their experience of a rich and dynamic African American community life, and relating to that community, in both its affective and action dimensions. Interpersonal relations between participants and African
Americans were central to the learning of SIM participants. While there was some sense of solidarity with other white SIM students, their primary experience of community was in the African American community. For those in individual church settings (Collins, Helms, Walker, Brandon (1965)) or mixed church and direct action (McClain), they had virtually no contact with other SIM workers; for those who were in Southwest Georgia (Blackman, Steffa, Wiltshire, Brandon (1966)), their contact with white SIM students was mostly limited to the few who were working in the same county; in the Delta Ministry (Hulslander, Troy), the SIM students had contact with a few other white workers, among many African Americans; for Tom Boomershine and Barbara Cox, their experience of community was quite different, because they weren’t living in the African American community, although Tom’s experience with Black families was critical to his learning. A rich texture of affective factors can be seen throughout the interviews.

**Welcoming into a rich communal life.** Being made to feel welcome in the rich communal life of the African American community was a universal experience of SIM participants. People and families in the African American communities opened their homes and often their hearts to the visiting students. They provided them with shelter, food, safety, and guidance. They engaged them with a welcoming spirit.

Went visiting with Rev. Linsey to…people in the hospital and so forth. And was invited variously to people’s homes for dinner and that kind of thing. There I was – I was very warmly received. You probably find that to be a pretty universal experience. (McClain)

Often, SIM participants’ first taste of community was with the families with whom they were living. Ashley Wiltshire spoke of his experience of living with the Holts, an African American family that was central to his SIM experience:
I mean...here was a family...embracing us, loving us, taking care of us, essentially protecting us, feeding us. Yeah, it was just wonderful, and I mean, Jack Holt was just so stoic and humorous...obviously not in any subservient way or any way bowing to the outside pressures of the culture.

But...not only the Holts but the people up and down that road were so...embracing of us, and it was very affirming of community, and so that obviously had a profound effect on the way we felt about things. (Wiltshire)

Reflecting on a sentence in his written account that had been published in the *Grain of Salt*, John Collins said:

“And then I learned a lot about love and courage, the way these people accepted me”.

Accept me? - there was no question about the acceptance. My God, there was more than accepting. You know, I was just welcomed out of all proportion to my worth or anything I was doing. (Collins)

As has been described earlier, Tom Boomershine also spoke about the importance of experiencing life in the African American community in East Harlem, which eventually led to real friendship, as he got close to choir members, youth, and several families in the community.

The church was at the center of so much of the life in African American communities in the South. SIM participants got some feel for the rich social life of the church community – with foundations in shared worship, meals, and fellowship. John Collins spoke particularly about how this related to the communal dimension of African American life that he became a part of:

And then after church everybody would go out under the trees, and everybody would bring out their baskets, and then you’d feast. You know, fried chicken and sweet potato pie and macaroni and cheese. I put on another four or five pounds. It was wonderful.
Yeah, and I was almost embarrassed to say what a good time I had and then most of the time in that summer, but it was…wonderful. (Collins)

This welcoming community which SIM participants so warmly experienced was met with a heartfelt response of gratitude and respect on the part of the seminary students.

**Respect.** In most of the interviews, a strong sense of respect came through that was related to the sense of radical hospitality that the SIM participants had experienced in the Black communities in which they were living and working. They mentioned the almost universal gracious reception that they had received in black communities in the South. One factor that amazed participants was the indomitable element to this welcoming spirit. In the face of a lifetime of maltreatment by white people, they were steadfast in their gracious treatment of them.

John Collins said:

on reflection you realize how terrible it is and how much courage it takes on the part of blacks to live in that [racist] environment and for some white people to really challenge it all the time, you know… and it was some people’s lives to do it…

And then that there’s a reservoir of good will…I even found this in my church in East Harlem [following graduation]…so much anger in a lot of black people, although in the South…it wasn’t as close to the surface because it was worth their life, you know. And yet once you got to know them…you really were accepted. (Collins)

Flowing from this sense of gratitude for the gracious welcome shown to them was the respect that they showed toward African Americans in their interpersonal encounters. For several people at least, this appeared to be a powerful experience:

Perhaps the most important event of our summer was the night John Watts said to me as we sat on the back porch of our parsonage, “You know, you’re the first white person who
ever treated me the way I wanted to be treated.” He meant me as a person, not that I was nice to him. (Collins)

Bud Walker, who was raised in Mississippi in the most segregated situation of all the participants, describes his impressions of living in the home of Ralph and Juanita Abernathy in Atlanta:

Yeah, lived in their home. They had a room for me in their home. And I do want to say one thing because it’s important to me. I had great respect for Juanita Abernathy, Ralph’s wife. She was a beautiful human being. Actually she’s spoken of in Scripture: “let your, yes be yes, and your no be no.” But she was modest and clear and truthful… (Walker)

In some cases, it was merely the fact of their respectful presence and undemanding participation in the everyday life of the community, despite the obvious risks, that made an impression. John Collins experienced this one evening as he participated in a clandestine poker game with African American clergy gathered at the Methodist parsonage, in which the African American group acceptance extended to include him in the insider use of derogatory language. In one poker hand, there was particularly enthusiastic bidding:

So I raised one more time, and they both…they just folded. And so I had to lay down my card. And [the minister] says, “I knew that nigger was sandbagging them.” And I felt I was really part of them… So anyway we had a lot of good times with those fellows, and I think it was a source of encouragement to them that I was there without any question. Certainly to the people in the church and the young people. (Collins)
SIM participants experienced a tightly knit African American community, which sometimes had initial suspicion of these white student visitors - but once they gained community approval, the SIM participants experienced freedom and acceptance in the community:

You had to have an entrée into the community, and when you had the entrée into the community, then you could go by yourself [on voter registration activities]. So initially the local person at the town – at the church meeting where we would say “We’re the Movement. We’re here to do voter registration and help you with whatever issues you have”… once we got identified, and they knew who we were, and then they could trust us, then we got invited to homes individually. So eventually I could go anywhere I wanted to in the county by myself in the black community. (Steffa)

Don Steffa described this respectful sense of ease with which he was then able to move within the African American community:

So I moved very freely, and I picked cucumbers with them. I ate possum with them. Chitlins I didn’t like too much. They smelled so bad, but I mean, I ate their chitlins and slopped their pigs…what they did, I did. And I didn’t mind it at all…and I think that was the gift of my personality was that affirmation that their life and who they were was important. (Steffa)

For George McClain, the mutuality of the experience was extremely important – the combination of the African American community’s welcoming hospitality, despite his obvious anxiety, and his respectful approach:

Well, I think I was set at ease very beautifully by them…Here I was entering into the world of “the other.”…as much as it might have been inherited, absorbed racial prejudice from the culture…it was also just being among those who were different… And that
wasn’t that easy for me, in general. I like to go where I know that I’m welcome, and when you don’t know…it’s kind of anxiety producing. But I was very much set at ease. I mean…I was a phenomenon for many of those people, who just had not had relationships with white people on any kind of egalitarian basis. And that was kind of awesome to experience. To be this ambassador of what ought to be reality… [to people] who could not imagine … it being any different. (McClain)

In this context of shared respect, the SIM students would come to develop strong empathetic bonds with the Black community and share in a strong sense of solidarity with others in the civil rights movement.

**Development of empathy and a common sense of purpose.** The participants developed a strong sense of empathy along with a sense of common purpose that continued to drive their work and involvement with the community. Experiencing segregation and discrimination in person provided participants with a new perspective on the courage and sacrifice that was being made by others in service to the movement. John Collins remembers how his small participation in protest by requesting service at the “colored window” at the ice cream stand with the kids, brought the sacrifice of others into clearer focus for him:

there were little things like that that made you realize how close all this was and what it meant for these college students to sit down and challenge it…and all these people that made that whole thing happen. (Collins)

This led to strong, empathetic ties with those around them, who shared in the daily plight of living in such a dehumanizing society. When John was asked in his interview to expand on a statement from his SIM report concerning the big things that he learned, he said:
what it feels like to be denied the chance to be a complete person. Having to live in that environment … for one thing I never hardly ever went downtown to go shopping or anything like that…And you couldn’t go out in a mixed racial group without attracting a lot of attention, and even if nothing happened to me, I knew that it would mark some of these young people I was with…And to live in that and to know that was their whole life at that time. (Collins)

These empathetic ties helped to bind the community together, giving some participants a sense of solidarity and shared sense of purpose in working for racial equality. Ruth Brandon’s experience exemplifies this sense of solidarity in a common purpose that was inspired by the example of young African American leaders in the movement:

Well, being inside SNCC, clearly you’re in a group of people who were very busy about changing society, making the world a better place for the next generations, even if they didn’t get it themselves…And they were going to put their whole lives into it, and all we could do was just be there and do what they told us. That was our job. (Brandon)

Ruth Brandon describes her sense of a shared purpose and stance of respectful solidarity, as she participated with other civil rights workers in a protest that would send them to jail for six days:

Our job was to be there in solidarity, and when it was – and it was their call - whether it was useful or more dangerous to have white folks along. And they sometimes would say, “No, no, no,” we can’t – we don’t want you to go with us over there. We know you’re willing. It’s too dangerous.” And other – so when they took five of us or four of us with them to Newton Center, that was, as I recall, an “Okay, we’re going to do it. If you’re willing to come, we’ll do it this time”…But it was very dangerous times. And Newton
Center is in a county where the sheriff was notorious for thinking that shooting blacks was a recreational thing he could do, and nobody would call him on it. (Brandon)

In jail, that sense of solidarity was even more important to Ruth:

But, you know, that was an experience of solidarity that was very deep, and we were there six days [in jail] until they let us out on bond, and we never went to trial as far as I know. That case is still up there in the files of somebody…Oh, we were all there together. And I mean, there is some courage in solidarity. (Brandon)

The bonds of empathy and growing sense of solidarity were strong factors that encouraged SIM participants to act to fight against racism. That theme will be explored in the next section, while the role of community in leading to activist careers will be discussed later in this chapter.

**Movement toward social justice action.** Experience of the suffering of others connected with the deepest instincts of some SIM participants – instincts toward justice, fairness, and support for the underdog. This resulted not only in changed perspectives and a shared sense of purpose, but in motivation toward action:

so I think I always had that instinct in me, a feeling of resenting unfairness, people being mistreated, but those things really strike the – emboldened me, you know, to some degree. I found – I guess I could say those people gave me strength and courage.

(Collins)

First-hand experience of the suffering of others based on race changed John Collins’ attitude. He was no longer just *do-gooder* coming in to help people in need:

Well, it radicalized me…none of us had ever thought about going out -- almost none of us -- picketing and things like that…or even going south and doing something like that…
I think when I first started in Union, and I went down... on the lower east side and worked at that church with Jane, it was more like I was a do-gooder, I think...I liked helping people, and...I felt like I was really pretty impressed with myself. I'm doing these things, you know, and telling people. And it was different when I came out of SIM, out of that experience, it was not the same...it was certainly nice that people accepted me and felt good, but I felt more really at home in that environment. (Collins)

For Bill Troy, his new sense of deep connection with the African American community meant that in order to meet the real needs of African Americans, he would have to break with the status quo approach, and which was represented in the basic stance of white churches, like the one in Scarsdale. But this decision-making was connected to aspects of community, in terms of the community in which he was raised, and the shared purpose and commitment of his new community. As we examined earlier, the community in which Troy was raised was one that would “ameliorate things”, covering over differences – now, connections with his new community were calling him to choose. This also meant breaking with the liberal consensus that many at seminary felt very comfortable with:

Yeah, it is powerful. I learned a lot about class there [in Mississippi]. I mean, I was surrounded by people...who had a really what we called in the movement a radical political perspective about class and race...I hadn’t encountered that in that kind of forceful way before. I mean, I was part of a group of people at Union who thought of ourselves really as sort of liberal Democrats or something, I guess, right?...We loved JFK...we all wanted to be like JFK. There was a lot of maleness in it as well. But here I was. I was living down here with these people who wanted to turn everything upside
down. And by the time I came out of there, so did I. (laughter) You know? So -- It was really some experience. (Troy)

SIM students responded to their growing understanding of the needs of the community around them by beginning to move toward new commitments to action. Yet the violent nature of the segregated environment in which they were living and the continuing possibility of racial strife within the movement over white participation threatened to diminish the power of their learning and commitment.

**Fear and conflict with the white community.** Throughout the stories told by SIM participants, exposure to fear and conflict are common elements. Union students who chose to participate in SIM were well aware of the risks. George McClain remembers how his decision to go and take up his SIM placement in Birmingham was framed by reading articles in the *New York Times* about the devastating violence in Birmingham - both before his decision to go, with stories and pictures of the dogs and fire-hoses set on the protesters, and after, in the graphic coverage of the attempted assassination of Martin Luther King and the bombing of his room at the Gaston Motel. Mac Hulslander remembers some of the formal preparation that SIM participants had at his orientation conference:

I think we got a healthy dose of the potential for…danger…we were going to be…sent into a cultural conflict situation, and…it was not necessarily going to be easy. And so I think they probably instilled an appropriate amount of fear. (Hulslander)

Almost every SIM participant had striking stories of very fearful events that they experienced during their SIM activities. For John Collins, it started on the road trip to Alabama, when all of a sudden it struck him that he was driving into the heart of the segregated South in his car bearing Illinois license plates which proclaimed, “Land of Lincoln”. Ruth Brandon
explain how fear of retribution for civil rights activities was a constant concern among the people working for the Southwest Georgia Project (SWGP) as it worked on the front lines of the civil rights struggle. The SIM students’ role in this situation was to let the local leaders and SNCC workers decide if it was more or less dangerous if the white SIM students participated in any given event. Sometimes the fear took the shape of big, powerful events, such as the Delta Ministry’s participation in the procession of cars back into Philadelphia, Mississippi, the scene of previous violent attacks. Mac Hulslander remembers driving a car behind Martin Luther King’s car, and how the people narrowly avoided a local white driver who tried to smash into them and disrupt the march.

