

REFRAMING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT OF BLACK PARENTS:  
BLACK PARENTAL PROTECTIONISM

Jada Phelps Moultrie

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James Joseph Scheurich Ph.D., Committee  
Chair

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Gerardo Lopez, Ph.D.

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Jomo Mutegi, Ph.D.

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Samantha Scribner, Ph.D.

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Carlton Waterhouse, Ph.D.

Doctoral Committee

May 11, 2016

## **Dedication**

This is dedicated to all Black parents, specifically, the participants in this study, as well as my parents and my grandparents. Each name recalled in dedication, I have drawn my strength from and is how I got through this journey. I would specifically like to dedicate this work to Violet Hogan my fifth great paternal grandmother and my own mother, DiLynn Valerie Thomas Phelps, and father, Marcus Anthony Phelps I. My brother, Lil' Marcus Anthony Phelps II, father of my nephew, Marcus III. In spirit Ruth and Elzie Phelps, parents of Michael and Morris Smitherman, Marcus, Marietta, Mitchell, and Molly Phelps; In spirit Pearl and Terrell Thomas I, parents of Edith, Terrell "Bro", Marilyn, Kenneth, DiLynn, and Van Veen Thomas; Robin Khan, mother of Antoin Moultrie; and Antoin Mandel Moultrie, my husband and stepfather of my son Stephen Jaden Mosby, "Victorious Leader", father of my son Andric Jasiri Moultrie, "Fearless Warrior" and father to my daughter, Alaira Janie Lynn Moultrie, "the Great Unifier and Beautiful Gift from God". We are rich in family. Together we rise.

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soul, your emotional strength, and your togetherness held me together. I am and will always be forever yours. – Love Jada

Jada Phelps Moultrie

REFRAMING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT OF BLACK PARENTS:

BLACK PARENTAL PROTECTIONISM

In 1787, Prince Hall, a Revolutionary War veteran, community leader, and Black parent, petitioned the Massachusetts legislature on behalf of Black children demanding a separate “African” school. Hall claimed that Black children were met with continuous hostility and suffered maltreatment when attending White controlled schools. Many have documented similar claims and actions by Black parents throughout history. These experiences present a consistent insidious counter-narrative of parental involvement challenging the notion of race neutral schools but congruently demonstrate a racial phenomenon in the purview of parental involvement that is undertheorized.

Considering these experiences, my central research question was, how is one involved as a Black parent in their child’s education? Among 16 sets of Black parents, this study explored the relationship between race, racism, parental involvement using critical race theory (CRT), and critical qualitative research methods. Findings indicate that Black parental involvement included the consideration of how race and racism in schools may impact, at the very least, their children’s academic achievement, which led to two means of protection of their children from anticipated or experienced school-related racism; racial socialization, which was chiefly exercised as involvement at the home level, and racial vigilance, which seemed to be a pervasive form of involvement at the school and home level. I consider the totality of these parental involvement means, Black parental protectionism drawing from Mazama and Lundy conception of racial protectionism. This finding should reframe our understanding of parental involvement

but the implications of Black parent protectionism suggest that Black children need protection from racist institutions. When considering the treatment of Black children in White dominated schools over the last four centuries, perhaps Black parents have been their children's only saving grace to escape the continuous racial maltreatment in schools through time. Instead of falling into traditional research paradigms, which typically relate involvement to achievement, this study concludes with questioning if Black children can receive an optimal education in a pervasive system of racism in schools regardless of Black parental protectionism.

James Joseph Scheurich Ph.D., Committee  
Chair

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

In 1787, Prince Hall, a Revolutionary War veteran, community leader, and Black<sup>1</sup> parent, petitioned the Massachusetts Legislature on behalf of Black children and their parents demanding a separate “African” school (Bell, 1980). Before this legislature, Hall claimed that Black children were met with continuous hostility and suffered maltreatment while attending White dominated schools (Bell, 1980). Many scholars have documented similar claims of racial hostility asserted by Black parents in the pre-Civil Rights<sup>2</sup> eras in addition to Bell (1980). A few span of examples across various fields of education and throughout pre-Civil Rights periods can be found in the scholarship of Woodson (1919a, 1919b, 2008) Newby and Tyack (1971), and Fields-Smith (2006), each demonstrating a pattern of racial concerns held by parents regarding Black education<sup>3</sup> (King, 2006). However, considering the racial context of these periods it may come as no surprise that Black parents would render such declarations.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this study, those of Black African ancestry will be referred to as "Black", "African American", or "Black American". Black is capitalized in this study, as it denotes a particular sociocultural group.

<sup>2</sup> The eras prior to the Civil Rights Movement have typically been regarded as periods plagued with structural and institutional racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Feagin, 2006; Feagin, 2010; Feagin, 2014; Harris, 1992) dating back to at least the U.S. Constitutional Convention in 1787—the same year in which Prince Hall makes his professions as a parent. Feagin (2010) discusses how the foundations of racism were crafted during this Convention. Drawing from numerous empirical research and historical primary documents, Feagin juxtaposes the general sentiment of the Convention’s symbolism, one in which many believe to be noble origins of democracy, stating “[y]et, from the beginning, this house’s foundation was fundamentally flawed. While most Americans have thought of this document and the sociopolitical structure it created as keeping the nation together, in fact this structure was created to maintain racial separation and oppression at the time and for the foreseeable future (Feagin, 2010, p. 9).

<sup>3</sup> Because this study claims that Black students experience education in a markedly different way in comparison to other groups, the terminology, “Black education” as presented by King (2006) will be used throughout this study. King’s research centers the experiences of Black students, families, and communities and considers how racism, colonialism, imperialism, and so forth have directly and indirectly shaped the state of Black education.

But in these contemporary times where claims of “post-racialism” and colorblindness are often presented to be the adopted racial ideology of U.S. society (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), there are contrasting claims of racial maltreatment that remain a pervasive strife of African American parents in PK-12 education, particularly among studies that account for race and racism (e.g. Allen, 2012; Fields-Smith, 2005; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Fields-Smith, 2006; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Lundy & Mazama, 2014; Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Reynolds, 2010; Shujaa, 1992; Thompson, 2003) but even in studies with different theoretical underpinnings to rationalize the parental involvement of Black parents and decenters the role of race and racism (Lareau, 2011; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Rao, 2000; West-Olatunji, Sanders, Mehta, & Behar-Horenstein, 2010).

An example of a study that centers race and racism using Critical Race Theory (CRT) is found in Reynolds (2010) qualitative empirical study with Black middle-class parents. In Reynolds (2010), parents reported that their children were met with “unspoken hostility, [and] received implied negative messages” (p. 510) from school officials. Although Thompson’s (2003) quantitative empirical study does not theorize race, the findings compliment that of Reynolds (2010). In Thompson’s (2003) fifty-one percent of 121 Black parents ranging in demographics indicated that the racial climate was their most problematic concern of schools. A substantial number of these participants claimed, “that adults on campus were the culprits [of racism]” (p. 11, Thompson, 2003). Thompson claimed that this sentiment might have been higher for many Black parents omitted questions pertaining to “race”. Using an Afrocentric lens, Mazama and Lundy’s (2012) empirical study of Black parental involvement in homeschooling yielded similar

contentions among 60 African American parent participants. The researchers conducted 74 open-ended interviews among participants residing across major metropolitan areas (e.g. Chicago, Philadelphia, Atlanta, New York City) and surrounding suburbs and found that many parents saw both private and public schools as emotionally unsafe for Black children due to the “outrageous racial insensitivity” that plagued their experiences. Overall parents described “[s]chools and their agents... as playing a critical role in the reproduction of the racist social setup and therefore understood as being antithetical to African American welfare” (2012, pgs. 733-734). To add, the participants had numerous complaints of teachers describing them “as major agents of covert and overt racism... were... unresponsive and overly critical of Black children, mean to them, unsupportive, unwilling or unable to show compassion and patience, abusing their authority, and treating Black children like animals (Mazama & Lundy, 2012, p. 734).” These examples, along with other studies (Allen, 2012; Cooper, 2007; Elliot & Aseltine, 2013; Fields-Smith, 2006; Reynolds, 2010; Shujaa, 1992) show that Black parents have repeatedly reported racially hostile school environments when discussing their children’s and their own interactions with White dominated educational systems. For these reasons, it is plausible that racism in schools may play a critical role in a parent’s involvement<sup>4</sup> in their child’s education.

The evidence of this plausibility is also found within many counter-narratives of Black parents—even within studies that assert external demographic features (e.g. SES)

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<sup>4</sup> A review of the literature of parental involvement and its definitions is provided in chapter two. Although there is no consensus, McNeal, a prolific scholar in the field of parental involvement, offers a definition that either encompasses or is in congruence with several others. McNeal (2014) defines parent involvement as “any action taken by a parent that can theoretically be expected to improve student performance or behavior. In other words, parent involvement consists of those actions that help a child meet or exceed the norms or expectations of the student role and encompasses parent-child, parent-teacher, and to some degree parent-parent relations.” (p. 564).

supersede racism and use theoretical frameworks that do not attend to racism (social class capital as presented by Bourdieu by Lareau and Horvat, 1999). For example, in Lareau and Horvat's (1999) study, many Black parents declared that their school continuously racially discriminated their children in covert and overt ways. One "working class" family, the Mason's, openly fought elements of race discrimination through their advocacy for increased African American representation at the school level challenging the Euro-centered focus and curriculum of the school. Specifically, the Mason's claimed that the school "systematically ignored the celebration of black heroes" (p. 43). Teachers even commented that the Mason's third grade daughter would call the teachers prejudice, which perhaps could be a result of racial socialization (Caughy, Nettles, & Lima, 2011; Lesane-Brown, 2006; Neblett, Smalls, Ford, Nguyen, & Sellers, 2009; Neblett et al., 2008), a common feature of parenting practices among Black families for centuries (Williams, 2009). Despite these findings, Lareau and Horvat (1999) attribute the Mason's parental involvement to their possession and activation of social class capital, apparently inherited by the mores of the working class—not the anti-Black racism that their daughter and other Black children were repeatedly exposed to.

