

**FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SUCCESS OF AN AFRICAN AMERICAN
COLLEGE PRESIDENT**

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DEDICATION

God is good and I thank Him for his many blessings. My faith has guided and continues to guide me. To my late mother Judith and late sister Artia, I wish you could here to celebrate this moment with me. I know you are both smiling down, with ultimate pride. Thank you to my late Aunt Janice for exposing me to a life greater than I knew. To my late grandmother Josephine Garland Small, I finally did it. You were always my champion. This is for you Willie, Bessie, JoAnn, Clarence, Curtis, and Mary your support in big and small ways got me here.

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ABSTRACT

This narrative study examines the experiences of Dr. George Wright, a successful African American college president. Dr. Wright had 14-year career at the helm of Prairie View A&M University, an Historically Black College or University (HBCU), where he changed the trajectory of the institution. His story begins with seminal experiences in the segregated schools of Lexington, Kentucky and continues to Duke University, where he became the first African American to receive a Ph.D. in History. In this study, Dr. Wright relates critical moments in his childhood, educational, and career experiences that put him on a path to success. This narrative is a message of hope, redemption, and possibility with important lessons about overcoming significant obstacles to reach the pinnacle of higher education leadership. Several lessons emerge from Dr. Wright's narrative when considered alongside the theory and literature on leadership. These include a focus on mentoring, the importance of relationships, and recognizing and taking advantage of opportunities. Each aided in Dr. Wright's success and were foundational pillars for his presidency. Findings and insights from this study are offered as recommendations for developing and sustaining a successful career as an African American college president.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Leaders (e.g., college or university presidents) are critical to the success or failure of their organization. Traditionally, presidents are seen as the standard bearers who create the visions for their institutions (Blumenstyk, 2014). Additionally, they are charged with fundraising, bringing in new campus resources, connecting with faculty and staff, and building rapport with existing governing board members. Higher education leaders are responsible for a plethora of functional duties designed to keep their institutions moving forward. These include supporting the academic mission of their institution, fostering and stewarding the financial stability of the campus, and managing and promoting student life activities. Thacker and Freeman (2021) found that while expectations for external engagement have risen, their length of time in office has decreased. When leading such a varied enterprise, presidents must be adept at managing multiple priorities. Harris and Ellis (2017) noted that university presidents are facing competing demands as they successfully lead their organizations. In this study, I chronicle a successful African American college president and through narrative inquiry tell the stories of his successes.

According to *Inside Higher Education* (2017) the percentage of Presidents of Color increased to 16.8% in 2016, up from 12.6% in 2011 and 13.6% in 2006. A significant amount of this increase came from more African Americans selected as presidents. The percentage of African American presidents increased to 7.9% in 2016 from 5.9% five years prior. The percentage of Hispanic presidents remained relatively flat moving from 3.9% to 3.8%. Whereas the percentage of American Indian/Alaskan Native presidents declined to 0.7% in 2016 from 0.8% in 2011. The percentage of Asian American/Pacific Islander presidents increased modestly

to 2.3% from 1.5%. Although the majority of the research centers on the experiences of White presidents, this study adds to the literature on African American university leaders.

Data in the American College Presidency Report (American Council on Education (ACE; 2023) indicates the following: Among all college Presidents of Color, 13.2% identified as Black/African American; 5.7% as Hispanic or Latino/a; 2.8% as Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander; and 2.8% as multiracial. No other race or ethnicity was reported at more than 1.5%. Comparatively, the number of Black/African American presidents has nearly doubled since the 2017 release, which found they held 7.9% of positions among respondents. Prior research focusing on presidential derailment have studied community college leaders (Touzeau, 2010), leaders of research institutions (Carver, 2009), and private institutions (Bogue et al., 2013; McNeal, 2009); however, there are few studies that have examined the successes of African American college leaders (see Alai et al., 1990; Allen et al., 2000; Flowers & Jones, 2003; Jackson, 2003). Therefore, this study examined the factors associated with the successes of one African American college president.

ACE reported in the *American College Presidency* (2007) presidential leadership is still less diverse than faculty and other administrative staff. The percentage of presidents with underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds increased from 8.1% in 1986 to 13.6% in 2006; however, this small increase is mitigated when minority serving institutions (MSIs) are disaggregated from the data decreasing to 10%. Kim and Cook (2012) reported that since 2006 the percentage of college presidents who identify as People of Color has continued to decrease. *Inside Higher Ed* (year) reported of the 329 leaders colleges hired in 2019–20, 256 or 78% identified as White, 14.6% identified as Black/African American, 4% identified as Hispanic/Latino/a, and 3% identified as Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander. Even that

represents modest upward movement from the last American College President study (2017), when 83% of presidents identified as White. Sparkman (2021) noted a significant number of all administrative positions including university presidents and chief academic officers identify as White. When considering leadership, a lack of diversity and differing perspectives limit the effective decision-making process (Oikelome, 2017).

Problem Statement

A significant body of literature exists on leadership success in the for-profit business sector. Tropman and Shaefer (2004) stated “a good deal of scholarly work has been undertaken to examine these problems in both the government and for-profit sectors, less attention has been paid to these issues in non-profit human services organizations” (p. 167). This includes presidential successes in the academy. Numerous studies have produced scholarship higher education leadership. For example, Birnbaum (1992) conducted research on higher education leadership and Bryman (2007) identified 13 forms of leader behavior associated with leadership effectiveness in higher education. Much of the research on leadership in the academy has concentrated on older, White males (Holmes, 2008), while also noting the need for diversification in academy.

There is minimal literature that examined success based upon salient personal characteristics of the president. Furthermore, Turner and Grauerholz (2017) found that there were not enough developmental or leadership programs to help prepare African Americans for the role of president or to create opportunities for African American leaders to prepare for advancement into the presidency. In an effort to contribute to the limited literature on the success of higher education leaders, this study focused on examining factors that influence the successes of African American college leaders. It is important to understand the factors that aid in the

success of African American colleges leaders to recognize how the intersection of the leader's characteristics and decision making affects their success in the role of the presidency.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors and events associated with the success of an African American college president. This study focused on the experiences of one successful president using narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Furthermore, this study may serve as a resource for aspiring African American college presidents and for boards of trustees to assist them in understanding what aided this president in his success.

Significance of the Study

A review of the literature indicates a paucity of data collected and analyzed on the success of African American college presidents. Few researchers have delved into the topic of African American academic leadership, and in particular, the presidency. Hernandez and Longman (2020) studied the idea of sponsorship as a means to prepare Leaders of Color for higher education roles. Sponsorship in this context is a distinct leadership tool, much like mentoring where seasoned leaders help more junior level leaders navigate the work environment. According to Cooney and Martin (2021), effective mentoring is a key to for the preparation of prospective college presidents. However, little is known about the factors that lead to their success or about the implications it has on their institutions. Less is known about African American leadership in academic organizations, and in particular, the presidency. Understanding these factors, both broadly related to presidential success and issues that might be more specific to African American male success, has implications for multiple stakeholders, including current and future Administrators of Color, faculty, staff and alumni. There is some research by Guillory (2001) that recommends strategies for aspiring Black administrators of PWIs. Aspiring leaders of

color may deeply benefit from this study and this research could be a useful tool as they navigate their careers as higher education leaders. It also can serve as a resource, in some respects, to assist them in understanding how to craft their tenures as college presidents.

Aspiring African American presidential candidates and various institutional governing bodies, such as the board of trustees, may also benefit from this study. The potential candidate may be able to better evaluate the search process and determine beforehand if this is an institution where their success is a possibility (Klein & Salk, 2013). A significant amount of resources are utilized when searching for presidential leadership. Many institutions use executive search firms to help identify potential candidates. In addition, presidential success affects the fiscal climate of the institution and can have positive long-lasting effects (Barton, 2019). Positive press about the success of an institution can influence enrollment, faculty hiring, as well as fundraising and development efforts. The morale of the institution may also benefit. Finally, presidential success may bring a greater level of governmental or legislative support, especially for public institutions.

The board of trustees can perform a more exhaustive search, giving them an opportunity to directly identify factors that have contributed to the success of previous presidents and make attempts to replicate them. Furthermore, exploring the events that aided in the president's success can help the board highlight them and use it to garner greater support for the institution.

This study can serve as a resource for presidents and board of trustee members on what behaviors and actions contribute to the success of institutional leaders. Many universities with successful leaders experience positive press and publicity, increased funding opportunities from donors and funding agencies, and this positive press might aid in the recruitment and retention of faculty, staff and students. Also, presidential searches can be costly, if boards of trustees can

identify factors that aid in presidential success during the interview process, this may save time and money, especially for public institutions that rely on taxpayers' dollars.

Finally, this study may add to the body of knowledge on presidential success. This inquiry may aid potential university leaders in understanding what they can do to have a successful presidency, particularly those who identify as African American.

Design of the Study

This study employed the use of narrative inquiry methodology to examine the factors associated with the success of an African American college president. I conducted interviews and engaged in archival data analysis of documents (e.g., letters, newspaper articles) released by the university. Narrative inquiry is valuable when studying the stories people tell (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Research Questions

Based on the problem statement and purpose of study, the following research questions guided the study:

- RQ1: What are the experiences associated with the successes of an African American college president?
- RQ2: How can the factors associated with the success of an African American college president be used to better understand successful presidential leadership?

Theoretical Framework

McCall and Lombardo (1983) were some of the initial researchers to interview executives about the derailment of personnel in the United States. Their research and subsequent work from Leslie and Van Velsor (1996) led to the development of four common themes across success research. The themes include: (1) problems with interpersonal relationships; (2) failure to meet

business objectives; (3) inability to build or lead a team; and (4) inability to change or adapt during a transition. Bensimon et al., (1989) summarized the most prevalent leadership theories and their applicability to higher education leadership. They studied senior level leadership, which provided faculty greater understanding into higher education administrative processes. In the study of effective leadership in higher education, Bryman (2007) identified 13 forms of leader behavior that are associated with administrative effectiveness. These theories helped me view leadership both from a macro level (success) and then a micro level (African American) as I studied the participant's success factors and how it might compliment and differ from the literature.

The derailment themes generally aligned with the for-profit sector; however, previous research suggested that these themes might also apply to the success of college and university presidents (Trachtenberg et al., 2013). Bryman (2007) focused specifically on higher education leadership and African American higher education leadership respectively. Thus, these frameworks guided my study of examining the factors associated with the success of African American college presidents. Based on this research, my inquiry was designed to gauge the applicability of these themes as it related to African American college presidents.

Limitations of the Study

This study is largely based on the interpretations and vantage point of one successful president. Because the president was successful, there might be a tendency for the individual to recount situations and circumstances that will amplify their version of success. Another limitation is that this study exchanges the potential breadth of a quantitative study for depth of a qualitative study, so the researcher can get a deep understanding of the phenomenon. The aim of qualitative analysis is a detailed description.

The disadvantage of this approach is that findings cannot be applied to a larger population with the similar level of confidence as quantitative studies. This is because the findings of the research are not tested to discover whether they are statistically significant or due to chance. However, transferability, which is accomplished through a detailed description of the research process, allows the reader to determine if the results can be relatable to a similar setting or similar circumstances. Thus, while this study focused on the success of one African American president, some of this information can be used to chronicle the success of other academic leaders.

Delimitations of the Study

This study is delimited to the success experiences of one African American college president. It focused on one small four-year HBCU in the southern United States. I did not interview nor collect data with other administrators, trustees, or campus stakeholders. I intentionally did not interview others because I wanted to tell the president's stories of his successes. The study findings are presented from the president's viewpoint.

Definitions

I define the following terms as they are used throughout the study.

African American/Black – individuals who identify as a member of the racial or ethnic group that are United States citizens who are descendants from ancestry of the African diaspora. (Belgrave & Allison, 2006).

Presidential Success – a process by which a sitting university president has served for more than five years and departed the presidency of their own accord (Bryman, 2017).

Historically Black College or University (HBCU) – institutions of higher education in the United States that were established before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 with the intention of primarily serving the African American community (Hardy et al., 2019).

Presidential Derailment – an outcome by which a sitting university president departs from his or her position involuntarily, this can include contract non-renewal, forced resignation or resignation in lieu of firing (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996).

Presidential Success – A process by which a sitting university president has served for more than five years and departed the presidency of their own accord (Bryman, 2017).

Organization of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. In Chapter One, I introduced the study and included contextual information, the problem and purpose statements, and the guiding research questions. I also discussed the significance of the study, theoretical framework, and study limitations and delimitations. In Chapter Two, I review the relevant literature on derailment, higher education leadership, and African American higher education leadership. In Chapter 3, I present the methodology and methods/procedures employed to conduct the study including the research design, context/participant, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and my positionality. I discuss the findings in Chapter Four and present the implications for policy and practice in higher education and opportunities for future research in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 2:

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to identify factors associated with the success of African American college presidents. I begin the chapter with a review of the research on the development of African American leaders in higher education, Black male undergraduate success, and faculty as the primary feeder for the presidency and administrative leadership positions. This is followed by a review of the literature on African American presidential leadership in the higher education context. Next, success factors for African American presidents and the challenges they face are reviewed. I then review the literature on presidential derailment, which served as a guiding framework for this study.

Development of African American Leaders in Higher Education

The scholarly literature on higher education is robust as it relates to leadership characteristics and behaviors leading to senior leadership roles, more specifically the presidency. The need to diversify higher education administration mirrors the shifting demographics on college campuses (Flowers, 2003). However, researchers have identified a pathway issue for developing Leaders of Color, beginning with factors affecting Black male success in higher education institutions (Shapiro et al., 2017). This significantly affects faculty hiring and creates barriers that limit career advancement. In addition, much of the research on African American leadership centers on women in administrative roles with limited scholarship focusing on African American men in executive positions.

Black Male Undergraduate Pipeline

Scholars have noted that if academia is to increase the number of African American males in higher education leadership positions, the academy must look to Black male collegiate

pathways. Black males must not just have access to college, but they must be given the tools for success in their educational pursuits (Harper, 2012). Data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2021) indicated that 5.7% of the U.S. population identifies as Black male, while they comprise 4.4% of all males enrolled in colleges and universities in fall 2020. Shapiro et al. (2017) found Black students have the lowest six-year graduation rate of any demographic at 49.5% and the lowest graduation rate at 40% for all students at four-year institutions.

Hargrove and Kim (2013) contend higher education institutions and specifically predominantly White institutions (PWIs) often neglect the needs of their Black male students. While Black males at PWIs and HBCUs need familial support and peer relationships, students at PWIs frequently contend with racial battle fatigue, which many students at HBCUs do not experience at significant levels (Flowers, 2012). Bonilla-Silva and Peoples (2022) argued the experiences of People of Color at PWIs are typically by-products of racialized systems and structures and not simply implicit bias. Ultimately campuses need to create environments for Black male success by implementing policies and procedures that support their persistence (Boyd & Mitchell, 2018).

Scott and Sharp (2019) discovered Black male graduate students need slightly different interventions than undergraduates to succeed. Graduate students need positive social networks to support their cultural identity and beliefs. McCoy and Winkle-Wagner (2015) suggested for graduate students to persist to degree completion they need to increase their confidence as scholars, referred to as scholarly habitus or identity. Brooms (2018) outlined potential methods to encourage Black male success on campus, such as creating Black Male Initiatives (BMI) programs. The most important quality of BMIs is the ability to gain access to critical cultural and

social capital (Scott & Sharp, 2019; Wicker et al., 2023). Clark and Broom (2018) stressed the importance of self-authorship and the value of honoring students' voices as academia attempts to improve both research and practice.

The importance of the leadership pathway for African American men cannot be underscored enough. If higher education is truly invested in diversifying the compositional diversity of the presidency, academia must nurture and support that pathway.