Most often, the tone of fear was set through police intimidation and complicity with racist militants. Some examples of this include being harassed by police while trying to use a phone booth late at night, with the authorities muttering about ‘taking them to the river’ (Blackman); returning in a bus from the March on Washington and being surrounded by police cars with flashing lights, as the bus tried to stop and let passengers out for a rest room break – then being held for an hour or so in the police parking lot (Walker); and being terrified after an all-day assignment with just one other person, an African American teenager, to watch the polls in an unknown Mississippi town, and being shadowed by the police wherever they walked as they waited for a ride home:

We looked around, and this police car was right there in front of us…It had two or three cops in it, white cops. And we cut through this yard and went over to the next street and came out on that street. There they were, waiting for us. We kept going and walking, and we finally made it to this man’s house, and he took us in. And about eight o’clock,
nine o’clock that night they [Delta Ministry workers] came and got us…And later I heard that these same police guys, they killed a guy who was in jail there. (Troy)

Sharing in the fear generated in such an environment helped the participants to appreciate the omnipresent quality of violence in segregated communities, and the level of stress that was created by it. The terror of segregation wasn’t just an occasional thing for African Americans, but an everyday reality (McClain). John Collins remembers the following scene upon his evening arrival in Talladega, Alabama, being met by one of the church members:

And so that was when Billy sensed that I was a little nervous, and he said, ‘Reverend, don’t worry.’ He says, ‘I got a .30-06 in there, and I ain’t gonna shoot no bear.’ I learned about him and about the courage that some of these people had down there. They lived with this. (Collins)

The SIM participants experienced this everyday anxiety and fear most often when they travelled in racially-mixed automobiles. A necessary trip from Georgia to Alabama to deliver some message to other civil rights workers would necessitate high speed driving in the wee hours of the morning in order to get there and back undetected by the police (Steffa). A trip across town in South Carolina had an African American minister instructing the SIM participant to pretend that the minister was simply his worker that the white student was taking home to work on his farm (Helms). As described earlier, George McClain explained how the fear was compounded when SIM participants realized that the very homes they were living in might become bombing targets for Klan members seeking retribution for housing activists.

Terror and fear also sometimes constrained the activities of the white SIM students, because of concern for their own safety and for the African American people with whom they were working and living.
We got some harassment, but it was more the subtle threat… And we stayed strictly in the black community. We did not go anywhere in the white community. We didn’t go to any white church. We lived solely on the black side of town. (Steffa)

Charles Helms witnessed the subtle shift in the approach of his African American pastor-supervisor, Willis Goodwin, following the time when Helms got mugged at a sit-in:

He never did do anything to express doubt that we should continue together or say that he didn’t want us to continue this together or anything like that. But…it was clear to me that he had suddenly been drug in over what he considered to be his head level…and I could tell he was kind of nervous. So I didn’t try to stay until the very end of the summer. I left a little bit early for New Orleans because that was my next thing (Helms)

When the systemic nature of terror was better understood, a less judgmental, more empathetic response could develop toward widespread reluctance on the part of many in the Black community to participate in the civil rights activities in the face of terror. At first George McClain wondered why more people in the Black community did not participate actively. After he had experienced the violent environment personally, he began to develop a more sympathetic attitude, because he realized that it was a kind of balancing act, since “everybody had some kind of exposure…where it could come back to haunt them” (McClain), risking physical, social, psychological, and economic injury.

This omnipresent violence also affected the white community, stifling the possibility of activism or reform on the part of potentially sympathetic white people. Part of the SIM mission was to reach out to the white churches in order to try and build some bridges of contact and understanding between the black and white communities. John Collins and Charles Helms both remember meeting with white ministers who were paralyzed by the system of segregation.
I met with the Presbyterian minister, and he was a young guy. Very friendly. Basically I felt his heart was in the right place or at least right leaning, similar to where mine was. And – but he just felt he couldn’t raise this in his church…And there was such an atmosphere of – just under the surface. I would call it terror. What else do you call something like that? (Collins)

Helms recalls:

I would say that they – the white ministers generally were pretty nervous. They did not express any sympathy for racism or segregation or racial injustice or anything. They were just maybe expressing skepticism about whether or not taking action like this would really do any good and talking about how direct action like that could lead to more … And they would rationalize and so forth and so on…they were nervous. Anxious is a better word. (Helms)

It has been seen how fear and conflict were a major factor in the environment in which SIM participants lived and worked. Yet on the whole, they were able to continue in their ministry, while conscious not to be a danger to those who were caring for them in the Black community. Yet another kind of conflict, over their very participation in the movement, still loomed. The next section will examine how SIM students met this challenge.

**Dealing with exclusion from the civil rights movement.** From its beginning, SIM was founded on the principle of seminary students playing a supportive role in any activities in which they were involved, especially those activities related to the movement. Their place was not to lead, but to be supportive and to help build connections with white society in ways that would help to alleviate tension between the black and white communities. SIM participants who were in direct action rather than church-based placements felt the importance of this commitment most
strongly, especially those who participated in the later years of the program. For participants in this study, those who participated in the Delta Ministry and the Southwest Georgia Project (SWGP) in 1965 and 1966 came face to face with the growing move toward the exclusion of whites from civil rights activities. Participants in the Delta Ministry (Hulslander; Troy) witnessed the official birth of the Black Power movement through their participation in the Meredith March in which the Black Power slogan was used publically for the first time. As we have heard Mac Hulslander describe above, this was “a real watershed” for white people in the movement as they came to realized that the problem was with us and with our communities, with our power structure” (Hulslander).

The Southwest Georgia Project (SWGP) was an important location in the civil rights movement in which white participation was able to continue longer than in some places, due to the deep interracial commitments of its African American leader, Charles Sherrod. Four participants in this study worked in the field with the SWGP, Ruth Brandon in Summer 1965 and Larry Blackman, Don Steffa, and Ashley Wiltshire in Summer 1966. All told some 33 SIM students worked with the SWGP. Sherrod, who had been an early and important SNCC leader, worked to bridge potential tension between his mostly white SWGP volunteers and the African American SNCC leaders and workers. He worked out a compromise with the SNCC leaders that the white participants in the SWGP would only play supportive roles. Sherrod’s approach is remembered by Don Steffa:

our role was just to be a presence, a sign that, you know, there was support. That people were there…in those days…you just needed to show up and be a white face on their side…we weren’t leaders in that sense. We were a presence. (Steffa)
Some participants found that cultural differences sometimes got in the way of easy communication:

And some of the whites were the leaders in the group, and they spoke up. My primarily – role – I’d just kind of sit there and listen and wrote because if you ever see my picture, how I looked -- I mean, I looked like a cracker. I mean, nice clean-cut hairdo and – I mean, I was… I didn’t have shaggy hair or raggedy clothes. I mean, I looked like a college student. It was a mess. (Steffa)

The backseat role that Sherrod advocated was instrumental in helping SIM participants learn, despite the tension over white participation:

Sherrod’s wisdom was, “Look. Observe. Participate. Pay attention. Listen.” And so I really learned how to pay attention and listen and begin to understand the struggle for justice in a non-color issue, although I had to understand that I had the biases of being white because that’s the way I was raised, not that that was bad. It just meant that I was limited in what I understood, which also left me open to see and to be open to change, to be open to seeing the other side, so I became really much more perceptive of what was going on around me.

Sherrod was good because he was sensitive to people, and that’s what I wasn’t. I was not real sensitive to people, and I needed to learn that, so that’s why he made me, I think, sit down and pay attention to what was going on around me, which was a very good lesson for me to learn…to not have the pressure of having to be out front, but to just sit back and listen and watch, and that’s what I did. (Steffa)

As we have seen, a number of participants had important learning experiences connected with the growing tendency toward exclusion of whites from the movement. For Bill Troy, critical
learning happened as he continued dialogue with the upper middle class church in Scarsdale in which he had been serving. Through this dialogue he came to realize that they were never going to accept this new role of Black leadership as expressed in the Black Power movement. In the end, he found that he had to part ways with them and find his own way to form an activist vocation outside formal church structures. For Ashley Wiltshire, this learning involved the development of his racial identity as a southern white man. Although he appreciated the need for the development of black leadership, he also had fully embraced the reconciling notion of the beloved community. As his fellow civil rights workers lumped all white southerners together as racists and ‘crackers’, he found that it was important to express that he was a ‘cracker’ too. That God’s love was there for crackers as well as the black community and its supporters.

Part of the emphasis of the Black Power movement was to call sympathetic whites to work in the white community (rather than the black community) to deal with their own race problem – to get their own house in order. This dynamic led some participants in this study to make that issue an important part of their vocation after they left seminary. This topic is taken up again in the vocational section below.

Overall, SIM students were able to turn a potentially devastating issue – that of exclusion of whites from the movement, into something that they integrated into their learning and faith development. The next section will examine some of the holistic factors that helped to equip SIM participants to meet the challenges raised by fear, conflict, and exclusion.

**The Spiritual and Symbolic Process Dimensions of SIM**

Not only did SIM provide students with a rich sense of community and interpersonal and affective environment that fostered learning, it also served as a dynamic context in which we can see the strong role played by holistic learning factors, including the spiritual and religious
dimension and what Fowler (1981) referred to as “symbolic processes” and “unconscious structuring processes other than those constituting reasoning” (p. 103) – ways of knowing present in the spiritual-religious and creative-artistic realms. As seminary students, it was natural for there to be a religious dimension to their experience, yet the data indicates that the spiritual-religious perspective appears to have been a mediating factor in their learning. The SIM participants knew that religion could be a strong factor in support of the racist status quo, as evidenced by their encounters with the white, southern church. The positive function of religion for them stands in sharp contrast to this other known function of religion. For SIM participants, their learning seems to be intimately connected and integrated with their faith development – the vocational connections of which will be examined in a later section. The African American community, particularly as connected to church and specifically the civil rights movement provided SIM participants with a rich artistic and creative context in which learning could take place. The songs and music of the movement, experienced in movement meetings, protest events, church services, and even in jail, deeply informed the learning of SIM participants as well.

**Spiritual/Religious Dimension.** Several participants mentioned that they made early connections between their church upbringing and progressive perspectives on race and other social issues. These connections were sometimes positive, or ones in which, early on, they found themselves, challenging the status quo:

I grew up in the Methodist church, and… I can remember kind of questioning my Sunday school teachers about things like “turning the other cheek,” you know. And the thing about a “rich man getting into the Kingdom of Heaven.” Because there were so many of
these passages, the ethical passages, that it seemed to me we didn’t really observe very much. (Collins)

Ashley Wiltshire reflected on the power of core religious images to counteract the influence of the dominant segregated culture:

You know, you can’t spend a lot of time in Sunday school and Bible school and things like that without…coming across “red, yellow, black, and white – they are precious in His sight.” And you know, the Good Samaritan and this and that and the other. And it just seems to me that those things just sort of built in as well as the popular culture.

(Wiltshire)

For some participants, the very fact that Union provided a potent mixture of theology and social action was in itself a powerful learning environment. This was expressed in the most dramatic way by Bill Troy:

And the most exciting thing, I guess, was – the best thing, I think, was -- I used to say that I got saved at Union because I took this course with Paul Lehman about Barth, and Paul Lehman finally got through to me then…I didn’t have to earn my salvation; that it had already been done for me, and all I had to do was accept it and live it out. And that just broke an intellectual knot for me…And the other thing that happened was Niebuhr - was this whole ethical and political approach to the Gospel that I found really, really stimulating. (Troy)

For Tom Boomershine, the process of discovering, through his fieldwork experiences, churches that had social issues as a vital part of their life, was something that renewed his personal faith:
there was a way in which I – Chambers and the engagement and involvement with the people of East Harlem…made it possible for me to re-commit to the church and to Christianity because it showed me a whole different side of what the church could be than what I’d experienced before, and I could believe in that; that a church that was actively engaged in poor people and people who were marginalized in the culture, who then could find in the church support, hope, energy, dignity for their lives. I could believe in that. (Boomershine)

For Ruth Brandon, throughout her life, social activism has been intertwined with faith, and she indicates that she can’t separate one from the other:

I would say that all the way along – I’ve been involved in all these different sort of movement things. Partly it’s because I’m a child of the ‘60s who never grew up maybe. But it’s because I’m a child of the ‘60s whose family also had been activist in both peace and other issues, and so that was not a strange thing. I was not in rebellion if I was activist…And partly it’s because that is how I read the gospel…if I didn’t think that Jesus was about love and justice, peace and hope, I wouldn’t bother with the church.

