

# BRAD R. BRAXTON

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## Summary of Qualifications

- **Scholarly and Public Speaking Expertise** – Rhodes Scholar. Thought leader in religion, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Held tenured professorships in religion at Southern Methodist University and Vanderbilt University. Taught courses on religion, diversity, and social justice at Harvard University. Widely-published author with 3 scholarly books and more than 30 essays and online publications. 20+ years of numerous speaking engagements at universities, academic conferences, and interreligious gatherings. International speaking appearances in Benin, Canada, England, Ghana, and South Africa.
- **Leadership Skills for Diverse Groups** – Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer at St. Luke’s School in New York City. Curator for a 2022 Smithsonian Institution national festival on religious pluralism. 15+ years providing spiritual guidance to university faculty, staff, and students from diverse backgrounds. 14 years serving as a Senior Pastor in progressive, urban congregations. Consensus-builder with strong facilitation and listening skills. Ordained Christian clergy.
- **Management Capabilities** – Managed 5 staff persons, 5 postdoctoral fellows, and a \$10 million grant at a Smithsonian Institution religion research center. Developed expertise in grant writing and evaluation as a program officer at the Ford Foundation. Served as Senior Minister of New York City’s historic Riverside Church. Established a non-profit organization committed to interreligious collaboration.

## Education

**Ph.D.**, 1999

Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia

Primary Area: New Testament Studies, Secondary Area: Homiletics (Preaching)

Ph.D. dissertation examined the Bible’s role in Roman and U.S. slavery.

**George W. Woodruff Fellow (four-year, full-tuition scholarship and stipend)**

**The George W. Woodruff Fellowship is “awarded to students who have demonstrated outstanding academic achievements and who show excellent promise as future leaders in their fields.”**

**M.Phil. (Master of Philosophy)**, 1993

University of Oxford, Oxford, England

Primary Area: Theology (New Testament Studies)

**Rhodes Scholar (two-year, full-tuition scholarship and stipend)**

**Rhodes Scholars demonstrate “literary and scholastic attainments; energy to use one’s talents to the full; truth, courage, devotion to duty; sympathy for and protection of the weak; kindness, unselfishness, and fellowship; moral force of character; instincts to lead and to take an interest in one’s fellow beings.”**

**B.A.**, 1991

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia

Major: Religious Studies, Minor: Classics

**Phi Beta Kappa, Magna Cum Laude Graduate, Jefferson Scholar (four-year, full-tuition scholarship)**

**The Jefferson Scholarship is the “premier undergraduate scholarship at the University of Virginia. Scholars are selected through a rigorous selection process that is based on exceptional performance in the areas of leadership, scholarship, and citizenship.”**

**Professional Experience**

**Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer**, St. Luke's School, New York, New York: Report to the Head of School at this coeducational, Episcopal day school. Provide thought leadership and strategic guidance to enhance St. Luke's institutional equity. Mentor and engage students in classroom instruction concerning social justice, leadership, and diverse religious traditions. Facilitate parent and student affinity groups. Connect St. Luke's School to local and national partners in educational, religious, and philanthropic organizations. 2019-present.

**Curator for Living Religions in Twenty-First-Century America**, Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Washington, DC. I am facilitating a team of Smithsonian scholars and diverse religious leaders across the US in planning the 2022 Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the National Mall in Washington, DC. The Festival will attract more than 700,000 visitors and will examine the diverse religious landscape in the US. 2020-present (part-time).

**Founding Senior Pastor**, The Open Church, Baltimore, Maryland: Established an intercultural non-profit organization committed to social activism. Lead initiatives including Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and religiously unaffiliated communities. The organization supports LGBTQ equality. Provide visionary oversight for a staff of 8 persons. The organization has raised more than \$1.5 million to support its diversity and social justice initiatives. 2011-present (part-time).

**Director and Supervisory Curator of Religion**, The Center for the Study of African American Religious Life, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, DC: Provided thought leadership, produced public programs, and collected artifacts relating to African American religion. Managed five staff persons, five postdoctoral fellows, and a \$10 million grant. Served as an ambassador to educational and religious institutions. 2018-2019.

**Adjunct Lecturer**, Department of Theology, Georgetown University, Washington, DC: Taught undergraduate courses on religion, diversity, and social justice in the 2017 fall semester. Mentored undergraduate students. Delivered the Martin Luther King, Jr. pedagogy lecture to Georgetown faculty and staff in the 2019 spring semester. 2017-2019 (part-time).

**Adjunct Lecturer**, Divinity School, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Taught graduate courses on religion, diversity, and social justice. Mentored graduate students. Received a faculty mentoring award from Harvard graduate students for my contributions to diversity and students' success and well-being. 2016-2017 (part-time).