African American Faculty Pathway

A major barrier to diversifying the presidency at PWIs is the lack of access to advancement pathways (Jones, 2014). A factor in the academic career trajectory for People of Color is the limited number of racially diverse faculty members who hold leadership roles on college campuses (Jackson, 2003; Moore & Herndon, 2003). This is significant given most college and university presidents advance from the faculty ranks, which is seen as the most direct route to the office. Louis et al. (2016) found Black faculty experience an inordinate number of microaggressions and racism in their jobs. They concluded departmental and university leaders must partner with Faculty of Color to address these issues to foster a more inclusive environment. Policies and procedures should be written to assist in diversifying academia. In turn, this may help fill the leadership pathway in higher education.

Wolfe and Freeman (2013) noted that inclusivity and sense of belonging are ranked consistently as major issues due to the continued underrepresentation of Faculty and Administrators of Color in the academy. Faculty of Color hold fewer tenure-track faculty positions compared to their White faculty colleagues (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). Researchers identified several significant reasons for this lack of diversity at the tenure-track faculty level including the small number of racially diverse graduate students, the paucity of qualified People

of Color who are candidates in faculty searches, and the presence of hiring policies and practices that are discriminatory in nature and career advancement procedures (Alai et al., 1990; Allen et al., 2000; Flowers & Jones, 2003; Jackson, 2003). Finally, Sherman (2021), theorized that mentorship and support often are misguided in the higher education partly because many leaders at PWIs gain their perspectives on Black men from the media or other sources.

The Administrative Pipeline

The limited research on African American administrators in higher education focuses on student affairs professionals (Holmes, 2004; Jackson, 2001; Watson, 2001) or leadership positions that are responsible for the diversity goals of the organization, such as multicultural affairs (Rolle et al., 2000). Conversely, not much is known about the development of academic administrators, their career trajectories, or their representation in the academy (Jackson, 2004). Briscoe and Freeman (2019) found that minimal mentoring or succession planning initiatives exist to assist in prepare African Americans for the role of president or to create equitable opportunities for African American administrators to ascend to the presidency.

Employment policies and practices in colleges and universities often hinder access and opportunities for aspiring African American leaders in higher education (Marable, 2003). Research on the perspectives of administrative Leaders of Color described their experiences as outliers and not as potential sources for theorizing based on their experiences (Tillman, 2004). Bush et al. (2010) noted if change is to occur in the composition of college and university leadership, there has to be a focus on disrupting the status quo at the executive level rather than continuing the flawed behaviors that permeate the academy.

The African American College President

The majority of research on African American college presidents has centered on the experiences of females with some research on men. This section reviews the scant research on African American college presidents.

African American Female Presidents

Research indicated African American women often leave higher education after receiving their terminal degrees due to a lack of institutional support (Howard-Vital, 1989; Jones, 2013). This has contributed to the low number of African American women in administrative leadership. Sylvester (2023) identified the following five themes from a narrative inquiry study of African American women presidents while navigating the complexity of their careers: 1) breaking with traditions, 2) the desire for success, 3) professional and personal support, 4) the desire to be president, and 5) finding one's way through the labyrinth. These findings indicated that despite their desire to succeed in the presidency African American women still faced significant barriers in pursuit of that goal. Key to the success of African American women is positive mentoring (O'Callaghan, 2009; Sylvester 2023)

Bell and Nkomo (2001) initially described the absence of African American women in senior leadership as a concrete ceiling, acknowledging Black women had to go beyond the glass ceiling to access opportunities for advancement in higher education. Jackson and Harris (2007) concluded the glass ceiling remains for African American women as they seek leadership roles at all levels of higher education leadership. By 2014, only 30% of HBCU presidents identified as female, with a significantly lower percentage of Black women presidents at PWIs (Freeman & Gasman, 2014). There remains an absence of Black women in senior-level administrative positions at PWIs (Boykin, 2020).

African American Male Presidents

The literature on African American male presidents is limited. Holmes (2012) revealed African American college presidents generally have the same qualifications as their White colleagues but are not given the same presidential opportunities beyond HBCUs. This suggests governing boards and other hiring decision makers are not proactive in their efforts to diversify their presidential candidate pools. Findings from the American College Presidency (ACE, 2023) indicated 13.2% of all college presidents identify as Black/African American. Freeman and Gasman (2014) posited HBCU boards of trustees and HBCUs could benefit from being more open minded in their understanding of what makes a successful Black college president.

Administrative Leadership in Higher Education

This section focuses on the literature related to administrative leadership in higher education. The section centers on the behaviors and experiences that can aid in the success of higher education leaders, especially those in presidential roles.

Executive Leadership in Higher Education

Smith and Hughley (2006) stated it is important to understand there are multiple ways to conceptualize leadership or to become a leader. Essentially, people follow individuals they find capable of providing effective leadership. This is further supported by other scholars who have studied higher education. For example, Gigliotti and Rueben (2017) suggested leadership is best viewed from a broad perspective as a social process that occurs through communication.

Foundational studies on administrative leadership in higher education help frame the discussion on presidential success and derailment. Bensimon et al. (1989) detailed nascent leadership theories and their applicability to higher education leadership. They examined leadership at the executive level and used that data to provide faculty a deeper level of

understanding of higher education leadership. Bensimon and colleagues (1989) found no single leadership theory applied to all situations and they varied considerably by president. Presidential perceptions of leadership typically reflect components of multiple theories. The presidents in their study overwhelmingly identified leadership, at least in part, by roles and behaviors.

Effective leadership correlated to leaders' actions, with particular emphasis on clarifying goals and providing support and motivation for people to achieve those goals (Bensimon et al., 1989).

Birnbaum (1992) conducted a qualitative study that found several conditions are needed for presidential success including the climate the university, faculty perceptions of the institution, and relationships with constituents. Birnbaum's findings offer ways college and university administrators could succeed by enhancing the institution's culture and climate, while simultaneously enhancing the president's ability to lead.

Guillory (2001) offered seven success strategies for Black administrators working at PWIs: 1) augment expertise by learning as much as possible about the department and institution; 2) identify a quality mentor; 3) acquire advanced degrees; 4) build relationships with powerful people within the institution; 5) avoid stereotypical administrative positions; 6) demonstrating leadership skills; and 7) cultivate fundraising proficiency. These recommendations are designed to help aspiring administrators develop the skills and qualities needed for success in the presidency.

In their work on presidential leadership in higher education, Fincher (1997) found that boards of trustees and presidential selection committees often consider the following as they contemplate presidential appointments: 1) institutional prestige; 2) academic discipline; 3) scholarly productivity; and 4) career patterns. These factors extend beyond administrative experience but are non-leadership factors deemed important. Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) found

that if institution's build and sustain cultures and climates of honesty and integrity, leaders are more likely to be effective.

Presidential Success

Rowley and Sherman (2003) discovered that effective leadership is a critical element in the success of an organization. They determined that universities in particular presented unique challenges because of their structures, policies, and practices. Inman (2011) articulated leadership preparation for presidential success is a gradual process. Certain leadership aspects are taught, however much of leadership is learned through lived experiences. The success of a president is an amalgamation of their professional and personal experiences.

Bryman's (2007) study of effective leadership in higher education identified 13 leadership behaviors associated with administrative effectiveness. Although the study focused primarily on departments heads, the findings are relevant for studying higher education senior administrative leadership. Bryman (2007) identified the following 13 qualities of an effective leader:

1. Providing a clear sense of direction/strategic vision
2. Preparing department arrangements to facilitate the direction set
3. Being considerate
4. Treating academic staff fairly and with integrity
5. Being trustworthy and having personal integrity
6. Allowing the opportunity to participate in key decisions/encouraging open communication
7. Communicating well about the direction the department is going
8. Acting as a role model/having credibility

9. Creating a positive/collegial work atmosphere in the department
10. Advancing the department's cause with respect to constituencies internal and external to the university and being proactive in doing so
11. Providing feedback on performance
12. Providing resources for and adjusting workloads to stimulate scholarship and research
13. Making academic appointments that enhance department's reputation.

Bryman's (2007) 13 qualities of an effective leader combined with Leslie and Van Velsor's (1996) four themes centering on presidential derailments were used to examine presidential success in this study. Using both theories as frameworks allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of factors associated with presidential success.

Presidential Derailment

The derailment framework (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988; McCall & Lombardo, 1983) identified for this study was used to identify the reasons why presidents failed, or are derailed, in their positions. Presidential derailments in higher education have been examined at multiple levels including community colleges (Touzeau, 2010), research institutions (Carver, 2009), and private colleges (McNeal, 2009; Trachtenberg et al., 2013). However, few studies have examined the derailment of college leaders, particularly African American college leaders.

Leslie and Van Velsor (1996) interviewed 20 senior executives from Fortune 500 companies in the United States and 42 senior executives from 24 large service or manufacturing organizations in 6 European Union countries. They identified four primary reasons leader's derail.

1. Problems with interpersonal relationships. Managers who experienced problems with interpersonal relationships had trouble relating to others which impacted their effectiveness as a leader.
2. Failure to meet business objectives. Managers who struggled with meeting business objectives usually had experience in a functional unit of the organization or had little to no authority to make decisions. They faced significant challenges as they progressed in the organization and contended with issues that were unclear.
3. Inability to build or lead a team. Managers who failed as a result of the inability to build or lead a team were usually considered to have a strong personality, they were aggressive and generally focused on only one task or issue.
4. Inability to change or adapt during a transition. Managers who failed because of their inability to change or adapt during a transition generally struggled with change and new leadership, new job responsibilities, and the inability to meet the responsibility of the position.

Leslie and Van Velsor's (1996) work initially focused on the for-profit sector; however, subsequent research suggested the themes were applicable to college and university presidents (Trachtenberg et al., 2013). This framework was chosen specifically because it considers significant challenges that inhibit leadership success, as opposed to other theories and scholarship that supported how leadership is defined and what determines a successful leader. Organizations seek effective leaders; yet those leaders fail for a number of reasons. These failures can have dire effects and consequences on an organization. Thus, it is important to understand how leaders succeed and why they fail. The following sections discuss Leslie and Van Velsor (1996) themes more closely.

Problems with Interpersonal Relationships

Problems with interpersonal relationships accounted for a majority of the negative personality traits identified in the literature. The executives who exhibited problems with interpersonal relations typically were viewed by their supervisors as being difficult to work with. They exhibited behaviors considered as creating an adverse or negative culture and climate within the organization (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). Although extremely competent in their job responsibilities these individuals lacked the interpersonal skills to appropriately engage with team members at all levels of the organization. Problems with interpersonal relationships were mentioned in two-thirds of the cases in Europe, while more than one-third of recently derailed North American managers were seen as having poor working relationships. Hollenbeck and McCall's (2001) study identified additional characteristics such as ruthlessness, overly ambitious, or poor communication that led to problems with interpersonal relationships.

The literature suggests problems with interpersonal relationships were connected to derailment in some organizations. Organizations with cultures and climates that value teamwork and cohesiveness, who have leaders who are not able to effectively deal with interpersonal relationships could be a significant factor in enabling presidential derailment.

Failure to Meet Business Objectives

Leaders who failed to meet business objectives were successful early in their tenures. However, once they were promoted or received additional responsibility, many were derailed because they were unable to develop the skills to succeed in their new roles (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). Failure to meet business objectives has been identified as a source of derailment throughout the Center for Creative Leadership's (CCL) program of research. The CCL has suggested not meeting business objectives is directly connected to a lack of follow-through on

promises or being overly ambitious (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988; McCall & Lombardo, 1983). Therefore, the failure to deliver results was seen as a betrayal of trust or unjustified self-promotion.

Inability to Lead a Team

Similar to the previous trait, those who were unable to lead a team were high performers in their initial roles. These executives ultimately derailed because they could not get team members to work toward a common goal. Kovach (1986) examined the changes in expectations of leaders associated with advancement through managerial levels. As the leaders' careers advanced, they were expected to operate effectively in a larger circle of peers and colleagues. During the career trajectory of these executives, leaders presumed since they would be competent at managing the complex human resources of the organization. In sum, they were expected to manage teams above and below them efficiently, while also working within the organization's political structure.

Inability to Change or Adapt During a Transition

The final factor that emerged was the inability to change or adapt during a transition. This theme includes failure to adapt to a new supervisor with a different leadership style (McCall & Lombardo, 1983), an inability to adapt to the requirements of a new job or assignment, a new work environment or changes in the industry (Morrison et al., 1987), and an overreliance on a particular or single skill and/or a failure to acquire a new skill (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). Organizations are fluid and successful leaders can adapt seamlessly to changes.

Several themes emerged from a review of the derailment and success literature. Braun et al. (2013) found the relationship between trust and an individual's perception of their supervisor's leadership positively contributed to job satisfaction. They also concluded that trust

at all organizational levels increased overall team performance. Whereas, Black (2015) determined effective leaders seek to develop new ways to enhance their leadership. Thus, effective leaders understand that leadership is a continuous learning and development process that requires a sense of humility and respect for the needs of others (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

Summary

This chapter focused on research related to the development and success of African American college presidents. The review of research on Black male success in postsecondary education, faculty development for People of Color, and administrative access and success in higher education for African Americans exposed significant and persistent gaps in the leadership development pathway. The literature on African American presidential leadership revealed few studies on this group and highlighted the need for additional research on male presidents in particular.

I concluded with a review of the theory and research associated with presidential success and derailment. Collectively, the literature review highlighted a need to understand more about the formative experiences that influence achievement for African American presidents as well as the factors related to their success in the position. In Chapter 3, I present the methodology and procedures used to conduct the study.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I describe the methods used to examine the factors associated with the success of an African American college president. The goal of this study was to explore the experiences of an African American college president and to examine factors associated with the success of this leader. Given this, I employed a qualitative research methodology because it is well-suited to capture the experiences necessary for a robust analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Specifically, to capture the spirit of human behavior, I adopted a narrative design to allow entry into the participant's life. In this study I sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences associated with the successes of an African American college president?
2. How can the factors associated with the success of an African American college president be used to better understand successful presidential leadership?

To address these questions, I identified and interviewed one (narrative inquiry) African American president who served 14 years and departed the presidency of his own accord. The participant was president of a four-year public historically Black college and university (HBCU).

Method

I employed a qualitative, narrative design in this study to develop an enhanced understanding of the success of an African American college president. Qualitative research was appropriate for this study as I studied a new area of research within the non-profit sector, and it allowed me to conduct an in-depth examination of the participant's successes. Employing a qualitative approach allowed for a holistic, chronological examination of events associated with success, and for a rich, descriptive explanation of the process (Miles & Huberman, 2015).

Qualitative research allowed me to hear directly from the participant, providing an opportunity to ask clarifying questions and to explore his perspective more in-depth while also examining external evidence (documents). A qualitative approach allowed for an exploratory and descriptive study. This study is important given the minimum amount of research that has been conducted on success at the executive level of higher education, and few with regards to African American presidents.

Narrative inquiry centers on individuals' experiences and how they are processed and relay those experiences. These experiences are shared through the retelling of their stories and they ways they make meaning from sharing them. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Narrative inquiry has several forms which include life histories, life stories, oral histories, biographies, and autobiographies (DeVault, 1997; Ellis, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995; Riessman, 1993; Mertova & Webster, 2020; Wells, 2011). Narrative inquiry encourages study participants to interpret their behaviors in ways that provide meaning to them (Reismann, 1993) and allows the researcher to understand the interpretation of the storytellers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004).

Certain assumptions are embedded in the qualitative approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013). It must be recognized that multiple realities can be present in any study; the researcher's, those of the individuals being studied and those of the readers' or those making meaning of the results. Also, multiple perspectives exist, including the voices of interviewees are included in the study. Moreover, researchers interact with those they study and keenly attempt to work to reduce the distance between the researcher and those they research. Researchers also clearly acknowledge and understand that a certain set of personal opinions might be present in the research, which is context-bound and based on inductive forms of logic. Also, themes of

interest may emerge from participants themselves which can be used to frame the understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Triangulation is the process that helps to increase the credibility and validity of research (Noble & Heale, 2019). The primary objective is to identify patterns or theories that help explain the phenomenon.