(Brandon)

For many participants, their participation in SIM was understood in religious terms. We have seen how George McClain experienced the decision to join SIM as the hand of God on his shoulder. For Ruth Brandon, she had a strong sense that being in Georgia was serving “where God had needed us to be; that the black community was willing to have and needed to have some white folks there” (Brandon). Many participants did not now, or during their SIM experience, use a great deal of overtly religious language to describe their experiences, but expressed their perspective, as Ruth Brandon did above, in terms of doing the right thing. Steffa said it this way:
The anxiety you had was doing the work and being confident that the work was – I didn’t use this language – the “right kind of work,” “the Lord’s work,” “what needed to be done,” “Were you going to make a difference?” You didn’t really ever have a sense that it was going to make any difference because it was all uphill…It was all very slow and southern. It was very profound, but it really did make a difference, particularly among the young people who came later…It’s a lifetime vocation … (Steffa)

In spite of being hesitant to use religious language in a public sense, this sense of doing the right thing, was also grounded in a religious vision and understanding of the Christian social gospel. Hulslander also spoke to this point:

it just seemed like what I was doing was just flowing from this basic stance of doing, like I was at the right place, doing what God wanted me to be doing at that time and that this is really what all of us as Christians were called upon to be doing; to be engaged and working for justice and reconciliation. (Hulslander)

Furthermore, in their SIM experience, many expressed the fact that they found comfort and help from their faith when they felt afraid:

I met Ella Baker, and she’s the one that told me. She said, “Abraham went into a strange country. You can too.” That gave me a lot of – well, a lot of courage, I guess. (Collins)

Don Steffa remembers how it felt:

You know, you were really isolated. It was – you strictly were – you know, you did what you did with faith, and you did it with that kind of commitment, and you – I don’t think we ever worried about being killed. I don’t think it was anything anybody – it was a violent environment you just kind of lived in, and you prayed to God that, you know,
nothing would happen, but you kind of ran scared, and so you didn’t go driving on the highway at night if you didn’t have to, unless you had to go to a meeting. (Steffa)

The faith of SIM participants was greatly enriched through exposure to the faith of the Black community:

one old lady that I went to visit, and she was sitting on her front porch. And these were people that weren’t that far – I mean, their parents were in slavery, you know. She must have been, say, 75, and that would have meant she was born in 1880…You know, and they had memories. And she told me that song. You don’t hear it too much today, but – and I was so taken by it, and I haven’t sung it for a long time. How did it go? Let me think of it…

Living alone in this old world of sin.
Hardly a comfort can afford.
Striving alone to face temptation’s sore
Where could I go but to the Lord?
Where could I go? Where could I go?
Seeking a refuge for my soul.
Striving alone to face temptation’s sore
Where could I go but to the Lord?

…she [the woman who sang the song for Collins] represented that incredible spirit that I later encountered…in people in my church in the Bronx. I had a black church in the ‘80s, early ‘90s, and there was a woman there named Rosa Belton. She was about 94. She still used to cook dinner for me in the Bronx. And when she was in the hospital just before she died, I went to visit her with some of her family… she was obviously very weak, and, you know, declining or something, and I said something like, “You’re really a brave woman, Miss Belton” or “I’m sorry you have to be in pain” or whatever. And she said, “Reverend, no other help I know but the Lord.” And there, the kind of faith these people had was – and so that was – I saw that many times down there. (Collins)
For Ruth Brandon, participation in the African American church was a chance to experience a spiritual unity that transcended outward appearances:

The experience of being in the black church was to experience another people’s understanding of God and other people’s music and language and style and prayer patterns and preaching patterns and all of that…And to understand more the diversity of God’s family in terms even of how we worship. And to say it’s all fine. You know, we don’t have to all do it the same way. We don’t all have to say the same words. We don’t have to have the same understandings. But we all need to be seeking where God wants us to be involved right now. (Brandon)

As we have seen above, the down-to-earth caring quality of faith that makes a difference in people’s lives is what also renewed Tom Boomershine’s personal faith – “a church that was actively engaged in poor people and people who were marginalized…I could believe in that” (Boomershine).

The SIM participants experienced the intimate connection between the civil rights movement and the Black church. George McClain describes how the mass meeting became a kind of model for him for the ideal church:

Well, you know, it was like the Church gathering, you know, for inspiration by the Word, spoken and in song and in prayer and then preparing to move out of the church to witness in whatever way. And then, you know, gathering back and having your wounds salved and receiving encouragement again that this is the way, this is the truth, this is the life that matters, and we’re doing what God wants, and you know it’s risky, but we’re together in it. It makes New Testament church language make sense in a way that…you
have accepted some kind of social action circles in some ways parallel that you just don’t experience otherwise. (McClain)

Yet this was not naïve acceptance of the Black church – the participants developed a complex appreciation for the Black church and realized that they shared some of the same struggles as white churches, such as overcoming the status quo. George McClain saw how Black churches struggled with “whether to rock the boat” or not, because each of the members “had some kind of exposure”, areas in which they were open to economic or legal intimidation. McClain saw how Black clergy had “a certain independence” because they did not need to count on white society for employment, “but they didn’t want to get too far out in front of their flock. Churches got bombed” (McClain). SIM participants also struggled with exploitative elements that they saw in African American churches, such as the perceived discrepancy between the appeals for money in church and the fancy new car driven by some ministers. Yet they were also aware that “from a black perspective, why for poor blacks it was important that their preacher look good and have the latest thing and have the prestige and dignity of that” (Hulslander).

For many participants, religious learning continued, stemming from their SIM experiences. John Collins describes how he has a problem with the way in which the Apostles’ Creed has “‘born of the Virgin Mary’,” and then the next words are ‘suffered under Pontius Pilate’” without asking ‘What happened in between?’” (Collins). In his experience in the Black church, Collins found deep Christian sensibilities about the connections between faith and ethics –ones that he finds lacking in the creed:

To me, what happened in between is what it’s all about. And those people understood that. Now they believed all the theology in the story, and they understood in some place in their bones that the ethics were at the core of it, it was how you treat your brother, it
Robert Collins, a participant in the SIM program, elaborated on how racial dynamics influenced his approach to ministry:

"You know, like on the south side of Chicago. (Collins)

Some participants reflected on the lack in their seminary training to provide them with the proper balance between spirituality and action:

I think the main point I want to make is, recognizing that there is this need for this balance between social action and a spiritual life to sustain it. And I didn’t really get that — that sense of need for balance…at Union. (Hulslander)

With its focus on the social implications of the Christian message, Brandon reflected on the lack of training in spirituality and pastoral ministry:

I mean, in a sense my theological education didn’t prepare me to be in churches, but it prepared me to be in life and to be a Christian. It did nothing about my faith journey. I think nowadays there’s much more done with faith journey and spirituality in some of the seminaries. (Brandon)

SIM participants drew upon the rich heritage of progressive Christianity, as taught at Union seminary, and found strength in this spiritual and religious heritage to encourage their ongoing learning in SIM. They were also enriched spiritually by participation in the African American church, and resonated deeply with its power for sustaining people in their struggles in the movement. Through the Black church, SIM participants were exposed to both the spiritual and creative resources of the community, especially through their involvement with the music of the church and movement.

**Songs, music, and art.** There was also an important element of their learning related to the “symbolic processes” that Fowler spoke of in relation to the music and artistic expression
that was part of their overall experience. Personal experience of African American music was a key factor in helping SIM workers connect with the experience of the African American community. This ranged from singing in church, to choirs at mass movement meetings, to singing during demonstrations and singing in jail, to very intimate experiences such as John Collins’ encounter on a porch with an elderly woman whose parents had been in slavery. Especially the SIM participants who were in church-based positions, had the opportunity to experience African American worship, and the powerful role that music played in it:

…the little white frame church sitting out in the woods…That’s what it was. Among the pines. And if we got there late, it didn’t matter because they didn’t have hymn books. They all knew the hymns…the men sat on one side and the women on the other, and there was a mourner’s bench where sort of the deacons or some of these…men sat. I don’t remember all the distinctions…the other thing I remember about that church is those people would sing those old songs and spirituals in what they called long meter…It was a whole different way. It was almost African…It was very slow and drawn out, and it had such a mournful and yet beautiful sound. (Collins)

As we have seen, the mass meetings, which were greatly influenced by the Black church, made a tremendous impression on SIM participants, and were another setting in which they encountered African American music and its power. While the mass meetings had much of the feel of worship services, they were also a powerful communication center in which the news of the day, the sufferings of civil rights workers at the hands of angry whites, and the small victories of resistance would be shared. And in the meetings, the participants would find new energy and strength, through the consoling power of the music which they shared together.
During protest activities, including sit-ins, picketing, and marches, people found solidarity, courage, and strength in the singing and the music. When threatened by the “enormity of the situation” people found “a sense of hope and resolve” in this communal expression that came through music. Even in the experience of being jailed and overcoming the oppressive power of the white law establishment, participants found strength in the expression of communal singing:

but we kept singing and singing and singing and singing, and that – the sense of solidarity there in a rural county where the sheriff showed up with his buddies and shot guns off outside the jail to see if he could scare us… that was an experience of solidarity that was very deep. (Brandon)

Thus it seemed that the music and its experience of community helped build solidarity, and ground them in a sense of purpose.

As many participants came face-to-face with the grim realities of suffering for the cause of civil rights, they found that the songs of the civil rights movement grounded them in even deeper realities:

I don’t know what we would have done without the songs and the music of the movement because it made such a difference in terms of your courage, in terms of your being inspired to deal with …the enormity of the situation there in those years and giving you a sense of hope and resolve…They were songs out of the real stuff of life, and they had deep, deep meaning for everyone…one of the things I remember most was after we had been into Jackson, I think it was, and got the release of some marchers and just in the van going back. Just singing, singing these songs:
We’d been duped.
We’d been scorned.
We’d been talked about
Sure as you’re born
But we’ll never give up. (Hulslander)

For some participants, this was also a time for creative exploration of their own artistic
talents. The civil rights movement was a vital source for a flourishing of new poetry among
young activists, including one of the founders of SIM, Jane Stembridge, who published a book of
poetry, and is recognized as a significant contributor to the literature of the movement. For SIM
participant Don Steffa, his experience in Southwest Georgia was chance for two of his artistic
talents to grow, his poetry and photography. This growth can be seen through the sensitive
portrayal of life in the rural south found in his photographs:

Well, I was learning to be a photographer. My father had been a photographer. My
grandfather had been a photographer, and I was just learning to be a photographer…

Martin Luther King’s movement had a darkroom that we could use, so I was learning to
print. [Steffa shows some photographs to the interviewer.] So these were my…first prints
I ever did myself. So here’s the…typical man and his child and a great deal of pride to
have your picture taken and the joy of taking a picture of who they were as
people…here’s an impressionist picture of a black man who was a farmer and the typical
kind of person that I met and his ease at being who he was with me at the camera taking
pictures of him. So I got to be – learn how to be a photojournalist and be a part and not
be intrusive in their life…and then to share these pictures with them and give them copies
of them. (Steffa)
On his return to Union, Don shared some of these photos and poetry with a broader community through SIM’s magazine, *Skandalon*, of which he was an editor.

For Tom Boomershine, the arts were central to his learning experiences around the church and activism. Through his work with the choir and youth at Chambers Baptist in East Harlem, Tom got to know the youth minister, Dune Cochran, and his wife Thelma. Out of these experiences he came up with the idea to write a passion play:

the play that I wrote was significantly a retelling of the West Side Story…in the context of East Harlem and the youth program there. And so the basic plot of it was there was a group that was…part of the church and some guys who were there, and they were doing a passion play on the street, and a rival gang from further down in East Harlem came – made fun of them, and they – it escalated into a gang war…The youth worker …Dune Cochran …was a veteran of the U.S. Navy who had no – he had no education. I don’t even think he’d graduated from high school and had never done anything in public. And I conned him into taking this part in the play… he was Jesus in the passion play.

(Boomershine)

As has been described previously, Boomershine would undertake a number of other artistic endeavors with the church. This combination of getting deeply involved in the community, seeing the importance of the church in the lives of the Cochrane’s and others in the church, combined with this creative engagement with the arts, led to Tom’s own sense of religious transformation.

Participation in the Student Interracial Ministry involved significant learning experiences for the participants, specifically concerning race. This experience made their understanding of racism and racial issues more vivid, in their movement from what was largely a conceptual
understanding to a more realistic, experience-based perspective. Three key factors appeared to influence the transformative nature of these learning experiences: Their experience of race served as a disorienting dilemma to them, as they wrestled with the stark reality of segregation and racism, the role of white people in perpetuating this situation, the status quo support of segregation and racism, and their own role in it. This powerful learning opportunity occurred in the dynamic context of a welcoming African American community, with whom they developed strong empathetic ties and a sense of common purpose in the struggle. As they moved, with community support, into action, they drew on the insight and strength from the spiritual and symbolic dimensions of the learning process. As theological seminary students, they continued this process by integrating their learning into their own faith development, particularly as it related to their sense of vocation.

**SIM and the Transformative Development of Vocation**

For the participants in this study, a developing sense of vocation was a critical element in the SIM experience that affected their whole lives. The learning that they were experiencing was intimately connected with their ongoing faith development and their understanding of ministry. In faith development terms, this meant, for most participants, the movement from the inherited faith of their communities of origin, with its reliance on institutional structures, to the development of ownership over one’s own faith. For these SIM participants, this movement also affected their understanding of ministry and vocation, as many of them struggled to develop their own vision of authentic ministry – often taking a less institutionalized form than that which they held previously.

For several participants, their overall experience resulted in a faith stance which took the form of a community-centered, rather than individual-centered conception of faith and ministry.
Conflict also played an important element in the experience of many participants’ faith development, as they wrestled with rival visions and approaches to activism, faith, and ministry. Finally, the importance of faith and vocational development as an ongoing, continuous process was seen with key elements of spiraling back to elements of their earlier faith lives that continued to be important for several participants.

