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DISTILLING THE ESSENCE OF AN HBCU LEADER: A PORTRAIT OF DR. HENRY PONDER

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
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Abstract

This study explores Historically Black College and University (HBCU) leadership by examining the perceptions of Dr. Henry Ponder, who served as president of Benedict College, Fisk University, Talladega College, and Langston University. The research was conducted using qualitative portraiture methodology and elite interviews to create a narrative representation of his experiences from childhood to the presidency. Three research questions guide the study. What is Dr. Henry Ponder's perception of his strengths as an HBCU President? What strategies did Dr. Henry Ponder employ during times of institutional challenge and uncertainty? And, what did Dr. Henry Ponder learn about HBCU leadership during his career? The investigation of his leadership unlocks access to his perspectives about his strengths and the tools he used in response to times of (institutional) challenge and stress in providing over 50-years of HBCU leadership.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The job of college or university president is a particular and hefty blend of responsibilities to frequently overlapping, yet sometimes contentious, constituencies – each of which plays a role in institutional success or lack thereof. In short, the college presidency is complex (ACE, 2012). And, while there are arguably increasing similarities in the challenges of the role as all institutions deal with truly 21st century issues, e.g., the looming enrollment management cliff and COVID-19, there remain differentiators. In this dissertation, I look at such a differentiated role: presidents of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), who have, throughout their institutions' histories, faced challenges beyond those of their counterparts at historically white colleges and universities (HWCU) based on unique missions as well as unique historical and cultural contexts (Brown, 2010; Esters & Strayhorn, 2013; Gasman, 2011; Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, & Bowman, 2010; Holmes, 2004). As a research case, this study looks at the career of Henry Ponder, Ph.D. – former president of four HBCUs and former CEO of the National Association of Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO) – using portraiture and semi-structured interviews. Spanning nearly 60 years through Jim Crow, Civil Rights, Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and the dawning of the digital age, Dr. Ponder's career is both historically compelling and relevant. Greater understanding of this case portends greater pathways for ongoing analysis of the challenges, strategies, successes, failures, and lived experiences of higher education leadership – particularly HBCU leadership.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

HBCUs are accredited institutions established prior to 1964 with the mission of educating black people liberated from enslavement and their descendants in the United States of America (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). From the post-Civil War to the post-Civil Rights period, HBCUs were the primary providers of education for black Americans because most HWCUs refused to admit black students. Black Americans, who faced systemic discriminatory barriers, began to believe that education was a pathway to fulfillment of the "American dream" – a belief that placed HBCUs at the center of progress/uplift for black people in this country by educating and thus empowering individuals and the collective to push beyond the bounds of marginalization (Kozol, 2005; Hawkins, 2004).

Black American marginalization finds its roots in slavery. From 1619 to 1865, more than 600,000 people were brought to this country as chattel (Huston, 2003). By 1860, their numbers had swelled to 4.4 million enslaved across the United States. The population of enslaved women alone exceeded two million (Bayor, 2003; Huston, 2003). When legal slavery ended, emancipated blacks outnumbered whites in many southern states. Thus, fearful whites enforced legal separations for the races, creating Black Codes to limit educational and occupational opportunities and requiring permissions for travel beyond prescribed areas (Bayor, 2003; Brown & Davis, 2001). But the end of slavery and its accompanying proscription of black literacy created significant interest in education among blacks. Because most traditionally-white-serving institutions, in the north and the south, would not admit black students (or limited their numbers), black institutions were born.

Among the first were private schools founded by northern missionaries. Yet southern whites' disagreements with motives they attributed to missionary education, including full racial equality, as well as missionaries' general refusal to teach only vocational rather than academic curricula led whites to create their own public, and thus controllable, schools for blacks (Swint, 1941; Patterson, 1972; Du Bois, 1903; Gallagher, 1971; Taylor, 1972; Wolters, 1975). By 1890, the second Morrill Act provided funds that established 19 black agricultural, mechanical, or technical colleges in states that used 1862 Morrill Act funds to create 117 white-only colleges. The mission of the historically black 1890 colleges was and continues to be provision of education to underserved, underrepresented persons traditionally lacking equal or any access to higher education (Esters & Strayhorn, 2013; Kennedy, 2012). Along with the private institutions, these colleges educated generations of black Americans, empowering them to overcome legally mandated discriminatory controls designed to marginalize them.

I suggest that this pivotal role in the creation of educated black Americans and thus of the black professional and middle classes despite state-sponsored racism and its non-codified – but no less real – antecedents, such as fiscal, governance, and public relations dilemmas continuing to dog HBCUs must be the background for studying these institutions and their leaders (Boyce, 2014; Roebuck, 1993; Whiting, 1991). Without this vital information, outdated narratives – based primarily based on arguably simplistic comparisons to HWCUs – will continue to define HBCUs, generating arguably wrongheaded, negative perceptions (Gasman, 2008; Gasman et al., 2007). This reality of what I believe is an under-tapped well of research on HBCUs and HBCU leadership has led me to this dissertation research in an effort to better understand the challenges,

strategies, and resilience that is both the HBCU and HBCU leaders.

Statement of the Problem

Research is a search for knowledge. Myriad academic professionals take pride in the acquisition of knowledge across a broad range of education topics. Thompson (1973) argues that black institutions dedicated to the racial uplift are black colleges and black churches. HBCUs continue to fill this role, yet there continues to be a gap in the literature about HBCU presidents (Allen, 1992; Brown & Davis, 2001; Gasman, 2007; Gasman & Bowman, 2011; Harvey, 1999; Holmes, 2004; Hoskins, 1978; Jackson, 2001; Kozol, 2005; Minor, 2008; Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008; Ricard & Brown, 2008; Rolle, Davies & Banning, 2000; Thompson 1973). My study seeks to capture in-depth data on how one long-term former president perceives HBCU executive-level leadership. This research study provides knowledge designed to increase the understanding of HBCU presidential leadership by creating a multi-dimensional portrait of Dr. Ponder's long and arguably storied career in higher education.

Significance of the Study

There is limited research on HBCU leadership, especially at the executive level (Ricard & Brown, 2008; Tillman Jr., 2014). This omission is compelling because historical context has almost always forced HBCU presidents into dramatically different leadership roles from their HWCU counterparts (Brown, 2010; Esters & Strayhorn, 2013; Gasman, 2011; Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, & Bowman, 2010; Robbins, 1996). This study will document the nearly 60-year career of one HBCU leader through economic, legal, and political changes. The resulting narrative will contribute knowledge regarding presidential leadership at HBCUs.

Purpose of Study

The broadest intent of this research is to add to the body of knowledge about leaders and leadership. At a more specific level, it seeks to produce knowledge about the capacity, effectiveness, and resilience of higher education leadership in the United States by looking at among its most consistently embattled institutions and leaders. At its narrowest, the study seeks an understanding of higher education's capacity to adapt and develop by looking at the 59-year career experiences of one successful HBCU leader through many of the most contentious decades in U.S history – from Jim Crow into the 21st century.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore leadership. I will examine perceptions of strength, challenge, and decision-making through elite interviews with Dr. Ponder, President Emeritus of Benedict College, Fisk University, Talladega College, and Langston University and former CEO of NAFEO. The theoretical framework for this study comes from Bolman and Deal's organizational leadership model and utilizes portraiture, a qualitative methodology created by sociologist Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot.

Research Questions

Dissertations are designed to add to the body of academic knowledge. This study pursues knowledge advancement about the contemporary HBCU presidency and the intricately balanced requirements of leading higher education organizations whose mission is provision of education for black people. Three research questions guide the study.

1. What is Dr. Henry Ponder's perception of his strengths as an HBCU president?
2. What did Dr. Henry Ponder learn about HBCU leadership during his career?

3. What strategies did Dr. Henry Ponder employ during times of institutional challenge and uncertainty?

Theoretical Framework

The use of Bolman & Deal's (1991) four frames – structural, human resource, political, and symbolic – is helpful when gathering information, making judgements, or determining how to address goal achievement. Outlined below is a brief description of each leadership frame taken from the authors' 1992 article in *Education Administration Quarterly* (Bolman & Deal, 1992).

> The structural frame emphasizes rationality, efficiency, structure, and policies. Structural leaders value analysis and data, keep their eye on the bottom line, set clear directions, hold people accountable for results, and try to solve organizational problems with new policies and rules – or through restructuring (pp. 314-315).
>
> The human resource frame focuses on the interaction between individual and organizational needs. Human resource leaders value relationships and feelings and seek to lead through facilitation and empowerment (p. 315).
>
> The political frame will emphasize conflict among different groups and interests for scarce resources. Political leaders are advocates and negotiators who spend much of their time networking, creating coalitions, building a power base, and negotiating compromises (p. 315).
>
> The symbolic frame sees a chaotic world in which meaning and predictability are socially constructed and facts are interpretative rather than objective. Symbolic

> leaders pay diligent attention to myth, ritual, ceremony, stories, and other symbolic forms (p. 315).

Effective leaders according to Bolman and Deal (1991) are those capable of response via more than one frame. They are able to act in appropriately-framed, contextually-based ways in response to each challenge and situation that arises. The ability to design and construct effective organizational components (structural), believing in and empowering others to act (human resource), relating to and working with existing power structures (political), and the creation and communication of a vision and pathway for followers and the institution (symbolic) are each necessary for the success of both the individual and the organization. Thus, most leadership activities, decisions, challenges, and solutions – regardless of the constituent group involved – can be addressed from at least one of the Bolman and Deal frames.

Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research seeks an understanding of human experience by exploring the unique contexts and relationships of the phenomenon being studied, and according to Denzin & Lincoln (2000), has a long, distinguished, and often anguished history (Patton, 1985). As qualitative researchers, we investigate how people make meaning of their lives and experiences. As portraitists, we become the main instrument of data collection, seeking through analysis of collected data to understand social phenomena (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2007) identifies narrative, grounded theory, case study, ethnography, and phenomenology as the five qualitative traditions. Specifically, this study uses portraiture for a narrative biographical study of a single individual (Creswell, 2007; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Qualitative research design empowers the researcher to capture the breadth, depth, richness, and meaning-making of an experience. Portraiture is a people's scholarship – seeking to inspire and transform a broader public outside the academy (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Thus, scholarly narrative tells the research story using non-academic language to entice interest and engagement.

Portraiture

A qualitative research portrait exists within narrative inquiry. Within this category, portraiture was specifically designed for application in education. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983, 2004) first created – and then with Davis (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) expanded – this purposeful leave-taking from and resistance to the traditions of empirical methodologies to make space for research centered in success (Chapman, 2005). Portraiture is her response to research using recorded failure as a starting point for creating success.

Storytelling is scholarship. It allows us look into the experiences of others in search of understanding (Andersen, 1993; Denzin, 1994; Facio, 1993; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Stanfield, 1993). Portraiture is a form of people's scholarship allowing the voices of people of color to be heard within an historical context (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The narrative thus produced reflects the researcher's willingness to study subjects within their context instead of an appropriately sterile and experimental one. Research makes meaning from experience. One of the most important things that researchers do is explain their process and findings (tell stories) in an organized (narrative) form. The goal is to create a document (narrative) explaining to

others what is discovered (Denzin, 1994). There is always a starting point, analysis, and result (a beginning, middle, and end).

The essence of portraiture, then, is to create a complex, provocative, appealing complete narrative while seeking to expose the interaction of history, personality, organizational structure, values, and human behavior created by context. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffmann Davis use Featherstone's statement to explain portraiture as follows.

> The telling of stories can be a profound form of scholarship moving serious study close to the frontiers of an art in the capacity to express complex truth and moral context in intelligible ways… *The Good High School* utilizes portraiture to argue against today's top-down reformers. It reminds us that the creation of a learning community is an essential feature of successful schools. Community, in this context, suggests the power of the local actors on the scene to create conversations and find shared meanings, the significance of the voices of teachers, and the crucial importance of local context, as well as the commitment of a scholar to truth and solidarity. The methodologies are inseparable from the vision. Historians have used narrative as a way in which to make sense of lives and institutions over time, but over the years they have grown abashed about its lack of scientific rigor. Now, as we look for ways to explore context and describe the thick textures of lives over time in institutions with a history, we want to reckon with the author's own stance and commitment to the people being written about. Storytelling takes on a fresh importance (Featherstone, 1989, p. 337 in Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 11).

Van Maanen (1988) sees portraiture nestled among the genre of methods he calls impressionist tales: autoethnographies in which the researcher displays their own experiences within their field. The resulting work speaks not of what actually happens, but about what rarely happens. In this process, researchers are encouraged to seek the voice of actors existing on the borders of mainstream ideology (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Marble (1997) adds that portraiture allows an event or situation to be understood in multiple contexts and conditions, which creates the possibility of many perspectives requiring recognition, consideration, and adding tint to the final portrait. This represents one of the portraitist's mandates – to listen for, not simply to, the unfolding story (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Decisions about what to exclude or include in the research narrative are made by any qualitative researcher. Portraiture begins by including a researcher's prior experiences, biases, assumptions, interactions, and relationships. This information places them directly within the narrative, not separated from or objectively observing. A portraitist enters, engages, and actively questions the lived experience of their subjects, acting on hunches and pursuing fleeting ideas with the people they study (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997; LeCompte, 1999). The objective is to highlight successes regardless of the imperfections of the social system within the actor's authentic central story – a processes named finding "goodness" within (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The researcher hangs the story on a framework of strengths rather than deficits.

While probing peoples' relationships and perceptions in organizational cultures is at the heart of portraiture, there is also rigorous data collection and data triangulation

(Lightfoot, 1986; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Mueller & Kendall, 1989). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis proclaim:

> In summary, portraiture is a method framed by the traditions and values of the phenomenological paradigm, sharing many of the techniques, standards, and goals of ethnography. But it pushes against the constraints of those traditions and practices in its explicit effort to combine empirical and aesthetic description, in this focus on the convergence of narrative and analysis, in its goal of speaking to broader audiences beyond the academy (thus linking inquiry to public discourse and social transformation), in its standard of authenticity rather than reliability and validity (the traditional standards of quantitative and qualitative inquiry), and in its explicit recognition of the use of the self as the primary research instrument for documenting and interpreting the perceptions and experiences of the people and the cultures being studied. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997, pp. 13 – 14).

One of the strong draws to portraiture is for me the focus on delivering research findings in a reader-friendly manner. This focus proscribes the muddling of information with jargon, academically complicated formats, and GRE level words which deter, often to the point of exclusion, people outside the ivy-covered walls of academia. The need to present knowledge with an eye to accessibility makes inclusivity a part of the intricate dance that is portraiture.

Summary

This chapter provides background, problem statement, study description, purpose, and significance for my research. Chapter 2 provides a more-detailed literature review,

and Chapter 3 a more-detailed description of the research methodology. The importance of this work is evinced in the wealth of history and experience that the Dr. Ponder interviews bring to light. Further, I assert that unlocking this value is consequential not only for those with an interest in HBCUs but to any interested in any portion of the academy.

CHAPTER TWO

Historic Framing – Literature Review

Prospero, you are the master of illusion. Lying is your trademark. And you have lied so much to me. (Lied about the world, lied about me) that you have ended by imposing on me an image of myself.

Underdeveloped, you brand me, inferior, that's the way you have forced me to see myself. I detest that image! What's more, it's a lie! But now I know you, your old cancer, and I know myself as well.

Caliban in Amie Cesaire's A Tempest (2002)

The literature review for this dissertation engages history, context, and research about HBCUs, HBCU presidents, and leadership theory, specifically Bolman and Deal's four frames of organizational leadership. There is research tangential to these topics, like the histories of colleges and the college president that do not include black colleges, and for the most part black people. These overrepresented histories, while interesting and perhaps important, certainly provided impetus for my decision to enlarge the body of literature found in the gap where black institutions lie.