Narrative inquiry offers participants an opportunity to understand their behaviors in ways that are meaningful to them (Reismann, 1993), and it allowed me as the researcher to further interpret and understand the experiences of the individual sharing their story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). This research combined narrative inquiry with a single case study design. Case study is a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Bogdan and Bilken (1992) stated that general case study design should be represented by a funnel; the questions should initially not be too specific and, as the researcher identifies the people, phenomenon, and location to study, should narrow to develop a focus. Interview based case studies often rely on interviews with people associated with the particular studied phenomenon. In a case study, the researcher examines a single entity or phenomenon ('the case') bounded by time and activity (e.g., a program, incident or institution) and collects detailed information through a variety of data sources. The case study is a narrative record of an individual's experiences and/or behaviors maintained by an outside observer (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This case is bound by participant and time, one African American college president who served for 14 years. Furthermore, the study is a single case of the experiences of one president at a public HBCU, binding the study by context (e.g., one institution of higher education).

The components of qualitative, interview-based case study design include: guiding research questions, propositions if any, units of analysis, logic linking the data to the

propositions, and the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2009). The research questions serve as the basis for gathering more information about the phenomenon.

Yin (2003) suggested using case study methodology when the researcher is investigating certain social phenomena. Case studies also are applicable when the researcher does not have control over the events. A case study design allows for studying a phenomenon that is relatively unknown and probing that phenomenon in depth. This can be done through observations, interviews, and other evidence that allows the researcher to delve into the phenomena (Yin (2003).

Context

The president studied is a historian by profession. Immediately before beginning his presidency, he was a senior-level academic leader, culminating in a role as provost and vice president for academic affairs. It is important to note that until his presidency, he only worked at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). His presidency lasted 14 years at a single institution until his retirement.

Participant

To recruit the participant, I initially identified any “sitting” presidents who met the criteria stated above by reviewing the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, newspaper outlets, and other public reports (including the Internet). The president held office for 14 years and retired from office with the support of the board of trustees and chancellor of the university system.

Data Collection

I used two data collection methods for this study: life history interviews and document analysis. Life history interviews were the primary form of data collection. I conducted a series of

interviews with the participant: Interview 1 – (Life History), Interview 2 – (Career Path), Interview 3 – (The Presidency), and Interview 4 – (Successes). I developed a semi-structured interview protocol (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to guide the exploration of the participant’s presidential experiences. I digitally recorded the interviews and then engaged in document analysis, including reviewing the participant’s curriculum vita. Additional documents included board of trustee meeting minutes and notes (including executive sessions), newspaper articles and magazine articles from higher education publications.

Elite Interviewing

I conducted several in-depth, semi-structured interviews comprised of open-ended questions. Semi-structured interviews are “generally organized around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee/s” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). Open-ended interviews seek to gain the perspective of the participant (Patton, 2015). Qualitative interviews allow the researcher to get a deeper understanding of the experiences of the subjects and then retell the events even though the researchers were not a participant in the events (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

I developed the interview protocols based on Seidman’s (2013) recommendation of the three-interview structure that provides some context and detail to this success event. Each interview was designed to build upon the previous interview. This process helped create sequencing and logic to the conversation, while also keeping the researcher and participant focused on the topic.

Elite individuals are members of society who have risen to positions of prominence. Originally, they were seen as politicians or those who had amassed wealth (Lilleker, 2003; Natow, 2020) However, they now include businesspeople, educational leaders, and athletes. Elite

interviews are more customary within journalism than within academic research, although disciplines like sociology or political science also rely heavily on elite interviews (Phillips, 1998; Stephens, 2007). The elite interview within higher education is certain type of focused interview that differs from other protocols in several ways (Dexter, 1970; Odendahl & Shaw, 2002). This type of interview includes many of the following qualities: the interviewee is known to have participated in a certain situation, the researchers review necessary information to arrive at a provisional analysis, the production of the interview guide is based on this analysis and the result of the interview is the interviewee's definition of the situation (Merton et al., 1990). Elite interviews are rigorous and direct and in many ways are aligned with the journalism profession's ethics and rules of engagement. It is imperative that interviewer has as much information about the context, previous behaviors and interviewee perspectives before commencing the interview; this is germane to both senior level leaders and administrators as well as entry level employees blue collar workers. Knowledge of a participant's background, including life history and career, is an important aspect of preparing for an elite interview (Hochschild, 2009; Lancaster, 2014; Mikecz, 2012). For the purpose of this study, an elite participant is someone who has achieved a certain position (e.g., college or university president).

Elite interviews are designed to induce strong personal reflection and to assess the participant's actions, not necessarily to relive a situation (Liu, 2018). Elite interviews allow the participant to recall a specific situation based on their account and encourage them to tell the story from their perspective. For instance, in the case of presidential success, I focused on the reason or reasons that the president felt he was successful (and only the president can share that perspective). Elite interviews seek to understand the political issues that affect personal

relationships and then contrast them with a wider exploration of issues of authority (Lilleker, 2003; Natow, 2020; Phillips, 1998).

The primary purpose of the interviews was to gain perspective about the successes of an African American president. Examples of the interview questions (see Appendix B for the full interview guide):

1. How did you become a university president (career path)?
2. What were your initial motivations for accepting the presidency?
3. What factors did you see as being associated with your success as president?
4. What events may have occurred that contributed to or aided in your success as president?
5. Is there anything else related to your tenure as president that you would like to tell me?

Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I conducted the first three interviews via Zoom. The final interview took place face-to-face.

Data Analysis

I engaged in two forms of data analysis – document analysis and analysis of the interview data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Miles and Huberman (2015) suggested the researcher develop a set of core research goals, a list of questions, a conceptualized framework, hypothesized themes and a method to analyze data prior to data collection.

Document Analysis

Document analysis allowed me to triangulate the data. I reviewed all documents to which I had access and analyzed them to extract meaning, gain understanding, and develop knowledge of the phenomena studied. I reviewed multiple documents including board of trustee minutes/notes, local and national publications, and any personal notes, memoranda, and letters the participant willingly shared. This process helped me further study the phenomena by granting

me access to documents that were in the public domain obtained via search engines, the university's web page, and board minutes. Also, reviewing the local newspaper articles written about the president and university allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the participant's experiences.

Interview Data Analysis

With narrative inquiry, data analysis consists of interpreting the experiences of the individuals and composing a narrative based on the emergent themes from the data that may answer the research questions (Flick, 2017). The data analysis method is defined as a dialogic/performance that focused on the thematic and structural parts of the story according to Riessman (2008). This method incorporates and values the social context of the researcher, participant, and audience, and views the narrative as multi-voiced and collaborative (Riessman, 2008). After I conducted and transcribed the interviews, I used Otter.ai a qualitative data analysis software to aid in the data analysis. I then identified the themes, patterns, and discrepant data from the data collection process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I separated the data into two primary areas, leadership themes and behavioral themes. For the leadership themes, I analyzed for leadership principles that either proved or disprove his espoused approach to leadership. With respect to behavioral themes, I analyzed for specific behaviors that emerged which could speak to how he put those behaviors into practice as a leader.

I reviewed all data, including field notes (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) from the interview, letters, personal archives, electronic documents, speeches, and video interviews, to get insight into who President George Carlton Wright is and was, and how he approached communicating his story. I then took notes from his stories that were salient or stood out as

particularly meaningful. Finally, I created a list of the emergent themes that I placed into major categories.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness involves the researcher's ability to report faithful representations of the studied phenomena (Gall et al., 1999; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To enhance the data trustworthiness, also known as reliability and validity. I engaged in member checking, peer debriefing and triangulation (with the existing literature) and used external auditors. When conducting research, a major concern is the ensuring the validity and reliability of the research (Merriam, 2009). Member-checking is one of the most well-respected strategies of ensuring trustworthiness and allows the participants to engage in data collection and analysis and helps hone the data collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Noble & Heale, 2019). One form of member checking consists of sharing the interview transcripts with study participants. This technique is helpful for the fact-checking process (Birt et al., 2016). Recognizing that a person's thoughts and perspectives can be misunderstood during both the recording and transcription phases, I employed this process to accurately convey the thoughts and actions of the participant (Birt et al. 2016; Shenton, 2004; Twining et al., 2017). Member checking gives the participant the opportunity to share new information, while simultaneously allowing them to remove data they no longer want to share (Birt et al., 2016). I then provided the participant with the analysis of his interview data. This method required that the participant received my detailed analysis of his interview. This method was one additional tool I used to enhance the trustworthiness of the entire data set, and it gave the participant an opportunity to ensure trustworthiness within his own data (Birt et al., 2016). Lastly, member checking allowed me to combine and make meaning of the

data collected from the study, thus giving the participant an opportunity to understand and interpret his personal experiences within the emergent themes (Birt et al., 2016).

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing is fundamentally built into the process of writing a dissertation, because the dissertation committee read and provided extensive feedback on the study and its findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I effectively used triangulation, by working my dissertation chair who provided considerable feedback, in addition to members of my committee. This process added an additional level trustworthiness as it provided interpretation beyond just the researcher, Creswell and Creswell (2018).

External Auditor

I also used an external auditor, which provided me an external view of the study. Much like a financial auditor they ask questions about the study to ensure its trustworthiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I used a colleague with an earned doctorate, who coordinates writing groups, to serve as an external auditor.

Triangulation

Triangulation is the process by which multiple methods are used to collect data on the same topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation is an effective way of developing trustworthiness when using multiple data collection methods. This aided me in providing a contextual analysis of the interviews.

Positionality

My interest in this topic stemmed from my desire to be a college president. As a professional in higher education who has worked in diversity, enrollment management, and community relations, this research is personal to me. As an African American male and senior-

level administrator in higher education, I think it is important to have leaders and administrators who represent the diversity of our society. During my 20+ years working in higher education, I have never had an African American supervisor and I have never worked in a college that had an African American (or other Person of Color) as president/chancellor. I have only had one instance where my institution-of-employment had an African American vice president or other senior-level executive. As someone who had goals to be a college president, I understand how my personal experiences, feelings and thoughts could inform how I frame my approach to the study. Reflexivity, also known as the researcher's positionality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Milner, 2007) is how the researcher is personally and emotionally connected to the research and how that can influence the research. Due to my personal ties to the subject, I understood the importance of member checking and peer review to account for any potential bias. Positionality highlights the ways the researcher can influence the process, conversely it surfaces the ways the process may affect the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Institutional Review Board

Before the study began all methodological and data collection procedures were approved by the University of Tennessee's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon approval from the IRB, I contacted the participant to ask his consideration for study participation. I emailed the informed consent and asked him to review and sign the form. I then provided a copy of the informed consent to the participant for his records. The participant consented to having his name used in the study.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I presented the research questions and methods that guided the study. I discussed the study context, participant selection, data collection (including elite interviewing

and document analysis), data analysis, trustworthiness, my positionality, and ethical standards/IRB. In Chapter 4, I present the study findings.

CHAPTER 4:

PRESIDENT WRIGHT'S STORY

In this chapter, I provide analysis of multiple in-depth interviews with Dr. George Carlton Wright. I also include analysis of relevant external documents. These are woven together to create a narrative account to explore the life and career of Dr. Wright. I want to honor his legacy and his story by telling it as authentically and honestly as possible, while also recognizing my role in co-creating his story through my participation in the interviews, data analysis, and organization of this chapter.

The chapter is organized to relate key aspects of Dr. Wright's life that were meaningful and impactful to him, including his childhood experiences, academic journey, presidency and finally his reflections on these periods. I tell his story of success and how he overcame several challenging contexts. These contexts include growing up in public housing, poor secondary school grades, his father's personal struggles and the death of his daughter. As a sign of respect, throughout the telling of his life's story, I referred to him as either President Wright or Dr. Wright. During our interviews, I referenced him only as such. To be as authentic as possible to his voice, I included fully intact quotations to convey his words. I also included descriptions of his tone, mannerisms, and other non-verbal responses during our conversations.

About the Interviews

Dr. Wright and I conducted our first three interviews remotely via Zoom. I was at work during each of these interviews, so I was in a suit and tie for these Zoom meetings. Dr. Wright always wore a polo shirt, and it seemed as if he was located in either his home, home office or campus office. He recently had been asked to serve as Interim Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Kentucky, in addition to his role as an endowed professor.

Throughout our interviews he maintained a professorial tone. The way he recounted his stories often reminded me that he was a history professor. Each Zoom meeting felt like an exciting history lecture. He was always very formal but engaging. He had a moderate and deliberate tone, except when there were significant events he wanted to emphasize, his voice would get more pronounced, and he would lean almost directly into the camera. He wore thin, dark-rimmed glasses and at times when he got really excited, he would take them off to make a point and once that point was made, he quickly put them back on and continued to tell his story.

My fourth meeting with him was in person, in Lexington, Kentucky. The date that we agreed to meet he was giving a keynote talk at the Hunteertown Reunion, a former African American neighborhood, which was eventually purchased by the county due to persistent flooding and other issues. We agreed to meet on campus, and he drove us to the event, which took about 30 minutes. The event was outside, so he advised me to wear comfortable clothing. We both wore khaki pants. I wore a white UT polo, and he was wearing a blue and white buttoned up shirt. My first thought when I saw him in person was that he was much shorter than I expected. During the drive he gave me a brief history of the area, since that is where he was born and raised. Once we arrived, he was greeted like a local celebrity. He introduced me to everyone he met. It felt like an elder relative introducing me to new family members. After his talk, we made our way back to his faculty office at the University of Kentucky to complete our final formal interview. His office was located in a building that clearly felt like a humanities building, which is where the history department was located. His office was small and sparsely decorated, but it felt comfortable and homelike. We talked for a little over an hour, as he sat behind his desk and I on the other side, absorbing his every word. He was even more engaging in person. During

this time, we discussed his presidency, and he excitedly shared his experiences. His voice carried through the empty halls of the building.

President Wright and I has one final meeting on Zoom. This meeting was to answer questions I had about our interviews and to clarify other aspects of my research. This interview was very much like our other remote interviews, where I felt I was in a history class with President (Professor) Wright.

Key Aspects of His Life

Dr. Wright grew up in Lexington, Kentucky. He was the second oldest of six children. His parents married in 1947 and he was born in 1950. His father was 1 of 13 children and Dr. Wright was named after his uncle George who was next in age to his father, Scott Jobert Wright. His mother, Amanda Clay Quick Wright never really liked that name, but in their household his father was “the boss” and when he made a decision, there was no questioning it.

My mother never fond of the name George. I'm not so sure in the 47 years that I was alive, you know that she died when I was a 47, that she ever called me George one time. I don't know that she ever did. She may have, but I don't think so. She called me Ricky and that came from where she would be doing housework and she had the radio on listening to the Ozzie and Harriet Show. There was a character named Ricky Nelson, that's how I became Ricky.

His early years of were marked by vivid memories of attending church. His mother made him memorize Bible verses and he would recall those verses during the toughest moments of his life. His life was the juxtaposition of two experiences - one where his mother, father and family worked hard to pull themselves out of poverty into homeownership, and the other when his father spiraled into alcoholism and his family found themselves returning to public housing,

which they had found so hard to get escape. During our interviews there were a few seminal moments that laid the foundation for his life and the decisions he made.

Church with Mom

His faith often came up as an anchoring part of his life. He spoke of his mother's insistence that he attend church. He was active in the youth programs and while he did not recognize it at the time, this involvement gave him a basis to evaluate later aspects of his life. His faith is still important to him, and he continues to attend church.

I have never had the option of not going to church, my mother mandated that I go. She made me go to this program called royal ambassadors on Saturday, and somehow, all this becomes a part of me. I know Bible verses that I've known all my life, I recite to you all 40 verses to the 37th Psalms.

While his faith was not an overbearing part of his story, it was an integral part of his story. This was evident in the way he shared his stories and shared how doors opened for him, many by divine order.

Death of Daughter

Dr. Wright married his college sweetheart Valerie Annette Ellison in 1970 and they had two children. While Valerie and he married young, they had their children much later in life. He was a doting father to his son, William Benjamin Wright and daughter, Rebecca Ellison Wright. An incredibly painful and lifechanging moment for Dr. Wright was the death of this daughter, Rebecca developed a kidney condition at age 20 and died at age 24. He recalled this challenging time stating, "I didn't know if I [could] get over it or not." She was ill for four years, bed ridden the last year, and in a coma three months before dying.

