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Intersectionality and identity politics of race, religion, and class in Georgia public schools

In 2015, an US non-sectarian, non-partisan, non-profit initiated a new religious literacy project (hereafter "the Project") in two Georgian public school districts. Now in its inaugural year of teacher training, the Project aims to foster religious literacy among teachers so that they are better informed and equipped to teach the current state standards that pertain to religion, as well as address religious discrimination, in line with the "rights, respect, and responsibilities" in the First Amendment. As evaluators of the Project, we notice three emerging themes that reflect the current tensions in the South, the US, and the world – the need to go beyond white normativity (to consider race), beyond Christian-Protestant normativity (to consider dominant religions in a secular state), and beyond the public school (to discuss class and resegregation). This presentation is an opportunity to discuss the three emerging themes and co-explore them in relation to the teaching of intersectionality and identity politics alongside presentation attendees.

In 1963, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. lamented that, "in America, the church is still the most segregated major institution in America." "The first way that the church can repent, the first way that it can move out into the arena of social reform," he continued, "is to remove the yoke of segregation from its own body." Over fifty years later, Rev. King Jr.'s analysis on the Church, prejudice, and segregation still stand.

In our evaluation of a new religious literacy project (hereafter "the Project") by a US non-sectarian, non-partisan non-profit, we have immersed our data collection in metro Georgia, mostly Atlanta and the suburban environment surrounding the Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS), and Central Georgia, in the towns and cities associated with Bleckley County Public Schools (BCPS).[1] Since 2015, the Project has developed relationships with GCPS and BCPS with an aim to offer a blend of online and in-person religious literacy training among public school teachers so that they are better informed and equipped to teach the current state standards that pertain to religion, while addressing religious discrimination. Our role has been to evaluate the success of the Project and understand how it can be of benefit to Georgia.

While the evaluation began with a focus on teacher and community leaders' perspectives on religious identities, religious traditions, and the teaching about religion in public schools, our observations and perspectives from 44 local interviews illustrate that a conversation related to teaching about religion in Georgian public schools intertwines racial, religious, and class-based

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[1] A brief description of the Project will be shared during the conference presentation.

tensions at the individual and societal level. To introduce these emerging themes of our study, this paper discusses the complexities of region and race, Christian-Protestant normativity juxtaposed to the inclusion of a diversity of religions, as well as racial and class-based resegregation within the dichotomy of public and private schools; thereby,expanding the conference discussion on white normativity to consider other norms and their complications in Georgia and the South. We also extend the conversation in the South to consider the saliency of understanding tensions between personal and national identity that permeates globally today.

As educators ourselves, we understand that the tensions teachers may have between their personal identity, the curriculum, and their socio-cultural and/or political views influence their practice. With respect to the Project, we ask: How aware are teachers of their own intersectionality and identity politics, and that of their students? Can this knowledge inform their religious literacy so that religious literacy training is not perceived as an attack on their personal self or their conception of national identity? This is of exceptional concern as one participant remarked that many teachers present a simplistic teaching of American history who personally believes that the US is a Christian nation. "Convincing them that it's not could be a problem" (Manis, interviewed March 2018).

We begin this discussion by first clarifying our theoretical framework for this discussion based in Crenshaw (1991), and Hill-Collins and Bilge's (2016) conception of intersectionality and Kruks' (2001) philosophical approach to identity politics. Afterwards, the three emerging themes from our evaluation are presented alongside questions that we would like to discuss with attendees during our presentation. Embedded in each theme is a consideration of how the Project, and others, can promote respect for diversity and intersectionality among white evangelical Christians without alienating them, as many feel marginalized and under attack from mainstream American culture.

Theoretical Framework

The emerging themes are distinct but they also intersect and raise the complexity in varying convergences of race, religion, and class, e.g. black, Muslim, and middle class students who may attend public school versus ethnically South Asian, Muslim, and upper-middle class students who attend private schools. To unpack this discussion, we refer to the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and identity politics (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill-Collins & Bilge, 2016). Through intersectionality, we recognize the oppression on specific identity markers in society and how one's oppression is compounded when one oppressed marker is coupled with other oppressed markers. However, the power dynamics within one's intersectionality varies by context, and one can be disenfranchised without an association to several oppressed markers. For example, white evangelical Christians are a majority in the areas of our evaluation. Yet, they may be a minority on some university campuses and sense that their voices are suppressed. More generally, evangelicals may be dominant in Georgia, but be a minority in other parts of the US and sense that they are marginalized nationally, as mentioned by educator interviewees in BCPS and Macon. In recognizing this, we also use intersectionality as a framework to analyze the social power dynamics that exist in the varying milieus across Georgia.

In relation, identity politics refers to the political sentiments that one affiliates to particular identities in society and is typically expressed by those who have been marginalized or feel that they have been marginalized.

What makes identity politics a significant departure from earlier, pre-identarian forms of the politics of recognition is its demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied: it is *qua* women, *qua* blacks, *qua* lesbians that groups demand recognition. The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of "universal humankind" on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect "in spite of" one's differences. Rather, what is demanded is respect for oneself *as* different (Kruks, 2001, 85).