Access to education was conceived as a historic prerogative for citizens of the United States. Thomas Jefferson wrote: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights…" The idea of citizens having access to education in service to democracy is a binding and enduring principle of the United States of America (Wagoner, 2004). However, access to education in practice is quite a different and divisive matter. Denial of education is an economic tool of oppression consistently used against groups of

residents, citizens, and immigrants of the nation (Anderson 1988; Carney, 2009; Fraser, 2014; Gonzalez, 1990; Pak, 2002; and Solomon, 1985). Social and economic mobility, though founding values for this American republic, were closely held by Anglo, Protestant, land-owning men, who would, over centuries, rationalize varying exclusivity through racist, classist, misogynist, xenophobic and like ideologies.

Beyond economics, these ideologies were used to deny access to education – forms of oppression and marginalization that created the impetus for the creation of separate schools specifically established to meet the educational needs of black students, the genesis of HBCUs. Yet, historical biases persisted in the selection of HBCU leadership, as white males were selected for these posts. Many of these men supported the conventional belief that few black students could attain stellar scholarship, and that most were better off with enough education to take direction and perform minimal reading, writing, and mathematics (Anderson, 1988).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

HBCUs were created to educate black men, women, and children whose enslavement legally ended. These institutions were founded prior to 1964 with the stated mission of educating black students (Brown & Freeman, 2002: Roebuck & Komanduri, 1993). For clarification, institutions with a student population that is more than 50 percent black are called PBCUs (Predominantly Black Colleges and Universities) regardless of their founding (Brown & Davis, 2001). There are 102 HBCUs. They are public and private, 2-year and 4-year, sectarian and secular, and single-gender and co-educational.

HBCUs were often founded as elementary, college preparatory, and normal

schools which evolved into colleges and universities (Anderson, 1988; Jackson and Nunn, 2003). This evolution provides insight into a communal belief in educational attainment as necessary to advancement, and a commitment to the practical necessities required to gain, support, and achieve this success. Initial funding and support came from both black and white philanthropy – with often differing views of purpose, execution, and objective (Anderson, 1988). At founding most HBCUs had a white president. This leadership situation would continue into the 1920s for most, though the argument that there were few black academic intellectuals, ministers, and successful business owners was negated by the institutions themselves. Whether subscribing to Hampton (Institute) University's work-based philosophy, Fisk University's liberal arts focus, or the Morrill Act land-grant, teaching and learning was a sustaining objective of these institutions.

The late 1880s presented changing options for HBCUs. During this period many HBCUs changed their mission statements to reflect support of either the work-based or the liberal arts-based education debate highlighted by Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Jones, 1971; Kannerstein, 1978; Ricard & Brown, 2008; Willie, 1994). Washington espoused education to fill the nation's labor niche. This mechanical, agricultural, and technical education – as taught by Tuskegee Institute (now University) and Hampton Institute (now University), where Washington himself had been a star student – found agreement with many whites who believed blacks incapable of or potentially dangerous if given any other sort of learning (The tradition of white presidents at black colleges, 1997).

Further, Washington's vocational emphasis was trumpeted by many, including northern philanthropists, as the only way to counter southern white negativity. Southern

whites liked vocationalism because it would maintain political, social, and economic inferiority for blacks. Northern philanthropists liked it because they believed that black education would not survive without white southern compliance. Within this constraint, vocational education appeared the best solution.[1] That said, racism arguably had a lot to do with these events. The rise of Social Darwinism corresponds directly (and contributed to) the end of Reconstruction. It was a time when the United States (not merely the South) increasingly participated in a general Western trend towards racialist thought, generating widespread belief among whites that people of color were innately inferior.[2]

On the other side of this thinking, DuBois supported a liberal arts education to prepare black students for racial and national leadership, a position supported by black intellectuals and institutions like Fisk University. However, the Morrill Act of 1890 increased by 19 the number of black colleges and made vocational education the dominant model for black higher education.

The second Morrill Act was a response to the founding of 107 white-only agricultural, mechanical, and technical colleges from President Lincoln's Morrill Act of 1862 funds. The second act required the creation of at least one college for black students in any state with a race-based entry restriction. The mission of these historically black 1890 colleges was and continues to be provision of education to underserved, underrepresented persons traditionally lacking access to higher education (Esters &

[1] Wolters, pp. 7-9. In fact, a 1916 joint report of the U.S. Bureau of Education and the Phelps-Stokes Fund stated that for African Americans collegiate education should be curtailed and vocational training should be encouraged. Source: *Ibid*., p. 14.

[2] See: Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1944.

Strayhorn, 2013; Kennedy, 2012). In addition, several of the HBCUs established by southern states hired black presidents to maintain segregated education systems (Cross, 1999; The tradition of white presidents at black colleges, 1997).

Some would argue that this debate resulted in a somewhat lasting "duality of mission" for HBCUs. Although vocationalism lost its sway because of Du Bois' persistence and Washington's death in 1917, even as HBCUs adopted academic curricula, they enhanced standard teachings through inclusion of scholarship, writings, art, and other offerings from people of color. As stated by former Morehouse College president Benjamin Elijah Mayes, later supported by former Dillard University president Samuel DuBois Cook and cited here from Willie, Reddick, and Brown (2006).

> Benjamin E. Mays (1978) said (T)he Black colleges have a double role. They must be as much concerned with Shakespeare, Tennyson and Marlowe as the white colleges. But the Negro institutions must give equal emphasis to the writings of Paul Dunbar, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes; as much emphasis, as white colleges to white sociologists, but equal attention to Black sociologists like E. Franklin Frazier and Charles S. Johnson. The Black colleges must include works of great white historians like Schleinger and Toynbee, but they must also include the works of John Hope Franklin, Carter G. Woodson, and Charles Wesley. It is not enough for Black colleges to teach their students the economics of capitalism. The graduate of a Black college must also understand the problems of the small Black capitalist and be able to help him and must know something about cooperatives (p. 27).

To this end, HBCUs created and advanced pedagogy appallingly ignored by and

unrequired of other colleges and universities through the 20th century and likely into the 21st. HBCU leadership has demonstrated adaptability and commitment to knowledge, execution, and advancement relevant and supportive for constituent communities – a part of mission which has had to co-exist with a near-constant defense their right to exist (Brown & Davis, 2001).

> No one has ever said that Catholic colleges should be abolished because they are Catholic. Nobody says that Brandeis and Albert Einstein must die because they are Jewish. Nobody says that Lutheran and Episcopalian schools should go because they are Lutheran or Episcopalian. Why should Howard University be abolished because it is known as a black university? Why pick out Negro colleges and say the must die" (Mays, 1978 in Willie, Reddick, and Brown, 2006 p. 27).

Allen (1992) identifies six common goals of HBCUs to push black progress: (a) preserving and aiding the evolution of black culture and traditions; (b) preparing and providing leadership for black communities; (c) enabling economic growth in the black community; (d) providing black role models to inspire achievement in the black community; (e) providing black college graduates prepared to mediate black community issues with white communities; and (f) developing black change agents equipped to disseminate knowledge that supports and uplifts the black community. Preparing graduates to be role models, leaders, and architects of black economic and social empowerment are common threads among HBCUs. Sims and Bock (2014) report these black institutional characteristics as the basis for more consistent educational experiences and outcomes than occur among other institution types. Allen (Allen, et al., 2007) creates four common HBCU themes: (1) HBCUs have a developmental role in the black

community; (2) HBCUs have a transformative role in American society; (3) HBCUs operate at the intersection of class and race; and (4) HBCUs have an evolving role post-Civil Rights. Knowing these institutional frames informs a researcher's ability to understand HBCU president's roles as they move their colleges into the 21st century filled with new and evolving challenges.

Brown & Davis (2001) offer a three-fold critique of HBCUs as participants in the American social contract, the making of black social capital, and the promotion of social equity. Social contract theory attempts to eliminate conflict and social inequity by satisfying the good of society. The American social contract with free black communities was crafted by three constitutional amendments: XIII (prohibiting slavery in the United States), XIV (providing equal protection under law, regardless of race), and XV (mandating the right to vote, regardless of race). These amendments were enacted by federal legislation like: The Emancipation Proclamation, the Freedmen's Bureau, and the 1890 Morrill Act, resulting in the creation of post-Civil War black colleges.

Prior to the founding of black colleges, education was legally denied to black people for three reasons (Brown & Davis, 2001). First, the racist belief that black people were intellectually inferior to whites. Next, formal education would reduce the usefulness of black workers in the American caste-labor system, and finally, educated Black people would be violently rebellious, posing a threat to the American social order (Aptheker, 1969; Brown & Davis, 2001). The social contract was solidified by national investment in creating educational parity, by financial support for development of schools, and by state level initiation of (often segregated) public schooling for Black citizens.

A notable and historically-relevant omission from this work is the intersection of

gender in, as Allen stated, the HBCUs' critical developmental role for black communities and transformative role for American society. Black women – despite the realities of their contributions – have frequently been characterized as supporting players in the history of black Americans' struggles for civil rights, equal protections, and equality of opportunities (Dyson, 2001; Associated Press, 2005; Cole, 2009). In fact, women were pivotal to strategy and execution in the movement from Reconstruction to its typically-accepted "conclusion" in the late 1960s (Cole, 2009). The very real leadership roles that women played in both public and private, e.g., family, settings are well-known but frequently sublimated because of codified and customary gender roles prevalent, even among those fighting for equality, in these eras before and after the successful passage of the 19th Amendment and the near-success of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).

Women enrolled in HBCUs – women who founded HBCUs, e.g., Mary McCloud Bethune – were pivotal to and leaders in black progress. Even kept behind the scenes, it is understood that "men led but African American women organized" (Crawford, Rouse, and Wood, 1993). Women at HBCUs not only participated but also initiated the seminal 1950s lunch-counter protests that launched a new era of powerful challenge to systemic racism in the U.S. Then and before they sat-in, marched, protested, organized, fought, suffered public humiliations, and risked violent backlash as well as legal, employment, and social repercussions alongside their male counterparts but are not accurately situated in historic accountings.

Black social mobility increased because HBCUs were focused on altering the existing United States social order. Sociocultural resources developed at Black colleges because they tied together the American social contract and educational attainment of

black citizens (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Brown, 1999; Fleming, 1984; Freeman, 1998; Garibaldi, 1984; Merisotis & O'Brien, 1998; Thomas, 1981; U.S. Department of Education, 1996; Willie, Reed, & Garibaldi, 1991). These colleges are also a key location in the fight against our nation's history of social hostility. Constituent groups from students to intellectuals, artists, and professionals produced and ultimately transmitted social capital, thus increasing educational development and attainment in the broader black and national community (Brown & Davis, 2001).

All-too-frequently throughout U.S. history HBCUs alone have embraced the role of preparing black students for entry and success in the broader indifferent society, replacing Bourdieu's (1973) construction of precollegiate structures. Black colleges have disproportionately provided compensatory tertiary study for students from poor educational backgrounds along with a rich, relevant, and supportive cultural environment structured to build student confidence and engagement (Davis, 1998). Thus, HBCUs have been disproportionately responsible for diversifying the national higher education landscape and working towards equalizing their graduates' future wages (Constantine, 1994). They also promote graduate study, producing black professionals at a higher rate than their HWCU counterparts, demonstrating their importance to equality of opportunity and outcome for black communities (Brown & Davis, 2001; Wenglinsky, 1996).

Willie, Reddick, and Brown (2006) offer several factors influencing the socio-political-cultural success of HBCUs: (a) they fulfill a mission of individual and community advancement; (b) they have never restricted attendance by race unless required by law; (c) they employ administrators who believe HBCU faculty stand equal to their counterparts at other institutions and; (d) they prepare a special population for

participation in the U.S. mainstream. They do these things with fewer resources and substantially more academic achievement than their contemporaries at HWCUs (Brown & Davis, 2001; Fleming, 1984; Ricard & Brown, 2008). Yet challenges about their viability and success have not declined. According to Nichols (2004), the significance of HBCUs to American higher education mandates research to understand both the complexities and distinguishing characteristics of these institutions. The continued questioning of the relevance of HBCUs, of their viability and success – the idea that they are vestiges of a past best unremembered or viewed only through a cognitively-dissonant lens of "rose-colored glasses" is a driving force for this dissertation.

The HBCU Presidency

The college president has filled many roles like minister, teacher, accountant, fundraiser, mentor, orator, and lead public ambassador (Prator, 1963). The HBCU president adds to these roles leading institutions with the historic responsibility as the primary provider of black post-secondary education in a system of racial discrimination (Brown & Davis, 2001). They are, in the eyes of their many constituents including their Boards, responsible and accountable for the institution and the performance of their administrative teams along with faculty and staff leadership groups – all of which will impact the evaluation of their tenures (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008) and the future of their institutions.

Presidents often lead disorganized organizations requiring courage, good judgement, and the resilience to stick to a course of action while maintaining an openness and self-possession that engenders trustworthiness, tolerance, and compassion with a touch of optimistic persistence – all with an ability to cause injury, take criticism,

and have diminished personal and family time (Crowley, 1994). Some leaders successfully navigate these rapids, guiding their institutions through treacherous, boulder-strewn white water into a safe harbor. All college presidents, including those leading HBCUs, experience long hours, intense institutional demands, and continual crisis management (Moore, Salimbene, Marlier, & Bragg 1983). Research on and about the college president and his/her role is vast, there is however, significantly less research about the role, experience, and leadership dynamics of HBCU presidents specifically (Corigan, 2002; Gasman et al., 2010; Moore, Salimbene, Marlier & Bragg, 1983; Prator, 1963; Thelin, 1962; Welch, 2002).

There is a paucity of scholarly research specifically about HBCU presidents. These collegiate leaders are often relegated to the edges of general research about college presidents or included in studies about black or other racially-marginalized administrators of HWCUs (Harvey, 1999; Holmes, 2004; Hoskins, 1978; Jackson, 2001; Rolle, Davies, & Banning, 2000). The extant research seems designed for a purpose, either to support or deride the HBCU using the president as a unit of analysis (Gasman, 2011). Thompson's (1973) historical background of HBCU presidencies included ten church affiliated HBCUs. This group of colleges had just begun to consider the hiring of black presidents. The rationale for hiring white presidents was the need to have a white leader to intercede with the suspicious, hostile local white and mostly southern communities where the colleges are located.

According to Minor (2004), research on HBCU leadership, especially the presidency, results in negative findings. It is important that researchers understand methods used to reach solutions at HBCUs since faculty, staff, administrators, mission

statements, and institutional culture can have varying impact on decision-making. Minor situates responsibility for negative findings among researchers who know little about HBCUs and those who make comparisons to HWCUs.

Empirical data collected by ACE (American Council on Education) in 2001 was later analyzed to create a three-part profile of HBCU presidents (Willie et al., 2006). The categories were: demographics - race, gender, and highest degree earned; career path – number of years served, prior positions; and a description of presidential management challenges. Ninety-seven percent of the study's presidents identified themselves as black, 7% had a presidency before 50, and 14% were 71 or older; 92% were male; 88% were married, and 93% had terminal degrees (Willie et al., 2006). Most, as was true of their HWCU counterparts, were former academics, deans, professors, or administrators. In both institutional types, it was extremely rare to be promoted from within to the presidency.

Several research studies indicated problems, including those of scarce resources, linked to HBCU leadership (Evans, Evans, & Evans, 2002; Hamilton, 2002; Holman, 1994; Wagener & Smith, 1993). Holman (1994) found that HBCU presidents prefer to rule and prefer being respected to being liked. Johnson (1971) and Banks (1996) report similar findings but also indicate these to be generalizations about an authoritarian, conservative, and paternalistic leadership style not always supported by empirical data.