This was extremely difficult. The first year I kept saying, “Am I going to die because I can't live like this.” I can't. I couldn't go 30 minutes without thinking about my kid. And I said, “This is crazy.” But at some point, maybe a year or so after her death, it began to change. And now she's been deceased for 14 years.

This loss helped him put into perspective the frailty of life and to focus on what really mattered to him: his family, faith, and making an impact in any area he was given the opportunity. As a professional he was intent on providing access, opportunity, and education in each of his roles. He recalled that this tragedy also helped him deal with what was to come as president of Prairie View.

During my time at Prairie View every semester, at least one student died. Not one semester, but every semester! And a lot of times they died of heart attacks or other things that could have been avoided. But most often they didn't. They died from lupus, and other diseases that were mostly hereditary. But what happened with my daughter was, she was ill for two years, and it was all downhill.

Reflecting on this defining moment, Dr. Wright further described how it put the suddenness of the issues he dealt with on campus into perspective. For example, while his daughter's illness allowed him time to prepare for her passing, many of the parents he consoled had spoken to their children earlier that day. While he did not specifically connect the passing of his daughter to other events, the tragedy helped him deal with challenging situations in a more humane and empathetic way.

Growing Up

Dr. Wright spent his formative years in public housing, but during his elementary school years his family purchased their own home in St. Martin's Village Subdivision. This home was a

three-bedroom, one bathroom house not more than 1500 square feet, which was a tight fit for the large family. But, coming from public housing, he thought it was incredible. Life was looking and getting better. However, the next challenge for him was around the corner.

Meanwhile, my father is becoming an alcoholic. And by the time I'm 14, he is a full-blown alcoholic. We live in this subdivision, but we can't make ends meet. And one Christmas, we not only don't have anything for Christmas, but we also don't have utilities. She said, you know, I don't need a man to do this, we can be this bad off all by myself. We don't need this added stress and struggle. And so, my father essentially abandoned us. He would leave us and would provide no support for us. He would leave my mother and six children. I'm the second oldest. And I must tell you by the time I'm 14, I actually hated my father. And I would for years curse his name as a result of that. But what happens by the time I'm 14, getting ready to start high school, my mother can't you know, she's going to lose the house. So, she decides we're going to move back to the housing projects.

His high school experience, which began during this same time, was significant in his development for several reasons. These years were filled with anger, self-discovery, and healing. He spent this time trying to figure life out his lot in life and more importantly why his circumstances were what they were. He posits that during his high school years he spent more time out of school than in school. Much of that time, he was seen as an angry young man. His life circumstances resulted in a strong temper that caused him considerable trouble growing up. His father left his family, his living situation was not ideal, and he had a little direction about his future.

I ended up going to a school called Lafayette High School, but most of my friends went to Bryan Station High School. So, from the 10th level and 12th grade, I really was not in class with anybody Black during the time of the Civil Rights Movement from 1965 to 1968. But my first day at Lafayette High School, I qualified for free lunch because of my family situation. And they have a free lunch. They have four lines, but one of them is the free lunch [line]. I can't go through that line and so I made the decision right there that any day I did not have lunch money. I wouldn't go to school and overall, I didn't attend school for three years.

A Life Changing Moment

While attending school, Dr. Wright got a job working at a country club washing dishes for seventy-five cents/hour. He described a time when he was working an extremely cold night in November 1967, and he looked up and it was 11:25p.m. He knew the last public bus from the club would leave at 11:30p.m., so he rushed out of the door to catch the bus home. He was also very cognizant that he did not want to get caught in the predominately White suburbs at that time of night. As he approached the bus, he saw several of his friends and he knew he could not get on, fearing he would be ridiculed and teased, especially "wearing that stupid uniform." So, he missed the bus and walked home. This event became a life changing moment for Dr. Wright.

On the walk home, I cried, and I curse, and I cry. I've always cursed a lot and gotten in a lot of trouble as a kid. And I cried, and I cursed, and about halfway home I said God, "What is this all about? What did I do God? I don't ask for anything, I don't bother folk. I don't beat up kids. I'm just a smart aleck. I'm the one in class who always says what everybody else wishes they would say. I go ahead and say it." And I said, "God, why can't I be something in life? Why can't that be me?" And I decided that night, I was

never going to cry again about being poor, and I was never going to be ashamed again.

And I was never going to feel sorry for myself again in life. I'm done with the anger.

High School to College

In the early 1960s, the University of Kentucky, like many other universities, was integrating and increasing the number of African American students. These efforts were accelerated at the University of Kentucky. After the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., many higher education institutions attempted to honor him and his legacy. One day at school (one of the rare days Dr. Wright attended), the Lafayette school leadership called all of the high-achieving African American students to the auditorium, stating that there was an opportunity for them to attend the University of Kentucky. The university had created a scholarship program in Dr. King's honor. The caveat was that students had to maintain a "B" average; however, Dr. Wright had made only Cs and Ds throughout his high school career. After seeing his transcripts, the high school counselors realized he was invited by mistake and attempted to disinvite him. Dr. Wright told them that he would work hard and succeed if given the opportunity. He was no longer the angry young man he used to be and was ready to work hard and give education a try, as he knew this would be his way to a better life. He was ready to, in his words "turn over a new leaf." He successfully convinced the counselors that he was worth taking a chance on and they allowed him to apply for the scholarship. He was later admitted to the University of Kentucky.

Summary

Dr. Wright's life has taken a circuitous journey. From his family living in public housing, to them purchasing their own home, to having to move back into public housing. He had to contend with his father who was an alcoholic and his own embarrassment of standing in the free-lunch line in school. This humiliation led him to miss a significant amount of school until he had

spiritual epiphany while walking home from his job as a dishwasher at the local country club.

His life changed forever when he was inadvertently invited to apply for admission through the new Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship Program the University of Kentucky. Each of these moments, while innocuously independent, together set in motion his journey to the presidency.

The Beginning of the Academic Journey

Dr. Wright enrolled at the University of Kentucky in fall 1968. He loved reading but was told not to major in a social science field if he wanted to make money, unless he planned to attend law school. As an undergraduate, he took a course in southern history from Dr. Steve Channing, a Jewish professor. He loved that class and decided he would major in history.

Unbeknownst to him, his church background and upbringing had prepared him for his history studies. He was always reading, had to memorize speeches, and honed his critical thinking skills.

He met his wife Valerie his first year and by their sophomore year he asked her to marry him. They married August 8, 1970. He had to convince her family he was right for her because his reputation and that of his family preceded him. For money, he was a computer operator at Cowden Manufacturing Company from 11:00pm – 7:00am and would then attend class. This job paid well, so finances were not an issue for he and Valerie, who also worked.

I tell folks, we were really blessed when we got married. When I proposed, I had just turned 19. My wife was 18. We waited until I was 20 and she was 19 when we got married, both undergraduate[s], so we still had two years of undergraduate at school to finish.

Dr. Wright loved his time at the University of Kentucky, even as an academically average high school student, he was successful due to his love for learning and reading. He was eager to experience all of the academic accoutrements that the university had to offer.

...college turns out to be incredible. Because where everybody previously told me I was a smart aleck. But in college, I got to question everything, and I got to express my opinion and prove my points. I've never bought into the status quo. I realize folks can't put limits on me anymore. Most of that resonated with these White professors who I had in college. And interestingly, there were Black students who told me UK was racist. They would tell me Duke was racist. Maybe they are. But I needed a degree from those places. I need to be clear on why I was there. It wasn't that I wasn't interested in all of those things. But I said I've got to get a degree. So, I said, I've got to work. So, I joined nothing. I've never been a member of a fraternity. Like Woody Allen said, if you would want me to be in your organization, the organization must not be very good. Because I'm not, so I don't join and clubs or organizations. I said, "I have got to work and do this," and I was driven.

He graduated with a history degree in 1972 and was accepted into law school. However, before entering law school, Dr. Wright sought career advice from his undergraduate mentor Dr. Channing, for whom he had deep admiration and respect. With encouragement from Dr. Channing, Dr. Wright eventually decided to pursue a master's degree in history from the University of Kentucky, instead of attending law school. He dedicated himself to completing the program and graduated in 1974.

In subsequent conversations with Dr. Channing, Dr. Wright shared that he wanted to get a PhD in history from the University of Kentucky and eventually teach there. Dr. Channing encouraged him to explore other universities because, during that time, many universities did not hire their own doctoral graduates for tenure-track positions. Dr. Channing had a relationship with Duke University professor Dr. T. Harry Williams, who had been a visiting professor at the University of Kentucky. After one of Dr. Williams's lectures, President Wright met with him,

sharing his interest in attending Duke University to earn his PhD. Dr. Williams then reached out to the PhD program director at Duke on behalf of Dr. Wright. Shortly afterward, Dr. Wright was offered a fellowship to Duke.

Dr. Wright pursued his PhD under the mentorship of Raymond Gavins, the first African American to join the Duke history faculty. In 1977, Dr. Wright became the first African American student to earn a PhD from Duke. He recalled:

I am admitted and enroll at Duke. And they said, it would take four years to get a PhD, I get a PhD in three years, I become the first Black American to get a PhD from Duke. And they would eventually give me an endowed chair. And this year, 2021, I was named the outstanding graduate from Duke during that period of time.

After completing his doctorate, Dr. Wright joined the faculty of the University of Kentucky, where he was an assistant professor of history from 1977 to 1980. He contemplated spending his career as an academic, conducting research and writing books. He did not initially set out to become an administrator but after several administrative roles, he realized that not only was he good at it, but he liked the opportunity it gave him to make institutional change. This started his career on the administrative track.

In 1980, Dr. Wright joined the faculty at the University of Texas at Austin, where he later became the Mastin Gentry White Professor of Southern History and vice provost for undergraduate education. This role gave him a broader view of campus leadership and also allowed him to make a significant campus impact, particularly as it related to the undergraduate educational experience. He had unfettered access to senior-level administration and was an engaged member of the senior leadership of the university. He developed a strong working

relationship with the university president and had significant access to him and was seen as one of his confidants.

A few years later, there was a vacancy for the dean of the college of liberal arts. Dr. Wright was interested in the role and was given every indication from the provost and president that he would be the chosen candidate, even though a national search was conducted. However, after the search he was not offered the role, and he had to make some difficult professional decisions about whether he should remain at Texas or seek other opportunities.

His alma mater, Duke University, approached soon thereafter. The renowned historian and professor, Dr. John Hope Franklin, encouraged Duke to recruit Dr. Wright for an endowed professorship the institution sought to fill. He was offered the role of vice provost, endowed professor, and director of the Afro American studies program, which he accepted.

I was disappointed I didn't get the dean's job at Texas. So, when Duke approached me, I accepted the vice provost job. Was it the right move at the time, maybe so but I felt like I needed a new environment.

While this role was fulfilling, Dr. Wright did not have the level of access to decision-makers he had at the University of Texas. During his transition to Duke, the president that hired him, Keith Brody, decided to step down and a new president was onboarded. A new provost was hired from another institution. In this new organizational structure, Dr. Wright was no longer part of the president's inner circle, and he did not have the access to senior leadership he desired. He felt as if he was only brought in to make major decisions about diversity, and many times he was consulted after a decision had been made. He described this working environment.

However, George Wright was not part of that team. But then she (the new provost) put me in the worst position of all. If we had an issue related to race at Duke, they would

initially decide what they're going to do. And then if it didn't work out quite like they wanted [it] to, they would then say, "George, we need your advice." We want to talk to you about this issue, and we need you to fix this after they had already gone down a certain path.

After three years in this role, Dr. Wright began contemplating if wanted to explore provost and president positions or if he wanted to return to the University of Texas as an endowed professor. The real issue, as he shared it, was he was not making the type of impact he wanted as a mentor/advisor to students, a role he appreciated at Texas.

Duke was as good as advertised. But I thought my talents might be better utilized back at a place like UT Austin or at other schools like that. Most of the students I had...they had made 4.0s [GPAs] throughout high school, they already knew they were going to medical school, law school, etc. But I didn't inspire folk, like I had at Texas. In other words, nobody came to me for advice or guidance. And I said, you know, you're so smart, you should get a PhD. They already knew they were going get a PhD. But in any rate, I just felt like my talents were not being utilized.

Before he could make a decision about his path forward, another professional opportunity presented itself from Bill Cunningham, a mentor and friend. Dr. Wright recalled, "But boy, I sure benefited from having someone like Bill Cunningham, right, as a mentor, and someone giving you a chance. You see, he gave me a chance and opportunity." Bill had been president of the University of Texas, Austin [and] had initially offered Dr. Wright his first significant leadership role as vice provost. Since then, Bill had ascended to the chancellorship of the University of Texas System. Bill persuaded him to reject an offer for the same role at the University of

Kentucky and to accept his offer. Bill made him a part of his inner circle and cabinet. He thought of Bill in high regard as a leader and as a friend.

With Bill's support and strong urging, Dr. Wright accepted the role of interim vice president for academic affairs and later provost and executive vice president at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). The university was fledgling and because of their prior experiences together Bill knew Dr. Wright had the academic background, administrative savvy, and "get it done" attitude to help turn the university around. He was brought in with an administrative team that included him as provost, another former University of Texas colleague, Dr. Robert Witt as interim president and another UT system campus administrator, Daniel Williams as chief financial officer. Together they were collectively known as the three Ws since their last names all started with a W.

As a team, they had to make some extremely difficult decisions to turn the UTA campus around, including ending some academic programs and reducing administrative positions. Together, they changed the campus funding model and shifted funds to the highest demand programs to shore up enrollment that had been in steady decline. While making tough decisions, which they were given *cart blanche* to do, Dr. Wright's priority was to ensure he did not make haphazard decisions regarding people's futures and livelihood without great deliberation and consultation. And when he did not agree with the president or CFO, he let them know and presented data and logic. He reflected, "sometimes something else comes into play that you didn't realize, and you may have to do it. Now, every time you don't do what you've been told to do, you better be prepared to explain that." This experience solidified his belief that he could ascend to and be successful at the highest levels of academic leadership.

Dr. Wright believes that with regard to his career trajectory, he was “always at the right place at the right time.” His next opportunity came when President Witt accepted the presidency at the University of Alabama. He wanted to bring Dr. Wright with him as provost. Dr. Wright decided to forgo the opportunity as he knew he was ready to pursue a university presidency. There was speculation that Dr. Wright would ascend to the presidency at UTA, but he knew the new president needed to be someone the campus community helped select. He was keenly aware that the three Ws were thrust upon the campus, and the community did not have a say in their selection processes.

The time felt right for Wright to begin searching for a presidency. He interviewed at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville and quickly realized he did not perform well in the interview and was not offered the position. Meanwhile in Texas, several legislators had reached out to him about the presidency at Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical University (PVAMU), a public HBCU that was part of the Texas A&M University System. Because of his previous committee work with the Texas Priority Plan, he was aware of the potential and opportunity that existed. Understanding the political nature of presidential searches, he also knew he needed to win over the search committee, who was weary of legislative influence. He interviewed for the position clearly understanding the challenges and opportunities.

President of Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical University (PVAMU)

In August 2003, Dr. Wright was named President of Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical University (PVAMU). Of the 9 universities in the system at that time, PVAMU was the only HBCU. The other institutions were predominantly White or Hispanic serving. Dr. Wright initially was weary of the search process, not having previously worked at an HBCU. There was considerable concern from members of the search committee that he might not

understand or appreciate the history or traditions of Prairie View. Ultimately, they thought he would try to change them.

...one of the things I say to the folks at Prairie View, everywhere I've ever been, those schools have been in existence long before I got there. And I'm going to make sure they're still in existence and better when I leave. They were good before I got here.

They're going to remain at least good, and I'll respect your traditions. I'm not coming to Prairie View, to tear down your tradition. I'm coming here to uphold your traditions.

