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Committed to the Faith While Sticking Out Like a Sore Thumb: Stories of Black Catholics on the Social Frontier

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Bartlett presents the results of a survey of Black Catholics in predominantly White parishes, a topic he presented in part during the 2002 Annual Meeting in Spokane, Washington. He focuses on the lived experiences of these Black Catholics who maneuver within what he terms “the social frontier” as they describe their challenges as they’ve tried, with mixed results, to practice their faith in the face of tension generated by racial, community, and personal pressures.

One major aim of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium has been to contribute to the development of a “theology which is authentically Black and truly Catholic.” As the result of decades of studies and research, there are now several that examine the lives of Black Catholics. For the most part, however, these studies have focused on communities in which there exist a real Black presence in a parish. Even when Blacks are not the majority, the presence of three or more Black families in theory can help foster a sense of community. Feelings of isolation and loneliness are lessened.

Still missing from the literature are studies of the ‘lonely only’ – the experiences of Blacks who are the only ones in an otherwise all-White community and who attend all White parishes. These Black Catholics occupy what I have termed the ‘social frontier.’ To gain a better understanding of their experiences, I originally identified and interviewed nine Black individuals who are practicing Catholics in majority White parishes in a majority White place. To preserve their anonymity, I have assigned pseudonyms to the subjects, and refer to the town as ‘Three Forks,’ also a pseudonym. One-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted with each of the participants in an effort to understand and document what it means for the them to be Black and Catholic in a an overwhelmingly White church. The place of Three Forks was chosen because of its racial demographics, with 87% White, less than 2% African American and far less than 1% Black Catholics in this place of nearly 500 thousand population. Some participants viewed themselves as Catholics who happen to be Black, while others described themselves as a Black person who happens to be Catholic. All participants indicated a strong commitment to the Catholic Church despite their perception of the ways they have been treated – or mistreated – by fellow White Catholics and Black non-Catholics in Three Forks.¹⁵

The purpose of this study was to begin to make “known” the “unknowns” of the lived experience of a few Black Catholics. It was an attempt to capture stories that “once caught,” can help us understand what life is like for others, and invite us into new and unfamiliar worlds. This

¹⁵ This study is based on a paper presented at the African Americans and the Catholic Church Conference, Seattle University, Washington, April 27-29, 2006.

study was an attempt to discover and name a type of situational discrimination that once named could be combated. It was an attempt to call attention to the lived experiences of a few Black Catholics on the social frontier.

It was an attempt to allow selected participants to name their own reality through the stories they chose to tell. Indeed, when the voiceless gain their voice and share their stories they provide an opportunity for members of the majority to meet them halfway. This was an attempt to connect us with others through the often different stories they tell of their struggles to belong to the Catholic Church. Ultimately, the purpose of this study was to fill a gap in the literature concerning what is known of the lived experiences of Black Catholics who live and practice their faith in a predominantly White place.

Methodology and Conceptual Framework

This study was a qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study conducted in the spirit of van Manen (1990), but not bound by hermeneutics and phenomenology. According to van Manen:

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a human science which studies persons. It is a philosophy of the personal, the individual, which we pursue against the background of an understanding of the evasive character of the logos or other, the whole, the communal, or the social. (pp. 6-7)

The conceptual framework for this study was Critical Race Theory (CRT) because of its emphasis on race. Calmore (1995) argued that critical race theory (CRT) as a methodology can be described in part as an expression of critical hermeneutics that reflects a way of appreciating the

dynamics of a critical-utopian interpretation of cultural practices and traditions (p. 319). For this reason and others, CRT was chosen as the specific conceptual framework for this study.

Pillow (2003) identified qualitative methodologies that place an emphasis on race. Race-based methodologies give voice to differing discourses that seek social change. Race-based methodologies make visible what is often invisible, taken for granted, or assumed in our knowledge and practice and do this work out of necessity (pp. 187, 189). This kind of methodological approach and way of thinking, or more importantly “way of knowing,” make up the basic tenets of CRT that served as the conceptual framework in this study.

I begin my discussion with a story. Years ago, I had just moved to Three Forks where I had recently begun as a student life professional at a Catholic University in town. It was the beginning of the school year, and the Welcoming Mass had just ended. As I headed toward the parking lot I was singled out by a young White priest who had just concelebrated the mass. The young priest, whom I did not know especially well, approached me and asked a question that would change my life, “So Bob, what does it mean to be Black and Catholic?”