Drawing from the Mason's counter-narrative, the type and context of racism experienced seems to be a more poignant and direct impact on their involvement aside from a presumptive class consciousness that Lareau and Horvat (1999) assign to the Black family. I argue this conclusion to be a misnomer for it largely disregards a historical pattern of home and school level of involvement that align with the Mason's actions and other Black parents and families throughout the history of Black education in America. Despite the saliency of race and racism as a source of contention in the counter-

narratives of African American parents, treating them as secondary or nonexistent factors in the parental involvement literature is a normative feature. For example, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) reviewed literature on parental involvement do not highlight any studies that found race or racism as a factor, despite identifying several studies that have found racism to be something parents of marginalized groups contend with (e.g. Lopez, 2003).

In order to contextualize this point, I offer several historical examples that demonstrate that racism has been an ever-present encounter for Black parents in the education system and other commonly explored variables (e.g. class, parental proficiencies) seem to be secondary factors when considering these on-going racialized hostile encounters. For example, during chattel slavery, Black parents and fictive kin established secret learning communities (Williams, 2009) primarily in response to slave codes that were inaugurated in fear of slave insurrections thereby forbidding the education of enslaved Africans (Fuller, 2002; Stamp, 2011). During the Jim Crow period, a time when separate was inherently unequal—specifically in allocating resources between African American and White students Black parents worked toward providing their children with basic school necessities that were afforded to all-White schools but withheld from all-Black schools (Anderson, 1978; Anderson, 1988; Fields-Smith, 2005; Newby & Tyack, 1971). Several empirical studies and historical manuscripts discuss the parental involvement activities of Black parents that range from fundraising for items not afforded to all-Black schools, such as building repairs, transportation, books and so forth not provided by the White controlled school boards elected (see Fields-Smith, 2005 for example). Even in the post-Civil Rights “race-neutral” era, many scholars have detailed

how Black parents sought community control of their schools (Bell, 1980; Newby & Tyack, 1971; Slaughter-Defoe, 1991; Tyack, 1974). Bell (1980), one of the key pioneers of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and prominent assistant counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense supervising over 300 school desegregation cases, discussed parental sentiments that led to their desire to regain local school control for their children in the wake of *Brown*<sup>5</sup>. Bell professed that many of the NAACP's Black parent plaintiffs (see Bell, 1976) attempted to reclaim their local schools after the first wave of desegregation efforts and did so because they believed that “[their] children don’t stand a chance in the [integrated] schools because teachers favor white children” (Bell, 1980, p. 283). Presently, some half-century after the Civil Rights Movement, we see an unprecedented growing parental response to racism in schools during this post-racial period. In mass numbers, Black parents are opting out of racist institutions by choosing to homeschool (Fields-Smith, 2005; Lundy & Mazama, 2014; Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Ray, 2015). Mazama and Lundy (2012) highlight that in the small number of studies focused on African American homeschooling parents, the researchers “unmistakably and constantly identified racism as an important factor in the African American decision to homeschool” (p. 733). Moreover, in Mazama and Lundy’s own study, Black parents overwhelmingly choose homeschooling in order to protect their child from school-related racism. Mazama and Lundy termed this typology of parental-determination “racial protectionism” distinguishing these parents as “racial protectionist”.

These counter-narratives are not an exhaustive list of parental actions taken by African Americans to mitigate the colossal of racial issues faced by Black children in

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<sup>5</sup> *Brown v. Board of education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)

schools as there are many others (Cooper, 2007; Edwards, 1993; Kakli, 2011). These historical and contemporary actions do not explain all possible paradigms of involvement as these few critical studies have shown that African American parents are involved for complex reasons. But it is imperative to consider that their story lines demonstrate grave similarities when researching parental involvement and few, if any, mention that these decisions are based on their class membership, values, proficiencies, locality (inner-city/urban/suburban), and family dynamics outside of race.

Regardless of these narratives, Black parents have been characterized as uninvolved, apathetic, and studied on the presumption that their demographics (e.g. SES) or proficiencies are connected to their parental involvement activities in the mainstream literature. This characterization or presented premise of research focused on Black parents is often predicated on the idea that racial disparities prevalent in Black education are attributed to Black parental involvement (e.g. Brandon, Higgins, Pierce, Tandy, & Sileo, 2010; Rao, 2000; Trotman, 2001)—not racism despite the centuries of claims, narratives, evidence, and identifiable actions of Black parents as I have presented.

Because of the aforementioned narratives of Black parents coupled with the empirical data relating to the inequitable treatment of Black students in these contemporary times (e.g. see Chambers, 2009; Skiba, 2001; Wildhagen, 2012), I question if researchers considered how race and racism impacts the involvement of Black parents for it appears that the traditional literature has given more credence to the characteristics of Black parents (e.g. SES, family dynamics, attitudes toward education) than the characteristics of schools that have a embittered history of racial hostility when educating Black children.

Drawing from Lopez (2001), it can be argued that the limited view of schools—that they are solely race neutral, coupled with the limited view of what parental involvement actually entails outside of the White paradigm, has led to the wide mischaracterization of Black parents (e.g. “uninvolved”). Extending this critique, it is plausible that the research has yielded an incomplete and/or inaccurate analysis of Black parental involvement. The consequences of continuously applying narrowed and largely hegemonic perspectives may falsely prescribe a deficit pathology to Black parents—a feature of social science research on Black families dating back to at least the Moynihan Report in 1967 (Moynihan, Rainwater, & Yancey, 1967). Given these concerns and to address the gaps in the parental involvement research of Black parents as it relates to race and racism, I wanted to explore how one is involved as a Black parent, centering race as a sociocultural construction<sup>6</sup> as presented by Mutegi (2013) but using Lopez’s (2001; 2003) expanded view of parental involvement.

### **Literature Review**

The second chapter is a review and a critique of the literature focused on parental involvement, which I argue largely treats schools as race neutral and uses deficit premises to base studies of Black parental involvement. I contrast this treatment of schools in the literature with historical narratives of Black parental involvement in response to racial hostility in schools. These jarring constructs calls for an expanded view of parental involvement that accounts for the role of race and racism (i.e. anti-Blackness, White racism) when exploring Black parental involvement. This chapter’s underlying objective

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<sup>6</sup> Drawing from Mutegi (2013) the use of sociocultural racial construction seeks to “underscore and identify the meaning we ascribe to racial categories [is] grounded in historical and social convention, plays an active role in shaping our present day interactions, and merits consideration in studies of African Americans in...education” (p. 88-89).

is to demonstrate the need to expand Lopez's (2001) critique of parent involvement but it also demonstrates why one should consider how the sociocultural construction of race, as presented by Mutegi (2013), has impacted the school experiences of Black students and thereby may influence Black parental involvement.

### **Theory, Methodology, and Research Design**

The third chapter is focused on my theory, methodology, and research design. First I will provide an overall discussion of this study's theoretical framework, critical race theory (CRT). Since I explored the relationship between race, racism, and parental involvement, I used CRT because its central tenet posits that race is a pervasive construct. Its genesis in legal studies embraced an ideology of race-consciousness in the research process (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Matsuda, 1987). According to DeCuir and Dixson, "CRT focuses directly on the effects of race and racism" (2004, p. 25) and its' central tenet posits that racism is a pervasive construct. Renowned CRT theorist, Bell considered racism to be "a permanent component of American life" (1992, p. 13) asserting that the theory should be used to examine phenomena concerning African Americans and other people of color (POC) (also see Crenshaw, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). In this discussion, I briefly describe CRT's origins in legal studies and its application in the education—expanding to the parent involvement literature.

This chapter also provides a description of the critical qualitative inquiry methods (Carspecken, 1996) and research design used in this study. Specifically, over a six-month period, I collected demographical data through observations and at least two informal

interviews with each parent set<sup>7</sup>. All parent sets ranged in demographics, family dynamics, educational levels, types of careers occupied, and their children attended mostly public, private, or charter schools. This data was used to create a thick primary record. After the construction of the thick records, I conducted one semi-structured interview among all parent sets and one formal follow-up interview with representative sets<sup>8</sup>. What representative means will be discussed in chapter three, but these sets had no more or less divergent experiences than other sets but comprehensively they represented the way African American parents were involved in this study across SES, grade level of students, type of school children attended, and so forth.

In this chapter, I also discuss the criteria and selection process for participants, my positionality, study limitations, analytical tools utilized, and trustworthy techniques (e.g. peer debriefs and member checks) used to allay any projections of my own belief when reconstructing the tacit features of each participant counter-narrative.