To properly appraise the early vocational decision-making of SIM participants, it is necessary to understand the role that their learning experiences about race played in the participants’ decision to integrate activism into their vocational choices. For four participants (Collins, McClain, Hulslander, Brandon), the commitment to church forms of ministry and to activism were inextricably linked. For them, activism would deeply inform their choice of ministry, while their commitment to church would frame their activism. For three participants (Boomershine, Helms, Walker), their primary focus would be on church-related ministry (of several forms), but their ministry would still be informed by their activist commitments. The distinction between these first two categories is a matter of degree of activism: most of the church work of the first group of four was activist; while much of the church work of the second group was not activist in nature. For two participants (Troy, Wiltshire), their ministry would take an activist, secular form, while each maintained a strong sense of their work as ministry. For the final two participants, the connections between vocation and their SIM experience are less clear. One participant (Steffa) would do secular work with some activist orientation, while another (Cox) would do non-activist church work.

**Movement from Inherited Faith to One’s Own Faith.**

As young adults who were mostly in their mid to late 20s when they were at seminary and in SIM, it makes sense that they would be in the process of moving from the inherited faith
of their adolescent days to the development of their own faith understanding. For at least two participants who had substantial experiences outside home and college before coming to seminary (Hulslander, Walker), this movement was further along. Bud Walker’s time in the Far East had opened his eyes to a vast, new world beyond his parochial upbringing, had built on his sense of disillusionment with his church’s complicity in racism, and moved him well on the way to establishing his own faith perspective. As he explained, “[it] had the wonderful result of turning my whole world upside down. It became very clear that God was not a Southern Baptist” (Walker). For Mac Hulslander, his immersion experiences in an African American community (at Howard) and in a predominantly, non-Christian culture (Japan), combined with his interracial work on college campuses in the south, had helped him to significantly develop his own faith perspective. Mac described his experience at Howard:

[it] just kind of exploded my world. To go from not only small rural white communities of northeastern Pennsylvania to metropolitan Washington and then be in a minority for the first time in my life…it was consciousness raising par excellence.

For several participants, their coming to Union and participation in church-related activism sparked their faith development. John Collins had been developing his own sense of faith for some years, during his experience in the navy and as an attorney in Chicago, but he described his exposure to activist leaders in New York during his orientation to Union: “I just felt like I finally found my role in life…This is where I’m meant to be” (Collins). For Bill Troy and Tom Boomershine, seminary was a time to resolve their college struggles with their inherited faith, by forging a new faith deeply informed by activism. Tom Boomershine renewed his faith through his experience working at Chambers Baptist in Harlem. In particular, it was his exposure to deeply caring and committed African American families that helped him find a
“faith that” he could “believe in” (Boomershine). For Bill Troy, this happened as a combination of classroom learning, in which his theology professor helped him to understand the meaning of being saved by grace, and his deep immersion in activist work at the local and national level, culminating in his work with SIM.

For many SIM participants, this development of expanded faith perspective, took on a distinctly non-institutional character, both in terms of a conception of faith as well as an understanding of ministry.

**Movement Away from an Institutional View of Faith and Ministry**

In the development of their own faith perspective, many participants shared in the movement away from an institutionally focused or grounded faith. We have already seen how John Collins had found his home in a Christianity that was deeply connected with social action. For John, this would not lead to a rejection of the institutional church, but instead to a calling to renew that church from within. Collins would spend a lifetime of service in the Church as an activist pastor and staff person for Methodist and activist ecumenical agencies. For Mac Hulslander, this movement away from an institutionally centered faith and vocation took place through his experience both in the classroom and in activism. Mac’s activist experiences in SIM and other work, such as his anti-apartheid protests when he returned to Union from SIM, taught him about the complexity of racism and other social problems. This dovetailed with the new vision of church that he was learning about in class which called for a group ministry approach to deal with social problems in a multi-faceted way:

so the idea of a group of people committed to a new form of ministry that would bring together different disciplines – theology, sociology, understandings about housing and urban development…It just made a lot of sense to me… (Hulslander)
For others, they would attempt to stay within the institutional church to reform it from within, but would end up fashioning unexpected forms of ministry. For Ashley Wiltshire, he hoped to be able to make an impact on the Southern Baptist church from within, by becoming a progressive minister within the denomination. But his experiences in SIM, in which he saw the relative ineffectiveness of religious leaders to accomplish change (in comparison with the lawyers) and his correspondence with a liberal Southern Baptist minister, pushed him to pursue a new type of ministry outside the institutional church. He would become a poverty lawyer, working his entire career in legal aid, yet always keeping a sense of the spiritual nature of his calling.

I sort of say that…everybody who’s devoting…a substantial part of their career to Legal Aid is there because of a religious commitment. They may not know it…I don’t try that too far. … I think it’s part of…what sort of drives us, and…we look for people to work there who were driven by that kind of commitment. Not blinded by it. (Wiltshire)

Bill Troy was deeply moved by a call to activism. His experiences in SIM in particular pushed him to make a decisive commitment in service of the oppressed and poor. His long-term field work in Scarsdale gave him the opportunity to test whether or not he could be faithful to his new found commitment to activism within the traditional ministry. Based on his dialogue with church members over the emergence of new African American leadership (Black Power) he realized that the status quo was too powerful a factor in the church – he would need to develop a sense of ministry outside the institutional church. Troy would go on to a career in which he was a leader in a number of activist organizations, while striving to retain meaningful connections with the institutional church.
This rejection of the institutional nature of the church is seen most strongly in the case of Mac Hulslander. Like Bill Troy, he was raised in a Methodist ministerial family, yet his experiences of the complexity of social problems, as noted above, encouraged him to seek lay solutions. Following seminary, Mac and his wife founded an experimental urban ministry in Raleigh that would call the church to look for complex solutions to the systemic problems of the inner city, rather than the current “Band-Aid” approaches of the church. He would spend his career, working in various ways, to strengthen the role of the laity in leadership of the church.

For many SIM participants, their expanding faith development, moving from inherited faith to their own faith perspective, provides an important context for their learning. For many participants, this faith development was not individually centered, but instead in the community. In their SIM experience, the participants continued to develop their sense of vocation for ministry. Like their learning about race, this faith development in relation to vocation was deeply rooted in their experience of the African American community.

**Community-Centered Understanding of Faith and Ministry**

In contrast to the individual-centered model of faith development, the faith development of many SIM participants was centered in the community. For Ruth Brandon, the community was at the center of her experience in SIM, especially her time in Southwest Georgia. She was deeply moved by the strength of the community, as demonstrated in the mass meetings, with their music, song, and testimony, as well as in the jails, where the singing and the sense of unity kept Ruth strong. Her major transformative learning stemmed from her community experience in which she recognized that despite their lack of education, the people she met had a vital intelligence concerning what is needed and important in their lives.
I learned that education really was just a luck of the draw and that there were very smart people, very intelligent people about what was good for the future, who had not had that luck. Hadn’t happened to go to school, but they were very bright, and they knew exactly what was good for their futures.

Rather than trying to impose outside ideas and values on the community, ministry needs to recognize this intelligence and respect and empower the community. In terms of her own preparation for ministry, Brandon consistently frames this in terms of her communal experiences. She describes the cumulative power of this experience in community, which started in SIM:

coming from no exposure to anybody black. Then immersion in a black American experience. Then immersion three times in an African experience. It’s always been related. And it’s sort of like being involved in the SIM experience made it easier to be involved in the African experience, particularly in an African liberation experience because the SIM experience with SNCC was [a]…liberation experience. And being involved with a people who are intensely organizing and singing and building morale around a common purpose. And certainly in all those communities sorting the values out that…you don’t do everything just to preserve your life. There are higher values...And seeing the values in both of those struggles for freedom as values for the community being higher than just the individual values. (Brandon)

Ruth learned about the value of community in her various activist experiences, and it has deeply shaped the way in which she practices her ministry, focused on the needs and strengths of the community rather than her own approach:

In my role as the association minister for 88 churches of whom at maximum 20 would be happy to know that about me [commitment to progressive Christian ideas], the rest just
want me to help them – they will go as far as helping them discover what God wants them to be about in today’s times, but they’re anxious about generational cultural differences and things like that. And I don’t start with my agenda… I start where they are. I still believe that people are capable of figuring out what they need and what they need to learn, and you plant seeds. And you organize at the right time, and then you have some people out front, and you have some people who are the bridge holders who can interpret to the ones back here what those up there are doing because all of us are needed. And I’ve been pretty much a bridge kind of person. (Brandon)

John Collins also recognized the importance of community in his own development. He saw how his commitment to radical activism would be difficult to maintain if he didn’t have the ongoing support of the community. Collins found a certain freedom working in the Black church, especially related to their willingness to support him when he made radical connections between the gospel and the social issues of the time.

I did not want to go into a white suburban church…I have friends who did, and they really made a powerful witness. Some of them even had to leave… or got disillusioned… It was really hard to be a radical and be in a white church in those days. A liberal, yes, up to a point… So I always had the luxury of being in a black church, and I could get away with stuff that a lot of my friends couldn’t. (Collins)

At the heart of his sense of vocation is a commitment to work for the renewal of the broader community. This commitment is well illustrated as a newspaper reporter (Stern) reflects on John Collins’ ministry:
In East Harlem, Collins became a key figure in a community being overtaken by crime, heroin and poverty. He opened his church to everyone, reached out to the parents of at-risk kids, and created a temporary school during a public school strike.

"It was a wild scene and the Rev's church was right in the center of it," said Dennis Watlington, a writer and filmmaker who was one of the troubled youth taken in by Collins. "He recruited the toughest, the roughest, the most at-risk of us all, and brought us into his church. He didn't come in like a missionary, but Rev and Sheila [Collins’ wife] created a community." (Stern, 2008)

Strength that comes from community was very important for Bill Troy and the need for that community support was a critical element in his inner struggle over the nature of his ministry. Yet he found that the status quo power in the church was far too strong to fight against successfully – so he had to find new ways to forge community outside the church:

what I loved about being in the parish was the interaction with people and throwing out seeds and watching them bloom and the change in people and projects…I really, really loved it, and I missed it…And I think I had to look for ways to replace it ever since… I began to look for the same experience in a broader community setting…The same values and the same kinds of relationships and so forth. And found them. So vocationally it really made a big change in my life. Thereafter I worked most often in a church-related vocation, but not a parish setting. (Troy)

Tom Boomershine and George McClain found models in the movement for their later ministry. Tom based his Biblical storytelling network on the movement, knowing that “a loose-knit network of relationships with a minimal administrative structure; that that was a framework…within which movements for social change could happen (Boomershine); we have
also seen how George McClain understood the mass meetings as providing a model of what the New Testament church must have been like.

As has been demonstrated, their experience in community provided an important context for SIM participants’ faith development and vocation. As in their learning about race, conflict also played an important role in their faith development and sense of vocation.

**Role of Conflict**

Although the topic of the role of conflict has been covered above in relation to the learning the SIM participants did in community, it is also important to consider the role conflict played for most participants in the ongoing development of their faith and sense of vocation. For three (Boomershine, Troy, Wiltshire) the struggle surrounding the emergence of Black Power was a key factor in their vocational decision-making. Unlike many other white participants in the civil rights movement, SIM participants were well prepared for the emerging role of African American leadership. Ashley Wiltshire and Bill Troy experienced the emergence of Black Power directly. Ashley wrestled with issue of white identity as he talked with an African American SNCC leader about his understanding that God’s love extended even to white “crackers” like himself:

> [he was] trying to insist to me that I was not a cracker. You know, that I was one of them…and I appreciated that. I found it very endearing, but I felt within myself that…he was not fully appreciating…the real differences.

This conflict, along with his ongoing tension with his potential role as a minister in the Southern Baptist Church, was a catalyst to help him to form his new sense of ministerial calling in poverty law. As we have seen before, Bill Troy’s radical embrace of the validity of the Black Power perspective was a critical element in the development of his sense of vocation and faith.
For Mac Hulslander, it meant that, following seminary, as he developed his work with alternative approaches to ministry, he also made commitment to anti-racism education. The progressive white community had begun to understand the concept of white privilege and the need for white self-examination, Hulslander embraced this *new white consciousness* which advocated that “whites needed to tackle our own communities, our own issues, and that that was the hopeful way of dealing with the deep-seated racism in this country”. Mac also developed his own race relations curriculum.

Tom Boomershine’s story is an important one illustrating the role of conflict in shaping the understanding of ministry and his vocational call. As we have seen, in his administrative work with SIM, Tom was a mediating presence between several conflicting forces in relation to SIM. These conflicting forces gave Tom vital experience in which he would come to understand more fully the complexities of social change.

Following graduation, Boomershine left Union and went to serve in an urban church in Chicago. His choice of appointment was shaped by his work in SIM – “It was THE major factor”. He chose to serve in a multi-racial congregation in Chicago, rather than accept an appointment in a white church in his own denomination – based on his commitment formed in SIM and his other experiences in urban ministry, to supporting the development of the African American community. Yet in Chicago, Boomershine came face-to-face with the racial complexities of urban churches. First Congregational Church was run by rich white people now living in the suburbs, yet it was supportive of various progressive urban programs and had a growing Hispanic congregation. This complex situation made effective ministry for him very difficult, as he discovered that the church had a significant racist past and a lack of credibility in the African American community.
that was a major factor in my own vocational decision to not be a white inner city minister in black churches…There was no future for me as a white guy as a pastor of a black church in the urban areas then. So I decided that what I could do would be to try to - get a Ph.D. and then to empower black and Hispanic pastors so that they could get the credentials that they needed so that that could in turn empower the churches in the urban communities. (Boomershine)

This situation, in concert with his experience of the rise of Black Power, while in SIM and in Chicago, helped him to decide that his work with the Black community would need to be less direct – he would become a seminary professor and help develop programs to train African American pastors for effective urban ministry.