**Program Officer, Religion in the Public Sphere**, Ford Foundation, New York, New York: Managed the Ford Foundation's \$3.4 million annual investment in religious activism. Reviewed grant proposals and recommended to the Foundation's senior leadership grant disbursements. Served as the Foundation's thought leader on religion's role in fostering diversity, inclusion, and social justice. 2014-2015.

**Lois Craddock Perkins Professor of Homiletics (Preaching), with tenure**, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University (SMU), Dallas, Texas: I was the first African American to come to SMU with an appointment to an endowed faculty chair. Conducted research on social inclusiveness and cultural diversity. Taught graduate courses on the role of religious practices in fostering diversity, inclusion, and social justice. Mentored graduate students. 2012-2014.

**Distinguished Visiting Scholar**, McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois: Organized a public conference on the role of religious rhetoric and ethics in public leadership and delivered keynote lectures. Conducted research on social inclusiveness and cultural diversity. Taught graduate courses on the role of religious practices in fostering diversity, inclusion, and social justice. 2010-2012.

**Senior Minister**, The Riverside Church, New York, New York: Provided pastoral and administrative leadership for large, ecumenical congregation. Managed 100+ staff persons. Oversight of \$12 million annual budget. Ministries dealt with social justice issues such as strengthening early childhood education, reforming the criminal justice system, and alleviating poverty. Delivered keynote speech at an international conference uniting Muslims, Jews, and Christians. 2008-2009.

**Associate Professor of Homiletics (Preaching) and New Testament, with tenure**, Divinity School, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee: Supervised Ph.D. dissertation on religion and racial justice. Participated on a faculty task force examining cultural diversity and social justice in higher education. Chaired and served on successful search committees that enhanced the gender and racial diversity of the faculty. Supervised departmental self-study comparing department to peer institutions. Taught graduate courses on the role of religious practices in fostering diversity, inclusion, and social justice. Mentored graduate students. 2004-2008.

**Jessie Ball duPont Assistant Professor of Homiletics (Preaching) and Biblical Studies**, School of Divinity, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina: Chaired the School of Divinity's accreditation steering committee. Supervised master's theses on religion and social justice. Taught graduate courses on the role of religious practices in fostering diversity, inclusion, and social justice. Organized the School of Divinity's Black Student Association. Mentored graduate students. 2000-2004.

**Senior Pastor**, Douglas Memorial Community Church, Baltimore, Maryland: Provided pastoral and administrative leadership for mid-size, ecumenical congregation. Ministries included 50-acre residential camp for youth, moderate-income apartment complex, federal credit union, and interfaith dialogues with Baltimore's Jewish community. Hired and managed a paid and volunteer staff of 10+ persons. Oversight of \$750,000 annual budget. 1995-2000.

## Publications

### Books

*Preaching Paul*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004. (This 208-page book examines the theological, ethical, and homiletical significance of the Apostle Paul, one of the earliest and most influential interpreters of Jesus of Nazareth.)

*No Longer Slaves: Galatians and African American Experience*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002. (This 160-page book explores the lingering "mental slavery" in many African American communities that fosters violence and poverty and recommends solutions for racial justice and inclusion.)

*The Tyranny of Resolution: I Corinthians 7:17-24*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000. (This 302-page book explores the ambiguous role the Bible played in first century and nineteenth century debates about slavery.)

## Selected Articles

**“Policy and Poetry: Progressive African American Religion in the Public Square”** in *Religion and the Public Sphere in Africa and the African Diaspora*, ed. Jacob Olupona, Forthcoming; manuscript submitted to the editor. (This article examines the role of religiously-inspired art and poetics in progressive social change.)

**“Aiding and Abetting New Life: ‘Sex-Talk’ in the Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square”** in *The Sexual Politics of Black Churches*, ed. Josef Sorett. New York: Columbia University Press, Forthcoming 2020; manuscript submitted to the editor. (This article examines ways to foster healing and constructive discussions concerning diverse sexual identities in religious communities and public venues.)

**“Baptism and Holy Communion: Affirming that Black Lives Matter”** in *T&T Clark Handbook of African American Theology*, ed. Frederick L. Ware, Antonia M. Daymond, and Eric Lewis Williams, 197-211. New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019. (This article examines how religious rituals can foster political consciousness and social inclusiveness in African American communities.)

**“An Experiment in Radical Religious Openness”** in *Intercultural Ministry: Hope for a Changing World*, ed. Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Jann Aldredge-Clanton, 81-96. King of Prussia, PA: Judson Press, 2017. (This article explores how progressive religious approaches can sponsor diversity, inclusion, and social justice in intercultural communities.)

**“From ‘It’s Just Words’ to Just Words: Speech Ethics in the Time of Trump”** in *Religion Dispatches*. <http://religiondispatches.org/from-its-just-words-to-just-words-speech-ethics-in-the-time-of-trump>, October 2016. (This article examines how diverse religious perspectives can improve the content and tone of public conversations, especially in light of the divisive rhetoric of the 2016 presidential campaign.)

