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ABSTRACT

THAT THEY MAY ALL BE ONE: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY IDEOLOGIES  
OF REGIONAL CONFERENCES IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

by

Debbie-Ann Francis

Chair: Desrene Vernon-Brebnor

## ABSTRACT

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church has been known for its wide diversity along with its struggles in racial relations within the Black SDA community in the United States. The SDA Church established regional conferences for Black SDA leaders as an alternative to full integration within the denomination. For this analysis, an ideological criticism was performed on two videos that focused on the topic of regional conferences. The hegemonic ideology that surfaced was that separation within the church organization based on race is necessary in order to fulfill the mission of the SDA Church and that issues such as racism will be resolved at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Other perspectives such as change, forgiveness, and integration were mentioned, but were muted in order to support the dominant hegemonic ideology. These findings clash with the SDA Church's example of a culturally diverse organization that promotes a global mission, unity, and diversity while also permitting the presence of ideologies that support racial separation.

**Key Terms:** Seventh-day Adventist, regional conferences, racism, integration, unity, diversity.

Andrews University

College of Arts and Sciences

THAT THEY MAY ALL BE ONE: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY IDEOLOGIES  
OF REGIONAL CONFERENCES IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Debbie-Ann Francis

2019

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THAT THEY MAY ALL BE ONE: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY IDEOLOGIES  
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A thesis  
presented in partial fulfillment  
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by  
Debbie-Ann Francis

APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Desrene Vernon-Brebnor, Ph.D., Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
David K. Penno, Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Willie Hucks, DMin

\_\_\_\_\_  
T. Lynn Caldwell, MA

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date approved

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GC	General Conference
NAD	North American Division
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey of completing a master's thesis has been one that I never imagined that I would take. Nevertheless, I am here, presenting this topic for the world to see. There are many who I would like to thank who have chosen to take this journey with me. First, I would like to thank God for giving me the inspiration to complete this topic. I will stress that I did not choose this topic, it chose me through divine intervention. I also would like to thank those who journeyed with me with their encouragement and prayers, especially my mother and father. God sent you as earthly representatives to keep me going on the right track.

I would like to thank the members of my research committee: Dr. Desrene Vernon-Brebnor as the chair of my committee, Dr. David Penno, Dr. Willie Hucks, and Prof. Lynn Caldwell for their guidance, expertise, and for allowing this project to come to life. I especially would like to thank Dr. Vernon-Brebnor for her patience and expertise, thank you for all that you have done for me.

Finally, I would like to thank all the predecessors of my topic: the past researchers who courageously chose to undertake such an emotionally charged subject and turn it into knowledge to help the future of the SDA Church. I am indebted to you: thank you for your bravery and persistence. My prayer is that we are all able to discover what truly brings us together as children of God. Thank you.

## CHAPTER ONE

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church is an international Christian denomination that spans six continents. The mission of the SDA Church is to share the gospel with all the world to prepare for the second coming of Jesus Christ. The SDA Church, founded in 1863, is known for its vast cultural diversity: out of the 235 countries officially recognized by the United Nations, the SDA Church is present within 213 of them (Office of Archives, 2017). Approximately 946 languages are used for publications as well as for “oral work” (Office of Archives, 2017). A 2015 study completed by the Pew Research Center identifies the SDA Church as the most diverse religious group within the United States (Lipka, 2015). The SDA Church has the advantage of both domestic and international diversity.

The ideologies of racism have covertly plagued the SDA Church through policies and decisions that inhibited the growth and flourishing of the Black community within the SDA Church (Baker, 2011; Baker, 1993; Greene, 2009; Hector, 2012; Hollacid, 2016; London, 2006; Penno, 2009; Rock, 1984; Stunkard, 2014; Washington, 2017; White, 1948; White, 1965). This has created a situation where the movement to address the issue of diversity and unity has slowly stagnated. As a religious organization, the SDA Church should be at the forefront in leading the discussion of unity within diversity on the social and religious level. This critical thesis will seek to analyze ideologies expressed from recorded discourse concerning regional conferences from SDA clergy, administrators, and millennials in order to contribute to the discussion of ethnic diversity and unity for the future of the SDA Church.

## **Background**

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church is a Christian denomination that was established out of a movement initially founded by William Miller, a Baptist preacher who desired to share the message of Jesus Christ's soon return (Lechleitner, 2013). Miller preached that Christ was soon to return on October 22, 1844, which led to the Millerite movement with a purpose to prepare others for the second coming of Jesus Christ (Lechleitner, 2013; Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000). When that event did not occur, many left the movement, while others stayed together to review possible misunderstandings of biblical passages regarding Jesus' second coming (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000). These remaining members eventually discovered their errors, which led to the establishment of what is now known as the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863 (Lechleitner, 2013; Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000). Some of these key members were Ellen Gould (Harmon) White, her husband James White, Joseph Bates, and several other founders of the SDA Church (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013). With that, the mission of the SDA Church was to share their message worldwide for the benefit of all humanity.

At the time, the SDA Church had the rare perspective of embracing views that were unconventional for church denominations that were battling with social tensions. They were fervent for the cause of abolition within the United States before the Civil War (Grant, 2010; Greene, 2009; Stunkard, 2014). In fact, in its early days, the SDA Church was active in spreading its message to many ethnic groups, which also included Blacks (Grant, 2010). At the end of the Civil War, the SDA Church began to do work within the southern United States, where they came across several difficulties. The South was embittered by its devastating and humiliating loss at the hands of the northern United States. The SDA Church, being an

organization from the North, held the view that all humankind was created equal in the eyes of God. The South, known for its racism and slavery, was hostile to the presence of any organization that allowed for equality for former slaves, especially a Northern presence in the South (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000, p. 226). The members who decided to work in the South were encouraged to go gently, without angering the people of the South who wanted to return to the former ways of life.

By the 1890s, there was stagnation of the SDA work amongst the Black community in the South. This created difficulty in the South, where integrated meetings amongst Whites and Blacks were bitterly discouraged by society. In general, the SDA Church did not seem to make active and intentional efforts exclusively amongst the Black community. Ellen White wrote a scathing rebuke to the leaders of the church for their apathy towards the Black community (White, 1965). In her work entitled *The Southern Work*, White challenged the ideology and mindset of the church, stating that, “Sin rests upon us as a church because we have not made greater effort for the salvation of souls among the colored people” (White, 1965, pp. 12-13). She strongly encouraged members to go of their own accord to help the Black community, rather than to wait for the support or approval of church administration (White, 1965, p. 16).

White’s son, James Edson White, was compelled to do mission work in the South by helping former slaves learn to read and write. Edson, along with a willing team, used a steamboat called *The Morning Star* while in the South to reach Blacks (Grant, 2010; London, 2009; Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000). White and his team planted schools to help train and empower the Black community. However, resistance began to build within the community. The difficulty initially came from Black ministers in the community of Vicksburg, Mississippi, who were terrified at the loss of members from their denominations (London, 2009). This initially did not

stop the work. However, a critical incident occurred where a mob destroyed property on the school established by White and his team in the city of Calmar, Mississippi. The principal was forcibly removed from the town. N. V. Olvin and his wife, a local Black Adventist couple who collaborated with Edson White, were physically attacked; Olvin was whipped while his wife was shot (Grant, 2010; London, 2009; Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000). N. V. Olvin, was seen as a threat to both White and Black non-Adventist ministers. There were no deaths, but this did raise the severity of the hostility towards evangelism in the South for the SDA Church. As a precaution, Ellen White stated that a separate work created and established by Blacks would be a safer option until a better way was found (White, 1948).

Ellen White had initially supported the idea of separate ministries as a temporary safety measure until an effective solution was found. However, the concept of separation became a permanent standard in dealing with race relations within the SDA Church (Rock, 2018). Calvin Rock, in his analysis of SDA relations within the Black community, highlighted the stance of SDA historian Arthur W. Spalding, who stated that the shift of Ellen G. White from integrated missions to separate missions was due to “conforming. . . to public opinion that the gospel not be hindered” (Rock, 2018, p. 24). However, the SDA Church, with a “reluctance to act against injustice,” used the position as a “principle of policy” and began to use this perspective as a “fundamental, Bible-based teaching of the church,” which was stronger in areas where segregation was the standard (Rock, 2018, p. 24). The thought was that this structure of separation would be accepted for the sake of the SDA mission (Hollancid, 2016).

Eventually, the SDA Church pivoted from social activism to an acceptance of the inequalities of the society (Grant, 2010; Greene, 2009; Hector, 2012; London, 2009; Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000). White’s stance had changed in order for the church’s work to continue without

loss of life. The push for a “color line,” a system of separation between the White and Black SDA community, was placed in stronger focus during the late 1800s (Stunkard, 2014). Charles M. Kinney, who was ordained as the first Black SDA minister in 1889 (Greene, 2009; Rock, 2018; Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000; Stunkard, 2014), expressed his concerns about evangelism and the racial tension that was mounting within the SDA Church. Kinney suggested that a system be created that allowed for the Black SDA community to evangelize effectively among their own due to racism within the church (Greene, 2009; Stunkard, 2014).