As this demand may rise out of an understanding of self and one's intersectionality, the idea of and mention of identity politics in the US today provokes a negative response from many sides as various groups feel marginalized or threatened. For example, anxiety levels have increased among some white Americans upon discussion of a shift in majority-minority groups in the US (Mutz, 2018). Perhaps in consideration of these perspectives, Steve Bannon, Trump's previous chief strategist, described a conversation with Trump where he expressed, "The Democrats…the longer they talk about identity politics, I got 'em. I want them to talk about racism every day. If the left is focused on race and identity, and we go with economic nationalism, we can crush the Democrats" (Bannon in Kutner, 2017). Although it can be difficult to fully understand the views of Bannon, he has shown here that identity politics has been equated with specific political parties and marginalized groups by some, which has raised a degree of contempt from others rather than a recognition and respect for difference. In particular, Bannon presented the Democrats as a party that focuses on the voices of racially marginalized individuals while omitting the concerns of others. As a result, he and the Trump administration presented itself as an advocate for the suppressed voices of those excluded by the Democrats – the white majority, in his perspective, where 39.9% self-identify as Christians (PRRI, 2018).[2]

Methodology and Thematic Analysis

To date, we have conducted 44 interviews with Georgians (in January, March, and May 2018). With support from the Project's Regional Coordinator and Advisory Council members, we used snowball sampling to approach each participant, comprising community leaders, religious leaders, school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and academics in political science, history, education, and religious studies. Table 1 and 2 lists their demographic data, which reflects Georgia's predominantly white and Christian populations noted in Table 3.

Table 1: Summary of interviewees based on gender and religious tradition

Gender	White	Black	Middle Eastern	Asian	Unsure
Male	26	1	-	3	-
Female	12	-	1	-	1
Total	38	1	1	3	1

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[2] The 2017 national figure of 39.9% white Christians is based on 15.3% white evangelicals, 13.3% white mainline Protestants, and 11.3% of white Catholic (http://ava.prri.org/#religious/2017/MetroAreas/religion/m/national).

Table 2: Summary of interviewees based on gender and religious tradition

Gender	Christian	Jewish	Muslim	Hindu	Unaffiliated	Did not self-identify
Male	Mainline – 3; Evangelical – 12; Catholic – 3; Did not specify – 3; LDS – 1	Reformed – 3	-	3	-	3
Female	Mainline – 4; Evangelical – 3; Catholic – 0; Did not specify – 1	"Not religious" – 1; Did not specify – 1	1	-	2	-
Total	30	5	1	3	2	3

Each interview was recorded with an audio-recorder and transcribed verbatim. Recordings were omitted only when an interviewee preferred to not be recorded, in which case notes were taken during the interview. In most cases, interviews were conducted one-on-one. The Regional Coordinator of the program participated in the interviews on occasion. We acknowledge that this could have posed a conflict of interest when Advisory Council members of the Project were interviewed while the Regional Coordinator attended. However, in most circumstances, we found it beneficial to observe the interaction between the two individuals and gain further contextual insight in being part of the conversations before and after the interviews as both evaluators are not from Georgia.

Using the transcription and notes, each interview was analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The analysis has raised the following three themes thus far.

Emerging Themes

1. Beyond white normativity: region and race

In 2017, 46% of Atlantans were white, non-Hispanic, 31% were African American (marking Atlanta the US metro area with the largest African American population), 12% Hispanic, and 3% Asian or Pacific Islander[3] (PRRI American Values Atlas, 2018). This differs somewhat from the statewide demographics of 52% white, non-Hispanic, 29% African American, 9% Hispanic, and 2% Asian or Pacific Islander[4]. Moreover, in consideration of the intersectionality of race and religion, PRRI reported that in 2017, the combined percentage of White evangelical Protestants (21%) and White mainline Protestants (12%) were comparably larger than the percentage of Black Protestants (20%) in Georgia[5], illustrated in Table 3. However, in Atlanta, the

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[3] Demographic details for Atlanta by race are listed online here:
http://ava.prri.org/#demographics/2017/MetroAreas/race/1,2,3,4,5
[4] Data at the state level is available online here: http://ava.prri.org/#demographics/2017/States/race/m/US-GA
[5] Data for Georgia by Religious Tradition is available online here:
http://ava.prri.org/#religious/2017/States/religion/m/US-GA

25% White Protestants (comprising 15% of White evangelical Protestants and 10% White mainline Protestants) were similar to the 21% of Black Protestants, suggesting the presence of two majorities[6] despite the potential normativity of one over the other. John Dunaway, Professor Emeritus of French and Interdisciplinary Studies, Mercer University, and founder of "Building the Beloved Community Symposium," a program pairing African-American and white clergy, explained this contemporary separation between white and black majorities in Christian groups.