As with any negotiation, there were tradeoffs in leaving a larger, better-funded PWI for a small public HBCU. President Wright wanted to do this job fearlessly, so he needed a comparable financial package, a faculty appointment post-presidency, and the support of the president and board. All of which he received. This did not come without some give and take. During the negotiations, he asked for what he needed to succeed because he considered this to be his final leadership role and he did not want salary and institutional budget to prevent his success. When the negotiations were completed, he accepted the job. One of his first acts as president, Dr. Wright set the tone for a no-frills leadership style.

I'm so glad I don't need all of the perks that other leaders get hung up on. So, when I heard of HBCUs, they have their inauguration? Well, we set out we don't need one, I'm glad to get paid nice salary to do a job I love. So, we had a one-day program for both my wife and me. And then when I stepped down, I said, there'll be no dinners. I was president for 14 years and that was enough of an honor for me.

This approach to leadership was also exhibited when he attended his first football game versus Texas Southern University at Reliant Stadium in Houston. However, he soon learned being president also might mean some changes.

I decided I would never buy into all of the attractions that came along with being president. I would never do certain things. I'm serious. I'd go to the SWAC meeting. I go to my first game as president of Prairie View. And I go to the restroom. But about [the] third time, I realize this gentleman goes to the bathroom every time I go back. And he says, "I'm your bodyguard." I said for what? They don't even know me. Nobody's going to harm me. And I said, "It's embarrassing! Don't do that." I said, "That's not what we're going to do at Prairie View."

President Wright was familiar with the financial struggles of colleges, particularly HBCUs. This was one reason he felt he did not need a bodyguard. A major deciding factor for him in pursuing the Prairie View presidency was the opportunity that emerged from the Texas Priority Plan, which was approved in 1998 and instituted in 1999. Former Texas Governor, George W. Bush, created a committee to look at the funding disparity for Texas's two public HBCUs, Prairie View and Texas Southern University. At that time, Dr. Wright was asked to serve as a committee member. The ultimate recommendation of the committee was to allocate \$125,000,000 over six years to both Prairie View and Texas Southern University. This funding was primarily for new buildings. He realized this was a transformational opportunity for both campuses, because this was a significant infusion of cash, especially for small public HBCUs. Prairie View opened an average of one building per year during his 14 years as president. Many thought the committee was created in preparation for Governor Bush's expected campaign for President of the United States of America.

President Wright shared numerous thoughts about his time at Prairie View and what it took to succeed as a university president. Following are key leadership lessons that contributed to his success.

Awareness and Humility

President Wright understands the significance of his identity as a Black man holding senior-level administrative positions at several PWIs, especially at a time when there were so few Men of Color serving in significant leadership roles at these institutions. He also was reflective about concerns related to his candidacy at Prairie View. Particularly given one of the primary issues raised was that he had never worked at an HBCU. He told the search committee:

They said you've never been at a Black school and these other things. I said I'm Blacker than everybody in this room. I've been doing Black stuff all my life, When I was in 11th grade, I tried to get out of being Black. It didn't work! I'm stuck with being Black! [I] said I am absolutely Black. Don't kill me just because I'm in the White schools, as if I'm not Black. All of us are Black, you know, Black radicals are Black, light-skinned folk are Black. Oh, how can you not be Black just because I don't have the same experience that you may have had. But you don't have the same mix. Everybody didn't live in a housing project like me. It's still Black. You know, the folk who go to the Naval Academy, Black. So, I said, "Now, let me tell you this."

After a few months as president, he realized he had much to learn about HBCUs. There were traditions such as homecoming and campus king and queen pageants that he had not worked with before. He had to reassure the campus and the community that he was not there to change or alter who they were, but to support the important traditions and campus culture that made HBCUs unique.

Three months after that, I go into my office, I shut the door and said, "Oh, you didn't know anything about Black schools. You said you knew everything, you know, nothing.

You have quite a bit to learn.” So, they were technically, right? It was different in some ways, but they were right, I did have a lot I needed to learn.

Thoughtful Advocacy

At Prairie View, President Wright had a positive working relationship with both the president of the board of the Texas A&M System as well as the system chancellor, to whom he directly reported. For example, he worked with the board to expand the Texas Priority Plan to permanently add \$25 million per year to Prairie View’s budget. These additional funds helped set the foundation for many of the successes that were highlighted at the end of his tenure. He also kept the chancellor apprised of campus affairs. However, as the only HBCU in the system, he recognized his responsibility to advocate for his campus and its needs.

He was adept at balancing the needs of the system and board while also ensuring Prairie View had the resources needed for success. He understood the need to advocate for his institution while understanding it was part of a larger system with varied needs that the board also was responsible for meeting. Prairie View differed from the other schools in the system, particularly Texas A&M, and President Wright realized his role was to be a vocal and ardent supporter of his university. However, he did not want to be seen only as a complainer, although there were certainly issues to complain about. He wanted to be considered as a solution-oriented leader. He wanted his university to get its equitable share of funding and resources, and he worked thoughtfully with the president and board to ensure Prairie View was well supported.

Relationship with Staff

President Wright hired experienced administrators for his cabinet. They were subject matter experts who were keenly aware of their role helping to fulfill Prairie View’s mission of providing access and opportunity to African American students. Many of the administrators he

hired at Prairie View identified as first-generation students who saw the institution as an opportunity to change the trajectories of their lives and those of their families. In regard to his process for building his leadership team, President Wright acknowledged he wanted to hire administrators who had a long track record of success in their specific areas, from athletics to student affairs to finance. He was told he could remove the entire existing leadership team and bring in his own people. He decided to evaluate each member based on their role and the skills needed to excel in that role.

As an example of his evaluation process, he learned to appreciate one of his senior staff members who represented Prairie View at all of the community events. This individual attended funerals almost every weekend of prominent alumni or community leaders. Her actions helped him understand that involvement was tradition and expected within the HBCU community. Her contributions in this way as a representative of Prairie View's leadership allowed him up to do engage with other important initiatives.

President Wright said he trusted every person he hired. Loyalty was an important trait he expected from his team; however, this did not mean blind loyalty. His leadership team was encouraged to disagree with him at all times, but he challenged them to either do what he said, argue him out of it, or quit. He charged his team to not lie, always be honest, and if an issue was not their main issue, do not worry about it. He extolled the members of his cabinet to do four things: ensure their finances were in good shape, establish strong relationships, balance their family responsibilities, and act consistently.

Student-First Mentality

Knowing many of his students had varying levels of preparation for college, President Wright worked closely with the Texas A&M System to ensure his students had the same

resources other system campuses had. This was evidenced by small actions, such as not using a golf cart to get around campus. He told his staff that he would only use a cart to traverse campus if all his students had one:

Before I [went] there, folk would ride golf carts on campus because it's kind of spread out. I said if I get a cart let's make sure every student gets a ride everywhere they want to in a golf cart too. Either way, do it one way or the other.

He started a campus tradition for Valentine's Day that students would get a rose from him and if they desired to do so they could take a picture with him. This was an extremely popular initiative, as students would stand in line for long periods of time to have their photo taken with Dr. Wright. They often sent the pictures to their families and loved ones. This became a tradition that created lasting bonds with Dr. Wright and the students. President Wright also was committed to maintaining the campus culture by supporting all the traditions that made HBCUs unique, including enhancing heritage months and celebrations. He also had a strong commitment to literacy, which included supporting campus-wide reading initiatives, essay writing and poetry compositions, and attending debates and promoting the forensics program.

Not a Loser

As a faculty member, President Wright was committed to the academic enterprise. But as President Wright, he recognized the importance of athletics. When named president the football team was in the midst of 10-plus years of losing seasons. They were last in the Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) in all sports. Nationally, the athletics teams were recognized as "losers," which President Wright thinks sent an unintended message about the quality of the university.

I go this SACSCOC (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges) meeting, and I've just been named president of Prairie View and the speaker is talking about universities who are winners and losers. She mentions all of these schools who are losers and says Prairie View. Here I am the new president, and she says this. From that moment on, I knew I had to change the perception of my school.

Again, he worked with the Texas A&M System chancellor and board of regents to re-allocate funds to enhance athletics. For example, Prairie View was only offering 10-15% of the athletics scholarships they eligible to offer. He increased athletics scholarships to the full allotment, which led to an increase in the talent level of the student-athletes. In addition, President Wright increased the number of academic scholarships to athletes. He renovated all facilities, and in 2016 he opened a new on-campus football stadium on, which became the "crown jewel" of campus athletics facilities. He wanted Prairie View to win in all aspects.

The Decision to Step Down

After 14 years, President Wright knew it was time for him to move onto the next phase of his career. He always felt his true connection was to the faculty as an academic, stating that he "was always a history professor masquerading as a college president."

When I ultimately stepped down it was my decision. And one of the things in my 13 Points of Leadership, I say you have to know when to step down. Here's what I think about all these administrative jobs, it is very hard to step down on your own. Because, again, whatever it is you like about the job, you're getting to do that. It is no crime, if you enjoy having that level of income, or that level of clout or that level of notoriety and influence.

He shared that when he accepted the presidency that would be his one and only college presidency. With this in mind he was fully committed to Prairie View. He does not have any regrets about his time in the role. He did all of the things we set out to do. He reflected decisively that, “I reached the fullest capacity that my abilities allowed. I am eternally grateful for this opportunity.”

When I asked President Wright to share his major accomplishments, he shared securing permanent funding through the Texas Priority Plan through the Office of Civil Rights, elevating the athletics department, and creating a culture where academics are valued. He also reflected on notable aspects of leadership that he called the 13 Points of Leadership.

1. A leader must always exhibit ethical behavior, be honest, and truthful. A leader must not, under any circumstances, engage or encourage anything that is illegal, immoral, or unethical.
2. A leader must accept responsibility. It is easy to accept credit for the good things. But what about when things go wrong? Can you admit that you were wrong?
3. A leader must be brave. What does that mean? Speak the truth. Take the right actions despite the consequences that you personally might suffer.
4. A leader must seek “buy in” from others. A leader must listen to others.
5. A leader should be humble. This is important because so many people “praise” you. Leaders need humility because so many good things come our way and we need to be thankful and humble, and realize how fortunate we are to serve in these positions.
6. A leader must accept constructive criticism and accept that unfair criticisms come with the position. There are times when your critics just might be right!

7. A leader must have the right instincts for the job he/she occupies. He/she must know the right thing (decision to make) to do, often at a moment's notice. Discernment is essential.
8. A leader must be optimistic. Must believe that changes can and will occur.
9. A leader needs good inter-personal skills, "soft skills." Must like people and be committed to helping them succeed. Make everyone feel at ease.
10. A leader must inspire.
11. A leader should have a sense of humor. Under the "guise of humor," some people make negative comments about a particular person or group, in short, use "humor" in a mean-spirited way.
12. A leaders must always be on time for appointments and meetings.
13. A leader needs to know when it is time to step aside.

In further describing these he stated the following:

I developed these "13 principles" early in my presidency at PVAMU. I decided that it was important to me, if not to others, to always remember certain principles and to go back to them on a regular basis. As president, I would have a day-long meeting with PVAMU administrators, these would range from the vice presidents, deans, etc., on the academic side, to administrators on the student [side], staff, and indeed every area of the university. I shared with them my principles and I also lectured about leadership from a range of perspectives.

According to the Prairie View A&M Office of Media Relations, the following are a list of his milestone accomplishments: Over the 14 years he was president, total student enrollment increased from 6,500 to 9,000. His team created Doctorates in Education, Engineering, and Juvenile Justice, including the Doctor of Nursing Practice starting in 2010. To further emphasize

his commitment to the academic culture, he created the Honors College. He oversaw the opening of several state-of-the-art facilities, including the School of Architecture, which was housed in a three story, 105,000 square-foot building, The Don K. Clark Building, which was home of the College of Juvenile Justice, Psychology and Texas Crime Prevention Center, and the Electrical Engineering Building. He also led efforts to build the College of Nursing's leading edge 12-story nursing educational facility, located in the Texas Medical Center in Houston. His team also led the process to build a new football stadium.

Additional Insights

In addition to his views on leadership, outlined in the 13 points discussed above, President Wright offered additional insights on success for future African American college presidents. First, he noted that mentorship is very important – both of mentoring of others and being a mentor. President Wright shared the importance of mentoring future college presidents, particularly in regard to increasing the number of African American college presidents.

I think institutions have to be committed to really mentoring people, even if it turns out that the person, they mentored doesn't become president at their institution. You mentor someone, and when they're ready to go to the next level of leadership, you support them. Even if you don't have a job available, it's still good for the profession overall, even if it may not be good for your institution overall. But we have to be committed to mentoring.

He also emphasized the importance of understanding and mastering the budget. From his previous experiences, it has been important for him to understand finances and how enrollment impacts the budget. As a university leader, much of his financial strategy depended on student enrollment. He had to plan for unexpected financial expenditures, whether it was hurricane damage to the campus, or the need to remove birds from an academic building.

They got to understand the budget, you absolutely need to understand those things and, what enrollment numbers mean, or what debt means. The person who's your CFO [chief financial officers], you better believe in that person, your enrollment management, your financial aid person. These are all critical roles that will determine if you're successful or not.

Finally, he reflected that the legacy a leader will leave will be less about what they said and more about what they actually did to improve the campus. A leader should wake up every day and think about how they can make their institution better than it was yesterday.

The legacy, I would hope is that I think whatever institution I served, I want to believe... I would hope people say that Prairie View is a better institution because on my efforts. You can decide whether it's great, excellent or whatever. I tried to leave Prairie View in a better position [than] when I found it. I tried to do my very best to enhance the overall culture of the campus. Whether it was supporting academic programs, building new buildings, securing more state funds. I worked every day to make the institution better.

Summary

This chapter wove together President Wright's experiences re-telling his story beginning with the discussion of key aspects of his life, significant moments that impacted the trajectory of his life, and the academic journey that led to his presidency. He discussed moving from public housing in Lexington, Kentucky to the start of his collegiate career at the University of Kentucky, then to graduate school at Duke University. His professional journey took him from the University of Kentucky to the University of Texas at Austin, Duke University, the University of Texas at Arlington, and finally the presidency at Prairie View A& M University. Each

position providing critical learning experiences that aided in his success. In Chapter Five, I share the lessons learned from President Wright's story, offer implications on leadership, provide considerations for the success of African American university presidents, and helps further the dialogue about higher education leadership.

CHAPTER 5:

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors and events associated with the success of an African American college president. This study focused on the experiences of Dr. George Wright, the former fourteen-year president at Prairie View A&M University, and sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences associated with the successes of an African American college president?
2. How can the factors associated with the success of an African American college president be used to better understand successful presidential leadership?

Using a narrative qualitative research design, I followed President Wright's journey through a series of in-depth interviews, which revealed a story about possibility and potential. The account of his journey and experiences provided insight in the seminal moments that shaped him as a person and ultimately as a leader. The story began with his childhood experiences, guided by his parents and his community. These experiences were buttressed by mentors, unlikely figures such as professors and supervisors, who became the catalysts to help him visualize a life he did know existed. The narrative shifted to one man's quest to make an impact in the world, as a college president. While leading Prairie View, President Wright focused on helping the institution realize its land-grant mission to lift up all communities through access, education, and opportunity.

Organization of the Chapter

In this chapter, I took the lessons and themes garnered from the interviews and reconstruction of the narrative in Chapter 4 to make meaning of his story. I divided the chapter

into four major sections that begins with an overview of Dr. Wright's story, followed by discussion framed in theory and the literature, and considerations for successful presidential leadership.

The theory section of this chapter connects two leadership theories and President Wright's personal leadership philosophy. Leslie and Van Velsor's (1996) considerations for how and why presidents are derailed are juxtaposed with the factors that aided in President Wright's success. This is followed by consideration of Bryman's (2007) forms of administrative effectiveness as exhibited by President Wright. Finally, during the interviews, President Wright described his philosophy on leadership, which is used as the third framework to consider and make meaning of his experiences.