**“The Grace of the Lord Jesus Be with All: A Minister’s Conversion to Religious Pluralism”** in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*. <https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/articles/summerautumn2016/grace-of-lord-jesus-be-with-all>, Summer/Autumn 2016. (This article presents an inclusive approach to religious pluralism that fosters cooperation among diverse religious traditions.)

**“The Zimmerman Verdict: There’s a New Justice in Town”** in *The Huffington Post*. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brad-r-braxton/zimmerman-verdict\\_b\\_3635159.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brad-r-braxton/zimmerman-verdict_b_3635159.html), July 2013. (This article calls for restorative justice in the aftermath of the death of Trayvon Martin.)

**“Every Time I Feel the Spirit: African American Christology for a Pluralistic World”** in *Radical Christian Voices and Practice: Essays in Honor of Christopher Rowland*, ed. Zoë Bennett and David Gowler, 181-199. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. (This article examines how African American religious resources can promote social justice and the embrace of religious pluralism.)

**“Leave No Change Behind (Preaching for Social Transformation)”** in *Sojourners*. <http://sojo.net/magazine/2012/08/leave-no-change-behind>, August 2012. (This article provides practical counsel to religious leaders and social activists concerning imaginative and courageous public speaking on social justice issues.)

**“Same-Sex Marriage Support: A Sign of Love, Acceptance and Devotion to God”** Opinion Editorial in *The Washington Post*.

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/same-sex-marriage-support-a-sign-of-love-acceptance-and-devotion-to-god/2012/05/16/gIQAlkFkTU\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/same-sex-marriage-support-a-sign-of-love-acceptance-and-devotion-to-god/2012/05/16/gIQAlkFkTU_story.html), May 2012.

(This article provides a progressive religious rationale for marriage equality.)

**“Preaching, Politics, and Paul in Contemporary African American Christianity”** in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, ed. Michael Lieb, Emma Mason, Jonathan Roberts, and Christopher Rowland, 557-575. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. (This article investigates the religious and political significance of contemporary African American sermons based on the letters of the Apostle Paul.)

**“Lifting the Veil: *The Shoah* (The Jewish Holocaust) and *The Maafa* (The African Holocaust) in Conversation”** in *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, vol. 38, number 2 (2011): 185-193. (This article examines the similarities of the genocides experienced by the Jewish and African American communities.)

**“Getting in Front of Jesus: The Politics of Progressive Christianity”** in *The Huffington Post*. Part I: [www.huffingtonpost.com/brad-r-braxton/getting-in-front-of-jesus\\_b\\_649152.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brad-r-braxton/getting-in-front-of-jesus_b_649152.html), July 2010. Part II: [www.huffingtonpost.com/brad-r-braxton/getting-in-front-of-jesus\\_b\\_680553.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brad-r-braxton/getting-in-front-of-jesus_b_680553.html), August 2010. (This two-part article argues that progressive approaches to religion, rather than conservative approaches, more accurately represent Jesus’ counter-cultural legacy.)

**“What Happened to Sacred Eloquence? (Celebrating the Ministry of Gardner C. Taylor)”** [co-authored with Martha Simmons] in *Our Sufficiency Is of God: Essays on Preaching in Honor of Gardner C. Taylor*, ed. Timothy George, James Earl Massey, and Robert Smith, Jr., 272-300. Macon: Mercer University Press, 2010. (This article explores the theological and rhetorical genius of Gardner C. Taylor, one of the most celebrated American preachers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and a mentor to Martin Luther King, Jr.)

**“Paul and Racial Reconciliation: A Postcolonial Approach to 2 Corinthians 3:12-18”** in *Scripture and Traditions: Essays on Early Judaism and Christianity in Honor of Carl R. Holladay*, ed. Gail O’Day and Patrick Gray, 411-428. Leiden: Boston, 2008. (This article examines the Bible’s problematic role in trans-Atlantic slavery and the Bible’s promising role in contemporary public dialogues about racial justice and reconciliation.)

#### Selected Academic Projects

**Contributing Editor, *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present***, ed. Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010. This 960-page anthology chronicles the contributions of African American religious rhetoric to national and international movements for social justice. I wrote historical synopses for the anthology and served as an editorial consultant. 2003-2010.

**Scholar-in-Residence**, Social Justice Global Immersion Trip to Ghana and South Africa. Served as thought leader and cultural ambassador during trip sponsored by the Ford Foundation. Visited educational and cultural sites in Accra and Cape Coast, Ghana and Cape Town and Johannesburg, South Africa. Established dialogue with African leaders about economic, educational, and healthcare ventures. Prepared a twenty-five-page report examining cultural principles for local and global social justice work. Presented the report at a national leadership conference. 2007-2008.