**About the participants.** All participants in this study were interviewed about their parental involvement practices when their children attended school in the state of Midwestern<sup>9</sup>. There were eighteen mothers and four fathers interviewed outside three mother/father sets. All children of the parents interviewed were PK-12 students during the period of 2001 – 2015. Across the 16 sets, there were 35 children (18 girls and 17 boys). The youngest student was in first grade and the highest grade level completed was a junior in college. The breakdown of student grade level is as follows: seven elementary

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<sup>7</sup> One participant set replaced a set unable to participate in this study. The replacement was a father-mother parent set and their interview was extended to 90 minutes to gather additional demographic information.

<sup>8</sup> Representative means reported parent sets had no more or less low and high-level codes in frequency or categorization across all sets. However, the sets presented have been selected to represent a broad range of parental representation across demographics (SES, family dynamics, type of school, education level, etc.).

<sup>9</sup> Midwestern is located in the Midwest area of the U.S. where it is at least 60 percent White Americans, a third African American, and less than 5 per cent Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian together.

students (1st – 5th), five middle school students (6th – 8th), 14 high school students (9th-12th), eight post-secondary students, and one child that had enrolled and completed a GED program during the time the parent was selected and had their last interview. There were two affluent families, nine middle-class families, and five families considered low SES.

### **Findings & Analysis**

The fourth chapter presents the data related to my central research question, “How is one involved as a Black parent?” and is divided into two sections. The first section consists of a demographical overview describing participants and their children. I focus mainly on the self-reported demographics, such as SES and family household dynamics. The second section is focused on the counter-narratives of participants. These counter-narratives demonstrate that participants were racially vigilant in their involvement and racially socialized their children.

**Racial vigilance and racial socialization.** Drawing from the empirical research on racial vigilance (also termed racial hypervigilance, racism-related vigilance), it is widely described as a coping strategy used to resist the effects of racism through the anticipation and preparation for it (Hicken, Lee, Ailshire, Burgard, & Williams, 2013). Specifically, “hypervigilant strategies are characterized by increased caution and sensitivity in interactions with others who are not Black, the use of avoidant strategies to evade future racially charged interactions, and cognitive pre-occupation with the incident” (Forsyth and Carter, 2012, p. 130). Some associate racial vigilance with race-based traumatic stress (Reynolds, Sneva, & Beehler, 2010) and to note, the racial incidents that occurred in schools were arguably unpleasant stressful events, however no

measure of stress was conducted. Nevertheless, parents were racially vigilant through their school selection process, examination of curriculum, tenacity in creating an external support system for their children that were related to both educational values and interaction with other African Americans and POC to name a few race-related vigilant acts. Most of these strategies were enacted in response to the structural, institutional, and individual racism occurring at the school level that Black parents recognized or were aware could be a racial threat, which generated or increased their racial vigilance.

For example, parents whose children were victims of peer-on-peer racism (e.g. Black student was called “nigger” by white student) underwent a series of parental involvement actions in an effort to protect their child from further racial injury (e.g. investigating incident, arranging school conferences, hiring lawyers, seeking external support). Subsequently, these parents took added measures to prevent these actions from reoccurring again at the school level (e.g. frequent school visits, volunteering, withdrawing child from school). Superficially, many acts aligned with typical parental involvement activities but in actuality the parents were attempting to protect and prevent their children from further anti-Black racism, which they felt at the minimum impacted their child’s student achievement. Examples of this evolving racial vigilance are highlighted using the counter-narratives of six representative sets of parents.

The use of race socialization was the other primary form of parental involvement that lied outside the dominant notions of involvement that Black parents were actively engaged in (e.g. helping children with homework, taking children to the museum, etc.). Race socialization was enacted chiefly at the home level. Race socialization is multifarious concept and Lesane-Brown’s (2006) review of race socialization in Black

families gives a thorough analysis of its complexity. Drawing from several studies Lesane-Brown defines race socialization as:

specific verbal and non-verbal (e.g., modeling of behavior and exposure to different contexts and object) messages transmitted to younger generations for their development of values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs regarding the meaning and significance of race and racial stratification, intergroup and intragroup interactions, and personal and group identity. (p. 403, 2006)

Despite the multi-dimensions of race socialization, Black parents in this study clearly transmitted racial messages to their children, particularly after a racialized incident occurred at the school level. Many parents claim to have started transmitting messages of race since birth. This finding is consistent with Lesane-Brown's analysis in that the empirical research demonstrates that there is a prevalent practice of race socialization historically among Black families (Lesane-Brown, 2006). The six representative cases reported in chapter five highlight how parents were involved by transmitting messages of race and racism to their children as it related to their child's education.

Comparably across sets, not all parents were alike in their racial vigilance and race socialization as it related to their involvement in their children's education, nevertheless, the unifying feature was accounting for race in order to protect their child from school-related racism that they believed would ultimately impact academic achievement. Throughout the presentation of the six representative sets, I have weaved in discussions of other participants to support or demonstrate a divergent presentation of how Black parents may have attended to involvement through racial vigilance at the school level and race socialization at the home level. I also highlight the relationship between school selection and parental involvement.

These highlights are given because the school selection process often played a role in how participants decided to be involved as Black parents. But still, these actions were often predicated on the racial dynamics of schools—not to say that racial dynamics determined involvement, rather Black parents conception of the racial climate played a role in how they perceived the school and that perception of the racial climate subsequently influenced their involvement as Black parents.

## **Discussion**

In chapter five, I discuss the major findings and implications of this study. Aligning with the general understanding of parental involvement (Auerbach, 2010; Barton, Drake, Perez, Louis, & George, 2004; Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009), participants were involved in a myriad of ways that have been historically presented as involvement in mainstream literature. However, their involvement in these traditional forms was much more sophisticated than meets the eye. Many were masked as mainstream parental involvement activities (e.g. volunteering, contacting educators, etc.) but when issues of race and racism raised, parental involvement was often executed in anticipation or in response to the racial maltreatment of their children. For the most part, we can think of the racial vigilance conducted at the school-level as a front-stage performativity. At the home level, it can be argued that racial vigilance continued as parents transmitted messages about race and racism to their children. Messages were centered on racial and cultural pride as well as understanding what it means to Black (as a sociocultural racial construction) to help children understand racism at the school and societal level. This agency of involvement was done to assist children in their preparation

of what parents deemed a racial reality for their Black children in and out of schools. Racial socialization can be considered a back-stage performative approach.

In this section I discuss how the counter-narratives of Black parents support the theoretical framework in used this study, CRT. As previously stated CRT argues that racism is a pervasive construct and consequently, in response to this pervasiveness, all sets of participants anticipated and contended with issues related to race and racism in their child's school. Given these findings, I argue these parental involvement responses, from the front-stage to the back—racial vigilance and racial socialization, was done so to protect children from racism within schools primarily dominated by Whites. I consider the totality of these parental involvement actions as Black parent protectionism in schools. Black parent protectionism expands the role of *racial protectionism* to school context as presented by Mazama and Lundy (2012) and Eliot and Aseltine (2013) term *protective carework* on mothers, which I apply to Black parents in general. According to Mazama and Lundy (2012), African American parents employed homeschooling as the act of racial protectionism from school-related racism and Eliot and Aseltine (2013) found that parental concerns about racism factored into how mothers implemented protective carework, which includes “gauging potential threats to children’s well-being, determining how much autonomy to allow them, and employing strategies to monitor children’s activities, peers and surroundings” (p. 720).

This chapter concludes with addressing the implications of Black parent protectionism overall and the implications of racism in schools for parents, school leaders, and scholars.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

### Introduction

The traditional parental involvement literature has predominantly misrepresented and treated schools as race neutral institutions despite a substantial and extensive range of empirical research demonstrating that schools have and remain sites of inequitable treatment that exists in nearly all facets of education at its core and found to be vastly harmful to African American children (see Ladson-Billings, 2006). Instead the parental involvement literature hyper-focuses on external-school constructs like parental proficiencies, SES, and family dynamics among Black parents to find a relationship between these Black parent oddities and racial academic disparities. This malignment of internal demographic traits of Black parents with racial disparities in education, altogether ignores the relationship that Black parents have historically and presently have with schools that are racially hostile to their children.

Within this review, I highlight historical social science research focused on Black parents and families demonstrating that the parental involvement literature takes a limited position and approach of both schools and the involvement of Black parents as it pertains to race and racism—a contention that Black parents have been mitigating for centuries and in turn, blames Black parents for academic failure. Drawing from Lopez (2001), parent involvement has been found to be more than prescribed acts of involvement like transmitting messages on the value of hard work and I suggest that perhaps the involvement of Black parents in schools may encompass other measures that relates to the conditions their children face in education. Therefore, this review also serves as a critique.

Overall, these critiques along with the substantial evidence showing that race and racism are repeated contentions claimed by Black parents in education, suggest a need to centralize how race as a sociocultural racial construction (as presented by Mutegi, 2013) plays a role in the involvement of Black parents when exploring their activity and interaction in schools. To conclude this chapter, I use the story of Malcolm X and the circumstances involving his decision to drop-out of school in seventh grade to illustrate how the assumption of schools as race neutral and deficit frames of Black families could converge in a way that leads researchers concluding Black parents have pathologies preventing their children from achieving. This narrative also serves as a demonstration as to why it is important to account for race and racism when exploring Black parents-rather than the outcomes of students, SES, family dynamics, etc.

### **Foregrounding Parental Involvement**

First, I will foreground the definition of parent involvement using eight peer-reviewed articles (e.g. Gordon, 1977; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; McNeal, 2014), one peer-reviewed book chapter (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999), one federal legislative educational policy (Education & Education, 2004), and one recent national study (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013). These various empirical works span across three decades but is not an exhaustive representation of all parent involvement literature. However, the literature presented can provide the reader context of the major themes across the literature concerning what constitutes parental involvement.