Robert M. Kilgore, president of the Texas Conference of the SDA Church, independently supported the notion that in order to allow the ministry of the church to flourish in the racial tensions of the South, there should be a form of separation between the White and Black community within the church in order for the mission of the SDA Church to continue (Greene, 2009; Hector, 2012; Stunkard, 2014). Kinney presented the concept of a system that would be run by Black Adventist administrators at the 1890 General Conference (GC) Session of the SDA Church, but it was rejected. However, at the same session, Kilgore advocated for a policy to form separate churches, which was similar to what Kinney initially presented. This policy of supporting a color line was a marked shift from what was previously supported within the SDA Church in terms of racial issues (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000). However, due to the tensions of society along with its perceived hindrance to the goals of the SDA Church, the church administration decided to go along with this mandate as a substitution for integration.

This greatly troubled Ellen White, who challenged the mandate headed by Kilgore at the 1890 GC Session where the segregation of churches was allowed (Hector, 2012). White’s perspective was rejected at the GC Session. In addition, not only did the SDA administrative leaders support Kilgore’s perspective as a solution of racial issues in the church, they also

supported the “better way” of separation for safety until there were improvements in societal issues. Though White initially put this forth, she did not expect that it would become “synonymous” with the second advent of Jesus Christ by the SDA membership (Rock, 2018, p. 24). That meant that until Christ’s Second Coming, the line of separation would be upheld and respected as a standard for the SDA Church. The perspective of separation would eventually continue to hold its course within SDA race relations.

This mindset produced devastating results for the SDA Church, especially within the Black community. Leadership, ministerial support, and financial support were restricted within the SDA Church within the Black community; there was little to no support. When the North American Negro Department of the General Conference was founded on June 1, 1909, its first three directors were Caucasian; its first Black director was W. H. Green (Rock, 2018; Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000). Green was appointed to the position in 1918 (Rock, 2018). Green was not afforded certain privileges that were available to White pastoral leaders of the church that would have made his position easier, such as housing while working on location at the General Conference (Rock, 2018). After 10 years of serving in that position, he passed away. Some members from the Black community thought that he was overworked to death (Rock, 2018, p. 25).

Green’s death and other factors resulted in a stronger push for a separate conference structure to be formed within the SDA Church, where Blacks in the church could manage themselves effectively. Black SDA members were restricted from worshipping among White SDA congregations, they were not afforded treatment in White SDA hospitals, and they were not allowed to make administrative decisions on leadership/policy making within the SDA Church (Rock, 2018, p. 39). If they were allowed any form of administrative leadership, they were only

placed within supporting roles while their activities were surveyed and governed by White conference presidents (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000). This created emotional strain within the church among Black ministers. Eventually, four talented ministers who were a part of the Black SDA community left the church due to racial issues. They were James K. Humphrey, John W. Manns, Lewis C. Sheafe, and Arna Bontemps (Greene, 2009; Rock, 2018, Stunkard, 2014). In addition to the difficulty within the church, the next push for regional conferences came to a halt in 1929 when the decision allowing for the structure was rejected.

A critical flashpoint came to the SDA Church in 1943. Lucille Byard, a Black SDA member from New York, was ill with liver cancer and requested to be taken to the Washington Sanitarium and Hospital in Takoma Park, Maryland in order to receive care at the SDA medical institution. She was originally admitted for treatment on September 21, 1943, until it was discovered that she was a Black woman. There are conflicting accounts concerning the outcome of the situation. Rock (2018) detailed the accounts. The first account came from James Byard, who was Mrs. Byard's husband. After their arrival, they were notified by the attendant that although their reservation was acknowledged, the state law of Maryland prohibited the admission of Blacks to the Sanitarium. James Byard protested the decision due to his wife's condition, however he was referred to another hospital by the attendant. The attendant called a taxi, informed the driver to take the Byards to Freedman's Hospital, a public hospital, and they were transported from the sanitarium to the hospital.

The second account came from Robert Hare, the medical director of the sanitarium. Hare did not give his account of the situation until November 15, 54 days after the Byards initially came to Washington Sanitarium and Hospital (Baker, 2019). Hare was not aware of Lucille Byard's ethnicity until she was on her way to the sanitarium. Hare was willing to accept her in



the sanitarium by giving her a private room and arranging for medical examination during “off-hours,” hoping that Byard would see this as a compromise due to social sentiment and the misunderstanding of her ethnicity. Hare and another worker suggested that the Byards go to Freedman’s Hospital, now known as Howard University Hospital, to have the medical examination completed as an alternative (Baker, 2019). Hare was positive that Mrs. Byard would accept the private room, therefore he did not meet her in his office. However, when he finished his rounds, he was informed that the Byards had refused his offer and left for Freedman’s Hospital. Lucille Byard passed away a little over a month later on October 30, 1943 (Rock, 2018).

The entire situation caused a significant uproar within the Black SDA community (Rock, 2018, pp. 44-45). The GC president, James L. McElhany, was informed in a letter by James Byard and fifteen other members of Mrs. Byard’s church, First Jamaica SDA Church [currently the Linden Boulevard SDA Church in Laurelton, NY], that the sanitarium used poor judgment and should be held responsible for the expenses that Mrs. Byard had accrued due to the ordeal, or they would contend with a lawsuit. The Sharon SDA Church, another SDA Church that was located in Mrs. Byard’s community, also sent a letter of protest to McElhany. To diffuse the situation, GC vice president and North American Division (NAD) president W. G. Turner preached a sermon at Ephesus SDA Church, now known as Dupont Park SDA Church, which was the largest Black SDA Church in Washington D.C. at the time (“History of Dupont Park”, 2017). The theme of his sermon came from 1 Peter 4:12-13, that through the recent situations that they had dealt with as a community, it was a sign that they were able to partake of Christ’s sufferings. This did not resonate well with the church congregation, who openly protested the message immediately after the sermon with examples of overt racism from the local SDA college

prohibiting Black students from attending as well as the GC cafeteria prohibiting Blacks to enter and eat inside. These tensions and other protests set the stage for the establishment of regional conferences.

In the Spring Council of 1944, the topic of regional conferences was brought to the forefront. A committee was founded by certain prominent SDA members of the Black community, which included educators such as Eva B. Dykes, Helen Sugland, Willie Dodson, Lula Bell Cox, Valerie Justiss-Vance, and Alma J. Scott, Myrtle G. Murphy, Alan A. Anderson, and Chairman Joseph T. Dodson; Addison V. Pinkney served as Co-Chairman (Baker, 1996; Rock, 2018). Even though the Council was attended by other leaders of the SDA Church, the committee and other Black members were invited as non-voting guests (Baker, 1995). This committee, known as *The Committee for the Advancement of World-Wide Work among Seventh-day Adventists*, created a document that brought clear examples of overt hindrances and decisions that were made against the Black community within the SDA Church. The document was entitled, “Shall the Four Freedoms Function among Seventh-day Adventists?” In this document, the committee highlighted the policies presented within education programs, medical programs, administration, employment, and spiritual matters that were “discriminatory and un-Christlike” (Baker, 1996; Rock, 2018). The document included a set of detailed recommendations to resolve the racial issues within the church. The decision of the Council, led by GC president J. L. McElhany, was to create regional conferences within the SDA Church in the NAD.

The SDA Church grew rapidly in the years following the establishment of regional conferences (Greene, 2009). The Lake Region Conference was established as the first regional conference within the SDA Church. Currently, there are nine regional conferences: Lake Region

Conference, Northeastern Conference, South Atlantic Conference, South Central Conference, Central States Conference, Allegheny East Conference, Allegheny West Conference, Southeastern Conference, and Southwestern Conference. These conferences have always led Black Adventists within the United States of America. Currently, the NAD has stated that there is no intention of altering the current structure of regional conferences due to the racial tensions of the United States, the success of the Black SDA community, and ministry in urban areas (North American Division Administration, 2015).

The discussion of the validity of regional conferences is not only limited to the NAD. International SDA members have dealt with church decisions that were racially motivated, such as South Africa during the apartheid era (Crocombe, 2007; Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000; Singata, 2018) as well as the United Kingdom (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000; Hector, 2012). The United Kingdom nearly formed a regional conference structure, but decided to choose an alternative route (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000). A structure similar to regional conferences was created in South Africa within the SDA Church, however, the structures merged in 1993 with the effort to have a structure not based on racial lines (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000). The effects of that period of integration has not been researched in-depth.