I was surprised by his question and equally surprised by my reaction. I experienced in that moment what Mura (1991:47) referred to as a minor *epiphany of identity*. I was reminded of the plurality of being “and both” rather than “either or.” The priest’s question reminded me of my formative years and becoming aware of the complexity of living as an African-American, a “hyphenated” person. I was reminded of DuBois (1903) and his explanation of the dual internal struggles felt by Black people in America, a “double-consciousness” or the “twoness” experience of being both an American and a Negro.

The passion behind this study started from my own interest to know myself better as a Black Catholic who has lived his entire life in predominantly White communities as a member of predominantly White parishes. First, I was curious to learn the stories and lived experiences of other Black Catholics and how similar or dissimilar their stories were from my own. Secondly, and most importantly, I was curious to know whether these experiences might have implications for the larger Catholic Church. And so I engaged this study. My goal was twofold: (a) to explore the lived experiences of Black Catholics in a predominantly White place and (b) to use their stories to explore whether there are individual and community tensions between race and faith, how these tensions are managed individually and how they might inform the larger church. It is my hope that this information will inform Church leadership about those in the pews who may feel conflicting tension concerning their race and their Catholic experience

In many ways, Three Forks is a social frontier place. By this, I do not mean a wilderness, seemingly boundless in natural resources or vast open spaces yet void of social amenities. Rather, I am referring to a geographical place with social organizations, infrastructure, and commerce, but without resources to support the cultural, spiritual, and economic interests of minorities. In Three Forks, there are no Black neighborhoods or Black parts of town, few Black owned businesses, no predominantly Black parishes, or Black vowed religious. It is a place where Black people, and particularly Black Catholics, describe themselves as *“sticking out like a sore thumb.”*

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001: 41-43) stories can name a type of discrimination that, once named, can be combated. They claim that stories and narratives may begin a process of adjustment in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence

and reminding readers of our common humanity. Stories provide a language that can bridge the gaps in imagination and perceptions. Stories can reduce alienation for members of excluded groups, while offering opportunities for members of the majority group to meet them halfway. The value of storytelling is that it can be used to demonstrate how the same phenomenon can be described in different and multiple ways (Ladson-Billings 2001: 268). Delgado and Stefancic (2001: 7-8) argue that no person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity.

The Participants

The stories of five participants were selected for this paper: two women (Sophia and Sara) and three men (Peter, Mark, and Moses). The length of time they had lived in or near Three Forks ranges from only a few months to their entire lives. Their overall age ranges between 40 and 85 years.

Each interview began with the same invitation: "Tell me a story about being Black and Catholic and start wherever you like." Each interview was conducted in the same general way during a period between August 2005 and January 2006. Participants were interviewed in a place of their choosing or a place of mutual convenience. While some interviews were conducted in a private conference room or in an office, others were conducted in participants' homes or places of work.

While some participants asked me to clarify what I meant by Black and Catholic, others simply began telling stories as if they had been waiting for someone to ask. Each interview averaged more than one hour. I began the interviews by asking them to tell me a story or stories about their lived experience of being Black and Catholic. From that point, their experiences unfolded.

Several themes emerged in the course of the interviews. The two dominant themes, which form the topic for this paper, are: (a) the process of becoming Catholic; and (b) the experiences of being Black and Catholic in Three Forks. In addition, participants were asked if they would attend a predominantly Black parish if one existed in Three Forks. The responses to this last question were telling and will also be presented.

Peter's Story

Peter is in his late 40s, average height, medium build, with thinning salt and pepper hair and beard. His complexion is a deep brown. There's a slight hint of a southern accent in his voice. Peter is the husband of Sophia. He is a native of New Orleans, LA, who grew up in a racially mixed Catholic parish and attended Black Catholic schools. Peter is a career military man who now lives near downtown Three Forks.

According to Peter, his parents were both Lutherans who attended a Black Lutheran Church in New Orleans. They moved Peter and his siblings out of the public schools and into Black Catholic schools. According to Peter his Lutheran parents proclaimed, "You're going to go to this African-American Catholic Church. This is where you are going to be fed religiously, because it has a great foundation, it has some great principles." Peter described what he calls the two principles he learned during his Catholic education; "What it means to be a faithful Catholic" and "What it means to be African American in the U.S."