In the third section of the chapter, I demonstrate how the study connects and contributes to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Specifically, I identify scholarly alignment and divergence with President Wright's experiences. A major focus is this study's contribution to the research on success factors for African American college presidents.

In the final section, I focus on considerations for successful leadership including key takeaways such as the importance of sponsorship, mentorship, relationships, and preparation for opportunities. Each of these were paramount in creating an environment for President's Wright's successful leadership. I end the chapter with my reflections and concluding thoughts on the study and recommendations for future research.

Overview of President Wright's Story

President Wright's story is one of hope, optimism, overcoming adversity, and possibility, demonstrating how he learned to lead with integrity, passion, and purpose. His story tells of how his upbringing and childhood shaped his view of the world and allowed him to reshape his

future. It describes how he identified and connected with mentors and sponsors who helped him understand his purpose and then how to live it out. The story winds from a turbulent secondary and high school educational experience to success, first at the University of Kentucky, then at Duke University where he obtained his doctorate and begin his professional career. Dr. Wright then moved to the University of Texas at Austin, where he began his administrative career and his ascent to the presidency. It also tells of missed opportunities and professional disappointments, such as how his role at Duke helped him understand different leadership styles in higher education administration that might not align with his leadership style.

From President Wright's narrative we learned he was not afraid to ask tough questions and make hard decisions. We learned he was a skilled administrator who displayed compassion for others. He was unwilling to ask someone to do something he was not willing to do himself. For example, in the story of his not using a golf cart at Prairie View unless all of his students had one, he rationalized that if students could not have a golf cart, then he would walk on the campus, just as they did.

President Wright never set out to have the career he had. He did not grow up knowing any college professors or administrators. He was not a child who knew what he wanted to be when he grew up. He was shaped by each experience. As a leader, he simply wanted to do what was right, meet the objectives laid before him, and leave the institution better than he found it.

Growing up in Lexington, Kentucky, George Wright may have been seen as an unlikely candidate to be a university president. In fact, he may have been seen as an unlikely candidate to attend college. But a praying mother who kept him in church, an emotional and spiritual encounter on a walk home, and then an unexpected invitation from a guidance counselor each had a significant role in creating this journey. Lessons he learned, informed his leadership

philosophy. While not explicitly stated, the death of his daughter Rebecca was a key factor in why he went to great lengths to take care of his students. This helped him develop a leadership philosophy based on an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982; 1993), while maintaining a sense of accountability.

President Wright's story reads as one built on taking advantage of opportunities. He did this at every turn, from his days as a faculty member to his presidency. He continuously took advantage of career advancement prospects. This started with his appointment as Director of the African American Studies Program and Vice Provost at the University of Texas at Austin. He sought opportunities where he thought he could make a difference. Most college and university presidents are employed at multiple institutions during their career, starting as faculty who pursue administrative opportunities or solely as administrators (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Moore et al., 1983; Wessel & Keim, 1994). President Wright began his career as a scholar and then moved into administration, with each experience preparing him for the Prairie View presidency.

Theoretical Considerations

Reasons Leaders Fail and President Wright

Leslie and Van Velsor (1996) identified four reasons leaders fail. These include problems with interpersonal relations, failure to meet business objectives, inability to build or lead a team, and inability to change or adapt during a transition.

Problems with interpersonal relationships describes managers who have a difficult time relating to others, which impacts their effectiveness as a leader (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). These leaders often are seen as cold and unrelatable. They often have poor (working)

relationships with others and can be seen as too ambitious, many times focusing on the next career move instead of the task at hand.

President Wright was a consummate relationship builder. From his days as an experienced administrator to his presidency he operated with a sense of humility and a respect for humanity. He attempted to convey that he had an open-door policy with those who worked with him (faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders). While he did not always agree with others, he created space for disagreement, recognizing that they might be right. He worked to build authentic, genuine relationships that allowed other voices to be heard. He emphasized on many occasions the importance of listening. When there was an issue, he tended to take it head on. He did not believe in letting issues linger. This is not to say he did not have team members who were unhappy with him, but he sought to establish an environment for their perspectives to be heard.

Failure to meet business objectives describes managers who were initially successful in a functional unit of the organization but when their roles require expanded skillsets, they struggle to perform effectively (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). This failure is especially difficult for them as they progress in the organization and find new ways of working with others.

President Wright wanted clear expectations about goals and objectives from his supervisors and he went to great lengths to provide the same clarity for those who worked for him. Once he established clear goals and objectives, he and his team worked diligently to meet them. He worked closely with the university's chief financial officer (CFO) to ensure he understood the budget, and more broadly he worked directly with each cabinet member, so they knew how their functional area connected to the institution's strategic plan.

The inability to build or lead a team describes managers who usually are considered to have a strong or aggressive personality and generally focused on only one task or issue (Leslie &

Van Velsor, 1996). Leaders who fail here often lose the trust of their teams. This could be for many reasons, including personal and professional failures. These leaders often lack follow-through and typically are seen as poor performers. Overall, their teams never fully gel; either because the leader fails in the hiring process or never coaches their staff to full potential.

President Wright created high expectations of his leadership team, as evidenced by the emphasis in his 13 Leadership Principles. His leadership mantra was “you hire competent people, give them the tools to do their jobs, and get out if their way.” He understood the value of subject matter experts. He sought those who had a different skillset than his and those who were more knowledgeable in key areas, be it student affairs, fundraising, or communications.

The inability to change or adapt during a transition describes managers who derail because they struggle with change and new leadership, new job responsibilities, and the inability to meet the responsibilities of the position (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). These leaders fail to adapt, either to the leadership style of their boss or to the needs of their existing staff. They are seen as unwilling to move strategically or as not intentional about their decision making.

Change and adaptation were hallmarks of President Wright’s administration. As the landscape of higher education evolved, he had to ensure he and his team were abreast of this change and were ready to pivot as needed. Academia is an ever-evolving profession and he had to consistently adapt to new paradigms if Prairie View was to remain relevant. There were times when he managed change at the university, while also providing stability to fulfill his obligations.

Behaviors of Effective Administrative Leadership and President Wright

Bryman (2007) identified 13 behaviors of effective administrative leaders. These include 1) providing a clear sense of direction/strategic vision; 2) preparing department arrangements to

facilitate the direction set; 3) being considerate; 4) treating academic staff fairly and with integrity; 5) being trustworthy and having personal integrity; 6) allowing the opportunity to participate in key decisions/encouraging open communication; 7) communicating well about the direction the department is going; 8) acting as a role model/having credibility; 9) creating a positive/collegial work atmosphere in the department; 10) advancing the department's cause with respect to constituencies internal and external to the university and being proactive in doing so; 11) providing feedback on performance; 12) providing resources for and adjusting workloads to stimulate scholarship and research; and 13) making academic appointments that enhance department's reputation.

President Wright exemplified many of Bryman's (2007) principles. However, at times this was not as evident in his decisions as others. He created a clear vision and strategy as president, but for some of his decisions, it seemed the goals were his alone and not necessarily developed with the support and buy-in of the administration. This is not to say they were not impactful goals that moved the university forward, nor that his staff was unsupportive; however, they were certainly the president's priorities. For example, the emphasis on a more "academically literate" environment where he wanted to increase the academic rigor at Prairie View, seemed to emanate from the president's office and not necessarily a collaborative effort with his cabinet. When he became president, many worried that President Wright would change the traditions of the university, and while he did not, he was laser-focused on enhancing the academic environment. This was his priority and his team had to get on board.

President Wright often discussed the importance of integrity as a leader. Treating academic administrators fairly and with integrity and being trustworthy and having personal integrity are principles emphasized by Bryman (2007). President Wright frequently discussed the

need for ethical, honest, and truthful behavior. When he made decisions, he felt it was important to not compromise integrity. Likewise, he held all of the university employees to the same standards. There was no gray area when it came to “doing the right thing.”

Creating a positive/collegial work environment was a key aspect of President Wright’s leadership philosophy. This environment was based on respect for students and staff. He led by the golden rule of treating others how he wanted to be treated. He never asked staff or students to do anything we was not willing to do, including riding golf carts on campus, unless every student had one to ride as well. These might seem like small gestures, but they went a long way in establishing a campus climate of trust, openness, and mutual respect.

Points of Leadership and President Wright

President Wright developed 13 guiding principles for his leadership and those who were a part of his leadership team.

1. A leader must always exhibit ethical behavior, be honest and truthful. A leader must not, under any circumstances, engage or encourage anything that is illegal, immoral, or unethical.
2. A leader must accept responsibility. It is easy to accept credit for the good things. But what about when things go wrong? Can you admit that you were wrong?
3. A leader must be brave. What does that mean? Speak the truth. Must take the right actions despite the consequences that you personally might suffer.
4. A leader must seek “buy in” from others. A leader must listen to others.
5. A leader should be humble. This is important because so many people “praise” you. Leaders need humility because so many good things come our way and we need to be thankful and humble, and realize how fortunate we are to serve in these positions.

6. A leader must accept constructive criticism and accept that unfair criticisms come with the position. There are times when your critics just might be right!
7. A leader must have the right instincts for the job he/she occupies. He/she must know the right thing (decision to make) to do, often at a moment's notice. Discernment is essential.
8. A leader must be optimistic. Must believe that changes can and will occur.
9. A leader needs good inter-personal skills, "soft skills." Must like people and be committed to helping them succeed. Make everyone feel at ease.
10. A leader must inspire.
11. A leader should have a sense of humor. Under the "guise of humor," some people make negative comments about a particular person or group, in short, using "humor" in a mean-spirited way.
12. A leaders must always be on time for appointments and meetings.
13. A leader needs to know when it is time to step aside.

From his story and evidenced by examples of how he tried to connect with students and create an intellectually curious environment, President Wright lived these principles. As a leader he empowered his team to disagree with him; because ultimately, he wanted the best for his campus. However, there were times where those values might have been viewed as not supporting his leadership principles. For example, was it helpful for him to allow one of his staff members to represent him at the funerals of alumni and dignitaries. It is unclear from his story whether this was seen as acceptable delegation or problematic within the university community. President Wright shared in his 13 principles of leadership how he used humor as a leadership trait. He shared how he used humor to disarm some individuals, while using it to ingratiate himself to others. These are leadership qualities that ultimately made him a successful president.

Summary

This section connected Dr. Wright's story to two leadership theories and his personal theory of leadership, helping to make meaning of President Wright's experiences. Each experience highlighted and described the conditions that aided in his success as a president. Leslie and Van Velsor's (1996) contribution offered a framework of behaviors to avoid as leaders seek to establish foundations for their success. Bryman's (2007) work assisted in understanding leadership characteristics that have been proven to help organizational leaders succeed in their roles. Finally, President's Wrights personal philosophy of leadership enlightened how he made decisions and how he defined success (personally and for others) at Prairie View. These theories and Dr. Wright's philosophy highlight the importance of treating staff and employees with respect and care. Integrity and personal responsibility are key qualities for successful leaders. While not highlighted specifically, effective communication was key in some cases such as when communicating with staff, supervisors, and organizational stakeholders. Each of these characteristics were noticeable in Presidents Wright's success.

Connections and Contributions to the Scholarly Literature

Research indicates PWIs are seeking to diversify their student enrollment and faculty composition (Campbell-Whatley et al., 2021; Chenoweth, 1998; Fikes, 2004; Holmes, 2004; Jackson, 2001a; 2006; Jackson & Daniels, 2007; McAllister, 2023; Roach, 2001;) however, the literatures reveals the same efforts are not occurring at the administrative ranks (Chamberlain III, 2022; Hurst, 2022; Jackson, 2001a; 2001b; 2002; Scott, 2016). A closer examination of the research on administrative leadership and African American males highlights particular strategies needed to aid in their success at the undergraduate, graduate, and faculty levels to ensure potential paths to the presidency. There is a direct connection to the ability of

undergraduates to garner social and cultural capital and the importance of self-authorship to their success (Brooms, 2018; Clark & Brooms, 2018). Black males need opportunities to find community on college campuses, this may lead to a greater sense of belonging. Doing so could aid in their retention and ultimately persistence to graduation. This is evidenced in the literature as (Brooms, 2018) noted the ways that Black Male Initiatives helps create environments where they can be themselves and find acceptance, a critical factor in increasing persistence rates. President Wright found this through his mentors, and those who assisted him in finding his passion and vocation. On his journey to the presidency, President Wright excelled academically both in his undergraduate and graduate degree programs. His academic success is counter to the master narrative that Black males do not achieve academically (Brown, 2011; Brooms, 2018; Harper, 2009; 2012; Rhoden, 2017). He was able to earn his undergraduate and graduate degrees and embark on a lengthy career as a professor and administrator.

Harper (2012) discovered that most Black male undergraduate students who enter, persist, and graduate from college within six years tend to have five common characteristics. These characteristics include 1) expectations of attending college; 2) campus engagement as students; 3) responding productively to racism; 4) mentor-mentee relationships; and 5) primarily a Christian religious/spiritual identity.

Scott and Sharp (2019) highlighted Black graduate students need supportive social networks, a cultural identity and self-beliefs to succeed. McCoy and Winkle-Wagner (2015) concluded graduate students need to develop a scholarly habitus to become scholars. President Wright found the environments he needed and became the first Black American to earn a PhD in history from Duke University. He began his higher education career as a faculty member in history at PWIs (University of Kentucky and University of Texas at Austin). Wolf and Freeman

(2013) acknowledged belonging as a major issue Faculty of Color face. Much like students, faculty need an environment void of microaggressions and racism where they feel affirmed and supported as scholars. They want to feel a sense of belonging and community where they can bring their authentic selves to campus, without fear of judgement or retaliation. President Wright was able to navigate these nuances and earn tenure and promotion culminating in a named professorship.

Successful Presidential Leadership for an African American Male

While President Wright's experiences are unique to his story, aspiring African American college presidents can use his story as a source of inspiration. Several important leadership lessons emerge from President Wright's narrative when considered with the literature on presidential leadership. These include mentoring/sponsorship, the importance of relationships, being in the right place at the right time, and preparation for leadership. Dr. Wright's story helps further define that success as not simply consisting of a time in a role, but other critical components necessary for holistic success. He shared that to truly succeed as a leader it is imperative that a culture and climate of support, openness, and communication is sustained. This environment is one where challenging the status quo is expected and disagreement is not considered negatively.

Mentoring

Mentoring matters. Mentorship comes in many forms, but ultimately it helps the mentee understand where there are opportunities and what are personal areas of development. Mentors are champions, accountability partners and supporters, they reflect on those being mentored. Mentoring had a significant role in President Wright's career. This started with his undergraduate studies at the University of Kentucky where faculty members guided him to graduate school. He

was mentored by higher education leaders such as Dr. Bill Cunningham at the University of Texas. These were seminal experiences that set President Wright on his administrative career trajectory and is reflected in the literature on successful presidents. Selingo et al. (2017) found that nearly two-thirds of presidents reported being groomed by mentors or coaches to prepare for their roles. Conversely, only one-third shared that they continued to receive mentoring and coaching after ascending to the presidency. This underscores the importance of mentors and mentoring. Fullan (2014) shared that organizational leaders should constantly enhance their skillset. The value and importance of mentoring is discussed in both the derailment and leadership literature. Further, the literature on Black administrators in higher education converges with the derailment and leadership literature (Jackson, 2004; Jones, 2014). Black male students and faculty recruitment and retention can be assisted by Black male administrative recruitment and retention (Konrad & Pfeffer, 1991; Wolfe & Freeman, 2013). This president's story can serve as a guide for advancing and retaining Black male senior administrators.

Importance of Relationships

The importance of relationships also is evident in President Wight's story. This was evidenced in how he engaged with the system chancellor, board of trustees, and alumni. It also was demonstrated in how he selected and led his team. Dr. Wright treated everyone with respect and dignity. This is further evidenced by his personal leadership principle that emphasizes the need for buy-in from others and to listen to others; as he said, "they just might be right." President Wright wanted those who worked with and for him to be in partnership to achieve the goals they established. He respected his colleagues and treated them with the dignity deserved while also holding them accountable. He wanted the students he served to know he was an advocate for them and their success. Dr. Wright did this by being present and engaging with

students in ways that felt comfortable to them. For example, he gave them roses in the student dining hall on Valentine's Day and he went out of his way to talk and engage with them on campus.

