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With Xavier, however, there will be this distinction: Mapping the Educational Philosophy of Saint Katharine Drexel in the Intellectual Tradition of Black Higher Education in New Orleans, Louisiana

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WITH XAVIER, HOWEVER, THERE WILL BE THIS DISTINCTION: MAPPING THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF SAINT KATHARINE DREXEL IN THE INTELLECTUAL TRADITION OF BLACK HIGHER EDUCATION IN NEW ORLEANS, LOUISISANA

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Education

by

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B.A., Southern University and A&M College, 2003
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For Mama

Thank you for telling me I could do anything if I put my mind to it. You are missed. Everyday.
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LIST OF ARCHIVES AND ABBREVIATIONS

New Orleans Archdiocese Archives (NOAA)

New Orleans Notarial Archives (NO Notarial Archives)

Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament Archives, Bensalem, Pennsylvania (SBS Archives)

Xavier University Archives, New Orleans, Louisiana (XULA)
Abstract

Historical studies on higher education often utilize traditional historical methods. This practice has produced a body of literature, both historical and contemporary, which has a particular focus on (a) the histories and mythologies of institutions, (b) the individuals who function within the system at the administrative or student levels, and (c) the individuals who have been excluded from the system. Therefore, utilizing southern womanism, a theory developed in this study, I presented primary and secondary historical sources to show that Saint Katharine Drexel, a White Roman Catholic nun, and the university she founded, Xavier University, the first and only Black Catholic university in the United States, have been grossly understudied in the history of higher education. I found that regionalism, anti-Catholicism, racism, and sexism have functioned in a manner for Drexel and the intellectual tradition of the Afro-Catholic community in the New Orleans to be written out of the history of higher education. This is due to the tradition of African American higher education being studied solely through the lens of the Booker T. Washington/W.E.B. DuBois debates which focuses exclusively on the problematics of White male philanthropy and Protestant benevolent societies on curricular development. Saint Katharine Drexel was a present, thoughtful participant whose impact in Black higher education has been woefully understudied. Using her educational philosophy, Drexel did more than fund schools; she created a complex network of family members, clergy, lay persons, both White and Black, to create a multi-tiered system of education.
CHAPTER ONE: NARRATIVE AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Saints were not super human. They were people who loved God in their hearts and who shared their joy with others.

-Pope Francis, Twitter, November 2013

“You don’t know our Sister,” Stella said as she graded papers. Stella’s cool composure was a stark contrast to my frenzied state as I told her about my dissertation frustrations. An assistant professor in the School of Education, Stella was my mentor and friend and often gave me academic, relationship, fashion, and life advice from her third floor office. I was looking forward to talking to Stella because we had not spoken in a while, and on this Monday morning, I was updating her on the highs and mostly lows of the final stages of my writing process. I was having problems putting everything together and felt like my research questions were getting lost in the data. I thought Stella would tell a joke to make me laugh and ease my worries, but instead, she made matters worse. So with all the indignation I could muster, I replied, “I don’t know who?” Without looking at me or acknowledging my indignation she responded, “You don’t know our Sister Katharine.” I knew she was aware of all the work I put in over the past three years studying the life of Saint Katharine Drexel, founder of Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana, which is the first and only Black Catholic University in the United States. I was expecting her to say anything, but not that I did not know my research subject. As I mentally prepared my retort, I reminded myself that Stella is a Black Catholic from New Orleans. Because I was raised in a Black Catholic family from Atlanta, Georgia, my whole life I have heard it said that there are not a lot of Black Catholics in the United States, and all of them live in New Orleans. This idea resonates in Estes’s (1998) observation in which, by quoting Zora Neal Hurston, he calls New Orleans the “neo-African Vatican” because “elements of Roman Catholic belief and ritual have been incorporated into a vibrant, traditional black religion” (p.
68). So in that sense, Stella was right, Katharine Drexel did “belong” to New Orleans; she is a key figure in New Orleans and South Louisiana’s Black Catholic history.

Drexel was a wealthy heiress and native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Known for her philanthropy, Drexel channeled her wealth and influence into religious life when she founded the religious order, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People, on February 12, 1891. She stated that the calling of her congregation was to “Instruct the Indian and Colored Races in religious and other useful knowledge” (Blatt, 1987, p. 186). Simultaneously as an heiress, philanthropist, and foundress, Drexel became well known for conceptualizing, funding, and staffing schools for Native Americans in the Western United States and Blacks in the Southern portion of the country.

During the late 1880s, Drexel began funding schools in south Louisiana staffed by the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and the Sisters of the Holy Family (Hurd, 2002; Lynch, 2001). Eventually, Xavier University became the centerpiece of what Hurd (2002) calls Drexel’s “ladder of education,” a system that staffed rural schools with teachers trained at Xavier University. The locations of these schools were numerous and included more well-known cities like Lafayette and Lake Charles and smaller towns such as City Price, Point a la Hache, Broussard, Glencoe, Rayne, Julien Hill, Abbeville, Bertrandville, Thibodeaux, Coulee, Crouche, Leonville, Prairie Basse, Church Point, Mallet, Duson, Reserve, Mamou, St. Martinville, and West Point a la Hache, Tyrone, Edgard, and Eunice (Hurd, 2002). These schools provided the religious and educational foundations of four African American Bishops. According to Hurd (2002):

Bishop Harold R. Perry, the first African American Bishop of the twentieth century, was a native of Sacred Heart parish in Lake Charles. Perry, consecrated in 1966, was the auxiliary bishop of New Orleans until his death in 1991. Bishop Raymond Caesar of St. Mathilda’s parish in Eunice was the bishop of Papua New Guinea from 1980 until his
death in 1988. Bishop Curtis Guillory of St. Anne’s parish in Mallet was appointed auxiliary bishop of Galveston-Houston…Bishop Leonard Olivier, a native of Sacred Heart parish in Lake Charles, has been the auxiliary bishop of Washington, DC since 1988. (p. 180)

With this knowledge, I decided my best reply to Stella was to present my own Black Catholic pedigree. My hometown of Atlanta, Georgia provided some leverage because it was the home of the first Black Archbishop, Eugene Marino, and his predecessor James P. Lyke. Lyke and Sister Thea Bowmen, an African American nun, were critical in crafting our church’s hymnal, *Lead Me Guide Me*, which not only provided church hymns, but chronicled the African American musical tradition. As a child, I had constant access to images of a strong Black expression of Catholicism.

With that being said, I reminded Stella that “I am Catholic” and that “My Sister went to Xavier,” and ended with a proud, “I do know her.” Again, without looking up from her task, or acknowledging my pedigree, she replied, “No. You don’t know our Sister Katharine.” I puffed up with anger and frustration, ready to unleash a flood of Katharine Drexel history on Stella.

First, I may not have been from New Orleans, but I knew that, as the foundress of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People, she was Mother Katharine, maybe Saint Katharine, but not Sister Katharine.

Second, my sister graduated from Xavier University. She was the first of three siblings to attend college, so her entrance into university life was accompanied by excitement and fanfare that remains vivid to me as an adult. Back then, I was a precocious ten year-old, and I was curious about the place called Xavier where several of the teens at church were going to spend their college years. I also wanted to know about Katharine Drexel, the woman after whom my sister’s dormitory was named. So, I read all the informational placards around the school, read my sister’s college handbook, and I learned that Katharine Drexel was a nun, and that she founded Xavier. In my ten year old mind, I thought my sister was extra special because she was
selected to live in the dormitory named after the woman who founded the university; that feeling was something that always remained with me.

Finally, I was the one who spent the last three years of my life reading every book or article that contained even the slightest reference to Katharine Drexel in order to find the answers to my primary research question: why have Saint Katharine Drexel and Xavier University been left out of the history of higher education? I was the one who had spent countless hours in the Xavier University Archives, the Archdiocese of New Orleans Archives, the New Orleans Notarial Archives, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament Archives in Philadelphia, and the Saint Francis de Sales School in Powhatan, Virginia; a feat which without a research grant or car seemed impossible at times. I even managed to obtain second class relics—articles of clothing Katharine Drexel wore—that I kept on the mirror in my bedroom. Although not from Louisiana, I was a Black “cradle Catholic,”¹ and in my opinion a good researcher, and I was not going to let Stella—just because she was a Black New Orleans Catholic—tell me that I did not know “their” Sister Katharine.

But as I sat in the office that had provided so many other life epiphanies, I realized that Stella was right. I did not know their Sister Katharine, or my Mother Katharine, or even Saint Katharine. However, my researcher self would not admit defeat. Maybe this New Orleans Catholic had the missing piece of the puzzle! Maybe she held the magic needle that I needed to thread my mountains of data together. So, as sweetly as possible, I asked, “What is it that I don’t know?” Again, not looking up from her papers, she replied, “I’m not telling you.” I was late for an appointment, so I could not badger her. But nonetheless, our conversation haunted me, and I

¹ Cradle Catholic is a colloquial term used among Catholics to describe a person raised in the Catholic faith since birth as opposed to a person who willingly converted to the religion.
had to find out what I did not know. I knew the answer had to be in the literature, and I recalled one of the first passages from Davis (1990) I read when I began this research:

In the rich background of church history, there are images we have chosen not to see, figures that have been allowed to blur, characters passing through center stage for a brief moment with no supporting cast. Still they have been there, and the church has been marked with their blackness…It has been the historian’s task to make the past speak, to highlight what has been hidden, and to retrieve a mislaid memory. (p. x)

As I walked away from Stella’s office, I reflected on the relationship I developed with my research subject over the past three years. I wanted to take up Davis’s challenge to uncover mislaid memories. What I thought to be two simple and seemingly easy to answer research questions turned into a preoccupation with a dead saint and her lives of privilege and poverty. This preoccupation became disturbing to me as an academic because I could not ignore the spiritual connection I began to develop with Drexel. An aspect of Catholicism is a belief in the communion of saints and the intercession of saints. In the Catholic doctrine, the communion of saints refers to the spiritual unity of three groups of faithful: those who are alive on earth, those who are waiting entrance into heaven in purgatory, and those who are in heaven (Clark, 2006). Because of this spiritual unity, those of us who are alive can request the intercession of saints, which means requesting a saint to pray to God for us on our behalf (Brom, 2004). In itself, this doctrine can be a strong point of contention between Catholics and Protestants because Protestants associate this practice with idol worship. Therefore, when I began this project, I consciously compartmentalized Drexel; she could no longer be Mother, Sister, or Saint but a research subject who just so happened to be Catholic and dead. However, as much as I tried to compartmentalize the spiritual from the rational in my research, I could not do the same for my research subject and eventually, the spiritual seeped back into the rational. This deep level of interrogation into Drexel’s life, which became a requirement for this project, left me feeling
haunted. As I spent time touching aged documents and reading books that had not been touched for many years, Drexel and twentieth century New Orleans manifested around me as a heaviness that at times I could not explain. I was haunted by the woman in the nun’s habit that kept gazing back at me on the covers of the many biographies scattered around my home and office. I was haunted by the guilt I felt when a person of color asked me whether Drexel was White or Black, and I had to answer White. I was haunted by the fragmented research methods scattered like puzzle pieces that I had to use to tell a story I was unsure could be told. I was haunted by the many other plots, sub-plots, tones, and characters that would remain mislaid memories if I could not resolve these questions.

Eventually, I had to come to terms with the fact that I was doing the same thing to Drexel that so many other researchers before me had done. I was theorizing Drexel and Xavier University from my viewpoint as a Black Catholic female with generally positive interactions with the two. I was venerating her, setting her aside, and keeping her away from the communities in which she worked. The heaviness I felt was the weight of the stories that surrounded and influenced Drexel’s and Xavier’s narratives that had not been told. I realized that my so-called dead research subject occupied a space of hidden histories that manifested as living ghosts. Even viewing this project through a poststructural lens, I began to realize my line of questioning and the subsequent answers would continue to place Drexel in opposition to the history of Xavier University and not within the history of Xavier University. I was creating what Carney (2004) called a “(s)hero’s narrative.” In my mind, the plot line was perfect—a riches to rags tale of the misunderstood social justice crusader in a nun’s habit. To complete this project, I could not work backwards from a contrived image in order to portray the image I thought to be best. Instead, I had to present all the images and stories and let meaning emerge. Therefore, this
historical and narrative context continues with an incursion into the historiography of Drexel’s religious and historical canon.

**Saint Katharine Drexel**

In the small canon of Drexel literature, biographies and scholarship often start by tracing Drexel’s family history, beginning with the European and Catholic ancestry of her grandparents, and proceeding to her idyllic and privileged childhood (Baldwin, 2000; Duffy, 1966; Holt, 2002; Lynch, 2001). Next, they present the spiritual history of her decision to become a religious and they highlight her founding of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People in 1891. These tomes conclude with her death, and depending upon the year of publication, her beatification in 1988 and canonization in 2000 as a Saint in the Roman Catholic Church (Baldwin, 2000; Duffy, 1966; Holt, 2002; Lynch, 2001).

Saint Katharine Drexel was born Catherine Mary Drexel on November 26, 1858 to a wealthy and devoutly Catholic family. Catherine’s biological mother, Hannah Jane Langstroth, died of complications from Drexel’s birth. Francis Drexel married Emma Bouvier in 1860 when Drexel and her oldest sister Elizabeth were respectively two and five years old. According to Lynch (2001), Emma took Catherine and Elizabeth “to her heart so well that Catherine did not realize that she was not her real mother” (p. 9). A third daughter, Louise, was born to Francis and Emma Drexel in 1863. Emma Drexel was described as having “an excellent mind with a bent toward scientific literature” (Lynch, 2001, p. 11). While Elizabeth attended Sacred Heart Academy in Philadelphia, Emma directed Catherine’s and Louise’s education and under Emma’s guidance, Drexel received what would be considered a degree in humanities (Lynch, 2001).
Emma, however, is mostly known for her Dorcas\(^2\) charity that she operated from her house three times a week. Emma supervised the crowds that gathered at her back door, and it has been documented that she spent up to $30,000 a year providing needy Philadelphians with groceries, rent, coal, or shoes. She also paid the rent of 150 families a year. Because there were no “professional” social workers during that time, Emma hired a woman to visit families to make sure the aid was going to those who “really needed it,” and she kept very detailed records to ensure proper use of what was given (Lynch, 2001, p. 11). In 1879, Emma was diagnosed with cancer and nearing the end of her illness, her final words to her family were, “Don’t let the poor have cold feet” (Lynch, 2001, p. 18). She died on January 29, 1883, and it has been noted that hundreds of those whom she helped came to her home to mourn her passing. Within just two short years, death visited the Drexel sisters again when their father, Francis Anthony Drexel, died after a brief illness of pleurisy (Lynch, 2001, p. 21). Francis’s father, Francis Martin Drexel, established Drexel & Co. in 1847 with Francis and Anthony as partners. Upon Francis Martin’s death in 1863, the youngest brother, Joseph joined the firm and the three brothers developed Drexel & Co. into a major investment banking firm (Lynch, 2001, p. 7). In addition to the home office in Philadelphia, the brothers established Drexel, Harjes & Co. of Paris, and Drexel, Morgan & Co. of New York. It is important to note that the “Morgan” in Drexel, Morgan & Co. of New York is John Pierpont (J.P.) Morgan, an American financier and philanthropist known for dominating corporate finance and industrial consolidation during the rise of investment banking in the late nineteenth century (Rottenberg, 2006, p. 7). The Drexel brothers, particularly Anthony Drexel, provided mentorship to J.P. Morgan, and it has been noted that Anthony was the only man that J.P. revered and respected. While he is remembered as a

\(^2\) Dorcas, also known as St. Tabitha in some Christian faiths, is a female disciple referenced in the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament. Dorcas, a woman of wealth, provided clothing and food for widows and the poor (Lynch, 2001).
“gentle man who had been a powerful figure in the financial world and had quietly helped so many,” Francis Drexel is best known for his will, which at that time left his daughters the wealthiest heiresses in the United States (Lynch, 2001, p. 21). At the time of his death, Francis Drexel’s estate was worth fifteen and a half million dollars. According to Lynch (2001), Francis Drexel named his brother, Anthony Drexel and his “close friend” George Childs as executors of the estate (p. 21). In his will, Francis designated that ten percent of the estate should be distributed “among twenty-nine churches, schools, orphanages, and hospitals of Philadelphia” (p. 21). The remainder of the estate was to be divided among his three daughters. Francis ensured strict precautions to make sure his daughters would not become victims of “fortune hunters;” therefore, of the fourteen million dollars the sisters were to share equally, future husbands would have no control over the estate or the incomes of their wives.

When Catherine’s parents, Emma and Francis Drexel, died within two years of each other, she was stricken with grief and became very ill. Her health was so poor that her sisters encouraged a trip to Europe where she could visit the famous Schwalbach baths of Germany. Elizabeth and Louise designated the trip to serve two purposes which were to revive Catherine’s health and for them to learn about European school methods and construction to enhance their plan for disbursing educational aid (Duffy, 1966). The sisters toured Europe from July 1886 to April 1887; Drexel’s health improved and the sisters toured industrial schools in Geneva, Tours, Issy, Fleury, and Igney and studied the current European developments in education (Lynch, 2001). It was during this tour of Europe that Catherine had her infamous audience\(^3\) with Pope Leo XIII. Catherine’s primary intention during her meeting with Pope Leo XIII was to ask for priests for Indian missions in America. Pope Leo XIII responded, “Why not become a

\(^3\) In this scenario, audience refers to a formal, private meeting with a sitting Pope. Only Catherine and her sisters were present in this meeting. It has been noted the Drexel sisters received preferential treatment because of their wealth and philanthropy towards the Church (Baldwin, 2000; Rottenberg, 2006).
missionary yourself, my child?” (Duffy, 1966, p. 101). After the audience, Catherine recalls that “she felt sick all over, hurried out of the Vatican and sobbed. She did not know what the Pope had meant, but she was unsettled” (Holt, 2002, p.52). Although Catherine was an avid writer and kept detailed journals of her travels, she did not write about her intense reaction to the Pope’s suggestion that she become a missionary. Duffy (1966) attributes this to the fact that “The effects of this interview were too deep in Katherine’s soul for recording in a letter” (p. 101).

Although she did not write or speak of her intense emotions stirred by Pope Leo’s suggestion for her to become a missionary, Drexel would confide to Duffy (her secretary) the weight of the emotions she felt. According to Duffy (1966):

This was a new angle; this was not a contemplative life to which at this point she was inclined. What did Pope Leo mean? She did not know and the tears flowed. It was as if all the fonts of sorrow, death, loss, uncertainty opened up at once to overwhelm her. (p. 101)

Catherine’s 1887 meeting with Pope Leo XIII, whether in the longest biography or the shortest article, is acknowledged as the paramount event in her theological arc and primary catalyst for becoming a missionary (Garneau, 2003; Hurd, 2002). For this reason, the exchange between Catherine and Pope Leo XIII has been presented one of two ways. First, it has been chronologically positioned as the logical catalyst for Drexel’s decision to become a missionary within her broader life story. Second, biographers and scholars (who are often either religious or members of the Church) who are aware of Catherine’s adverse reaction to Pope Leo XIII’s suggestion have tendencies to view this reaction as negative or problematic. Therefore, they provide intense spiritual commentary where they try to justify young Catherine’s reaction according to the spiritual difficulties of making such an intense commitment to religious life (Baldwin, 2000; Garneau, 2003; Holt, 2002; Largarde, 1989).
Drexel, however, never revealed the specific details of the source of her *unsettlement*, and in turn, scholars have made assumptions about the reasons for her adverse reaction to Pope Leo XIII’s suggestion. While these accounts provide valuable information about the spiritual conflict that occurs when one is deciding to opt for a religious vocation, they unfortunately glaze over the larger historical and socio-religious context of the marginalization of women in the Church and society as a whole during the nineteenth century. As such, the discourse associated with the Catholic Church’s saint making tradition has influenced historical, biographical, and archival materials about what are considered to be critical moments in Drexel’s life.

**Holy Discourse**

Pope John Paul II authorized Drexel’s beatification and canonization. According to Bennett (2011), Pope John Paul II authorized 482 canonizations and 1300 beatifications during his 27 years of service. This number is staggering and significant because “he [John Paul II] created not only more saints than any other pope in history, but also more saints than all the other popes put together since Pope Urban VII finally centralised control of saint making in 1634” (Bennett, 201, p. 441). Bennett (2011) argued that John Paul II engaged in “strategic canonization” which Bennett defined as using the saint-making process to pursue a broad range of strategic objectives to underpin a larger vision for the Church. Bennett (2011) critiqued Church leadership who in response to questions as to why John Paul created so many saints and stated that the “Pope wished to promote as many models of holiness as possible” (p. 448). Bennett (2011) concluded that, “models of holiness do not exist in some kind of transcendent zone, free from ideology or politics; on the contrary they carry with them very clear social and political messages” (p. 448). Bennett acknowledged not all canonizations can be described as
strategic especially since the cause for canonization, the first stage in the process, originates locally in the candidates’ communities.

Woodward (1998) also engaged in a critical examination of the Church’s saint making process and provided critical commentary on Drexel’s *Positio super virtutibus*, a 1,600 page document commissioned by the Vatican to determine the holiness of the candidate for sainthood. Woodward illuminated larger problems in how Drexel was storied in the *Positio*, and he highlighted discrepancies in her spiritual narrative. Woodward explains that Drexel’s *positio* was crafted with a specific focus on rational and reason rather than the miraculous and the marvelous. It is within this context that the reasoning behind the crafting of the *positio* and essentially the reasoning in making her a saint illuminate the larger problems with the historical records of Drexel’s secular and spiritual narratives.

Woodward (1998) problematizes the deliberate intention of Fr. Joseph Martino, author of the *positio*, to dismiss the issue of civil rights as irrelevant to proving Drexel’s heroic virtue. Woodward notes that Martino had to find the delicate balance in presenting Drexel’s work with Native Americans and Blacks in light of the Civil Rights Movement. This was important because after Drexel’s death, the discourses of self-determination surrounding the civil rights movements positioned Drexel’s philanthropy and educational efforts as paternalistic. Martino’s solution to this problem was to focus on the Church’s classical hierarchy of Christian virtues. Drawing on the *positio*, Woodward (1998) explains:

> [P]ersonal charity towards others ranks higher than just doing justice by them. More precisely, love of neighbor rooted in love of God and manifested by personal attention to individuals more closely approximates the example of Jesus than does achieving justice for a whole class of people, particularly when justice is instanced, as in this case, by concern for the social and civil rather than the religious well-being of a subject people. (p. 243)
Ironically, by elevating her charity over her activism, Martino, and essentially the Church craft a paternalistic figure that starkly contrasts the self-determination of contemporary Black and Native American civil rights movements, and further illuminates the Church’s hands-off approach to race and gender.