Some researchers offer an analysis of HBCUs as potentially detrimental to black advancement (Allen & Jewel, 2002; Brown & Ricard, 2007; Fryer & Greenstone, 2010). Others state that this alternative higher education experience created for disenfranchised and disadvantaged students is necessary (Brown & Davis, 2001; Brown-Scott, 1994;

Fleming, 1976; Hale, 2006; Harris, 2012; Williams & Ashley, 2004). This latter view can be tied to research suggesting that HBCUs' grounding in racial uplift dictates the need for them to continue educating social justice advocates and change agents for the black community (Gasman, 2007; Gasman & Bowman, 2011; Minor, 2008; Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008).

Reporting about academic, financial, human resource, and accreditation issues at HBCUs tends to get negative media coverage (Gasman et al., 2007). HBCU presidents suffer from stereotypes of being autocratic, living beyond the means of their institutions, and being poor decision-makers (Hamilton, 2002; Wagener & Smith, 1993). These stories impact the perspectives of students, parents, faculty, staff, donors, and government agencies, affecting recruitment, retention, etc. creating additional challenges for presidents as they negotiate the space between the reality and the spin of the story, which is unlike media treatment given HWCUs about similar issues (Gasman, 2008).

Budgets, accreditation, strategic planning, organizational stability, enrollment, retention, and faculty governance are among the challenges faced by HBCUs (Gasman et al., 2010; Minor, 2004; Willie et al., 2006). Known for making bricks without straw, HBCUs do more with fewer resources than many HWCUs (Willie et al., 2004). HBCUs and their presidents continue to deal with reductions in already low funding; lower salary and unit budget levels; technology and accreditation challenges; deteriorating facilities; and underprepared students as standard because their mission includes delivery of educational opportunity to students (Ebony, 1999; Graham & Kormanik, 2004; Minor, 2004; Nichols, 2004; Pelletier, 2008).

The HBCU institutional type is not a monolith. There are differences among

colleges with this designation as is true among HWCUs. HBCUs do however, have a common purpose based on their mission, shared history, and shared belief in education as a leveling tool for social justice and racial parity (Brown & Davis, 2001; Gasman, et al., 2015; Ricard & Brown, 2008). Allen et al. (2007) state this differently, saying all HBCUs exist within a system of social oppression; that their existence is disruptive of systems of racism, bias, marginalization; and that facing these challenges unites them.

HBCUs hold a unique place in U.S. higher education. Understanding this context is important to the selection of their presidents, who must engage a shared faculty and administrative governance process and negotiate with multiple levels of government administrators as advocate for their college (Nichols, 2004). They should have outstanding communication skills to engage key constituents appropriately in very different circumstances. They should motivate a campus filled with divergent operating perspectives and become the champion for an inherited or newly created institutional vision (Evans, et al., 2002; Fields, 2001; Nichols, 2004). An HBCU president should also create and invest trust in a leadership team, whose specific expertise extends the president's knowledge, experience, and judgement (Ebony, 1999). The complexities facing HBCU presidents are among the least empirically examined and most discussed in academic literature (Brown, 2013). There has been growth in the institutional level HBCU literature, but less so about the HBCU presidency (Brown, 2010; Gasman, 2011).

Presidential selection while important to any college, is crucial to an HBCU where they are the face of the university, maintaining relationships with multiple diverse constituents over a longer period of time than those typical at HWCUs (Seymour, 2004). The selection process often includes internal and external constituents engaged in

developing job descriptions and organizing multi-tiered candidate screening to sort the list of candidates to a few highly qualified candidates expected to meet and exceed the goals and objectives of institutional boards, faculty, staff, students, alumni, communities, and other key stakeholders. Ebony (1999) finds selectors seek candidates who embrace and understand HBCU philosophies of mentorship, teaching, and being a role model.

The president's influence on stakeholders is multifold and diverse. This influence includes public appearances, creation of documents, political support, and strategic planning, in addition to leadership; personal and professional style and; fundraising and budget decisions. The president has broad influence based on the alignment of institutional history to its service community. A president's impact is also mediated by their leadership model. Birnbaum's (1988) organizational model identified five structured organizational models: collegial, bureaucratic, political, anarchical, and the cybernetic, which is a blend of the original four. Bolman and Deal (1991) advance a four-frame leadership model. The frames are called structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. Their study concluded that most leaders use two frames effectively, but as with Birnbaum's study, determined that the most effective leaders adjust their context according to the current challenge.

Organizational Leadership Theory

Leadership is central to organizational success. Stogdil (1974) cites over 7,900 research studies designed to learn about leadership. Lyle and Ross (1973) discovered four common leadership styles and named them product-oriented; permissive; detached, aloof, and under controlling; and exploitative. Bolman and Deal (1991) expanded the Lyle and Ross leadership styles by focusing on how individuals see their relationship to the

organization to create their four previously mentioned frames.

The structural frame emphasizes goals, specialized roles, formal relationships, and efficiency (Bolman & Deal, 1984). Its metaphor is a factory or machine. Systems, goals, and time management are the foci of people using this frame. Leadership from this frame creates uniformity, designates worker-specific roles, and uses policies, procedures, and a formal chain of command. Structural leaders are social architects who value hard data and analysis, watch the bottom line, and support adherence to rules and standards to order the organization (Daft, 2005). At the core of this frame are differentiation and integration. The six assumptions at the base of this frame are as follows (Bolman & Deal, 1984).

1. Organizations exist to achieve goals and objectives.
2. Organizations increase efficiency and improve performance by specialization and clear division of labor.
3. Coordination and control ensure the connection between individual and unit effort.
4. Organizations work best when order is maintained over personal preference.
5. Structures are designed to fit organizational need.
6. Problems and performance gaps are created by structural deficiencies and with analysis and restructuring are remedied.

Rooted in sociology and management science, this frame seeks conformity and consistency.

The human resource frame is based on psychology and organizational behavior and focuses on the relationship between human and organization needs; its metaphor is a family. Leadership in this frame is based on motivation and empowerment of workers

because people are the most valuable resource of the organization. Daft (2005) noted that problems and issues are defined in interpersonal terms, and leadership believes the organization should adjust in support of its people (Bolman & Deal, 2003). This frame is structured upon four assumptions (Bolman & Deal, 1984).

1. Organizations exist to serve human needs.
2. Organizations and people need one another.
3. Without a good fit between people and the organization, both suffer.
4. With a good fit between people and the organization, both benefit.

Sense of belonging and unity are characteristics of this frame. Human resource leaders believe that workers' skills, insights, energy, ideas, and commitment assist or hinder the organization.

The political frame comes from political science. Organizations are described as jungles, where a state of continuous conflict or tension surrounding the sharing of scarce resources is normal. Political frame leaders spend their time building alliances, coalitions, and networks to structure their powerbase. The result is an organization whose structure, policies, and goals are defined by bargaining and negotiation. Thus, leaders are often perceived as people who maneuver their organization for personal gain (Daft, 2005). There are two assumptions underlying the political frame (Bolman & Deal, 1984).

1. There is a scenario with a possible win/win outcome.
2. There are always solutions that are better than others.

Social control is important to constructing authority in the political frame since a leader's ability to make decisions depends upon this authority.

The symbolic frame is likened to a temple, theatre, or carnival. The focus is on

rituals and ceremonies, which are important to all parts of the organization. It centers on concepts of faith, meanings, and beliefs and is structured around these five assumptions (Bolman & Deal, 1984).

1. The meaning of an event is more important than what happened.
2. The interpretation of what happened is how an event's meaning is determined.
3. What is significant is uncertain, and it is hard to know what will happen next.
4. Problem-solving and decision-making are undermined by uncertainty.
5. People create symbols to resolve confusion and find direction when faced with uncertainty.

Bolman and Deal (2003) suggest leaders should learn to reframe situations to understand alternate perceptions and why things are not working according to plan. They suggest that reframing can lead to new options and strategies leading to clarity for efficient decision-making. With this tool, an effective manager should be able to visualize solutions to challenges that move through the four frames.

Summary of the Literature Review

HBCUs are institutions born under complex historical contest. The HBCU president's role is also complex, filled with a diverse group of stakeholders often holding conflicting perspectives about the institution and its president. It is, however, a rich role connecting institution to community in a social contract designed to broaden, protect, and ensure access to black culture and tradition (Brown & Davis, 2001). My literature review examined the history of HBCUs, the HBCU presidency, and Bolman and Deal's four frames for organizational leadership context. Research about HBCUs does exist, though often flawed. In many instances the research has negative findings based less on the

research performed than lack of HBCU knowledge by the researcher and/or comparison to HWCUs (Gasman, 2011; Minor, 2004; Willie et al., 2004). The work demonstrates a continued need for research about HBCUs by researchers familiar with them. My qualitative portraiture study seeks to understand one long-term HBCU president's career perspectives about his strengths, challenges, and strategies for success.

CHAPTER THREE

Study Purpose

What is the role of the HBCU president, and how can we understand it as a role more historically complex than that of HWCU presidents? Three terms help understand the black college role: social contract, social capital, and social equalizer. As outlined in Chapter Two, HBCUs have a unique mission to fulfill – to engage in uplift of black communities and to improve social equity for the nation (Brown & Davis, 2001). The already complex role of college president is further complicated for the HBCU president by historic context and mission. This factor also complicates the trustworthiness of research done by persons unfamiliar with these roles of the HBCU.

The purpose of this qualitative research investigation is to gain an in-depth understanding of the relationship between HBCU presidents and their institutions. Moving beyond simple definitions, the goal of the study is to delve into the actual experience of a President Emeritus and elicit information about sense-making and successful strategies used to meet internal and external challenges to the singular HBCU, this institution-type, and the office of the HBCU president. Broadly, the subject, Dr. Henry Ponder, will be asked to explain how he, as president, crafted strategies to build both the organization and organizational behavior. Ricard & Brown (2008) and Weick (1995) offer the insight that people make sense of experiences only after the fact, making individuals more aware of what has been done than what they are doing. The resulting knowledge while not generalizable, should be useful as a tool for current and prospective presidents and researchers interested in the HBCU presidency.

Research Questions

Three research questions guide the study.

1. What is Dr. Henry Ponder's perception of his strengths as an HBCU president?
2. What did Dr. Henry Ponder learn about HBCU leadership during his career?
3. What strategies did Dr. Henry Ponder employ during times of institutional challenge and uncertainty?

Research Design

This study is situated in the narrative tradition of qualitative research design. The portraiture method was designed to gain an understanding of contextualized phenomena to create a narrative portrait representative of the subject's experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Bolman and Deal's (1991) four frames of organizational leadership provide the theoretical framework for analysis. The subject is Dr. Henry Ponder, President Emeritus of four HBCUs and one black higher education policy organization. Research was conducted in a series of in-person, semi-structured, elite interviews with Dr. Ponder.

Interviews are purposeful, structured conversations designed to produce perspectives about a given topic (Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Elite interviews focus on subjects in positions of authority and influence. Significant challenges to research about this specialized group include gaining access to and establishing relationships with them, which is critical to this qualitative research tool (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Dexter, 1970; Hertz & Imber, 1995; Krathwohl, 1998; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Maxwell, 1996; Moyser & Wagstaffe, 1987; Thomas, 1995). HBCU college presidents are elite because they are the highest-ranking administrator on the campus

(Ricard & Brown, 2008). Elite individuals are visible but inaccessible (Thomas, 1995) – a likely explanation for the limited number of qualitative studies about HBCU presidents (Ricard & Brown, 2008; Tillman, 2014).

Portraiture Methodology

Research is much like a dance. The first steps include selecting the 'dance form' or research methodology, which is the research paradigm and style selected for the intended affect. Next are the variables or movements used to assemble information. Data points are chosen, including site, music, co-producers, and context. These are then set into a context rich with tones, textures, themes, and movements that flow through, around, and among the processes of creation in a swirl of intuitive, deductive pattern-making that ebbs and grows until the emergent themes are condensed into a final moment of beauty and understanding that becomes a knowing of some new thing. The resulting research, like art, gives us new material for response. The response completes the circle, igniting the creative flow pointing toward the next question to answer. Thus, I believe the need to create, whether art or science, once ignited, never stops. My selection of portraiture is an extension of this worldview.

Portraiture is a research method that blends elements of art and aesthetics with scientific research until they become a new, inseparable whole. This method searches for understanding by delving into personal, professional, cultural, historical, political, and temporal meaning. After reading Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffman Davis (1997), I describe portraiture as the amalgam created by blending science and art to capture human experience and organizational life by documenting and interpreting the subject, or 'person,' and their perspectives. Portraiture's goal is not to create a

generalizable picture. Rather, it diligently pursues goodness, universal truths, and the unfolding stories of daily life (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008). It is an aggressive, yet creative research methodology developed in 1983 by Dr. Lawrence-Lightfoot, sociologist and professor of education, to ensure her subjects felt seen, heard, appreciated, and understood throughout the research process. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) describes the portrait-writing process this way.

> Portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life. Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions - - their authority, knowledge, and wisdom. The drawing of the portrait is placed in social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image (p. xv).

This process of blurring to capture the complexity of human interaction for meaning-making appeals to my understanding of the ways that United States' educational systems continue in support of a philosophy that denies the humanity and excellence of students, faculty, staff, administrators, institutions, and supporters of MSIs (Minority Serving Institutions), specifically HBCUs. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) join Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) in linking empiricism and aesthetics in descriptions of qualitative research.

A qualitative research portrait exists as a life history within narrative inquiry. Within this category, portraiture was specifically designed for application in education.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983, 2004) first created and then with Davis expanded this purposeful leave-taking from and resistance to the traditions of empirical methodologies to make space for research centered in success (Chapman, 2005; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Portraiture is her response to research using recorded failure as a starting point for creating success. In her own words, she torques the center to ground research in characterizations of health and goodness.

> I was concerned, for example, about the general tendency of social scientists to focus… on pathology and disease rather than on health and resilience. This general propensity is magnified in the research on education and schooling, where investigators have been much more vigilant in documenting failure than they have been in describing examples of success (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 8).

This goodness is not imposed by the portraitist, nor is a single universal definition assumed, in direct contrast to the expert researcher both defining and judging the criteria of success. Similarly, regarding the search for goodness, other researchers describe making the choice to expose and describe a story from a framework of strength rather than deficiency, an approach that is uniquely suited to educational leadership studies where strength emerges from studying success (Hackman, 2002; Mitchie, 2005). Finally, underscoring goodness from Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997):

> In supporting the expression of strengths, the portraitist…seeks to create a dialogue that allows for the expression of vulnerability, weakness, prejudice, and anxiety - - characteristics possessed to some extent by all human beings, and qualities best expressed in counterpoint with the actors' strengths. By *goodness*, then, we do not

> mean an idealized portrayal of human experience or organizational culture, nor do we suggest that the portraitist focus only on good things, look only on the bright side, or give a positive spin to every experience. Rather we mean an approach to inquiry that resists the more typical social science preoccupation with documenting pathology and suggesting remedies (p. 141).

Another departure from research tradition is the use of speaker voice in portraiture. In his overview of portraiture for educational leadership research, Hackman (2002) describes the way the researcher's voice is purposely woven into the narrative research product resulting from interaction with participants in the research setting. Bottery, Wong, Wright, and Ngai (2009) and Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), stress that the researcher-portraitist must understand the importance of listening '<u>for</u>' rather than just 'to' a story.

In *See you when we get there: Teaching for change in urban schools,* Gregory Mitchie (2005) uses portraiture to describe the transformative teaching practices of five urban teachers of color. His stated goal is to:

> craft rich, detailed descriptions that would convey something of the meaning these teachers give to their experiences…[with] elements of the teacher's life history, her reflections on her specific classroom issues, and her beliefs about the purposes of her teaching… (Michie, 2005, pp. 200-201).

The resulting portraits are like those of a painter: not a literal presentation, but an interpreted image – rich, multidimensional, and representative.