**Work in Progress**

***Give Yourself to the Wind: Interpretive Essays on the Public Theology and Religious Rhetoric of James A. Forbes, Jr.*** (I am co-editing with Eric Lewis Williams a volume of scholarly essays interpreting the public impact and rhetorical genius of James A. Forbes, Jr., the first African American Senior Minister of New York City's historic Riverside Church and a renowned progressive theologian.)

***School Is in Session: Lessons from the Left to Make the World Right.*** (I am preparing the proposal for a book-length collection of my essays and public addresses examining cultural diversity, social justice, and religious rhetoric from a progressive perspective.)

***On Purpose: Opening Churches to Keep Them from Closing.*** (I am preparing the proposal for a book examining the founding of The Open Church of Maryland and the moral courage and leadership skills needed to create intercultural communities committed to inclusion, innovation, and social justice. Howard Thurman's book *Footprints of a Dream: The Story of the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples* is the inspiration and model for this book project.)

**Selected Lectures**

**"Broad Meadows and Open Tables: Spiritual Openness in a University,"** Division of Student Affairs, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. May 2019. (This lecture explored the role of progressive forms of spirituality in the holistic nurturing of university students.)

**"Lifting the Veil: Religion, Reparations, and Reconciliation,"** UNESCO International Conference on New Approaches in Interpreting and Representing Slavery in Museums and Sites, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia. March 2018. (Representatives from more than a dozen nations attended the conference. My lecture examined how postcolonial readings of the Bible can provide intellectual and moral frameworks to rectify the lingering injustice and trauma from trans-Atlantic slavery.)

**"Faith-Based Social Enterprise,"** 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Social Enterprise Conference, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. March 2017. (I moderated and spoke on an interracial and interreligious panel of non-profit leaders who examined the role of religion and values in social entrepreneurship.)

**"Blueprint for the Beloved Community: Vocation, Values, and Voice,"** Harry Vaughan Smith Distinguished Lectures, Mercer University, Macon, Georgia. February 2017. (This lecture investigated the moral dimensions of effective public leadership.)

**"Street Corner Religion: Public Theology for a Pluralistic World,"** Schaff Lectures, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. April 2016. (This lecture invited scholars and religious communities to join practical, public efforts to reduce violence and overcome racial and religious bigotry.)

**"Violence and Reconciliation: Three Dimensions of Restoration,"** Samuel DeWitt Proctor National Social Justice Conference, Norfolk, Virginia. February 2015. (This lecture examined how violence ruptures the personal, communal, and spiritual dimensions of human interaction. The lecture also provided constructive suggestions for promoting reconciliation after violence.)

**Selected Preaching Engagements**

Morning Worship Service, Diversity and Inclusion Conference, National Association of Episcopal Schools, Baltimore, Maryland. March 2020.

Commemoration Service, 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, DC. April 2018.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Interfaith Service, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts. January 2017.

Chapel Service, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts. February 2016.

Green the Church: An Environmental Justice Summit, Trinity United Church of Christ, Chicago, Illinois. August 2015.

Interfaith Organizing Initiative's National Summit on Criminalization and Race, Chicago, Illinois. May 2014.

Distinguished Preachers Series, Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia. March 2012.

Chapel Service, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut. November 2009.

Sunday Worship Service, Westminster Abbey, London, England. (The service was part of the bicentennial commemoration of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.) March 2007.

**Selected Courses Taught**

**“The Bible and Contemporary Cultures”** (This course highlights the role of cultural contexts on interpretations of the Bible. The course also introduces students to a variety of contextual reading strategies practiced in African, African American, Asian, Asian American, Latin American, and LGBTQ communities.)

**“The New Testament and Politics: Ethical Considerations”** (This course explores the Apostle Paul's responses to pressing political, ethical, and religious issues of his time such as Roman imperialism, slavery, ethnic reconciliation, gender equity, and sexual behavior. The course also examines the enduring role of the Apostle Paul's letters in contemporary conversations concerning political and ethical issues.)

**“African American Religious Rhetoric”** (This course examines the historical foundations, social justice commitments, and rhetorical features of African American religious rhetoric. The course also situates African American religious rhetoric in larger, pan-African cultural contexts.)

**“Rhetoric and Ritual: An Interdisciplinary Investigation”** (This course invites students to consider the interdisciplinary nature of rhetorical practices and public rituals in religious communities. Within the framework of practice-based learning, the course introduces students to a variety of disciplines including media studies, human development theory, critical discourse analysis, and performance studies.)

**“Pluralism and Public Speaking”** (This course responds to the question: How do leaders and social activists speak life-giving words in diverse cultural contexts? The course engages the fields of cultural studies and interreligious studies and draws upon my extensive entrepreneurial experience in establishing an inclusive non-profit organization committed to intercultural harmony.)