Drawing on Bennett (2011) and Woodward (1998), I assert that the socio-political ramifications of Drexel’s canonization are clear. In its biography of Saint Katharine Drexel, the Vatican calls Drexel’s founding of Xavier University her “crowning education focus” and lists a tenet of her legacy as “her undaunted spirit of courageous initiative in addressing social inequities among minorities—one hundred years before such concern aroused public interest in the United States” (The Vatican, Dec. 3, 2010). With her beatification in 1988 and canonization in 2000, the Roman Catholic Church became the dominant voice and guardian of Drexel’s narrative. As such, the Catholic Church’s saint making tradition has influenced historical, biographical, and archival materials about Drexel’s life, the people in the communities she served, and ultimately Xavier University. Drawing on Foucault’s conceptions of discourse, Wheedon (1997) tells us that discourses are

more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the “nature” of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and the emotional life of the subjects which they seek to govern. Neither the body nor thoughts and feelings have meaning outside of their discursive articulation, but the ways in which discourses constitute the minds and bodies of individuals is always part of a wider network of power relations. (p. 105)

This brings us back to Drexel’s unsettlement with entering religious life. If Drexel’s unsettlement can be attributed to more than just a conflict between becoming a missionary over a contemplative, then it is possible to challenge Drexel’s decision to work with Native Americans and Blacks as a direct result of her spiritual altruism. In other words, if Drexel was challenged by Pope Leo XIII to reconsider a life as a contemplative, in what other ways was she challenged over the course of her
life as a missionary? In Drexel lore, Catherine emerges from this period of uncertainty as Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, the confident, theologically mature, and socially conscious foundress and missionary. In written texts and photographic images from this period, we see Drexel adorned in the habit of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People as she brings Jesus and education to the Indians of the West and Negroes of the South. This narrative falls in line with the centuries-long tradition of the Catholic Church using the life stories of saints to show believers the possibilities of non-divine human beings exemplifying what it means to be Christ-like (Woodward, 1998). Therefore, Drexel’s life story, and the themes which emerge from it, become mythologized as an inspirational story with characters (not people), plotlines (not experiences), and moods (not discourses). These images are of great service and benefit to the Catholic Church because they perpetuate the image of a sympathetic, non-racist Church during a time when the education and civil rights of Indians and Blacks were the concern neither of the larger American populace nor of the Church. However, this feel-good story of a “do-gooder” nun bringing Jesus and education to the Indians of the West and Blacks of the South does not benefit Drexel’s educational legacy or the memories of the communities she served. In other words, when Drexel’s educational activities are presented solely as a result of her religious vocation, it erases the agencies of the individuals in the communities she served and perpetuates an ideology that evangelization is a solitary and one-sided activity. In this vein, Drexel and the Catholic Church become allies, and to some scholars, co-conspirators, in the segregation projects of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

**Emerging Questions**

As previously stated, I originally considered this project through a poststructural lens with the goal to disrupt previous representations of Drexel and Xavier University. A
poststructural polyvocal analysis calls for researchers to work with texts in a manner to hear multiple voices in data (Hatch, 2002). To present the complex nature of Drexel’s secular, spiritual, and educational narratives, it became necessary to incorporate multiple voices from historical, biographical, and archival data sources. By entering a poststructural space, the intent was to draw upon theories and methods to create a polyvocal representation of Drexel’s life and Xavier University’s founding. The intent of the poststructuralist polyvocal methodology was to give biographical materials, archival artifacts, and Drexel’s personal correspondence equal weight in developing a disrupted presentation of the event. However, this project began to change shape when I began to carry out another critical aspect of a poststructural polyvocal analysis which considers the researcher’s voice to be a critical aspect of the data collection process (Hatch, 2002). When I encountered this aspect of poststructural polyvocal analysis, I realized that I was attempting to present Katharine Drexel’s life story without interrogating my own historical and spiritual presuppositions.

**Challenging Knowing and Embracing Haunting**

In 2009, Bernadette Baker asked, “Does one really, then, need to know History in order to Know Thyself? And is Knowing Thyself always and everywhere the common goal?” (original emphasis, p. xiii). She continued to question “whether that the love of or significance attributed to History or to history is a line ‘moderns’ have been implicitly sold, so that some forms of subjectivity and belonging could be forged and others blocked or forgone” (p. xiii). Ricoeur (1976) explored this idea in the development of his interpretation theory. A central tenet of interpretation theory was Ricoeur’s critique of romantic hermeneutics focus on the reader knowing the author better than himself. Instead, he argued for a contemporary hermeneutics where the text becomes an independent entity that belongs to no one—author or reader.
According to Ricoeur, when discourse takes the written form, meaning literally takes on a new life and belongs to neither author nor reader. When the authority of the text is placed in an open, discursive space, the interpreter can engage in a more intense interpretive process. Central to this process are the acts of distanciation and appropriation. Distanciation is the act of distancing oneself from the text, and appropriation is the “bringing together of what was once distant” (p. 51). Within this process of creating distance and closing distance, it is possible to see the discursive utterances and silences that cloak the written word. It is also possible for the interpreter to understand that written text does not exist in a vacuum. Therefore, when interpreting texts, it is important to not privilege the author’s intent during analysis, but to also consider the discursive utterances and silences.

Essentially, Baker’s (2009) interrogation of a purely subjective History and Ricoeur’s (1976) challenge to the privileging of the written word intersect to question the unseen but ever present guardians of history who determine what should be known and unknown. This begs the question of whether history is no more than an attempt to capture the traces of living ghosts, and is it possible to capture these traces? De Certeau (1988b) interpreted history as a preoccupation with death and explains that Western civilization’s obsession with death is based on a fear of death and hence, there is always a conscious effort to conquer death in spite of the fact that it is unconquerable. Therefore, the West privileges “progress” and is uncomfortable with returning to the past. De Certeau (1988b) posited that historiography should not shy away from the opportunity to embrace the past as a valid site of knowledge production:

Historiography tends to prove that the site of its production can encompass the past: it is a procedure that posits death, a breakage everywhere reiterated in discourse, and that yet denies loss by appropriating to the present the privilege of recapitulating the past as a form of knowledge. A labor of death and a labor against death. This paradoxical procedure is symbolized and performed in a gesture which has once the value of myth and of ritual: writing. (original emphasis, p. 5)
The act or performance of historiography is a dance that twirls within the spaces of life and death. However, before this dance can begin, the researcher must be comfortable with the separation that death will bring. It is a dance of separation and joining together, and de Certeau posited that the fruit of this performance is writing. Therefore, it becomes possible to disrupt linearity when we look through discursive spaces—historical, literary, physical, and religious.

This reading of Baker (2009), Ricoeur (1976), and de Certeau (1988b) helped me realize that my poststructural unsettlement lay in my experiences as a Black Catholic woman who was challenged by her encounters with the discourses surrounding Drexel and Xavier University. When I applied these ideas of separation and rejoining and writing as a mythical and ritualistic process to Drexel, it became possible to envision a method where Drexel’s life story, Xavier’s foundational story, and the supporting characters in these stories can be told simultaneously. In fully realizing this poststructural space, the question became, what methods can be used to disrupt linearity and challenge what people think they know? If it is possible for a Black Catholic female to tell the story of a wealthy White nun and a Black Catholic university—people and places that should not exist together according to traditional historical narratives—it becomes possible to tell the stories of other people, places, and things that also should not exist together but do. For example, when writing about the aftermath of the 1993 Los Angeles Riots, Hayes (1993) wrote:

The ghosts that exist, because their experiences cannot truly be called living, haunt our streets and our minds, flashing into focus for a few minutes in lurid newspaper headlines or bloody scenes on the evening news but quickly fading back into obscurity—leaving ghostly images of anger, seemingly mindless hatred and violence, a humanity gone wild—if seen as human at all. (p. 15)

Drexel has multiple identities which were distorted within multiple discourses which bump against one another and cause “bruises.” By introducing methods and practices that disrupt
history, we can embrace the bumps and bruises (West, 1993) of Drexel’s history, and in turn, retrieve mislaid memories. Drexel can then become less of a romantic and isolated figure but more of a real and valuable part of a movement for Black higher education. In embracing this complexity, we can attempt to deconstruct an educational movement that was in its nature southern in region and identity and womanist in its theological scope and inclusion of all races and genders. My research is not designed to create a new binary of Drexel the educator versus Drexel the philanthropist/missionary. Instead, I am challenging the traditional historical discourses and the research methods attached to these discourses which force us to categorize Drexel as either/or. Southern womanism, a theoretical concept coined in this study, does not name Drexel as nun, or philanthropist, or educator. Instead, southern womanism places Drexel within the movement for Black higher education in the South with a particular focus on the movement for Black higher education in New Orleans, Louisiana. It is problematic to tell the story of Xavier University, Black higher education, and race and gender relations in the Catholic Church without embracing the complexity of experiences found within the individuals who revived the educational spirit of Southern University through the creation of Xavier University. To achieve this goal, this dissertation will present and subsequently disrupt the plot lines, tones, and characters involved in the removal of Southern University, Drexel’s purchasing of the Southern University physical plant, and the foundation of Xavier University. The intention of the project was not to restructure previous presentations of this event from previous biographies and other primary documents, but to present this event in conjunction with the tensions and contradictions in Drexel’s story as a white, cloistered university builder working for social justice in a hostile socio-religious space. southern womanism claims that there is methodological space for Drexel, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, and the Black Catholic community’s experiences as they
worked together to develop Black higher education in New Orleans. To achieve this goal, this study will introduce southern womanism as a theoretical framework to analyze data collected and analyzed using methods associated with narrative inquiry, microhistorical analysis, and discourse analysis.

The remainder of this dissertation proceeds as follows. In Chapter Two, I present the warrants for southern womanism by challenging the historiography of higher education. In Chapter Three, I give a broader definition of southern womanism and how this concept will be utilized in data collection and analytical methods. I continue this process in Chapter Four by using Barad’s (2003) theory of agential realist ontology to interrogate Drexel’s intra-actions with the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, members of the Native and Black American communities, and the Catholic Church hierarchy. The project of disruption is completely engaged in Chapter Five when I shift the focus from Drexel to the moment where Southern University transitioned into Xavier University. In Chapter Six, I provide a summary of the study and implications for historical and contemporary studies of higher education. This project concludes with an epilogue that defines Drexel’s educational philosophy.
According to several accounts, in the spring of 1915, New Orleans Archbishop James H. Blenk contacted Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, a millionaire heiress turned Roman Catholic nun, to purchase the Southern University physical plant left vacant when the school was removed from New Orleans and relocated to Baton Rouge, Louisiana (Anderson, 1988; Fairclough, 1995; Lovett, 2001). Blenk’s intention was to develop this space to provide higher education and ministry to the city’s Black Catholics. Drexel acted on this call, and opened Old Southern University under the protection of Saint Francis Xavier in September 1915. The act of founding Xavier University placed Drexel in a space where she encountered a complex matrix of people, places, religions, and identities that went beyond traditional binaries of Black/White, male/female, and Protestant/Catholic. Historical accounts have continually favored one-dimensional, monolithic accounts of Drexel and Xavier which arbitrarily situate Drexel and Xavier within a White/Black binary. These monolithic stories prevent empirical analysis of a moment that can reveal the tactics (de Certeau, 1988a) people of different races, genders, and places used to negotiate difference to promote educational social justice. While some scholars (Fossey & Morris, 2010) have begun to interrogate Drexel’s encounters with racism in the communities in which she worked, traditional historical methods allow the discourses associated with Drexel’s experience to remain untouched. Drexel’s leadership in higher education has not been studied in relation to the more dominant narratives of her philanthropy and religious work because traditional historical methods have produced a historical record without a language to do so. These methods produce historical accounts that create rigid definitions of being and identity. In turn, these accounts are fragmented because historical discourses have created binary upon binary to separate Drexel from
Xavier University, Southern University from Xavier University, and Drexel from the Afro-Catholic Community in New Orleans.

For example, according to the dominant and most widely consumed historical record, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been situated within the Washington/DuBois binary as either the benevolently intended products of Anglo-Protestant missionary societies or the mal-intended breeding grounds of a Black underclass supported by super-rich Northern philanthropists (Anderson, 1988; Gasman, 2007; Watkins, 2001). Catholicism, on the other hand, has been situated as the antithesis of the Black American university experience, and Blacks are not associated with having a strong theological and historical tradition in the Catholic Church (Anderson, 2005; Baudier, 1939; Bennett, 2005; Miller, 1983). University builders are not White nuns; they are White male philanthropists who were the captains of industry and erudition (Thelin, 2004; Watkins, 2001). In addition, the normative tradition states that Catholic nuns were completely obedient to Church doctrine and essentially valued charity and evangelization over social justice and activism (Baldwin, 2000; Coburn & Smith, 1999; Fialka, 2003; Holt, 2002).

When placed in the larger context of Jim Crow New Orleans, these are overly simplistic and flawed analyses. Traditional historical analyses have allowed racism, sexism, and anti-Catholicism to function in a manner for Drexel, the pioneering Sisters of Xavier University, and Afro-Catholic educational activists to not receive significant attention in the history of higher education. I argue that if we look beyond the constraints of traditional modernist historical methods that seek to define, confine, and restrain, we can then see past imposed limitations of identity, religion, and place. Southern womanism, however, can identify the intersections of identity, religion, race, gender, and space in the creation of historical narratives in the field of
educational history. Consequently, it is then possible to analyze a model of Black higher education vastly different from the industrial model being pushed by the White male architects of Black education (Watkins, 2001) or even prominent black male voices like W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Carter G. Woodson. But before I define southern womanism, I must first present the warrants for southern womanism interpretation of the historiography of higher education by interrogating the construction of race and gender in narratives of university building.

**The Historicization of Gender in Higher Education**

In the field of higher education history, Gasman (2007) has used historiography to expose the omission of women and gender relations in the historical literature on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Gasman (2007) defines the goal of historiography as to examine “how the history of a topic has been written, including the historian’s ideologies and arguments, the scope and foci of their work, the treatment of sources (or lack thereof), and the historical context of the work being reviewed” (p. 762). Gasman employs this method by dividing the literature on HBCUs into three categories—philanthropic outside control, internal relations, and Black women’s higher education. Gasman’s text is critical to this research for two reasons. First, she reifies the argument that current historical literature on HBCUs has not thoroughly examined the intersections of race and gender when she writes, “Within the race-specific context of black colleges, most authors ignore gender altogether—in effect, sweeping the very existence of black women under a rug. Some authors see gender but not its relationship to race, and a few recognize the dual impact of race and gender” (p. 762).

Gasman (2007) particularly focuses on the historical silencing of Black women in higher education literature due to the patriarchal religious foundations of HBCUs and heavily focuses
on males, be it White male philanthropy or Black male college presidents, faculty, and students. However, it can be argued that Drexel’s and subsequently Xavier University’s histories have not been given sufficient historical treatment, because even within the traditional problematic of race and gender in higher education history, they fall even further outside the margins because of their identity as Catholic—an identity whose mere mention evokes criticisms of racism, sexism, and hierarchy. Therefore, when Gasman refers to Patricia Hill Collins and Evelyn Nakano Glenn’s discussions of White women being positioned as the universal female subject (p. 760-761), Drexel’s position in this category becomes complicated because of her identity as a Roman Catholic nun. Xavier University’s identity as an HBCU founded within the religious missionary tradition also becomes complicated because its Catholic identity is not rooted in the dominant narratives of the Black Protestant tradition.

To that end, historical studies on higher education have followed traditional historical methods, and it was not until more recently that philosophies of higher education have been studied in relation to economic, political, and social theories. This phenomenon has produced a literature, both historical and contemporary, that has tended to focus on: (a) the histories and mythologies of institutions, (b) the individuals who function within the system at the administrative or student levels, and (c) the individuals who have been excluded from the system. In other words, the historiography of higher education has been studied as fixed places that have evolved physically over time. When conceptualizing strategies and tactics as expressions of space and time, de Certeau (1988a) wrote, “strategies pin their hopes on the resistance that the establishment of place offers to the erosion of time; tactics on a clever utilization of time, of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundations of power” (original emphasis, pp.38-39). This idea that strategy “places its bet on
place” (p. 39) is important to the current historiography of education because the foundation of higher education is rooted in the idea that it is a well-established system rooted in the physicality of institutional structures—locations and buildings. For example, the most commonly used metaphor to describe higher education is the *ivory tower*.

But if higher education is instead a power system as defined by de Certeau, then the strategies related to creation and reification of higher education as a system have been recorded and preserved, but the tactics of the individuals who have resisted the system have been rendered invisible. Traditionally, practices in higher education have been conceptualized to be the activities of college students related to campus life—fraternities, sororities, sports, etc. However, I am interested in the tactics or, to borrow de Certeau’s term, “tricks,” that individuals used during periods of chaos and resistance to build universities for marginalized groups.

**What is University Building?**

If it can be recalled from the previous chapter, Francis Drexel’s death had a deep impact on the Drexel sisters. On the effect of Francis’s death on the Drexel sisters, Lynch (2001) writes, “For his daughters, his sudden death so soon after Emma’s was devastating” (p. 21). It seems that, for the Drexel sisters, the best tribute to their parents was to continue their charitable works. Duffy (1966) noted:

> The Drexel daughters had been reared in an atmosphere of charity...Each of Mr. Drexel’s children inherited a keen business instinct and a power of meticulous order in procedure ...[they] would give endlessly of their wealth...but the giving would be carefully planned and prudently administered. (p. 77)

As such, each sister took on the administration of a large project. The oldest sister, Elizabeth, became the main charitable contributor for the St. Francis Industrial School. Elizabeth was familiar with the educational needs of this population because her father served on the boards and donated money to several orphanages in Philadelphia. She realized the boys who were
raised in these orphanages received a “rudimentary education” and were not prepared to earn a living (Lynch, 2001, p. 22). There were no schools of this nature in the area, so Elizabeth purchased two hundred acres in Eddington, Pennsylvania. The building was completed and blessed by Archbishop Patrick Ryan on July 28, 1888, and Elizabeth provided the name, Saint Francis, as it was intended to be a living memorial to her father (Lynch, 2001).

Louise would take interest in the mission of the American Branch of Mill Hill Foundation in England whose apostolate was dedicated to serving Colored Americans. This branch would break away from the Mill Hill Foundation to form the Society of Saint Joseph which is better known as the Josephite Fathers. Louise purchased property for the Josephites in Baltimore and gave them 30,000 dollars to renovate and improve buildings to establish Epiphany College. After her marriage to Colonel Edward Morrell, the couple continued to support the Josephites. In 1894, they bought the plantations and related properties of General Phillip St. George Cocke to establish the St. Emma’s Industrial and Agricultural Institute to provide military and industrial training for African-American boys in Rock Castle, Virginia (Duffy, 1966, p. 78). During this period, Drexel also began establishing schools in memorial to her parents. Drexel purchased the other portion of the Cocke properties to begin St. Francis de Sales academy for African-American girls.

As the leader and financier of her religious congregation, Drexel began her work in the education and evangelization of Native Americans and eventually began opening schools for Black children in the South. In the 1890s, her work garnered the attention of the Archbishop of New Orleans, Louisiana, Francis A. Janssens, and he wrote to her for funding to assist in the ministry of Colored Catholics in South Louisiana (Lynch, 2001). This began collaboration between Drexel and the Archdiocese of New Orleans which at the time encompassed most of south Louisiana. When
protests from White residents caused Southern University to be removed from New Orleans in 1913, its physical plant was left vacant, and Archbishop James H. Blenk saw this as a “God-given opportunity” to establish a Catholic institution of higher education in New Orleans (Lynch, 2001). Blenk contacted Drexel to encourage the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament to purchase the “Old Southern” and start the university.

Southern University’s and Xavier University’s histories have been recorded separately as two separate systems. However, the schools shared more than the physical space of the buildings; they both occupied a complex space of conflict, accommodation, and resistance. The strategies have been recorded—the location of the buildings, the purchase price, the curriculums, the teachers and their levels of education. Some information has also been recorded about the protests that ensued when Southern University left New Orleans and when the building was reopened as Xavier University. But the lives of students and faculty members who were displaced with the removal of Southern University have been overlooked. And without these accounts, it is difficult to determine how Drexel and the seven pioneering sisters of Xavier University interacted with the people in the community and walked the streets of Jim Crow New Orleans while purchasing, organizing the new university. This act of transferring a place of Black higher education from public ownership to private ownership was more than a legal or financial matter; it highlights the complexity of the intersections of space and time within the conceptualizations of Black higher education during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the remainder of this dissertation, I connect the Drexel’s experiences as a university builder with the foundational histories of Southern University and Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana, by telling institutional narratives through people instead of telling people’s
narratives through institutions. The physical and spatial connections between Southern University and Xavier University’s foundational years have not been given significant attention in the historiography of higher education. The most unique aspect of these schools’ foundational histories is that they occupied the same building during two distinct and tumultuous periods in the history of New Orleans. Southern University, a state-supported institution for Blacks, occupied the building at 5100 Magazine Street during the collapse of Reconstruction, and was removed from the city in 1913. In turn, Drexel purchased the buildings from the state in 1915 to start Xavier University for Black Catholic higher education during the enforcement of the Jim Crow system of segregation. These institutions have been storied as complete opposites. Southern University, with its designation as a publically funded, segregated institution has been historicized as a direct contrast to Xavier University’s private, Catholic origins. These conceptions have affected how these histories have been thought about and written about. In the next chapter, I will define southern womanism as a theoretical perspective and methodological opportunity and will present primary and secondary historical sources to show Drexel as a present, thoughtful participant whose impact on Black higher education has been woefully understudied.
CHAPTER THREE: SOUTHERN WOMANISM

Thus the biblical myth is reversed, the confusion of tongues is no longer a punishment, the subject gains access to bliss by the cohabitation of languages working side by side: the text of pleasure is a sanctioned Babel.

-Roland Barthes, The Pleasure of the Text, 1975

This quote is found at the beginning of Barthes’s (1975) *The Pleasure of the Text*, an essay which serves as an indicator of his move from structuralist thinking to poststructural awareness (Barthes, 1975). In this text, Barthes introduces an “anti-hero” who “endures contradiction without shame” (p. 3). Just as Barthes asks readers to “Imagine someone who abolishes within himself all barriers, all classes, all exclusions…who mixes every language, even those said to be incompatible,” (pp. 3-4) this chapter will mix languages, even those thought to be incompatible, to embrace the hope, death, and contradiction in Drexel’s life story.

As stated in the previous chapter, this research recognizes Drexel’s marked absence in critical and historical accounts of Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), as well as biographical accounts of university builders. This absence provided this study with a problem statement and methodological dilemma. To confront these issues, I originally considered using data collection and methodological strategies associated with microhistory (Burke, 2004), narrative inquiry (Maynes, Pierce & Laslett, 2008), and discourse analysis (Ricoeur, 1976). Microhistory provides the rationale for reducing the scale of inquiry to primary documents within the seven month period Drexel purchased, staffed, and developed the curriculum for Xavier University. Narrative inquiry provides the method for presenting Drexel’s experiences gleaned from close examination of these documents. Within these traditions, discourse analysis provides the lens to examine the discursive spaces surrounding these documents. Each of these strategies can account for an aspect of Drexel’s experience and subsequently provide a method for data collection. The theoretical underpinnings of these methods share a critique of
structuralism and traditional modernist historical methods which seek to define, confine, restrain, and impose limitations on identity, race, gender, religion, place, and space. However, the influences of systemic oppression were so present in Drexel’s life (religious, political, professional and personal) that a theoretical apparatus was needed to afford discursive and critically contextualized understandings of primary and secondary resources.

In order to push the limits of microhistorical analysis, narrative inquiry, and discourse analysis into a theoretical construct which can allow for a simultaneous discussion on identity, race, gender, religion, and space, I will suspend the conventional concepts of time and space in traditional historical representations. Lugones (2003) elaborates on this idea when she writes, “to understand the spatiality of our lives is to understand that oppressing/being oppressed⇌resisting construct space simultaneously and that the temporality of each, at their infinite intersections, produces multiple histories/stories” (p. 17). Separately, these methods and strategies have epistemological foundations that would want to describe a White nun who founded a Black Catholic university in New Orleans that served male and female Afro-Americans as historical anomalies. But when used together with a southern womanist lens, they can question the meanings behind the stories attached to historical documents. Therefore, drawing on the traditions of discourse analysis, narrative inquiry, and microhistorical methods, I ask readers to consider Drexel’s story as an expression of southern womanism. If we can consider history as southern and womanist, we can then see the particularities of Drexel’s experience as a White nun from the North who traveled to the Jim Crow South to open schools for Black Catholics. Thusly, the founding of Xavier University and Drexel can be removed from categorized binaries, and Drexel can be situated as a multi-dimensional figure working for social justice.
A southern womanist perspective allows this study to develop a more robust set of research questions. For example, I can use theories of southernism to question Drexel’s choice of working in the South while simultaneously questioning what it means to be in the South. I can also question Xavier’s lack of representation in the history of higher education as a Black Catholic university while simultaneously questioning what it means to be Black and Catholic in the South. Finally, as a female who identifies as being Black and Catholic who is interested in researching a White female research subject, I can use womanism to connect the experiences of women in a patriarchal hierarchy. However, shifting the lens to southern womanism and taking Drexel out of the binaries was not enough. To truly de-mythologize Drexel, southern womanism needed to stretch the disciplinary boundaries of data collection.