There are multiple critiques of portraiture, several made by scholars who are unable to see the junction between research and artistry. English (2000) provides a

critique to Lawrence-Lightfoot's arguments about portraiture methodology. He makes the following statement:

> What remains shrouded in portraiture is *the politics of vision*, that is, the uncontested right of the portraitist/researcher to situate, center, label, and fix in the tinctured hues of verbal descriptive prose what is professed to be "real." Admitting that such an activity is subjective does not come close to dealing with the power to engage in it. It is that power that remains concealed in portraiture. It is a tension within all educational research, but even more so within an approach that professes to be emancipative, open, and ultrasensitive to such issues. (English, 2000, pp. 21-22).

On the contrary, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis often find multiple possibilities for truth, stressing the beauty of portraiture is the creative blending of researcher and subject perspectives in the resulting portrait. They never position the portraitist as the arbiter of what matters in the story. Instead, they clearly say the important parts of the narrative are worked out in conversation between the engaged meaning-makers who co-construct meaning (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Bloom and Erlandson (2003) continue, stating the intent of portraiture is neither replication nor generalizability. Its purpose is instead to adapt to the kind of socio-political world we live in and are coming to understand; not a single right way, but rather different ways that affect the understanding, attitudes, and actions of its readers (Richardson & Pierre, 2005).

Participant Selection

Narrative studies require the researcher to think carefully about whom to sample. Qualitative research samples are often purposive, not random, based on the limitations of

the study universe and the importance of context within (Kuzel, 1992; Morse, 1989). Selecting participants knowing that they can contribute information useful in understanding the study's research problem and central phenomenon is purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2005). My study seeks an in-depth understanding of the HBCU president's job. Using purposeful sampling, I selected one participant, Dr. Henry Ponder, whose experience as president of an HBCU spans twenty-six years and four institutions.

The study used elite interviews to create a portrait drawn from the narrative study about Dr. Ponder's journey to the HBCU presidency and his perspectives about black college leadership, its challenges, strategies for success, and suggestions for the 21st century. Interviews are a primary tool in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Elite interviews occur with individuals who are or were in privileged or influential positions, having a role in shaping our society and providing access to information not readily available to the public (Richards, 1996). Participants in elite interviews provide help understanding context, events, perspectives and personalities present during the phenomena. Potential participant problems with elite interviews are gaining access to and time with the participant, memory-based reliability issues, and researcher over-deference and loss of interview control (Creswell, 2007; Richards, 1996). The solutions are interviewer preparation: provide research description, objective, participant role, and intended use to the participant in advance of the interview; and become familiar with the participant, phenomenon, interview questions, and site so that recognizing misrepresentation and misdirection are more likely (Richards, 1996).

Let me introduce the research subject with a bit of context. When Dr. Ponder took over the presidency at Fisk University in 1984, the university was more than $11 million in debt, with an endowment reduced from $15 to $3 million, had experienced a 70% drop in enrollment, faculty and staff were demoralized, and the Nashville Gas Company cut service until the debt of $170,000 was paid (Jennings, 1994; Smothers, 1988). In 1988, after four years of austerity leadership, Fisk's debt was reduced to $200,000, the endowment was over $3 million, faculty salaries were up by 30% and student enrollment was up by 27% (Four years after crisis, Fisk university thrives, 1988). Dr. Ponder also leveraged relationships with individual, corporate, and foundation donors garnering over $3 million in a drive spurred by a $1.3 million gift from Camille and Bill Cosby. These are examples of the fiscally conservative leadership of the Ponder-led institution.

Dr. Henry Ponder has been an educator since his 1951 graduation from Langston University in Langston, Oklahoma. He received a Master of Arts in agricultural economics from Oklahoma State University in 1958 and a Ph.D. in the same field from Ohio State University in 1963. He was drafted into the Army and served in Korea and Japan from 1953 – 1955. Apart from his first job at The State Training School for Negro Boys in Boley, Oklahoma, from 1951 – 1953, he worked continuously with HBCUs.

Dr. Ponder began his career as Department Chair at two HBCUs: Chair of Agri-Business at Virginia State University, Petersburg, Virginia from 1958 – 1961 and 1963 – 1964, then Chair of Business and Economics at Fort Valley State College, Fort Valley, Georgia from 1964 – 1966. The gap at Virginia State exists because Virginia's segregated higher education system agreed to send him to Ohio State University to get his doctorate. He moved from the professoriate to administration in 1966 when he became Vice

President for Academic Affairs at Alabama A & M University, Normal, Alabama, departing in 1973 to become President of Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina where he developed a reputation for sound fiscal management and relationship building. In 1984, he accepted the presidency of Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee during a financial crisis which he resolved prior to his 1996 retirement (Four years after crisis, 1998; Smothers, 1998).

Dr. Ponder's short-lived retirement ended in late-1996 when he became President and CEO of NAFEO (National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education) a Washington, D.C. based policy organization for HBCUs. He retired from this position in 2001 and returned to his Beaufort County, South Carolina home. Later in the same year, he was asked to take the helm of Talladega College in Talladega, Alabama. He left this position in 2003, returning to retirement in South Carolina for the next seven years. In 2010, his alma mater - Langston University appointed him as the first Lillian Hemmet Endowed Chair professor. During a 2011 – 2012 leadership change, he served as Langston University President, retiring afterwards once again to South Carolina. Dr. Ponder served as a consultant to many organizations, most recently in 2016 to the President of St. Augustine's College in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Dr. Ponder attended an HBCU under de jure segregation, led an academic department during the Civil Rights era, led institutions through federal reapportionment, and continues to be a spokesperson for HBCUs and their graduates. He worked with Dr. Benjamin E. Mayes and Dr. Frederick Patterson; led the Divine Nine in altering the intake process; chaired Accreditation Teams; was on the board of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges; chaired the UNCF

member institution board; and is an active mentor for several persons interested in an HBCU presidency. He is known as a legendary fundraiser, sound planner, and budget manager; he is however, perhaps best known for being the President who moved Fisk University back to solvency. The breadth of his experience and knowledge about these institutions is expansive.

Interview Questions

What are great research questions? O'Brien (1999) says that great research questions lead to deeper thinking, which leads to the next question. In person-centered research, he suggests, these questions should lead me to think more deeply about the identity and contributions of my subject to create an artful, respectful portrait of his life experience. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) recording and interpreting the perceptions and perspectives of the subject includes their vision of their authority, knowledge, and wisdom within a socio-cultural context. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1986) explains the multiple roles of the researcher as mirror, inquirer, companion, audience, tale-spinner, and therapist. Most importantly, however, the researcher acts as a human archeologist excavating layers to create a more authentic representation of the subject's life experience. This then, is the goal: to create a dynamic narrative that reveals the nature of one man, his leadership, and the institutions he shepherded using a three-part set of semi-structured interviews.

The interviews dig into Dr. Ponder's life history, career, and reflections on leadership. Interviews were done in the family home; averaged 2.29 hours and collected ten hours, sixteen minutes of data. Our initial interview covered life events, family, education, and mentors. The second interview covered career experience, focusing on his

role as president. Questions addressed his leadership style along with presidential challenges and his strategies to solve them. In the third interview, we discussed his perspectives about HBCUs, their importance, challenges, and future. A full list of the guiding questions for each interview segment is in the Appendix (pp. 95-99).

Data Collection

This portraiture study was conducted as a recorded three-part series of semi-structured personal, face-to-face interviews with a single individual (Schuman,1982; Seidman, 1998). Context is critical for understanding and finding meaning in people's behavior (Seidman, 1998). There are three parts to the interview process: life history, work experience, and reflection which formed the structure of the completed portrait.

In the research interview, participants share information in their voice and at their level of comfort about their lived experience (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This permits the researcher to engage the perspective and uncover thematic meaning central to participant experience (Patton, 2002). I use interviews as Creswell (2007) suggests because Dr. Ponder has retired and is no longer within the physical HBCU environment. My interview questions were open-ended and semi-structured, designed to guide a naturally flowing conversation while allowing space for in-depth probing and emerging lines of inquiry about his career path, role, challenges, barriers faced, and perceptions as an HBCU president (Babbie, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). Recording the interviews strengthens the validity of the interview data (Patton, 2002). I also made notes during the interviews, recording location, mannerisms, tone, body language, interruptions or disruptions, and other rich contextual data which added dimension and texture to the interviews (Groenewald, 2004; Hyener, 1999). Each interview was transcribed by

rev.com, dated, numbered, and read by me for initial corrections, then sent to Dr. Ponder for a member check reading to create the final transcribed documents.

Data Analysis

Within the qualitative research paradigm, data analysis is an inductive categorical coding process. Dr. Ponder's interviews were reviewed for thematic analysis, searching for repeated words, ideas, and concepts then categorically organized into open codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Lots of codes are generated initially, then combined and discarded, producing a smaller set of codes representing themes in the data. These themes emerged or are unearthed after observing repeated topics, expressions, gestures, tones and words, including use of analogy and metaphor, and by comparison to theory-related material (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) situates the creation of the research portrait as being shaped in the space between portraitist and subject, each participating in drawing the image created by their dialogue. In this space the rich meaning and resonance critical to the authenticity of the portrait is made.

Establishing context, engaging in reflexivity, and searching for goodness are the three key elements for creating a research portrait. My study is situated in the context of black collegiate leadership in the United States of America. My written thoughts and observations about the process as we move through the series of interviews are reflexive. The search for goodness is embedded like context within the discussion of this HBCU leader's perspective about negotiating a system rife with inequitable and unjust processes (Anderson 1988; Carney, 2009; Fraser, 2014; Kennedy, 2012; Gonzalez, 1990; Pak, 2002; Solomon, 1985). Goodness again is described as "a complex, holistic, dynamic

concept that embraces imperfection and vulnerability; a concept whose expression is best documented through detailed, nuanced narratives placed in context" (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 142).

I looked for emergent themes using these strands of analysis cited by Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997) as consistent with the portraiture method. First, identify visible and audible refrains repeatedly spoken and enacted by the participant across contexts. Next, pay attention to the participant's resonant metaphors. Third, observed rituals and ceremonies symbolized through art, music, dance, or poetry likely indicate what is valued, often providing continuity and coherence. Fourth, triangulate data looking for points of convergence among tools of data collection. Finally, listen for perspectives and voices that seem to fall outside or separate from the emergent dimensions. In all instances, the findings may be complimentary, contrasting, or dissonant.

Authenticity

Authenticity in portraiture is called trustworthiness in other qualitative methodologies and consists of checks and balances (Denzin, 1978; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). There was continuous member checking of the process and content as Dr. Ponder and I co-created this document. We talked through interesting errors in the transcription, reviewed the data thinking of what was missing, and validated meaning in a continuous cycle as one or the other thought of something further to explore. Member checking can create concerns about researcher loss of control leading to a biased or consensus-based document. These concerns are, however, mediated in methods accepting a collaborative approach in questioning, interpreting, and reporting (Creswell, 2007;

Kvale, 1996; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Nunkoosing, 2005; Schwandt, 2007; Weis & Fine, 2000).

An important part of portraiture is the power of shared knowledge construction based in the collaborative relationship between the participants – researcher and subject – producing a document reflective of the subject as visualized and ultimately constructed by the researcher (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Dr. Ponder's role as participant and co-constructor of knowledge extends to validation of data by questioning and clarifying interview transcripts and the developing narrative. Similar to the role of a subject having their depiction painted, the actual product is prepared and presented by the researcher-artist, who carefully utilizes all data in its creation (Chapman, 2005; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Many qualitative researchers use reflexivity as a validation tool. This process requires engaged critical self-reflection to understand personal bias, predispositions, perspectives, and their evolving outlook as their research develops (Schwandt, 2007).

Trustworthiness of Researcher

Qualitative inquiry utilizes one of five methods: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and cases studies. This study employs the narrative research approach – specifically portraiture. While Creswell (2006) acknowledges the researcher as a key instrument, he asserts that they collect data through examining documents, observing behavior and interviewing participants.

As qualitative inquiry presents the subject's narrative, biases are automatically limited to some degree. However, all research has some bias. Creswell (2006) asserts that a qualitative researcher must thus consider and address bias at multiple points during the

design of the study as well as its execution. In this study, through a series of interviews, a review of critical artifacts, reflexive journaling, and field notes the researcher maintained the integrity of the process adhering to Creswell's guidelines.

Like every researcher, I grappled with the cost-benefit analysis of closeness with the people and organizations they study while acknowledging the possibility of potential biases that could interfere with truth seeking and knowledge production. This will always be a significant challenge to qualitative researchers – something of which we must remain mindful. Yet this should never stop the pursuit of truth-seeing and our quest to understand the full dimensions of personhood.

Limitations

Among the limitations of portraiture is difficulty with replication because the relationship formed between artist and subject is different if for example, context or individuals change. A method for engaging this issue is using emergent themes, which should remain consistent (Hackman, 2002). In addition, it should be noted that replication is not the focus of a portraiture study.

Researcher bias is a significant limitation of all qualitative research, especially when using interviews for data collection, because the researcher is both data tool and data analyst (Creswell, 2007). When personal relationship is present, there is also the potential for bias in both researcher and participant. Confidentiality disclosures, iterative questioning, transparency during the interview, and member checking of the interview transcripts are ways to manage such bias (Creswell, 2007).

Challenges to the strength of interviews are potential limitations. Interviews are not neutral because they are designed to answer specific research questions. The

relationship and interaction between researcher and participant happen within the context of the constructed research. Other factors include the verbal acuity, cooperation, and perceptiveness of the participant. And finally, the researcher must have interviewing skills. Recording the interview strengthens validity and field notes add dimension to the interview by including information about participant reactions, nonverbal communication, the setting, and occurrences impacting interview responses (Groenewald, 2004; Hyener, 1999; Patton, 2002).

An unanticipated limitation occurred when I reached out to several individuals present during his presidencies. Unexpectedly, this proved more challenging than expected. It was difficult to connect with people. Many no longer worked at the institution some retired, and many deceased. Others still connected to an institution were unsure of how their contribution might be received by their institutional peers and leadership. Several people willing to share their perspectives were among those I knew to have been against actions taken by Dr. Ponder. One of two things happened during these conversations, they asked not to be quoted or they were now in accord with what happened; one angrily assured me that I was misconstruing the events and their participation.

As I processed these occurrences, I thought about participant bias toward me as the researcher, understanding that my close relationship to Dr. Ponder could have elicited these responses. In addition, I recalled learning that people grapple with the mechanics of memory. Richard White (1998) reminds us that memory and history compete for the same space, that incongruity between these two occurs when interpretation of events meets our need to interpret, to make sense of events and actions in ways that matter to us.

These understandings will inform my future research.

The Researcher

Academic researchers are taught to use expertise to create research projects, then asked not to use this expertise, suspending predispositions, knowledge, and experience of the phenomena they study. The attempt to suspend themselves often includes preparatory self-reflection as part of the pre-interview and analysis processes (Moustakas, 1994). Yet, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument responsible for gathering accurate and valid data (Creswell, 2007). Stated differently by Lincoln & Guba, (1985) a person is the only research instrument able to grasp and evaluate the nuances and distinctions buried in human interaction. This makes it necessary to understand my perceptions of phenomena to critically interpret data that reflects the voice of the participant I must grasp a broad set of philosophical assumptions, explain these, and then decide how and in what ways this knowledge is beneficial to my study and analysis (Creswell, 2007). Social science portraiture is devoted to the search for authenticity and authority.

My motivation to understand the leadership development and career of Dr. Henry Ponder is multifold. As his daughter, I know the dad: disciplinarian, loving provider, soother of woes, bringer of gifts, and purveyor of advice. As an academic professional, I know some of the joys and challenges of executive-level leadership and respect his path. I am aware of ways our household was altered by the demands of his career. Yet I know relatively little about his professional leadership style and was quite startled to learn that he is an icon whose effective guidance of HBCUs is well-known and respected. I have been asked many times to introduce someone to him. It was, however, a request to offer

insight about a portion of his career that led me to this role as researcher about the leadership style and experience of Dr. Henry Ponder.

