A worldwide Christian denomination of some eighteen million in global membership, and with a presence in over 200 countries and territories (i.e., in just about every country on the globe), the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church is one with a distinctive arrangement in the U.S., insofar as it concerns its racial segregation practice. The SDA Church professes and preaches unity in the pulpit, as in all members being equal and one in the faith, yet the actual practice says otherwise. Such is the case since it is officially segregated along black-white lines.

The segregation arrangement, essentially a black-white schism, falls within the overall denominational structure, at the two bottom levels of the general church structure (i.e., from the local church to the local conference). This is unlike other denominations such as Baptists and Methodists, for instance, which have experienced total racial divisions in their general membership, and have totally separate black and white church organizational structures. Thus, gaining deeper insight into this racialized structure and unique SDA arrangement lies at the heart of the metanarrative driving this social research.

This is a qualitative study with a focus on the Detroit area which, in itself, offers a picture of the broader SDA segregated pattern in America. In pursuing this study the
socio-historical backdrop was considered, in order to better examine the societal dynamics and the meanings involved in SDA (black-white) racial segregation. To accomplish this, 36 semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out, seeking members and pastors’ perspectives on the racially segregated arrangement, from separate black and white SDA churches.

Theoretical insight formed an integral part of this study, particularly cultural toolkit theory and the homophily principle. The findings show that these theoretical lenses, along with other social dynamics and a history of racial prejudice and tensions in the SDA Church, help explain the persistent segregation in the denomination, accentuated by its attendant inequality. This study and its findings should: (a) prove useful to American SDA leaders, and (b) be of at least informative value to church members, besides its contribution to the overall academic work on ‘race,’ religion, and society.