The SDA Church has the unique position of having a presence in many ethnic groups worldwide (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2013). Within the United States, the Pew Research Center identifies the SDA Church as the most diverse church in the country, where “37% of adults who identify as Seventh-day Adventists are white, while 32% are black, 15% are Hispanic, 8% are Asian and another 8% are another race or mixed race” (Lipka, 2015). In allowing for the current system of regional conferences, there could be perceptions of

allowing for a separate yet equal structure, which would be counterproductive within an organization that celebrates diversity and unity.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem to be researched is the ideologies present within the discourse concerning regional conferences within the SDA Church. Currently, the regional conference structure is unique to the United States. Another issue that presents itself is that the church's mission is “. . . to call all people to become disciples of Jesus Christ, to proclaim the everlasting gospel embraced by the three angels' messages (Revelation 14:6-12), and to prepare the world for Christ's soon return” (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2014). The system of regional conferences could be seen as a stumbling block that serves as a clear and present reminder of discrimination, separation, and racism. Thirdly, the SDA Church as a worldwide religious organization that seeks to celebrate diversity and unity also contains structural division based on racial factors. This may create difficulty in fulfilling its mission for all ethnicities.

### **Researcher's Interest in the Problem**

As a researcher, the problem of racism in Christianity is a complex topic. As one who ascribes to the SDA worldview, it is a paradoxical situation to see the effects of racism in the SDA Church. As a member of the millennial generation, I support social causes we perceive to be valid to advocate for, such as women's issues and working against racism. Another interest comes from my personal background. I represent both a domestic and international Black perspective. While I was born in the United States, my family heritage is from the West Indian context. I am also affiliated with both state and regional conferences: I grew up in an SDA Church within a regional conference but I was baptized and hold membership within an SDA

Church in a state conference. These churches are located in a culturally diverse city where the congregations are infused with multiculturalism from the diverse ethnic backgrounds that make up the membership, regardless of whether the churches are affiliated with a state or regional conference. I was always puzzled as to why there were two different conferences within the same region. The magnitude of the separation did not fully reveal itself until the time came to leave that region to further my academic studies. It was then that I noticed how separated the church truly was. I also had the opportunity to study in another region of the world; there I saw church members willfully and joyously collaborating and worshipping together, from a plethora of cultural backgrounds. I returned to the United States, where I saw the stagnation of cultural diversity within the church.

When I selected this topic, I was unaware of the historical contributions and perspectives of SDA members on racism in the SDA Church. As this research topic grew, I learned more about which perspectives and contributions were easily accessible, and which ones were missing from the conversation. As a millennial, as a woman, and as a supporter of cultural diversity, I have the hope and desire that effective cultural unity would be displayed throughout the structure of the SDA Church. The SDA Church reflects cultural diversity differently from what I initially perceived. The history of the SDA Church as well as the contemporary culture will give clues as to what could happen in the future for the SDA Church in regards to regional conferences and church unity.

### **Significance of the Study**

Previous studies have shown that there are current SDA members who are in favor of full integration with a system that allows for a cohesive form of unity amongst all members and administration within the SDA Church (Penno, 2009; Stunkard, 2014; Washington, 2017). On

the other hand, there are studies that have addressed the racial issues of the SDA Church and the safe havens produced by the establishment of regional conferences (Hector, 2012; Rock, 1984). Others have focused on the attitudes about the SDA racial divide amongst church members (Hollancid, 2016). However, no study was found on the ideology present in the discussion. This study will attempt to delve into the topic of regional conferences and the ideologies that control the perspectives on its existence. The study will focus on the perspective of administrative church leaders as well as the millennials' perspectives, as presented in the chosen artifacts. The aim of this study is to discover other themes of discussion and reconciliation for the SDA Church to address the issue of racism within the SDA Church.

This would be the first time that ideological criticism is applied in research concerning the topic of regional conferences. Other studies have either surveyed or interviewed research participants or completed a historical analysis of the church's history in dealing with racism. There has been no textual or artifact-based analysis found as of yet in the conversation of regional conferences, neither has there been an analysis of the ideologies concerning regional conferences. The video artifacts analyzed in the conversation on regional conferences will serve as the foundation of the ideological criticism of regional conferences and the current stance that is most identified within this conversation.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the dominant ideologies present within the current conversation on regional conferences?
2. What are the emerging themes that are revealed in the artifacts concerning regional conferences?

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Artifact:** A source selected for textual analysis (Foss, 2018).

**Ideology:** a perspective that governs one's interpretation of how to perceive one's world, which determines the actions and decisions they make (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, and Goodall, 2017; Foss, 2018).

**Hegemony:** the use of control of one's specific ideology over an ideology of the social group in order to benefit one's ideals rather than the group as a whole (Foss, 2018).

**Regional Conference:** an administrative structure of the SDA Church created to allow for governance and representation for the Black SDA community in the United States, not restricted to state lines (weareAUSA, 2015).

**State Conference:** the equivalent of the administrative structure for the SDA community at large, also known as local conferences (weareAUSA, 2015).

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

Within this section, the principal contributors to the literature on the SDA Church and regional conferences will be discussed. Key participants such as Calvin Rock have contributed academic literature to the discussion of regional conferences since 1984. There have been a few more contributors as of recent times. However, the most contemporary female contribution is that of Ellen G. White. Throughout this review of literature, each author's work will be summarized and analyzed for its contribution to the discussion of regional conferences.

### **Past Researchers**

Calvin B. Rock, a prominent leader in the Black SDA community, discussed the issue of Black self-determination. In his analysis, Rock described the historical struggles that have been present in the Black SDA community, such as advancement into higher positions in the SDA Church, little to no Black representation at the administrative level, and finally the establishment of regional conferences, from its rejection in 1929 to its acceptance after the Lucille Byard incident in 1944. The premise of his 1984 analysis was to balance the internal struggle that Black SDA administrative leaders face while remaining loyal to the SDA message and mission, yet challenging the racial struggles within the SDA Church. Rock shared that, "Formerly, under the social strategy of 'separate but equal' (segregation) Blacks suffered apartheid-like restrictions upon their 'freedom of access,' which relegated the Black leadership to a framework of being second-class citizens" (Rock, 1984, p. 49). According to Rock (2018), the establishment of



regional conferences was a symbol of advancement and progress within the SDA Church and the Black SDA community.

There are members of the SDA Church who would prefer that regional conferences be disbanded and integrated into the main SDA structure. Rock believed that in light of the push for integration from outside influences, the concern would be that, with integration, the essence of Black self-determination would be forced to conform to the majority's perspective of unity: "Now, in the name of integration (brotherhood) they suffer restrictions upon their 'freedom of self-determination.' The former restriction ignores their basic humanity; the latter rejects their ethnic reality; both deny their political power" (Rock, 1984, p. 49). This creates a level of tension that is continually left unsolved within the SDA Church, the NAD, and the Black SDA community.

The history of Black SDA representation as well as the struggles encountered come down to two main perspectives within Rock's discussion on the need for regional conferences: desegregation vs. integration and cultural pluralism, along with the aforementioned theme of self-determination (Rock, 2018, p. 167). Rock argued that structural accommodation is important within the United States for the reason that desegregation, or equal access, is the opposite of segregation, which is exclusion. Rock stated that while the stance of the Civil Rights Movement was for integration, desegregation has been the enduring outcome. Desegregation allows for the ability to participate without alluding to an inevitable merger, which presents a transition where all are welcome without force, which would be more viable on a mass societal scale. Integration, however, presents the perception of "economic displacement, cultural contamination, and racial amalgamation" amongst White Americans (Rock, 2018, p. 168). However, the quality of relationships that are based on integration are more substantial on a deeper level, yet integration

is not as likely towards a functioning reality in comparison to desegregation. Unforced integration in the form of desegregation eventually produces a genuine action toward integration in general (Rock, 2018, p. 169). Cultural pluralism allows for multiple forms of cultural expression without the risk or pressure of cultural homogenization, where all cultures would be expected to conform to one dominant culture. Rock strongly supported the structure of regional conferences as an “arresting display of the ‘unity in diversity’ modeled in Scripture and manifest throughout God’s wondrous creation” (Rock, 2018, p. 227).

Hector (2012) analyzed similar issues of Black self-determination. In his analysis, Hector presented the viewpoints of those who are in favor of maintaining the current structure of regional conferences in contrast to those who are in favor of disbanding the structure for integration. Hector outlined a theological framework of racial reconciliation as a possible avenue towards allowing for change within the SDA Church. Hector separated two modes of thought within his analysis: pragmatists and idealists. Pragmatists are in favor of the current regional conference structure, while idealists prefer integration. However, there is a tone shift within Hector’s analysis of racism, regional conferences, and the SDA Church. Hector outlined that idealists are in favor of disbanding the current structure for the love-unity ethic, the end of legal segregation, as well as the “Age of Obama” argument as the symbol of a post-racial society (Hector, 2012). Pragmatists are in favor of maintaining the current structure because it encourages cultural solidarity, especially as a buffer against the unlikely change of racial attitudes (Hector, 2012). Hector included that issues such as victim-blaming toward pragmatists as the cause of segregation as well the issue of White privilege may create difficulty toward reconciliation (Hector, 2012, p. 167).