I learned much more than I ever expected and found similarities around many corners. I am an avid reader because I could order all the Weekly Reader books I requested and was constantly encouraged toward informal learning found in books. This is a direct connection to my father's relationship with his high school English teacher, Ms. E. A. Gorman. I am an early riser, finding peacefulness in the softly rising quiet of the day and able to work best between 5:30 AM and noon. This character trait is contextualized by dad's need to wake early so that he could study in peace and quiet. I discovered a deeply held sense of community in common, the belief that communal building of all things, including knowledge, is infinitely better and stronger than when done in isolation. I dug down and discovered that we have often been co-creators planting, playing, and providing support to one another, so this research project became and provided new perspective in our relationship.

There is resonance in the universe. This sense of connection, an ability to identify with an experience or story. The setting is part of what the portraitist strives to achieve. She describes details of what and how people behave, to carefully and systematically document visible, perhaps countable phenomena. This record, however, will not produce resonance. That outcome happens when the actors negotiated meaning or their experience of moment is connected to the action and explained by the writer (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Crafting the portrait is part art, part science. There are four dimensions: (1) conception, the development of the whole story; (2) structure, how themes are placed to

support the emerging story; (3) form, the movement of the story, the telling of the tale; and (4) cohesion, the unity and integrity of the work. During the entire process, the portraitist must be clear and consistent in her role as weaver of the empirical and literary themes if the result is to resonate, to be authentic. The portraitist creates using whatever materials are available. What is usable is found not only in the subject, but also in the researcher; her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity join those of her subject in a particular setting to shape the interactive process called research **(**Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

Summary

Situated solidly within the symbolic frame, portraiture explores basic issues of meaning and faith that make symbols powerful in the human experience, including lived experience within organizations (Bolman & Deal 1991). These frames can work to inspire change - organizational, professional, and personal. Portraiture can have the same effect. This study of the leadership development and career of Dr. Henry Ponder seeks to enable the reader to understand and make meaning of the personal and professional tools and strategies he used to lead HBCUs through fifty-plus turbulent years.

CHAPTER FOUR

His-tory

There was a planter who each day planted a tree. Nurturing them from seed, he planted a new young sapling each day. The people in his community asked themselves, "why does he do this?" - yet they never asked him. So, for years, as they continued to wonder, he continued to plant and cultivate the trees until there were orchards of fruit and nut trees, shady resting spaces, and beautiful arbors all around their town. Then one day, a youth approached the now elder planter and asked, "Why do you plant all these trees? What does this planting do for you?" The elder looked the youth in the eye and said, "I do not plant these trees for me; I plant them for you. I have already watched these mature trees grow, and I have eaten their fruit. I want you to be able to do the same and more."

Introduction

A tall man of mild demeanor, distinguished mien, and quiet nature, he stands 6-foot plus, with shoulders that – at ninety-two – are just beginning to stoop. He has a fringe of closely cropped hair surrounding an often shinny bald top. He is a natural listener whose rural-born sense of community requires interpersonal engagement. His smile is quick and often followed by contagious laughter. He is still working – at church, with his fraternity, on committees, in social organizations, and in conversation. He presses a continued mission to provide educational opportunities for African-American students, especially those who attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

People remember seeing him, a president, in unusual places on their shared campus. They remember that he always spoke to them during his morning walks. Many

students, faculty, staff, and many campus stakeholders remember him kindly, while others bristle, even all these years later, that their individual and collective calls for votes of no confidence never came to fruition. During his professional years, this very-nearly-always temperate man provided leadership to four HBCUs, one HBCU policy organization, and one international black collegiate fraternal organization.

This chapter describes Dr. Henry Ponder's leadership development based on themes developed from a series of interviews, conversations, electronic sources, and archival documents. Together, Dr. Ponder and I explored his life, seeking the seminal elements of his leadership style, attempting to excavate transformational experiences pivotal to the child, the man, and the leader. We found three themes – people, philosophy, and persistence – that, throughout his life, contributed to his leadership perspective and collectively reflect the essence of the man beneath the leader.

If you ask Dr. Ponder why he chose to become a college president, he will tell you a story about relationships that started with a youth walking four miles from home to a black Methodist church in his rural hometown of Wewoka, Oklahoma. He decided he had to hear the speech of a woman of great renown in his and most 1930's black communities. She wasn't a movie star or a singer – she was an educator, a civil rights activist, founder and President of what became Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona Beach, Florida. Her name was Mary McLeod Bethune.

Bethune was a celebrity, born shortly after Negro enslavement ended. She was educated to become a missionary and galvanized to push the cause of Negro education, declaring that education was the way for black racial uplift. She was also a familiar name in black households like the Ponder's. Dr. Ponder's mother, Lillie, insisted that her

children get as much education as possible. She believed strongly that education was an equalizer, that it offered access to a better life by pushing individual and collective Negro liberation – in her words, it was "something no one could steal or take from you."

So, he walked several miles to see this great lady, wondering what a college president would be like, whether since it was quite cold there would be heat in the church, and if perhaps he might get a ride part of the way back home. He remembers an elegantly dressed woman with black hair wearing a fur coat, who kept the audience's attention the entire time, and whom he remembers "had a presence!" Never had he seen people paying such rapt attention to a speaker. She quoted poetry, seeming to speak directly to each person in that small church. She shared stories about black students learning at black colleges, and she asked them to believe in and become part of this dream of a better world for black people through education. She talked about education, civil rights, and the ways that communities could help by sending students and money to support her school. She inspired them, collecting a modest sum to support the dream of college education. She showed them a future that included hard work leading to prosperity and racial uplift.

There was no personal moment when she recognized Dr. Ponder standing in the crowd. Nevertheless, she left an indelible impression on him. He did not get a ride home that night, and on his walk back to the farm, he decided he wanted to be like her: an orator whose words could inspire youth, get support from adults, and be someone a community would be proud to support. He would be a college president. When asked to reflect specifically about this experience, Dr. Ponder shared the following:

I know that the thing she did most by her appearance, by her way of talking, and

> by her demeanor was make me proud of being African American. I believe this was the only time I saw her in person, though I saw her in many pictures over the years. She was my image of a college president, and maybe – just maybe – I tried to be like her. I'm thinking that now, because every day on the job, for 20-25 years in the presidency, not a single day passed that I didn't go to the office fully dressed in suit and tie. Now that I just think about it, I believe I got that from what I saw in her.

What follows is a description of Dr. Ponder's perceptions of his strengths, the strategies he employed during times of uncertainty, and what he learned about leadership during his HBCU career. The collected data indicates that his experiences can be described using three themes. The first theme responding to research question one, revolves around community relatedness and people. The second theme responding to research question two, focuses on learning and engages the philosophies used by Dr. Ponder throughout his life and career. Finally, the third theme responding to research question three – persistence – is the confluence of people/community and his philosophies.

THEME: People

People develop in relationship to others. Learning to understand the world, how to process information and experiences typically happens as you observer and interact with people. This theme identifies the role that people play, centering Dr. Ponder's development within the context of a community - family, friends, teachers, colleagues, and mentors. This is the site of his resilience, centering his perspective of his leadership strengths in human engagement and the power of relationships.

Family

Born on Wednesday, March 28, 1928, Henry Ponder, named for his paternal grandfather, is the seventh son and eleventh child of an African American family that lived in the tiny town of Wewoka in rural Seminole County, Oklahoma. Lillie Mae Edwards Ponder and Frank Jerry Ponder, Sr. had 14 children – six daughters and eight sons. The Ponder family lived in a small home with a kitchen, front room, porch, and two sleeping rooms. The home was "air conditioned" by opening windows, heated by a wood stove, and lighted by kerosene lamps. Dr. Ponder remembers thriving in a community of respected elders, where youth received praise and punishment from most adults in the community regardless of ties of blood, and families pulled together to help each other endure the hard times and celebrate the good ones. Church was an important part of life for everyone in the community. Dr. Ponder attended Sunday services, still remembers Easter speeches, and is a now a deacon. He recalls games with his siblings and other youngsters, especially rock throwing, name calling, and riding horses. They hunted, fished, foraged, plowed, planted, and harvested a 160-acre row crop farm to feed the family. He describes growing up like this:

> We were row crop farming, renting from the landowner, and we simply paid off in shares of the crops that we made. We were growing peanuts for a cash crop, peanuts and cotton, and we grew grain, primarily to feed our livestock. We also had vegetables. My mother had a garden, so we had vegetables, fresh vegetables all spring and summer. My mother canned, so we had canned fruits and vegetables for the winter. I must say that I cannot remember ever being hungry. We had three meals a day, and most

> of it came from our farm and from my mother's garden. All my sisters learned to cook early, and the boys in the family did not have to do any housework. We had to do all of the fieldwork. So, it was a typical rural, southern, mid-western family upbringing. We didn't have much cash, as people would think of today, to go and buy things, but we still had plenty to eat and clean clothes to wear.

Ponder family leadership was matriarchal. This was the pattern of the Edwards, Lillie's family, and was likely prompted by the early death of her husband, Frank Jerry, in 1934. Dr. Ponder has a clear memory of the mailman, Mr. Cooley, carrying him and Frank, Jr. into the cemetery for the burial service because they did not have shoes. Lillie did not remarry, so there was never another male head of this household, though her sons were often the breadwinners.

As they married, the older Ponder siblings often started marital life in their birth household. Despite marriage, military service, or employment, and regardless of the reason for departure, they each continued to support their birth household and one another across the years. The community knew this family had tight bonds, and that to pick a fight with one meant you would face a united front – this too continued throughout their lives.

Dr. Ponder's siblings taught him many early lessons that he brings immediately to memory. He recalls learning from Ted that since you must work hard, it was better to do a good job than to repeat a task done poorly. Ted also taught him to take care of his possessions, especially the tools needed for your work. He remembers Mayme always becoming the leader of organizations where she was a participant. He remembers

Katheryn saving him from drowning and the bond that grew between them because of it. Responsibility was learned by watching his older siblings work, contribute to the household, and make new homes and careers.

Sister Mayme was important in Dr. Ponder's life for several reasons. She worked at a hiring office in Oklahoma City and often helped her siblings find jobs. Because of this connection, Dr. Ponder was able to get good paying summer jobs. In the year after high school, he worked at Wilson Packing House in the Oklahoma City Stockyards. As summer ended, many of his friends were heading back to college. He realized they would be learning and would likely decide not to continue socializing with an uneducated stockyard worker, so he decided he too would attend college at Langston University. He had the $33.00 required for tuition, and a buddy whose mother would rent him a room with one meal each day for $15.00 per month. Siblings Mayme and Paul alternated giving him $15.00 per month for room and board, which made attending college possible.

Community

Dr. Ponder recalls friendships with the Oguin and Grey families, who lived up the road. He and brother Frank, along with Delbert and Olean Oguin, formed the Oguin-Ponder Quartet, singing at school and events in the community. Dr. Ponder, laughing, says "we sang with lots of gusto and heart but rarely in tune, but folks listened and clapped and told us we were doing a great job."

The Grey family passed the Ponder home around 10:00 AM each Saturday going into town. He recalls that their sons always had enough money to purchase comic books.

> "That's how I got acquainted with the early comic book characters like Superman, Batman and Robin, Submariner, and The Human Torch. They

> would buy the comic books, and we would go up to their house and read them. When they finished reading them, they would let us have them because they didn't like to read them but once, and we liked to read them all the time. There was lots of fun and sharing I recall in that group."

He remembers that at his house, the comics were so well read, with fingers running across the ink so often, that it faded away. For Dr. Ponder, these memories are poignant reminders of not just his childhood, but also of his community and the support they provided to their children and to one another.

Teachers and Friends

Black children in the Wewoka area attended Johnson Elementary School, a community-supported two-room school from first to eighth grades. Students learned in clusters. The younger students in grades one through four were in one room, while the older children in grades five through eight were in the second room. The school was named for Cootie Johnson, a local landowner and lawyer, who gave both land and money for the construction of the school. He was known as The Black Panther and was a community hero, especially for black children.

> I can say now that with a lot of discussions going on about monuments and names of schools and so forth, it is worth something to have a school named for the majority of the kids who go there. Someone they can identify with. I think that's good; it helps get the youngsters to know and to do more, so just the name of Cootie Johnson – landowner, lawyer – said a lot for me as a student.

Dr. Ponder acknowledges that attending a school named for a prominent local

black community member helped them understand that, segregation notwithstanding, they too could achieve great things.

Lillie Ponder insisted that school was important, reinforcing this value with words and deeds. Dr. Ponder says she often reminded her children to:

> Get all the education you can get. Once you get an education it is something that no one can take from you. It's there and has to be recognized somewhere down the road.

School attendance for boys often went according to the farming needs of the community. The school sometimes closed during planting and harvest seasons. Though neither she nor her husband completed fifth grade, Lillie taught her children not to miss school. They learned to work before and after school. Indeed, each of the Ponder children attended Johnson Elementary School and most completed high school. Three got collegiate-level degrees: Alonzo an Associate's, Mayme a Bachelor's, and Dr. Ponder a Ph.D. This attention to and prioritizing of education was unusual in this 1930s rural community, especially for a black sharecropper's children.

Dr. Ponder was a good student. He remembers Charlesetta Brunner, his first through fourth grade teacher, as dynamic and as the person who noticed and developed his curiosity saying:

> I think my elementary teacher, a woman named Charlesetta Brunner, was my first mentor. She was someone that you thought a lot of, and you said, I want to be like her. Now the reason I liked her was because she was a good teacher. She recognized early something in me that I didn't even know I had, and maybe I didn't have it, but she recognized it. She would

> push me to learn more than what was being taught. She developed in me a curiosity to just want to know more. For example, I wanted to know all the names of all the birds in the community. I wanted to be able to recognize them because most people would just see a red bird and say, that's a red bird. Well, all red birds are not red birds. The prettiest red bird is a cardinal, and you need to know that. I wanted to know that. All black birds are not black birds, some are Baltimore Orioles. I wanted to recognize a Baltimore Oriole. So, these are the things I wanted to do because Charlesetta Bruner hastened that wanting to know, just wanting to know a lot more.

Ms. Brunner taught her students debate; a skill Dr. Ponder says he utilized throughout his career. He says debate "teaches you to give credence to the person that you're talking to" and to listen to what the other speaker is saying.

> What she taught me was how to be able to use logic to come up with your answers and be able to let the logic make the argument rather than you making the argument. Be able to have points rather than opinions. I think I got that in elementary school. Charlesetta Brunner taught me that.

Ms. Brunner paid attention to her students, providing both constructive and positive feedback equally. Her abiding interest in the well-being of her charges went beyond current standards of academic practice, flowing into positive self-esteem, provoking avid curiosity, and creating the desire to excel. These followed Dr. Ponder throughout his life.

The fifth through eighth grade teacher at the Johnson Elementary School, Theodore Malone, was also the principal. Dr. Ponder recalls Mr. Malone as an innovative

teacher who always pushed him to do better work while teaching his students by subject rather than by grade.

> Now, when he taught English, he combined grades four through eight because he said English is English. If you learn what a declarative sentence is in the fourth grade, you won't have to learn it when you get in the eighth grade because it will still be the same thing. He taught this kind of thing. History, when he was teaching American History, he would teach that for everybody. We learned things together, that was the way he was able to do it.

In addition, Malone encouraged older students who were proficient in a subject to tutor the younger students, which provided time for him to work individually with students requiring extra attention and attend to the running of the school. Dr. Ponder's first teaching experience was as one of the students singled out to teach history to fifth, sixth, and seventh grade students. He says that Mr. Malone's innovative spirit imbued an abiding interest in seeking unexpected solutions that empowered and supported everyone involved.