**Defining Southern Womanism**

Southern womanism proposes that southern, Catholic, African, and womanist are onto-epistemologies (Barad, 2003) that have been written as stationary historical concepts. When onto-epistemologies are written and theorized about as stationary historical concepts, it creates a historical record that divides and marginalizes identity, religion, race, gender, and space. Instead, southern womanism identifies the intersections of identity, religion, race, and gender in the creation of historical narratives. It asks readers to engage in a process which can afford valuable understandings about how differences in race, gender, class, region, and religion can be marshaled into educational spaces which challenge the most egregious circumstances of society. As such, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Afro-Catholics, and New Orleans become integral components in the development of the American higher educational enterprise and not anomalies or outsiders.

It is important to note that southern womanism is being developed in a moment referred to by scholars as post-qualitative (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013). This moment reconsiders
definitions of agency and ontology in relation to the researcher, the researched, and data. These scholars ask researchers to re-think how binaries stutter and falter, how agencies are distributed, and how ontologies are relational. This moment should be explored by educational historians because it means that we are not bound by the task to create historical accounts that add to a monolithic and linear historical record. For example, American history is defined as northern and more specifically as northeastern. The U.S. South with its slave holding history and racial problematics is placed outside that history and is considered an othered space and place. The African-American tradition is Protestant; the Black Catholic tradition is outside that and is other. Feminism is used as a theory and methodology to explain and describe the experiences of women. Black women’s experiences are other, hence the need for womanism.

To the contrary, southern womanism does not present static definitions of identity, race, gender, religion, and space to which experience can be compared; however, the focus is on within. It embraces the rich, mystical, and tragic tradition in the space called the American South and combines it with the theoretical call for universality and inclusion associated with womanism. It has an emphasis on listening; history becomes an active and universal process where all voices and expressions are heard, whether they are spoken or unspoken or supernatural or natural. Southern womanism is also concerned with journey and asks readers to travel down roads both seen and unseen. It challenges historical methods which seek to avoid disruptions that in turn create a historical record with recurring historical archetypes, characters, motifs, and plots. Instead, southern womanism embraces disruption by focusing on two theoretical concepts—southern and womanism—and places them in a space where they can be united as onto-epistemologies. When joined together, these concepts call for an expansion of boundaries,
that is, history is not confined by structured plotlines but can expand to include multiple
characters, methods, tones, plots, and themes.

**Southern Influences**

In the tradition of James Baldwin (1961/1991), Howard Zinn (1960/2001), and Houston
A. Baker (2001), southern womanism acknowledges the presence of racist terrorism in the South,
yet challenges constructions of the South as the only place where racism and racist terrorism
occur. From a southern womanist viewpoint, southern is not the opposite of northern; it is not a
place opposite of north. It is a discursive space that is conceptualized to be south of an
imaginary entity. In the physical boundaries of the United States, this imaginary entity is a North
which represents progress. In this Southern space, agents of all races, classes, and religions are
in constant battle to retain and readjust identities that have been named problematic in a space
that has been designated as problematic. In other words, the South, its people, its schools, and its
religions are problems to be solved. Throughout history, there has been shown a constant need
for people to come down to the South and solve its problems. The Civil War solved its slavery
problem. Northern school marms and philanthropists had to come down to educate its children.
U.S. President Dwight. D. Eisenhower had to send down the 101st Airborne Division of the
National Guard to escort nine black students into the segregated Little Rock Central High
School. And post-Hurricane Katrina, the Recovery School District and the school reform
movement solved the problems of New Orleans failing public schools. However, the problem
with the South being considered a problem space outside the traditional conceptions of American
identity is that it ignores the fact that these problems occurred in the physical boundaries of the
United States. And if according to Glaude (2007), White supremacy is as native to “American
soil as sagebrush and buffalo grass,” (p. 1), then the South cannot continue to be conceptualized
and storiéd as an isolated racist space within the physical boundaries of the United States. However, because the South’s racial problems are consistently highlighted and documented, Southerners of all races have throughout history have engaged processes—whether forced or intentional—to fix its problems. In this sense, the South is also a place of work where agents existed in a complex space of racial dominance and subordination but not complete racial separation.

This southern viewpoint is critical because it draws upon literary, political, and educational traditions that have sought to capture the complexity of the American South’s culture as romantic and gothic. But I must also note the importance of the word viewpoint because the “Southern” in southern womanism will not provide a specific critique of the American South but instead it will provides a unique perspective to explore race relations. Zinn (2011) explained this perspective when he wrote, “But the specialness of the Southern mystique vanishes when one sees that whites and Negroes behave only like beings, that the South is but a distorted mirror image of the North” (p. 20). In being deemed a problem space, people in this problem space were placed under a microscope and were forced to fix its racism. But, if we take the microscope away from the South, and consider it as a “mirror” to use Zinn’s term, the South reflects the problems of race, class, and gender found in the rest of the physical boundaries of the United States and beyond. While other scholars have acknowledged that America’s race problem goes beyond the physical boundaries of this imagined South, in the tradition of Barad (2003) I want to consider southern as an onto-epistemology that embraces the complexity of identity, journey, and work, particularly in the U.S. educational enterprise.

In the thirty-three years between Drexel’s birth in 1858 and the founding of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People in 1891, Americans fought a Civil War,
attempted and failed Reconstruction, and entered a period of unprecedented industrial growth.

Anderson (1988) presents the postwar battles between the newly emancipated and the White planter class over the ramifications of universal education. Anderson writes, “For a brief period during the late 1860s and 1870s, as free laborers, citizens, and voters, the ex-slaves entered into a new social system of capitalism, Republican government, and wage labor” (p. 2). However, full participation in those systems would not be possible without education for the newly emancipated. They understood that education remained a path to full social and economic citizenship. Anderson (1988) explains:

They [ex-slaves] played a central role in etching the idea of universal public education into southern state constitutional law...Black politicians and leaders joined with Republicans in southern constitutional conventions to legalize public education in the constitutions of the former Confederate states. (p. 19)

When the White planter class regained control of state legislatures in 1869 and 1877, the planters “kept universal schooling underdeveloped…and generally discouraged the expansion of public school opportunities” (Anderson, 1988, p. 23).

In 2002, Angela Davis informed us that Black and White women had formed successful partnerships when working towards social and educational equality. When giving the historical narrative of African Americans’ desires and efforts to become educated after the Civil War, Davis recounts several stories of White women who assisted in the education of Black children and teachers. She writes, “Sisterhood between Black and white women was indeed possible, and as long as it stood on a firm foundation…it could give birth to earthshaking accomplishments” (p. 73). Specifically, Davis tells the story of Myrtilla Miner, a White woman who founded a Black teachers’ college in Washington D.C. in 1851. Amid death threats, Miner opened the college with six students and her numbers eventually grew to forty. Davis uses first-hand accounts from Frederick Douglass to describe the dangers surrounding Miner’s attempts to open
the school. Davis quotes Douglass’s observation that “the District of Columbia [was] the very citadel of slavery, the place most watched and guarded by the slave power and where humane tendencies were more speedily detected and sternly opposed” (p. 73). When describing Miner, Douglass wrote, “she may have been ‘frail,’ but she definitely was formidable, and was always able, at lesson time, to discover the eye of the racist storm” (as cited in Davis, 2002, p. 73). This would prove true when her schoolhouse was destroyed by arson, but Miner forged on and “Miner’s Teachers College became a part of the District of Columbia’s public educational system” (p. 73). Davis poignantly concluded by stating “The history of women’s struggle for education in the United States reached a true peak when Black and White women together led the post-Civil War battle against illiteracy in the South” (p. 77).

The concept of journey and work is important because of the fact that Drexel left her native Philadelphia and travelled to New Orleans and other sites throughout the South to open and staff schools. As previously stated, Drexel’s motivation to open schools in the South was not motivated by financial gain. If she was not motivated by financial gain, why did she choose the South? Was it due to missionary zeal or was she influenced by larger tones of the South as a place of need?

**Catholicism and Education in the South**

The New Orleans post-Reconstruction educational milieu was unique compared to that of other Southern cities because of its roots in a Franco-Catholic tradition—a tradition which emphasized evangelization through education. For a significant amount of time during its colonial history, Louisiana was a Franco-Catholic colony and it was required that all inhabitants—whether free and enslaved—be baptized in the Catholic faith (Porche-Frilot & Hendry, 2010). And within the Catholic faith, there cannot be evangelization without education.
Young (1944) explained this phenomenon when she wrote, “It is and always has been the policy of the Church to establish, at the earliest possible moment, schools in connection with any of her missionary endeavors” (p. 1). Nolan (1993) continued in this vein when he wrote, “Evangelization and Education are two basic, recurring, intertwining wellsprings and expressions of the Christian experience…At the heart of Catholic education is the handing down of faith by example, love, support, and instruction” (p. 194). Therefore within Louisiana’s history as a Franco-Catholic colony and throughout its pre-antebellum history, there is evidence of the development of the Catholic parochial system as a “public” education system for all citizens, including the enslaved and free Blacks alike. However, the intersection of the problematics of colonial hegemony and the Church hierarchy would create an opportunity for nuns—Black and White—to take up the task of educating the colonized. These women would develop curricula, staff the schools, and provide pastoral care. In the 1830s and 1840s, free woman of color and religious Henriette Delille continued the tradition of Catholic women religious educators by educating enslaved girls and free women of color through her founding of the Sisters of the Holy Family. As the second order of Black nuns established in the United States, these women “claimed French Catholic tradition in order to defy the social and racial conventions of antebellum New Orleans. By promoting education they contested the racist ideology that denied basic humanity to enslaved Africans” (Hendry, 2011, p. 128).

To that end, scholars like Davis (1990), and Hayes (1993) looked beyond American expressions of Catholicism and recognized the African foundations of the Catholic Church. As such, southern womanism acknowledges the Catholic Church as a community as well as an institution (Davis, 1990; Hayes, 1993). Although the American Church hierarchy participated in oppressive racial politics, at local levels Afro-Catholics developed a connection to deeper principles
of universality embedded in the Catholic faith. As such, the Afro-Spanish, Afro-Franco, and Afro-Caribbean descendants of this tradition did not perform a bastardized version of Catholicism but instead had a deep theological understanding of Catholicism which informed the ideology of their social protest tradition.

For example, Davis (2009) explains this phenomenon in the life of Saint Martin de Porres, a Dominican lay brother who was born in Lima, Peru in 1579 where he died in 1639. de Porres, the illegitimate son of a Spanish nobleman and a freed Black woman, was declared blessed by Pope Gregory XVI in 1837 and canonized a saint in 1962. Davis describes de Porres as a “one-man charity agency in the city of Lima [Peru]” (p. 26). In addition to bringing “healing and compassion to the Indian outcast, the abandoned slave, the forgotten child,” de Porres also “inspired others in works of charity such as the erection of the first foundling hospital in the New World” (p. 26). de Porres has also been referred to as a mystic, and when his canonization process began, Davis argues that too many of the anecdotes and stories of his focused on the “marvelous and miraculous,” which have influenced biographies which do not document de Porres’s life and meet the “exigencies of scientific history” (p. 270). Davis’s critique is not to be confused as a modernist call for a linear telling of de Porres’s life, but is a “well-documented” study which places de Porres’s life “in the context of the society, both ecclesiastical and lay, of the time” (p. 270). Davis further explains that this work is critical because de Porres’s life and work manifested the Church’s Afro-Spanish tradition which would help “lay the foundation of the black Catholic community in what is now the United States” (p. 27).
Womanist Influences

Theories on southern identity and culture in relation to Afro-Catholic theology can address the complexity of space, identity, and religion in relation to Xavier’s identity as a Black Catholic university in the South. However, an additional lens is needed to address the influence of gender on this process. Finally, in the tradition of Alice Walker (1983) and Diana L. Hayes (1997), southern womanism relies on the call for womanist scholars to fight for justice and inclusion for all oppressed peoples—male and female, white and black, gay and straight. In attempting to develop a history of Drexel in relation to Xavier University and answer why she and Xavier University have been excluded from traditional historiographies of higher education, the foundational history of Xavier University must be evaluated beyond its surface as a school for Black Catholics.

In the introduction to her 2008 text, *Making a Way of Out of No Way*, Coleman defines the concept of “making a way out of no way” as a “central theme in black women’s struggles and God’s assistance in helping them to overcome oppression” (p. 9). As a womanist theologian, Coleman defines and applies this concept in relation to the socio-religious experiences of Black women. However, I found her terminology and subsequent discussion of “making a way out of no way” as a pathway to learning from the past to be useful in explaining the concept of a womanist historiography. Coleman uses postmodernist womanist theology to define the past as a “critical dimension in ‘making a way out of no way’” (p. 122). She informs readers that in order to learn from the past, we must acknowledge that “those who have died have never left” and that

*We learn* from the past and then use what we have learned, what we have experienced, toward God’s ideals of truth, beauty, adventure, art, peace, justice, and quality of life. Creative transformation remains the process, goal, and measure for “making a way out of no way.” (p. 122)
Therefore when applied to historical analysis, “making a way out of no way” can be considered as an onto-epistemology embedded in the collective consciousness of the Historically Black College and University (HBCU) community. In the following chapters, this study will take care to acknowledge the primary and secondary resources and scholarship that have chronicled how the systematic lack of support—financial and moral—affected the development of HBCUs. This concept can intra-act (Barad, 2001) with historical analysis because, as Ginzburg (2012) tells us, “In all institutions, innovations, while rupturing with the past, make headway by means of the reaffirmation of a certain continuity with what has gone before” (p. 203).

Within educational history, and particularly within the study of Black education, there exists a modernist preoccupation with defining physical places through their curriculums. As such, Historically Black Colleges and Universities have consistently been referred to as “colleges in name only” during their foundational years because the academic rigor was considered to be subpar to the curriculums of time-honored colleges and universities (Anderson, 1988). While the foundational years of these schools are historicized as difficult and subpar, the administrators, faculty, staff, and students of the schools ensured their survival in spite of by essentially “making a way out of no way.” Therefore, for the HBCU community, making a way out of no way became a way of being in knowing—a tactic for surviving in a socio-economic and political system designed for their failure.

It must be acknowledged that even within her privilege as a wealthy White woman; Drexel’s work with persons of color was often contested and in some instances included violent resistance. Neither her wealth nor her religion magically erased the racial and gender violence. As a result, she purposefully took on as an educational advocate for Native Americans and Blacks. As later chapters show, Drexel developed a host of methods to encounter racism and
sexism. She wrote letters, made anonymous donations, and used third parties; she had to make a way out of no way.

Walker’s womanism (1983) provides an opportunity for me, the researcher, to be situated as a woman of color engaged in research about Black Catholics and the role of nuns, both White and Black, in the development of Black Catholic education. Particularly, Walker’s definition of a womanist as a woman who is “Committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people” (p. xi) provides a possibility for evaluating Drexel’s motivations for including both young men and women in the foundational curriculum of Xavier University. However, it is important to note that Drexel’s viewpoint of what would be considered “the survival and wholeness of entire people” would be heavily influenced by her position as a nun in the Catholic Church. Therefore, I deemed it necessary to expand the theoretical frame to include a vein of womanism called Black Catholic womanism.

Including elements of Black theology and womanist theology, Black Catholic womanist theology recognizes that the intersection of race, sexuality, class, gender and religion makes the experiences of Black Catholic women unique and shows an effort to reveal the ways in which Christianity upholds social constructs and provides a language and ethos of subordination and oppression of women and persons of color (Hayes, 1997). Hayes (1997) asks Black Catholic womanists to call upon the universal aspect of the church and the holistic understanding of it that they share. As they look at the world today, they realize that as a people of color, they are not in the minority, nor are they, collectively as women of all races, in the minority…It is a theology that is based on community in community and draws upon the experiences of all in that community, both male and female, in seeking change. (p. 25)

Black Catholic womanist theology alone cannot fully express the practical nature of the work of a White nun from the North working with people of color in the South. However, when combined
with a southern lens, it becomes southern womanism and challenges narrow definitions of what it means to be Black, Catholic, woman, and activist.

Performing Southern Womanism

In the previous section, I introduced a robust theoretical apparatus with the hope of presenting a more holistic picture of Drexel’s life story in relation to the foundational history of Xavier University. The primary data collection strategy was to collect and review archival materials with a particular focus on Drexel’s personal writings. This included personal correspondence, notes from diaries and journals, newspaper articles, official university documents, and pictures. I also collected data from studies on the Catholic Church, women religious, and New Orleans. This allowed the experiences of other agents involved in the Drexel and Xavier University narrative to be acknowledged.

As previously stated, the subjects of this research are deceased, therefore my subjectivity in the selection and representation of data must be acknowledged. To ensure that I let meaning emerge from the documents, I used the processes presented by Reissman (2008) and McCulloch and Richardson (2000). Reissman encourages researchers to evaluate archival documents with the following set of questions: 1) how the concept of the narrative is used; 2) how data are constructed into text with attention to language and form; 3) unit of analysis focus; and, 4) attention to contexts (local; minimal, societal; considerable) (p. 75). For Reissman’s first question, “how the concept of the narrative is used,” I catalogued sources as primary archival (personal correspondence, historical annals written by members of congregations, newspaper clippings, Xavier University catalogues, etc.), secondary historical (books, journal articles, etc.), oral (interviews), and visual (pictures, paintings, etc.). To answer the second question, “how data are constructed into text with attention to language and form,” I used a southern
womanist lens to interrogate a set of questions McCulloch and Richardson (2000) present to help educational historians understand the nature and potential of primary sources. Southern womanism, a phrase coined in this study, allowed for the co-mingling of literary, social, and educational perspectives in the interrogation and evaluation of McCulloch and Richardson’s questions. These questions ask researchers to clarify issues relating to the text, author, context, the intended audience, influence of the text, processes involved in the production of the text, and issues that underlay its development (pp. 91-92). In regard to Reissman’s third question, unit of analysis focus, I selected the appropriate analytical tool—literary analysis, narrative analysis, or visual analysis for the document I am analyzing. For example, if I had a personal correspondence, I incorporated elements of literary criticism and historical analysis. If I had a picture of Drexel interacting with students at Xavier University, I incorporated visual analysis. Lastly, to ensure that I paid “attention to contexts (local; minimal, societal; considerable)” (p. 75), I performed adequate background research to ensure that I had a sufficient knowledge of the local, minimal, and societal contexts associated with the document.

**Representing the Data**

In addition to providing valuable insight about Drexel and Xavier University, this research explored the practicality of performing research and representing data in disparate methodological spaces. Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1981) put it more eloquently when she wrote, “The shape of the data is not in dispute: the question is how to best explain it” (p. 213). To deal with the issue of representation, I relied heavily upon the work of microhistorians such as Natalie Zemon Davis (1987) and Carlo Ginzburg (2012) who explore narrative discourse as it relates to historical representations. These historians argued that there is a discursive space, open for interpretation, between how individuals construct the stories which narrate their lives and the histories that are subsequently written about them. Essentially, these historians think and write narratively about
history. Therefore, when drafting the physical representation of this study, I used the techniques found in previous studies of this nature which weave together narrative storytelling techniques with empirical analysis. Thusly, shifting the lens to southern womanism and taking Drexel out of the binaries was not enough. To truly move out of the Drexel mythology, southern womanism had to stretch theoretical and methodological boundaries even further. At this point in the discussion, I will chronicle a complex process where, as a Black Catholic woman, I had to question what it meant to collect data in northern and southern environments in the midst of discourses that forced me to continue to reconsider what I thought I knew to be true of myself, my education, and my religion.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) tell us that “one of the starting points for narrative inquiry is the researcher’s own narrative experience, the researcher’s autobiography” (p. 70). As I further engaged in the data collection process, I began to question whether Drexel’s life story can be considered a performance with the intention of creating a discourse of selfless giving. I asked this question because the mention of Drexel as my research topic elicits strong and passionate responses among Catholics—White and Black, male and female. Until this stage in my research, I knew all these groups were connected to one another, but my attempts at explaining the connection or at developing a method to study that question resulted in a jumble of incoherence I explained in the first chapter. However, Reissman’s (2008) explanation of dialogic/performance analysis in narrative inquiry have possibly given me a method for making these connections.

According to Reissman (2008), dialogic/performance analysis attempts to answer the following question, “How is a story coproduced in a complex choreography—in spaces between teller and listener, speaker and setting, text and reader, and history and culture?” (p. 105). She continues, “[T]he dialogic/performance approach asks ‘who’ an utterance may be directed to,
‘when,’ and ‘why,’ that is, for what purposes?” (p. 105). Dialogic/performance analysis is important to this study because it “pushes the boundaries of what is and is not included in narrative analysis” (p. 105). This is important because the Catholic Church has made choices as to how Drexel’s voice has been heard, and I beg to question the effect this has had on the people who have been listening. Therefore in my data collection process, I attempted to open a space between myself and Drexel to show how our experiences fall out of the frames the Catholic Church and society created for us, and to find what lay in the spaces between. Would I find parallels between her story and mine?

**Embodying Southern Womanism: Data Collection**

This project began during a trip to the Xavier University archives with a colleague in September 2010. Our goal was to collect the academic catalogues from Xavier’s early years for a project on the foundational curriculums of Southern University and Xavier University. As my colleague and I stepped off an elevator to enter Xavier’s archives which are located in the university’s library, representations of Drexel’s image dominated our entry into the archives and the walls of the archives. As we began our research, I could not help but notice the images of the stoic yet kind looking woman in the large portraits surrounding our workspace. I immediately felt at home in the archives because it evoked the images and feelings I was exposed to as a child when my sister was on campus. I was abruptly disrupted from my comfort zone when the archivist brought out the first Xavier University catalogue. My colleague and I were stunned when the catalogue read “Old Southern” and not Xavier University. As a graduate of Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, I knew the university was originally located in New Orleans and moved to Baton Rouge in 1914. But with Southern University being an 1890 land grant institution and Xavier University being a private Catholic university, we did not see any
possible connection. Sensing our shock and confusion, the archivist informed us that Xavier originally occupied the old Southern University buildings which were purchased by Drexel and her Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, hence the reason why the school was referred to as Old Southern during the schools foundational years. As we continued to look through and document our materials, Drexel’s image loomed over me, and I began to recall all the information I had been told about Drexel and Xavier over the years. It was then I realized that I had been “told a story,” but I did not really know this woman or this university and there was much more to know. Sitting in the archives, I also could not seem to neatly resolve where my experiences with Catholicism began, ended, and collided with Drexel’s experiences of Catholicism. Although we lived a century apart and were of different classes and races, could our experiences as women in the “universal” Church bind us? Was it possible for a Black Catholic woman from Georgia to capture the experiences of a White nun and the experiences of the Afro-Catholic community in New Orleans?

I took up the challenge and continued my journey to the Archdiocese of New Orleans Archives. It was April 2012, during one of New Orleans’s notorious thunderstorms when streets and parking lots resemble miniature lakes. I walked into the Archdiocese of New Orleans Archives with drenched clothing and was ushered into what appeared to be the employee break room and left alone to sift through dozens of papers. I came across a folder of private, incoming and outgoing correspondence between Drexel and Archbishop James Blenk in which she is concerned with the presence of White protestors to the opening of Xavier University, dated May 16, 1915, and June 10, 1915 respectively. I began to feel as if I was heading in the right direction, and continued to read and research in preparation for my trip the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament Archives in Bensalem, Pennsylvania.
When I visited the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament Archives (SBS Archives) at the Motherhouse in Bensalem, Pennsylvania, I was nervous. My nervousness lay in the intimidating nature of archival research. I have also found that my nervousness lies in the interactions with the archivist. When you only have about 30 seconds to convince a person that you are capable of entering their sacred domain, it can be very stressful, and every archivist has a unique way of handling this initial interaction.