Within Hector's analysis, the main focus of his research was to discuss the viewpoints of both camps of argument concerning the current structure. However, the tone began to shift toward the theme of self-determination. In essence, for Hector, Black self-determination is at risk with reconciliation, and so would White privilege. Hector was also critical against other analyses that challenged perspectives presented in his analysis (Hector, 2012, p. 123). Hector concluded by saying that his viewpoint has shifted to become an optimistic realist, where one day the SDA Church may come to a point of racial reconciliation. Due to "the nature of human self-interest" however, that opportunity may not come quickly, "since those who currently set the agenda of the church, may not be concerned with such a self-reflective process" (Hector, 2012, p. 257).

Other researchers highlighted the historical aspects of the SDA Church and its actions in dealing with social justice and civil issues through a historical analysis. Baker (1993) and Baker (2011) focused on the SDA Church and Ellen G. White's actions toward the Black community during the late 1800s. Grant (2010) covered the shift of the SDA Church from being a pro-abolitionist movement to a reserved organization that was reluctant to be involved with the mission in the South in fear of angering Southern residents who were partial to the former system of slavery. In addition, London (2006, 2009) created a historical timeline for the SDA Church beginning with its initial start as a pro-abolitionist movement all the way to the Civil Rights Movement. During this movement, several SDA leaders were present, namely those who were distressed over the plight of the Black community in the U.S. and within the SDA Church. One key SDA member of that movement was E. Earl Cleveland, an SDA minister and evangelist who stood in solidarity with the self-determination point of view (Rock, 2018).

Greene (2009) compared the SDA Church to the Methodist Church and its historical background in confronting racism. In his analysis, Greene contrasted the system of cultural

assimilation within the Methodist Church against the cultural plurality of the SDA Church. The Methodists allowed church members to have slaves at one point in time. This decision angered the members who did not accept slavery within their denomination. The Methodist Church eventually had several denominations that split away from the organization, all due to the issue of slavery. The Methodist Church and the SDA Church had issues after the abolition of slavery in terms of managing cultural and racial tensions within their denominations. The Methodists eventually had a structure similar to regional conferences which was named the “Central Jurisdiction”, which lasted from 1940-1964. Their structure was disbanded and reabsorbed into the main structure due to low membership from the Black community, while on the other hand, the SDA regional conferences had an explosion of growth in the Black community; the Black SDA membership growth was 2.15 times the White SDA membership rate from 1946-1970 (Greene, 2009). The SDA Church eventually used the systemic framework of cultural plurality to allow for other cultures to have autonomy and expression, compared to the Methodist Church, which chose cultural assimilation.

Another theme present within the literature is the possibility of integration and the views of integration amongst church members and pastors. Penno (2009), Stunkard (2014), Hollancid (2016), and Washington (2017) all focused on the analysis of the attitudes considering integration within the SDA Church. Washington (2017) in his thesis analyzed a local Black SDA Church found in Macon, Georgia. Washington presented the idea of opening the church’s doors to members of the White community in their surrounding communities. Initially, the suggestion turned into a near-crisis amongst the members, who were quite offended by the idea. However, Washington was able to turn the situation around. Washington focused on the use of an evangelistic series that he hosted within the church to highlight the vision of unity in the Bible.

At the end of each meeting was a questionnaire. The local church came to the conclusion that they would want full-fledged unity in Christ, however, the church in general was not completely ready to take that step.

Washington (2017) shared that historically, the Black church has been a place of refuge for the Black community in general; when they were rejected by Whites, Blacks created their own place of worship. The Black church was also the center of the Civil Rights Movement. Many leaders of the movement were also leaders of a Black Christian denomination, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The Black church has an established place within the Black community. To invite Whites to come in for integration puts the notion of the Black church being a place of worship and refuge at risk. This is related to the theme of Black self-determination.

Hollancid (2016) used a series of interviews with White and Black SDA members and pastors within the Detroit area. Hollancid shared the history of the SDA Church during the post-Civil War era and included the writings of Ellen White that seemed to be in contradiction with each other, such as her views of interracial marriage as well as her views of the SDA movement in the South. Within his overall analysis, Hollancid conducted 36 in-depth interviews to assess the attitudes concerning themes such as cross-racial church attendance, neighborhood and church attendance, cross-racial local church leadership, attendance at mixed-group social functions, worship and preaching style, racial background of peers, segregation sentiments and effects of racialization in the church, and interracial dating and marriage in the SDA Church (Hollancid, 2016). Generally, the interviewees were grateful for the opportunity to share in the conversation, considering it to be a much-needed conversation within the SDA Church. The results, however, were quite varied; there was a desire for unity, but the direction that it should take was inconclusive.

Penno (2009) and Stunkard (2014) examined the views of integration within the SDA Church. Penno (2009) analyzed the attitudes within the current structure of the Southern Union Conference of the SDA Church amongst church members and clergy. Penno surveyed SDA members within the Georgia-Cumberland Conference and the South Atlantic Conference, conferences located within the southern United States. The results were that the respondents were more inclined to choose integration, mainly because it is seen as a divine calling to be unified and that the church's outreach would be more effective in outside circles if the system is integrated. Concerns about integrating church positions was present amongst the respondents, yet there was a willingness to make an attempt toward integration.

Stunkard's (2014) analysis contained similar views. Stunkard, who also surveyed SDA members of the Georgia-Cumberland Conference and the South Atlantic Conference, argued that cultural distinctions have changed so much to the point that the cultural boundaries that were initially present as to what constitutes a regional conference and a state conference has a fluid definition that is less defined as cultural groups grow. Stunkard went more in-depth with his analysis to assess what style of organizational identity would be a better fit: a homogeneous structure, a multicultural structure, or a synergistic structure. The homogeneous structure would have only one uniform cultural composition, the multicultural structure would have two or more groups that would be identified based on their ethnic/cultural backgrounds, and the synergistic structure would consist of multiple groups that are not identified or united mainly by their ethnic background, but rather by their mission and purpose (Stunkard, 2014). The results of Stunkard's surveys pointed to the idea that the respondents were partial toward a synergistic model for the SDA Church to allow for cultural expression and effective output for the church's mission.

## Thematic Elements

The themes present in the past research point toward the issues of both systematic and institutionalized racism within the SDA Church. Historically, the cause of the SDA Church focused on preparing for the second coming of Christ, which limited the advancement of certain civil causes such as racism. The concepts present in the literature of systematic racism and regional conferences within the SDA Church focus on the themes of Black self-determination and integration for the cause of the mission. The notion of homophily, that “like attracts like,” is also present within the conversation of racism and Christianity; which was highlighted within Stunkard’s (2014) analysis. The push for integration has created a fear of assimilation, which would be a possible erasure of culture for the Black SDA community (Rock, 1984). This theme surfaced in the writings of Calvin Rock, E. E. Cleveland, and within a panel discussion held at Andrews University (weareAUSA, 2015). The NAD has affirmed the structure of regional conferences, stating that it is “presently ministering in a racially-charged society...” (North American Division Administration, 2015). In response to the official NAD stance on regional conferences, Hollacid adds by affirming the establishment of regional conferences, that the NAD failed to acknowledge personal responsibility to the issue of the church’s ills while leaving the task of impacting urban areas to the regional conferences (Hollacid, 2016, p. 70).

There are several viewpoints that surfaced in the general overview of the literature. The salient theme within this literature review came from the absence of the female perspective. At the completion of this literature review, the perspective from contemporary female SDA members or researchers on the topic of regional conferences or racism within the SDA Church has yet to be found. There were several SDA women who contributed to the cause of advancing the Black SDA community such as Dr. Eva B. Dykes (London, 2009) and Irene Morgan (Baker,

1996; London, 2009), yet the most recent female author found was Ellen G. White, whose work entitled *The Southern Work* was initially removed from publication from 1920, five years after her death. *The Southern Work*, White's writings on the SDA Church and her concerns for the Black community, did not reappear in publication until 1965, due to efforts from Black SDA laymen who desired to have White's perspective shared within the SDA Church (Blacksdahistory, 2015).

The overarching aspect is that the SDA Church, due to its desire to limit unnecessary friction with other opposing groups and viewpoints, relegated concerns of social justice to civil groups while silencing their perspective, preferring to wait until the second coming of Christ for these issues to be resolved. Unfortunately, this created a culture that mirrors contemporary society regarding ideologies of racism. This ideology was present within the decisions and administrative representation of the Black SDA community. Blacks were not able to lead themselves or to make proper administrative decisions for many years without White leadership or control. Even within the 1944 GC Council that established regional conferences, Black SDA delegates were non-voting guests as opposed to being active participants in the discussion. GC president James L. McElhany proposed integration throughout the church or regional conferences as the options for the voting guests, who were White. London (2009) pointed out that Jay Johnston Nethery, serving as president of the Lake Union Conference, used his influence as a church official to persuade most of the White committee members to vote toward regional conferences because he was "unable to stomach the idea of a fully integrated Church" (p. 144).