Rather than live on the Air Force base where he was assigned, Peter decided to buy a home in Three Forks. After moving into their new home, he and his family visited a number of parishes on Sundays beginning with the one

close to their new home. Peter described his experience in the first parish they visited:

We stood out like a sore thumb, me and my family because we were African-Americans. . . . We were the only minorities. The parishes are Lily White! They're full of nice White Anglo-American people.

According to Peter, he soon learned that being African American in Three Forks means, "being a representative of all Black people, because of 'stereotypes', and feeling pressure "to go above and beyond to show that you're a good Catholic." In Three Forks, "You have to be comfortable and secure in knowing who you are, what you are, and where you come from."

When asked if he would attend a predominantly Black Catholic church, Peter replied:

I would definitely go. It isn't that I'm committed, that I had to go . . . it's more of a cultural thing to nurture what's important to the African American person, family, and culture. . . . Definitely; it goes beyond a spiritual religious thing.

Sophia's Story

Sophia, Peter's wife, is also in her late 40s. Together, Peter and Sophia have two young adult children. Like Peter, Sophia is also a native of New Orleans, and her accent is somewhat thicker than his. She has a light-brown complexion with short-cropped straight Black hair. Sophia grew up one of six children. As far back as she can

remember her entire family, on both sides, has been Catholic.

Sophia was born and raised in New Orleans in a predominantly Black Catholic community. She says there were: “saints on the mantelpieces, statues, candles, you name it.” Sophia grew up in a community in which being Black and Catholic wasn’t unusual. In fact, there are a number of Black priests in New Orleans, and even a Black bishop in her family. In her words: “growing up Black and Catholic was normal.” In a frustrated tone she shared her experience of being asked about how she became Catholic when she and her family moved to Three Forks:

‘Well, how you come to be Catholic?’ I go,
‘What you mean, how I come to be Catholic?’
They say, ‘Well, Black folks aren’t usually
Catholic.’ I say, ‘Well, what makes you think
White folks are never Baptist?’ This is how I
was raised; I never saw it any different.

Sophia credits her Catholic training and values to her parents and grandparents, particularly her grandmother, “She made sure we were grounded in our faith.”

Sophia described her initial Catholic mass experience in Three Forks and, “feeling the un-warmth of a Catholic Church to a Black Catholic.” She described heads turning when she and her family walked into the church. “It was like, whoa, what these Black folks doing in our church?” She described people seemingly afraid to touch a Black person’s hand during the handshake of peace. “Some folks acted like the Black will rub off on them.”

Sophia reported that her daughter felt shunned by other members of the parish. She quoted her daughter’s comment:

“They don’t touch my hand. They don’t even want to say ‘Hi’ to me.”

The problem for Sophia was how to help her child “walk in her faith as a Black woman if she doesn’t even feel welcome in God’s house.” Sophia’s response was to move her family to a more welcoming parish across town. “In Three Forks, when I see another Black person or Black Catholic in Church, I gotta go say hello, ‘cause there ain’t many of us around here.”

Like Peter, Sophie would welcome a Black Catholic parish, and would seriously consider joining one. “Oh, I’d definitely check it out. According to Sophia, “whether or not I would join would honestly have to do with the feeling of warmth in there.”

Mark’s Story

Mark has a dark complexion with a receding hair line and short Black hair. He is average height with a slender build. He is in his sixties, and has lived in Three Forks with his family for about twenty years. He and his wife have one adult son.

Mark described growing up in Charleston, SC, an area that was not heavily Catholic but a place with Black Catholic schools. His family was African Methodist Episcopal (AME).

My mother decided that the best education and the best discipline was in Catholic schools. My parents were happy with us going to Catholic schools so when we (my sister and I) said we were going to convert to Catholicism, it was fine with them.

Mark recalled locating a church to attend when his family first moved to Three Forks. They were looking for something familiar. “I’m so accustomed, I guess, to going to Mass. It’s ingrained in me.”

Mark described his feelings of isolation in his church.