By August 2013, I had been researching Drexel for three years and had a connection to her spiritually and academically which I explained in greater detail in chapter one. The SBS Archives were located on the second floor of the administration building. They were housed in what used to be the library of the convent school. Drexel’s shrine (burial site) is located on the grounds of the Motherhouse in the crypt of the chapel. Consequently, being at the archives literally meant I was in Drexel’s presence, which was quite overwhelming. Again, I kept asking myself, what does it mean to have a deceased research subject, and is it possible to capture his or her essence by researching his or her life? Because I was so overwhelmed, I had not adequately rehearsed my 30 second speech; therefore, there was some tension between the archivist and myself. I could not explain myself well, and the archivist was weary of my intentions as a Black female researcher due to the fact that some Black scholars have storied Drexel as a racist segregationist. Needless to say, I was unprepared for the two-hour interview I had with the archivist before I was allowed to see a document. Once I became less tense, and I was able to explain my dissertation research coherently, we had a very open and honest conversation about race relations and women in the church.

I wanted to visit Drexel’s shrine, so when lunch time came around, the archivist took me over to the chapel. It was raining, so we both had to huddle under a large umbrella for the quick
walk over to the chapel. The shrine is located in the crypt of the chapel that was built in 1891. It is a beautiful structure, and inside was the banner that hung in St. Peter’s Square when Pope John Paul II canonized Drexel. The archivist showed me the original location of the SBS archives. This was a small room across from the crypt which is now currently a video room that shows short videos of Drexel’s life. Then we went into the crypt.

The archivist introduced me to Mother Katharine Drexel. I was very moved by the archivist’s introduction. Although I choose not to share the details of this conversation in this project because it occurred in the sacred space of the crypt, I will share with you that the conversation let me know that we were building trust. In that moment, I began to feel as if there were more than research taking place.

The next day, it was not raining so I could see a little more clearly as I drove onto the grounds. This time, I noticed a cluster of larger graves immediately towards the front of the property; I made a mental note to go investigate on my lunch break. Instead of immediately entering the archive room, the archivist pulled me into her office, and we talked about this idea of the “journalistic Drexel.” The journalistic Drexel is the academic practice of referring to Mother Katharine by only her last name—Drexel. The archivist told me that the Sisters did not appreciate the use of the journalistic Drexel because, as a foundress of a religious order, Mother was her title. She continued, “Just as some people like to be called Doctor or Lawyer, she was Mother” (personal communication, Bensalem, PA, August, 2013). I shared with the archivist that I personally did not like the journalistic Drexel either, but that as an academic, I was advised to use the journalistic Drexel to make sure that I had enough “distance” between myself and the research subject. In spite of our opinions, she and I understood the ramifications of academic conventions. Therefore, the Sisters, by way of the archivist, asked that if I refer to Mother
Katharine as Drexel in the main text of my dissertation, would I please acknowledge her personal correspondence in footnotes and citations as *the writings of Mother M. Katharine Drexel*. This exchange quickly moved from personal preference to a thoughtful academic exercise. I remembered that one of my initial goals was to place Drexel alongside Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Vanderbilt as one of the great university builders. But in doing so, was I placing twenty-first century conventions on Mother and essentially masculinizing her? What did it really do to her legacy to call her Drexel? This brings to mind Derrida’s (1998) observation that we can never separate the impression from the imprint. Drexel made her imprint in the communities where she worked as Mother Katharine. By separating her from her name—Mother—how would I be separating the imprint from the impression or in Derrida’s (1998) words, “dividing the uniqueness” (p. 100). I had to remember the true depth and breadth of the Drexel family influence. These were people who had possessed wealth and power, but chose to live lives of quiet anonymity. As a researcher, did I have the right to put her somewhere in death that in life she did not want to be?

This conversation led into the question of paternalism in Drexel’s narrative. On the previous day, the archivist had told me that some of Drexel’s personal communications in regard to Xavier were heavily paternalistic. My response was that I had to confront the paternalism in the narrative because we cannot continue to not talk about Xavier University in the history of higher education because some aspects of the story are messy and complicated. The archivist was referring to one letter that Mother wrote to the Xavier University Alumni Association in which she addressed the letter to “My Dear Children.” Both my researcher and Black Catholic selves were not shocked by Drexel’s use of the word children. In the next chapter, I will discuss in greater detail the complexity of Mother’s relationships in Native American and African
American communities. However, in this space, I would like to explore the theme that emerged from our conversation, which was defining “children.”

In her personal correspondence, especially as she grew older, Drexel consistently referred to the Sisters as her “daughters.” In the documents I reviewed, she only used “children” in the salutation once. When I brought up these facts to the archivist along with the fact that Drexel was in her seventies when she wrote the letter to the alumni association, we both questioned what it meant to be a woman religious and give up the opportunity to have biological children. The archivist remarked, “There is a longevity that children bring” (personal communication, Bensalem, PA, August, 2013). Drawing on Ricoeur’s (1976) interpretation theory, it is impossible to discern an author’s true intent; we can only study the discourse around the event. While there are conflicting accounts as to the depth of Mother’s affinity for “children,” what is more valuable is unpacking the psychological impact on women entering religious life. With that being said, the archivist led me into the archives and explained to me in greater detail the particulars of Drexel’s formal entrance into religious life.

Taking the Veil

The rituals for becoming a woman religious during the late nineteenth century generally involved three stages—postulancy, novitiate, and final profession (Duffy, 1966; Lynch, 2001). The postulancy has been called the initial “break from the past” (Berenstein, 1976, p. 78), and Campbell-Jones (1976) describes it as a “testing time, a gentle trial in which the entrant learns about the congregation and they can learn something about her” (p. 78). A woman looking to enter religious life would seek a congregation to join, and if she met the requirements of the congregation’s Rule (Constitution), she would enter the convent as a postulant and would be held to all the rules of the novitiate. This means that she had to give up her personal belongings, wear
a postulant’s uniform, and drastically limit contact with family and friends. Because she was to found her own order, Drexel needed a religious order that could train her in religious life and prepare her to lead an order.

Drexel and her spiritual advisors decided that the Sisters of Mercy of Pittsburgh would be the best place to complete her religious training and the training of the novices for the new order (Duffy, 1966; Lynch, 2001). Drexel was familiar with the Sisters of Mercy as she and her sisters had donated funds to the congregation. She and Elizabeth visited the convent in April of 1889 under their birth mother’s maiden name, Langstroth, so that no one would be aware of her intentions to enter the convent but the mothers of the council. Drexel and Elizabeth and the Mercies were pleased with the visit, and they agreed to train Drexel and her novices (Duffy, 1966; Lynch, 2001).

Duffy (1966) and Lynch (2001) wrote during a period when nuns were redefining themselves and their roles in the Church. Part of this process was not to unveil the secrecy surrounding the rituals of becoming a woman religious, but to reveal the psychological trauma that often accompanied these rituals. Although Drexel lived during a time when she could not publicly describe her experiences and frustrations that occurred during her novitiate, Duffy (1966) and Lynch (2001) can provide a window into these experiences and frustrations on Drexel’s behalf. Within this context, we can understand why Lynch (2001) tells us that when “Kate” entered her novitiate, “she was a slight woman of thirty, only about five feet tall, with blue eyes, a good complexion, an attractive smile, and uncommonly beautiful brown hair” (p. 34). Duffy (1966) lets us know that “There had never been anything strained and stilted in Sister Katharine’s character. She had a natural gaiety and delightful sense of humor. She took both with her into the convent” (p. 141).
Catherine Mary Drexel entered the congregation of the Sisters of Mercy at St. Mary’s Convent in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as a postulant on May 6, 1889 (Lynch, 2001, p. 34). The postulancy’s severe break from family, friends, possessions and the outside world for the simplicity of the convent has been described as a traumatic experience for some women. It has been assumed that Drexel’s wealth and privilege made her initial contact with religious life a “demanding experience” (Duffy, 1966, p. 141). In spite of the unsettlement Drexel experienced at entering religious life, her fellow postulants observed that “with childlike simplicity she changed over from a life of luxury and ease to which she had been accustomed to the humble self-effacing life of our novitiate” (Duffy, 1966, p. 141). Drexel insisted on being treated as an “ordinary” postulant and when she discovered that she was given an extra orange before breakfast and an extra dish of strawberries at noon, she asked for these provisions to be immediately stopped (Duffy, 1966, p. 146).

After a period of six to twenty-four months as a postulant, if the woman decided to continue on the path of religious life, she entered the novitiate stage. Bernstein (1976) explains that the novitiate is a year of complete “enclosure devoted entirely to formation of character, study of the Constitutions, practice of prayer, instructions on the vows and virtues, and exercises suited to correcting defects, subduing passions, and acquiring virtues” (p. 79). The ceremony which marks a postulant’s transition to novice is a “highly symbolic rite of passage” and was sometimes referred to as the “clothing ceremony” (Ebaugh, 1977, p. 24). During the ceremony, the soon-to-be novice processed in the church fully dressed as a bride including a veil, ornate jewelry, and in some instances, was accompanied by little girls dressed as flower girls. She professed herself a bride of Christ before a bishop, and the bishop gave her a modified version of the congregation’s habit. She retired to the church sacristy to have her hair cut so that it could fit
under the habit’s cap and bonnet, and then she returned to the bishop where she would receive her religious name and formally become a “sister” (p. 24). On November 7, 1889, six months after she entered the Sisters of Mercy as postulant, Drexel had her clothing ceremony which Duffy and Lynch referred to as her Reception. Duffy’s (1966) account of Drexel’s reception aligns with other descriptions of clothing ceremonies for postulants. According to Duffy (1966), Drexel entered the chapel in a white wedding gown trimmed with orange blossoms. There were diamond rings on her fingers and diamonds in her necklace. Eight little girls in white satin dresses, and wearing white silk veils followed her. That day, the Banker’s Daughter was a regal bride, the bride of heaven and earth. (p. 146)

Archbishop Patrick Ryan of Philadelphia presided over the ceremony; he gave her the habit and white veil of the Sisters of Mercy and the name Sister Mary Katherine (Duffy, 1966; Lynch, 2001).

The days of Sister Mary Katharine’s novitiate were filled with her duties as a novice of the Sisters of Mercy, her training to lead a new order, and her work with the Bureau of Indian and Colored Missions. Unfortunately, during the period of her Novitiate, Drexel experienced two more significant losses. Her sister Elizabeth and her spiritual advisor Bishop James O’Connor died within five months of each other. Bishop O’Connor was the first to pass away on May 27, 1890. Duffy (1966) writes that with the passing of Bishop O’Connor, “The bottom fell out of Sister Katharine’s world. Tidal waves of isolation, distress, and anguish broke over her” (Duffy, 1966, p. 159). Lynch (2001) writes Drexel “feared that without his guiding hand she could not continue the foundation of the new missionary congregation which he had conceived” (Lynch, 2001, p. 35). Archbishop Patrick Ryan anticipated Drexel’s distress. He had previous dealings with Francis Drexel and had worked with Sister Katharine on the preliminary development of the new order. When Ryan visited Sister Katharine after O’Connor’s funeral,
she confided in him that “she could not go on, she simply could not do it” (Duffy, 1966, p. 160). Ryan replied, “If I share the burden with you, if I help you, can you go on?” (p. 60). Drexel agreed and carried on with the plans for the new order. Lynch (2001) posits that Drexel must have had a “difficult novitiate because of her grief, the pressures of developing a new order, and the onslaught of requests for funding she was receiving for Indian and Colored missions” (p. 60). This grief would continue when both Elizabeth and her unborn child passed during childbirth on September 26, 1890. In spite of this extreme loss, Drexel completed her novitiate and made preparations to make her final profession.

After the one year period of the novitiate, a novice would make a final profession. In the final profession, the novice made the three vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty with a fourth vow which usually related to the mission of the congregation. Although the clothing ceremony marked a period of change with more joyous symbols—a bride, flowers, and a wedding dress—the final profession used macabre images of death to indicate rebirth into a new life. Bernstein (1976) provides the following description:

the newly professed stretches prostrate on the ground while her sisters put over her the pall, the coverage of the dead, and place a candle at each corner. There she lies while the “Dies irae” is sung, as at the funeral, showing all who watch that she is dead to the world. (p. 99)

Drexel completed her novitiate and took the three vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty during her final profession on February 12, 1891. Drexel’s fourth vow was to be “Mother and Servant of the Indian and Negro races…nor shall I undertake any work which may tend to the neglect or abandonment of the Indian and Colored Races” (Lynch, 2001, p. 46). Louise, overwhelmed with grief from Elizabeth’s recent death from childbirth, did not attend the ceremony because she could not handle its macabre nature. Garbed in a new habit, Sister Mary
Katharine Drexel emerged from the ceremony as Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, foundress of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People.

**Applying Southern Womanism**

At this point in the process, I was beginning to fully understand the complexity of Drexel’s experiences. “Catherine” or “Kate” did not die when she walked into the convent. Instead, she was a woman who had endured physical sacrifice and tremendous grief when she took on the identity of foundress. In that sense, Drexel’s life is not looked at in stages and phases but in terms of experience. Saint Katharine Drexel is Mother Katharine, Sister Katharine, and Catherine. Again returning to Derrida (1998), we cannot separate the imprint from the impression.

From these accounts, it is not impossible to envision history as death. The literal and figurative images of death are present throughout the histories of the Saint Francis de Sales Industrial School and St. Emma’s Industrial and Agricultural Institute. Using traditional qualitative methods, their histories would retain death’s shroud. However, the purpose of this project is to embrace death and to explore what we can learn from living ghosts. If we view Saint Francis de Sales Industrial School, St. Emma’s Industrial and Agricultural Institute, and Xavier University as texts, then they can be understood not as inert monuments, but as living expressions of an ideal of education and social justice. In this theoretical space, death becomes not only a physical phenomenon in Drexel’s life but an ontological discourse which is manifested through text. I argue for Drexel, Louise, and Elizabeth, the texts are the schools they founded in their dead parents’ names. In this sense, these schools become interacting textual entities which warrant a process of interpretation.
Eventually, it was time to begin the journey to what would eventually end back in Louisiana. As I drove, I reconsidered what I thought to be a challenge of researching so-called dead subjects. My southern womanist perspective led me to cross boundaries in terms of geographic regions and disciplinary genres. But at some point, the story lines began to blur. As I continued collecting data, more and more documents that were supposed to document Xavier University’s foundational years did not refer to Xavier but instead to Southern University or Old Southern. The more I read and returned to the archives at Xavier University, the more I realized that it was becoming impossible to start Xavier’s University’s history with Drexel’s arrival in New Orleans in 1915.

It is important to note that this study does not seek to diminish the saint and philanthropy narratives because they are critical to the study; however, the goal is to engage in a methodological process that will fully develop Drexel as an advocate in the hostile space of Jim Crow New Orleans. The problems with these assumptions are that they heavily rely upon the spiritual aspects of the encounter. But what if her unsettlement can be explained jointly by the socio-religious and socio-political tenor of the nineteenth century? Although it has been well-documented that Drexel had an inclination for religious life (Duffy, 1996; Hurd, 2002; Lynch, 2001), it has also been documented—albeit not as well—that young Catherine also had an inclination towards the family business. Rottenberg (2006) and other anecdotal evidence suggest that Drexel had a brilliant mind and was being groomed by her father and his brother, Anthony Drexel, to become a partner in Drexel & Company. However, as America still looked across the ocean for societal norms, Victorian society would not permit a woman to lead the largest banking company in America (Rottenberg, 2006). It is here that socio-political and socio-religious structures of the nineteenth century intersect in a cloud of complexity. While the banking world would not be
receptive to Drexel’s talents, the religious orders of the Catholic Church provided a unique alternative. In the next chapters, I will use southern womanism to break through rigid conceptions of university building as a White male and Protestant endeavor.
CHAPTER FOUR: INTRA-ACTIONS

In spite of rejecting university building solely as the project of the “captains of industry and erudition” (Thelin, 2004), there is still a paradigm that considers higher education leadership as a hierarchal, “top down” activity. In this paradigm, Drexel still retains her position as a privileged individual with a vision of education for Indians and Colored People who used her wealth and influence to advance that vision. Here, it is important to point out that as Mother Superior of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Drexel was actively involved in the oversight of all the missions of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. At the time of Xavier’s founding, this included convents and schools in Bensalem, Pennsylvania; Santa Fe, New Mexico; Powhatan, Virginia; Saint Michaels, Arizona; Nashville, Tennessee; Carlisle, Pennsylvania; Winnebago, Nebraska; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Chicago, Illinois; Harlem, New York; Columbus, Ohio; Atlanta, Georgia; Boston, Massachusetts; St. Louis, Missouri; Cincinnati, Ohio; Macon, Georgia; and Germantown, Pennsylvania. Drexel’s brilliance and ability to manage multiple roles as educational administrator, financier, and advocate have been acknowledged as the reason for the success of these missions. As such, Drexel’s brilliance in these roles is also assumed to be the reason for Xavier University’s rapid growth during its foundational years. However, this assumption has completely glazed over the complexity of the building process within the university building project. By ensuring that Drexel is presented as a brilliant, yet selfless “behind the scenes” administrator, the tactics, or day-to-day intra-actions with individuals within her order, within communities, and within the Church hierarchy have not been given significant attention. This oversight is an injustice because within these tactics, there are several layers of rich data.

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4 The Mother Superior is the highest administrative level of a religious order.
In keeping with the goal of southern womanism to embrace avant-garde theories and methodologies, I will now turn to Barad’s theory of agential realist ontology. It will aid in understanding how multiple discourses have intra-acted to keep Drexel as an isolated figure in educational history.

**Agential Realist Ontology**

At the core of agential realist ontology is Barad’s critique of language and representation in intersubjective and interobjective traditions of inquiry. According to Barad (2001):

> Agential realism offers an expanded understanding of the matter of bodies, showing how it is possible to incorporate material constraints and exclusions in a way that simultaneously recognizes matter as a process of materialization. Taking full account of the nature of constraints and exclusions is important for understanding the materialization of bodies as well as the nature of abjection. Since the material and the discursive are intertwined in apparatuses of bodily production, material and discursive constraints operate through one another (the same is true for exclusions), and hence full consideration of the limits to materialization needs to include an analysis of both dimensions in their relationship to one another, that is, as material-discursive constraints (exclusions). (p. 109)

In this definition, Barad challenges the conceptualization of several metaphysical and physical constructs—matter, materiality, agency, ontology, epistemology—to re-conceptualize the relationship of human and non-human phenomena as *intra-actions* instead of *interactions*. For Barad, interactions are based on the assumptions that phenomena are independent objects with inherent, rigid boundaries and properties that can be observed by an equally independent subject (Barad, 2003). Intra-actions, on the other hand, consider phenomena to be “ontologically primitive” and are the “ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting ‘components’” (original emphasis, p. 815). Therefore, in the absence of pre-determined boundaries between subject/object, human/non-human, it is possible “through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the ‘components’ of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful” (p. 815). Barad (2003)
argues that language has functioned in a manner not only to create separations between ideations of human and non-human, but has privileged and historicized intersubjective discourses to primarily describe human phenomena. For Barad, matter does more than occupy space. Matter is not inactive; it is an “active participant in the world’s becoming, in its ongoing ‘intra-activity’” (Barad, 2003, p. 803). She further elaborates that

On an agential realist account, matter does not refer to a fixed substance; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity…That is, matter refers to the materiality/materialization of phenomena, not to an inherent fixed property of abstract independently existing of Newtonian physics. (original emphasis, p. 822)

Critical to Barad’s definition of intra-action are her conceptualizations of agency, ontology, and epistemology. Barad challenges traditional conceptions of agency being the ability to act; rather she states that agency is not an attribute but that “it is doing/being in its intra-activity” (Barad, 2003, p. 827). Thusly, she disrupts ontology and epistemology as separate notions of being and knowing and combines them into the neologism “onto-epistemology” which declares “knowing is being” (Barad, 2003, p. 829). So essentially, agential realist ontology interrogates relationships between human and non-human or people and things. Barad not only challenges the definitions of subject and object but also how they relate to each other. This is possible because matter, agency, and ontology do not possess static boundaries but instead constantly intra-act and materialize as phenomena. In acknowledging how matter intra-acts with discourses, it is then possible to study how exclusion and abjection materialize.

Therefore through the lens of agential realist ontology, Drexel, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, the members of the Native and African American communities, and the Church hierarchy are all parts of a larger educational phenomenon with components. This educational phenomenon involved complex layers of intra-actions between the materiality of human
bodies—Drexel, the Sisters, the communities, and the hierarchy—and the materiality of non-human discourses—educational spaces, hostile racial environments. Essentially, Drexel engaged in multiple layers of intra-actions which challenge conceptions of identity, race, gender, religion, and space at the local and state levels. By local I am referring to immediate day-to-day intra-actions with the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and the members of Native and African communities. However, as Drexel’s educational activism progressed to the development of Xavier University, local and state intra-actions overlapped. By state I am referring to formalized power structures as such in the secular and spiritual realms. The next sections will discuss these intra-actions in more detail.

**Intra-Actions: Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament**

Historically, religious orders of women served as a foil for the patriarchal hierarchy of the Church. These orders were independent clusters of women who were governed by women (Clark, 2007). This allowed women to function outside secular precepts and provided an independent secular space for them. Paradoxically, the constraint of religious life provided women religious the freedom to travel, have careers, and be administrators without the label of wife or spinster (Clark, 2007; Porche-Frilot & Hendry, 2010). But what makes the Sisters’ intra-actions more complex is what Barad (2001) calls the materiality of the body. In her development of agential realist ontology, Barad (2001) draws upon Judith Butler’s discussions of gender performativity.

The Sisters fall within a tradition in educational history which marginalizes the contributions of women. Crocco, Munro, and Weiler (1999) claim women’s contributions to education have been overlooked because

The structures and norms of education have been influenced by the patriarchy of the larger society. Men and women have worked together in relationships in schools and universities that have mimicked the broader culture, channeling women into narrow and subservient
roles according to cultural scripts emphasizing their intellectual and emotional limitations. (p. 7)

Crocco, Munro, and Weiler’s (1999) observation can apply to the Sisters; however, the nature of religious life prevented an embodiment of socio-cultural gender performance. Their asexual appearance (black robes, covered hair) invited perceptions of gender neutrality. In this vein, the Sisters materialize as neutral, faceless, nameless objects in the history of education. Because of this perceived gender neutrality, the Sisters are neither northern school marms nor activists because they did not perform any gender role that could be categorized.

While discursive constructions have rendered women religious as asexual, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament were well aware of their femininity and dangers of being women who traveled and lived alone. For the Sisters who engaged in school development, Drexel’s educational philosophy—Belief in Divine Providence, Total Gift of Self, Courageous Travel, Providing for the Best, and Understanding Life as Death—were ways of being in knowing. However, it must also be acknowledged that this educational philosophy was embodied in gendered bodies often working in hostile raced and gendered environments. This idea is clearer in Lynch’s (2001) history of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, when she recounts an incident that took place at St. Francis de Sales in Rock Castle, Virginia.

In July 1889, Mother Katharine, Mother Mercedes and nine Sisters—Sister Paul of the Cross, Sister Margaret Mary, Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart, Sister Josephine, Sister Gabriel, Sister Elizabeth, Sister Dominic, Sister Delarosa, and Sister Anthony—were in Rock Castle, Virginia preparing for the opening of St. Francis de Sales boarding school. St. Francis de Sales was the all-girls boarding school for young Native and African American women that served as the sister school for Louise (Drexel) Morrell’s St. Emma’s Military Academy for African American males. Although St. Emma/St. Francis shared a 2200 acre compound, the schools were separated.
by a creek that divided the property. Essentially, the Sisters were in an isolated environment bordered by the James River, a creek, and miles of forest and farmland. As such, Sister Anthony expressed her discomfort with Father Schmidt, SJ, the priest who had volunteered to serve as chaplain until a permanent priest could be appointed. According to Lynch (2001), Father Schmidt made himself appear to be “the servant of all” but “Sister Anthony was not entirely pleased” (p. 99). Lynch (2001) explained:

> Once when he was helping her at the mangle, she kept the washer going until he left, rather than let him see the items it contained. She preferred to have these personal items ripped to shreds, and many of them were. (p. 99)

This passage is telling for several reasons. First, one of the primary tenets of Mother Katharine’s theological arc is total gift of self (Hurd, 2002). This materialized in her strict adherence to her vow of poverty. Frugality and conservation of material items was more than a spoken vow, it was a way of being and knowing. So, for Sister Anthony to have preferred to let “these personal items [be] ripped to shreds” rather than to let Father Schmidt “see” them reveals Sister Anthony’s level of discomfort but also the tactics she used to maintain dignity and control within the situation.