Other important types of conflict helped to shape SIM participants’ sense of vocation. These occurred following seminary as they worked in positions within the church to raise awareness of the importance of activist ideas and actions. George McClain struggled for several years to work within the traditional church structure, but was stymied by the lack of progress. He ended up working from a position outside the traditional structure as the head of the major ‘unofficial’ Methodist social action agency. As we have seen, the potential for ongoing conflict in the white church helped to encourage John Collins to be the Methodist pastor of African American congregations. This enabled him still to be able to work for reform from within the Methodist Church structure. For Mac Hulslander, the conflict with the status-quo position of local churches would be a continual impetus and source of frustration in his quest to challenge the church to find more systemic answers to urban social problems.

The faith development of SIM participants provided a meaningful context for their learning about race. As they struggled with issues of racial identity, conflict, and potential
exclusion, they also refined their understanding of vocation, while maintaining their sense of personal commitment to involvement in racial issues.

**A Continuous, Ongoing Process**

Finally, it is important to consider the ways in which faith development and its connection with a sense of vocation, is a continuous, ongoing process. For many participants, SIM was their first opportunity to really put their faith into action. Many participants built on this formative SIM experience and their transformative learning about race, and had careers that continuously addressed a wide range of social needs in society (Collins, McClain, Hulslander, Troy, Brandon). George McClain’s experience might be considered typical. He followed his SIM experience with deep involvement in the anti-war movement. When he came to the leadership of the MFSA, he extended SIM racial learning to champion the apartheid struggle within Methodist circles and to fight for many other vital causes including women’s rights, Latino rights and gay rights. George explains that all of this work was based on “what the civil rights movement taught American culture…a sense of fairness that had never permeated so deeply into the culture” before (McClain).

In their ongoing faith and vocational development, many SIM participants spiraled back to reclaim elements of earlier experience in order to reintegrate them into their newly developing perspectives. After a full career in which he encouraged lay people to find ways to reflect and discern their gifts for ministry, Mac Hulslander finally took his own advice and paused to reconsider his ministry. While serving at a retreat center, Mac reconnected with a love of the outdoors and a long dormant interest in Japanese gardens that had been developed when he lived in Japan following college, and decided to become a landscape gardener. After a lifetime of working for the long-term goals at the heart of adult education programs, he found ways to gain
satisfaction in the immediacy of his new work. Bud Walker is another excellent example of this element of spiraling back. Walker was deeply committed to ministry yet his learning around race, following the Birmingham bombings and his participation in SIM, led him to a commitment to activism. His work became increasingly focused on activism – first as a campus minister, then in his work in the Black community while at Harvard, and finally in his Human Relations positions in North Carolina. As he was experiencing frustration and burnout, he also felt a rekindling of his call to ministry. Walker’s long career in prison chaplaincy represents a kind of spiraling back to reclaim an earlier sense of ministry, yet one that was now infused with the experience and perspective of Walker’s many activist years of service.

In conclusion, this chapter has explored the importance of understanding the orienting context for SIM participants’ learning about race. It has considered how upbringing, schooling, and events in early careers have shaped the racial ideas of participants. Two important factors for many participants were their participation in significant cross cultural experiences, often overseas, and their involvement in race-related activities through college Christian groups, with some participants having their first involvement in civil rights activities or developing early relationships with African Americans.

Extensive learning occurred in SIM concerning race. Central to this learning was the movement from largely conceptual understanding of racism to experiential based learning. SIM participants were deeply challenging by the reality and extent of racism, and its implications in the lives of members of the African American community. In the process they developed new perspectives on the identity of African Americans as well as their own identity in relation to race and class.
The context for this learning about race was the welcoming African American community in which they lived and worked. They experienced a strong sense of gratitude for this gracious and courageous welcome and developed strong empathetic ties with specific members of the community as well as in general towards African Americans. These rich interpersonal relations helped them to learn to act, as they forged new ways of thinking and acting in response to the disorienting dilemma of racism. They developed a strong sense of common purpose with others who were working for change. Their learning and experience was also deeply informed by the spiritual and artistic heritage of the African American community, through their participation in the African American church and through the music of the civil rights movement. They also drew on their own spiritual and religious heritage to find strength and purpose in their SIM participation.

Finally, it is important to understand this learning in the context of the faith development of SIM participants. They integrated this learning into their developing faith perspectives and struggled with the implications that this learning had for their sense of vocation. The learning in SIM was long-lasting for many participants, and its effects on and connections with their ongoing vocational development was demonstrated, as most participants did life-work that was informed by activism and their sense of spiritual/religious vocation.
CHAPTER NINE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways in which participation in Student Interracial Ministry affected the racial perspectives of the participants, with special attention to the interplay between religious background, theological education, and faith development. This chapter will begin with a brief summary of the findings, and then it will examine the findings in light of the three primary theories informing this study and in dialogue with relevant previous research.

Summary of Findings

This section will briefly summarize the findings that were described in detail in Chapter Eight. These include the role of the orienting context, racism as a disorienting dilemma, the African American community context, the spiritual and symbolic process dimension, and the vocational/faith development context.

All of the SIM participants in this study had limited experience with African Americans before their involvement in SIM, and came from a variety of backgrounds in terms of racial attitudes. For many participants, participation in college Christian groups and/or experience in overseas programs played an important role in the development of their racial perspective, moving them toward broader and more open perspectives toward the world and more progressive perspectives on race. At least ten of the twelve participants were actively involved in campus Christian groups. This involvement provided some participants with their first substantive relationships with African Americans, connected many with progressive ideas and movements concerning race, and gave some an early opportunity for activist participation. These various aspects of the orienting context for SIM participants illustrate important details of the
transformative process, extending over many years, of which their SIM participation would be a central event.

Although these aspects of their orienting context provided broadening experiences for SIM participants, for most, it was not until they travelled south and became immersed in the African American community, that they were confronted with the stark reality of the absurd system of segregation, with its separate bathrooms and service counters - a system which disrespected African Americans at every turn. This became a disorienting dilemma for them which would serve as a catalyst for their learning about race. This experience of segregation and racism deepened as they heard people tell their stories and as the SIM participants themselves experienced the suspicious looks and scorn of white southerners, as well as the pervasive climate of intimidation and fear. From this disorienting dilemma flowed new types of understanding about the nature of racial identity, the complex set of assumptions that they brought with them as white people trying to understand this segregated system, and the role of class issues. The critical learning for many involved the role of African American leadership as they took largely supportive roles in the community and movement, in recognition that African Americans must have the central leadership roles. This would become a key element in the vocational decision-making process of many SIM participants.

The learning that flowed from this disorienting dilemma took place in the context of the African American community. SIM participants were deeply affected by the radical hospitality shown to them as they were welcomed by the African American community, in particular by the individuals and families that housed them and took care of them. This happened, despite the horrendous ways in which African Americans had been treated by whites and white society in the past, and in the face of the fear of potential reprisals in response to the reception that they
were giving SIM participants. As SIM participants got to know members of the community, especially the people and families with whom they lived, empathetic bonds began to develop as SIM participants heard their stories and realized in deeper ways the devastating effects that racism has had on African Americans, and the great courage it took for African Americans to challenge segregation. This growing empathy fostered in SIM participants, what this study has described as, a respectful presence. A number of SIM participants believed that this respect on their part helped to foster a sense of mutuality, as African Americans shared with them how few white people had treated them with this kind of respect in the past. Among SIM participants, this also led to a new sense of commitment to the shared purpose of working for civil rights. From this commitment flowed changed behaviors and the willingness to act from their new perspective, even in the face of a growing sense of conflict concerning white participation in, and potential exclusion from, the civil rights movement.

As graduate students studying theology at Union Theological Seminary, it was natural that SIM participants would bring a strong religious dimension to their experience. Many participants connected their progressive learning about race with core elements of their religious upbringing. Most participants had a sense of religious calling or sense of doing the right thing in their SIM participation. They also found strength and comfort in their faith during times of fear and anxiety. The religious-spiritual-symbolic dimension was also enriched and strengthened through their involvement with the African American church. SIM participants were deeply impressed by the depth of commitment to faith; the ways in which the down-to-earth faith of African Americans supported them throughout their daily struggles with segregation; and the rich musical tradition which bound the community together, giving them strength in unity. Particularly in the music, SIM participants connected with a strong sense of the spiritual unity
found in a common reality which transcended outward appearances, in which they could draw strength and comfort even in times of great fear and anxiety. Many SIM participants would go on to integrate aspects of this learning into their own faith development.

For many SIM participants, a growing sense of vocation was a key element in their SIM experience. Their learning about race was connected with their own faith development and their understanding of ministry. Throughout their careers, at least nine of the twelve participants would make deep connections in their work between vocation and activism. This sense of vocation was deeply connected to their faith development as they moved from the faith that they had grown up with to a sense of their own faith. Greater awareness of racial and social issues was a key factor in the development of their own faith, as they moved away from an institutionally focused or grounded faith to a more dynamic perspective. In SIM and other activist experiences, participants would identify activism and activist values as core elements of their faith and sense of vocation. Seven participants would begin their ministries in positions outside the local church, as they sought to unite their commitments to ministry and activism in meaningful ways.

For most participants, their experiences in the African American community worked to shape their sense of vocation. This included key values of respect, connection of ministry with community needs, and drawing strength from the community. Several would find in the civil rights movement a model for a powerful, open, supportive network for effective ministry. For about half the participants, the struggle over a sense of racial identity and the conflict related to the rise of Black Power played a critical role in their sense of vocation. Their learning about race also continued as they applied the key principles of this learning to new situations. This can be seen in the ongoing involvement by SIM participants in a wide variety of issues such as the anti-
apartheid movement, anti-war movement, women’s rights, and gay rights, to name a few. Most participants directly connected such involvement to their learning in SIM.

Having reviewed the findings of this study, the next three sections will explore how the current state of research on the major components of the theoretical framework helps to understand the implications of these findings, as well as exploring the ways in which these findings point toward areas of revision in the theories underlying this study.

**Transformative Learning Theory in a Faith Context**

As the central theoretical perspective of this study, the connections to Transformative Learning Theory are extensive. But this particular study was also about the participants’ learning experiences in a faith context, which needs to be kept in mind when considering the findings in relation to transformative learning. In light of the particular context, conclusions are drawn concerning four areas: learning in action, the central role of community, mediating role of spirituality and religion in light of the faith context, and transformative process over time. Before considering these key areas, consideration will be given to two introductory matters – the reality of perspective change among participants and the issue of white privilege.

**Perspective Change among SIM Participants**

Before discussing the critical elements in the transformative process of learning that took place in the SIM participants in this study, it is important to establish that transformative learning took place. According to the classic conception of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991b, 1997, 2000, 2003) the central element of TL is meaning perspective change, in which adult learners change aspects of their central frames of reference – their basic ways in which they view the world. Based on the findings, as extensively detailed in Chapter Eight, it seems clear that for most of the participants in this study, their learning around race was part of a broad process of
transformative learning. From the interview data, there is evidence that at least five of the twelve participants underwent large scale meaning perspective change (Brandon, Hulslander, McClain, Troy, Wiltshire). There is also considerable evidence that many others experienced a transformative learning process, with many of the elements of transformative learning present, such as a disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, and taking action on new learning (Mezirow, 1991b, 1997, 2000, 2003). This is especially true at least for three others (Boomershine, Collins, Walker). As we have seen, the SIM experiences serve different roles in the learning experiences of the participants, based on their previous learning about race. For Collins, Walker, and Boomershine, very significant learning had already taken place before SIM. For John Collins, his activist experiences that he undertook in New York while at Union, both before and after his SIM experience, were critical to his learning and his SIM experience had a central role in this; for Bud Walker, his transformative experiences while in the Far East during his time in the marines set the stage for his ongoing learning at Union and in SIM; for Tom Boomershine, his first field work experience in East Harlem set in motion a process of transformative learning that would change him from someone who had a somewhat dismissive attitude toward the civil rights movement while in college, to a leader in SIM and someone who would have civil rights as a major part of his vocation as a seminary professor.

The Problem of White Privilege

Before exploring the various factors in the learning process of SIM participants concerning race, it is useful to problematize the issue of white privilege. In adult education currently, the issue of white privilege is a key factor in understanding white identity, racial attitudes, and racism (Baumgartner, 2010; Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2010; Boyd, 2008; Colin & Lund, 2010; D’Andrea, 1999; Dass-Brailsford, 2007; European-American Collaborative
Challenging Whiteness, 2008, 2010; Kaufmann, 2010; Lund, 2010; Manglitz et al., 2005; Manglitz & Cervero; Paxton, 2010). The few studies of race and transformative learning have found that an understanding of white privilege was central to transformative learning around race (D’Andrea, 1999; Dass-Brailsford, 2007; Tisdell, 2003). Yet in the mid-1960s, this was still a concept in its infancy - one that would develop only after the emergence of Black Power with its insistence on white people taking responsibility to root out racism in their own communities (Carmichael, 2003). For SIM participants, the key areas of learning about race involved personal experience of the deep reality of white racism and discrimination against African Americans, through personal observation and encounter with African Americans in the segregated south; experience of white racial scorn stemming from their associations with African Americans; understanding the full humanity and worth of African Americans through personal contact; the importance of African American leadership within the movement; and the necessity for white people to act on this new learning in lives more committed to social change. While a fully-formed understanding of white privilege was not prevalent, it can be theorized that this understanding was nascent in the SIM learning experience. In particular, their new understanding of the depths of white racism and their empathetic appreciation for the degrading power of white racism, well might lead to a more complete sense of white privilege.