Table 3: Religious affiliation in Georgia, Atlanta, and the US, 2017
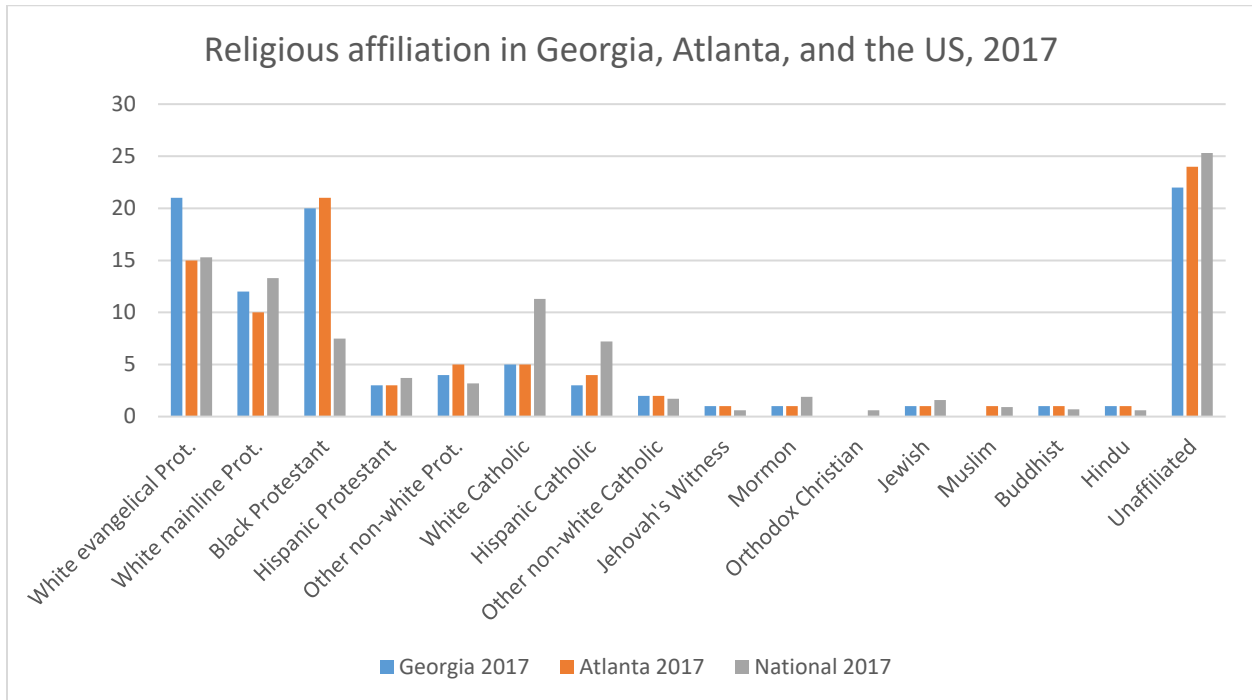
In Macon, Georgia, Dunaway explained that the history of the First Baptist Church and a First Baptist Church of Christ, as both white individuals and their slaves attended the former church until the Emancipation Proclamation, when African Americans organized the latter church across the street from the former one. "So there are two First Baptist Churches downtown in Macon, and there are a lot of cases throughout the South where there will be, I don't know, for example, an Ebenezer Baptist Church and down the road is another black Ebenezer Baptist Church." To mend such divides, Dunaway described that the New Baptist Covenant, a national organization, established the Covenant of Action[7] projects that aim to, "get those churches [that were once one congregation before the civil war] to not necessarily merge but at least collaborate" (Dunaway, March 2018 interview). In his own efforts, Dunaway also aims to bridge the racial segregation locally through his annual "Building the Beloved Community Symposium[8]" (named after the

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[6] This paper does not elaborate on the nuances among Black Protestants but heterogeneity exists among Black Protestants, despite the lack of detail in the PRRI data in Table 3. See Pomerantz (1997), Branch (1989), and Gould (2017).

[7] Details about New Baptist Covenant and the Covenant of Action projects are available here:
http://newbaptistcovenant.org/our-calling-new/

[8] The "Building the Beloved Community Symposium" details available here:
http://community.mercer.edu/beloved/history/

references to the "Beloved Community" in MLK speeches) that gathers and encourages relationships among clergy from different races and denominations.

With such demographics and historical and contemporary racial segregation, a project situated in the South could not dismiss a discussion on religion and its relation to race. Thus, in reviewing the Project's aims to address religious discrimination, we asked interviewees if they thought that the Project could also address race. With the historical and current cultural divide between black and white churches,[9] many leaders we spoke with (such as FM, KR, and DG) struggled to articulate their concerns but were hopeful and anticipate that the formation of dialogue skills in discussing one controversial topic, such as religion, could potentially facilitate even more taboo discussions of race. Andrew Manis was perhaps the most comfortable interviewee in broaching this contentious topic.

In our conversation with Dr. Manis, Professor of History at Middle Georgia State University, and author of *Macon Black and White: An unutterable separation in the American century* (2004), he explained that, "Race and religion in America, and especially in the South, where slavery was and where Jim Crow was, you can't really separate those very easily." Among his students, he found it difficult to teach about certain topics as some white students used those topics as a "license to check out, either mentally or physically." "They'll say, 'It's black history. It pertains to black people. It's a black thing. It doesn't really effect my ethnic group or me as a color-blind American'". As a result, Manis highly recommended that aspects of historical discrimination could be discussed under a focus of multiculturalism that includes the realities of Irish Americans in the 1840s and 50s, or the prejudice towards Arabs or Muslims today.

> The fact that you can trace these issues to ethnic groups other than African-Americans provides a perspective that can be illuminating to many white students and to many black students or students of other ethnic traditions because they see that these are problems that every ethnic group has experienced to some extent. I think that it universalizes the problem and that's healthy to know that it happens with the other ethnic groups.