Although Lynch (2001) did not explicitly say that Sister Anthony felt the threat of sexual violence, it is important to return to Barad’s questioning of how the materiality of gender prevents us from questioning the Sisters’ exposure to gender violence. In other words, just because the Sisters were not cloaked in so-called feminine or fashionable clothing did not mean that they were not vulnerable to violence. More importantly, as their leader and caretaker, how did Drexel encounter this vulnerability and teach the Sisters how to remain safe?

On April 11, 1915, Mother Mary Mercedes began a series of letters to the Sisters at the Motherhouse which detailed her and Drexel’s travels from the North Philadelphia train station to New Orleans, Louisiana, for the Southern University auction. In the first letter, Mother Mercedes
recounts an incident on the train where a “young man of very nice appearance and genial manners” offered to upgrade their travel arrangements from the public sleeping car to a private drawing room (XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, Mother M. Mercedes to Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, April 11, 1915). According to Mother Mercedes, Drexel and this young man engaged in a lengthy exchange as he fervently insisted on paying for the upgrade in accommodations because he had two aunts who were nuns, and he considered the sleeper car to be “too public.” When he implored Mother Mercedes to convince Drexel to accept the gift, she wrote that she told him, “I hardly thought I could prevail on Mother [Drexel] if she said No, for of course we were poor people and should travel like the poor where it was consistent with safety and protection” (XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, Mother M. Mercedes to Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, April 11, 1915). However, as Drexel and the young man continued their exchange, Mother Mercedes found out that the young man was the chief mining expert for Standard Oil Company and his father was “one of the head officials” (XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, Mother M. Mercedes to Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, April 11, 1915). Mercedes wrote that she thought within herself that Mother would “lose” this time because she recalled reading of Ida Tarbell’s exposé articles on Standard Oil that their agents conquered every opposition, surmounted every obstacle, started revolutions, crushed every competitor, swallowed up everything, little or big, that menaced its interests, etc. etc. Also that they never kept anyone who was not as masterful as well as resourceful. All this imagery passing through my brain determined me to be a silent witness and watch keenly the conflict, for I well knew Reverend Mother’s sincerity as well as tenacity of purpose. (original emphasis and punctuation, XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, Mother M. Mercedes to Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, April 11, 1915)

Mother Mercedes then lets us know that Drexel eventually won the argument, and “Standard Oil retired, seemingly vanquished,” but then three porters appeared; one with a receipt for a drawing
room and the two to collect their belongings. Mercedes’s account then takes a more serious tone when she explains:

Now, I fear I may shock some of the real young Sisters but Reverend Mother says what follows must be told for their benefit. When we came to the drawing room, everything was ready for occupancy except Reverend Mother. Mother looked at the door, examined the lock, investigated the private bath to find if it had any means of ingress from the outside, and then decided she would risk it as she found we could securely barricade ourselves within. Mother very seriously remarked that as we were both up in years and not good-looking she would venture it. (XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, Mother M. Mercedes to Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, April 11, 1915)

Here, Mercedes shifts from narrating past events to giving an account of a “real-time” interaction between her and Drexel. She lets us know that writing the line “Mother very seriously remarked that as we were both up in years and not good-looking,” caused her to laugh out loud and at that moment Drexel entered the room and “inquired the reason of her mirth.” When Mercedes showed her the lines, she tells us that Drexel said very solemnly:

I really meant it. If you had been a young Sister, or a good-looking one, I would never, never have risked it, and I want this to be a warning to the young Sisters never to accept unusual courtesies, especially of this nature, as many persons have been entrapped, and fearful things have happened. (XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, Mother M. Mercedes to Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, April 11, 1915)

Barad’s agential realist ontology can help readers think through multi-layered material and discursive intra-actions in Mother Mercedes’s account. First, Drexel’s cautiousness could be attributed to the fact that she had in her possession the $18,000 in cash needed to purchase the Southern University physical plant. But instead of directly referencing to a fear of being robbed, Drexel consistently expressed her concern for the “young, good-looking” Sisters and acknowledged that she and Mother Mercedes were not in any marked danger because they were “not good-looking.” In sending this cautious note to the young and good-looking Sisters to let them know that “persons have been entrapped, and fearful things have happened,” Drexel is clearly expressing a fear for the Sisters being victims of physical and/or sexual assault. Barad’s (2003) onto-
epistemology helps us understand how these women religious not only experienced gender but how they reacted to potential threats to their bodies. So whereas the lack of a legally attached male presence in these women’s lives provided an aura of freedom, in some ways, this left them more vulnerable for physical assault.

In looking as intra-actions between materiality and discourse and in turn what these intra-actions produce (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012); we can explore how Drexel and the Sister’s ontological awareness materialized into Black Catholic co-education. However, Barad’s (2003) questioning of what happens when gendered bodies interact with materiality should be included in this conversation for the following reasons. If, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women in higher education have been historicized to be on either one side or the other of heterosexual conceptions of marriage, motherhood, and family, it is then possible to relay the experiences of asexual persons interacting with raced and gendered persons in New Orleans’s hostile racial environment in 1915.

**Intra-Actions: Native and African American Communities**

Scholars (Bennett, 2004; DeRosso, 2007; Franklin, 2000; Hayes, 2006; Mitchell, 2010) have documented the tensions between Blacks and Catholicism since the presence of the religion in the North American colonies. For example Miller (1983) writes, “Catholicism among black slaves in America left no legacy of resistance; it built no solid foundation for future black social and political activity; and it declined steadily among blacks throughout the nineteenth century” (p. 149). Mitchell (1991) continues in this context:

Catholicism and the black man have been kept apart by historical, social, and psychological factors…the barriers that have kept the black man separate from Catholicism, that is the psychological and social factors cannot be specified or said to be particular to one area or city of the country. (p. 86)
These barriers are rooted in the Church’s early struggles to define itself within the racial hierarchy of the newly formed United States of America (Davis, 1990). Racism permeated all aspects of American society and the American Catholic Church was not immune or safe from the repercussions of functioning in a society which practiced chattel slavery. Even as Church leaders in Europe began questioning the morals of the slave trade which cumulated in Pope Gregory XVI’s formal condemnation of the slave trade in 1839, many American Catholic bishops, priests, and religious brothers and sisters were slave owners (Davis, 1990). Davis (1990) explains that the priests’, religious’, and lay persons’ “pacifist accommodation” of slavery created more long-lasting problems for the Church. As slavery became a contestable issue in America, the Church’s sporadic outcries against slavery by a few individuals was overshadowed by the Protestant church’s vocal and public battles for or against slavery. The Church’s participation in slavery and its subsequent lack of adequate participation in its abolition would have long term consequences for the Church. Davis (1990) observed:

[T]he Catholic church in the United States found itself incapable of taking any decisive action or of enunciating clearly thought-out principles regarding slavery. This factor unfortunately prevented the American church from playing any serious role until the middle of the twentieth century in the most tragic debate that this nation had to face. (p. 66)

The more recent Black Theological and Liberation movement has provided a language to express the African American Catholic experience. Using tenets of the Black Theology movement, Black Catholic Theology has described the African American Catholic church tradition as one of struggle for justice in the Church and society as a whole (Copeland, 1993).

Drexel was aware of the shortcomings of the Church in the evangelization and education of its minority membership. As a deeply spiritual and devout Catholic, she clearly understood the connection between education and evangelization. But she also understood the link between education and evangelization as tools necessary for survival. In her youth, Drexel was aware of
the plight of Indians and Blacks in America, and provided financial aid to these communities when she received her share of the inheritance. For example, Lynch (2001) documents the correspondence between Drexel and her spiritual advisor, Bishop James O’Connor, when the former was a young woman. O’Connor frequently provided details of his work with Indians in the Nebraska territory and Drexel kept the bishop abreast of the activities of a school for Blacks taught by the Sisters of Notre Dame in Philadelphia. Therefore, it should not be seen as a coincidence that one of Drexel’s first major contributions, along with her sister Elizabeth, was to support the work of the Sisters of Notre Dame by purchasing a house in Philadelphia in order to provide larger quarters for the school (Lynch, 2001).

Lynch (2001) also recounts Drexel’s ruminations in regard to her status as an heiress versus her desire to live a life of service. After a week-long social visit to Washington D.C., Lynch recounts Drexel’s observations that she feared she was esteemed in Washington “only because I am rich or for the sake of my parents” (p. 27). She found that all the small talk of society left her very uncomfortable. But even though she saw herself as “a child of Providence, one singularly blessed by God,” she admitted that waiting on her sisters was too simple and that she preferred “visiting hospitals, waiting on Indian Missions, waiting on Colored School[s], …anything large” (p. 27). Drexel had some understanding of the nuanced connections between race, religion, and education. However, this understanding was enhanced and deepened when she began her work in New Orleans in 1895. It was then that she discovered that in New Orleans, being Creole and Catholic was not as simple as Black and White.

Initially, Drexel’s presence and funding was met with resistance from the Franco-Afro-Creole-Catholic community. It is important to understand that for Franco-Afro-Creoles in New Orleans, being Catholic was not a feature of their identity; it was the foundation of their identity.
For Creoles in New Orleans, the concern was how America’s new edict of separate but equal
(*Plessy v. Ferguson*) would encroach on their Afro-Franco-Catholic culture (Hall, 1992). For
this community, Americanization had meant the enforcement of segregation based on a rigid
two-tiered racial structure reliant on skin color—White and non-White—rather than the
established three tiered structure based on identities—White American, Franco or Latin Creole,
and Black American (Hall, 1992). Drexel encountered the complexities of the Franco-Afro-
Catholic Creole community in 1895 when New Orleans Archbishop Francis A. Janssens invited
Drexel to fund St. Katharine’s, the first “negro only” parish (church) in New Orleans (Bennett,
2005). Drexel’s dedication to work in Black communities, particularly with the Franco-Afro-
Creole-Catholic Community in New Orleans, was a complex affair due to the colonizing or
paternalistic aspects of Catholic educational traditions.

Whether or not Janssens’s solution to his “negro problem” was intentionally racist or, rather,
a sincere attempt to aid the Blacks in his diocese, the church met with staunch opposition from the
Afro-Creole community. The Afro-Creoles did not view themselves as a problem to be solved in
the church, and Drexel was seen as Janssens’s co-conspirator in his efforts to segregate the
church (Bennett, 2005). It is important to emphasize that their resistance was rooted in the
strong Afro-Franco-Catholic traditions at the heart of the New Orleans’s socio-political and
religious structures (Hendry, 2011). The more radical leaders of this community understood that
segregation meant more than separation; it reduced the humanity of all people of color (Logsdon
& Bell, 1992). Prominent Creole leader Rudolph L. Desdunes eloquently summarized the
inherent flaw in her actions in relation to Catholic theology in a column for *The Daily Crusader*,

Mother Katherine has taken the vows of the church, and yet she seems by her actions
unconsciously to drift into the channels which lead into errors and contradictions. While
Christ has established the Father-hood [sic] of God and the Brotherhood of man, the
great Mother’s benevolence is being used by destination to destroy the fundamental
principle of our religion. If men are divided by, or in, the Church, where can they be united in the bonds of faith and love of truth and justice? (emphasis added, XULA Archives, New Orleans, Louisiana, Desdunes folder, 1895)

Duffy (1966) relayed a reflection from Drexel’s personal notebook on the progress of St. Katharine’s in 1904 where she wrote, “It seems that on Sundays, the Colored prefer to go to Church with the Whites” (p. 314). This is often the sentence that scholars select to present Drexel’s position on the situation; however, Drexel’s next written lines are also essential:

“Before Archbishop Janssens purchased St. Katharine’s, the Colored asked for a separate Church. They retracted but he held them to this first demand” (p. 314). Duffy (1996) deconstructs this last statement in the following manner:

We do not have any other evidence of this request made by some of the Colored people themselves for a separate church, but a woman as exact and painstaking as Mother M. Katharine would never have written this unless she had definite facts to justify it. (p. 314)

While Duffy’s bias as a member of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament may prejudice her interpretation of Drexel’s correspondence, Duffy’s interpretation is not implausible. Indeed, there is evidence to support the claim that some colored Creole Catholics did support separate parishes. For example, Ochs (1990) noted that “On January 23, 1866, colored Creole Catholics in New Orleans petitioned Archbishop Odin for their own separate parish church and for a ‘priest of the African race.’ Odin failed to respond to their petition” (p. 38).

Although her presence in New Orleans was contested, Drexel carried on the mission of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, funding churches and schools in the South Louisiana area as requested. As New Orleans sunk deeper into segregation, Bennett (2005) suggested that Black Catholics began to recognize “the material as well as spiritual advantages of belonging to separate churches” (p. 222). He continued:

A clergy and sisterhood dedicated to service among the African-American community provided a refreshing contrast to a diocesan clergy who admitted “we do not know how
to treat” black Catholics and a white laity that refused to support black mission. Black Catholics also recognized the advantages of not having to depend on the local hierarchy, given its past unwillingness to provide funds or clergy to aid black catholic interests. The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, endowed with the resources of its wealthy founder, Katharine Drexel, provided a particularly promising source of support for future needs. (p. 222)

Regardless of the problematic and paternalistic nature of the Church’s educational approach in New Orleans, the consistent handing off of the Church’s business with minorities to women like Drexel inadvertently allowed the Creole community to retain its Afro-Franco-Catholic identity. This pattern of handing off the Church’s business to religious women would continue with regard to higher education.

**Intra-Actions: The Church Hierarchy**

In the midst of the Jim Crow South, attempts to educate Blacks and Black Catholics were often met with extreme resistance and in some cases violence. For example, in 1872 the Redemptorist Fathers, a Catholic order of priests, opened a school for Black children in connection with their white parochial school in New Orleans. The Black school was burned down twice and rebuilt twice; but on the third burning, the school was not rebuilt (Young, 1944, pp. 61-62). Drexel’s efforts were not immune from this bigotry. However, Drexel’s education and influence, both direct results of her wealth, placed her at an advantage when the Catholic principles of education and evangelization collided with the South’s race problem. For example, by the time Drexel began the process of acquiring Xavier University, she had been purchasing properties to build schools in minority communities for almost fifteen years. Xavier University was not the first time she had employed the method of using an inconspicuous third party to purchase the properties in White areas for Black schools. Xavier University was also not the first time that she received staunch opposition from Whites when her intentions for the property were made public. Duffy (1966) gave the details of one notable incident which occurred in 1905
in Nashville, Tennessee, when the bishop of the diocese, Bishop Byrne, asked Drexel to purchase and staff a school for Blacks. Bishop Byrne had selected a potential property for the school and he informed Drexel that it was owned by a wealthy Southern banker “who was not particularly known either for an interest in, or love for the Negro. If his property were to be purchased, great caution would have to be used” (Duffy, 1966, p. 253). Although it was customary for Drexel to painstakingly inspect any property she purchased, especially if it was to be used for a school or a convent, the potential for hostility in Nashville was so strong that she could only view the building from a closed carriage. The banker who owned the property thought he was negotiating the sale of his property with Nashville attorney, Thomas J. Tyne. But when the banker “executed and delivered the deed to Attorney Thomas Tyne,” on the same day he “conveyed the property to the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament” (p. 256). The owner became incensed when he discovered his family birth home would be used for a school for young Black women (p. 256). The owner then began a series of appeals to Drexel and the Church to rescind the sale. In an attempt to calm this opposition, Drexel provided the following response to his appeal:

I think there is some misapprehension on the part of you and your neighbors which I should like to remove. The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, who have purchased the property, are religious, of the same race as yourself. We will always endeavor in every way to be neighborly to any white neighbors in the vicinity: we have every reason to hope we may receive from our white neighbors the cordial courtesy for which the Southern people are so justly noted. It is true we intend to open an industrial school and Academy for Colored girls, but the girls who will come there will be only day scholars. In coming to the academy and returning to their homes, I am confident they will be orderly and cause no annoyance. I observed very carefully when in Nashville, that the property which we purchased, was within very few blocks of numerous houses occupied by Colored families, and therefore, even were the property to be the residence of Colored teachers, which it is not, I think no just exception could be taken to the locality selected. (cited in Duffy, 1966, p. 257)
In the next section of the letter, Drexel made an interesting transition. It seemed as if she were attempting to make a connection with the owner as a person of privilege, but then decided to evoke the spiritual nature of her work:

I can fully realize, I think, how you feel about your old and revered home...I acknowledge I feel the same with regard to mine, and confess that some time ago, when passing it in the trolley cars, when I saw a bill of sale on it, a whole crowd of fond recollections of father and mother and sisters, etc., came vividly to my imagination. Then I more than ever realized how all things temporal pass away, and that there is but one home, strictly speaking, that eternal home where we all hope to meet our own, and where there will be no separation any more. And so temporal things, after all, are only to be valued, inasmuch as they bring us, and many others—as many as possible—to the same eternal joys for which we were all created. (as cited in Duffy, 1966, p. 257)

Drexel’s letter did not quiet the discontent, and if anything, further enraged the former owner.

As Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament continued to prepare the school for opening, the owner and other Whites in Nashville engaged in a full campaign to prevent this from happening. The owner’s final and failed attempt was to block the opening by petitioning to incorporate an old Reconstruction city plan to have a main city street run through the property and the home. As a last resort, the owner had the letter, which Drexel intended to be private, published in the local newspaper as a paid advertisement. According to Duffy (1996), Drexel expressed her sentiment on the matter in a letter to Bishop Byrne:

I cannot tell you how I regret that any letter of mine on the subject should appear in print. The very best thing to do is to let the whole affair die out—at least in the press if it won’t die out before the Mayor and the City Council. If the Apostles were sent as sheep in the midst of wolves, they were told, therefore, to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. To have this matter stirred up in the press is only to fan the flame. I have resolved not to answer another letter sent me by any of these parties, since they come out in the press. It seems but prudence to protect our cause by being very quiet, since there seems to be a certain prejudice which I hope will blow over by quietly minding our preservation of the good we have taken without any aggressiveness. (as cited in Duffy, 1966, p. 259)

Although Duffy noted that the letter did not have any “rancor, no indignation, no desire to make her position clear to the public” (p. 259), Drexel’s use of metaphor in regards to race, religion,
and education are very intriguing as she conjures up images of Mary and Joseph being turned away from the “inn” and having to go to the outskirts of Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus Christ:

It is certainly encouraging to meet some opposition in your work and ours. It is so appropriate for a Convent of the Blessed Sacrament—Christ dwelling with us—and the School of the Immaculate Mother, to have people of the city have no room for our precious Charge. They say “There is another place on this city’s outskirts” for our educational work. How truly was the cave of Bethlehem the great educator of the World! This was indeed the School of the Immaculate Mother. May the Holy Family teach us how to look out for the interests of the Father according to the Pattern given. My God! How much light can be wasted when the darkness does not comprehend it.” (original emphasis and punctuation, as cited in Duffy, 1966, p. 259)

In this passage, Drexel used biblical motifs and metaphors to make the case for continuing on with the plan to open the Immaculate Heart of Mary School at its current location. First, it is important to note that Drexel named her order *Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People* because her *Sisters* would receive the Blessed Sacrament, or Holy Communion, every day of the week and not just on Sunday or Holy Days of Obligation (Duffy, 1966; Lynch, 2001). This alludes to Drexel’s struggle in her decision on whether to enter religious life as a contemplative nun in an order which focused on a quiet life of daily prayer versus a more active order with a missionary focus. In insisting that her order be sanctioned to receive Holy Communion daily while performing missionary work, Drexel pushed the boundaries of what it meant to be a devout spiritualist and worker for Christ. Therefore, when she wrote, “It is so appropriate for a Convent of the Blessed Sacrament—Christ dwelling with us—and the School of the Immaculate Mother, to have people of the city have no room for our precious Charge” (cited in Duffy, 1966, p. 259), she literally argued that Christ is spiritually and physically residing within the persons of the Sisters of the Blessed working in Nashville. Hence in turning away the nuns and the girls of the Immaculate Heart of Mary School, the protestors are turning away Jesus Christ.
Second, she compared Joseph and Mary’s shunning to the “cave of Bethlehem” to the protestor’s call that the Immaculate Heart of Mary School be placed at the “city’s outskirts.” However, near the end of this passage she triumphantly proclaimed “How truly was the cave of Bethlehem the great educator of the World!” (as cited in Duffy, 1966, p. 259). Therefore, just as Jesus Christ was born in a dark cave and became the light of the world, so too can the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and their students be a light for the darkness of bigotry and racism.

Drexel alluded to this idea in her initial letter to the home owner when she wrote that her Sisters would “endeavor in every way to be neighborly to any white neighbors in the vicinity” and that the girls attending the school would be “orderly and cause no annoyance” (cited in Duffy, 1966, p. 257). In referencing Christ’s humble beginnings to become the “pattern” for believers, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and the girls of the Immaculate Heart of Mary School had the possibility to be a model for schools and communities in the South when encountering bigotry and racial prejudice.

Finally, it should be noted that Drexel emphasized her direction of “your” at the beginning of the letter to Bishop Byrne when she wrote “It is certainly encouraging to meet some opposition in your work and ours” (cited in Duffy, 1966, p. 259). I must re-emphasize that Drexel was functioning within a patriarchal hierarchy. So in spite of the fact that Bishop Byrne is reliant upon her financial assistance for the Immaculate Heart of Mary School, she must show deference to the Bishop while advocating for the location and very existence of the school. Drexel’s belief in Divine Providence as an approach to the Nashville situation would prove fruitful. The Immaculate Mother Academy and Industrial School with instruction “from the fourth through the third year high school” opened on schedule. And due to an increase in attendance, at the end of the first year, a new building had to be added.
Continuing On

Drexel’s vision of social justice evolved from an educational philosophy of inclusion that does not fit within the White male philanthropic or benevolent society narrative of Black education. This educational philosophy is rooted in five principles: (a) A Belief in Divine Providence, (b) The Total Gift of Self, (c) Courageous Travel, (d) Commitment to Providing the Best, and (d) Understanding Death as Life. Hence, a nuanced exploration of how this educational philosophy permeated throughout her educational activities and the activities of the Sisters who worked in schools to circumvent racist ideologies present in American society and the U.S. Catholic Church. Important to this process is exploring the transition between Southern University and Xavier University as it developed in a space-time network of intra-actions between people, ideas, and materials. Utilizing southern womanism, this study will continue to look at the particularities of Drexel’s involvement in the founding of Xavier University which removes Drexel from categorized binaries and situates her as a multi-dimensional figure. From this southern womanist lens, it becomes possible to challenge dominant historical discourses which create binaries such as nun/philanthropist, Black/White, and race/religion. This will then create a holistic presentation that is poststructural in nature and involves the voices of other agents during Xavier’s foundation, particularly the Afro-Catholic Community.