I’ve been going to church there longer than I’ve gone to church anywhere else, [but] I’ve not really become that much a part of it. I’m just gonna come and sit near the back door. ... Well, in Three Forks, I just get accustomed to life being that way normally, so going to church doesn’t really change that for me. It doesn’t even really come to mind, to be very frank, it’s kind of the way it is... It’s just a habit from school. I’m just kinda there.

Mark was enthusiastic when asked if he would attend a predominantly Black church:

Yeah, I would definitely [go]. Oh yes, definitely! Yeah! It would just be more of a Black experience. That’s the thing that would draw me to a Black parish. Because that’s still where the roots are and that’s how I grew up and those are the things you understand and feel comfortable with, you know.

Sara’s Story

Sara is the wife of Moses, a career Air Force officer. She and her family came to live in Three Forks initially 25 years earlier because Moses had been stationed at the base.

Twelve years later, after Moses retired, they made a conscious decision to settle in Three Forks.

Sara talked about growing up in Wyoming, in a medium-sized city with very few Black folks, a city very similar to Three Forks. She described her father's determination not to sit in church all day on Sundays, "like Black folks tended to do because he wanted to go fishing on Sundays. "That's how all of us became Catholics." She and her siblings went to Catholic schools, and her father:

[...] just figured [we would] be Catholics. I think my father wanted something better for us. He wanted us to go to Catholic school, so he figured then if we're going to go to a Catholic school, we ought to be Catholic. [...] Being Catholic is really the only religion I know. I always say, I'm gonna die a Catholic, that's it, you know.

Sara reported her first first five or six years in Three Forks:

I found the parish very cold, being the only Blacks. People weren't as friendly. It's taken us a good 13 years to be able to go into church and have somebody say, "Hi, how you doing, or, Hello!

Sara reported that being Black and Catholic in Three Forks is shocking to White Catholics.

If you want to meet Black people, you're going to have to do something else. There are so

few of us in the Catholic Church that we're just kind of out there. I found here in Three Forks, every time a Black person would say, 'Well, what religion are you?' And I'd say, 'Catholic'. It was like we ate a baby or something.

To make matters worse, Sara reports that her Catholicism has acted as a barrier to getting to know other Blacks in Three Forks. She recalls that when they first returned to Three Forks there was a group of Black retirees who would get together for lunch. Sara saw this as a good way to meet a few Blacks. Eventually though one of them asked, "Well, what church do you belong to? Methodist? Baptists?" And I said, 'No, we're Catholic.' And it was like, that's too bad."

Sara describes her parish choice in Three Forks by stating, "'Cause it's right down the street! (Laughter) It's a matter of convenience. There was no rhyme or reason to it. It's just that it's very close."

Unlike Peter, Sophia, and Mark, Sara probably wouldn't join a predominantly Black parish because of the inconvenience.

Well, I probably would go once in a while, but I wouldn't want to inconvenience myself just to go way across town when there's a parish right here. I would probably go a couple of times to meet other Blacks . . . just to be with other Black people. We're (Black Catholics) like outsiders, you know. Everybody like us belongs to the Baptist church, or the Methodist church in Three Forks.

Moses' Story

Moses has brown skin, thinning hair, and a medium build. He is very outgoing and has high energy for a person of any age. He retired from the Air Force after 30 years of service. According to Moses, his father was career Army so they moved a great deal during his childhood years. Moses is the husband of Sara.

Moses describes his family and upbringing:

I was born into this family where my mother was a Mexican. My Dad was an American Black. Within a couple of days after I was born I was Catholic. My Dad was not a Catholic, but he made sure if we didn't go to church, we didn't go anywhere on Sunday.

Moses shared a story about being a community volunteer in Three Forks to illustrate his experience with being Black there. Moses had been asked by a Black teacher to be a tutor for readers "not necessarily for Black kids, but in the school system," and he agreed. After doing this for two years, he wasn't called again. When he asked, "Hey, what happened with the tutoring?" the teacher replied: "Oh, I don't have any Black kids in my class that need tutoring right now . . . And I'm not gonna use you to tutor these other kids." Moses concluded that they just want the kids to "see me . . . to see a Black man who's not in jail."

Like Sara, Moses would visit a Black parish if there were one in Three Forks, but would not go there to church regularly. "I would probably go more as an experience, not regularly. I would continue to go to my own parish."