Nethery's use of his power in such a manner in that council may have contributed to the prevailing ideology on racial issues within the church. This perspective, when used covertly in organizational decision-making, creates a system of control throughout the organization, which



affects how its members interact. For that reason, the issue of integration has been perceived to be a futile mission in regards to unity and diversity for the SDA Church.

In regards to the literature, the perspective is that for the sake of the SDA cause, energies should be spent toward seeking evangelistic goals while deferring integration for a later time. This time has become indefinite, whether it may be centuries from now or at the second coming of Christ. The overall idea, based on the literature reviewed, is that racial reconciliation is not a viable goal at this time.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### **Research Design**

The research design for this thesis is a textual analysis based in the critical paradigm of research, which seeks to analyze systems of power structures and oppression with the intention to bring about reform. For this study, a textual analysis of the data was implemented by using the method of ideological criticism. The guidelines of ideological analysis are to identify the presented and suggested elements of an artifact, form an ideology based on the artifact's elements, and identify the functions that are implemented through the ideology (Foss, 2018, p. 243). After an artifact is selected and analyzed for present ideologies, the research question is formed and the essay is produced (Foss, 2018).

### **Ideology**

Ideological criticism is a method used within communication research that assesses ideologies and elements of hegemony within a particular piece of content, which is often identified as an artifact (Foss, 2018, p. 239). Ideology is defined as “a system of ideas or a pattern of beliefs that determine a group’s interpretations of some aspect(s) of the world” (Foss, 2018, p. 237). Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, and Goodall (2017) also define ideology as “basic, often unexamined, assumptions about how things are or ought to be” (p. 166). This can also be defined as a “mental framework” that “highlight particular positions on social issues” that are “composed of evaluative beliefs (beliefs that may have possible alternative judgments)” that also “communicates group beliefs” (Foss, 2018, p. 237). Ideology can “control and coordinate the actions of those who adhere to them” (Foss, 2018, p. 238). Ideology is neutral in and of itself;

it is possible to have many ideologies at once. However, when one ideology is controlled and manipulated over another ideology, it becomes hegemonic.

### **Hegemony**

Hegemony is defined as “the privileging of the ideology of one group over the ideologies of other groups” (Foss, 2018, p. 239). It in essence becomes a form of social control where those with dominant power command their preferred ideology through the notion that they are more advantaged by that particular ideology than others, which results in their ideology becoming hegemonic within the entire group (Foss, 2018). Those without control are programmed to believe that the ideology includes them as well, when in reality it benefits only those in power (Foss, 2018). The hegemonic ideology becomes the perceived normal way of being; in order to keep its dominant hold, it must be “renewed, reinforced, and defended continually through the use of rhetorical strategies and practices” (Foss, 2018, p. 239). Any ideology that challenges the hegemonic ideology is muted or constrained by “sophisticated rhetorical strategies” that can even manipulate the dissenting ideology to be perceived as a supporting ideology for the hegemonic ideology (Foss, 2018, p. 239).

### **Ideological Criticism**

The efforts of ideological criticism “identifies existing arrangements and the ideology behind them, calls attention to them, and opens the way for envisioning alternatives to create a better world” (Foss, 2018, p. 242). Foss explains that within an ideological analysis, “a critic looks beyond the surface structure of an artifact to discover the beliefs, values, and assumptions it suggests,” which in turn reveals the underlying ideology of the artifact (Foss, 2018, p. 237). The researcher who implements ideological criticism in a study will identify the presented and

suggested elements of the artifact, form an ideology based on the artifact's elements, and identify the functions that are implemented through the ideology (Foss, 2018, p. 243). As a result, the researcher would be able to identify and explain the "role of communication in creating and sustaining an ideology" as well as "to discover whose interests are represented in that ideology" (Foss, 2018, p. 242).

### **Data Analysis**

The artifacts were two videos found on two YouTube channels. The first artifact is a video of a 2005 panel discussion held at the June camp meeting for the Southeastern Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This video was located on the YouTube channel entitled "Blacksdahistory". The second artifact was a video of a 2015 panel discussion held at Andrews University on March 7, which was located on the YouTube channel entitled, "weareAUSA." Both videos were recordings of church events. The artifacts were viewed in their entirety several times. The first artifact had a duration of two hours, 13 minutes, 40 seconds; the second artifact had a duration of two hours, 9 minutes, 20 seconds. Notes were transcribed and paraphrased along with the corresponding timestamps of the statements made during the videos. The preliminary analysis of the transcripts was assessed for the ideological perspectives of the panel's participants. The highlights from each artifact were reviewed for a second time in order to identify the themes consistent to the process of textual analysis.

After the themes of the artifacts were identified, they were grouped under several ideologies. The highlights were categorized under a specific ideology that was salient to each artifact. After both artifacts were assessed for the ideologies present within the video, the themes were compared and contrasted from the 2005 video as well as the 2015 video. The results were used to respond to the research questions for this study. Through the analysis of the ideological

concepts, a general understanding was constructed on the perspectives concerning church unity and regional conferences.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### **Artifact #1: The 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Regional Conferences: A Panel Discussion (2005)**

The first artifact was a video recording of a panel discussion during the 2005 camp meeting of the Southeastern Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This video was entitled “The 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Regional Conferences: A Panel Discussion (June 2005)” (Blacksdahistory, 2015). In this presentation, six past and current SDA administrative leaders spoke on the history and the present state of Black Adventism, regional conferences, and its mission within the SDA Church. All the participants were men. The panel members consisted of three regional conference presidents: one former president and two active presidents during the time of the taping. There was one journalist on the panel who was strongly affiliated with the SDA history of regional conferences. Finally, there were two retired administrators who also served as evangelists. All the members were affiliated with Black Adventism and regional conferences.

The discussion began with the charge of Ellen White to help the disadvantaged Black community in the South after slavery was ended. The panel, who shared vivid accounts of the history of the SDA Church before regional conferences were created, cast a dark tone on the time period before the formation of the regional conference structure: the church was very hesitant toward the cause of the Black SDA community. For that reason, the panel concluded that regional conferences were a positive answer to the question of integration in the church.

In the artifact, several main ideologies framed the discussion of the panel. The overarching ideology presented was that regional conferences are effective and are here to stay. One presenter stated that, “You don’t kill a thing that’s working.” The panel described the

expansive growth of the church after regional conferences were created, in membership, the ministerial workforce, and funds. Another presenter shared that during their tenure as an administrative leader, they suffered under White SDA leadership; there were no available resources for him that were appropriate while serving as an evangelist. When the leadership passed over to regional conferences, he was able to receive better tools for his evangelistic campaigns. The presenter also shared that before the structure was created, White SDA pastors were paid more compared to Black SDA pastors. The presenter strongly stressed that in essence, “We ain’t going back” (Blacksdahistory, 2015).

Another ideology presented was that regional conferences are legitimate because of freedom of worship. The previous presenter stressed that freedom of worship allows one to worship with whom they please, because it is their right. For that reason, no one is constrained to worship in a manner that is not comfortable or forced upon them. The opportunity that regional conferences offered would be another avenue of worship to those who are more comfortable in worshipping with their own culture. The presenter stated that freedom of worship transcends culture and language; it is one’s own right to worship where they please. For that reason, regional conferences give the opportunity to facilitate the right of freedom of worship.

The general ideology was that regional conferences are “the greatest missionary impulse” for the urban communities for evangelism and that no state conference affords an opportunity for urban evangelism like regional conferences (Blacksdahistory, 2015). Another presenter affirmed that regional conferences are focused on evangelism. The same participant shared an example of a church within the local conference structure that allotted \$1,500 of their \$500,000 annual budget to evangelism, which paled in comparison to what regional conferences commit to evangelism regularly.

The concept of integration of regional and local conferences was discussed in the panel. The panel's ideology of integration concluded with the agreement that integration was not a solution. The idea of integration was strongly rejected amongst the panel. One participant presented that the conversation of "integration" from the White church leadership alludes to the annihilation of what has been established by Black SDA leadership. Another presenter shared that the SDA Church is more integrated compared to other denominations; other denominations have completely split due to racism while the SDA Church has maintained structure and representation. The general consensus of the panel was that integration of the regional conference structure was not viable.