I argue that it is not only impossible, but it is also an injustice to even attempt to tell Drexel’s and Xavier University’s story without acknowledging the work—the tactics—the Sisters, faculty, and students used to not only build a university, but also remember the forgotten educational space of Southern University in New Orleans and honor the protest tradition of the Afro-Catholic community. The first-person perspectives and artifacts that emerged from the Southern University/Xavier University transition are valuable data that challenge the curricular
boundaries and institutional narratives. Documents such as the convent annals from the early years at Magazine Street, correspondence between the pioneering Sisters and Drexel, and artifacts such as commencement programs reveal that Drexel built upon the intellectual tradition present in the Black community in New Orleans. When engaging with the data in this manner, the focus is not on curricular development, but instead on how Black Catholic education developed in a space facilitated by women whose gendered subjectivities did not materialize in traditional gendered norms. A southern womanist perspective of history allows to see that making a way out of no way for Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament meant learning from the past (Coleman, 2008). Making a way out of no way meant remembering and acknowledging the educational spirit of Southern University and honoring the individuals who worked to make a way out of no way. These tactics cannot continue to be viewed as irrelevant in the macro-history of higher education. The evidence of these tactics is most present in the name that is found throughout primary documents from Southern University in New Orleans, Xavier University, and the convent annals of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament—Professor W.J. Nickerson.
CHAPTER FIVE: 5100 MAGAZINE STREET

We went to see the Southern University as soon as we had received Holy Communion and breakfasted...The member of the board who was in an office to the right, to our inquiry as to whether we could look around, said, “Yes” in an indifferent kind of way, and he let us go around by ourselves and apparently forgot all about us.

-Mother M. Katharine Drexel, Letter to the Sisters, April 1915

On that Friday morning in April 1915 in New Orleans, Louisiana, the above-mentioned board member evidently did not realize that of the two nuns in the heavy dark habits who requested to see the building, one was the wealthiest heiress in the United States. And he could not have guessed that this nun was also an heiress who had in her possession the $18,000 needed to purchase the old Southern University Buildings. Nor could he have known that upon stepping out of the building, Drexel had already begun to calculate the additional funding needed to turn the space into a school for the higher education of Colored Catholics in New Orleans (XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, Mother M. Katharine Drexel to the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, April, 1915). Even if this board member learned the very next Tuesday that Drexel and her Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People had secured the property, he might have never imagined that Drexel was already making plans to visit the “Baptist and Straight Institute and Public schools to see what we must compete with” because “it is necessary to offset the protestant schools to have higher education” (XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, Mother M. Katharine Drexel to the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, April, 1915).

In April 1915, Drexel and her Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People purchased the Southern University physical plant. In 1912, the Louisiana Legislature voted to remove the University from New Orleans and relocate it to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Of the physical plant’s buildings, the largest was a “commodious and substantial 3-story brick building” which sat amidst “a whole square of ground on Soniat and Magazine streets” (Fortier,
When this building opened in March 1887, its location was considered “in the outskirts” and occupied “a conspicuous site on the highest ground in the city, only a few squares distant from the Mississippi river” (Fortier, 1904, p. 475). This building was “built in the classic style with doric columns and gothic arches” and possessed a marble entrance,” with “extensive galleries along its front” (Fortier, 1904, p. 475). Atop the stone masonry of the main building, were the words “Southern University.” Soon after the purchase, Drexel had the word “Southern” replaced with “Xavier.” In doing so, Drexel sent a message for “all passerby to read” (Duffy, 1966, p.324). In keeping the word “University” and adding “Xavier,” Drexel’s message was twofold. First, she intended to revive the original intent of the building which was to serve as an institution of higher education for the city’s Black residents, and second, by placing it under the protection of Saint Francis Xavier, she intended it to be a Catholic institution (Duffy, 1966). In spite of renaming the building Xavier University, Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament referred to the school as “Old Southern” on catalogues, registration materials, and advertisements during Xavier’s foundational years. In 1918, when the state legislature granted the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament the ability to confer degrees, the school officially became Xavier College, but the Sisters still affectionately called the school “Old Southern” (XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, SBS Convent Annals, 1915-1945). Xavier University remains the only Black Catholic university in the United States and for years has been recognized as graduating the highest number of Black medical students (Xavier University, 2012).

Southern University, with its designation as a publically funded, segregated institution has been historicized as a direct contrast to Xavier University’s private, Catholic origins. Southern University’s evolution from Southern University to Southern University and Agricultural &Mechanical College has historicized the school within the cohort of publically funded industrial
and agricultural colleges founded for Black citizens after Reconstruction. The presence of a liberal arts curriculum is important because when Drexel surveyed the property to buy, covered in a dusty basket she found Southern University catalogues from its foundational years. She used these catalogues to create the curriculum for Xavier University. This fact is important because it indicates that Drexel and her Sisters did not view the curriculum at Southern University to be subpar or lacking. Because they did not view the curriculum at Southern University to be subpar or lacking, Drexel and her Sisters were able to build upon the intellectual tradition which was embedded in the Black community in New Orleans.

The history of the building located at 5100 Magazine has not been explored in detail because physical location and religious affiliation have historicized the schools that occupied the space as separate entities. According to Vincent (1981), Southern’s years in New Orleans were marred by financial hardships and inconsistent leadership from the state. Therefore the university’s removal from New Orleans has been storied not as a “removal,” but instead a “move” that positioned the university for a stable future in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. In turn, when Xavier University moved to its current location on Carrollton Ave in New Orleans, the properties on Magazine Street became associated with Xavier Preparatory Academy, the high school that emerged from the larger university building project.

From a linear perspective of space and time, Southern University occupied the space at 5100 Magazine Street from 1887 until 1913. Vincent (1981) documented that the space was then briefly used by the Orleans school board for a “black school” (p. 82) until Drexel purchased the space in 1915. From 1915 until 1925, the grammar/high school curriculums, the normal school curriculum, and the university level curriculum gradually separated until Xavier Preparatory Academy and Xavier University became two distinct institutions. Therefore, when viewed from
the current historiography of higher education, the years from 1913 to 1925 would be considered a gray space and in-between time; the “school” was neither Southern University nor Xavier University. The most troubling aspect of naming the gray space and in-between time solely on the basis of modernist (read progressive) definitions of curriculum is that, when rigid boundaries are placed between Old Southern University and Xavier University, the gray space and in-between time are historicized as lesser than, and not worthy of, interrogation in the larger historiography of higher education. But instead of examining this space through its curriculum, what are the possibilities of looking into the cloudiness of the gray space and in turn, embracing the fact that the school was neither/nor. In other words, is there a freedom in being neither/nor?

Ani (1994) critiques conceptions of freedom as defined by Western concepts of the individual as having ownership over time and space. Drawing on Dorothy Lee, Ani makes the distinctions between Western conceptions of “positive freedom and negative freedom” (p. 343). Negative freedom is defined as having “free” time and space. This is considered to be negative because “space is empty and to be occupied with matter; and time is empty and to be filled with activity” for it to be considered valuable (p. 343). On the other hand, positive freedom, when rooted in the concept of the autonomous individual, sees power as the ability to manipulate time and space into productivity. Essentially, it is a freedom from “free” time. However, Ani notes that in “other cultures, ‘free space and time have being and integrity’” (p. 343).

A critical exploration of the connections between Southern University and Xavier reveal important information about the development of Black Catholic higher education in Louisiana. The connections between Southern University’s and Xavier University during Xavier University’s foundational years are important because they highlight what happens when ideological identities encounter discursive spaces. In other words, how did ideological conceptions of being Catholic,
female, missionary, Black, and Creole entangle with the university building projects for Black Americans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As the previous chapters explored conceptualizations of race, gender, religion, and identity, this chapter begins to deconstruct definitions of university building. The educational environment of New Orleans provided a space for the creation and eventual removal of a Black, nondenominational university that was subsequently replaced by a Black Catholic university. In this process, I will show how physical spaces can define and confuse onto-epistemologies (Barad, 2003); but yet and still, these same physical spaces can also provide opportunities for individuals to overcome differences to educational spaces that can overcome the most egregious circumstances of society. With that being said, the goal for this chapter becomes to mine the primary documents from this gray space and in-between time to reveal the intra-actions of university building and community identity.

**Black Higher Education in New Orleans**

As Black leaders started to question the consequences of the Hampton-Tuskegee Model of industrial education, Anglo-Blacks and Afro-Creoles in New Orleans collided in a fierce battle about the philosophical and socio-political implications of an “all-black Southern University” (Logsdon & Bell, 1992, p. 253). The creation of Southern University magnified the divisions of Anglo Blacks—persons born outside New Orleans who identified with the American and Protestant ideals of liberty and justice, and Afro-Creoles—persons born in New Orleans who identified with French ideals of liberty, justice, and fraternity. In popular culture, conflicts between Anglo-Blacks and Afro-Creoles have been storied to be rooted in the marked distinctions in skin-color between the descendants of enslaved Africans (Anglo-Blacks) and the descendants of a combination of French and Spanish settlers, Native Americans, and enslaved Africans (Afro-Creoles). Scholars have chronicled the history of Louisiana’s French, Spanish, Native American, and African colonial
heritage and how it contributed to the creation of a three-tiered racial structure of Creole, Black, and White (Hall, 1992; Porche-Frilot & Hendry, 2010). From this three-tiered structure emerged a group of free people of color whose position as free people allowed them to amass a significant level of wealth and education. Their wealth, education, and Afro-Catholic heritage allowed them to have a sense of agency that was directly challenged when Louisiana was purchased from France in 1803 and became a state in 1812. Louisiana’s new position as a state required that it conform to America’s bi-racial structure of Black and White. Here, it is important to emphasize that the socio-cultural conceptions of Creole terminology and the colorism or shadeism that resulted from the tripartite racial structure and the resulting animosity between Anglo-Blacks and Creoles are not the focus of this study. Instead, what is more telling for the historiography of higher education in New Orleans is how during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the term Creole became less of socio-cultural identity and more of a controversial adjective used to divide people.

As such, free Afro-Creoles were not immune to the deterioration of racial conditions in the years leading up to the Civil War, and they fiercely battled the encroachment of Americanization and the demeaning segregatory practices it carried with it. Reconstruction offered hope with the passage of the Louisiana constitution of 1868 which granted voting rights to Black men and banned segregation in public education; but these victories were short-lived.

P.B.S. Pinchback, a Mississippi native, served in the Union army and gained enough political capital during Reconstruction to briefly serve as Louisiana’s first Black governor. However, when Reconstruction collapsed, Pinchback, and radical Afro-Creoles such as Aristide Mary became sharply divided on how to proceed with the fight for equality. Pinchback used his political influence to support the Redeemer Constitution of 1879 which reversed the gains of the Afro-Creoles by re-segregating public schools and all other public spaces. Pinchback and
Mary’s approaches to the collapse of Reconstruction and the prospects of segregated education would be telling for the history of Southern University and essentially, Black higher education in New Orleans. Logsdon and Bell (1992) quote Pinchback’s defense of his support for Southern University in the *Louisianian*:

> I have learned to look at things as they are and not as I would have them…this country, at least so far as the South is concerned, is a white man’s country…What I wish to impress upon my people, is that no change is likely to take place in our day an generation that will reverse this order of things. (p. 252)

These comments sharply contrast with Mary’s conceptualizations of equality as relayed by Rudolph Desdunes, another radical Afro-Creole, who in a memorial to Mary explained, “Mary understood that equality could not take up its residence within the domain of subordination, and that compromises which resulted in this political anomaly, only post-poned the solution we envisioned with the abolition of slavery (Logsdon & Bell, 1992, p. 252). Ironically, both Pinchback and Mary’s observations would prove fateful for Southern University.

During the spring of 1880, the Louisiana State Legislature authorized the creation of Southern University for the “education of persons of color” and to establish a “Faculty of Arts and Letters, which shall be competent to instruct in every branch of the liberal education” (Southern University Catalogue,” 1892-1893, p. 6). However, the conflict that arose between P.B.S. Pinchback, the fair-skinned, Anglo-Black who orchestrated the so-called “deal” for Southern University and Aristide Mary, a “dark mulatto” who died never forgiving Pinchback his “betrayal,” highlight the onto-epistemologies that transcended color and had implications for the higher educational system in New Orleans (Logsdon & Bell, 1992).

**Entangled Education: Southern University**

From its inception, Southern University was grossly underfunded and received little support from the “state leadership, budgetarily and morally” (Vincent, p. xi, 1981). The Louisiana
legislature granted Southern University a yearly appropriation of “no more than” $10,000. This amount, significant for its budgetary restrictions which were not present in the appropriations for the other state-supported all-White (Louisiana) State University, also did not account for the monies needed to construct a building for the new university (Fay, 1898; Porter, 1938; Vincent, 1981). Therefore, the monies appropriated for teachers’ salaries had to be applied to secure a building (Vincent, 1981). The school took up a temporary residence “in the square bound by Calliope, Clio, St. Charles and Prytania streets” (Vincent, 1981, p. 14). Fay (1898) also observed, “The building on Calliope street, formerly occupied, was sufficient to accommodate only city patronage. There was no room for dormitories and a very small yard for school purposes” (p. 118). It would take the state seven years to construct the building on Magazine Street—an adequate and permanent location that reflected the scope and mission of the school.

However, Southern University did not receive federal land grant status until 1890 which was roughly ten years after its founding. Here, it is important to recall that the original Act 87 designated the University to teach the “education of persons of color” and to establish a Faculty of Arts and Letters, which shall be competent to instruct in every branch of the liberal education, and under the rules of, and in concurrence with, the board of trustees to graduate students, and grant all degrees appertaining to Letters and Arts known to Universities and Colleges in Europe and America, on persons competent and deserving the same. (“Southern University Catalogue,” 1892-1893, p. 55)

Although the point has been belabored that schools such as Southern University were so called “colleges in name only,” it is critical to point out that Southern was originally intended to be a liberal arts institution and therefore had a liberal arts curriculum during its foundational years (Fay, 1898; Vincent, 1981). The University’s developmental pattern mirrored New Orleans’s other Black universities which was systematic development from a secondary curriculum to collegiate curriculum with supplementary elementary and secondary curriculums (Marshall, 1956; Porter,
1938; Vincent, 1981). When Southern University received federal land grant funds, university leaders did not abandon the liberal arts curriculum. Thusly, the liberal arts curriculum developed alongside the agricultural and mechanical curriculum (Marshall, 1956; Porter, 1938; Vincent, 1981). One of the liberal arts programs that benefitted from the influx of federal funding was the Music Department. Vincent credits federal funding and the leadership of University President, Henry A. Hill during the 1890s for the upgrades in curriculum and the steady increase in enrollment. In regard to the music depart, Vincent (1981) explained:

Already a significant part of the University’s curriculum, Music remained an important aspect of the pupil’s daily exercise, and assisted very much in order and discipline of the institution. All of the primary and grammar school students participated in vocal music, with an orchestra of pupils from the higher grades…At most assembly programs, the music department students would be in the assembly hall galleries which added, after 1896, over five hundred more seats to its capacity. (Vincent, 1981, p. 53)

Vincent (1981) indicates that William J. Nickerson’s appointment to principal of the Music Department coincides with the arrival of federal monies the University received when it gained land grant status in 1890. The Southern University Catalogue from the 1892-1893 includes these remarks about William J. Nickerson, the principal of the Music Department:

The Music Department in Southern University has been very much advanced by the election of Professor W.J. Nickerson, a very capable instructor and musician, the principalship of the Department. Two classes in vocal music, with a total of 292 pupils, are now taught by him. The improvement of the pupils in music during the session has been very marked. (Southern University Catalogues, 1892-1900)

Nickerson was a Creole of color born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1851. He attended city schools for his elementary training and Straight University for his academic education (Hamilton, 1911; Sullivan, 2000). Although this study does not have the space to discuss the nuances of the musical history of New Orleans, it is important to acknowledge that Nickerson lived, studied, composed, performed, and taught music in an environment born of creativity from protest and resistance. As such, he has been documented as an influential participant in the musical genealogy of New
Orleans. According to Hamilton (1911), Nickerson became interested in music and “took up the study of music under some of the most capable instructors in the city of New Orleans” and also “took a course of instructions under one of the celebrated teachers from the Conservatory of Paris, France (p. 51). Hamilton was most likely referring to Edmond Dédé. Born in 1827, Edmond Dédé was a free Creole of color, an expatriate New Orleanian, and “one of the most successful of all nineteenth-century black composers born in the United States” (Sullivan, 2000, p. 75). Dédé’s parents immigrated to New Orleans from the West Indies in 1809. Dédé’s first music teacher was his father who was the “chef de musique of a local militia unit” (Sullivan, 2000, p.75). Sullivan informs us that Dédé’s first instrument was the clarinet, but he soon became a violin prodigy and took instruction from teachers of all races. Due to changing race relations in New Orleans, Dédé and other free Creoles of Color left the city and relocated to Mexico at the completion of the Mexican War in 1848 (Sullivan, 2000). When Dédé returned to the city in 1851, the next year his mélodie, “Mon pauvre Coeur” was published and is the oldest piece of sheet music by a New Orleans Creole of Color (Sullivan, 2000). In 1857,Dédé gained entry into the Paris Conservatoire and he later settled in Bordeaux, France where he first worked as a conductor at the “prestigious old Grand Théâtre. Dédé remained in France where he “wrote ballets, ballet-divertissements, operettas, opéra-comiques, overtures, and over 250 dances and songs” (Sullivan, 2000). However, only a few of his orchestral pieces were performed in the United States, but when they were performed, they were by Black musicians in New Orleans. Dédé returned to return to New Orleans only once in 1893 and gave several concerts during his extended stay. William J. Nickerson was one of the musicians who accompanied Dédé on one of these programs.

Nickerson has been credited with training some of New Orleans’s most well-known musicians. For example, according to Sullivan (2000), “W.J. Nickerson wrote at least two
published pieces before 1901. His teaching career provides historians with a link between the
genteel nineteenth century tradition and jazz, through his most famous pupil, Jelly Roll Morton”
(Sullivan, 2000, p. 79). Nickerson’s influence as an educator are as highly lauded as his influence
as a performer and composer. Nickerson originally began his career in a piano store so he could
learn the art of piano tuning and eventually began to teach “the art of music” (Hamilton, 1911, p.
51). In 1891, Nickerson was appointed chair of the department of music at Southern University
(Hamilton, 1911; Vincent, 1981).

In regard to student patronage, some historians have chosen to highlight the controversy
surrounding Southern University as an extension of the conflict between Afro-Creoles and Anglo-
Blacks (Logsdon & Bell, 1992; Vincent, 1981). For example, Vincent (1981) has noted that some
members in the Black community in New Orleans protested Southern’s arrival and cheered its
removal because it provided competition for Straight University. However, a closer look at
Southern University’s patronage exposes the myth of the monolithic Afro-Creole community.
While Straight University has been noted as the choice institution for the city’s more prominent
Afro-Creoles, Southern University was also recognized as an option for the city’s Catholics of color
(Duffy, 1966; Logsdon & Bell, 1992; Lynch, 2001). Because it was a public and non-
denominational institution of higher education, Southern University did not have a requirement to
attend chapel services as did the Methodist New Orleans University and the Congressionalist
Straight University. Without the threat of proselytization, it became an educational option for the
city’s Black Catholics who did not live downtown near Straight University (Duffy, 1966; Logsdon
& Bell, 1992; Lynch, 2001). At the time of its closing, Southern University had 487 students
enrolled with a 20 member faculty (Vincent, 1981). What is more telling for this discussion,
however, are the strategies employed by state leadership to prevent the University from completing its final term, and the tactics employed by students and faculty to resist the closing.

**Southern University: Entangled Places?**

In 1912, *Act 118* of the Louisiana State Legislature removed Southern University from its location on Magazine Street in New Orleans to an undetermined location in rural Louisiana. In the limited Louisiana Black higher education, two reasons have been given for the University’s removal. First, it has been documented that a consortium of state leaders including Governor J.Y. Sanders and superintendent of education T. H. Harris began to question whether Southern University could adequately fulfill its purpose as a land grant (agricultural and mechanical) institution (Porter, 1938; Vincent, 1981). Black educators such as Josiah S. Clark, president of Baton Rouge College and the Louisiana State Colored Teachers Association, began to advocate for a more centrally located Black university and normal school (Vincent, 1981). Second, it has also been documented that at the turn of the twentieth century, Southern University’s location which was once considered to be on the “outskirts of town” was now prime real estate and was being settled by White middle-class residents who made it known that they were not content with sharing the neighborhood with the Black university (Duffy, 1966; Logsdon & Bell, 1992; Lynch, 2001). Once again, a fierce battle ensued over the future of Southern University. Letters of appeal from both White and Black residents and legal injunctions would all prove to be fruitless (Vincent, 1981).

Vincent (1981) compiled detailed information on the logistical complexity of Southern University’s removal from New Orleans. The state systematically handicapped the school financially by creating a vicious cycle of debt. The state limited expenditures to the University while at the same time charging the University for state mandated physical plant improvements. As a result, University leadership often had to borrow against state mortgages to finance the daily
operations. The influx of federal funds provided some assistance, but the University still held significant debt in 1912. This “debt” created a problem when determining the sale price of the property in New Orleans. Obviously, this created problems when determining the funding available to purchase property and build a new institution and determining a time table for the opening of the new institution. Act 118 of the 1912 Louisiana General Assembly designated that property located in New Orleans and Jefferson parish (the 100 acre farm for agricultural studies) should be sold “for not less than $50,000.00” and that “instructional activities were to continue on the New Orleans site until the new Southern was provided for” (Vincent, 1981, p. 70).

Of course, the economic logistics along with legal interventions prevented the University from having a clean break from New Orleans. A group of thirty-eight who “identified themselves as ‘qualified electors and taxpayers of the city of New Orleans…some of them patrons of the Southern University’” filed a lawsuit against the Board of Trustees of the University in Civil District Court (Vincent, 1981). This group argued that the removal was a violation of the 1879 Constitution which established the location of the University in New Orleans; however, State Supreme Court reversed the lower court’s ruling. One portion of the ruling states, “It is not an institution owned in whole or in part by the city of New Orleans, or the citizens of that city. It is a state institution of learning” (as cited in Vincent, 1981, p. 72).

In that moment, the 483 students and the 20 faculty members exist in a gray space and in-between time. According to state law, the space they occupy does not belong to them, but instead is a misplaced space that belongs to state and the larger Black citizenry of New Orleans. Although Act 118 designated that instructional activities should remain in place until a new location was provided, Vincent (1981) informs us that actions were taken immediately to prevent the school from operating
for the 1912-1913 school year in spite of the fact that a location for the new school had not been secured.

The original charter for Southern University stated that the University was to be governed by a twelve member Board of Trustees that were to be selected “from several congressional districts” (Vincent, 1981, p. 10). Of the twelve members, four were to be appointed from the “colored race” (p. 10). From the Board of Trustees, an Executive Committee was to be elected to carry out the Board’s policies. The “colored” members of the Board of Trustees were well-known, prominent citizens in New Orleans like Afro-Creole civil rights activist Louis A. Martinet (Hart, 2013). A review of the University’s early catalogues reveals that the Executive Committee was usually comprised of local leaders like Martinet who in turn provided the local oversight of the University. However, when the school was re-charted in 1912, state law mandated that the racial make-up of the Board of Trustees be all White. The Board was reconfigured, and its power was transferred to the “close knit newly appointed” Executive Committee comprised of “Douglass Anderson, an electrical engineering teacher at Tulane University, Dr. T. P. Singletary of Baton Rouge, B.C. Caldwell, assistant and field agent for the Slater Fund, and State Superintendent T.H. Harris” (Vincent, 1981, p. 67).

At their last full meeting, the “old” Board of Trustees set the opening date for the 1912-1913 term on September 30, 1912 ordered the grass cut and the floors cleaned (Vincent, 1981). Four-hundred and eighty-three students and twenty faculty members showed up for the 1912-1913 term in spite of the fact that “the new board hoped the school would not reopen for the fall term in New Orleans” (Vincent, 1981). Tensions ran high between the new Board and the University administration as both sides waited for the judicial ruling on the legality of the move. Even though the University administration tried tactics such as not turning over the official “checkbook” and
withholding budgetary statements, the new Executive Committee voted to only fund the salaries for the faculty and President until September. The superintendent of the farm in Jefferson Parish was permitted to hire faculty but warned to “incur minimal expense” in running the farm (Vincent, 1981, p. 68).