Elizabeth's Story

Elizabeth is a tall light-brown woman in her mid 40s. She is a native of Three Forks. Elizabeth reported that her large Catholic family has been in Three Forks for three generations. She has been a member of a large downtown parish for over 25 years. Elizabeth is soft-spoken and a self-described “loner” with a “gentle” and “easy going demeanor.”

Elizabeth describes her formation as a Catholic. “I was baptized as a Catholic at birth, so I’ve been Catholic all my life ... Mother and Father were both Catholic.” She never knew any religion other than Catholicism, “because that’s all I was taught by the nuns and we had the nuns in the full habit, and the priests.”

Elizabeth talked about attending a Catholic elementary school in Three Forks with her brothers and sisters:

We were the only Black students in the school. I didn’t know there were other Black Catholics. [...] I don’t know any other Black families at my parish other than my cousin. I honestly don’t know any other Black Catholics.

Elizabeth remembers her parents taking the family to predominantly Black churches in Three Forks: “to be around other Black people, to hear the music and things like that, but I don’t make the connection with the church,” he said.

Elizabeth reported that her parents lived for 40 years on the same block and that everyone in the neighborhood went to the nearby Catholic church. They were the only Black family on the block. When they first moved to the neighborhood in the 1960s: “The White Catholic neighbors took out a petition because they didn’t want us there.”

According to Elizabeth, being the only Black person in her parish was normal.

I've never really thought about it because that's all I've ever known, living here in Three Forks. I've always been, all my life, the only Black person there or sometimes the only person of color. [...] For me, it feels unusual to be in a group of Black people because it's not the norm. I met my first Black friend in junior high.

The only opportunity for Elizabeth to be around other Black people was at family gatherings. She described having lived a sheltered life around White people, recalling that when she was around Black people she thought they were unusual.

I used to wonder, why are they [other Black people] doing this or doing that? [...] I always felt kind of awkward around my own kind because I had been raised around White people all the time. I had to be kind of schooled in my own culture. I didn't have a clue.

Elizabeth reported going to the Baptist church with a friend to "hear the music." She added: "I go to the Baptist church sometimes and then I always go to the Catholic church."

When asked about meeting other Black people on the streets of Three Forks she replied, "I always say hello. You know, glad to see somebody else that looks like me." She added that this gets her into trouble when she goes to bigger cities. "You open yourself up when you say hi to every

Black person you meet, but it's just something I was taught as a child, and I continue to do it. And I'm still all in one piece.”

Elizabeth would welcome the opportunity to attend church in a Black parish to help offset the loneliness of having so few other Black people in her community.

Oh definitely, I would go there, to find some people that practice the same religion that I do. I would definitely go. I don't understand the Baptist ways. But I like to be around people that look like me. Sometimes I like to be in that comfort zone where I don't have to worry about this or that. . . . But I haven't been able to find it in the Catholic Church.

Elizabeth's stories and interests were the most similar to my own.

Conclusions

Most of the participants were introduced to the Catholic Church as infants or as school age children. While a few inherited their faith from parents, others were introduced to it through parents who were not Catholic yet believed in the Church's ability to improve their children's lives through a combination of education and religion.

The majority of stories indicated a lasting commitment to the Catholic Church. At the same time they reported experiencing cold treatment by some White Catholics. Some participants who were raised in or had experienced predominantly Black parishes prior to Three Forks described difficulty with finding the same warmth and level of diversity in the Catholic churches in Three Forks. One participant referred to his first parish in Three Forks as “Lily

White and cold.” Other long-term residents of Three Forks described those same conditions as normal to them, as an accepted reality.

Half of the participants interviewed for this study appear to have adopted what some Catholics refer to as a “*gas station mentality*” when it comes to their experience. A kind of pull-up, fill-up, and immediately leave the station while acknowledging the importance of and the missing of “good Church music” and feeling a sense of belonging and community they once felt.

Only one participant reported having intentionally and deliberately sought out a diverse parish some distance across town. This participant and her family sacrificed convenience for her preference for parish warmth and acceptance. She reported finding:

... a warm and welcoming community where, if the Spirit gets to me, I can start clapping. ... If I ever started clapping in one of those other churches in Three Forks, the ushers gonna be escorting me outta there. You know I’m telling you right!

The majority of participants would visit a Black Catholic parish if given the option even if it was some distance across town. However most had reservations concerning making a serious commitment to join.