### **Artifact #2: A Forum on State and Regional Conferences (2015)**

The second artifact was a video recording of a panel discussion held at Andrews University, an SDA institution, on March 7, 2015. This panel was supported by three main student organizations of the university: Andrews University Student Association, Andrews University Adventist Peace Fellowship, and Black Student Christian Forum. The panel participants consisted of ministers, one administrative leader, student representatives, and one professor. There were seven participants in total; six were male, one was female. The panel consisted of different perspectives of the regional conference conversation; all were not directly affiliated with the formation of the structure, yet they had a connection to the church and the regional conference structure through administrative, ministerial, or personal experience.

The discussion began with the history of segregation within SDA institutions and administrative areas of assembly. As the conversation unfolded, the issue of integration and the dissolution of regional conferences appeared, however, the presenters shifted the discussion



toward tackling the issue of racism within the SDA Church rather than focusing on regional conferences as the main problem. Themes of forgiveness and retribution formed the framework of the beginning of the panel discussion.

The overarching ideology found within this artifact was that unity can only come with change from within. The panel participants shared sentiments such as: “We cannot have integration until we deal with our own racism” and that “There is no way we can get beyond the present until we have dealt with the past” (weareAUSA, 2015). They also stressed the idea that diversity in terms of difference is not inherently wrong, with statements such as: “We have to see the importance of understanding each other and loving difference and seeing our difference as a blessing, not a burden” and that “To suggest that everything has to be Eurocentric in order to be correct [is not good]” (weareAUSA, 2015). They reiterated that “change must happen from the administrative level, apologies must be made” (weareAUSA, 2015). However, another opposing ideology that surfaced was that unity may be impossible. A participant stated that due to the issue of racism in the SDA Church, “racism will continue to prevail if we integrate like it did right now” (weareAUSA, 2015). Another presenter shared that “. . .unity doesn’t come through policy,” while another presenter stated that, “Adventism is American; therefore, Adventism has problems with racism” (weareAUSA, 2015).

Another ideology that surfaced was the issue of integration and cultural expression. According to the findings within the artifact, cultural expression would be at stake with integration. A student presenter shared the example of Malcolm X, his failed push for integration in the northern United States, and his perspective of separation rather than segregation, where one can control what is theirs on their own terms. The presenter continued, stating that through regional conferences, “We have our own voice, we speak for our own issues, we have

representation at the NAD level. . .” (weareAUSA, 2015). The presenter shared an example that during the 2014 death of Eric Garner, a Black man who died from police brutality, the Northeastern Conference released a statement stating concerns of injustice as well as standing in solidarity towards finding justice in similar situations of injustice. The presenter stated that, “When we integrate, we won’t have our own voices, our own representation to make voices [*sic*] like that. . .” They added that while Northeastern Conference voiced concerns about the situation of Michael Brown’s death, a Black man who suffered a similar outcome like Garner, the SDA Church’s Facebook page censored comments perceived to be offensive, while other comments that were not as well received as the deleted comments remained on the page, which gave an appearance of bias. The presenter also included an example of an SDA state conference prohibiting the use of drums in their churches. Since drums are often included within the worship services of regional conference congregations, if conferences are integrated, the prohibition of drums could be interpreted as a form of discrimination against the communities and cultures that regional conferences serve.

An emerging ideology in the artifact was that the millennials of the SDA Church are receptive to possible change. One presenter, a student leader stated that as a millennial, “Race is something we care about very much. . . .We want to see a future where we can appreciate diversity” (weareAUSA, 2015). Another participant, a young pastor, stated that, “The younger generation is more ready [*sic*] to move in some direction that reflects something different than what we see now,” while acknowledging the generational gap: “There seems to me to be a difference between what ministers my age, my generation are thinking than those who are older than us” (weareAUSA, 2015).

Another emerging ideology was forgiveness. The consensus came from the panel that within the SDA Church, in order to have conversations of integration, the White SDA community must rebuild the trust that was damaged within the Black SDA community in order for those conversations to happen, for the main reason that prejudice and racism dictated the actions and decisions toward the Black SDA community. One presenter shared, through the analogy of an abusive relationship, it is not up to the abuser to demand forced reconciliation from the one they mistreated. For SDA members who demand the assimilation of regional conferences through its dissolution through the angle of casting the blame on the community that the structure serves, the participant stated that while being open to talking about reconciliation, they stated that “. . . instead of the abuser coming to my people, the abused, saying: ‘Why don’t we get back together?’, I would prefer for them to start the conversation instead with this question: what can we do to make things right?” Another presenter alluded to the notion that there possibly may never be a moment where an open apology from the church leadership is made toward the Black SDA community. They shared the statement that forgiving someone who demonstrates repentance is one thing, but it would be another to forgive someone who does not ask for forgiveness. They shared their personal story of forgiveness toward someone who had caused pain to the presenter, yet never apologized for the wrongdoing, neither did they ask for forgiveness. In this connection, they related this toward the church’s leadership and the Black SDA community, stating that:

We have to learn how to forgive people even when they don’t say ‘I’m sorry’. . . . As it relates to this church’s leadership, whether they repent, or not, at the end of the day, I have to be willing, we have to be willing, to forgive. (weareAUSA, 2015)

Finally, the last emerging ideology is that disassembling regional conferences is not the solution; the SDA Church has to find a way to redefine itself, not on the basis of separation but

unity. One participant, a pastor, stated that the SDA Church needs to address the structure of regional conferences and how it appears to the public, as it would be appalling for someone who is not familiar with the structure. This final ideology refers back to the first two ideologies, that unity can only happen with change, but that unity may be impossible within the SDA Church.

### **Discussion**

The artifacts presented similar ideologies and opposing perspectives at the same time. The artifacts held differing ideologies due primarily to the fact that the artifacts were recorded ten years apart with different participants from varying backgrounds. The first artifact had retired and active administrators serving as participants while the second artifact had a representation of students, clergy, and one professor. This construction of panelists offered diverse ideological perspectives from both artifacts. The first artifact was a celebration of what Black SDA pioneers had done through the use of regional conferences. The audience consisted of members who would be affiliated with regional conferences. The second artifact was a conversation on the current state of the SDA Church regarding the expression of cultural diversity, both past and present. The audience members would contain students, faculty, and community members, some of which would not be familiar with regional conferences or the effects of racism in the SDA Church. All of the second artifact's participants were affiliated with the church, either through profession or through other forms of personal experience. The summary of the ideologies reflected in the artifacts can be found in Table 1:

Table 1

*Ideologies of Selected Artifacts*

Artifact #1	Artifact #2
Regional conferences are effective and are here to stay	Unity can only come with change from within
Regional conferences are legitimate because of freedom of worship	Unity may be impossible
Cultural expression would be at stake with integration	Cultural expression would be at stake with integration
Regional conferences are focused on evangelism, especially urban evangelism	SDA millennials are open to change
	Forgiveness
	Dissolving regional conferences is not the issue; SDA Church must redefine itself on the basis of unity rather than separation

The heart of the analysis consists of historical and contemporary views of regional conferences, racism, and the SDA Church. The first artifact was consistent with the ideology that what has been implemented is effective and should not change, while the second artifact introduces a new ideology into the conversation: there could be unity while on earth, before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This difference of ideology is reflected throughout both artifacts. To clarify, the artifacts both had one similar ideology: cultural expression was at stake with the church’s integration of the conferences. However, the majority of the ideologies presented within the first artifact and the second artifact are in direct contrast with each other. For example, one participant from the first artifact stated that as a life-long Adventist, they were offended when someone stated that regional conferences are a symbol of segregation. This perspective contrasts directly with the millennial ideology of the second artifact where one of the student participants of that panel discussion clearly stated that, “Race is something we care about very much. . . .We want to see a future where we can appreciate diversity” (weareAUSA, 2015).

According to the student presenter, racism and diversity are in conflict with each other. To have a system that is defined by separation of ethnicity is contradicting toward appreciating diversity. This perspective is not in line with the first artifact's perspective, where regional conferences are accepted not as symbols of segregation, rather they are symbols of cultural expression.

Generally, the ideology toward regional conferences that is shared in common discourse is similar to the first artifact's perspective, that regional conferences are effective and that they are here to stay. The ideology of integration was rejected by the presenters within the first artifact because that there was no problem in separation or allowing for self-governance. In fact, these ideologies reflect certain themes found within the review of literature as well as other SDA publications, such as the April 2018 book review of Calvin Rock's *Protest and Progress: Black Seventh-day Adventist Leadership and the Push for Parity*. Statements or differing ideologies that challenge those ideologies are often questioned. For example, the ideology of the second artifact where millennials are seeking racial change in the SDA Church are in direct conflict with the overarching ideologies from the first artifact. A quote found within an *Adventist Review* book review stated that, "We often cite the millennial generation as a group with the most doubts or who believe our current system is an embarrassment" (Andrews University News, 2018). This concern given by the millennial generation of the SDA Church is an alternative ideology to the overarching ideology that regional conferences are valid and effective. This perspective from millennials is significant for the reason that this perspective has rarely appeared within published conversations of regional conferences. This clash of differing ideologies has not been fully explored within the conversation of regional conferences and its future amongst the millennial SDA Church members.