Although the Executive Board voted to stop paying the salaries of the President and Instructors at Southern University that September, they continued instruction in New Orleans. In March 1913, Professor W.J. Nickerson was a part of a four member committee that included President Henry A. Hill, Frederick F. Simms, and W. B. Smith who presented a petition to the board on behalf the faculty of Southern University. Their primary goal was to obtain payment for the services in order to “continue the present session of this institution” (Vincent, 1981, p. 68). Essentially an ultimatum, the petition argued that it was unlawful for the Board to withhold $26,000.00 in state and federal appropriated funds intended for the University operations since the University opened in accordance with state and board guidelines being that a new location for the school had not been obtained. They continued:

We cannot, however, remain without pay as much as we would dislike to see this session come to an abrupt conclusion; it is beyond our power to continue without your support and assistance. Is it not conceivable that an institution of learning, with over 400 students in attendance, and a State institution amply provided with funds, would be closed in the middle of the session, and its pupils deprived of a full school term, its teachers unpaid and driven to the courts for their just claims. (as cited in Vincent, 1981, p. 69).

The faculty never received their pay for the 1912-1913 school year, but the session continued. At the University’s final commencement in New Orleans, 227 students graduated, and the first Bachelor of Science degree was awarded to Frederick F. Simms who also served as the head of the mechanical department (Vincent, 1981). When the University officially closed on June 19, 1913 with the last commencement exercise, it did not reopen in Baton Rouge until March 9, 1914 (Vincent, 1981).
At this new location, there were no classically built buildings with doric columns and gothic arches. There were no marble entrances with extensive galleries along its front. Instead, the new physical plant matched the aim and scope of the “new” Southern University for which Governor Hall informed White residents “[W]ould be strictly along agricultural and mechanical lines, and would fit the Negro to be a useful farmer and workman” (Vincent, 1981, p. 81). At the school’s new location on Kernan Place, near Scotlandville Plantation, were “the best buildings of the landscape” which included “a one story frame building…twelve plantation cabins badly in need of repair, a barn containing several stables for the work stock, and a small house for tools and small implements” (Vincent, 1981, p. 82).

The most troubling gap in the study of the removal of Southern University is the lack of in-depth analysis of the displaced professors, instructors, and students who were left without employment and a place for education. Sweeping narratives of higher education that venerate systems, institutions, and individuals prevent us from questioning what happened to the people of Southern University in New Orleans. And more importantly, what does it mean to move a school from a space? Who and what gets transferred and who and what gets left behind?

From Vincent (1981), we know that only one faculty member, Frederick F. Simms, “followed the school to its new isolated location” (p. 227). Simms was put in charge of supervising the packing and shipping of “usable items from old Southern (p. 85). These items included “band instruments, chairs of types, carpenter’s tools, mules, horses, pianos, school records and many other items” (p. 85). While Vincent informs us that “students” were enlisted to help, we do not know whether they were students from New Orleans or students from the Baton Rouge area. However, Vincent informed us that with the exception of students from wealthy families such as the Pinchbacks, Allains, Isabelles, Dejoies, and Gaudets, most students who attended Southern
University in New Orleans “were from parents of less than moderate means…who walked ‘several miles daily to attend’” (p. 240). With that being said, it is possible to question the feasibility of students in New Orleans being able to travel to attend the new Southern University, particularly since the new location did not have accommodations for boarders. Of Professor W.J. Nickerson, Vincent and historical documents acknowledge that during this period, Nickerson devoted his time to establishing the Nickerson School of Music which has been noted for training some of the most prominent musicians in Louisiana.

Here, I return to the chapter’s questioning of the ownership of space and how the definition of space relates directly to who has ownership. In other words, does physical ownership of property designate ownership of space? Underpinning the state’s ownership of the property at 5100 Magazine Street was the ideology that the state owned the right to determine the parameters of Black education. By shutting down the building at 5100 Magazine and displacing its people, state leadership and racist dissenters believed that was the end of Southern University in New Orleans. When defined as a place, yes, that was the end of Southern University in New Orleans; but, the educational space that was filled with people, ideas, and discarded objects like old catalogues were still very much present. And when Coleman (2008) tells us “that those who have died have never left,” it should not be a hard to believe that Professor W. J. Nickerson showed up at the “Old” Southern to teach music.

**Entangled Spaces**

On Easter Tuesday (April 6, 1915), Katharine Drexel confided the following to her sister, Louise Drexel Morrell in a letter:

My time is well filled these days. We want to get both the Germantown convent and school and the Macon plans well under-way in working out condition before Wednesday when in the 5 P. M. Mother M. Mercedes and I are off for New Orleans. The reason of the trip I confide to you as it is a dead secret. Very Rev. McCarthy, Josephite, some days during
mid lent, said that in New Orleans (where he has just been) there was a property 320 ft. X 250 ft. with a 3 story brick building on it, 80 ft. X 100 ft. which would hold 800 to 1000 pupils. He said it was owned by the State and that it would either be sold for public or private sale. It was a Colored Industrial school: but it was closed because the authorities would not teach the industrial features and no appropriation of the State would be given for the higher education into which the managers of the school had thrown the school open. The property now, they say, may be purchased for a small sum and it is, they say, well located. (original emphasis and punctuation, SBS Archives, Bensalem, Pennsylvania, Mother M. Katharine Drexel to Louise Drexel Morrell, 1915)

By the time Drexel began the process of acquiring the Southern University physical plant, she had been purchasing properties to build schools for minorities in White communities for almost fifteen years. To purchase the Southern University physical plant, Drexel employed her methods of using an inconspicuous third party to purchase the properties in White areas for Black schools. Harry McEnerny, an elusive figure, was the ‘real’ purchaser of the Southern University buildings (Duffy, 1966; Lynch, 1998). As a well-known financier of Black schools, Drexel’s presence at the auction would have alerted Whites to her intentions to open a school for Black patrons at the site. According to Duffy (1966), Archbishop James H. Blenk introduced Drexel to several men he thought would be able to assist them in the sale. McEnerny, the advertising manager of the Picayune and an Irish-American Catholic, agreed to make the sale (Duffy, 1966; Mount, 1896). Drexel’s opinion of McEnerny was that he “influences the whole state, beginning with the Governor and the Archbishop” (as cited in Lynch, 2001, p. 204).

White residents’ opposition the reopening of Southern University did not quiet. Drexel discusses the threat of protests in a letter to New Orleans Archbishop James Blenk on May 16, 1915:

Mrs. Blackmore has sent me a clipping from the Times-Picayune of May fifth which has caused me just a little anxiety. It stated that a protest from many signers had been transmitted by the Mayor to the City Council asking that an ordinance be passed to prevent the Southern University building from being used as a convent, or school for Negro’s educational purposes. Perhaps the petition will not be regarded seriously, yet I feel some anxiety, as I know the devil sometimes can stir up an account of opposition, in
order to frustrate a work for souls. On the other hand, if it come from God, a 
manifestation of His will, it would certainly free us from no [easy] task. But I want to be 
sure, and for this reason refer the matter to you as God’s representation. I know your 
great zeal for souls, and for everything, that in any way can further God’s interests, so I 
leave the matter to your watchful care. [I am] however, sending a little note to Mr. McEnery [sic] asking his opinion too. (original emphasis, NOAA, New Orleans, 
Louisiana, Mother M. Katharine Drexel to James H. Blenk, May 16, 1915)

In spite of her persuasive language, Drexel never makes a direct reference to the bigotry 
expressed by the white protesters. Instead, she makes constant reference to the important work of 
saving souls. I argue, however, that her constant reference to God and the saving of souls was 
part of a strategy used by Drexel to validate her strong appeal to the archbishop, and to validate 
her cause by deferring to God, who is traditionally conceptualized as a male entity. In that sense, 
God becomes a man to whom the archbishop cannot refuse. Therefore, as “God’s 
representative” it was Blenk’s responsibility to fulfill her request without question. Again, aware 
of her position in a patriarchal Church and America, Drexel understood she would need 
assistance from all primary stakeholders to fight the Xavier University petition if necessary; 
hence her statement, “[I am] however, sending a little note to Mr. McEnery[sic] asking his 
opinion too” (original emphasis, NOAA, New Orleans, Louisiana, Mother M. Katharine Drexel 
to James H. Blenk, May 16, 1915). It can be argued that Drexel included the reference to 
McEnermy out of obedience to the archbishop, to inform him of her activities. But it can also be 
argued that this was a deliberate action to let the archbishop know that she was involving other 
parties, just in case he became lax in his “zeal for souls.” In his reply on June 10, 1915, Blenk 
informed Drexel that he had delayed his answer because he, “[W]anted to be quite certain of the 
attitude of the Commission Council towards this protest” (NOAA, New Orleans, Louisiana, James 
H. Blenk to Mother M. Katharine Drexel, June 10, 1915). He also acknowledged Drexel’s contact 
with McEneny, and informed Drexel that he was aware of “the substance of his reply to you”
Blenk went on to inform Drexel that the protest lacked substance, and subsequently, the preparations to open Xavier University in the fall of that same year went on as scheduled.

**From Old Southern to Xavier University**

The sale of Southern University was finalized on August 14, 1915 (Notarial Archives, New Orleans, Louisiana, Act 00032). On August 16, Mother Mary Mercedes and Sister Mary Frances Butell left the Motherhouse in Cornwells, Pennsylvania and arrived in New Orleans on August 18, 2013 (XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, SBS Covent Annals, p. 1). Because Mother Mercedes was not to take permanent residence in New Orleans, the Sisters consider Sister Frances Butell the first missionary in New Orleans and cite her arrival as the “beginning of Xavier” (XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, SBS Covent Annals, p. 1). Sister Mary Frances Butell was born Frances Carolyn Butell on August 26, 1884 (Marshall, 2004, p. 287). She came from a German Catholic family and decided to enter religious life at an early age. While attending St. Ursula Academy in York, Nebraska, she learned of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and began correspondence with (Marshall, 2004). She entered the convent of Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament at age twenty-one in 1905. Her first assignment was at St. Francis de Sales in Rock Castle, Virginia where she spent five years. She left Virginia in 1913 to go to Immaculate Mother School in Nashville, Tennessee, where she taught the children of instructors at Fisk University (Lynch, 2001). When she arrived in New Orleans, her assignment was to be the principal of St. Francis Xavier. Butell received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Villanova College, Pennsylvania in 1924, a Master of Arts Degree from Loyola University, New Orleans, and a Doctor of Philosophy from Catholic University, Washington, D.C., in 1933. Butell served as Dean of Xavier University from 1942-1950 (Marshall, 2004).
The next Sisters to arrive in New Orleans were Mother Mary Paul of the Cross and Sister Mary Barnabas Healy. Mother Mary Paul of the Cross was one of the “foundation stones” of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament (Lynch, 2001). Before joining the convent, she made $4.50 a day “sewing black borders perhaps on the long skirts of the day,” and gave her entire salary to her mother (Lynch, 2001). In 1899, she was one of the first Sisters to arrive in Rock Castle, Virginia to begin preparations for the opening of St. Francis de Sales. Then named Sister Paul of the Cross, in addition to her work at the school, she was one of the Sisters who initiated a prison ministry. This ministry began when the Sisters learned of a Black man who was condemned to be hanged on death row. Sister Paul of the Cross began visiting the man which resulted in him requesting to be baptized before his death (Lynch, 2001). In 1906, Sister Paul of the Cross became Mother Paul of the Cross when she was appointed Mother Superior of St. Katharine’s Hall in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Referred to as Carlisle, this school served both Native American and African American Students. From there, Mother Paul of the Cross joined Mother Katharine in Harlem, New York in August of 1912 to open St. Mark’s school. At St. Mark’s, Mother Paul of the Cross served as Mother Superior of the convent, educational administrator, and seventh and eighth grade teacher. As Mother Superior of the convent at Xavier, Mother Paul of the Cross was responsible for the religious, physical, and emotional well-being of Sister Frances Butell, Sister Justin, and four newly vowed Sisters—Sister Barnabas Healy, Sister Bertha, Sister (Mother) Anselm, and Sister Angelica. Although these Sisters were new to religious life, they had been educated at normal schools and were well trained to begin instruction at Xavier.

The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament convent annals from New Orleans give detailed information about the pioneering Sisters’ first months in New Orleans as well as the first months of
what they referred to as the “reopening of Southern University.” In the early months of September 1915, the convent annalist wrote:

The colored people are so delighted to have Southern back again that they are doing everything to help us. We have received a list of probable students and September 9th has been selected for ‘visitation day’. The Sisters will visit these homes even tho [sic] they are strangers in a strange land. (original punctuation, XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, SBS Convent Annals, 1915, p. 4)

Drexel was in New Orleans during this time, and she would have been among the Sisters walking the streets and visiting homes in the city. Upon their return, the convent annalist noted:

The Sisters were well received in every home and they found the people most refined and seemingly in better circumstances than the colored in the North. We have every reason to believe that we shall have a good attendance as the newspapers have given us splendid write-ups. Mother is praying for at least two hundred children, boys too, but only manageable boys. On all sides we hear, ‘You will have plenty scholars’. We are trusting to the Lord that this will be the case. (original emphasis and punctuation, XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, SBS Convent Annals, 1915, p. 4)

Xavier University re-opened with the spirit of “Old Southern” on September 27, 1915 under the management of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament with instruction at a level below full university status to ensure the instructional integrity of the university (Blatt, 1987). The scholars did indeed come, and the school experienced overcrowding in several of the classrooms. Although it began with instruction at the high school level, Drexel had always intended for Xavier to become a university, as evidenced by the school’s rapid advancement from instruction at the high school level to the ability to confer degrees in 1925.

In their respective roles as Mother Superior and Principal at Old Southern, Mother Paul of the Cross and Sister Frances engaged in frequent conversations with Drexel about the daily workings of the school. From the convent annalist, we learn that during the early months of the school’s opening, a Professor William J. Nickerson was “permitted to form an orchestra” (XULA,
New Orleans, Louisiana, SBS Convent Annals, 1915, p. 8).  Mother Mary Paul of the Cross in a letter to Mother Katharine dated October 31, 1915 wrote:

Both Professor Nickerson and Mr. Crozier are lovely to work with, not making one unnecessary demand, in fact, trying to serve. Since we have the two [sunny] rooms Prof. Nickerson is using one of the rooms in the Mechanical Building for orchestra practice. Mr. Lewis will give lessons in mechanical training twice a week in the same room. (XULA Archives, New Orleans Louisiana, Mother Paul of the Cross to Mother M. Katharine Drexel, October 31, 1915)

Mother Paul of the Cross began her letter by asking Mother Katharine whether they could spend $25.00 for band instruments. According to Mother Paul of the Cross, “Professor Nickerson asked for this, in order to get a few more violins which he finds necessary” (XULA Archives, New Orleans Louisiana, Mother Paul of the Cross to Mother M. Katharine Drexel, October 31, 1915).

Nickerson developed a plan so that the students could purchase the instruments on a payment plan, and the $25.00 would be paid back before the end of the school term. The product of Nickerson’s and the students’ efforts were put on display at the first commencement exercise.

Performing Curriculum in Entangled Spaces

In June 1915, three separate commencement programs were held, and according to the convent annals, “all the exercises were attended” (XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, SBS Convent Annals, 1915-1945, p. 21). The first program, the Baccalaureate service, took place on June 11, 1916 at 8pm. According to the Morning Star, Reverend Carl F. Schappert, S.S. J., preached the sermon “before a most appreciative audience. On June 15, 1916, forty-six eighth grade students received certificates “entitling them to enter the High School Department next fall” (XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, SBS Convent Annals, 1915-1945, p. 21). At the June 16, 1916 commencement exercise, five students received diplomas from the evening normal class:
Mr. George Carpenter, Miss Beatrice Bell, Zerita Bell, Evelyn LaChappelle and Mrs. Pricilla Waterhouse. Of this ceremony the convent annalist noted:

[T]he auditorium was packed to capacity in spite of the fact that there was a very heavy rain. We had to send many away and close the doors at eight o’clock. The rain was so heavy that we had to open a few classrooms to give shelter to those who could not be accommodated in the auditorium. (XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, SBS Convent Annals, 1915-1945, p. 22)

The Very Reverend A. E. Otis, President of Loyola University gave the commencement address where he “spoke on general education, the attitude of Holy Church towards learning and the sacrifices she is constantly making therefor [sic]” (XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, SBS Convent Annals, 1915-1945, p. 22).

At the Xavier University Archives in New Orleans, the original program from the June 15, 1915 closing exercises has been preserved. A document analysis of this program reveals the fluidity of the Southern University to Xavier University transition. In May 1916, the school became incorporated, and the Sisters had to legally change the name from Southern University to Xavier University so as not to conflict with the institution located in Baton Rouge. However, on the front cover of the closing exercise program indicating closing exercises for Xavier University, “Old Southern” appeared directly under Xavier University. While the reference to “Old Southern” on the cover can be considered a surface level tribute to Southern University, the contents of the program challenge conceptions and definitions of curriculum. What follows is an in depth description of the order and contents of the program which reflects the complexity of that curriculum.

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5 The convent annalist listed the names in this order and with the accompanying titles. No indication was given as to why some names had titles and others did not.
Commencement

The students entered the auditorium to a March performed by W.J. Nickerson’s Orchestra. Next, the Chorus sung French composer Louis Neidermeyer’s arrangement of “Pater Noster” which is the Our Father prayer in Latin. Joseph Zimmerman, a member of the junior class who became one of the charter members of the Xavier Alumni Association, gave the address of welcome. Then, Mercedes Gorman performed Ludwig van Beethoven’s Sonata, Op. 14 No 2. Next the ninth grade students performed an Indian Club Drill. Mary Baudit and Nellie Crawford performed an instrumental section from Norma, an opera by Vincenzo Bellini. Ethel Coleman read “A Woman in a Shoe Shop.”

Fannie G. Roche performed a vocal solo titled “Summer” composed by Cécile Chaminade, a female French composer and pianist. The orchestra performed an overture—Sunshine and Shadow by Dudley Buck. The seventh grade then lightened the mood with a May Pole Dance. Next, Henryk Wieniawski’s “Faust Fantaisie” was performed by Duplain W. Rhodes, Jr. on violin accompanied by May Berhel on piano. Herman Lewis and Percy Wilson engaged in a political debate. The Glee Club performed My Sister Mary. The tenth and eleventh grade students performed Pavlova Gavotte, a French Ballroom dance. W.J. Nickerson’s Orchestra performed Anchored, a Victorian parlor song. The next item on the program was the awarding of medals and conferring of degrees. Alvin H. Jones won a medal for church history, Edna Richards won a medal for Christian Doctrine, and May Berhel won a medal for excellence in scholarship.

When reverend S.J. Kelley, S.S.J. gave his address, he “feelingly referred to the late Father Lebeau and the large share he had in the resuscitation of Old Southern as a place of learning, and spoke of the hopeful future that awaited the Colored students of New Orleans in the
opportunities of education offered by the devoted Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament” (XULA, New Orleans, Louisiana, SBS Convent Annals, 1915-1945, p. 22). The program closed with “The day is Done” by Carter.

Continuing On

We hope the story of our work at “Old Southern” may be found written at the hearth-stone of thousands of families throughout the length and breadth of New Orleans. We hope the story of our work shall be burned into the very lives of devoted Catholic and non-Catholic, who trained within the walls of ‘Old Southern,’ shall do their share toward maintaining and perpetuating its holy ideals; and who shall yet offer the tribute of their love to the nuns who trained them in the ways that lead to life.

Very respectfully yours,
The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament
-Old Southern Yearbook, 1915

At first glance, this note which is found at the end of the 1915 Old Southern Year Book appears to be full of contradictions. First, there are Roman Catholic nuns speaking of “Old Southern,” a secular institution, in terms of “its holy ideals.” Second, these same nuns reference the education of “devoted Catholic and non-Catholic” who studied “within the walls of Old Southern.” Finally, the tone is not domineering, but more of a hopeful request for acceptance into the “hearth-stone of thousands of families throughout the length and breadth of New Orleans.”

The large building on Magazine Street, which “stood majestically in emptiness idleness,” (Duffy, 1966), represented the lack of attention and care given to the educational needs of New Orleans’s Black citizens. However, this space that originally contained spirits of conflict, accommodation, and resistance also included spirits of emancipation, empowerment, engagement, and determination. The energy emanating from this space would have it that the building on Magazine Street would not remain empty and idle for long. As fate would have it, the spring of April of 1915 brought Drexel and her Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored
People to purchase the Southern University physical plant with the sole purpose of developing it into an institution for the higher education of Black Catholics and the larger Black citizenry in New Orleans (Lynch, 2001).

Empowered by Drexel’s educational philosophy, seven women—Mother Paul of the Cross, Sister Frances Buttell, Sister Mary Barnabas Healy, Sister Bertha, Sister Anselm, Sister Angelica, and Sister Justin—worked with the Afro-community—Protestant and Catholic—to reclaim the space that was Southern University and transition it over time into Xavier University. A review of archival evidence which includes personal correspondence between Drexel and the Seven Joys—the first Sisters to staff Xavier, the first catalogue distributed in 1915, and the program from the first commencement exercise in 1916 reveals the interconnectivity of the aforementioned educational entities. These women engaged in a complex, multilayered, intellectual process that involved community outreach, teaching, administration, and care. They hired lay and secular personnel of all races, embraced the rewards and challenges of co-education, and positioned the school for its rapid advancement towards recognition as a university.

On June 18, 1918, Louisiana Governor R.G. Pleasant signed an Act of General Assembly empowering Xavier University to confer degrees and grant diplomas. In 1925, the normal department expanded into a formal Teacher’s College, the College of Liberal Arts opened, and a Pre-Medical course was added to the curriculum. In 1927, the College of Pharmacy opened. In 1935, Drexel began to suffer a series of heart attacks which forced her to retire permanently to the Motherhouse of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in Bensalem, Pennsylvania. In 1941, Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament celebrated their Jubilee—50 years of service in the Church and society. To celebrate this occasion, new and former students from the schools Drexel founded
traveled to the Motherhouse for a program filled with performances celebrating their respective cultures. One of these groups was Xavier University’s music department who performed a scene from the opera *Carmen* (Holt, 2002).

Lynch (2001) offered that it was always Drexel’s vision to work in collaboration with the communities she assisted and to educate their students for leadership in the Church and society (pp. 619-620). Future administrations of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament would fulfill this vision on April 4, 1968 (the day Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated), when they ceded control of Xavier University to lay leadership and appointed Norman Francis, a Black Catholic and graduate of Xavier University, as president (Alberts, 1994). Francis has been credited with shaping the policies that have allowed Xavier to have long term success in preparing its Black graduates for medical school and its graduate programs in science, specifically its School of Pharmacy. Francis has also been credited with leading the university to a resilient comeback in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and with his service to the university totaling forty-five years, and he is currently the longest tenured college president in the United States (Mangan, 2013).

The existence of Xavier University must be attributed to more than just a philanthropic nun that provided the funding for a Catholic university in a city with a large Black Catholic population. Xavier University was birthed from the complicated history of the Afro-Creole protest tradition in New Orleans that can be traced to the Afro-Creole Catholic tradition (Bennett, 2004; Bell, 1997). This history created a culture of people that protested the move of Southern University to Baton Rouge in 1913 who felt the educational void that the removal of the institution left (Lynch, 2001). It is in this environment that Drexel and her Sisters, building off the complicated legacy of Southern University in New Orleans, not only financed, but designed a model of Black Catholic higher education. However, in spite of these contributions, Xavier as a Historically Black College and
University, a historical Catholic institution, and Drexel as a university builder, are markedly underrepresented or in some instances, not even mentioned in current historiographies of higher education. In the next chapter, I will provide the implications of this absence for the field of higher education.
CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND SUMMARY

I began this project with one primary research question: why have Saint Katharine Drexel and Xavier University been left out of the history of higher education. I found that, when used separately, traditional historical methods and qualitative methods did provide adequate tools for the data collection and analyses needed to answer these questions. Therefore, I developed southern womanism as a theoretical perspective and methodological apparatus to frame this research. Southern womanism provided me the opportunity to simultaneously interrogate the conceptualizations of Black and Catholic Higher Education, construct and deconstruct historical narratives, and question discursive constructions of race, gender, religion, identity, and space. In this chapter, I will address the answer to my research question and provide commentary on the implications for historical and contemporary studies of higher education.