This nascent development can be seen in a few SIM participants who had some awareness of white privilege – especially Mac Hulslander and Bill Troy, both of whom were on the scene when Black Power was first proclaimed on the Meredith March, and Ruth Brandon who came to more fully understand how intelligence transcends educational opportunity.
Learning in Action

A central dynamic of understanding transformative learning among SIM participants is that their learning can best be understood as praxis (Freire, 2000; Marx, 1969). While classroom and book learning were important for many participants, SIM was formed as a critique and alternative to strict classroom learning. As has been demonstrated above, students believed that they really learned about race when they saw the effects of racism and segregation in person, met and learned from African Americans experiencing oppression, experienced the rejection of white society themselves, and began to act to change it. This realistic understanding of the plight of African Americans is a key element in the transformative learning of the privileged (Curry-Stevens, 2007; Van Gorder, 2007). This study underscores the critical importance of Freire’s mediation of the Marxian notion of praxis to the world of adult education (Freire, 2000; Marx, 1969). It shows the importance of the socio-political setting for the conscientization of SIM participants, which supports those who criticize Mezirow for removing transformative learning from its necessary foundation in this setting (Collard & Law, 1989; Cunningham, 1998). This importance of the social setting can be seen in three main contexts for learning among SIM participants: the classroom, their SIM experiences, and their ministerial work. They had liberal classroom learning that had educated them concerning race, but they saw that teaching as largely disconnected from real world application and sometimes complicit in supporting the status quo; they mostly had progressive notions about race, but virtually no real experience in interracial settings prior to their SIM experience. To some degree, their SIM experience gave them the real world experience; after returning from SIM, they struggled to raise awareness in their church congregations and other settings, often to be met by what they viewed as deep support for the
status quo concerning social issues. All of these social settings framed the transformative learning process for SIM participants.

This study also contributes to the adult education literature concerning learning in social movements (Baumgartner, 2005; English, 2005b; Parrish & Taylor, 2007; Rachal, 1998). In particular it adds to the studies about how activists themselves learn in social movements. SIM participants shared several learning elements with the white student civil rights workers interviewed by Rachal: segregation served as a disorienting dilemma; they understood their active learning in the movement as an alternative to classroom learning; and they felt that they learned more than they taught. This SIM study also shared very similar results with the study of participants in the Catholic Worker (Parrish & Taylor, 2007) including: the importance of understanding the varying influences of family and school on participants; the role of significant interpersonal relationships; the development of one’s own value system in place of the one in which you grew up; a sense of purpose found in putting your faith into caring action; and the importance of understanding learning in life context (made possible by the oral history methodology used in each study).

**Community and Affective Factors in the Transformative Process**

A central criticism of Mezirow’s classic formulation of transformative learning is that it fails to adequately take account of the importance of interpersonal relations and the role of affective factors (Clark & Wilson, 1991). This study provides extensive evidence in support of this perspective, as the transformative learning about race among SIM participants, as has been described above, had the African American community as its main context, with the development of affective bonds of gratitude, respect, and empathy as key factors in the learning process. It seems a strong example of a connected way of knowing in which learning flows from
relationships and empathetic understanding. (Belenky & Stanton, 2000; Cranton, 2006). This transformative process in SIM began with the participants’ exposure to racism and segregation and the way in which this acted as a disorienting dilemma to them (Rachal, 1998). Central to this learning process was the role of interpersonal relations (Baumgartner, 2002; Carter, 2002; Eisen, 2001; King, 2004; MacLeod, Parkin, Pullon & Robertson, 2003; Rachal, 1998). SIM participants began to feel at home in the community - this sense of trust fostered learning (Baumgartner, 2002; Carter, 2002; Eisen, 2001). As they got to know members of the African American community more deeply and saw the effects of racism and segregation on them it intensified the sense of disorienting dilemma (D’Andrea, 1999; Dass-Brailsford, 2007). As empathetic bonds developed between participants and the community, this would lead to ongoing dialogue; and, as in the case of George McClain and his learning from Mae Lindsey, it sometimes facilitated the development of new perspectives (Tisdell, 2003).

In particular, the role of empathy in relation to transformative learning is a new finding of this study, with very little research having been conducted previously. A recent study (Ogle & Damhorst, 2010) with 334 college undergraduates explored how a curriculum unit “designed to promote critical reflection and multifaceted understanding about the topic of obesity” (p. 604), which made use of filmed interviews/testimonials with three overweight and obese people, encouraged the development of empathy and critical reflection on the part of participants. The study did not measure whether empathy and critical reflection reduced obesity bias or transformed student perspectives. The role played by empathy in this study of SIM participants is also in line with intergroup contact studies that found that empathy was an important factor in prejudice reduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Swart, Hewstone, Christ & Voci, A., 2010).
Potential Mediating Role for Spirituality and Religion

For SIM participants, as people who took religion seriously in their lives, the spiritual and symbolic process dimension served as an important context for their transformative learning. Further, as noted above, the context of these participants’ learning was related to a faith context, given that Union Theological Seminary is specifically a theological institution, and the SIM experience was framed within a faith context. As Clark and Wilson (1991) discussed nearly 20 years ago, the context of transformative learning always matters, and the faith based context of these participants’ experience is significant to understanding the experience.

Transformative learning theory, as developed by Mezirow, has often been understood as a largely cognitive approach to learning that is not generally amenable to spiritual and religious experience, or at least does not explicitly account for such experiences. Yet a growing number of scholars are calling into question this restrictive view of transformative learning in relation to the positive role of imaginative ways of knowing (Dirkx, 1997, 2001a, 2001b) and the role of spirituality (Healy, 2000; Tisdell, 2003; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006; Turay & English, 2008).

Religion as an orienting context. Most SIM participants connected their progressive perspectives on race to elements in their religious upbringing, both positive and negative. For Ruth Brandon, SIM was an opportunity to live out for herself the core values of her upbringing, as she was raised in a family and community which had the interconnection between faith and social activism as a natural part of its life. From a faith development perspective (Fowler, 1981) Ruth, like most SIM participants, was in transition from inherited, synthetic-conventional faith (Stage 3) to her own, individuative-reflective faith (Stage 4). In Stage 3, authority is primarily
located external to the self, and one is comfortable with traditional and status quo values and ideas. In Stage 4, authority is primarily located within the self, with two essential features:

The critical distancing from one’s previous assumptive value system and the emergence of an executive ego. When and as these occur a person is forming a new identity, which he or she expresses and actualizes by the choice of personal and group affiliations and the shaping of a “lifestyle.” (Fowler, 1981, p. 179)

This may have been accelerated or made easier for Brandon because she was raised in a community in which Stage 4 faith was most likely dominant (Fowler, 1981, p. 161). As Ruth herself said “I was not in rebellion if I was activist”. For other participants, they had to struggle against the predominantly synthetic-conventional setting of the churches in which they grew up. Some examples include: questioning the accommodation of their church to the status quo, in incidents such as asking Sunday school teachers about why the church does not teach *turning the other cheek* or “the thing about a rich man getting into the kingdom of heaven” (Collins); calling into question his church’s claim to a unique view on the truth – “God is not a Southern Baptist” (Walker); or in realizing that core values of equality had lain dormant in his church, although for himself, he connected the development of his more progressive racial views with early training about the *Golden Rule* and the *Good Samaritan* (Wiltshire).

For some participants, Union Theological Seminary served as an orienting context, in a similar way as Ruth Brandon’s community of origin had served for her. It provided a setting in which religion/spirituality and progressive social values were brought together in an expected fashion (English, 2005a). Exploring the positive impact of religious faith on the world through the development of progressive social values was a standard element of both formal classroom instruction and much field experience. As has been shown in Chapter 2, throughout Union
Seminary’s history, students have struggled to keep Union from accommodating to the status quo and have sought to reform the educational experience through the development of organizations like SIM.

**Religious/spiritual motivation and connections.** The importance of the religious-spiritual dimension to SIM participants’ transformative learning can be seen in the way in which this dimension provided a strong sense of ethical motivation for participants (English, 2005a, 2005b; Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996; Henderson, 2006). They phrased it in terms such as the need to “do the right thing” or to “do what God wants”. Having this spiritual dimension to their experience helped SIM students to see that they were participating in something bigger than themselves – “doing something that felt like it was worth doing and with people that it was important to be with, and that’s all that mattered. It felt like that’s where God had needed us to be” (Brandon).

When times of fear and conflict threatened to overwhelm them, SIM participants also found strength and comfort in their faith. They “approached emotionally charged experiences imaginatively rather than merely cognitively” (Dirkx, 2001, p. 70). Yet this was not simply turning to the faith that they had come with, but to the faith of the African American community in which they were living. It was partly through faith connections that they were able to make connections with African American people. They were inspired by the examples of courage and faith that they saw, both in those who were deeply connected to traditional religious faith, such as the 94 year-old woman who sang the spiritual “Where Could I Go but to the Lord?” for John Collins as she sat on her porch; and in those African Americans who had a sense of spiritual calling, that was not necessarily connected to the church:
Well, being inside SNCC, clearly you’re in a group of people who were very busy about changing society, making the world a better place for the next generations, even if they didn’t get it themselves…And they were going to put their whole lives into it, and all we could do was just be there and do what they told us. (Brandon)

The faith of the African American Church community had profound connections with the learning by SIM participants, especially those in church-based placements (Brewster, 2007). They saw in the Black church examples of faith making a difference (Chappell, 2004; Marsh, 1997, 2005) – with the practical focus and application that SIM participants often found missing in liberal religion. They also saw and experienced the way faith could sustain church members through struggle, and the way in which the church influenced the whole movement through the music of the movement. Their participation in the mass meetings of the movement, which were deeply influenced by the black church, helped SIM participants to imagine alternative models for the way in which church and social justice concerns could interact (English, 2005a; Tisdell, 2003). These were radically egalitarian models in which the people all gathered together, heard the word preached, listened to the testimony of those spreading the word in the community, joined together to find healing and hope in the music and testimony of the people after their battles in the movement (McClain).

This study has shown the spirituality and religion can sometimes play a significant role supporting the transformative learning process. The participants in this study are important case studies of the way in which faith development and transformative learning can happen in parallel and integrated fashion. Among many people for whom a spiritual and religious perspective is not an integral aspect of their lives, transformative learning theory may not need to account for this dimension of learning. But for people like the SIM participants, it is critical to examine the ways
in which these two developmental/transformative processes occur and to explore the potential interconnections between them. Significant studies have indicated that when looking at transformative learning in relation to social change, important connections exist with the spiritual/religious dimension of learning, (English, 2005a; Parrish & Taylor, 2007; Tisdell, 2002, 2003; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001; Toliver & Tisdell, 2006; Turay & English, 2008).

**Transformative Process over Time.**

One of the clearest findings of this study is that the learning about race by participants in SIM was part of transformative process in each of their lives (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2009). For most participants, their learning about race extended back to their families of origin, and at a number of times in their lives they experienced learning situations in which their attitudes and perspectives on race had changed. For many, these transformative experiences that happened as young adults, during their time in college and in overseas experiences in which they adopted new broader life perspectives based on their encounter with racially and ethnically different others. For several participants, these represent transformation of meaning schemes or clusters of meaning schemes. For example, while in college campus groups, Barbara Cox and Don Steffa attended interracial meetings for the first time and began to have a more realistic perspective on African Americans as people like them; Ashley Wiltshire went on a summer mission project to Jamaica and broke societal taboos by swimming in a pool with Black people. For others, the learning entailed the transformation of frames of reference. For example, Bud Walker’s experience of having his Southern Baptist frame of reference on the world turned “upside down”, or Mac Hulslander’s new perspective which was forged during his years in Japan, and based on which, upon his return to the U.S., he began to take action by voluntarily
facilitating interracial encounters for college students and also began to integrate this into his
own sense of vocation.

**Transformative Learning as a Developmental Process.**

Although it will be suggested below as an area for future study, there were enough
interesting elements in the data to suggest that this study indicates the importance of using a
King & Kitchener, 2004; Merriam, 2004) when considering transformative learning around
issues such as race. The learning around race was part of a much longer process that both
preceded and followed their experience in SIM. Fowler’s model of faith development helps
illuminate the spiritual development dimension of the learning process. Faith Development
theory (Fowler, 1981) indicates that the fundamental developmental transition occurring among
the participants was from Synthetic-Conventional (Fowler Stage 3) to Individuative-Reflective
(Fowler Stage 4) faith as SIM participants constructed their own faith perspective, moving away
from their inherited faith perspective. This appears to support Kegan’s epistemological analysis
that TLT primarily describes the transition to the self-authoring self, which, in Kegan’s model
(Kegan, 2000; Merriam, 2004), is parallel to Fowler Stage 4. This raises the question as to
whether transformative learning is limited to this particular developmental stage transition, or
might it have different characteristics at other developmental stages?

The other important developmental issue concerns Mezirow’s limitation of TLT to adults,
and, as has just been considered, to a specific aspect of adult development. SIM participants
connected key aspects of their learning about race to learning experiences in childhood and
adolescence. Their descriptions of their vocational history also demonstrate that the
transformative processes continued into the later years of adulthood. This supports the research
of many scholars who are working to modify the transformative learning model to include a broader span of learning (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Erickson, 2002, 2007; Kegan, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Merriam, 2004). Although the study did not use transformative learning as a theoretical lens to understand the data, the integration of their learning by SIM participants into life-long commitments seems quite similar to the experience of participants in the Catholic Worker study - “narrators described an awakening and the development of a framework for the rest of life, based on the values of personal responsibility, pacifism, and voluntary poverty” (Parrish & Taylor, pp. 237-238).