In majority of the literature focused on Black parents, there is little variation as to what constitutes parental involvement outside of this comprehensive list. One of the reasons why I have drawn from many sources and across this lengthy period of time is

because the empirical studies focused on parental involvement and those with majority African American parent participants, do not provide a definition of parent involvement. Other researches have found this in their analysis of the parental involvement literature (Fan & Chen, 2001) and among studies focused on Black parents (Davis, Brown, Bantz, & Manno, 2002). In this section, I will briefly discuss the inconsistent findings in the literature and the orientation of the literature that often sways toward linking parent involvement to student achievement. The final discussion in this section is drawn from three articles, which includes a meta-analysis on parental involvement (Fan, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; McNeal, 2012).

### **What is parental involvement?**

Parental involvement encompasses a multitude of complex phenomena. Differences in the family structure, culture, ethnic background, social class, age, and gender represent are only a few of the factors affecting interpretations of generalizations about the nature of parent involvement...Notwithstanding the limitations these factors place on our findings, the “what” of parent involvement...appears to depend on whom you ask. (Scribner et al., 1999, p. 36 )

### **Ambiguous**

The definition and operational use of parent involvement has been inconsistent (Fen & Chen, 2001; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; McNeal 2012, 2014). Broadly, much of the literature refers to parent involvement as something parents do or the action that they take to improve student achievement. For example, one of the most recent definitions provided by McNeal (2014) states:

Parent involvement is any action taken by a parent that can theoretically be expected to improve student performance or behavior. In other words, parent involvement consists of those actions that help a child meet or exceed the norms or expectations of the student role and encompasses parent-child, parent-teacher, and to some degree parent-parent relations. (p. 564)

The law defines parent involvement as:

the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including: [1] Assisting in their [the parents] child's learning; [2] Being actively involved in their child's education at school; [3] Serving as full partners in their child's education and being included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and [4] The carrying out of other activities such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA [Elementary and Secondary Education Act] Section 9101. (32)

Other terms, such as parent engagement have emerged in describing the actions taken by parents. Parental engagement expands upon parental involvement as it not only focuses on the actions taken by parents but on the how and the why parents take these actions (Auerbach, 2010; Barton, Drake, Perez, Louis, & George, 2004; Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009). Moreover, the definition of engagement, relates these actions to the experiences parents have in and out of the school community (Barton et al., 2004). Regardless of which definition is of operational use, U.S. schools and policies often use the term parent involvement and the definitions of it is often tied to what parents do to improve academic achievement (McNeal, 2014).

For example in 2012, the U.S. Department of Education used the federal entities, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) to conduct a study among 17, 563 households with children in grades K-12, covering all 50 states including the District of Columbia, to survey parent and family involvement in education (PFI) (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013). No definition of parent involvement was given within the PFI, however, questions to determine parent involvement ranged from attending school functions, such as PTO/PTA meetings, to participating in various activities selected by the school, family, or student, such as

visiting libraries and museums (Noel, et al., 2013). This strongly correlates with McNeal's (2014) description of parent involvement. But also demonstrates that many have adopted a narrow view of involvement as argued by Lopez (2001).

### **Inconsistent**

Aside from the ambiguous and narrowed definition of parent involvement, research focused on the effects of parental involvement over the course of the last four decades has been contradictory and inconsistent. As described by McNeal (2012) the erraticism in the literature has become "the standard" (p. 80). Fan and Chen (2001) reiterate this same conclusion calling the research focused on parent involvement as "a thorny issue...because the research findings in this area have been somewhat inconsistent" (p. 3). Desimone (1999), Fan and Chen (2001), and McNeal (2012) also demonstrate this erraticism by citing an inventory of various types of parental involvement strategies, behaviors, activities, and so forth that have been found to have an impact upon student achievement. However, these authors further demonstrate the inconsistency and contradiction by highlighting that in some studies the same types of parental involvement that have been found to make a positive impact upon student achievement have not been as impactful in other studies.

Nevertheless, based on McNeal, (2012, 2014) Fan and Chen (2001), Desimone (1999), and others (i.e. Jeynes, 2003, 2007) what is consistent is the attempt to link parent involvement to student academic achievement. Yet, just like the inconsistencies in how parental involvement impacts student achievement, what academic achievement actually entails is also defined erratically. In much of the literature, indicators range from performance on standardized testing (Fan & Chen, 2001), attending college (Perna &

Titus, 2005), decrease discipline rates (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002), and lower dropout and truancy rates (as cited by Howard & Reynolds, 2008), etc. Using these indicators, the effects of parental involvement and engagement remain inconclusive (Fan, 2001, McNeal 2012, 2014).

### **Premises for Exploring Black Parents**

There are two premises that have been uniquely applicable to studies exploring Black parents. The first premise suggests that Black parents are uninvolved and apathetic. The second premise suggests that Black parents have something to do with the racial disparities in schools. To be more specific, this premise often is the springboard for investigating the pathology of Black parents by aligning their characteristics and demographics, to their involvement practices, to student achievement. To problematize the second premise, I will review the racial disparity literature in schools, primarily highlighting the disparity between White and Black students. This is done to provide the reader some context concerning the educational landscape that is uniquely applicable to Black students which can be considered the state of Black education (King, 2006). Overall, I argue that these premises in the literature are indicative of the deficit social science research focused on Black families that span back to the Moynihan report (Moynihan et al., 1967) which has been argued birthed the War on Poverty (Quadagno, 1994).

**Overarching premises.** The parental involvement literature provides some overarching premises for researching parents in schools. The first premise is grounded in the idea that parental involvement has an impact on student achievement. Although this impact is inconsistent, researchers continue to investigate the connection between

achievement and involvement (e.g. Overstreet, Devine, Bevans, & Efreom, 2005; Trotman, 2001). Another premise is in response to NCLB legislation that requires Title I schools to have parental involvement policies. This premise often addresses how schools can increase parental involvement by attending to school environments (e.g. Epstein, 2005; Thompson, 2003). Other premises for exploring parental involvement, specifically among people of color, have been in response to the rise in diverse student populations (Lopez, 2001). These overarching premises have been reasons for investigating all groups of parents, including African Americans. However, there are other widely applied premises that are uniquely applicable to Black parents in the literature.

The first unique premise is based on the idea that Black parents are not involved. Based on this premise, researchers have investigated alienating factors (e.g. poverty, school relationships) that may lead to less parental involvement in schools among Black parents. This premise lacks empiricism. The second premise for examining Black parental involvement is grounded in the prevalence of racial disparities affecting Black children. Often these studies explore how Black parents contribute to or hinder student achievement through parental involvement practices. Many researchers that align Black parental involvement with student achievement deduce that the achievement gap is attributed to external factors that lie outside of school organizations. Few studies within this premise consider systemic school factors that may cause racial disparities. These premises are important because they are purported more than the overarching premises (e.g. response to diversity or policy) or are often confluenced with the overarching premises in the parental involvement literature. In this section, I will provide exemplars

of these premises that give rise to studies focused on Black parental involvement and briefly discuss their problematic nature.

**Apathetic and uninvolved.** Researchers have explored Black parental involvement based upon the idea that Black parents are apathetic or have low levels of participation in Black education. However, this reason has little empirical basis. Brandon et al. (2010) is an exemplar of this theme:

[r]esearchers have begun to examine the lack of African American parent participation in school-based activities (Davis Brown, Bantz, & Manno, 2002). This lack of participation in the educational process of their children, with and without disabilities, is proving to be detrimental to the education of the children (Bempechat, 1992). (p 208)

The researchers go on to cite reasons why African American parents are not involved, which includes “apathy” as cited by Harry (1992). However, the research provided by Brandon et al. (i.e. Davis, et.al, 2002; Bempechat, 1992; and Harry, 1992) do not correspond with these premises (viz., Black parents are not involved and/or are apathetic). For example, Brandon et al. cite Davis et al. (2002) with this assertion that researchers are investigating the lack of involvement among African American parents. Davis et al. literature review examines four qualitative studies and a number of position papers. The purpose of Davis et al. review was to determine the quantity and quality of articles on African American parental involvement in the field of special education.

The researchers found there were small numbers of qualitative studies, and these studies contained numerous methodological issues. Davis, et al. (2002) findings conclude that the research hyper-investigates the involvement of low SES African American parents and often generalizes findings from low SES Black parents and indiscriminately ascribed these findings to all Black parents of children with disabilities (Davis, et al.,

2002). There was no evidence in Davis et al. literature review that demonstrated researchers have begun to examine the lack of African American parent involvement or African American parents were not involved. Thus, I cannot explain why Brandon et al. concluded that researchers have examined the lack of African American participation in schools based upon the cited reference (i.e. Davis et al.). Brandon et al. (2010) also purport that the lack of involvement of Black parents is detrimental to their children's education.