Right Place Right Time

Dr. Wright was prepared for each opportunity that presented itself. He took advantage of opportunities to better himself and expand his leadership skills as he prepared for a presidency. When he accepted the provost's role at the University of Texas, Arlington he had been vice provost at two research extensive universities, the University of Texas at Austin and Duke University. From his selection to attend a seminar in high school that led to a scholarship to the University of Kentucky to his decision to pursue a PhD instead of law school, President Wright often felt he was in the right place at the right time to take advantage of the opportunities presented. Dr. Wright articulated that he knew his worth and would not stand for disrespect or not being appreciated. He left the University of Texas at Austin and Duke University when he believed he did not have the access needed to succeed. At Texas, he maintained unfettered access to the president and was a member of the president's inner circle. At Duke, due to leadership changes prior to and immediately after his arrival, he found himself working with a provost who had not hired him and with whom he was not familiar. These are examples of not only pursuing opportunities as presented but understanding context when making important decisions. This concept did not emanate from the literature but from President Wright's espoused leadership philosophy. According to Argyris (1990), this espoused theory is how he sought effectiveness in his practice. An espoused theory is a theory that a leader believes in, although it has not been tested empirically, they are their personal beliefs the individual holds to be true.

President Wright's 13 Principles of Leadership converges with the literature on effective leadership (Bryman, 2007; Rowley & Sherman, 2003). Several of his interpersonal skills such as using humor, making people feel at ease, and the use of soft skills were important leadership traits he used to help him accomplish his goals. However, I wonder if he felt as if he had to incorporate these particular principles to excel as an African American male who initially had only worked at PWI? These skills served him well, but I was left pondering if they served to put those who might be skeptical of his leadership at ease? These leadership principles were developed by an African American male who led an HBCU. Personal leadership skills must be combined with institutional efforts to combat structural bias to be effective (Bonilla-Silva & Peoples, 2022). Sherman (2021) found that with intentional and culturally appropriate mentoring colleges and universities could have a greater impact by creating additional opportunities to widen the presidential pathways.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provided a personal narrative telling one African American male's journey to the presidency. African American higher education leaders who seek to ascend to the presidency can use President Wright's experiences as a guide to help understand factors that enabled him to succeed. More importantly, they can glean important lessons for their own leadership journeys. Additional research is needed on People's of Color experiences in higher education leadership positions, particularly the presidency. For example, African Americans comprise only 11.1% of all college presidencies and when considering only PWIs, that number significantly decreases (American Council on Education (ACE; 2023). PWIs are often the flagship and/or land-grant universities which were established to serve increasingly diverse student populations. In the case

of land-grants universities, they were designated to serve the state's citizens and provide opportunity for all communities.

Future research should study the career trajectories of presidents to determine if there are differences between those who, like President Wright, ascend through the traditional academic ranks, versus those who advance from student life or other functional units. There also might be some benefit to comparing HBCU leadership experiences to PWIs leadership experiences, particularly for People of Color. It would be helpful to compare and contrast the experiences of presidents to gauge the differences and similarities that exist in career preparation and career trajectories. Future research should also explore leadership by institutional type (e.g., community colleges, research I, public, private). Finally, an evaluation of President Wright's 13 leadership principles could be helpful in understanding how his approach might add to the leadership research, particularly its applicability to aspiring African American college presidents.

Dr. Wright benefited from multiple mentors in his life. However, there also is a growing body of research on the differences between mentorship and sponsorship (Hernandez & Longman, 2020). Mentors are described as people who provide guidance and advice to someone who looks to them for professional and personal support. Sponsors are mentors, who take their role a step farther. They not only provide advice and guidance, but they also take action using their networks and cultural and social capital to provide opportunities for those they sponsor (Cabrera-Muffly, 2021). For example, Dr. Bill Cunningham served as a mentor and sponsor to President Wright. Dr. Cunningham provided President Wright with opportunities for advancement and opened doors for him to achieve his goals, including naming him provost at the University of Texas, Arlington. Mentors and sponsors are important to individuals who are on the receiving end of these relationships, but they have different but important roles.

Final Thoughts

President Wright's journey from Lexington to Prairie View speaks deeply to me. His is a story of hope, resilience, determination, and redemption. Every obstacle that he faced, he met head on and overcame it, from his high school days when he released his anger to when he vowed that the University of Kentucky would not regret their decision to accept him. He did not let racial or economic barriers prevent him from finding mentors and relying on their experiences and advice to help guide his career. President Wright took advantage of opportunities, but he also was in the right places, doing the right things to expand his network and create opportunities.

President Wright's journey to becoming an African American president took many turns. It began with an angry young man named Ricky who was trying to understand the embarrassment of having to stand in the free lunch line at school. Later, this same young man walked home from his job at a country club on the other side of town, so his friends on the city bus would not see him in a dishwasher's uniform. President Wright's ability to translate these experiences into resiliency highlights a common theme of his leadership journey. His leadership is complemented by an innate humility that he possesses. He never took for granted the privilege and responsibility he had in leading Prairie View. Dr. Wright often commented how he wanted to leave the university in a much better place than he found it. He acted as if leading this institution was an honor of a lifetime, and never took it or its people for granted.

In retrospect, President Wright was open to opportunities presented to him. In all of his leadership roles, he focused on making the institution better and attempted to lead with honesty and integrity. He led transformational change while leading with authenticity. He found mentors who supported and challenged him. He offered insights into how he was able to lead Prairie View for 14 years using his ability to build relationships as the bedrock of his career. This

research is important because it highlighted the power of possibility, and it underscored the saying that “where you start doesn’t have to dictate where you end up.”

Epilogue

I appreciate Dr. Wright’s willingness to share his story and let me into his world. Our initial interviews were conducted by Zoom because we were at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, with careful planning we were able to have our final meeting in person. I traveled to Lexington to meet him. I had the pleasure of being his guest as he was the speaker at the annual celebration to honor the founding resident of a predominantly Black community known as Hometown. Meeting him in person felt as if I was in the presence of royalty. Although extremely busy as an interim vice president at the University of Kentucky, Dr. Wright always made time for me and was always available for follow-up questions. He was also very mindful of my time and our time together. After each interview, he became more and more comfortable with me as an interviewer and scholar. I truly appreciate his partnership with me as we journeyed through his life experiences.

This dissertation was not easy for me. I had lots of starts and stops. I was filled with doubt, and imposter syndrome crept in from time to time. But once I heard President Wright’s story, it gave me hope and inspiration that I could complete this degree.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval

Consent for Research Participation

Research Study Title: The Factors Associated with the Success of an African American College President

Researcher(s): Tyvi Small, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Faculty Advisor-Patrick Biddix, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this research study because you are an African American College President.

What is this research study about?

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors and events associated with the success of an African American college president. This study will focus on the experiences of one a president using qualitative methodology. Findings from this study will serve as a resource for aspiring African American college presidents and as a guide for boards of trustees to avoid costly issues/expenses associated with presidential derailment.

Who is conducting this research study?

This study is being conducted by researchers at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and researchers at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

How long will I be in the research study?

If you agree to be in the study, your participation will last for 10 months and will involve 1 study visit and 4 phone calls. The visit will last 2 hours and each phone call will last at most 2 hours.

What will happen if I say “Yes, I want to be in this research study”?

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to agree to participate in 5 interviews, 1 in person and 4 by telephone for a total of 10 hours. Each interview will have a different focus. Following are the areas the interviews will cover: Life History, Career Path, The Presidency/Success. I will also request written documents such as news articles, announcements, meeting meetings, and communications such as letters and emails that you are willing to share related to these areas to aid in my analysis.

What happens if I say “No, I do not want to be in this research study”?

Being in this study is up to you. You can say no now or leave the study later. Either way, your decision will not affect your relationship with the researchers or the University of Tennessee.

What happens if I say “Yes” but change my mind later?

Even if you decide to be in the study now, you can change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to stop before the study is completed, please email or call the researcher and indicate your decision to no longer be a part of this study.

Are there any possible risks to me?

It is possible that someone could find out you were in this study or see your study information, but we believe this risk is small because of the procedures we use to protect your information. These procedures are described later in this form.

Are there any benefits to being in this research study?

We do not expect you to benefit from being in this study. Your participation may help us to learn more about presidential derailment. We hope the knowledge gained from this study will benefit others in the future.

Who can see or use the information collected for this research study?

We will protect the confidentiality of your information by keeping all data on secured computers with two factor authentications. The study records will be stored securely and accessible only to research personnel.

If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information or what information came from you. Although it is unlikely, there are times when others may need to see the information we collect about you. These include:

- People at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville who oversee research to make sure it is conducted properly.
- Government agencies (such as the Office for Human Research Protections in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), and others responsible for watching over the safety, effectiveness, and conduct of the research.
- If a law or court requires us to share the information, we would have to follow that law or final court ruling.

What will happen to my information after this study is over?

We will not keep your information to use for future research or other purposes. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from your research data collected as part of the study.

We will not share your research data with other researchers.

Will I be paid for being in this research study?

You will not be paid for being in this study

Will it cost me anything to be in this research study?

It will not cost you anything to be in this study.

What else do I need to know?

The University of Tennessee does not automatically pay for medical claims or give other compensation for injuries or other problems.

Who can answer my questions about this research study?

If you have questions or concerns about this study, or have experienced a research related problem or injury, contact the researchers:

Tyvi Small

tsmall@utk.edu

865-202-0992

Patrick Biddix, Ph.D.

pbiddix@utk.edu

865-974-2214

For questions or concerns about your rights or to speak with someone other than the research team about the study, please contact:

Institutional Review Board The University of Tennessee, Knoxville 1534 White Avenue Blount Hall, Room 408 Knoxville, TN 37996-1529 Phone: 865-974-7697

Email: utkirb@utk.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have more questions, I have been told who to contact. By signing this document, I am agreeing to be in this study. I will receive a copy of this document after I sign it.

Name of Adult Participant

Signature of Adult Participant

Date

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Life History

1. What are some of your early meaningful experiences growing up that impacted your life?
2. Growing up what was your family's perspective on college and career?
3. Who were the key mentors and sponsors in your life?

Career Path

4. What experiences led you to a career in higher education administration?
 - a. What are some of the most important ones?
5. Who or what influenced your decision to become a college president?
 - a. When did you realize that you wanted to become a college president?
 - b. At what point did you think you could actually accomplish this?
6. Can you share with me a significant experience in your that lead you to this role?
 - a. Can you share a story or give an example about this important event?
7. What types of support did you receive as your career progressed?
8. What obstacles did you face with as you moved through your career?

The Presidency/Success

9. What was the most challenging aspect of your job?
10. What did you enjoy most about the presidency?
11. Do you think race a factor in your relationships with members of your senior administration?
12. Do you feel there were different expectations for than your White counterparts when you dealt with the topic of diversity?
13. This dissertation can be used as a source of information for aspiring administrators and faculty who might want to move into senior level administrative roles, including the presidency, but don't have access to Black mentors and sponsors.
 - a. What skills, talents, and attributes do that they need to acquire that might not be ascertained your vita?
 - b. What would you like to share with professionals about managing the higher education environment/infrastructure?
 - c. How can universities increase the number of African American Presidents?

Conclusion

- What did/do you want people to see as your legacy?
- What else would you like to share that we haven't already discussed?
- Would you be willing to participate in follow up interviews?
- Would you be willing to answer questions via email or Zoom?
- Are there any other people you would like for me to speak with?
- May I contact you if needed to clarify your answers?
- Thank you for your time and assistance.

Appendix C: Curriculum Vita of George Carlton Wright

EDUCATION:

Duke University
Ph.D., History, 1977

University of Kentucky,
M.A., History, 1974

University of Kentucky,
B.A., History, 1972

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Senior Advisor to the President, University of Kentucky, August 1, 2020.

Interim Vice President, Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, University of Kentucky, July 2020.

Distinguished University Research Professor, University of Kentucky, June 1, 2020.

Visiting Professor, Department of History, University of Kentucky, September 2019 to May 2020.

Professor, Department of History, Texas A&M University, September 2017 to June 2020.

President, Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, August 2003 to August 2017.

Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, The University of Texas at Arlington, September 1995 to August 2003.

William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of American History, Duke University, August 1993-February 1996.

Vice Provost for University Programs and Director, African and Afro-American Studies Program, Duke University, August 1993-July 1995.

Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, The University of Texas at Austin, 1990-1993.

Mastin Gentry White Professor of Southern History, The University of Texas at Austin, 1990-1993.

Professor, Department of History, The University of Texas at Austin, 1990-1993.

Director, Center for African and Afro-American Studies, The University of Texas at Austin, 1986-1990.

Associate Professor, Department of History, The University of Texas at Austin,
1986-1990

Assistant Professor, Department of History, The University of Texas at Austin, 1980-86

Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Kentucky, 1977-1980

BOOKS:

A History of Blacks In Kentucky: In Pursuit of Equality, 1890-1980, Volume II. Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, November 1992.

Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings." Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, May 1990. Recipient of the "Governor's Award" presented by the Kentucky Historical Society for the best book on Kentucky history published between 1986-1990. Selected by the Gustavus Myers Center for the Study of Human Rights in the United States as an "Outstanding Book" on the subject of human rights.

Life Behind a Veil: Blacks in Louisville, Kentucky, 1865-1930. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, September 1985. Co-recipient of the "Governor's Award" presented by the Kentucky Historical Society for the best book on Kentucky History published between 1982-1986.

SELECTED ARTICLES, BOOK CHAPTERS, AND ESSAYS:

"Growing Up Segregated," in Elizabeth Jacoway and C. Fred Williams, eds., *Understanding the Little Rock Crisis: An Exercise in Remembrance and Reconciliation.* Fayette: University of Arkansas Press, 1999.

"Lessons I Learned from My Teachers," in Judy Reinhartz and Don M. Beach, eds., *Teaching and Learning in the Elementary School.* New York: Prentice Hall, 1997.

"By the Book: The Legal Executions of Kentucky Blacks," in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

"Commentary on Raymond Arsenault's 'The Folklore of Southern Demagoguery,'" in Charles Eagles, ed., *Is There A Southern Political Tradition?* Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996.

"The Contexts of Southern Lynchings: New Answers to Old Questions," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Summer 1995.

"The Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky, 1900-1970," in W. Marvin Dulaney, ed., *Essays on the Significance of the Civil Rights Movement in American History.* College Station: Texas A&M University Press, November 1993.

"Afro-Americans in Kentucky," in *The Encyclopedia of Kentucky*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, August 1992.

"Race Relations After 1865," in James Klotter, ed., *Our Kentucky: A Study of The Bluegrass State*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, June 1992.

"The End For Me, But A Beginning For Others: My Years of Research On Kentucky Blacks," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, June 1992.

"Executions of Afro-Americans in Kentucky, 1870-1940," *The Georgia Journal of Southern Legal History*, Winter 1991.

"The Forced Removal of Afro-Americans from Rural Kentucky," *Reflections: Occasional Papers on Research in Kentucky Public Records*, Volume 1, Number 1, 1990.

History Museum Review, "Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America," *Journal of American History*, June 1990.

"William H. Steward: Moderate Approach to Black Leadership," in August Meier and Leon Litwack, eds., *Black Leaders of the 19th Nineteenth Century*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, March 1988.

"The Billy Club and the Ballot: Police Intimidation of Blacks in Louisville, 1880-1930," *Southern Studies*, Spring 1984.

"Black Political Insurgency in Louisville, Kentucky: The Lincoln Independent Party of 1921," *Journal of Negro History*, Winter 1983. This article was the co-recipient of the Carter G. Woodson Award for the best article published in the *Journal of Negro History* for the years 1983-1987.

"Oral History and the Search for the Black Past in Kentucky," *Oral History Review*, Fall 1982.