To breach the conversation on race (and in turn religion) in the South, he suggested broadening the discussion to go beyond the black and white majority groups. Despite the attempt to blur such racial lines, Manis did raise the reality of regional tensions as well.

In our conversation, Manis offered to help with the Project in case the Project sought to include a southern versus "Yankee accent," since individuals with a southern accent may be more readily welcomed, illustrating an understanding of whiteness that extends beyond race to consider one's regional affiliation. Although all the teacher trainers and speakers in the Project were white,

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[9] In 1845, the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society aimed to disqualify any slave owner from missionary service. In response to these sanctions, some Baptist churches in the South left the Society to form the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), "a haven for pro-slavery Southern Christians," so that they could keep their slaves and continue missionary work (Jones, 2016, p. 168). For decades, the SBC excused its institutional complicity by placing the onus of maintaining racist norms on individual members and not the institution (Jones, 2016). However, in 1995, the SBC issued an official apology in Atlanta on its 150th year anniversary (See http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/899/resolution-on-racial-reconciliation-on-the-150th-anniversary-of-the-southern-baptist-convention). Since then, the non-white SBC-affiliated congregations increased from 5% in 1990 to 20% in 2010, but the diversity results from an increase in majority-black and Latino churches, as less than 1% of SBC churches are multiethnic. (See http://accesswdun.com/print/2012/6/249806).

with the exception of one, they did not reflect the presumed representation of a Southern religious leader. Thus, Manis' candidness shared an affinity that some others only showed in attitude and action; thereby, articulating the historical and contemporary inclusion and exclusion that exists based on one's race, perceived whiteness, and perhaps one's assumed political affiliation.

For example, David Gushee, Professor of Christian Ethics and Director of the Center for Theology and Public Life, School of Theology, Mercer University, shared that the course might be interpreted as (and might in reality be to an extent) an imposition from elitist about local community (interview, January 2018). One specific self-identified Christian evangelical teacher in our study (BK, January 2018 interview) expressed these sentiments as she shared that Georgia is a "Southern, Confederate, redneck state" and that she was concerned about an elitist bias in the Project. "I was a little wary of the essays [in the teacher training material] that had been published on the Harvard website…taking me to a Harvard website…Being conservative I don't look at Harvard as being conservative." Here, BK's specific example presents the intersectionality and bias based on region, political affiliation, aspects of race, and class. Although she did not explicitly state it, many of her ideas, and those of Gushee and Manis, relate to sentiments from southerners; understood to be from families with "generations-long histories in the South," "have a regional sense of place tied intrinsically to their identities,[10]" and where changes are determined by locals (Falk & Webb, 2010, p. 69).

The skepticism towards "non-southerner" individuals, identities, and groups raised the following questions in our evaluation that relate to local and global concerns:

- In Georgia: How important is it to have teacher trainers that reflect the average teacher in the Project by accent, political affiliation, and race? If regional identity is so important, is the presence of a non-black or non-white trainer ineffective?
- In America: How are in and out-groups formed, and how does this inform one's regional authority?
- Internationally: Is the sensitive issue of racial discrimination best articulated from a local authority figure, or does the understanding or respect towards a particular authority differ based on context?

2. Beyond Christian-Protestant normativity: White Christian America remains the majority religion in the US with mainline Protestants largely in the Northeast and upper Midwest and evangelical Protestants mostly in the South (Jones, 2016). Alongside this demographic reality are national historical narratives represented in key speeches by George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King Jr. that are steeped with biblical references [even as Washington and Lincoln often defied conventional beliefs in their own private religious practice and refused to conceive the American founding documents in narrowly sectarian terms]. To this, Manis (March 2018) said that many history teachers today probably share a single narrative about the formation of the US as it is easier to convey than the complexity and diversity in religious communities throughout US history. Yet, this historical narrative ignores the demographic changes that some have experienced nationally from 1974 to 2014, as Protestant and Catholic populations dropped from 63 to 47% and 26 to 22%, respectively, while the unaffiliated population increased from 7 to

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[10] Falk and Webb (2010) found that there is no specific definition of a southerner, but the most commonly reported were language (accents and vernacular expressions), customs, religion, politics, the Confederate flag, and the importance of family.

22% (Jones, 2016). In contrast, locally, the teachers' lived experience in Georgia may not differ greatly from their potentially single narrative understanding of US history.

In Georgia, PRRI's American Values Atlas data from 2013 to 2017 shows that the population of White evangelical Protestants (approximately 23% of the population), white mainline Protestants (approximately 12% of the population), Black Protestants (approximately 21% of the population), Hispanic Protestants (almost consistently 3%), and other non-white Protestants (approximately 3.5%) have remained quite steady[11]. Table 3 details the breakdown of demographic data by religious tradition in Georgia, Atlanta, and the US in 2017. In this setting, we observed three nuances within and beyond Christian-Protestant normativity.