The researchers references Bempechat (1992) with making this claim. On the contrary, Bempechat's (1992) literature review examining parent involvement research across race and SES suggest Black parents are involved and their involvement contributes to high achievement. Bempechat makes little reference of any detrimental effects upon Black children based on the lack of parental involvement. Specifically, Bempechat (1992) discusses an ethnographic study among low SES Black families that concluded: high and low achieving African-American children showed that high achieving children had parents who stressed the value of education for their futures, monitored their academic progress closely, and fostered an internal sense of control and responsibility over academic outcomes. (p. 34)

It is unclear why Brandon et al. (2010) suggested Bempechat (1992) claimed that African American parents participation leads to the detriment of Black children in education. One could speculate that the researchers inferred that if some low SES Black parents of high achieving children participated in the ways described then the latter must apply—low achieving students do not have parents that participate in the ways identified. However, it seems that Brandon et al. (2010) applies the latter premise to all African

American parents. The researchers ignore the finding that African American parents of high achievers in low-SES are involved. The third claim Brandon et al. assert is Black parents are apathetic. The researchers attribute Harry (1992) with this finding. However, Harry's (1992) study was on Puerto Rican families—not African American parents or families. Since Harry's (1992) research focused on Puerto Rican families, I am uncertain why Brandon et al. would apply the finding of “apathy” to African American parents.

Trotman (2001) also uses the premise that Black parents are not involved, and advocates for research on Black parental involvement in schools. Trotman (2001) argues that “African American children are failing at record rates [and] [e]ducators have identified several variables that contribute to the problem, including...low rates of parental involvement (Wallis, 1995)” (p. 275). Trotman (2001) credits Wallis (1995) with this finding. However, this citation was an opinion editorial newspaper article. This article did not examine or conduct research pertaining to Black parental involvement. This article did not detail other empirical studies that found Black parents were not involved. Additionally, this editorial did not note Wallis as an educator that has identified reasons for African American failure in schools. Moreover, Wallis' (1995) article focused on low-income parents. To speculate, it appears, Trotman applies the demographic of low-income to all Black parents. However, I am unable to determine the reason for purporting this premise without empirical findings and based upon an op-ed news article.

Roa (2002) makes similar claims of Black parents in her premise to examine a Black mother whose child was enrolled for special services. Roa states that Black parents have shown “a lack of interest in or apathy about their child's education” (para 5). Roa cites Lynch and Stein (1987) as the source of this claim. Lynch and Stein's (1987) study

focused on Hispanics but compared their parent participation to Black and Anglo families. In reference to Black parents' participation, Lynch and Stein (1987) reported Black parents had time constraints related to work, transportation, and childcare that at times hindered their parent participation. These were the same constraints Anglo and Hispanic parents voiced. Black families suggested that schools only contacted them for reasons related to behavioral issues, not in an effort to share favorable news about their children, as Anglo and Hispanic families claimed. Black families reported that they felt significantly left out of the special education assessment process. Lynch and Stein do not report that Black parents lacked interest or were apathetic to the needs of their children. With that said, Roa also lacks empirical evidence like Trotteman (2001) and Brandon et al (2010). Again, I do not know why Rao (2000) considered Black parents as apathetic based upon the research cited.

These unfounded premises raise concerns for the conclusions drawn from these bodies of work. I will use Brandon et al. study as an exemplar to show these concerns. In Brandon et al. study (n=421), the researchers predicted that Black parents would rate "often to always a concern" on the questionnaire provided to Black parents. This categorization of "often to always a concern" related to several factors that the researchers predicted that would restrict or limit Black parental involvement. Specifically the researchers predicted Black parents would rate personal concerns, placement of children in special education (n=83), low SES, single-family status, unemployment, and lack of higher education as alienating factors that would limit involvement (i.e. "often to always a concern").

However, contrary to the researchers prediction, Black parents significantly answered that these areas (viz. personal concerns, special education, economic, family, and employment status and education attainment) were not problems in their involvement (i.e. “not a problem to rarely a problem”). In response to these findings, Brandon et al. argued a need to examine the stereotypes that exists explaining why Black parents are not involved. The researchers also suggest that perhaps Black parents do not know where to begin when it comes to being involved because Black parents self-reported little factors that hindered involvement. This conclusion remains grounded in the idea that Black parents are not involved for the researchers simply shift by suggesting that Black parents do not know how to be involved.

Roa (2000), Trotman (2001) and Brandon’s et al. premise for exploring parental involvement based on the idea that Black parents are uninvolved on apathetic cannot be validated using the research these researchers have provided. Attention is needed to investigate why researchers would purport Black parents as uninvolved and apathetic without distinct and sound empirical findings. Furthermore, the implications of these false premises raise concern for the conclusions drawn from them. These conclusions have the potentiality to purport unsubstantiated claims of Black parents and recommend research focused on Black parents that is unwarranted.

**Racial disparities.** Another premise for exploring Black parental involvement has grown from the rise in racial disparities in education. For example, Desimone (1999) poses that because education policy seeks to “equalize disparities in schooling opportunities and outcomes...[but] our education system does not afford children from low income and racial ethnic minority backgrounds the same opportunities, on average,

as middle-income nonminority” (p. 11). Desimone then suggests that “[t]raditional American ideology dictates that those economic inequalities are acceptable only to the extent to which opportunity is perceived as equitable” (p. 11). Desimone claims “education policy, much like other governmental policy, is to ensure that rewards are distributed on the basis of achievement and not ascriptive processes ” (p. 11). Because of this notion (i.e. education policy ensures meritocracy), Desimone purports that:

[g]roup-specific outcomes and patterns cannot be attributed to a simple uni-dimensional notion of race-ethnicity or income, however, but must instead be attributed to some with-in-group behaviors, activities, or processes such as family dynamics and parenting behaviors. The challenge for research is to unpack those processes. (p. 11)

To summarize, Desimone presents the idea that: a) education policy ensures neutrality and meritocracy in schools; b) therefore, racial inequalities are acceptable. With that in mind, Desimone maligns families and parents as the cause of racial disparities.

Another, example of maligning parents as the cause of racial disparities can be found in Gutman and McLoyd (2000). Gutman and McLoyd (2000) investigates variations of parental management strategies among African American parents as a function of whether their children experienced academic success or academic failure. This investigation extended analyzing home, school, and community involvement practices. Here is what Gutman and McLoyd (2000) offered for their premise to focus on Black parents:

Previous research documents a challenging academic path for poor African- American children...African-American children living in poverty are at a substantially higher risk of experiencing an array of academic difficulties including low performance on cognitive tests, low school performance, and higher rates of school dropout than their non-poor European-American peers.

Other researchers also purport racial disparities as a reason to analyze Black parental involvement (Slaughter & Epps, 1987; Trotman, 2001). Some have even attributed these disparities to the notion that Black children enter school academically behind White children and thereby encourages the investigation of Black parental involvement (Connell & Prinz, 2002; Hill, 2001). For example, Connell and Prinz (2002) claim that “[l]ow-income and African American children are at increased risk for school readiness deficits in terms of both cognitive and social development (p. 177)” and therefore their study examines parent–child interactions and its impact on school readiness.

### **A Closer Examination of Disparities**

Despite claims made by Desimone (1999), Gutman and McLoyd (2000), Connell and Prinz (2002) and other researchers, national data and empirical studies suggest that despite whatever increased risks Black children are faced, Black students are school ready. For example, national kindergarten retention rates provided by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights reveals that Black students are on virtually equal footing with all other racial group’s, if not ahead in comparison to other racial and ethnic groups. In 2014, the U.S. Department reported that only five percent of Black kindergarteners are retained compared to four percent White kindergarteners (Duncan & Lhamon, 2014). The national average in kindergarten retention is four percent, and in some states, Black students have a lower retention rate below the national average (Duncan & Lhamon, 2014). Moreover, some retention rates of Black students are below their White counterparts (e.g. Kentucky, Texas, Tennessee, etc.) (Duncan & Lhamon, 2014).

In other studies, such as Fryer and Levitt (2004) national study (n=20,000), the researchers found a minimal gap between Black and White students when these groups enter school. However, Fryer and Levitt (2004) found that racial disparities are exasperated in the first two years of schooling where Black children drastically become behind their White counterparts. Other scholars (Steele, 2003; Wilson, 1978, 1992) have suggested that the longer Black students stay in school, the more academically behind they fall, even across low to middle SES (Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Steele, 2003). For example, Steele (2003), argues, “[d]espite...socioeconomic disadvantages..., blacks begin school with test scores that are fairly close to the test scores of whites their age” (p. 98). Steele discusses this is falling behind pattern across SES. Steele (2003) states:

This pattern holds true in the middle class nearly as much as in the lower class. Even for blacks who make it to college, the problem doesn't go away. 70 percent of all black students who enroll in four-year colleges drop out at some point, as compared with 45 percent of white students. (p. 98)

In regards to Steele’s observance, there are similar patterns of dwindling achievement among Black gifted students. Some studies have found that these students perform comparable to gifted White students on intelligence tests in elementary school but then no longer are high ability learners in their high school careers (Commady, 1987; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The declining process from Black student school readiness to dwindling student achievement seems evident when one analyzes national assessment data. For example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported in 2009 that by the fourth grade Black students lagged an average of 27 points in reading behind White children in long-term trend assessments (Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). These racial disparities persist across 44 states in grade

four and 41 states in grade eight (Vanneman et al., 2009). In mathematics, the disparities are equally abysmal. Nationally, Black students perform an average of 26 points behind White students (Vanneman et al., 2009). This disparity was exhibited across 46 states, and the gap in eighth grade was across 41 states (Vanneman et al., 2009). Drawing from this data, Harris (2010) reported “[b]y the age of 17, the average black student is four years behind the average white student” (Harris, 2010, p. 247). By twelfth grade, Black students, on average, score below what a White eighth grader will score in the areas of reading, math, history, and geography (Harris, 2010). These disparities are so pervasive between Blacks and whites that the NAEP data indicates that it will take 30 years in reading and 75 years in math to eliminate these disparities between the two racial groups (Vanneman et al., 2009).