Consistent with other findings, there are differences among Black Catholics in Three Forks. Some see themselves as a Black person who happens to be Catholic. Others consider themselves Catholics who happen to be Black. There are similarities in the role of family and Catholic education in forming or contributing to their Catholic identity. There are differences in the extent to

which they view themselves as sticking out or being different from others in the Church. All participants told stories of being mistreated or being misunderstood both in and outside the Church. However, in the end, there was a consistent commitment to the Catholic Church that appeared to be ingrained in them.

Thanks to the question of that young Jesuit, this study has helped me better know myself as a Black Catholic as well as to know others who find themselves “sticking out like a sore thumb” on the social frontier.

The goal was to ground each participant within their own social and historical context. The introductions include physical descriptions, information about where they come from, and stories of their early experiences of the Church and being Catholic before or while growing up in Three Forks.

From their stories the participants shared with me during 18 hours of conversation, I originally identified six themes. Themes developed around such common experiences as “naming” their own perceptions of themselves as “a Black person who happens to be Catholic” or as “a Catholic who happens to be Black.” Other themes had to do with common experiences of prejudice and racism in the Catholic Church and the accepting of the realities of living as a minority of minorities in Three Forks.

In recent years, the Church has concerned itself with articulating its position on the sins of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerances. It has stated publicly that racism is a form of social sin that must end. Concurrently, Black Catholics and Black Catholic scholars have moved from the margins to the center of the discourse concerning Black people and the role of the Church among Black people.

The stories of my participants confirm the need articulated by Church leadership and Black Catholic

leadership on the need for renewed efforts to address racism. It is the responsibility of Catholic leadership at the local parish level to pay particular attention to what the Church demands of itself, regardless of the absence or presence of Black Catholics in the pews. The Catholic Church is called upon by the results of this study for action in three areas.

1. The Catholic Church recognizes racism as sin. In 1991 the U.S. Bishops' Pastoral letter stated that "racism is a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called the children of the same Father" (Brothers and sisters to us, 1991, p. 3). According to Collum (2006), Pope John Paul II spoke of structures of sin, which he said are "rooted in personal sin and thus always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove" (p. 5). Collum also stated, "Once we become aware of it [social sin], we are obligated as Christians to avoid participating in it as individuals-even by our silence" (p. 5).
2. The Catholic Church, and especially Black Catholics, should actively learn and pass on the history of Black Catholics. There is a need to challenge the very lens through which history is viewed. According to critical race theory, there is a need to reexamine America's historical record, replacing comforting majoritarian interpretations of events with ones that square more accurately with minorities' experiences (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 20). The Catholic Church has been the Church of both slaves and slave owners, of the free and the illiterate, and the rich and the poor for well over 450 years. Black Catholics in America predate the various floods of European immigrants. The argument put forth by Fr. Lawrence Lucas during

the early 1970s was that this kind of research could be of momentous importance to the life or death of the Catholic Church among Black people.

3. The Catholic Church should expand its current Eurocentric thinking about spirituality to include the communal and participatory approach associated with Black spirituality.

It is my heartfelt belief as a Black Catholic that we are called to continually make visible the invisible and to add voice to the voiceless. We are called to live in the tension that comes with striving everyday as individuals and as Church to meet the demands of the Gospel message of Christian love and acceptance. Nowhere is this call more necessary and important than in the places like Three Forks and in the individual lives of the few Black Catholics who live and practice their faith absent of a Black Catholic community.

The purpose of this study was to begin to make “known” the “unknowns” of the lived experience of Black Catholics. It was an attempt to capture stories that “once caught,” can help us understand what life is like for others, and invite us into new and unfamiliar worlds. This study was an attempt to discover and name a type of situational discrimination that once named could be combated. It was an attempt to call attention to the lived experiences of a few Black Catholics.

This study also attempted to allow selected participants to name their own reality through the stories they chose to tell. Indeed, when the voiceless gain their voice and share their stories they provide an opportunity for members of the majority to meet them halfway. This was an attempt to connect us with others through the often different stories they tell of their struggles to belong to the Catholic Church.

Ultimately, the purpose of this study was to fill a gap in the literature concerning what is known of the lived experiences of Black Catholics who live and practice their faith in a predominantly White place.

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