Challenging the Historiography of Higher Education

The higher education system is the oldest formal system of education in the United States (Manning, 2013; Birnbaum, 1988). What is often thought to be the “American” system of higher education is derived from an Old World model of individuals self-organizing into guilds to study knowledge in a designated space (Manning, 2013; Thelin, 2004). However, while it has been acknowledged that the development of the higher education system beginning with Harvard in 1636 predates the colonial project for independence by over a hundred years, the causal effects of studying higher education through the romanticized images of the colonial colleges has not been thoroughly interrogated. Thelin (2004) explains this idea in greater detail when he defines colonial colleges as institutions founded before 1781 that survived after the American Revolutionary War. These schools, Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, Brown, Dartmouth, Rutgers, and Pennsylvania, attempted to mimic the Oxford-Cambridge ideal
of mixing living and learning (Thelin, 2004). But, it is critical to note that as philosophical conceptions of knowledge were undergoing the shift from metaphysical to physical; the American institutions of higher education were morphing into a hierarchal system based on time and location. As the nation-building project expanded, so did institutions of higher education. In turn, colonial colleges became the ideal standard other institutions strived for in terms of architecture, curriculum, and prestige. Thelin (2004) has connected this to the Anglophilia present in the colonies located on the eastern seaboard. And while the colonial colleges are more closely associated with the Oxford-Cambridge model, they did not actually mirror this model in terms of curriculum, physical plant and academic structure until the 1930s (Thelin, 2004).

Because of its long history in America and beyond, the U.S. higher education system has been traditionally viewed as a fixed enterprise versus the elementary and high school systems that have always been in some stage of flux or experimentation. To further unpack this idea, I will draw upon Davis’s (2009) discussion of the emergence of intersubjective discourses and interobjective discourses in the study of teaching and learning.

**Intersubjectivity and Interobjectivity**

Davis (2009) borrows from Warren Weaver’s 1948 classifications of scientific objects as “simple, complicated, and complex” (cited in Davis, 2009, p. 93). As such, Davis (2009) defines complex systems as emerging from the interactions of agents that are themselves dynamic and adaptive. Examples include microorganisms, cells, organs, animals, animal packs, cities, societies, species, and the biosphere. Such phenomena are not entirely predictable, because members of the same class of phenomena have the capacity to respond differently to the same sort of influences. Such is not the case for simple and complicated systems. Just as significantly, complex systems can learn new responses. This means that, unlike simple and complicated systems, complex systems embody their histories. The conditions under which they came to form are woven into and enacted through their physical structures. (p. 94)

Davis (2009) explains that although Weaver did not present his definition of systems until 1948,
Davis uses this definition to explain that the shift in metaphysical to physical conceptions of natural phenomena directly affected the emergence of social scientific theories and methodologies used to study schooling, teaching, and learning. If natural systems are complex and constantly evolving, then the phenomena that emerge from human interactions are equally complex and evolving. Therefore, the traditions of inquiry which emerged to study the complexity of human experience can be divided into two primary movements—intersubjective and interobjective (Davis, 2009). The traditions associated with intersubjectivity (structuralist and poststructuralist discourses), generally critique the modernist assumption that “knowledge is out there” and instead asserts that “all knowledge is socially constructed” (Davis, 2009, p. 96). The traditions associated with interobjectivity (ecology and complexity sciences) share the same assumptions with some of the intersubjective traditions in a critique of how language is used to describe phenomena. However, the main distinction is that where intersubjective traditions maintain a distinct separation from scientific epistemologies, interobjective traditions focus on “interrelations and interconnections” (p. 103). As higher education became an entity to be studied, whether as a macro system or micro system, empirical studies became rooted in twentieth century perceptions of an ideal university.

Current studies in higher education are conceptualized through a modernist construct of categorical inputs and outputs. In this system, metaphysical concepts of knowledge, truth, and doubt are housed in physical structures (buildings). When individuals enter the physical structure (the university proper), they will be changed through a mix of interactions with tangible materials—people, books, experiments, conversations—in the metaphysical project to seek knowledge that is out there. As an evolving, complex system, the fundamental concept of higher education is rooted in the interactions between individuals in a designated space. The advent of
the study of higher education not only mimicked the project of measurement and categorization in the pre-secondary education (Lagemann, 2007), but set the scale of measurement against the colonial colleges. Therefore, the history of American higher education is not told through discourses of education but through institutional histories based on an Anglofied colonial ideal. Here, Egea-Kuehne’s (2001) translation of Derrida’s commentary on the problems with striving for an ideal democracy is useful. For Derrida, democracy is something which “remains to be invented. Every day. At least” (original emphasis, cited in Egea-Kuehne, 2001, p. 191). When describing the “ideal of democracy,” Derrida speaks of “promise” and continues on to say that when “you refer to…democracy, you have to speak of democracy today…democracy to come” (original emphasis, cited in Egea-Kuehne, 2001, p. 191). Using Derrida’s interpretation of democracy as something that is constantly evolving is critical because the colonial colleges play a dual role in representing the advent of true American democracy and the pinnacle of educational rigor. The problem occurs when these concepts become fixed organizational models. While recent scholarship in higher education has interpreted higher education through postmodernist and poststructuralist discourses (Kezar, et al., 2006), the language used to describe the components found in the organizational model of higher education has not been evaluated in great detail. As such, there exists a heavy reliance upon definitions of the people, places, and curriculums that make-up higher education through modernist/pseudo-structuralist conceptions of race, gender, and space.

American Dream Ideology and Black Higher Education

Because of the historical exclusion of Black Americans from the larger sociopolitical polity, Black scholarship often functions to highlight the contrasts between the ideology of the American Dream and the realities of racism. Ideology can be broadly defined as the set of ideas
that pervade the belief system that is presented to the masses. It functions to make decisions involving the formations of socio-political systems seem natural and unthinking. Schwarzmantel (2008) expanded on this idea when he wrote, “Political ideologies thus present a view of the good society, and further than that they seek to mobilize people in support of political projects designed to bring about that particular kind of society” (p. 26). He added, “The implication of this is that an ideology is not just an abstract philosophy, or set of ideas dreamed up by one person, but something which links such general ideas to political action” (p. 26). Watkins (2001) echoed this idea and posited, “Ideology becomes the currency of those dominating the culture. Ideology is imparted subtly and made to appear as though its partisan views are part of the ‘natural order.’ The dominating ideology is a product of dominant power” (p. 9). Mills (1997) continued in this vein when he argued that White supremacy is an ideology which has so heavily influenced Western philosophical thought that it has tainted the philosophical theories that serve as the base of American political theory, therefore making them invalid. Mills (1997) defines White supremacy as “the unnamed political system” of “domination by which white people have historically ruled over and, in certain important ways, continue to rule over non-white people” (p. 3). He theorized that “global white supremacy” is “itself a political system, a particular power structure of formal and informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties” (p.3). Samuels (2004) also explains how the dominant ideology in the United States manifests itself as the American Creed. Quoting Gunnar Myrdal’s definition, Samuels (2004) describes the American Creed as the ideals of the essential dignity of the individual human being, of the fundamental equality of all men, and of certain inalienable rights to the freedom, justice, and a fair opportunity represent to the American people to the nation’s early struggle for independence…The ideals of the American Creed have become the highest law of the land. (p. 5)
Samuels (2004) made a relevant observation that while the tenets of the American Creed served as the basis for the arguments for the civil rights of Black Americans, “the American Creed tends to obscure the particulars of the African American Experience…Despite the laudable goal of promoting racial harmony and understanding, applying the American Creed to racial issues often produces greater polarization between whites and African Americans” (original emphasis, p. 5).

These definitions of ideology are important because they highlight not only how ideology affects the creation of socio-political structures, but also how these structures are historicized. For example, even though the Declaration of Independence states, “All men are created equal,” ideologies of racial and gender superiority allowed for the creation of laws to exclude minorities from political participation and limited the rights of their citizenship for decades in America. When dominant ideologies are used to create structures as justification for excluding certain groups from socio-political structures, the dominant group is able to relinquish responsibility for the ills that this exclusion creates while simultaneously ignoring or downgrading the potential positive outcomes born from exclusion. The creation of a separate system of higher education for Black Americans is an example of these phenomena.

Black higher education was developed and nurtured within the same time period during which America was redefining its intellectual, political, and economic identities after the Civil War (Menand, 2001). As the United States moved from an agrarian to an industrial society, education transitioned from a privilege of the elite and neo-elite classes to a requirement for participation in the socio-political enterprise, and access to the American Dream (Anderson, 1988; Menand, 2001; Watkins, 2001). After Emancipation, institutions of higher education for Black Americans were developed within and against an American society that was (and still is) struggling with its race problems. These institutions were tasked with educating and
democratizing Blacks into the American citizenry as both second and middle class citizens (Anderson, 1988; Watkins, 2001). From this viewpoint, it becomes possible to realize how ideology and its implications for the American Dream have influenced the study of Black higher education and allow for an understanding of how Black higher education has been consistently studied through the lens of political economy. To that end, most studies of the history of Black higher education stem from the implications of the Washington/DuBois debates, and for good reasons.

The theories behind the Washington/DuBois debates involve conceptualizations of the goals of Black higher education to educate Blacks whether to compete in the industrial economy or to become fully embodied members of the citizenry. Scholars such as Anderson (1988) and Watkins (2001) have produced seminal texts which highlight the influence of the ideology and political economy on the development of institutions for the higher education of Blacks. They pay particular attention to how White, mostly male, Northern philanthropists in their motivations to gain new levels of wealth and influence, manipulated the development of Black education in general and higher education in particular. However, these discussions of political economy and ideology do not explain the motivations of individuals involved in Black education who were not motivated by gaining wealth in the American capitalistic enterprise. Although institutions for Black higher education are the results of problematic conceptualizations of American Dream ideology and political economy, should they be exclusively studied through these lenses? In other words, can American Dream ideology and political economy explain the activities of a White woman, who was connected to the capitalistic enterprise, benefitted from the capitalistic enterprise, but was not motivated to gain more wealth from the capitalistic enterprise? To add to the previous question, is it even possible to explain the motivations of an individual who was
connected to a hierachical bureaucratic structure that was not a corporation, but the equally powerful Catholic Church?

**Implications for the Study of Higher Education**

Amid global economic crises and local budget cuts, universities have been tasked with asserting their relevance as legislators, parents, and students demand accountability, efficiency, and fiscal responsibility (Morton & Griffin, 2013). President Barack Obama, in his 2013 State of the Union Address, called for changes to the Higher Education Act “so that affordability and value are included in determining which colleges receive certain types of federal aid” (Obama, 2013). He added, “My Administration will release a new ‘College Scorecard’ that parents and students can use to compare schools based on a simple criteria: where you can get the most bang for your educational buck” (Obama, 2013). Although President Obama did not explicitly define “most bang for your educational buck,” it can be inferred from the rhetoric of his speech that colleges and universities are to now be judged on how quickly and inexpensively they can prepare young people to enter the workforce upon graduation (Morton & Griffin, 2013).

President Obama’s call is not particularly new or innovative. The “practical” benefits of a college education versus its more liberatory potential have been debated since 1828 when Yale faculty advocated for students to be taught the “furniture of the mind” (Silliman, 1997).

The advantages and disadvantages of the new college scorecard are being debated in forums sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and among the higher education community in scholarly journals and online forums. The primary debate centers on how this rhetoric of efficiency and accountability will impact policies and practices at the university level, and in turn, how these policies and practices will impact pedagogical practices and dialogical exchanges between professors and students (Morton & Griffin, 2013). I argue that an additional
effect of college scorecard policies with be a deeper schism between quantitative and qualitative
studies, with historical and theoretical research being further marginalized. The overarching goal
of the college scorecard is laudable. However, is it ethical to layer twentieth-first century
categories and labels upon problematic socio-historical categories and labels?

In its current form, traditional historical educational research provides overly simplified
definitions of institutions, curriculums, leadership, and identity. Because historical educational
research appears to merely restate dominant historical narratives and widely accepted
institutional narratives, it is perceived to not offer any solutions to current educational crises.
However, I offer that a shift in the perspective of how we view the theories and methods of
historical educational research can have a direct impact on the field of educational research in
general, and policy development in particular. The events I recounted in this dissertation were
not isolated incidents or anecdotal musings. The historical themes that emerged from this
research have contemporary implications for higher education. These themes are more fluid
versus static definitions of institutional identity and conceptions of university building and
leadership development as isolated processes.

**Fluid versus Static Definitions of Institutional Identity**

The notions that Historically Black Colleges and Universities were colleges in name only
and were slow to develop institutional culture have been generally accepted in the history of
higher education. When the development of institutional identity is perceived as a linear
timeline beginning with Harvard in 1636, it is logical to argue that institutions founded hundreds
of years later were slow to develop institutional identity. However, new perspectives on
historical research and data collection can reveal the fluidity of the development of institutional
identity. For example, Hart (2014) used ethnographical research methods to present the history
of Straight University, the historically Black institution that preceded Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana. Challenges to static conceptions of institutional identity emerge from his research. For example, when Straight University merged with New Orleans University to form Dillard University in 1935, the Straight University students protested this event because they believed they were going to lose their identities as “Straight-ites.” This identity as Straight-ites began to develop when the college was founded in Reconstruction New Orleans and was nurtured by academic, cultural, and extra-cultural activities. At Straight University, the students referred to themselves as Straight-ites, and continued to refer to themselves as Straight-ites at the new Dillard University. Hart’s theoretical framework relied upon ethnohistory’s call to perform history at the street-level. As such Hart, used pictures, letters, and commencement addresses and constructed not only a history of Straight University, but to also redefined conceptions of democracy and education. New perspectives on the fluidity of institutional identity can prevent institutions from being trapped within static definitions of their identities based on problematic dominant narratives.

**Conceptions of University Building and Leadership Development as Isolated Processes**

Underpinning the development of the college scorecard system is Capitalism’s call for competition. A by-product of competition is isolation. Although universities are dynamic systems with many moving parts, they have been historicized as isolated entities (“the” ivory tower). This isolation is magnified by the competition that is fueled by modernist preoccupations with categorization. This phenomenon influences historical studies on higher education. Educational studies of higher education generally focus on one institution, one university president, or one historical event. In turn, university building has been historicized as the narratives of Cornelius Vanderbilt, John D. Rockefeller, and Paul Tulane.
When I reached the point of the narrative development of this research when I had to relay the founding of Xavier University, I purposefully did not place Katharine Drexel at the center of the story. My goal was to show that the acts of university building go beyond giving money, naming buildings, and erecting statutes. It is, however, a communal process. When unpacking the absence of Drexel and Xavier University in the history of Black higher education, I noticed other individuals were also missing from this history like the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, and members of the Catholic community in New Orleans who administered, staffed, and nurtured Xavier during its foundation. This oversight is an injustice because within these tactics, there are several layers of rich data.

Summary

Saint Katharine Drexel and Xavier University present a study in contrast. Xavier’s identity as the first only Black Catholic University places it within two very different historical constructs. At once, Xavier is a Black university and a Catholic university and therefore blends two identities which, exclusive of each other, bring about difficult conversations regarding the histories of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and the permeation of racism in the Catholic Church during the formative years of the United States. Because of these two very separate and seemingly contrasting identities, scholars have chosen to simplify Xavier’s history as a static yet exemplary story of a philanthropic nun who provided the funding for what would eventually become the first and only Black Catholic University in the United States, and which would eventually become renowned for its science curriculum and be the top producer of African Americans who gain acceptance into medical schools. Xavier has been regarded as unique, and its founder, Saint Katharine Drexel as exceptional, hence her veneration as Saint;
and while these adjectives are typically qualified as being good descriptors, who benefits from these descriptors?

When Xavier is identified as the only Black Catholic University and Drexel is identified as a philanthropic saint, Xavier becomes a bright spot during a period when the U.S. Catholic Church lacked a voice in the struggle for civil rights in the South. This static telling of the story presents an interesting dynamic in the literature on Xavier and Drexel. In the literature which has a focus on the histories of HBCUs, Xavier stands alone with its Catholic history. As the focus remains solely on the basic facts of its founding and its status of placing African Americans in medical school; Drexel is regulated to the background as merely a philanthropist. In biographies of Drexel’s life, the focus is solely on her religious calling and therefore Xavier is viewed as a byproduct of her missionary work. Essentially, there remains a tendency to view Xavier as Black and Drexel Catholic with the two only having a business or financial connection.

Cynthia Dillard (2012) suggests that as scholars of education we have to remember the things we have learned to forget in order to be effective teachers, scholars, and human beings. Racism, sexism, and anti-Catholicism have taught us to forget that Saint Katharine Drexel was a university builder, and that Xavier University was a critical to the development of Black higher education in New Orleans and the United States. The same rationale that allows people, institutions, and events to be left out of the history of higher education is the same rationale that continues to exclude people, institutions, and events from policy discussions. Embracing different perspectives on historical research has the potential to create a more inclusive higher educational enterprise.
EPILOGUE: EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

In a letter to Xavier Alumni Association dates January 2, 1943, Drexel wrote:

Because Xavier itself is young, so is your alumni young, but as it advances in age your association will be venerated by each succeeding generation, even as that of the older colleges of our present day. With Xavier, however, there will be this distinction, your alumni stands for more than scholarship, it stands for Faith, as the ultimate goal of Xavier is not simply worldly science, but the science of the saints, the sanctity of the individual soul of every student who attends its courses. (SBS Archives, Bensalem, Pennsylvania, Mother M. Katharine Drexel to the Xavier Alumni Association, January 2, 1943)

As a White philanthropist, Drexel could fit the mold of the Northern White philanthropists referenced in current studies of Black higher education. But, her position as a nun in the Catholic Church who used her wealth to work against the socio-economic and political structures of the American South to open a Black and Catholic university makes her not fit this mold. Theories of American Dream ideology and political economy glaze over the complexities of identity, religion, gender, race, and space and fail to acknowledge the ruptures in Drexel’s experience as a Roman Catholic nun who sought social justice in New Orleans.

Drexel’s privilege has often masked the complexities of the multiple discourses she had to negotiate while managing her multiple identities and confronting racism in minority communities. Whereas her wealth provided influence over the Church hierarchy, she consciously used compliance and deference as tactful strategies to navigate the Church hierarchy. As foundress of her own religious order, Drexel provided Native and African American communities opportunities for education and advancement in a changing America. But these opportunities took place within the context of a paternalistic Church hierarchy. Given the complicated racial politics in New Orleans at the time, it is crucial for us to recognize that while Drexel’s wealth provided her with influence within the Church hierarchy, as a woman, she still had to negotiate its patriarchal tendencies. Thusly, the woman who left the Vatican in tears had just as much
influence on the development of Xavier as the composed foundress who shrewdly navigated America society and the Catholic Church’s racism and sexism.

In primary documents, secondary documents and anecdotal interviews, I found five recurring themes—*Total Gift of Self, Providing for the Best, a Belief in Divine Providence, Courageous Travel*, and *Understanding Death as Life*. Throughout the dissertation, I formally referred to these themes as Drexel’s educational philosophy; however, I did not present a concrete definition or explanation of this philosophy. This was purposeful. Drexel’s educational philosophy was not an inherent result of her spiritual altruism, but instead evolved from her intra-actions with the people in the communities she served. Drexel’s educational philosophy emerged from a complex network of spiritual and secular experiences. I chose not to explicitly define this at the beginning of the dissertation because it was my hope that the reader could see how this philosophy could not be pinpointed to one specific time period or action. Also, I wanted the reader to see that this philosophy was not only found within Drexel’s person—it permeated through the people she worked with, worked for, and the institutions she founded.

The concept of the *total gift of self* is heavily present in Drexel’s life story. From the noted philanthropy of her family to her entrance into religious life, self-sacrifice is an ever present theme in Drexel’s life story. However, how did the concept of self-sacrifice influence her educational choices and life as an educational leader? Drexel has been venerated as spiritual example of selfless giving; however, what are the possibilities of studying selfless giving as a trait of educational leadership? Rottenberg (2006) noted that the Drexel fortune and the family’s level of influence were on par with the emerging super-wealthy class of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, as the Drexels (Anthony, Elizabeth, Louise, and Katharine) engaged in school building projects for Blacks and Native Americans in the late nineteenth and
early twentieth centuries, their institutions were different in mission and scope. Whereas
capitalistic philosophies underpinned the intentions of the so-called White architects of Black
education (Watkins, 2001), the Drexels were motivated by the Catholic principles of
universalism. Eventually, this morphed into a pragmatic cosmopolitan philosophy of education
where belief in divine providence became as equally important as courageous travel. In her life
as a debutante and a missionary, Drexel constantly travelled. It is within this constant state of
travel that Drexel expanded her territory physically, spiritually, and mentally. It was during
travel that Drexel witnessed the poverty of the reservations in the West and the racism of the
Catholic Church in the South. It is during travel that Drexel documented best practices in
teaching, architecture, and curriculum which led her to always strive to provide for the best for
the students at her schools. Drexel always staffed her schools with who she thought to be the
best trained teachers. She built her schools with the best materials. And, she only implemented
the best curriculums in her schools.

The one thing that could be considered a criticism of Drexel’s educational philosophy
which recurred in anecdotal conversations was Drexel’s belief in divine providence. Drexel
firmly believed that God would always provide. If we return to the main stipulation of Francis
Drexel’s will, it clearly stated that if no heirs were ever born to his three daughters, upon the last
daughter’s death, the estate funds would be distributed to charity (Lynch, 2001). Drexel was
heavily encourages and eventually begged to several stakeholders to break her father’s will; yet,
she did not do it. As the Sisters worried that that work would not be sustained financially upon
her death, Drexel truly believed that God would provide. To be clear, this was not necessarily an
undying faith in the Church, but a belief in the power of God to work through people. This came
from an understanding of life as death. Death was ever present in Drexel’s life beginning with
the death of her biological mother as an infant, to the deaths of Francis, Emma, and Elizabeth when she was a young woman. In a total gift of self in a ceremony shrouded in death, she said farewell to Catherine Drexel and was reborn as Mother M. Katharine Drexel. In this role, she was the primary caretaker of her Sisters in life and death. And eventually, she witnessed the death of her travel companion and assistant, Mother M. Mercedes, and her beloved sister, Louise Drexel Morrell. But as a courageous traveler, in a spiritual and physical sense, Drexel always confronted death and believed that life could flourish from death, within death, and in spite of death. As Jim Crow tried to bring death to the educational dreams of Blacks and Native Americans, she instead saw life, and fought for the life that education can bring.

Therefore, the most unique aspect of this research experience was the that fact that myself and my mentor and friend Stella whom you met at the beginning of this study—two higher education professionals—were arguing about who knew Mother best. Mother died long before we were born. Neither of us went to Xavier nor do we consider ourselves to be Creole. However, we are connected to this woman in a unique space-time continuum. In that sense, the most valuable aspect of Mother’s educational philosophy is that it manifested in a spiritual and pragmatic essence. What Mother did, essentially, was bring people together so that they could be their best selves. Mother provided a space for a woman like Mother Paul of the Cross, who worked as a seamstress, to become a pioneer in the movement for Black higher education. She provided a man like W. J. Nickerson with a passion for teaching music the opportunity to return to the space that was named misplaced to teach students the art and beauty of music.

In terms of higher education, Mother challenges us to reconsider definitions of institutions, curriculums, and identity. Recently in an online editorial, Henry A, Giroux commented:
The university is nothing if it is not a public trust and social good; that is a critical institution infused with the promise of cultivating intellectual insight, the imagination of inquisitiveness, risk taking, social responsibility, and the struggle for justice” (Giroux, 2013).

Yes, according to Giroux, Mother M. Katharine Drexel was ahead of her time and that has been acknowledged, venerated, and praised. However, what are the possibilities of taking her life’s work out of the sacristy and studying it as work for the improvement of higher education. As higher education professionals, we are still struggling with the concepts of diversity and inclusion. Mother struggled too; but she pushed through the struggles. How can we do the same?
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VITA

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