Since the release of the 2009 NAEP reports, not much has changed. In 2013, the proportion of racial/ethnic student groups in twelfth grade that reached proficiency in mathematics ranged from seven percent to 47 percent. The range in reading was 16 percent to 47 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). At the bottom of every student group in both subject areas were Black students (Math= seven percent; Reading=16 percent) and consistently near the top, were White students (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Black students have been persistently at the bottom in the area of mathematics since at least 2005 and in reading since 1992 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). These dwindling disparities seem to be far from where Black children began when they were school ready at the onset of kindergarten.

Recent education literature has attributed these patterns of racial disparities in achievement to systemic school deficiencies that create racial inequities between Black

and white children—regardless of variables, like SES. These phenomenon’s have been termed “education debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006), “opportunity gap”, (Akiba, LeTendre, & Scribner, 2007; Flores, 2007) and “receivment gap” (Chambers, 2009) to specifically denote issues within the school that, if not the cause, exasperates the racial gaps between Black and white student achievement. However, these denotations describe other significant areas in education aside from achievement—from the disproportional treatment in student discipline (e.g. see Duncan & Lhamon, March 2014; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Skiba & Leone, 2001; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba, 2001), a non-culturally relevant curriculum (Asante, 1991; Gay, 1990), high disproportionate special education placement (Sullivan & Thorius, 2010), lack of advance programming offerings (i.e. advanced placement, college preparatory courses) to Black students (Ford & Whiting, 2007), access to highly qualified teachers in schools (Ferguson, 1991; Peske & Haycock, 2006), right to equitable funding and facilities (Gloria Ladson-Billings & William Tate, 1995; Vaught, 2008), and even contrasting attitudes of teachers toward Black and white children (Pollack, 2012; Wildhagen, 2012).

Regardless of this data, and even when researchers have claimed that systemic issues in schools are problems, researchers continue to focus solely on Black parents in the parent involvement literature. For example, West-Olatunji, Sanders, Mehta, and Behar-Horenstein (2010) case study on five low-income African American mothers. claim that Black children experience, “systemic oppression and educational hegemony” (West-Olatunji, 2010, p. 139). The researchers add that Black children also suffer “marginalization by school officials” (West-Olantunji, 2010, p. 142). However, the researchers never attend to these systemic issues in education when understanding

parental involvement actions of these participants. Instead, the researchers use resiliency theory as a framework to explain protective factors against poverty. Although West-Olantunji et al. (2010) mentioned endemic racial concerns; they chose to identify the parent protective factors as guards against poverty instead of discerning if they were factors resilient to systemic racial oppression and marginalization.

Although there are a latitude of racial disparities stretching from academic achievement to teacher attitudes toward Black children deriving from systemic inequities, there are prevailing notions that Black parents are somehow attributed to these disparities in education if not the ones that can improve the racial outcomes among their children through parental involvement and engagement strategies. For example, Fryer and Levitt (2004) pose that poor quality schools and low teacher expectations of Black children contribute to the dwindling rate of academic achievement of Black children. However, they also offer Black parents as possible contributors, even though Black children in their study were found to be school ready for kindergarten. But this is an evident pattern in the parental involvement literature focused on African American parents as they have been presented as the key possibility for narrowing achievement gaps (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002), discipline gaps (Jeynes, 2007), college enrollment gaps, (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002), and so on. Even when results in the research suggested that racial disparities are perpetuated by schools, researchers still gravitate toward this premise.

Reflecting back to Desimone (1999), who argued that educational policy ensures that these racial disparities are based on parent attributes, not school inequities, her study found that parent-school involvement was strong predictors of grades but not test scores. In correlation to this finding, Desimone's study found that Black parents who participated

in the PTO, their students had significantly better grades and more so than other groups. Desimone (1999) goes on to claim the reasons for these significant differences might be because “grades are more dependent on subjective criteria such as teachers perceptions and expectations, which can be affected by factors unrelated to actual achievement at the time of assessment” (p. 19). This challenges Desimone’s (1999) initial assertions that a) schools are meritocratic; b) education policy protects meritocracy and c) therefore racial disparities may be attributed to parent characteristics. However, Desimone still concludes that “[t]o be able to craft education policies to address group-based inequalities, we must determine what it is about being associated with a particular racial-ethnic or income group that affects social, psychological, academic, and other outcomes. Desimone does not question what it is about schools (like inflating grades for parents that appear to be involved in schools) that contribute to inequities, which ignores her findings.

In summary, this premise, that racial disparities can somehow be mitigated or perpetuated by parents brands parental involvement as being something much more than it is and has historically been in schools. To draw the attention back to the definition of parent involvement as presented earlier, parent involvement is “any action taken by parents that supports their child’s education, in and out of school context, that is expected to improve student achievement”. However, it appears whatever actions parents may take has the potential to have great to little to no bearing on a child’s achievement because schools (e.g. teachers) are in the primary position to determine how parent involvement impacts a student. This highlights Lopez’s (2001) argument that the concept of “parent involvement delimits who are the primary players in schools” (p. 417)-which seems not to be Black parents.

## **Raising Questions**

Aside from these false premises, countless studies have analyzed Black parents and their participation in schools and these studies seek to identify characteristics of Black parents to help determine how they are involved or will be involved (Greene, 2013; Jeynes, 2007; Jeynes, 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Overstreet, Devine, Bevans, & Efreom, 2005; Rao, 2000; West-Olatunji et al., 2010). These studies often analyze specific parental involvement practices in and out of school context (e.g. Abel, 2012), predict factors that influence type or frequency of their involvement (e.g. Hayes, 2011; Overstreet et al., 2005), or investigate their parental proficiencies (i.e. attitudes and behaviors) regarding education that may influence student achievement (e.g. West-Olatunji et al., 2010).

Specifically, this research often intersects with the demography of race (i.e. Black) and various “at-risk” conditions (Davis et al., 2002) such as low SES (e.g. Greene, 2013; Jackson & Remillard, 2005; Overstreet et al., 2005; Waanders, Mendez, & Downer, 2007; West-Olatunji et al., 2010), Title I status, (e.g. Bartel, 2010), or living in a neighborhood generally regarded as lacking in resources, like the inner-city (e.g. Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Bartel, 2010; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Williams & Sanchez, 2013) or an urban environment (e.g. Loder-Jackson, McKnight, Brooks, McGrew, & Voltz, 2007). At times SES or social class spans from low to working to middle class (e.g. Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Lareau, 2011; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Overall this body of literature presents the notion that demographics and characteristics (e.g. SES, inner-city, urban, and suburban residency, employment, education level, marital status, attitudes, skills, and so forth) of Black parents inform their method or degree of involvement.

Moreover, the literature is saturated with looking at this connection between at-risk variables, Black parents, and student achievement.

This parental involvement research agenda on Black parents raises a multitude of questions about the social science research conducted the last two decades. Why the false pretense posing Black parents are not involved without empirical research (e.g. Brandon et al., 2010; Rao, 2000; Trotman, 2001)? Why mischaracterize Black parents in a negative manner (e.g. Brandon et al., 2010)? Why the lack of analysis of systemic racial inequities in schools that have historically affected Black children (e.g. Desimone, 1999; West-Olatunji et al., 2010)? Why the excessive intersection of Black and at-risk variables (e.g. Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Greene, 2013; Jackson & Remillard, 2005; Overstreet et al., 2005; Waanders et al., 2007; West-Olatunji et al., 2010)? Based on this research agenda, I offer Hill's (2003) analysis presented in *The Strength of Black Families*. Hill states:

[m]ost discussions of black families tend to focus on indicators of instability and weakness. With few exceptions, most social scientist continue to portray black families as disorganized, pathological, and disintegrating (p. 37).

What Hill argues and what this research agenda seems to exhibit, is that social science research attempts to pathologize Black parents and families. To extend Hill's argument, the social science research transfers school dysfunction and maligns it to Black parents. This research trend is deep-rooted in early social science research focused on Black families.

### **The Tangle of Research, Education, and Pathology**

“The fundamental problem . . . is that of the [Black] family structure (para 8)...the Negro himself [is] the cause of inequality between Negro and

whites [and] at the center of the tangle of pathology is the weakness of the family structure” (Moynihan et al., 1967, p. 30).

In Gordon’s (1977) analysis of parent involvement research, he argued that the social science research had taken two directions. The first focused on White parents. This involved focusing on PTO organizations and cooperative nurseries (e.g. scripted acts or performances, Lopez, 2001). The other focused on the “indigent poor” described to be Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, and Appalachian groups who were deemed as deficit in family structure in comparison to white middle-class families (Gordon, 1977). These parents were prescribed mainstreaming programming that entailed assimilation through social programs and activities (e.g. adult education and childrearing programs) and conducting home visitations (Gordon, 1977).

In addition to Gordon, others (e.g., Fine, 1993; Solórzano, 1997; Reynolds, 2010) have noted these patterns in the research. Fine (1993) details that much of the parent involvement work prior to the 1980’s was centered on “maternal blaming [and] offered workshops on loving the unlovable child, dealing with a latchkey adolescent, and assertive discipline” (p. 691). This attention to mainstreaming in education, particularly as it relates to Black parents, seems to be an extension of what Asante (1991) argues is an education system focused on “socializing Black children and their families to become part of a social group that supports a White supremacist-dominated society (p. 170)”.