Another conflict of ideology appeared between the two artifacts in the perspective of the foundation of regional conferences and evangelism. The first artifact revealed that regional conferences are fueled by evangelism and its missionary efforts within the urban areas. However, a panel participant within the second artifact brought up the notion that the separation found within the regional conference structure impairs the SDA voice on its witness in religious liberty for the reason that it is founded in the beliefs that all human beings are created in the image of God, with equal treatment and equal human dignity. To allow for separate but equal treatment hints that all are not equal and undermines the idea that all do deserve equal treatment. They also added that regional conferences are a compromise based on “hardhearted spiritual failings” and, while celebrating all the accomplishments that the structure has done, they cannot celebrate the spiritual hardheartedness that created the situation from the beginning (weareAUSA, 2015).

Another ideological conflict results in the perspective that regional conferences allow for the freedom to worship as one desires. One participant within the second artifact shared that the willingness of accepting difference has always been an issue with integration, which makes the notion of freedom of worship challenging within a diverse organization. For example, the participant included, “There’s a joke among Black members that if we want a new church then just go to a . . . nice White church and after a few months we’ll have a new church . . .”, which makes integration difficult (weareAUSA, 2015). The notion of freedom of worship in one’s conference yet not being able to worship consistently outside of one’s conference structure in an inclusive manner challenges the ideology of unity within the denomination.

The underlying ideologies that are at the heart of both artifacts are in contention with each other. Within the first artifact, the ideology is that regional conferences are an institution of success that must not be dismantled for the sake of Black Adventism and the SDA Church. In the

second artifact, the ideology is that the heart of the SDA Church must change in order to produce the unity within diversity that is desired and outlined by the ideals of the SDA Church. The ideology of forgiveness was present within the second artifact but largely missing from the first artifact, which creates difficulty in discussing how to confront and heal the damage from the past. The perspective of the SDA Church is to celebrate unity, yet the complication remains as to how that can be accomplished. With the differing of ideology from the mature generation of the SDA Church in contrast with the millennial generation of the SDA Church, there is a struggle as to how the church should deal with its issues of racism and future relations in terms of social issues and the future of the church amongst the millennial generation.

### **Implications of Findings**

According to Foss (2018), an ideology becomes hegemonic when one ideology as used by those with dominant power, is imposed as their preferred ideology over the ideologies of other groups. This becomes a form of social control by the dominant group over a social group. The preferred ideology, which is now hegemonic, has been accepted as the normal way of being by all members of that particular societal structure when in reality, the hegemonic ideology benefits the dominant group rather than all the group members. This process can be broken when the hegemonic ideology is revealed and acknowledged to be hegemonic by the societal group.

The stance taken by the SDA Church's perspective on the issue of racial integration is that the separation of the church organization based on race is necessary in order to fulfill the mission of the SDA Church; all will be resolved at the second coming of Jesus Christ, where racism and evil will be no more (Hector, 2012; Hollacid, 2016; Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000). This stance is a hegemonic ideology that is present in the conversation of regional conferences



within the SDA Church. This ideology of necessary separation for the sake of the mission appears throughout the entire review of literature; it has not appeared to change as of recent years. It has been normalized and accepted within the discourse of regional conferences, which supports the guidelines found in ideological criticism that a hegemonic ideology “provides a sense that things are the way they have to be” (Foss, 2018, p. 239). For example, during the Rodney King incident in 1992 where King was a victim of police brutality, Black SDA members were cautioned by Black SDA ministers to restrain from revenge and approach the situation with peace and reconciliation for the reason that history demonstrated that, “. . .inter-racial tranquility would occur only in the world to come” (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000, p. 506). The only hope presented from the Black SDA leadership was that calm and open dialogue in the issues of racial injustice would prepare for the future, when the SDA membership would reflect the explosive growth of minorities in North America (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000, p. 506).

This demonstrates the process of how hegemonic ideology is able to maintain dominance among a social group through rhetorical methods and strategies. The hegemonic ideology of necessary separation for the sake of the church’s mission is reinforced through supporting ideologies found throughout the review of literature as well as the first artifact, the 2005 panel discussion of regional conferences from Southeastern Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. For example, one ideology that supports the dominance of the hegemonic ideology in the SDA Church is that regional conferences are effective and are here to stay, which was supported by the participants who stated, “You don’t kill a thing that’s working” and “We ain’t going back” (Blacksdahistory, 2015). In addition, in a 1983 proposition given by the president of the Atlantic Union Conference to merge the Atlantic Union and the Northeastern Conference in order to have

stronger efficiency of the same territory, the Black SDA community opposed the idea, declaring it to be a “bad scheme disguised as integration” (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000, p. 503).

With the support of the separation through regional conferences, the hegemonic ideology is reinforced throughout the church’s conversation on unity and its mission. Another ideology that also supports the hegemony is the ideology that regional conferences are legitimate because of freedom of worship; this allows for unforced expression of worship, which may not include unified worship experiences. Finally, the ideology that seals the argument is that regional conferences are focused on evangelism, especially within the urban communities. Due to its impressive success as an organization for the Black community and for the church, integration would only thwart the mission and progress that has already been established by regional conferences, therefore, the ideological consensus on integration is that it must not happen for the sake of the mission. For those reasons, those ideologies support the hegemonic ideology that separation of Blacks and Whites in the conference structure is necessary in order that the mission of the SDA Church is able to reach its goal of sharing the gospel of Christ to all nations.

The ideology of separation for the church’s sake is directly hegemonic for the fact that any perception that is perceived to be in opposition or in contrast is thought to be abnormal or even rejected. For example, the perspective of SDA members such as millennials or other members, who are concerned by the structure’s appearance of racial segregation or are hesitant to accept the appearance of sanctioned racism, question the legitimacy of the system (Andrews University News, 2018; Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000; weareAUSA, 2015). Based on the second artifact and other literature, millennials and other members of the SDA Church are open to change or redefinition of the church structure (Stunkard, 2014, weareAUSA, 2015). Calvin Rock, while serving as a General Conference vice president, shared with a new SDA member

who was embarrassed at the structuring of regional conferences that while not the biblical ideal for relationships, refusing organization for the Black SDA community would do more harm than good (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000, p. 505). This ideology of change directly challenges the hegemonic ideology of separation within the SDA Church, for that reason, it is swiftly dismissed in favor of maintaining the current regional conference structure (Andrews University News, 2018; Blacksdahistory, 2015; North American Division Administration, 2015). The rationale is due to the success of regional conferences, which plays into the hegemonic ideology of separation for the sake of the church's mission.

The hegemonic ideology affects the ideology of forgiveness, where it is not widely communicated within the discourse of regional conferences due to the hegemony's dominance. The Lake Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists gave a formal apology on June 20, 2015 at the camp meeting of Lake Region Conference, a regional conference in its union. The occasion was the celebration of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lake Region Conference, which was the first regional conference formed. In the apology, the president of the Lake Union Conference apologized for the failures of the SDA Church in its history of allowing racism and taking the path of "the sins of the society" of that time, as well as the lack of progress since the establishment of regional conferences (Lake Union Conference, 2015). The president also recognized that more needed to be done to reconcile themselves to the Black SDA community in order to have a "deeper, more meaningful understanding of each other" that would allow for "more sensitive approaches, more inclusiveness and stronger partnerships" in order to "make us more united as God's people and for His cause that we may come closer together, march together arm and arm now, and then into the Holy City, to spend eternity with our God and each other" (Lake Union Conference, 2015). The apology was accepted by the president of the Lake Region

Conference, who also resonated with the union's resolve to do better in working against the issue of racism, stating that, ". . . as you've stated, an apology is good, but let's work aggressively and vigorously and intentionally now to eliminate this scourge of racism that is so prevalent and pervasive in our land, yea, even in our Church. Let's work together!" (Lake Union Conference, 2015).