Firstly, we noted that among Christians, a discussion on religious diversity pertained to the differences within Christianity. For, in a milieu where a common introduction in Georgia included the question, "where do you go to church?" (Christopher Lawrence, January 2018 interview), local leaders knew that the diversity in south Georgia included Presbyterians, Methodists, the church of Christ (Brad Bryant, January 2018), and that interfaith meant conversations between Baptists and other Protestants (Aaron Sataloff, January 2018). "Probably the most liberal religion we have is Episcopalians, and we don't have other religions, everybody is Christian-based, now we have a large Mormon population here [in Central Georgia]. But everything is pretty much Christ-centered" (Steve Smith, January 2018). Regarding non-Protestant denominations, Aaron Sataloff, a local senior rabbi remarked that, "Catholicism on its own is quite controversial. If you ask a Baptist if Catholics are part of the same faith tradition, they might have a different answer for you." Additionally, Sataloff elaborated to say that he has learned about Christian culture but he was uncertain if they learned about Jewish culture. As these attitudes described the public sphere, narratives from school settings show that these descriptions are apt among students and teachers also.

Janell Johnson, Professor in the Department of Religious Studies, Mercer University, shared that when her daughter's middle school was voting for the school yearbook cover, every single option included a cross or were "blatantly kind of Jesus Saves, you know, very religious," and some parents reacted against them. "Some people were outraged that people would complain about that. There is that very conservative base, but also the voices are there somewhere that are willing to stand up to that and say no, we want more separation of church and state." In her own lectures, she explained that outspoken conservatism existed among her students too. "I have gotten a lot of pushback in my courses because I stress a lot of feminist kinds of issues… I've had students e-mail me and tell me they're tired of the feminist crap." Scott Nash, also a Professor in the Department of Religious Studies, Mercer University, believed that these attitudes existed among teachers as well. (January 2018).

Secondly, we noted that moving beyond Christian-Protestant normativity included non-Christian worldviews and a particular discomfort regarding Islam. Within the larger society, George Wirth (January 2018), Pastor Emeritus at First Presbyterian church in Atlanta, explained that, "I know that there are schools all over this state, and superintendents who are going to find out that this program includes Islam, not just Jewish, Christian, but Islam, and Hinduism, and Buddhism. Their initial reaction because of the sheer fear and prejudice here is going to be to shut

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[11] The largest change existed among the unaffiliated, with 16% in 2013 and 22% by 2017. Altogether, data from 2013 to 2017 by Religious Tradition in Georgia was tallied separately and are available here: http://ava.prri.org/#religious/2017/States/religion/m/

that down… This state is not a really receptive state to teaching about other religions besides Judeo-Christian." Similarly, Gushee described "a simmering distrust of Muslims is higher in [the] South and Georgia than other places," that the distrust worsened after 9/11, and that he was skeptical about a successful implementation of the Project in small-town Georgia even if the curriculum included teaching the history of Islam (January 2018). In Newton County, a community complained about zoning for a mosque "because in those folks' mind that was tantamount to terrorist" (Brad Bryant, January 2018). The communal identity to Judeo-Christianity seemed to coincide with a regional and national association to protect against an "other" that appeared untrustworthy and threatened public safety. Teachers shared a similar outlook at the classroom level.

JK, a teacher in Central Georgia (January 2018) said that, "We are pretty much a Christian community." Yet she did note that with the nearby U.S. Air Force base in Warner Robins "[you] never know what culture they bring in." In reviewing the professional development training material on Buddhism, JK said that, "[I] just don't understand this… [The] part about Jesus [is] so familiar. I don't know enough about other religions." She did share that the professional development training she completed "opened my eyes to some of the things," and that she was happy to have completed it and looked forward to her child studying about different world religions. Yet, she felt that the Project would be helpful to "witness to other people" as well, although it was unclear if she meant to witness in action or word. Likewise, KF, another teacher in the area, stated that, "[you] can't take what I am away from the classroom… [I am a] child of God…not afraid to tell them what I believe" (January 2018). Yet, despite the suggestions towards proselytization, KF noted that Muslim students were especially mocked and that she "definitely thinks it would be a good thing" for the course to teach about respect towards Muslims. She felt that, "if parents knew background [of the Project] they would be supportive," especially if "students have options . . . could sign a waiver," as "everyone in this community are Christians – Bible Belt." A third teacher, BK (January 2018), shared that she is a very conservative Christian and that, "my job [as a Christian] is to tell you the truth" but she did not espouse using public schools to promote Christianity. Rather, she felt that teaching about religion should be an elective course that is discussed thoroughly at the college level, as she felt that teaching about religion "is a job for parents" and that asking the public schools to teach it was similar to "taking this most important job away from parents."

These conversations highlighted the struggle that teachers had in balancing their personal views with their professional practice, and how a personal Christian worldview and beliefs informed their teaching about any religion. In some senses, such as those from BK, the suggestion of a religious literacy program seemed to pose a personal attack on the teachers' religious identity and role as a parent. Thus, although the Project aims to protect the First Amendment freedoms of all individuals, it also appears to challenge an understanding of one's self and one's conception of their regional, if not national, identity.

Thirdly, while we noticed tensions of intersectionality within Christian groups and between Christian and non-Christian groups, one interviewee also noted the complexities within non-Christian groups and spoke about the differences among Muslims in Georgia. "For Muslim communities, until probably 2005-6, the majority of Muslims in the Atlanta area were probably African-American. It's now very close to being balanced if not weighing in the other direction. Where now probably half African-American and half immigrant. And that has led to a significant diversity in the type of Muslim communities there are" (JM, January 2018). Within this diversity,

based on race and geographic socio-cultural practices, were also observable conflicts between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims.