But this agenda is not confined to simply education contexts for it expands to large-scale national efforts through “government interventions in employment, education, housing, and health care [aimed to] integrate African Americans into mainstream (that is...white) American culture (Berger, 1996, p. 409)” and it has included social science research (e.g. Moynihan et al., 1967) that greatly influence public policies.

For instance, Gordon (1977) reports that the best representation of mainstreaming the “indigent poor” (i.e. Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, and Appalachian) was the “War on Poverty” initiative in 1965 birthed out of the social science research focused on Black families, in particular the study published by the U. S. Department of Labor in 1965, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Moynihan, Rainwater, & Yancey, 1967). This research, headed by Daniel P. Moynihan, Lyndon Johnson’s Secretary of Labor (Brauer, 1982) is more known by its alternative name, *The Moynihan Report* (Moynihan et al., 1967).

***The Moynihan Report.*** *The Moynihan Report* begins with a quote from President Lyndon Johnson pronounced at the State of the Union Address in January 1965. Johnson states, “[t]wo hundred years ago, in 1765, nine assembled colonies first joined together to demand freedom from arbitrary power” (Moynihan, et al., 1967, para 1). The report claimed that despite the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Black Americans will not obtain equal results produced from having equal opportunities, because “[t]he fundamental problem . . . is that of the [Black] family structure” (para 8). Although Moynihan, Rainwater, and Yancey (1967) acknowledge racism as a contributor to inequality it still focuses on the Black family in its analysis concluding “the Negro himself for being the cause of inequality between Negro and whites because of the family’s “weak” structure (p. 30). Ironically, little to no recognition of the “arbitrary power” institutionalized and legalized through chattel slavery, de jure and de facto segregation, and the lack of civil rights for 191 years were pursued as a possible reasons why Black Americans in the past or in the future may not obtain equal outcomes to that

of Whites in *The Moynihan Report*. Thus, Black families were found to be the focus of inequalities—not structural, institutional, or individual racism.

Accounting for this “pathology” and these environments, Moynihan, Rainwater, and Yancy (1967) proposed that Black families socialized their children differently than White families, and therefore a national agenda focused on restructuring Black family dynamics was needed. Specifically, the report urged “[a] national effort is required that will give a unity of purpose to the many activities of the Federal government in this area, directed to a new kind of national goal: the establishment of a stable Negro family structure” (para 9).

Although this report has been criticized for its racist undertones and framing, and does not consider the systemic racism, it has been reported that “a number of policies have appeared to flow from this [Moynihan] report” (Berger, 1973, p. 2). But because of the racist criticism, Berger (1996) argues that the “discussion of race became less open, giving way to evasions and euphemisms—talk of ‘crime’ and ‘welfare’ on one side of the political spectrum to overly broad characterizations of racism on the other” (Berger, p. 508). With this in mind, the use of encoded adjectives such as “low SES,” “poverty,” “urban,” “single-headed,” and/or “female-headed” began to intersect with Black as a demographic. However, because these descriptions are often in tandem with each other (e.g., Black and low SES), it has created a dynamic that disables the significance of racism by maligning Black parents as the culprit for systemic racial disparities.

Even if one did not believe that the “War on Poverty” began based upon findings in *The Moynihan Report*, the 1964 Economic Report of President Johnson revealed that the same people that Gordon (1977) described to be the “indigent poor” (e.g. Blacks) were

the same people targeted in the “War on Poverty” initiative (see Advisors, 2014). Based upon the official poverty measure in 1959, those in poverty were mostly “Black” (57.8 percent); “Hispanic” (40.5 percent) and “Immigrant” (23 percent) (Advisors, 2014).

The “War on Poverty” initiative was the first broad sweeping federal plan that targeted parents/families and education that were of low SES living in urban areas (Advisors, 2014; Jeffrey, 1978). A large amount of research from this initiative went toward social science research and programs, including initiatives within The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The ESEA of 1965 has been characterized as the most far-reaching federal legislation that has affected education. Its reauthorization in 1994 (*Improving America’s School Act*) and in 2001 is the nation’s current legislation, NCLB.

Both the ESEA of 1965 and NCLB requires parent involvement components (Watson, Sanders-Lawson, & McNeal). Through the “War on Poverty” initiative, the ESEA established programs such as Head Start, Title I, Home Start, Parent and Child Centers, and other programs that were a hybrid of parent education and involvement efforts directed at those presumably living in poverty. Some of these programs, like Head Start and Title I, persist within NCLB. Many of these programs take the same approaches used to mainstream parents, such as parent education and home visiting programs established from the War on Poverty under ESEA. For example, for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the War on Poverty, a report issued by the White House in 2014 detailed that the Obama administration has “advanced investments in early learning and development programs and reforms” (Advisors, 2014, p 5). Accordingly, the administration proposed

the expansion and investment in several early learning development programs, like the home visiting program and Head Start (Advisors, 2014).

The pathologization of Black and nonwhite families is deeply rooted in a history aimed at mainstreaming them. Presently, the literature appears to be camouflaged in euphemisms such as “low-SES”, “urban”, and “innercity” that crosses with race, ultimately rendering race invisible. Based on the literature previously discussed dating back to the Moynihan Report, this pathologization of Black parents is caused by maligning two things—racial outcomes of students (e.g. student achievement scores) and characteristics and/or circumstances of parents (e.g. low SES).

### **Centering the Sociocultural Construction of Race and Racism**

As demonstrated in this review, studies that have analyzed Black parents and their participation in schools have attempted to malign Black parents in-group characteristics (i.e. social-class, cultural capital, attitudes) to student achievement (Greene, 2013; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Jeynes, 2007; Jeynes, 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Overstreet et al., 2005; Rao, 2000; West-Olatunji et al., 2010). However, in these studies, very few consider the endemic structures in school, like racism, as a potential variable<sup>10</sup> that can influence Black students and their achievement.

Drawing from a host of critical researchers (Feagin, 2010; López, 2003; Nkomo, 1992; Scheurich & Young, 1997), these approaches to research perpetuate racism. Moreover, applying Mutegi’s (2013) characterization of invisibility literature<sup>11</sup> in science

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<sup>10</sup> The term “variable” is often used in quantitative research. Although this is a critical qualitative study, I use the term variable to denote how parent involvement external school characteristics have been thought of.

<sup>11</sup> Mutegi (2013) considers literature that examines Black students and families, conducted in seemingly “Black” communities and schools, addressing issues that could be considered issues indicative of Black people, but do not consider the historical legacy of racism as “invisibility literature” (p. 86).

education, these approaches also mask racism in schools—ultimately “rendering racism invisible” (p. 86). According to López (2003), “[t]his slippage only maintains racism firmly in place by ignoring or downplaying the role of White racism in the larger social order” (p. 69).

Because parent involvement among Black parents seems to hinge upon the current pervasive nature of racism and the research devoted to exploring Black parent involvement has masked and perpetuated racism, I argue, future research focused on Black parent participants and their children in white-dominated institutions, like schools, should reorient and shift its theoretical framework and methods. This also aligns with the recent call from other critical researchers in the field of education (e.g. Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; López, 2003; Mutegi, 2013; Tillman, 2002). In response to my observation and the call from critical researchers, this shift in studies analyzing parent involvement should center the sociocultural construction of race and racism in schools and use critical and culturally responsive methods that will allow one to explore how racism manifests in schools and how Black parents respond to this manifestation.

**De-centering race.** Jeynes (2003) statistical meta-analysis included 21 studies to help determine the overall effect of parent involvement upon minority children. Minority children were defined as African American, Asian American, and Latino (Jeynes, 2003). Results determined that parent involvement impacted student achievement, despite student gender and student SES. Across studies, parent involvement among African Americans had more impact on student achievement than other groups, particularly in comparison to Asian American student achievement. Jeynes gives two rationales as to

why Black parental involvement has more of an impact between the other two racial groups.

Jeynes first reason stated:

there is a great deal of educational emphasis in the Asian and Asian American culture . . . It may be that there are enough educational incentives present in other aspects of Asian American culture so that even without a large degree of parental involvement, students do relatively well. It may well be that parental involvement has the greatest impact where there are not other cultural factors that are working to raise academic achievement. (p. 215)

The second reason proposed by Jeynes states:

...Asian Americans 'being affected less than Latinos and African American students probably relates to the likelihood that these children come from single-parent families. Of the three racial groups included in this study, African American children are the most likely to come from single-parent families, Latino children are the second most likely to come from this family structure, and Asian Americans are least likely to come from this family structure. (p. 215)

These proposed reasons run contrary in the literature cited within Jeynes meta-analysis. Some of the literature selected by Jeynes with Black parent participants found that they had exhibited high education expectations (see Yan, 1999). Moreover, some studies in Jeynes analysis did not consider single-parenthood or noted the factor in their sample. Black parents seemed to be pathologized regardless of the fact that what they did produced improved student achievement.

Another example of this pathologizing can be found in Lareau and Horvat's (1999) study where most Black parents in their ethnographic study indicated that there was significant racial discrimination in their child's elementary school. The researchers attempted to demonstrate that parent responses to racism were mitigated by possession and activation of the parents' social class capital. Specifically, they state, "social class

appears to mediate how parents with similar types of concern<sup>12</sup> about racial discrimination seek to manage their children's school careers" (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 46).