Dr. Ponder acknowledges that his first leadership experiences happened at Johnson Elementary School. The earliest took place through 4-H club where he was the games leader.

> I was elected leader of games in my local club. I had to know 15 to 20 games and the rules for each of them thoroughly and keep reading to learn new games. I had to watch to see how my classmates were reacting to the game and ask (myself) if this was a game they liked. I developed a sixth

sense to know when to stop a game and start a new one, and this has been an important skill for me.

Dr. Ponder says this experience taught him to be prepared, to always have secondary options, and that if you deal with the people first, the situation gets to be easier to understand and modify as needed for success.

Beyond Johnson Elementary School, Dr. Ponder had myriad educational experiences, but he believes that his personal, professional, and leadership foundation was built in this space. There are, however, two important foundational experiences from high school that he recalls fondly. The English teacher, Ms. E.A. Gorman, taught Dr. Ponder to love reading by giving certificates of achievement for reading beyond the regular assignment. Dr. Ponder remembers he got a certificate each time one was offered. He would sit in the library reading and learned to enjoy reading as a hobby. This expanded Ms. Brunner's gift of satisfying curiosity, while simultaneously being an illustration of community directed toward Dr. Ponder.

At Douglass High School, students risked suspension when they left the campus during school hours. Dr. Ponder's friends would leave regularly to get fresh doughnuts at the store a block away. He loved doughnuts and decided he would start going to the store too. His buddies responded by remembering to share, bringing him a doughnut because they said he was smart, that he wanted to be somebody, and they didn't want to be responsible for letting him be suspended or expelled. This memory still has an emotional impact on Dr. Ponder as he remembers this and other moments when his friends supported and protected him.

While people and community are the primary source of Dr. Ponder's strength, they are also his kryptonite or Achilles' heel. Dr. Ponder relates that the hardest thing for him to do as a leader is to discipline friends. He had a very loyal, very social, and not very academic best friend, [3]Stephens, in college. Dr. Ponder helped him manage his academic career, providing support and helping him when he was behind on his schoolwork.

> I'm not defending what I did, but Stephens graduated, had a family, and joined the police force. He had many citations for good service. So, it didn't hurt him that I did it, it didn't hurt me that I did it, and it didn't hurt anybody in the room that I did it. It was not immoral; it was not illegal. It was just not forcing him to do it for himself or punch out. I figured it was better for me to help him get through. Suppose the teacher had caught on, the teacher could have flunked me for doing this. Was the chance worth saving him? I think Jesus Christ would say it is, but I don't know. But all of this is part of leadership. All answers are not yes or no; there are some maybes. I think this is an early example of making a hard decision, which is a big part of leadership.

Franks, a strong supporter of Dr. Ponder's career, was a unit head on one of his campuses, while Tucker, a distant relative, and Davis, a close family friend, had incredible skills in a unit necessary to any college's function. Each was accused of and found guilty of malfeasance. In both instances, Dr. Ponder acknowledges that he should have realized something was amiss. Why Dr. Ponder continued to support each of these

[3] Stephens, Franks, and Tucker are pseudonyms.

men is clear – they were part of the same community, which according to his Wewoka upbringing meant if it wasn't illegal, immoral, or unethical, you should support one another by doing your part in a way that would not dishonor your relationships. In the first instance, Stephens' values and understanding of the responsibility of the relationship are similar. Franks and Tucker did not share the values, understanding, and responsibility of this community relationship. Their misdeeds were proven, leading to questions about Dr. Ponder's knowledge of their wrongdoing. In each case, he was cleared of any complicity. There is laughter when he thinks of Stephens and only sadness in his memories of Tucker and Davis. These were valuable, but hard-learned lessons for Dr. Ponder.

THEME: Philosophies

Beliefs that form guiding principles for living are called by many names. Your credo, faith, convictions, principles, values, and – for the purposes of this story – philosophies. These ideals become foundational and are what directs our thoughts, actions, and reactions to the world. We could easily call this set of values a worldview creating our perspectives and often guiding our behavior.

Dr. Ponder's philosophies are demonstrated in the ways he thinks about leadership and in his worldview, they were formed before he left the two-room elementary school in Wewoka, Oklahoma. He says:

> It sounds corny to say, but the relationships I had at Johnson Elementary School really were the ones that I used for the rest of my life. I just grew and matured into the beliefs of my community.

These beliefs are rooted in the black uplift philosophy of the early 1900s and Judeo-Christian ideas. They are the belief systems and values that structure Dr. Ponder's life. They expand based on added exposure to life, to living, to experiences beyond his youthful imagination. His philosophy is, in an archeological way, an excavation around his leadership style – a participatory democracy.

The Man in the Mirror

The first guiding principle is based on the Christian Golden Rule, or what Dr. Ponder calls his Man in the Mirror (MIM) philosophy. This means that in all parts of his life he tries to behave in ways that reflect how he would, in the same circumstances, want others to treat him. When I tried to isolate a single incident of this philosophy in action, Dr. Ponder had difficulty doing so. Instead, he explained the importance as follows.

> Don't look for MIM as a single or even a group of incidents. This is a daily routine of mine because a college president is constantly making decisions that are small to most people but can be crucial for an individual or a unit at the institution. People come to you wanting to talk about change or an action they want to take, and I would have to make a decision regarding their request. Once I got home, as I got ready for rest, I would stand before the mirror and go through the day's work. If the man facing me within the mirror said, "I don't like that decision" I would go in the next morning, call that person in and say, 'I'm sorry, I've changed my mind and I need to make this right.' If I did something I thought was not right, I had difficulty living with it; therefore, I would try to change it so I would not have to continue thinking about it over and over again. I cannot

> remember a single incidence that stands out because this was a way of making sure I was in tune with what was happening on campus.

Dr. Ponder continues,

> I always try to be the first one to know whether my decision was right or wrong, and if it was wrong, I was the one who would go back and say I'm sorry, I made a mistake, let's make this right. That's basically why I use the man in the mirror concept for how I dealt with problems that happen to me every day.

Tied to this philosophy is another – no one and nothing is more important than the institution. No single or combined part of any collegiate community is more important than the function of the college. No one person, unit, department, or group should be able to shift the institution's goals or actions in a way that is even potentially detrimental. Thus, all parts of the community should be focused on doing things that make the college better. Dr. believes the president has a responsibility to maintain the integrity of the institution. This encapsulates all presidential duties and negates supporting any actions that put the self or anyone else before the institution. He says the following:

> I would also use the man-in-the-mirror to help me safeguard the institution, checking to be sure that something like funds allocation for travel, an event, or activity would support more than the persons involved so that I did not hinder the operation of the institution while making decisions because of finances or other kinds of dilemmas or difficulties. I also did not want to make a decision that I could not stand before my Creator and say, "Yes, I made it and I still think it was the right one." I

> discovered that most people don't seem to understand and can't or won't deal with the idea that they make mistakes. All of us make bad judgements! Some people don't review their decisions, which means that they don't have a chance to evaluate the worth of those decisions.

Open-Door Policy

Evolving from the man-in-the-mirror and the institution's supreme importance is the concept of an open-door policy. Dr. Ponder believes it is critical for a leader to be in touch with their constituents. A good leader listens to what is said and learns to understand people, especially those who follow or are part of their community.

> When you are president, you constantly make decisions that people don't understand that alter their lives. They don't understand, for example, why they cannot take a trip or order what they consider essential supplies during periods of austerity. Because I have an open-door policy, people feel free to come talk to me, and that is exactly what I wanted to establish. They didn't need an appointment. My assistants knew it was important to me that people felt comfortable coming to see me, that they knew I was available to them, and would interrupt me doing paperwork or ask them to wait until I'd completed a meeting already in progress. Many presidents say this is their policy, but then lock their doors or install a gatekeeper who assures visitors that they must make an appointment because their leader is busy just now. If you came to see me and my assistant was not there, you simply knocked on the door and I said 'come in.

The Buck Stops Here

Harry S. Truman, 33rd President of the United States, had on his desk a sign reading "The Buck Stops Here" as a reminder that regardless of the outcome, he as president was responsible for what happened and how it happened. The president is the final authority for decisions made under their leadership. The belief that the president must seek information to weigh in the process of making the final decision is fundamental to Dr. Ponder's leadership perspective. Here is an example.

> In either my first or second year as President at Benedict College, the federal government offered funds to HBCUs for new buildings. We applied for and received one of these grants. We agreed upon a plan and everyone was eager to begin construction. Over the next three years, I postponed construction because I did not believe we were in a position financially to make the required amortized payments, and though some people understood, most did not agree, including the Board. Finally, after about five years, I said alright, now I think we are ready to build. We did so and with never a problem making the payments. Many times people said it was a good thing that you did not do this when we wanted you to; we really would not have been able to do as well and now we understand what you were doing. I think the point is that most people agree that a decision is good once they experience the benefits. So, a critical element of leadership is being concerned that most people will agree with your decision in the end. I remember this clearly because I was questioned about waiting at every Board meeting and at most campus administrative

meetings. However, they were glad in the end that I held out until our financial resources were in order.

Participatory Democracy

Dr. Ponder's name for his leadership style is "participatory democracy." This is at first glance repetitive since democracy by definition – a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state - demands participation (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The political and historical ramifications of African American people being ineligible - persistently denied and excluded from full visibility, personhood, and participation - in the privileges promised by this nation's founding documents make the naming a declaration. In rebellion against and to refute the issue of African American visibility to a white American gaze, Dr. Ponder created a philosophical and sometimes physical sweet spot where everyone could choose to be visible. It is an interesting space where your visibility depends on white sight, where your value or context in a situation can shift quickly to your erasure.

Dr. Ponder's leadership style flows directly from his relationships - from the people who supported him, the education that expanded his horizon, and the community that protected and nurtured him. He created a style grounded in relationships not economics or order to assure people that they and their opinions and feelings matter and that together they could create something stronger and better for African Americans, HBCUs, and the world.

THEME: Persistence

Persistence is the confluence of people and philosophy. It is perseverance and a belief that you will reach a goal, even when you only have a foggy understanding of what

lies on the road ahead. For Dr. Ponder, there is a sense that when he was ready and needed information or skills to move to another level, someone appeared to provide what he needed.

Lillie instilled the belief that education was critically important to being able to move self and race forward. Education was so important to her that she insisted her children attend school when other families in their community kept theirs home to help in the fields. This didn't mean that her children were exempt from field and farm work. It instead meant that they had to do their chores before or after school. Dr. Ponder wanted to please his mother and wanted good grades, so he got up early, lit his kerosene lamp, and did his homework because this was the only time that the home was quiet. He learned farming and husbandry from his brothers – Ted stands out for teaching him to work hard and value the result of his effort. A sense of community, always honoring the family bond, knowing that when you do well it lifts everyone, treating others as you wish to be treated, that innovation and change were acceptable, and valuing formal and informal learning equally stand as surety and are crucial in the building of Dr. Ponder's character and his accomplishments.

Even in his youth, Dr. Ponder was a change maker. He took very seriously and often applied a farming and biblical lesson – there's a time for everything and nothing is impossible. He needed quiet to study, so he woke early to take advantage of the early morning quiet. Here is another example.

> I did not want to milk a cow. So, I took over going to get the mules morning and evening and cut wood for the fire for Frank, then he didn't object to milking and I didn't have to do it. This is important because I

> learned to read human nature. The other kids could have said, "I'm not going to milk if Henry doesn't have to." But to keep them from saying that, I fed the hogs, cut the wood, and got the mules morning and night. So, they said, "all I need to do is milk" and didn't object to milking at all.

In this incident, we see the young Dr. Ponder has developed and understanding of negotiation. He does not cajole or connive to get what he wants. Instead, he offers something of equal value in exchange for what he desires, aligning with his perceived philosophies.

Mentors

Dr. Ponder's talks about the ways that early mentors supported him and attributes his success primarily to his family and what he learned in grades 1 through 8. Ms. Brunner gave him the freedom to exercise curiosity, which she channeled using his interests to teach him to go beyond the simple answer. She supported and challenged him to find solutions and answers to his questions by teaching him to use basic research methods. She nurtured his need to know. Mr. Malone supported his understanding of community, encouraging him to share his enthusiasm for learning as a tutor for younger students and pushing him to excel. Both teachers nurtured his need to know and created a life-long teacher and learner.

Dr. Ponder recalls learning about the field of economics in a conversation with his commanding officer in Japan. The West Point-educated officer was interested in Dr. Ponder's goals after he returned to the United States, which included graduate school. Dr. Ponder's Bachelor's was in agriculture, and the officer, who had advanced degrees in

Economics, suggested this might be a good field for Dr. Ponder, who eventually blended them into a Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics.

Many mentors helped to guide, direct, and give support to Dr. Ponder. These persons include individuals from varied backgrounds and environments. His mother, family, those he encountered in K-20 and while working, people from his travels, and wisdom collected from his steady reading seem readily available and are constantly reshuffled as he responds to circumstances. Here are a few representations.

Dr. Ponder pledged Beta Kappa Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. at Langston University in Langston, Oklahoma, becoming a full member on December 11, 1948. He held the following roles in the fraternity: undergraduate chapter president, lay member to the executive council, and eventually General President. During the Langston period, he met Lionel Hodge Newsome, then the 22nd Alpha General President, about whom he says the following.

> He was a mentor of mine as an adult from college going forward. He was a great speaker, very articulate. He was tall and he walked straight. His demeanor showed that he was somebody who knew where he was going. That's the impression that he gave me. He was always immaculately dressed and was willing to talk to a young man. I never felt that I was interrupting him when I spoke to him because he gave me his attention, and I think he did that to everyone, not just me. It was just his way and that's the kind of person he was. He was a mentor who told me that he would be glad to help me in any way that he could, and I think that on my first presidential applications he was one of my references. I think I kept

> him there as long as he lived. I saw him on special occasions at Alpha meetings. Always we had things to say. When he was president of Central State, he invited me to be his commencement speaker, and when I had difficulty as a college president, I would call him and ask him for advice, and he always gave it to me.

When Dr. Ponder received his first job offer from Virginia State College, now University, he went to discuss the opportunity with his brother-in-law, Lee Cooper, who married his sister Dorothy. They discussed the questions he had about moving away from home and family, about moving to the deep South, and about his readiness to take on the role of a college professor. At the point where he told Cooper the salary was $4,800 per year; he was told to hurry up and leave Oklahoma because that much money would be good for his family and take him further down the road of becoming a college president.

Virginia paid for black students to attend graduate school in another state. Dr. Ponder says he always wanted his higher education experiences to be at different schools, so when his first Ph.D. program response came from Ohio State University, he called and spoke to his major professor, Dr. Richard U. Sherman, received an assistantship, and decided to attend. He found comradery with his peers by playing softball on the graduate team, sharing information about classes and professors, and working together to manage family and academic life. Dr. Ponder recalls the agreement he had with his professor that anything he put on Dr. Sherman's desk by 4:00 PM would be back on Dr. Ponder's desk by 9:00 AM the next morning. With the support of his wife's typing and Dr. Sherman, he completed the degree in two years, finishing and returning to Virginia State College in August of 1963.

Reuben Roosevelt McDaniel, Chair of Mathematics, university administrator, took a liking to young Professor Ponder and his family during their time at Virginia State College, now University, in Petersburg, Virginia. Dr. Ponder says the following:

> He was an Alpha, so that may have been the reason that he wanted to see a young Alpha man do something, be something. We had breakfast at his house many Sunday mornings and went from there to church. We joined the church where he was a member. We were just a part of his family for the time we were at Virginia State College. He gave me some good points of advice. Number, one he said, you should always be supportive of the president. Never be in a position where the president looks out his window and sees you lined up in a march protesting something that he has done. I remember him talking about that a long time before students started protesting, but I think at the time presidents had to be concerned about teachers not necessarily liking what they were doing and so forth. He wanted to make sure that I didn't become a part of that group of youngsters that thought they knew everything. He said to remember that you don't know everything.