In going beyond Christian-Protestant normativity, we found that the variance among black and white Christians raises the diversity among people of the same religion in the same geographic locale, the tensions within Christian-Protestant groups themselves, unease and prejudice between Christian and non-Christian groups, as well as conflicts within some non-Christian groups. These observations raise three questions :

- In Georgia: How much priority should interfaith initiatives give to racial diversity as opposed to diversity between Christian and non-Christian groups? Might a discussion on diversity overall be more effective in addressing race indirectly?
- In America: How can regional and national history be taught to include more narratives from minority groups in US history, e.g. the generational contributions of US Sikh or Muslim citizens, so that minority groups are not perceived as a threat to regional or national identity or security? Alternatively, how does one introduce training about diversity without alienating evangelical Christians who themselves and at times for legitimate reasons feel marginalized?
- Internationally: How does one's conception of the national identity inform one's personal identity?

3. Beyond the public school: From 2010 to 2017, the demographics of public school enrollment shifted in Georgia from 3 to 4% of Asians, remained consistent at 37% among black students, rose from 12 to 15% for Hispanic students, and dropped from 44 to 40% for white students (Table 4). While the enrollment among the same groups in BCPS remained consistent (Table 5), groups in GCPS fluctuated (Table 6), where Asian enrollment remained at 10%, but black enrollment rose from 29 to 32%, Hispanic enrollment from 25 to 30%, and white enrollment dropped drastically from 32 to 24%.[12] These changes highlight the potential for white flight and resegregation in public education, where wealthier families attend private schools and others may have relocated to another school district based on class, race, or religious preferences. However, the data that we have complicates this segregation in the two specific districts of BCPS and GCPS.

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[12] Table 4, 5, and 6 are summarized data from the Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement "Enrollment by subgroup programs" downloadable data from the years 2010 to 2017, from https://gosa.georgia.gov/downloadable-data.

Table 4: Enrollment to public schools by race/ethnicity across Georgia, 2010-2017

Enrollment to public schools by race/ethnicity across Georgia, 2010-2017

Y-axis: Percentage enrolled; X-axis: School year
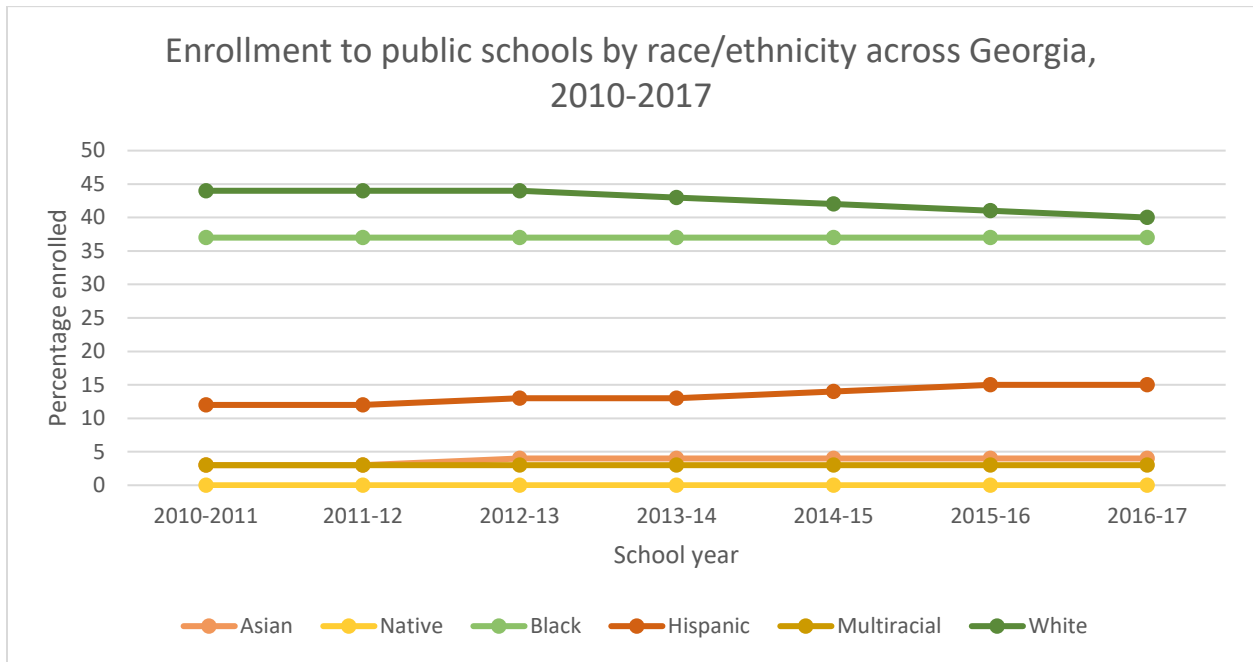
Legend: Asian, Native, Black, Hispanic, Multiracial, White

Table 5: Enrollment to Bleckley County Public Schools by race/ethnicity, 2010-2017