"Desegregation of Public Accommodations in Louisville, Kentucky," in David Colburn and Elizabeth Jacoway, eds., *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.

"The NAACP and Residential Segregation in Louisville, Kentucky, 1914-1917," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, January 1980. This article won the Richard Collins Award as the best article appearing in the Journal for 1980.

"The Faith Plan: A Black Institution Grows During the Depression," *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, October 1977.

"The Founding of Lincoln Institute," *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, January 1975. Reprinted in *Kentucky: Its Heritage and People*, Fred Hood, ed. St. Louis: Forum Press, 1978.

BOOK REVIEWS:

John Hope Franklin, *Race and History: Selected Essays, 1938-1988*. *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, January 1992.

David R. Colburn, *Racial Change and Community Crisis: St. Augustine, Florida, 1877-1980*. *The Public Historian*, 1987.

Houston A. Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*. *Journal of Southern History*, 1985

Mary A. Rothschild, *A Case of Black and White*. *The Oral History Review*, 1984.

Louis Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*. *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, Spring 1984.

John D. Wright, *Lexington: Heart of the Bluegrass*. *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, Autumn 1983.

Howard N. Rabinowitz, ed., *Black Political Leaders of the Reconstruction Era*. *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Spring 1983.

Charles P. Roland, *The Improbable Era: The South Since 1945*. *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, July 1977.

Robert P. Williams, *By the Bulls That Redeemed Me*. *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, January 1976.

SPECIAL REPORT:

"A Report on the History of Blacks in Texas to 1950, with Special Emphasis on the Desegregation of the University of Texas School of Law," May 1994. This report was written and prepared for the Defendants in the case of *Cheryl J. Hopwood, Douglas W. Carvell, Kenneth R. Elliott, and David A. Rogers, Plaintiffs v. The State of Texas, University of Texas Board of Regents, and the University of Texas School of Law, Defendants*.

HONORS:

Hall of Distinguished Alumni, University of Kentucky, May 2005.

Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of Kentucky, May 2004.

FELLOWSHIPS, GRANTS AND AWARDS:

Friar Society Centennial Fellow for Teaching Excellence, University of Texas at Austin, 1990.

Jean Holloway Award for Teaching Excellence, College of Liberal Arts and College of Natural Sciences, The University of Texas at Austin, 1988.

Silver Spurs Centennial Teaching Fellowship, College of Liberal Arts, The University of Texas at Austin, 1987-88.

The "Eyes of Texas" Award for "Excellence in Service" to the University of Texas at Austin, presented by the Friar Society, 1986 and 1988.

Lillian and Tom B. Rhodes Centennial Teaching Fellow, College of Liberal Arts, The University of Texas at Austin, 1985-86.

Andrew W. Mellon Faculty Fellowship, Harvard University, 1983-84.

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Award for "Outstanding Black Faculty Member," The University of Texas at Austin, 1983.

"Best Faculty Poll," *UTmost* Magazine, The University of Texas: 1982, 1983, 1987, 1989 and 1990. Selected in March 1992 for the *UTmost* Best Professor Hall of Fame.

Oral History Fellowship, Duke University, 1974-1977.

Haggin Fellowship, University of Kentucky, 1973-1974.

CONFERENCES, SYMPOSIA, COLLOQUIA:

"African-Americans in Texas: The Nineteenth-Century Legacy." Paper presented at the Symposium on the African-American Experience in Texas," Houston, Texas, February 2002.

"Distance Education at the University of Texas at Arlington." Paper presented at the Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications 13th Annual Conference in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, October 2001.

"Action Research: Building A Teacher Research Academy." Paper presented at the Global Conversations Conference, Utrecht, Netherlands, August 2000.

"Race Relations in Texas." Paper presented at the Texas Historical Association meeting, Austin, Texas, March 2000.

"Oral History and the Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky." Keynote presentation, Kentucky Civil Rights Oral History Symposium, Frankfort, Kentucky, February 2000.

"The Kentucky Racial Justice Act." Paper presented at the Kentucky Bar Association, Louisville, Kentucky, June 1999.

"Rethinking The University Reward System to Support Educational Renewal." Paper presented at the In Praise of Education Conference, Seattle, Washington, June 1999.

"Restructuring the Reward System: An Overview from the Provost Perspective." American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Washington, D.C., February 1999.

"Lawyers and Historians Confront Capital Punishment in the South: A Roundtable Discussion." Presentation at the Southern Historical Association meeting, Birmingham, Alabama, November 1998.

"Growing Up Segregated." Paper presented at the Little Rock Conference, Remembrance and Reconciliation: Understanding the Little Rock Crisis of 1957," September, 1997.

"Race Relations in Present-Day America." Paper presented at De Montfort University, Leicester, England, January 1995.

"Southern Demagogues: Is There A Southern Political Tradition?" Session Commentator, University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi, October 1994.

"Justice or 'Just Us': Continuity and Change in the Lives of Southern Blacks." Paper presented at Black and White Perspectives on the American South, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, September 1994.

"Notes of a Native Son: Growing Up Black in Kentucky During the Civil Rights Movement.." Paper presented at The Fifth Maple Leaf and Eagle Conference on North American Studies, Helsinki, Finland, April 1994.

"Black Texans in the Nineteenth Century." Paper presented at the Texas Southern University Symposium on Texas History, Houston, Texas, October 1992.

"Robert Charles O'Hara Benjamin: His California Years." Paper presented at the Western History Association, New Haven, Connecticut, October 1992.

"Robert Charles O'Hara Benjamin: Newspaper Editor." Paper presented at The Fourth Maple Leaf and Eagle Conference on North American Studies, Helsinki, Finland, September 1992.

"Robert Charles O'Hara Benjamin: Forgotten Black Leader." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association Pacific Coast Branch, Kona Coast, Hawaii, August 1991.

"Oral History and Race Relations in Kentucky." Paper presented at the Kentucky Conference on Oral History, Louisville, Kentucky, April 1991.

"Changing the Core Curriculum: A Case in Point." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Higher Education, National Conference on Higher Education, Washington, D.C., March 1991.

"The Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky, 1930-1970." Paper presented for the Walter Webb Lecture Series, The University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, March 1991.

"The Forced Removal of Afro-Americans from Rural Kentucky." Paper presented at the International Oral History Conference, Essen, West Germany, March 1990.

"Racial Violence in Rural Kentucky." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Lexington, Kentucky, November 1989.

"Duke University Oral History Program: Toward A Biracial History of the South." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Oral History Association, Galveston, Texas, October 1989.

"Those Who Stayed Home During the Great Migration, 1915 to the Present." Paper presented at the Jackson State University National Symposium, Jackson, Mississippi, September 14-15, 1989.

"Eligibility Requirements of College Athletes and Racial Discrimination." Paper presented at the Sports Law Conference, Austin, Texas, March 1989.

"Black Texans: What Do We Need to Know?" Paper presented at the African-American History in Texas: Preserving and Sharing the Legacy Conference, Dallas, Texas, February 1989.

"The Forced Migration of Afro-Americans from Rural Kentucky." Paper presented at the Conference on the African-American Urban Community, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., February 1988.

"Race Relations in a Border City: Black Louisville, 1914-1930." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Louisville, November 1984.

"History from the City." Paper presented at the Kentucky Conference on Oral History, Louisville, February 1983.

"Desegregation of Louisville in the 1960s." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Louisville, November 1981.

"Oral History and Kentucky Blacks." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Oral History Association, Burlington, Vermont, October 1981.

"The Black Church in Kentucky: From Oral History Collection to Television Documentary." Paper presented at the Kentucky Conference on Oral History, Owensboro, Kentucky, September 1981.

"Race, Class and Politics." Session Commentator at the Annual Meeting of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association, Eugene, Oregon, August 1981.

"Historians and Slavery." Session Commentator at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, New Orleans, Louisiana, October 1980.

"Civil Rights Organizations in Louisville in the 1910s and 1920s." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Organization of American Historians, San Francisco, California, April 1980.

"Housing Discrimination in America." Session Commentator at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Atlanta, Georgia, November 1979.

"Park Segregation in Louisville." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, New York City, October 1979.

"Oral History and the Civil Rights Movement." Session Commentator at the Annual Meeting of the Oral History Conference, Savannah, Georgia, October 1978.

"Race Relations in Louisville, 1900-1920." Paper presented at the Duquesne University History Forum, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, October 1978.

INVITED LECTURES AND ADDRESSES:

"The Quest of Blacks to Become Full Partners in American Democracy." One Out of Many: The Great American Experience of Unity in Diversity, Sesquicentennial Observance, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, November 1994.

"Research on Race Relations in Kentucky," University of Louisville, October 1992

"From Project To Project: In Search of Our Multicultural Past." Keynote speaker at the Annual Meeting of the Oral History Association, Cleveland, Ohio, October, 1992.

"The Value of Multicultural Education In American Society," College of Education, University of Kentucky, March 1992.

"University Initiatives Concerning Multicultural Education," Alliance for Undergraduate Education meeting, Tucson, Arizona, January 1992.

"Life Behind A Veil: Dreams of the Blacks in Southern History," The Institute for the Humanities at Salado, Salado, Texas, October 1991.

"The Value of Multicultural Education in Our Changing World," Beaumont Rotary Club and the John Grey Institute, Beaumont, Texas, May 1991.

"Blacks in Texas History," African-American Heritage Series Lecture, Dallas Museum of African-American Life and Culture, Dallas, Texas, 1991.

"Institutional Racism in White Universities," Grayson County College, Sherman, Texas, January 1990.

"The Rest of the Dream: A History of Civil Rights In Kentucky," Kentucky Center for the Arts, Louisville, Kentucky, February 1989.

"Legal Lynchings in Kentucky," Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, Texas, March 1988.

Keynote Speaker, Kentucky Governor's Scholar Program (for outstanding high school students), Louisville, Kentucky, July 1986- July 1992.

"Black History and Appalachian History," Berea College, Berea, Kentucky, October 1984, April 1984.

"Racial Violence in Kentucky: Lynchings and Mob Rule," Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston, Massachusetts, January 1984.

"Racial Violence in America," Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas, June 1983.

"An Overview of Afro-American History," University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky, Cultural Awareness Seminar, October 1982.

"The Age of Booker T. Washington," Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, July 1982.

"Slaves and Free Blacks in Antebellum Kentucky," University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, Black History Month Program, January 1980.

"The Importance of Afro-American History," Midway Junior College, Midway, Kentucky, February 1979.

"Blacks in Contemporary America," Kentucky State University, Frankfort, Kentucky, Freshman Honor's Program, June 1978.

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Member, Humanities Texas Board of Directors, Austin, Texas, January 2005 to 2011.

Member, City of Arlington Chamber Foundation Board of Directors, Arlington, Texas, January 2002 to August 2003.

Member, Board of Directors, Medical Center of Arlington, Arlington, Texas, January 2001 to August 2003.

Member, University of Kentucky College of Arts and Sciences Advisory Board, Lexington, Kentucky 2000 to 2006.

Member, Editorial Board for the Southern Biography Series, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1994-2002.

Member, Board of Editors of the Journal of Southern History, 1992-2002.

Member, Southern Historical Association Program Committee, 1989.

Member, National Endowment for the Humanities panels responsible for reviewing Summer Grant Proposals and Travel to Collections Proposals, 1987-90.

Co-director, "Trouble Behind," television documentary on the Corbin, Kentucky, "race riot" of 1919. (1988)

Judge, Historical Museum Grant Proposals for the National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, D.C., 1985-86.

Co-director, "Upon this Rock: The Black Church in Kentucky," a documentary for Kentucky Education Television broadcast in February 1982.

Director, Oral History Project on "The Black Church in Kentucky," 1979.

UNIVERSITY SERVICE:

Speaker, "Changing Definitions of the American Family: Implications for Policy and Practice," Duke University, October 1994.

Speaker, "Duke Directions," Continuing Education Conference for Duke Alumni, September 1994.

Speaker, "Into the Twenty-First Century," Faculty Seminar for New Student Orientation, Duke University, August 1994.

Testified as an expert witness for the Defendants in the case of Cheryl J. Hopwood, Douglas W. Carvell, Kenneth R. Elliott, and David A. Rogers, Plaintiffs v. The State of Texas, University of Texas Board of Regents, and the University of Texas School of Law, Defendants, May 1994.

Commencement Address, College of Education, The University of Texas at Austin, May 1992.

Keynote Speaker, The University of Texas Honors Colloquium, The University of Texas at Austin, July 1991.

Member, University Committee on the Undergraduate Experience, The University of Texas at Austin, 1990-91.

Member, Newly created Faculty Advisory Committee, Center for Teaching Effectiveness, The University of Texas at Austin, 1989-90.

Chair, University Committee on the Recruitment and Retention of Minority Students, The University of Texas at Austin.

Member, University Committee on Undergraduate Education that reviewed the work of the Dolusio Committee, The University of Texas at Austin.

Member, task force concerned with minority faculty and related issues, Department of English, The University of Texas at Austin.

Chair, Search Committee in Afro-American History, Department of History, The University of Texas at Austin.

Chair, Search Committee for Director, Center for African and Afro-American Studies, The University of Texas at Austin.

Speaker, Liberal Arts Honors Day Program, The University of Texas at Austin, April 1990.
Chair, Steering Committee, of the Heman Sweatt Symposium on Civil Rights, The University of Texas at Austin, 1986-1990.

Member, Graduate Opportunity Fellowship Committee to award fellowships to minority students, The University of Texas at Austin, Spring 1985.

Member, Graduate Opportunity Fellowship Committee, The University of Texas at Austin, September 1982.

COMMUNITY SERVICE:

Brackenridge Hospital Foundation Board, Austin, Texas, 1986-1991

Annual Black History Month presentations to public schools assemblies, church groups, and various other civic groups.

For 25 years donated services to groups and organizations such as the Lexington, Kentucky Human Rights Commission, the Louisville NAACP and the League of Women Voters.

VITA

Tyvi Small is a native of Pahokee, Florida. He is the youngest child of the late Judith Small and the brother of the late Artia Small. He attended Pahokee Elementary School and graduated in 1996 from Pahokee Middle/Senior High School. He enrolled at the University of South Florida in the summer of 1996 as an alternative admit into the Student Support Services Program, which is a federal Trio Program. At USF he served 2 years as President of the Black Student Union, 1999 Homecoming King and in 2000 was elected Student Body President. He became a member of the Zeta Chi Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. in Fall 1997. He graduated from the University of South Florida with a bachelor's degree in communication and a master's degree in education, with an emphasis in College Student Affairs. After graduation he worked at USF as Coordinator of Multicultural Recruitment in the Office of Undergraduate Admissions. He then worked for the City of West Palm Beach, serving as Education Coordinator in the Mayor's Office. He began his career at the University of Tennessee's Haslam College of Business, in 2007 initially serving as Coordinator of Diversity Initiatives. He was subsequently promoted to Director of Diversity and Community Relations and then Executive Director for Talent Management, Diversity and Community Relations in 2016. He served as Interim Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Life from September-December of 2017. In January 2019 he began his role at the University of Tennessee as Interim Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Engagement, a position he assumed on a permanent basis in September 2019.

Tyvi serves as chair of the board of directors of the Knoxville Area Urban League which is one of the oldest civil rights organizations in the U.S. He served as a founding member of the board of directors of The Change Center, which helps increase opportunities for success among teens and young adults through recreation, job-skill development, and part-time employment. He serves as Vice Chair of the Board of Commissioners for the Knoxville Utilities Board (KUB), where he has advocated to reduce the energy burden for low-income customers. Tyvi has served as a big brother with Big Brothers Big Sisters of East Tennessee and currently mentors' countless young people through the University of Tennessee and in the community.

He is a member of the Executive Committee for the Tennessee Valley Fair, past Secretary/Treasurer of The Development Corporation (TDC) of Knox County, a member of Leadership Tennessee Class VII, and a graduate of Leadership Knoxville and Introduction Knoxville. Tyvi is a life member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. He is an active member of Overcoming Believers Church and enjoys spending time with his wife of seven years, Tammi.