This study adds to our understanding of the transformative learning process in several ways. It has been demonstrated how SIM participants learning was deeply connected to social context and characterized by learning in action. This learning had the African American community at the center of the learning experience, as the transformative process developed through the disorienting dilemma of segregation and racism, and deepened through rich interpersonal relationships founded on strong empathetic bonds and a respectful presence. For these participants, it has also been shown that spirituality and religion played a strong supportive role in the transformative process, especially when it is understood as part of a developmental process over time.

**Implications for Intergroup Contact Theory**

An important operating assumption of this study has been that something needs to happen to move people with a conceptual understanding of racism to a deeper level. It has been demonstrated that up-close exposure to racism was critical in stimulating this learning (Boyd, 2008; Manglitz & Cervero, 2010; Paxton, 2010). This section shows how the African American community was the essential context to make this learning effective. As intergroup contact
theory has demonstrated, interracial contact is effective in reducing prejudice, especially when certain conditions are met: “equal status contact”, the “pursuit of common goals”, intergroup cooperation toward a sense of “common humanity”, and the support of authorities such as “law, custom, or local atmosphere” (Allport, 1954, 1979). This contact is often mediated by four interrelated processes: learning about the out-group, changing behavior, generating affective ties, and in-group reappraisal (Pettigrew, 1998). Social psychologists have also identified the important role of group salience and empathy as major affective factors. Adult education scholars have demonstrated that interpersonal relations and the community context (Baumgartner, 2002; Carter, 2002; Eisen, 2001; K. P. King, 2004; MacLeod, Parkin, Pullon & Robertson, 2003; Merriam & Ntseane, 2008; Taylor, 1994), as well as affective factors (Baumgartner, 2002; Carter, 2002; McDonald et al., 1999; Taylor, 1994) are critical factors in transformative learning. This study provides strong empirical support to this research in social psychology and adult education.

SIM participants were the recipients of a radical hospitality that graciously welcomed them into the African American community. Through a process of differentiation and personalization (Brewer & Miller, 1984), SIM participants began to recognize the true humanity of African Americans, as distinguished from simply being members of a racial group. This process took place as SIM participants were deeply affected by the manner in which they were treated by African Americans, despite the ways in which African Americans had been treated horrendously by whites and white society in the past, and in the face of a strong fear of reprisal in response to the reception they were giving SIM participants. Here the importance of equal status contact was critical (Allport, 1979). SIM participants were not coming into the community with an established organization of any sort, but were coming in support roles – as assistant
ministers to local African American pastors or in non-leadership positions in direct action settings. This respectful approach by SIM participants led to their increased recognition of the common humanity of whites and blacks.

As they got to know members of the community, especially the people and families with whom they lived, empathetic bonds began to develop as SIM participants heard their stories and realized in deeper ways the devastating effects that racism has had on African Americans and the great courage it took for African Americans to challenge segregation. This growing empathy (Batson, Polycarpou, Harmon-Jones, Imhoff, Mitchener, Bednar, et al., 1997; Batson, Lishner, Cook & Sawyer, 2005; Vescio, Sechrist & Paolucci, 2003) had a key role in fostering a sense of mutuality and respect. Deeply impressed by the forgiving and courageous attitude shared by many of the African Americans they met, SIM participants responded with what this study has described as a respectful presence. A number of SIM participants believed that this respect on their part helped to foster a sense of mutuality, as African Americans shared with them how few white people had treated them with this kind of respect in the past.

This study provides some interesting data concerning the role that potentially negative factors played in the racial learning experience of SIM participants. According to current research on intergroup contact, the role played by group salience in interracial contact is a key factor. The idea is that in intergroup contact, there should be a balance between a process of differentiation in which out-group members (in this case, white SIM participants) move from category-based contact, in which all African Americans are seen as the same, to a differentiated view, in which people are viewed and treated as individuals. Through good interpersonal relations, out-group members replace categories (personalization) as a “useful basis for categorizing each other” (Brewer & Miller, 1984, p. 288). The danger is that without a strong
enough sense of people representing a specific group (group salience), people might not
genralize these new attitudes to other in-group members (in this case, other African Americans)
(Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Brown, Vivian & Hewstone, 1999; Kenworthy, Turner, Hewstone &
Voci, 2005). The opposite danger is that if group salience is too high, then issues related to
conflict might be generalized to the whole in-group, undermining prejudice reduction.

It is in this last area that this study of SIM participants may provide interesting data. In
particular, this relates to the way in which SIM participants navigated the crisis concerning the
rise of Black Power. It is easy to see how the rise of leaders who wanted to exclude white people
from participation in movement activities, might have undermined the whole SIM enterprise –
certainly making it a far less successful in terms of providing positive learning experiences for
participants. Since that did not happen among participants in this study, as might have been
expected, it is interesting to examine a few of the factors that appear to have been involved in
avoiding these problems. First, from the earliest days of SIM, seminarians were well prepared, at
least conceptually and intellectually, for the challenges related to white participation in
interracial settings. SIM mission documents described how SIM participants should take a
supportive rather than leadership role. Participants also seem to have entered into SIM
participation with a commitment to being flexible and supportive, as they showed considerable
adaptive skills throughout.

Credit should also be given to excellent African American leaders, like Charles Sherrod,
who navigated difficult waters, between the growing pressure from within SNCC to embrace
Black Power’s approach to white participation, and his own determination to maintain an
interracial approach.
SIM participants in this study also seemed to learn from conflict situations. When faced with issues over his identity as a *cracker*, Ashley Wiltshire was able to talk through his concerns with more radical SNCC leaders; when tensions rose within the SIM organization at Union over the role of the Southwest Georgia Project and SNCC, with its growing exclusion of whites, and those advocating the role of the Ecumenical Institute approach, Tom Boomershine learned from all parties involved and came to find his own way of integrating these issues into his vocational process (as we have discussed before). This echoes adult education research that shows how conflict and diversity of opinions can be seen as strengths in interpersonal and group processes (Kilgore, 1999), especially around issues of race and white privilege (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004; Kaufmann, 2010).

Finally, some of the success of the intergroup experience in SIM, in positively affecting racial perspectives, should be attributed to it being an immersion experience in a socioeconomically different community. In this study, two placements seemed somewhat less successful in encouraging racial perspective change – Ruth Brandon’s first placement as an assistant pastor in a middle class church setting in Raleigh may not have been a diverse enough setting and Barbara Cox’s participation in the Charlotte Urban Ministry was not really an immersion experience, as she continued to live in the white community, since Charlotte was her hometown.

Intergroup contact theory helps us to understand how the interracial experience of SIM provided participants with a vital setting in which racial attitudes could be changed as part of a transformative process. A commitment to equal status relations, the importance of empathetic bonds, and an attitude of respectful presence helped SIM participants navigate the potential crisis of white exclusion from the movement. This focus on the intergroup quality of SIM leads to a
concluding look at how the immersion experience was central to participant learning - an aspect that benefits from an integrated analysis using our three theoretical perspectives.

**Critical Role of an Immersion Experience – An Integrated Analysis**

In concluding this section on the implications for theory, it is helpful to take an integrated theoretical look at a key element of the transformative learning process for SIM participants: an immersion experience. Three types of settings serve as immersion experiences for SIM participants: participation in cross-cultural immersion programs before seminary, their approach to Union Seminary, fieldwork, and New York City, and involvement in the Student Interracial Ministry. Upon graduation from college, almost all of these students were developmentally ready to learn in a transformative manner about race, and their learning experiences in these three immersion-type settings acted as a catalyst to this learning process. A growing area of empirical research (Mwebi & Brigham, 2009; Taylor, 1994) and other studies (Clarke & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2009; Kimmel & Seifert, 2009; Marmon, 2010) demonstrate the importance of a cultural immersion experience on transformative learning.

For each of the participants, their first immersion experience served as a catalyst to transformative learning. For some, this occurred in an overseas immersion experience in a non-Western culture before coming to seminary (Hulslander, Walker). For others, their experience of diversity and engagement in activism at Union itself and New York City (Collins, Troy), in their interracial, urban church field-work (Boomershine) or in SIM (Brandon, Helms, Wiltshire, McClain, Blackman, Steffa) served as an immersion experience. For the participants who have these initial experiences in New York, they are students who were actively involved in the cultural and political life of the seminary, including active participation in student activism, and in the city (Troy, Collins) or who took field-work assignments in interracial, cross-cultural
settings (Boomershine, Collins). The other participants, who have their learning experiences in SIM, typically took more traditional field-work assignments (Blackman, Wiltshire), or had no field assignment, because they were not in the pastoral ministry track (Brandon, Steffa). Helms and McClain both had some urban ministry field work (Helms in Hell’s Kitchen and McClain’s first largely unsuccessful experience in Hoboken), but both were not deeply involved in social activism at Union until after SIM.

These experiences, which are being termed immersion experiences, bring together three factors which the three aspects of the theoretical framework help to understand. From a faith development perspective, these young adults were developmentally ready for a transition from stage three inherited faith to stage four individual faith. They had been prepared for this transition by various broadening experiences during college. The immersion setting provided the young adults with intense exposure to a broad nexus of racial issues, which, from a transformative learning perspective, served as disorienting dilemmas, which in turn stimulated the transformative process. These settings also provided them with experiences of community and rich interpersonal, interracial relations, which Intergroup Contact Theory identifies as critical to the process of prejudice reduction.

The importance of these immersion settings can be seen by considering the case of Barbara Cox, whose experience does not fit into this model as well. Barbara came to Union at age 33, having spent 10 years working in local churches as a director of Christian Education, while the other participants had an average age of 24 when they arrived at Union. She did not have any cultural immersion experiences before coming to New York. At Union, she did not have a field work assignment, because her extensive work experience before seminary exempted her from this requirement. Barbara does not remember a lot about her extracurricular activities at
Union, although Mac Hulslander does recall her involvement in anti-apartheid protests. Her SIM experience was not a true immersion experience, because she lived at home in the white community, and her work in SIM was as part of an interracial team with Black and White supervising pastors. SIM was an important learning experience for Barbara, but the data from the interview does not suggest transformative learning at the level of changing frames of reference.

It has been shown that this study of SIM participants is an important case study for understanding racial perspective change from the perspective of transformative learning theory, as informed by faith development theory and intergroup contact theory. Implications of this study in the arena of practice will now be considered.

**Implications for Practice**

As an alternative form of curriculum and pedagogy, the Student Interracial Ministry experience has implications that can helpfully inform practice. This includes areas such as the interaction between the classroom and activism, the role of activist experience in adult learning, and the ongoing need for interracial learning.

**Classroom and Activism in Complementary Relations**

This study makes it clear that social activism settings can provide rich learning experiences for adult learners (Baumgartner, 2005; Brookfield, 2008; Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Parrish & Taylor, 2007; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009; Rachal, 1998). SIM was formed based on a strongly felt need among graduate students in theology to ground their learning in real life social action. Yet that learning need not be seen as distinct from classroom learning, but can be a very powerful counterpart to it (Guy, 1999a, 1999b; Johnson-Bailey & Baumgartner, 2008; Kaufmann, 2010). Participants in SIM shared this complimentary perspective as they returned to the seminary and became advocates for curricular reform and worked with individual faculty to
develop classes that were more relevant to social concerns. In particular, the innovative field work relationship that Bill Troy had with Robert Lynn is a wonderful example of a robust dialogue between field work supervisor and student - one that actively engaged the issues and concerns of the field work setting. While theological education has grown tremendously in its support for field education over the several decades since SIM (Beisswenger, 1996; Drummond, 2008; Harder, 2007; Marmon, 2010; O’Gorman, Talvacchia, & Smith, 2001), in many institutions, it is still seen to lack the academic respectability of the traditional theological disciplines. A recent project (Harder, 2007) surveyed excellent programs worldwide that provided innovative contextual theological education. The following excerpt represents the kind of program that is supported by this research study:

In Madurai, India, the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary (TTS) requires its second-year students to move into nearby slums under conditions similar to those of the permanent residents…the assumption is that students cannot know what might be good news for the folks to whom they will minister until they know their struggles.

In their third year, TTS students spend six months living in rural Hindu villages seeking to understand the life and perspectives of the villagers. Professors come out for two or three weeks at a time to teach intensive courses. (Harder, 2007, p.128)

Three recent articles describe innovative field work/practicum programs that explore this approach using a theoretical framework of transformative learning. An empirical study of Canadian pre-service teachers who go to South Africa for a teaching practicum (Mwebi & Brigham, 2009) reports on individual perspective change as well as changes that the participants then brought to the classroom and curriculum. Two additional articles report on innovative curricula that united field experience and more formal types of learning in interesting ways, one
in the setting of theological education (Marmon, 2010) and the other, a cultural exchange program for teachers and education graduate students (Clarke & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2009).

**Role of Activist Experience in Adult Learning**

A second implication for practice involves the role of activist experience in adult learning. Like Marilyn Parrish’s dissertation on participants in the Catholic Worker (Parrish, 2004; Parrish & Taylor, 2007) this study provides a rich array of data that shows the deep interconnections between ongoing learning throughout the lifespan and activist experience – whether it is from an activist immersion experience or from a life commitment to activism. This study encourages that integration of activist experience into adult education programs, in readings, speakers, and direct activism experience. As new attention is being given to connecting learning to social action (Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009), a focus on the experience of everyday learning among everyday activists is important.