Dr. McDaniel helped create community for Dr. Ponder and his family in Petersburg, Virginia. He taught Dr. Ponder to look at the underlying and openly held reasons for discord and protests on the college campus. McDaniel's lesson was ultimately about how to be a president sensitive to the concerns of stakeholders to prevent the need for protests and to remember the importance of finding the devil in the details, of digging to get as much information as possible so that your decisions are more likely to be sustainable.

Alabama Agricultural & Mechanical College President Richard David Morrison shared leadership with Dr. Ponder by demonstrating confidence and security in a subordinate's role and ability. Dr. Ponder says the following about Dr. Morrison:

> Dr. Morrison was a different kind of person. He wasn't an Alpha. He was a person who wanted to give me a chance to be something, so he took a chance and made me his Vice President of Academic Affairs when I'm sure no one else would have given me that job. And I mean that he actually let me be VP. He did not try to run the business of academic affairs. He let me do my job the way I saw fit. We would talk and he would tell me things that he wanted done. He would just say what he thought should be done then it was up to me to do it. He didn't tell me how to do it, so I had to figure out how to accomplish tasks and goals. I think this was the first time that I really understood what this poem says: "If you work for a man - in heaven's name work for him - do not work for him part of the time - but all of the time." He knew he could tell me to do something, and in my way, I would get it done. He was more blunt than I. I believed that I should always try to get people to go along with what needed to be done. He and I worked very well together because I kept the faculty in line – not in an ugly way – I always kept them knowledgeable about what was going on so that he didn't have that group to worry about and I think he appreciated that very much. He also welcomed the idea that the Ponder household could take on some of the social obligations with the college's guests. He was not jealous of those kinds of things, and in fact,

> he asked me to do many of them because he was not threatened in the least.

Dr. Morrison's leadership example showed Dr. what a secure leader could look like, and in doing so, also demonstrated the nascent belief that no single person, including the president, should stand in the way of institutional growth, development, and experience. Only a self-absorbed leader would permit harm to the institution, and this was truly an anathema.

The President's Mentors

The impact of mentors on Dr. Ponder's life and career are perhaps invisible to outsiders. These mentors are, however, very present for those inside his circle. He was able, by good performance, to create a good reputation, which led to increasing responsibility and ultimately to the presidency. The following are people who invested in Dr. Ponder as an HBCU college president.

Of his first presidential mentor, Dr. Benjamin Franklin Payton, Dr. Ponder says the following:

> Dr. Payton is really responsible for my first presidency. Payton came to Alabama A&M to make a speech. Founder's Day, I think. He'd left the Benedict College presidency to join the Ford Foundation as one of their program officers and was giving away a lot of money to black colleges. Dr. Morrison often asked that I host visitors to the campus. I picked Dr. Payton up from the airport, had him at our home for lunch, took him to the program, and took him back to the airport, so we had a lot of time for conversation. At some point, Payton asked me if I'd ever thought about

> being a college president, and of course I said yes, I'd love to get there. Then he asked me what I thought about Benedict College and if I would be interested in that job, I said yes. And he told me he'd see what he could do about it. He went back and put my name in for President of Benedict College. I got a call, had an interview, and they hired me primarily based on Dr. Payton's recommendation. Our relationship continued after I became President of Benedict College. I was able to get one of the two million-dollar awards from the Ford Foundation earmarked for HBCUs. We developed a relationship where when I went to New York, I'd stop in to see him and visit at his home in Connecticut. So when he applied for the presidency of Tuskegee Institute, now University, and the board members called me and asked me about him and his dealings when he was president of Benedict College, I gave him good marks because he had done a great job there. Even as peers we remained friends until his death. That was a good relationship. I have tremendous regard and appreciation for him.

Dr. Payton reinforced Dr. Ponder's sense of community by helping a colleague reach their goal. He also demonstrated that support for the institution you lead is not diminished because you no longer serve there. He showed clearly that the good of the institution should remain ever present.

Of a long-time president who served as mentor, he makes the following observation:

> Milton King Curry, Jr. was president at Bishop College when I became president of Benedict College. He had served there for a long time. I had

tremendous respect for him. He was still doing amazing things and a great job. When I had difficulties, I would call him, and he would give me suggestions. I did most of what he told me to do, and it worked out just fine. I consider him as an adult and career mentor, and he was good at it. He never held back when I had something to ask him. He always gave me straightforward advice and we remained friends until his death.

Dr. Ponder was also inspired by the mentoring of two legendary HBCU leaders, Drs. Frederick Douglass Patterson and Benjamin Elijah Mayes. Each man took a liking to Benedict College's new president and offered insight about presidential leadership. In the following excerpts, Dr. Ponder describes his engagement with each man.

Frederick Patterson was the founder of the United Negro College Fund and had been President of Tuskegee Institute, before that. He took a liking to me, and I took a liking to him, and when we'd go to UNCF President's Meetings at the retreat in Cappahosic, Virginia, I would go up to his log cabin and visit with him. I consider him a mentor. He taught me about fundraising. He had a UNCF program where insurance companies helped HBCUs invest money. The HBCU needed to place $200,000 in an account, then borrow $200,000 from the insurance companies, which was then invested and became $5,000,000 over 20 years. I got two of these grants for Benedict College.

Dr. Patterson asked me to go with him while he was soliciting funds from insurance companies, and I went. I noticed that what we decided to present sometimes wasn't what he decided to talk about, and I asked him what

happened. He said, ‘Henry what you have to do is watch the people and read the expressions on their faces and when you see an expression that says they don't like what you're saying then you need to start talking about something else. Don't keep talking about something they are not interested in.’ So, I learned from him that you go there prepared, and if what you thought was going to work doesn't work, then you need to have something else that you can go to as an alternative. I learned to read facial expressions and body language while talking with people. I think that if anything helped me to become the successful fundraiser that I am, it was listening and talking with Dr. Patterson. Patterson was just good at what he was doing, and I appreciated that. I always called him when I had a question about fundraising, and he'd give me the straight stuff on it.

About Dr. Mayes, Dr. Ponder says the following:

I consider Dr. Mayes the grandfather of HBCU presidents. When I came in, he had already retired from being a president and he was doing other things. But he was on the Benedict College Board, and I had the privilege to call him and ask him questions about just different things. He always gave me good management advice about how to run the college, how to take care of personal grievances that people might have, and how to let faculty members have something to say about what was going on. So, he was the person I talked with every now and then when I had a problem that I thought needed his expertise. This was especially helpful when I had problems with the ministers. Dr. Mayes helped me walk through these

quite a bit because he was a minister, and he knew a lot more about them than I did. He helped me bring around the ministers who were opposed to me being President at Benedict College.

These men, Mayes and Patterson, offered a fully packed tool set and poured knowledge from the fount of their experiences into Dr. Ponder. Patterson taught fundraising and reinforced the lessons about people Dr. Ponder learned as 4-H Club games leader. Mays taught how to manage institutional structure and conflict and reinforced the concept that sharing information leads to better outcomes because people feel part of the decision-making process.

Dr. Ponder has a deeply ingrained sense of presidential responsibility that, coupled with creative envisaging, has helped him craft unique ways of managing dilemmas. He also believes that personnel action is not the best option for solving dilemmas. Here is an example of how these values come together. At Benedict College, students were not passing entry-level mathematics, which meant reduced enrollment in upper-level courses, fueling related dilemmas. The department created study halls and tutoring was available, but students simply did not pass. Eventually, decreased enrollment and static faculty numbers created questions about the viability of the then current configuration of the mathematics department. Among the ideas considered were decreasing full-time math faculty, hiring more tutors, creating mandatory math lab courses, and requiring mandatory study hall style tutoring. Dr. Ponder's challenge was to find a solution that did not require firing faculty while improving students' success in mathematics. Here is his take on what happened.

At Benedict College, the math teachers were considered the worst teachers on campus. I would say fully 70% or more of every entering freshman class flunked mathematics. The teachers were teaching math. They were doing a good job of teaching math, one hour, three days a week. That's the way they taught it. Now you've heard this, and I think it is true, that if what you are doing is not giving you the desired results, do something else. That was what I was trying to get the math teachers to do.

Now based on my experience in the Army, I came up with an idea. In the Army, you bring in this set of recruits, students, young men and women, from all walks of life. Some have never had a rifle in their hands. Now they're draftees in the Army, where the major weapon you're going to use is a rifle. You've just seen pictures of it. You've never really seen one. Now the Army must teach you how to use that weapon and the Army has a method that works. This is the method. You come into a classroom and sit eight people around a table. In the middle is a replica of the rifle you're going to use in combat. Every part in it can be removed. Every part that moves on the weapon can be taken off. You have the rifle sitting there dismantled. The teacher standing up front has a rifle too; he says, "this is the barrel" and lifts it up. He tells each group to pick up the barrel of their weapon. Then he says, "this is the butt, pick this piece up." As they are searching for the butt, he tells them, "The bullet comes out this end of the barrel. This, the butt end, fits against your shoulder. This is the magazine. Pull that out. This is the bolt, it goes here." and he pulls it out and shows you. Now he says, "Let's put it back together." And he gives you the order while demonstrating how to do it. So, the

students start trying to put the rifle back together and cannot. So, all day long, they sit taking that rifle apart and putting it back together until at week's end most could do this blindfolded. I thought, "maybe math can be taught this way."

Instead of going to math one hour per day, three days per week, let's teach math all day for six weeks. That's all you have, just math. Do math, go there and stay all day, every day with the teacher teaching you math from one plus one up.

Of course, change is difficult. There were complaints by faculty and students. In fact, the math teachers rebelled saying, "you can't teach mathematics like that." I asked, "why can't you teach math like this?" They replied, "We've never done that." Students were flunking consistently doing what you are doing, so let's try something new. Now once the math teachers started doing this, at the end of the first semester a math teacher was voted the best teacher on campus for the first time in the history of the university.

Now one of the math teachers came to me and said, "Mr. President, you just can't teach math like that." I said, "Let's give it a try." He said, "No I can't do that." And I said, "Dr. Jones, I understand your problem, and I see you really have a dilemma. This is the way we are going to teach mathematics at Benedict College. Your choice is whether you are going to be one of the teachers." That ended the conversation, he left, and he taught math – at Benedict College.

In this example we see the full complement of Dr. Ponder's leadership skill; problem recognition, innovatively crafted solution, and transitional perspective management for stakeholders directed toward institutional betterment. Dissention is met by the man in the mirror with respectful understanding and a clear choice is presented

without rancor. Dr. Ponder says this is one of the most difficult and best decisions of his career; a decision that improved the bottom line, faculty satisfaction and recognition, student success and institutional achievement.

Counter Narrative

Dr. Ponder's perceptions of his leadership development, leadership style and leadership experience are discussed in the preceding narrative. The themes of people, philosophies and persistence offer insight into what lies at the core of his strengths, the basis of strategies he used to solve institutional dilemmas. What follows is a different perspective of his leadership surrounding the Tucker and Davis dilemma gleaned from archival sources.

Revisionist histories can be kind. There are more than a few anecdotal instances of dissonant and/or compartmentalized recollections that might omit what some might term "rough patches." For Dr. Ponder, who is remembered by many as a good-humored, even-tempered, and fair leader, there were those who disagreed vehemently with his leadership and sought his removal. And, while the proliferation of Votes of No Confidence in U.S. higher education – from an average of three per year in 2000 to more than 17 per year by 2017 – have arguably diminished their power, this controversy occurred in Dr. Ponder's career in 1988 when such a vote might have been career-ending and, more, when the specter of it was absolutely publicly corrosive to both the reputations of the institution and its president (*WSJ*, Douglas Belkin, May 19, 2018).

In spring of 1987, nearly three years into Dr. Ponder's presidency at embattled Fisk University, a very real scandal involving fiscal malfeasance and alleged sexual harassment came to light. After an internal investigation, the administrators of the

university's financial aid office were fired in December 1987 for engaging in a complex scheme of falsifying financial aid documents and extorting financial kickbacks and/or alleged (but never proven) sexual favors from students. Compounding the revelations about these employees was the fact that Dr. Ponder brought both men with him from his prior post at Benedict College, and both were not only trusted employees but also personal friends.

The university's Board chair, Timothy B. Donaldson, raised questions about the dismissals and the underlying issues stating he was "…not satisfied with the answers we have received" (Wheeler-Stewart, *The Tennessean*, March 1, 1988). In March 1988, Mr. Donaldson and two other Board members – all Fisk alumni – publicly resigned from the Board, citing the scandal and its handling by Dr. Ponder. Mr. Donaldson said: "[t]here are some who feel that questioning Dr. Ponder is an attack on the university. I am not attacking anyone. However, if something is wrong, I have a duty as chairman of the board to admit there is a problem and straighten it out" (Wheeler-Stewart, *The Tennessean*, March 1, 1988). In the article, Dr. Ponder conveys for the first time to media how students were involved in the scheme. I asked whether the Board was aware of the details provided in the article. He replied affirmatively, saying that the Board got a full download on the internal investigation and the dismissals at its first-quarter meeting.

For months, the local papers – *The Tennessean* and *The Nashville Banner* – ran daily stories. By April, Mr. Donaldson tells reporters of *The Tennessean* that "…the problem with Fisk is that very few board members have a comprehensive picture of the financial plight of the university," which is due, he says "to the lack of candor and accountability." After receiving a petition for Dr. Ponder's resignation signed by 350 of

Fisk's then 600 students, Mr. Donaldson called for a special Board meeting to assess the request, which read: "This petition is submitted in support of your request for the resignation of President Henry Ponder. We feel he is not performing adequately or professionally." The article states that "[s]tudents say Ponder and his administration are insensitive to students and provide few answers to their questions about university operations." Further, it states that "[t]here also are students on campus who say Ponder is doing a good job and should have strong support from students and alumni." (*The Tennessean*, April 18, 1988).

In an article titled "Ponder fears dispute's effect on fund raising," Dr. Ponder discusses the effects of constant negative publicity on the institution's, and subtly, mostly by implication, on his own career. "I made a decision to come here in 1984 because I felt Fisk University was too important to higher education to even entertain the thought of closing its doors." Then he added: "I still feel Fisk is important and I am not considering leaving this university" and "… in all my professional career, this is the first time I have been accused of being insensitive to students." (Wheeler-Stewart, *The Tennessean*, April 5, 1988).

The Fisk Board of Trustees did not vote against Dr. Ponder, who remained at the helm until 1994 (Blum, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 27, 1988). They, in fact, supported him through the scandal, which ultimately included a formal federal investigation by the U.S. Attorney's Office and the IRS). The two terminated employees faced criminal proceedings and received charges but not the university or its president, Dr. Ponder. In May of 1988, the Board, led by new chair Cecilia Adkins, released a public statement that the disaffected Board members along with the president of the

Alumni Association has created "their own special brand of crisis by making attacks that were damaging to Fisk." It went further to state that "[t]hese four people have two goals, one to take control of the Fisk board and second, to discharge President Henry Ponder" (Wheeler-Stewart, *The Tennessean*, May 17, 1988). Media coverage – print and television – which included an above-the-fold story in *The New York Times* in April 1988, died down once the federal investigation uncovered no new information about the university or its leadership. From that point, news outlets returned to stories of transformation and fundraising that had been their focus prior to 1988.

Conclusion

A portrait is not a snapshot. A portrait is an attempt by the artist to create an image that resonates with the subject but may not be their exact replica. Similarly, with a portraiture study what the researcher attempts to uncover is the essence or core of what is investigated. In this way, the narrative offered provides understanding about who Dr. Ponder is, what guides him as an HBCU leader.