Enrollment to Bleckley County Public Schools by race/ethnicity, 2010-2017

Y-axis: Percentage enrolled; X-axis: School year

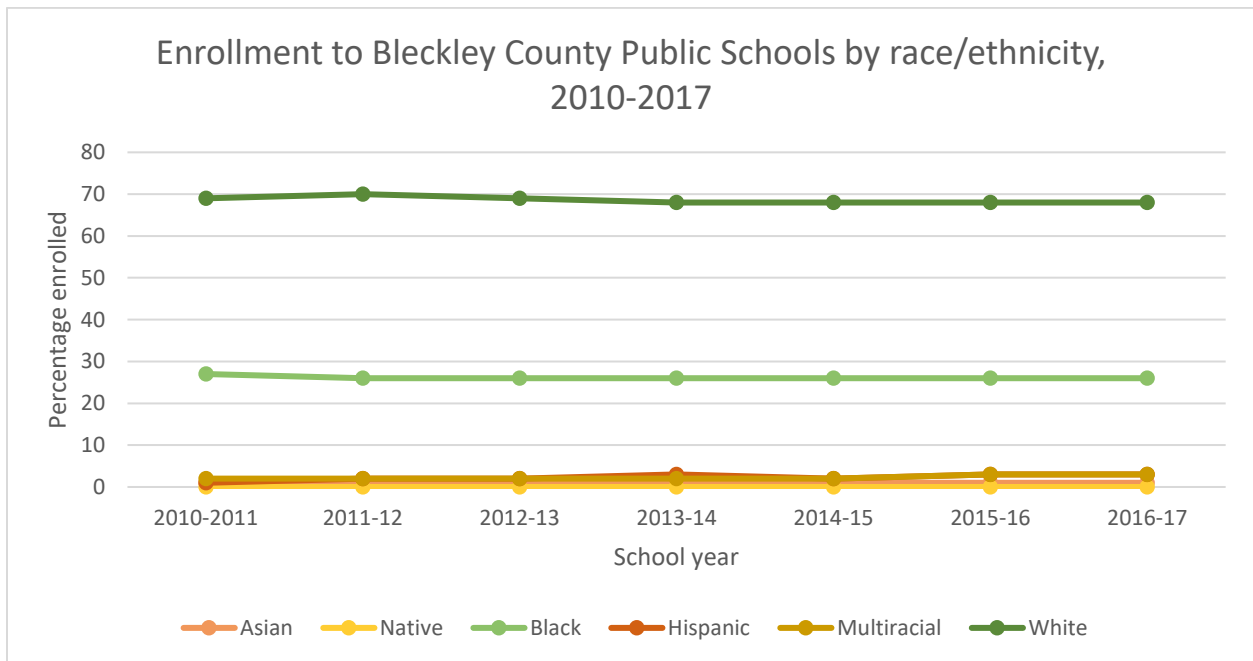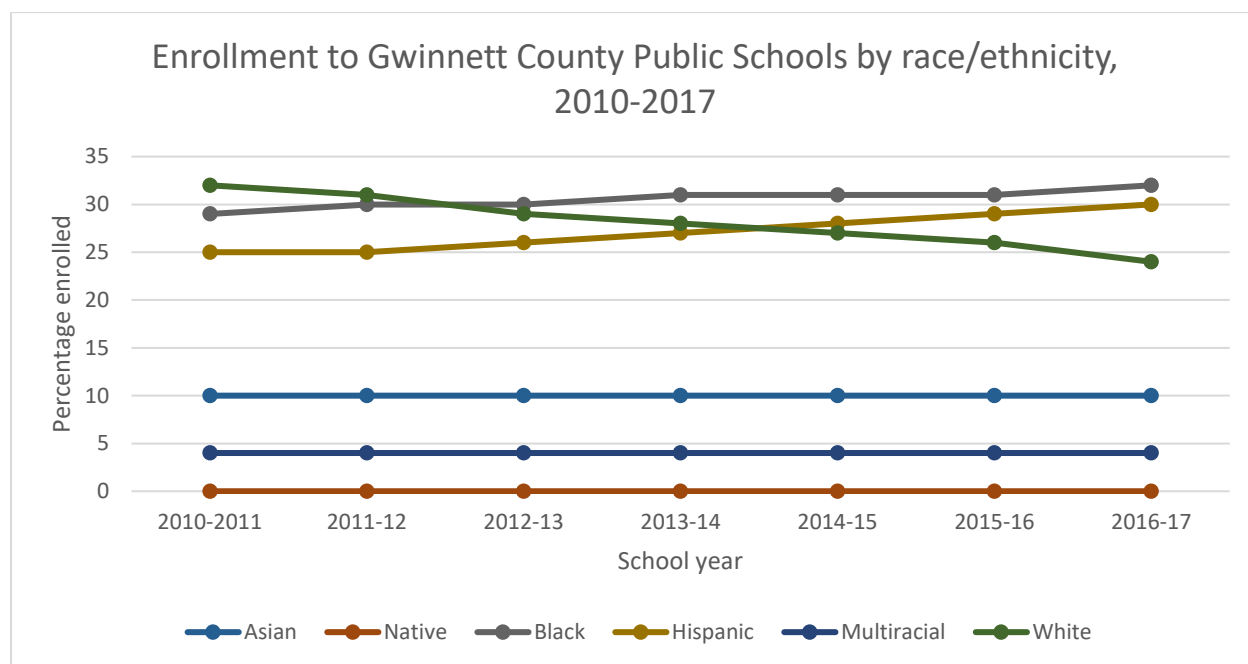Legend: Asian, Native, Black, Hispanic, Multiracial, White