Two other administrative apologies have been presented in the past: NAD president Alfred McClure in 1999 at the 1999 NAD Race Summit, and Andrews University president Andrea Luxton in 2016 (Lake Union Conference, 2016; McClure, 1999). Penno (2009) acknowledged McClure's apology, however, few recorded SDA administrative apologies of racism from other sources were found, if any (p. 12). McClure's and Luxton's apologies were quickly overshadowed in the conversation of racism and regional conferences. The shortage of administrative voices in the conversation of forgiveness alludes to hegemonic control in dealing with regional conferences. The opportunity of forgiveness and reconciliation is stagnated by the acceptance of the hegemonic ideology that a resolution to racism within the SDA Church cannot be found on the earthly realm, which necessitates the need for separation in the conference structure. This perspective is in direct contrast of the SDA stance on racism, which "deplores all forms of racism, including the political policy of apartheid with its enforced segregation and legalized discrimination" and reiterates the SDA Fundamental Belief No. 13, *Unity in the Body of Christ*, that, "We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation;" and that "Any other approach destroys the heart of the Christian gospel" (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1985). The acceptance of the hegemonic ideology of necessary separation is incongruent to the SDA belief that all are equal. Any mentioning of the ideology of

integration is perceived as a hostile threat and excluded from the conversation. In maintaining the hegemonic ideology of separation, the mission of the SDA Church in terms of unity is unintentionally weakened and undermined.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to discover and analyze ideologies surrounding the conversation of regional conferences. The SDA Church is known for its diversity worldwide yet it continues to struggle with racial issues. Originally, the SDA Church stemmed from the Millerite movement, a Christian apocalyptic movement that sought to prepare society for the soon-coming of Jesus Christ in 1844. When 1844 came with no return of Christ, many left the movement; however, those who remained decided to delve into more Biblical study to discover what was the missing link. The group eventually decided to organize into the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the year 1863. The SDA Church was also heavily involved in abolitionism within the United States. After the ending of the U.S. Civil War in 1865, the SDA Church eventually began to limit pro-abolitionist actions as a church to eventually be based in more fundamental perspectives, which brought the church to a detached perspective on life and social issues.

One major church leader, Ellen G. White, chastised the SDA administrative leadership for hesitating and ignoring the issues of former slaves in the Southern U.S. She encouraged church members to go and help the disadvantaged Black community on their own accord, without waiting for support from SDA Church leadership. Her son, James Edson White, created a team and built a steamboat called *The Morning Star* and sailed down the Mississippi River from Chicago to Vicksburg, Mississippi in order to help the cause of the Black community in the South. This came with severe threats to property and life to SDA believers in the South who were persistent on demonstrating the belief that all were equal in the eyes of God. This perspective directly clashed with members of the South who wanted to maintain the former ways

of life of separating Blacks from Whites. Out of safety and protection, Ellen G. White suggested to allow Black SDA members to manage themselves with full backing and resources coming from White SDA members as a temporary measure in order to prevent possible loss of life in the South, until there was a better way revealed through divine inspiration. Certain SDA leaders took this belief to be a permanent mandate of church standard that would influence racial relations as a church. Their perspective eventually became normalized as necessary separation for the wellbeing of the SDA Church. The belief was that the coming of Jesus Christ would resolve all issues of evil and wrongdoing, such as racism as well as the church's necessary separation along racial lines.

This perspective produced devastating results for the Black SDA community at large. They were not allowed autonomous leadership, quality resources, even dealing with quotas of Black members at institutions within the fabric of the SDA Church at large. The difficulty grew greater over time to the point that it resulted into schisms from four talented SDA ministers who were Black. The issues of racism within the SDA Church became too great to handle. There began a push for a separation conference structure by Black SDA ministers within the SDA Church to allow for autonomous Black SDA leadership, which was rejected in 1929.

Eventually, the situation grew to a major head in 1943 when Lucille Byard, a Black SDA woman, desired to be admitted to the Washington Sanitarium and Hospital for treatment; the sanitarium was an SDA institution. Upon arrival, Byard's treatment was eventually delayed at the sanitarium due to the fact that she was a Black woman. There are two conflicting accounts: one account stated that Byard and her husband were directly turned away from the sanitarium, another account states that the modified provisions for admitting Byard due to the color of her

skin were refused by the Byards. In the end, Byard did not receive treatment from the sanitarium, but rather from a public hospital. She died a month later.

The anger that roiled within the Black SDA community at Byard's treatment at the sanitarium burned hot and severe. The years of mistreatment and marginalization at the hands of the SDA Church came to its breaking point. The SDA senior leaders tried to calm the situation to no avail. In 1944, a committee created by key members from the Black SDA community brought their findings to the Spring Council Meeting of the White SDA leaders, stating clear examples of the racism perpetrated against the Black SDA community found within policies and decisions made by SDA leadership. The committee requested that the SDA community correct the missteps made as an organization. The leaders decided to allow for a separate structure, created for the Black SDA ministers to be established, known as regional conferences.

The regional conferences quickly exploded in growth; overtime, the SDA membership quadrupled. The regional conference system has been quite successful in facilitating for the Black SDA community in the NAD. Currently, there are nine regional conferences serving within the division. Their impact in urban communities have been remarkable. However, the use of regional conferences as a remedy to racism is not an isolated incident within the SDA Church; the South African SDA community has dealt with a separate church system on racial lines during the times of apartheid as a church decision. The United Kingdom has had their own issues as well, a regional conference structure was on the brink of formation at one point due to racism within the SDA Church in that region.

The uniqueness of regional conferences is that they are only present within some regions of the NAD, mainly in the north, south and eastern regions of the United States. The SDA Church is the most diverse Christian denomination within the United States. On the other hand,



the SDA Church's diversity spans 213 countries out of 235 countries worldwide. In allowing for the separation of the church by racial lines, there is an element of allowing a policy of separation yet equal structuring, which would be counterproductive within an organization that celebrates diversity and unity.

Previous research highlighted the historical elements of the founding of regional conferences and the perspectives of church members. Historically, the SDA Church has fared better than other Christian denominations for the reason that the SDA Church has not split into different denominations, as was the historical trend of Christian denominations that struggled with the issue of racism. SDA members from local churches were also surveyed, the findings pointed to the notion that there is a desire for unification and integration, how it will come about is yet to be discovered. However, the general consensus from the review of literature was that racial reconciliation within the SDA Church is not a viable goal at this time.

This study focused on the ideologies present within the conversation of regional conferences by studying two videos that served as artifacts for analysis. The first artifact was a video recording of a 2005 panel discussion from the Southeastern Conference on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the forming of regional conferences. The second artifact was a video recording of a 2015 panel discussion at Andrews University on the conversation of regional conferences and its presence within the SDA Church. An ideological criticism was used as the method of analysis, where the videos were watched in their entirety. Key points were transcribed from the videos and their timestamps. Preliminary analysis of the video transcripts assessed for the ideological perspectives of the panels' participants. Secondary analysis focused on the emerging themes of each artifact.

The first artifact revealed three ideologies, which were: regional conferences are effective and are here to stay, regional conferences are legitimate because of freedom of worship, and that regional conferences are focused on evangelism, especially urban evangelism. The second artifact contained six ideologies. These ideologies were: unity can only come with change from within, unity may be impossible, cultural expression would be at stake with integration, millennials of the SDA Church are receptive to possible change, the ideology of forgiveness, and that disassembling regional conferences is not the solution; the SDA Church has to find a way to redefine itself, not on the basis of separation but unity. The ideologies presented in both artifacts were in direct contrast to each other except for one: cultural expression would be at stake with integration.

The implication of the findings is that the SDA Church's stance on racial integration and unity is a hegemonic ideology that undermines the church's beliefs on equality and unity. The church's perspective is that it is necessary to separate the church's organization based on race in order to fulfill the mission of the SDA Church and all will be resolved at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, which would also include the end of racism and evil. Until then, the church must remain racially separate. This ideology dominates the majority of the conversation of regional conferences within the SDA Church. This perspective was found throughout the review of literature, supplementary literature, as well as the first artifact. The second artifact carried alternative ideologies that differed from the hegemonic ideology.

The use of the SDA ideology on racial separation prohibits other perspectives to present themselves as viable alternatives. The ideologies of the successes of regional conference feeds into strengthening of the reasonings for the hegemonic ideology. Past opportunities of repentance or perspectives on change that have been presented are quickly put away in order to support the

SDA ideology on racial separation. This allows the hegemonic ideology on racial separation within the SDA Church to be reinforced continually, which is in opposition to the SDA belief that all are equal. Any mentioning of integration is perceived to be hostile and is quickly rejected. For that reason, the possibility of structural unity within the SDA Church becomes stagnant without clear resolution.

### **Recommendations**

Due to the volatile nature of this study, the selected artifacts allowed for more depth of knowledge. As a recommendation for future study, one clear recommendation would be to survey the current administrative SDA leadership about their attitudes concerning regional conferences and unity in the church, either through a questionnaire or through interviews. The administrative voice is not strong enough within the current conversation. A survey would gather data for a much-needed perspective on the church and its future where unity is concerned.

Other recommendations for future study are:

1. Assessment of the SDA Church's actions to communicate improved/strengthened racial relations within the church.
2. The international Black SDA community and their history/perspective on segregation in the church.
3. The views of the international Black SDA community (West Indian, African, etc.) vs. the Afro-American SDA community in the SDA Church.
4. The millennial perspective regarding intersectionality and the SDA Church.
5. Cultural conflict and segregation of other ethnic groups within the SDA Church.
6. The female perspective regarding regional conferences within the SDA Church.

7. A textual analysis of Lake Union Conference's 2016 event entitled: *A Journey to Healing and Understanding*.

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