This story is about the leadership development, and career of Dr. Henry Ponder. It seeks to offer insights about his understanding of his motivations and the intrinsic values that guide his career. These are the people who taught, guided and supported him; the philosophies that informed his decision making; and the persistence, grounded in the combination of people and philosophy.

Leadership is a like double-edged blade, sometimes cutting with other times cutting against the grain. The Fisk University scandal focused on the malfeasance of the director and assistant director of Financial Aid is used to illustrate the alternate narrative of Dr. Ponder's leadership. This demonstrates perceptions of his leadership contrary to

his perspectives. This counter-telling is not unusual as history and memory bolster one another, each possessing part of the story that the other may not (White, 1998).

CHAPTER FIVE
Dis-Cover

There are lots of ways that I thought the process of writing a dissertation would end. I did not and could not have imagined the reality. The year 2020 has been one of changes. As a culture we are reluctant to change; in my lifetime rarely making significant change without violence. Nearing the end of a unique process, I have created a document for the specific purpose of making a deposit into the bank of knowledge. While I anticipated some of the transactions necessary to accrue capital, I had no idea how vast the investment would be. Time, talent, and treasure have all been poured in. This document is a work of dedication, persistence, and above all, critical love. I have joined dedication to the cause of research by black, brown, indigenous, and other people of color about themselves and their culture from their perspective in their own words, performed without apology or in receipt of violence by those who would proclaim this work "navel studies." I and mine have the right to be and to be heard. We have and will contribute to the life of knowledge production, higher education, this nation, and the world, but most of all we contribute to our own existence, our right to be.

I began the process thinking of leadership as a mechanical skill; a process existing to harness various capitals – human, symbolic, structural and political – to improve processes leading to a defined success. While this is one way of looking at leadership, and I shall do so shortly, it is not what was excavated in the process of discovery. I am thinking about the distance I have traveled to get to this point, Chapter 5 of my dissertation. While I started with a simplistic understanding of the process, nothing about this project was a simple. Ideas that seemed right for knowledge production became clumsy and cumbersome tools, hammers attempting to uncover delicate awareness. There

are both clear and cloudy perimeters in this quest for knowing. Sometimes the answers are in the rabbit holes or treed with the squirrels; so, nothing like Alice, here is what I discovered in Wonderland.

This study was crafted as a vehicle to delve deeply into the leadership of one HBCU president. I proposed using Bolman and Deal's four frames – structural, human resource, political, and symbolic – to talk about the actions of a leader, reckoning that the frames could offer an adequate description and perhaps an evaluative understanding of leadership. This, I discovered is possible; behaviors of and actions taken by leaders can be categorized in this manner, providing a standard, perhaps generalizable and replicable image of "leader" and "leadership".

Bolman and Deal

Bolman and Deal's four frames is the theoretical framework I selected for this study. My engagement with the theory began in the classroom and continued as I found myriad uses and citations of this theory in my academic reading. Perhaps because I have an MBA, I also felt some affinity with the frames to describe both organization types, leadership style, and a leaders' actions; finding the structural, political, human resource, and symbolic frames useful as I made meaning of the situations I encountered during my coursework.

The theory consolidates several organizational leadership schools into four perspectives, proposing they are sufficient to interpret and analyze leadership (Bolman & Deal, 1984). The propose that the most effective leaders utilize multiple frames as the negotiate their organizational responsibilities (Bolman & Deal, 1984). The savviest leaders will move between frames when dealing with the same perspective so that they

can achieve a multi-dimensional perspective which should translate into better decisions (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

The study shows that Dr. Ponder moves between frames. Utilizing the structural to plan and evaluate rules and regulations, and sometimes bases assessments on task completion; this is a strong frame. The human resource frame is perhaps the frame you expect to be his strongest based on his philosophies and commitment to doing the least harm possible to workers. The site of his strongest frame is in fact, the political as he advocates for HBCU funding and negotiates with people for the good of his institution. The symbolic frame which synthesizes symbols, culture, ceremonies and culture to create a sense of commonality among people is relevant to Dr. Ponder as he deals with the organizations many rituals, ceremonies, and rites of passage.

Birnbaum (1992) offers an idea of cognitive complexity that describes leaders who view their organizations through multiple frames have alternate ways of considering problems and a range of responses and are better able to recognize and interpret alternate realities (Bensimon et al., 1989; Thompson, 2000). There is, however, a gap or space where the mechanics of the four frames seems less facile in managing ideological and interpersonal precepts of leadership.

Inserting Servant Leadership

One value of the study is that servant leadership offers an important way to understand this characteristics of Dr. Ponder's leadership perspective and practice that Bolman and Deal's four frame theory does not engage. Servant leadership was first presented by Robert Greenleaf in a 1970 essay. The crux of his model is the leader

valuing their connection between themselves, the employees, and the organization (Greenleaf, 1998).

Servant-leadership is also described as ethical and caring practices that center the employee, involves them in decision making, strives to maintain quality of organization life, seeks and often achieves a deeper level of interpersonal and organizational trust (Joseph and Winston, 2005; Sharif and Scandura; 2014). This structure of leadership theory permits consideration of factors like a leader's guiding principles to become part of their leadership profile.

In this study the ability to provide space for engagement in authentic relationships and work from a framework that presents as a part of leadership style is critical to Dr. Ponder. There is also his connection to philosophies designed to produce interpersonal engagement – open door policy and participatory democracy – and the man in the mirror which leads him to daily introspection and a commitment to treat people the way that he wants to be treated. These guiding principles are also embedded in the Judeo-Christian lexicon and find space in servant-leadership that is not available in the four frames. The sense of valuing people to the extent that you, as leader will commit to altering decisions based on your credo or ideology is also existent in servant-leadership.

Greenleaf (1998) states that in institutions, including higher education, coercion or manipulation are used as motivation. Servant leaders he continues are persuaders, dedicated to the integrity of the institution, know their way around, and over time garner respect for their judgement and become trusted members of the community. This explains much of Dr. Ponder's leadership style, especially never allowing any person or unit to become more important than the institution. Servant leadership is thus capable of

embracing these intangible elements of Dr. Ponder's leadership perspective, and style that fill a niche vacant in Bolman and Deal's four frames.

The Study and HBCUs

The research study conforms to the literature about HBCUs finding resonance in understanding of institutional history, students, and the presidency. HBCU history is about the dedication of people to create greatness with few resources and lots of resilience. During his presidencies, Dr. Ponder often faced situations requiring creatively crafted solutions to institutional dilemmas. He depended on intuition, college staff, mentors and sometimes stakeholder support to keep the institutions running. His challenges were often based in financial, governance, student enrollment, deferred maintenance, technology, and curriculum; to meet these challenges he had the support of good administrators, staff, and faculty.

Fundraising is a strong skill for Dr. Ponder, learned from Dr. Fredrick Patterson, founder of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF). Dr. Patterson began a sort of apprenticeship for him, training him for major fundraising initiatives. This training gave him fundraising skills that worked successfully throughout his career.

An innovator Dr. Ponder initiated alternate ways of getting things done. For example, when faced with low passing rates of entry-level students in mathematics, he melded his military training learning how to maintain a rifle, sitting at a table several hours each day until each person at the table knew the skill. The college began teaching math for six hours each day for a six-week period. As a result, students began passing math, math faculty were acknowledged as great teachers and the math department regained good standing in the campus community. This example is important because

HBCUs have a disproportionate focus on successful instruction (Allen et al., 2007). have embraced the role of providing compensatory study for their students. Dr. Ponder's solution was fiscally sound, no new resources or workers needed, and improved the campus climate by eliminating the negative perceptions.

Dr. Ponder was a first-generation, low-income student. He arrived at Langston University, an 1890 Morrill Act college like many others with the supported by his family. He also arrived prepared to partake in the great educational contract, believing the mantra of his mother - education is something no one can take from you, get as much as you can. While he had no clear idea how education would change his life, he came prepared to participate.

HBCUs exist in a system of social oppression. Their existence is disruptive of systems of oppression creating challenges that unite them (Allen et al., 2007). Dr. Ponder's experiences with mentoring during pre-presidential years and with peer-mentors thereafter provide support for this at the executive level. He credits he support he received from seated and retired presidents during his first presidency with shortening his learning curve and smoothing his path.

Finally, this research contributes a qualitative in-depth study to the repository of new knowledge. The study provides access to Dr. Ponder's personal story of leadership development. Allowing the reader to understand his perceptions of his strengths, strategies for success in crisis and lessons learned throughout his career.

Implications

One of the most interesting complications of this research is found in what I could not access. At 92, Dr. Ponder has outlived many people whose perspectives could have

provided support for this study. My contact with the libraries at each institution produced less information than expected. It seems that the bane of HBCUs, limited funding, has considerable impact – limiting library staff and digitalization of information. It would have been useful to the study to have traveled to each campus to do archival research in each library. Additionally, I as the researcher, experienced participant bias as persons contacted did not wish to be interviewed or seemed to have crafted revised versions of their engagement with Dr. Ponder. Shifting from disagreement and discord to agreement and harmony, even in instances where the discord was documented.

Data confounded by time's passage

I spoke casually on several occasions with Dr. Reavis L. Mitchell, Jr who served as Executive Director to Dr. Ponder at Fisk University to gain insight into the Dr. Ponder's time at Fisk University. Our conversations meandered from the dissertation process to his remembrances of Fisk in the 1980s. We were looking forward to his role as a reviewer of my data and analysis and as a reader for the dissertation. Dr. Mitchell held both administrative and academic positions across his career including Director of Institutional Advancement, Dean of Academic Affairs, Dean of the School of Humanities and Behavioral Science, Professor Emeritus and Fisk University Historian Emeritus. He was collecting documents in preparation for our next conversation which we planned to go through together. Unfortunately, after an illness, Dr. Mitchell died mid-June of 2020.

Considerations for Further Research

There is much to be learned about the leadership development, styles and experiences of HBCU presidents. Though qualitative research does not lend itself to replication, there are many ways that tangential and similar studies could inform the body

of research about HBCU presidents, leadership development, and leadership style. There are also recommendations for scholarship to acknowledge the contributions of black women who are often unacknowledged in a leadership narrative. Here are several suggestions for future research.

1. The study shows women were mentors and critical supporters of Dr. Ponder throughout his life, yet most of the mentors he identified were men. A deeper qualitative exploration of these less visible critical mentorship relationships is important.

2. This study focused on the leadership development and career of one black male HBCU president. Further research could prepare in-depth studies about the leadership development, styles, and career experience of black women HBCU presidents.

3. Investigate leadership theory and HBCU presidents to determine which theories are utilized and an understanding of pertinent differences by gender, across institution type and between public and private institutions' leaders.

4. This study's focus is a 92-year old president emeritus. It is important to see in-depth narrative studies of younger HBCU presidents to determine how their experience of both the position and their leadership development is similar or differs using the changing political, social and economic context and landscape of Higher education.

Concluding Thoughts

There are many ways to investigate and learn about higher education leadership. The qualitative method provides an opportunity for close engagement with subjects. The portraiture research methodology offers an opportunity for co-production throughout the research process. This, though daunting was an important experience for both of us.

Dr. Henry Ponder told me his story. Our excavation of his lived experience was a deep dive into a thick, richly textured life. The resulting narrative attempts to present the essence of this leader, providing insights about his leadership development, people who taught, mentored and supported him and descriptions of some of his experiences as an HBCU president.

There is something about learning from an elder that has a different tenor than learning from a peer. This is something that Dr. Ponder said to me as he was speaking about being mentored by Dr. Curry, Dr. Mayes, and Dr. Patterson. What I had a chance to do was listen and absorb not just the words but to experience the changes in speech patterns and body language as he moved through temporal space that seemed to accompany many of his early memories. This cultural capitol exposed parts of Dr. Ponder I likely would never have seen. This is the magic, the joy and creativity that is the research process.

Appendix

Interview Questions

Life Perspectives – Interview Segment One

- What are your life experiences?
  - Where did you grow up?
  - Who were your parents and siblings? Your friends?
  - What was your birth order and your role(s) within the family?
  - What was your family's belief about and value of education?
  - Who were your childhood role models and mentors?
  - How and when did you decide what you wanted to do as an adult?
  - Beyond your career, what are the most significant life decisions you made?
- Education
  - Describe your primary and secondary schooling.
    - Possible prompts include physical & organizational structure, leadership experiences, academic performance, and mentoring.
  - How did you decide to go to college and what obstacles did you face?
  - Describe your college experience.
    - Possible prompts: academic, like choice of major; social, like choice of clubs and organizations; career/professional, like mentoring and offices held.
  - How did you decide to go to graduate school and what obstacles did you face?
  - Describe your graduate school experience.
  - What other educational experiences aided your career and leadership style?

- Leadership
    - What is your first leadership memory?
    - Were you encouraged to be a leader?
    - What experiences made you understand yourself as a leader?
    - How did you develop your leadership skills?
    - What is your leadership style?
    - What are your leadership challenges?
    - What is most important for leadership?
    - What is most detrimental to leadership?
- How were you mentored during your career?
    - How did you meet your mentors?
    - Did you have peer mentors?
    - What purpose did mentoring serve?
    - At what points was mentoring most important?
- Is there anything you want to clarify or add to this discussion?

Career Perspectives – Interview Segment Two

- What was your career path?
    - How did you transition from the professoriate to academic administration?
    - What were your presidential search experiences at each institution?
    - Have there been opportunities for you to move out of HBCUs into other collegiate institutions? If yes, when and why did you choose to stay?
- Leadership
    - What is the most important leadership characteristic?

- What is the most important leadership tool?
- What is the hardest thing for a leader to do?
- How do you describe your leadership style?
- What is your decision-making process?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses as a leader?
- What has been your most significant leadership challenge?
- How do leaders manage change? Please provide an example(s) from your career.
- Have you experienced the need to alter or change your leadership style?
  - If so, what were the circumstances and to what leadership style did you shift?

- As President
  - What was your primary role as an HBCU President?
  - What happened during a typical day as HBCU President?
  - What were your primary challenges as an HBCU President?
  - What were the most significant societal challenges for you as an HBCU President?
  - Were the most significant organizational challenges externally or internally based? Please describe.
  - What was most personally challenging for you as president of each organization?
  - What was most professionally challenging for you as president of each organization?

- How did you manage and meet these roles and challenges?
- What was your greatest success at each organization you led as president?
- What was a challenge that you left unfinished or a decision you would change for each organization you led as president?
- Did you find significant issues not presented during the search process once you became president?
  - If yes, please explain one for each institution where this occurred.
  - What is your perspective regarding why or how this occurred?

- Is there anything you want to clarify or add to this discussion?

HBCU Perspectives – Interview Segment Three

- HBCU Presidency
  - What are the primary roles and challenges for today's HBCU President?
    - Has this changed over time? If yes, in what ways?
  - What skills are critical to the HBCU presidency?
  - What internal issues most frequently derail an HBCU President?
  - What external issues most frequently derail an HBCU President?
  - How important is fundraising for the contemporary HBCU President?
    - What recommendations would you make for fundraising success?
  - Who is the HBCU president you most admire and respect? Why?
  - Are mentoring and peer-to-peer networking important to HBCU presidents?
    - If so, how and why?
  - How important is it for HBCU presidents to seek mentees?

- What recommendations or suggestions would you make to those interested in becoming an HBCU president?

- HBCUs as institutions
  - Why are HBCUs important?
  - What are some unique contributions HBCUs make to the American higher education?
  - How do you perceive the impact of diversity and inclusion on HBCUs?
  - What is the role of the HBCU today?
    - Has this role changed? If so, in what ways?
  - How can HBCUs survive with their institutional mission intact?
    - What resources must we bring to bear?
  - What is the most critical change that HBCUs must make in the 21st century?
- Is there anything you want to clarify or add to this discussion?

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