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Table 6: Enrollment to Gwinnett County Public Schools by race/ethnicity, 2010-2017

Using data from 1988 and 1990, Fairlie and Resch (2002) found that white families were leaving public schools that had "large concentrations of poor minority school children," specifically poor black schoolchildren as "white flight from Asians and Hispanics are less clear" (p. 32). This finding remains relevant as Archbal, Hurwitz, and Hurwitz's (2016) review across 26 years of data (from 1990 to 2016) show that, "the overall proportion of whites in public schools has declined" (p. 6). Reasons include residential demographics, institutional level policies, such as attendance zoning, and aspects of parental choice, such as the preference for charter schools. These findings relate to the experiences of many US suburbs, but a discussion of class in BCPS and GCPS may not be relevant, as the percentage of students eligible for free/reduced lunch[13] in BCPS (increasing slightly to 36% in the 2015 to 2016 school year) and GCPS are quite moderate (as it decreased slightly in the same period to 21%), compared to statewide percentages that rose from 57% in 2010 to 62% in 2016[14]. In Gwinnett County, the median household income between 2012 and 2016 was $61,865[15], suggesting that class may not be the main rationale for the decrease in white enrollment, and that other aspects of parental preference may be shifting the decreasing white enrollment in the midst of increasing Hispanic and black enrollment.

Although the Project focuses on GCPS and BCPS, these observations and our interviews raised questions about the public school environment in Georgia and the US in general. As GCPS

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[13] The Georgia Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) program replaced the Free/Reduced Lunch program in 2013 and established new criteria in an effort to better identify students who may be or come from low-income families. Details are available here: https://gosa.georgia.gov/changes-freereduced-priced-lunch-measure-student-poverty

[14] Data can be found under "Directly Certified (District Level)" for the years 2013 to 2017 here: https://gosa.georgia.gov/downloadable-data. State data is available here: https://gaawards.gosa.ga.gov/analytics/saw.dll?PortalPages

[15] Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF

and BCPS may be outliers to the norm, our interviews in Central Georgia may be more informative as we consider larger trends in other parts of Georgia and the US.

In Central Georgia, a leader in the Women's Interfaith Alliance of Central Georgia explained that many Muslim families in the interfaith group chose to send their children to charter or private schools. From her observation and conversations with the Muslim mothers in the group, she sensed that the mothers may prefer non-public schools as they were uncomfortable with school zoning allocation and concerned about a potential lack of support for their children at the school. As a result, many of the Muslim mothers, who felt that the charter schools were still "quite white," seemed to find that it was an alternate option if the local non-denominational private school that many Muslim parents preferred was not available.

While school zoning may be a main rationale for private or charter schooling, it seemed like the local private school was also more attentive to the needs of religious minority students. At the local private school attended by most of the Muslim students that she knew, Martin, who is familiar with members of the administration, shared that the administration is very sensitive and aware of discrimination. In order to heighten the awareness of teachers to understand the discrimination that students may be experiencing, the administration asked the Alliance to create an educational panel for their staff. This may have resulted in a fourth grade teacher who tried to include world religions in her multiculturalism lessons and the presentation of an "Eid song" during a Christmas concert last year.

From these short anecdotes, we are unable to discern if the teachers are familiar with their own intersectionality or that of their students, or if the panel was able to offer some level of religious literacy to the private school teachers. Nonetheless, these observations do raise questions for consideration:

- In Georgia: If private or charter schools present an interest in the Project (more than that of Georgia public schools), should the focus be placed there instead?
- In America: Resegregation and white flight relates to difficult conversations related to class, race, and access to economic resources. Can training on religious literacy and the First Amendment (two difficult topics) equip teachers for these other difficult conversations?
- Internationally: How do micro initiatives, such as public school-based programs, address inequities and discrimination when macro level policies and institutional systems, such as the public school system itself, may be the promoters of inequity?

Conclusion

An evaluation of a Georgia-based project led us to observe the universal struggle that all teachers face between their personal, regional, and national identity, as socio-cultural perspectives are expressed and events unfold around them and continue to inform their conception of self and nation. For Georgia, this is a complicated time to broach the tensions regarding regional, race, religious, and class-based differences as discussions of intersectionality and identity politics stem from various groups nationally. However, the details in the emergent themes warrant further consideration as Dr. Gushee reminds us that, "the case for an expansive view of religious liberty needs to be re-made every generation." To this, Jerry Durley, Pastor Emeritus, Providence

Missionary Baptist Church, Atlanta, adds the need to recognize religious diversity as "the world is changing" and that it is "so easy to go back to silos of comfortability." At this juncture, we realize this controversial discussion must progress (even beyond the Project) in order to address the denunciations from Reverend King Jr. 55 years ago, while recognizing the modern and context-based sensibilities of marginalization expressed by many societal groups, including that of white evangelical Christians.

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