This study also made clear the deep connections between activism, learning, and spirituality and religion. While adult education recognizes the importance of activist leaders such as Paolo Freire, Myles Horton, Martin Luther King, and Cesar Chavez, their deep spiritual and religious roots are often overlooked (Tisdell, 2003), as exemplified by the way in which two recent major books in the field disregard this aspect of learning (Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). This research on SIM and other studies in adult education (English, 2005a, 2005b; Lander, 2004; Parrish, 2004; Parrish & Taylor, 2007; Tisdell, 2000, 2003) indicate the importance of this dimension to adult social activism. This can also be an important pedagogical connection with adult education students, many of whom have religious or spiritual orientations.
Although legal segregation is now a thing of the past in the United States, America remains racially divided. This includes tacitly segregated housing and schools, based on massive, continuing income disparity, with 2007 Black median family income at 62% of white family income (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010). Major cultural institutions, most notably churches and many other religious groups, have failed to make significant progress toward full integration, with as few as 6% of churches being substantially multi-ethnic in their makeup (Dougherty, 2003; Emerson, 2006; DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey & Kim, 2003; Emerson & Smith, 2000). Higher education and schools, although not immune from these problems, continue to be a major place in which significant interracial learning occurs. Discussion-centered interracial learning around the complex array of social issues concerned with race (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Kaufmann, 2010; Palmer, 1998) occurring at all levels of education, needs to be a major focus of our educational efforts as a nation. Adult education can be an important driving force in this change (Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Closson, 2010a; hooks, 1994, 2003; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009; Sheared, Johnson-Bailey, Colin, III, Peterson, & Brookfield, 2010). Of particular importance are the recent studies concerning the critical need to address the issue of white privilege (Baumgartner, 2010; Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2010; Boyd, 2008; Colin & Lund, 2010; D’Andrea, 1999; Dass-Brailsford, 2007; European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness, 2008, 2010; Kaufmann, 2010; Lund, 2010; Manglitz et al., 2005; Manglitz & Cervero, 2010; Paxton, 2010; Tisdell, 2003) and the important role that can be played by Critical Race Theory as an innovative theoretical perspective which challenges established white research approaches (Closson, 2010a [see review of the literature], 2010b).

Having considered the implications of this study for practice, in particular its significance for the interaction of classroom learning and activism; the role of the activism in the learning of
activists themselves; and the ongoing need for interracial learning, it is time to turn to the implications of this study for future research.

**Implications for Future Research**

Before looking at the implications for future research, it is useful to examine the limitations of the study. In particular, the most significant limitations involved participant selection. These limitations involved the racial makeup, the limit to students (as opposed to supervising pastors or other civil rights leaders, and faculty), and the focus on Union Seminary only. We have already discussed the problems of recruiting African American SIM student participants. It is very unfortunate that African American perspectives were not available to provide complimentary experiences in different settings that would make for rich comparisons. It also would have been very valuable to interview other African American participants in the various settings, from supervising pastors or parishioners in church settings, to SNCC and other civil rights activists, such as Charles Sherrod. Finally, getting the perspective of participants from other theological schools would also have been valuable.

All of this leads to a first and obvious area for future research – the continuation of this project through additional interviews and perspectives. This could also involve more extensive use of archival materials – both those in the archives of the seminary, and rich materials that have been kept by participants. I hope to design a project to continue this research, potentially using Applied History graduate students from Shippensburg University to assist in a new stage of the project.

This study has also generated many other ideas concerning future research. Three are described here: the role of faith development, white racial identity development, and the importance of social networks. It seems clear from this study, that for the participants in the
Student Interracial Ministry who participated in this study, their transformative learning process was deeply connected to the development of their faith perspective and the sense of vocation. While this study was informed by faith development theory, it did not use any formal measure of the participants’ faith development, be it the full-fledged faith development interview, as detailed in the *Manual of Faith Development Research* (Fowler, Streib, & Keller, 2004) or another modified scale or interview process, such as the *Religious Styles Perspective* (Streib, 2001) using the *Religious Schema Scale* (H. Streib, personal communication, March 13, 2008). The process of using faith development research methodology was hindered by the fact that this was a historically-oriented study in which it would have been difficult to try to measure the faith development of participants decades after the events in question have taken place. More fruitful might be a new study in a current situation in which local congregations are struggling to become more multi-racial in their makeup, such as in types of congregations that are described in recent studies among evangelical Christian congregations (Emerson, 2006; DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey & Kim, 2003). In-depth qualitative interviews with parishioners concerning their own racial learning and participation in the local congregation, combined with the use of faith development interviews/scales would enable the researcher to explore the connection between the transformative learning process and faith development with much more rigor.

A significant theme of this study has been the development of new perspectives on racial identity among SIM participants. Yet, as has been described above, during the time of their SIM experiences, participants were largely unaware of a sense of white privilege and identity. Several of the participants indicated that this was a very important issue to them later (McClain, Hulslander, Troy), but that awareness of this was not yet present in the discourse within the civil rights movement. It really took the emergence of Black Power to more clearly articulate the view
that white people should focus their attention on the racism within white society. Not coincidentally, I think, the two SIM participants who, during their experiences in Mississippi in the summer of 1966, literally witnessed the emergence of Black Power in the civil rights movement and onto the national stage, were also the participants who described their own journey to understand white privilege and racism most clearly.

Since issues of white identity and white privilege are now important themes within adult education (Baumgartner, 2010; Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2010; Boyd, 2008; Colin & Lund, 2010; D’Andrea, 1999; Dass-Brailsford, 2007; European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness, 2008, 2010; Kaufmann, 2010; Lund, 2010; Manglitz et al., 2005; Manglitz & Cervero; Paxton, 2010; Tisdell, 2003), it is important to design studies that would directly explore the connections between transformative learning about white identity and white privilege in relation to social activism, especially when carried out in interracial settings, programs, and teams. Such a study might explore these issues in both classroom based learning and in activist settings.

Having stepped beyond the literature of adult education in order to explore some of the social psychological mechanisms involved in racial attitude change, through the study of the literature of intergroup contact theory, it would have been a natural step to expand the process further to include the role of social institutions and social networks. As this study was already sufficiently complicated, with its three theoretical perspectives and historical approach, it was necessary to leave detailed consideration of this to further research.

Quantitative research studies on the development of social movements have firmly established the basic structural variables or empirical relationships that are involved in the development of social movements (McAdam, 2003). McAdam sounds the call for the need for
extensive qualitative, often ethnographic, studies to explore the specific mechanisms by which these established structures function (see the review of the literature in McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2008). He gives an example:

If movements tend to develop within established social settings, what are the specific mechanisms that typically serve to transform a church, a college dorm, a neighbourhood, etc., into a site of emergent collective action? (McAdam, 2003, p. 284)

The influence of this approach can be seen in a number of civil rights movement research studies (Crosby, 2005; Fernandez & McAdam, 1988; Hogan, 2007; McAdam, 1988; Morris, 1984; Ortiz, 2005). This study began to apply this approach in a small way through its use of intergroup contact theory. Extensive quantitative research has established the importance of many key variables, for example, affective factors, in the way in which intergroup contact functions to reduce prejudice. This study sought to explore the way in which some of those affective factors, such as empathy, functioned to affect the racial perspectives of SIM participants as they acted in interracial settings.

McAdam (2003) lists three examples of established structures that can be effectively explored to discover the cultural/relational mechanisms: prior social ties form a basis for recruitment into movements; movements emerge in established social settings; and movements spread over existing lines of interaction. Each of these areas can be richly explored in relation to the Student Interracial Ministry. The relevance of this research for adult education can be shown by asking the following questions: Why, among students at the same progressive institution and from similar backgrounds, do some students choose to participate in activism and others do not? What kind of resources might be marshaled to help encourage greater participation? What can be
learned from history of SIM and the experience of SIM participants that can help us understand this?

**Final Reflections on the Doctoral Process**

When I began the doctoral program five years ago, I really had no idea what I was getting myself into. But I did know one thing – whatever I chose for my dissertation research, I knew that it had to be something I was passionate about. Now at the end of the program, I am very grateful that I kept to that guiding principle and followed my passionate concern for the problem of race, the importance of faith, and the power of ideas and experience to transform human lives.

I also feel very appreciative, even blessed, to have had the opportunity to explore the lives of twelve people who have tried to make a difference in our world. I thank them for trusting me and telling me their stories. Having been able to tell a part of their stories and to investigate and describe a little known civil rights group, gives me a great sense of satisfaction. With all of the attention given to fundamentalist religion and politics, it was a pleasure to spend this time giving voice to a different group of faithful people who worked desperately hard to live out their convictions in a time of great social strife.

Finally, and maybe strangely enough, I have a strong desire to continue the research. Grateful for the generous support and encouragement of family, friends, colleagues, fellow students, and faculty, I feel ready to continue the journey. My exploration of the civil rights movement during the 1960s and the transformative learning process of these women and men has opened up a whole world of questions and ideas that it would take many lives of research to explore. I hope to continue in the struggle.
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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following interview guide will be used with participants in the Student Interracial Ministry. Whenever possible, interview participants will be sent a copy of any reports that they wrote for the Student Interracial Ministry, to serve as memory prompts for the interview.

1. Please begin by describing some of your life history, for example, where you were raised and your experience of social class, up until the time you came to study at Union Theological Seminary. Please pay special attention to the religious and spiritual dimensions of your upbringing.

2. Please describe the decision-making process that led you to come to Union to study.

3. Please tell me about your time at Union. Were there particular classes and professors that helped to shape your ideas about social issues? If so, please describe some of these influences.

4. How would you describe your ideas concerning race relations at the time you came to Union? Please describe any of the influences on your racial attitude.

5. Please describe some of the activities that you were most involved in at Union?

6. How did you learn about the Student Interracial Ministry and what factors encouraged you to get involved with it? Was SIM discussed at Union – by faculty, other students, reports from the field, guest speakers, etc? If so, please describe.

7. Please describe any of the preparation that you had for SIM, either run by SIM, other people, or things you did yourself to get ready for your participation.
8. How would you describe your racial attitude toward African Americans (or whites) at the beginning of your SIM experience?

9. Please describe your activities with SIM, highlighting, some of your most memorable experiences in SIM.

10. Please describe any important elements of conflict that you experienced? Did you experience any sense of disconnect between your current perspectives on faith and race and your experience in SIM?

11. Please describe any contacts that you had with the broader civil rights movement – any other organizations (like SNCC, CORE, or SCLC).

12. Please describe how you felt as a white (or African American) SIM member working in a virtually all African American (or white) community.

13. Please describe any experiences you had with segregation and racial prejudice during your SIM experience.

14. Please describe any changes in your racial attitudes, ideas, feelings, or perspective that occurred during your SIM experience.

15. Please describe any other ways in which SIM affected or changed you, especially important things that you learned – ways in which SIM may have challenged ideas, feelings, or attitudes that you learned while growing up or were taught at college or at Union.

16. Did your SIM experience affect your ideas about what theological education should be like? If so, please describe.

17. Did your experience in SIM help to shape any vocational decisions that you made? If so, please describe this process.
18. Did your experience in SIM help to shape any of your ideas about God and theology? If so, please describe.

19. Please describe what it was like to return to Union (or to go on to some other work or school) after your time in SIM, including any ongoing contacts or involvement you continued to have with SIM and other SIM participants.

20. Please describe how your fellow students and faculty at Union may have responded to any of your learning from your SIM experience.

21. Please describe any ways in which things you learned in SIM may have continued to influence your life?

22. Please describe your current perspective on race. Please describe any ways in which your SIM experience has helped to influence your current attitude.

23. Please tell me about anything else you think is important or would like to share about any other matters.
APPENDIX B

Survey of Participants in the Student Interracial Ministry (SIM)

1. Today’s Date: ________________

2. Participant’s Name:
   __________________________________________________________________________

3. Site(s) at which you participated in SIM:
   __________________________________________________________________________

4. Supervising pastor or other person to whom you reported:
   __________________________________________________________________________

5. Dates of your participation in SIM (i.e. Summer, 1964):
   __________________________________________________________________________

6. Demographic Information:
   a. □ Male □ Female
   b. □ White □ African American □
      Other ______________________________________________________________________
   c. Denominational affiliation while in SIM:
      __________________________________________________________________________
   d. City/State of Birth, Home Town:
      __________________________________________________________________________

7. Current contact information:
   Address:
      __________________________________________________________________________
      __________________________________________________________________________
      __________________________________________________________________________
   Email: _________________________________________________________________________
8. Briefly describe/list your activities while participating in SIM:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

9. Briefly describe/list your occupations/positions since leaving Union:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

10. Would you be willing to be interviewed for this research project?  □ Yes  □ No

11. Do you have any documents from your time in SIM or at Union that you would be willing to share with this project? Please check any that apply:

   SIM: □ photos  □ diaries/journals  □ correspondence  □ reports  □ memorabilia
   □ other (please list)

   Union: □ photos  □ class notes  □ diaries/journals  □ any notes or documentation from committee meetings, lectures □ other (please list)

12. Would you like to be contacted if any email lists or Facebook groups are created for SIM participants?
    □ Yes  □ No

13. Would you like to be contacted about potential reunions or other events involving SIM participants?
    □ Yes  □ No
VITA

KIRK MOLL

Education


Employment

Shippensburg University. Ezra Lehman Memorial Library. 2004 to present. Assistant Professor. Instruction Librarian.

Selected Publications, Papers, Presentations