Lareau and Horvat (1999) arrived at this conclusion by comparing three families: 1) a Black middle class family who claimed that racism was covert and went to visit the school twice a month to prevent it; 2) a working class family (preacher and beautician) that openly fought racism (e.g. euro-centered curriculum) and; 3) a low SES single mother who claimed that her son's teacher and principal were prejudice and had limited interaction with the school. Specifically Lareau and Horvat (1999) state:

...Other black parents also approached the school with a suspicion that the legacy of racial discrimination was continuing. There were, however, important social-class differences in how the black parents managed their concerns. The middle-class parents were much more likely than the poor parents to maneuver and "customize" their children's school experiences. At times, they diffused the risk of racial discrimination without the teachers ever knowing of their concern. These patterns point to the importance of differentiating between the *possession* and *activation* of capital. (p. 44)

This conclusion is problematic as it lacks critical analysis of the race discrimination the parents were suspicious of or experienced. For example, one family in the study discussed having issues with a Eurocentered curriculum. Instead, the researchers analyze what characteristics parents have, that being capital. Specifically, the researchers conclude that the possession of capital dictated how the parents respond when it is plausible, that the form of racism experienced influenced their response. For

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<sup>12</sup> To begin, this assertion is problematic as none of them had "similar types of concern about racial discrimination"(p. 46). One family expressed concern over a euro-centric curriculum and they openly criticized the school. Another family expressed that racism was more covert, and they used bi-monthly school visits as a preventive measure to lessen the degree or impact of race discrimination upon their child. Another parent called the teacher and school leader semi-prejudice and she spent minimal time being involved at the school level although Lareau express that they were similar white parents unwittingly draw on in their school negotiations in this context.

example, the middle class parents thought racism was more covert. In response, these parents expressed that they visited the school twice a month serving as volunteers in order to prevent and ensure their child had been treated fairly. The working class family expressed that the school “systematically ignored the celebration of black heroes” (p. 43) and this family voiced to school officials that these actions were racially biased. Ensuring fair treatment regardless of skin color and advocating for a more racially inclusive school curriculum may both be a parental response to school racism, but these responses seem more aligned with the form of racism experienced or potentially experienced by the student than an attribute stemming from a parents possession of social capital.

Lareau and Horvat (1999) add that:

These patterns point to variations (often by temperament) in the parents’ skill and shrewdness in the activation process that have not always been noted in the empirical literature. Some black parents were extremely skillful for fostering interactions with educators. For example, Mr. and Mrs. Irving, a middle-class couple, were apprehensive that black children were discriminated against in the school and actively monitored their daughter’s schooling. But the teacher never knew the source of their concern because they shielded it from her. (p. 45)

This conclusion is also concerning as it purports parents must have skills and a temperament in order to properly combat racism to the liking of school officials. The fact that one has to have skills to combat racism in schools is racist in itself. Ultimately, the researchers undertheorize racism by using a social capital theoretical framework. The theory fails to consider that it is racist (in itself) for Black parents to have to have social capital—temperament, skills, evoke active monitoring (i.e. bi-monthly visits)—so their children are not subject to undue harm because of their child’s race.

In this article, Lareau and Horvat (1999) also argue that being White is an advantage (i.e. cultural captail) in education. Specifically, Lareau and Horvat (1999) pose

“[t]echnically speaking, in this field [education], being white becomes a type of cultural capital. In contrast, blacks do not have this cultural resource available to them” (p. 42). The researchers go on to note that Blackness is not a disadvantage but “the rules of the game [in education] are built on race-specific interactions” (p. 42).

These two claims made by Lareau and Horvat, that is: a) social capital mediates racism; and b) White is an advantage in education and c) Blackness is a disadvantage undermines Lareau and Horvat’s (1999) theory, that social capital possession can mitigate racism. If Whiteness is an advantage in education that Black students and parents will never have, then whatever form of capital a parent possesses could inevitably be useless in schools if they are Black.

This seemed evident in Lareau and Horvat’s analysis. Lareau and Horvat argued that the middle class family faced moments of inclusion by the school faculty because the educators thought their mode of involvement (volunteering) was appropriate. To Lareau and Horvat, moments of inclusion mean “the coming together of various forces to provide an advantage to the child” (p. 48). Lareau and Horvat claim the working class family that openly criticized the school for being racially biased faced moments of exclusion by the school faculty because they did not agree with the parents approach toward these issues. These are, however, Lareau and Horvat blame attributes the skills and temperament (possession of social capital) of the parent to the way in which schools responded to them. This article, demonstrates a need to shift the analysis to race and racism in schools.

**If we centered race.** Malcolm X was an excellent student. Malcolm was consistently at the top of his class in junior high school and was even class president

(Malcolm, Haley, & Handler, 1992). In Malcolm's eighth grade year his White English teacher, Mr. Ostrowski asked Malcolm about his career plans. Malcolm replies, "Well, yes, sir, I've been thinking I'd like to be a lawyer." Initially, Mr. Ostrowski looked surprised by Malcolm's answer but then his teacher "kind of half-smiled" (p. 36) and gave Malcolm this advice:

Malcolm, one of life's first needs is for us to be realistic. Don't misunderstand me, now. We all here like you, you know that. But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer-that's no realistic goal for a nigger (p. 37).

Mutegi (2013) uses this school experience of Malcolm's to advocate for a research agenda that accounts for the sociocultural construction of race in explaining African American underrepresentation in science education. Mutegi (2013) also uses this example to suggest research approaches that account for racism in the teaching and learning of African American children within science education. Although Mr. Ostrowski is an English teacher, and Malcolm wants to become a lawyer, Mutegi (2013) highlights this experience to demonstrate that despite Malcolm's success in school, "Mr. Ostrowski construction of race mediated the advice he gave [to Malcolm]" (p. 84).

Although this advice was given in the 1930's, a time period where overt acts of racism were common, Mutegi (2013) argues that there is a substantial body of literature that demonstrates that these sociocultural constructions of African American students may persist among educators in this present day. We can find these examples in recent parent involvement studies as well. For example, in Allen's (2012) article focused on Black middle class fathers and their school age sons, Allen notes how both fathers and sons, felt that educators thought of their son's as "lesser-than". Reynolds (2010) also highlights how Black middle class parents felt that the educators regarded their children

as “lazy”. Both Allen (2012) and Reynolds (2010) consider these experiences as racial microaggressions, because they racially demean children in subtle ways but still manage to have a profound adverse effect on students. To provide an example of the impact of a microaggression<sup>13</sup> and to expand upon Mutegi’s argument, I will share Malcolm’s narrative after the advice Mr. Ostrowski gives.

The more I thought afterwards about what he said [...got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer-that's no realistic goal for a nigger], the more uneasy it made me. It just kept treading around in my mind. What made it really begin to disturb me was Mr. Ostrowski's advice to others in my class-all of them white. Most of them had told him they were planning to become farmers. But those who wanted to strike out on their own, to try something new, he had encouraged...They all reported that Mr. Ostrowski had encouraged what they had wanted. Yet nearly none of them had earned marks equal to mine. ... I realized that whatever I wasn't, I was smarter than nearly all of those white kids. But apparently I was still not intelligent enough, in their eyes, to become whatever I wanted to be...It was then that I began to change-inside...I drew away from white people. I came to class, and I answered when called upon. It became a physical strain simply to sit in Mr. Ostrowski's class. (Malcolm et al., 1992, pp. 36 - 38)

After Malcolm X receives this advise, he expresses that it changed him inside. Malcolm deems this microaggressive act as the reason he decides to drop out of school (Malcolm et al., 1992). Shortly after dropping out, Malcolm struggles to find meaningful employment, he becomes a gambler, hustler, then later becomes a career criminal until his arrest and imprisonment for burglary (Malcolm et al., 1992). Although we do not know what would have became of Malcolm if he stayed in school, the change inside of him might speak to his new life trajectory after this school experience.

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<sup>13</sup> Many would consider Malcolm’s encounter with his teacher as overtly racist. His teacher called him a nigger, today this would be considered overtly racist, however, according to Malcolm et al (1992) it was common to refer to African Americans, even children, as niggers. Moreover, Malcolm X details that his teacher probably meant little harm to Malcolm as this was the time period in which he lived. Although this encounter is blatantly racist, based on the historical time period and Malcolm’s description, this could be considered a microaggression.

However, if one were to use the same research schematics that is often found in the parent involvement literature, that is maligning student failure to parent characteristics, one could attribute Malcolm's decision to drop out of school based upon his parent's circumstances, instead of his teacher's advice and maltreatment. Rev. Earl Little, Malcolm's father, worked as a Baptist Minister and for the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Little was dedicated to the empowerment of Black people. His social and political views, like Black self-determination, derived from the teachings of Marcus Garvey. This work led to the murder of Earl Little leaving Malcolm fatherless (Malcolm et al., 1992). We could relate Malcolm's dropping out to his fatherlessness, which is often considered an "at-risk" variable in the parent involvement literature (Davis et al., 2002; Rao, 2000).

Following the research trend in parent involvement, we could link dropping out to Malcolm's poverty status, a widely investigated variable in the parent involvement literature pertaining to Black parents (Davis et al., 2002; Howard & Reynolds, 2008).

Shortly after Malcolm's father was murdered, his mother, Louise Little began working to support her family. Louise, an educated woman, could pass for being White. She often took higher paying jobs posing as a white woman (Malcolm et al., 1992). However, once her White employer found out she was Black, she was fired. Even when Louise made it known she was Black, once white employers discovered she was the widow of Earl Little, they still terminated her (Malcolm et al., 1992). Due to the inability to find employment, she reluctantly took welfare (Malcolm et al., 1992). One could also relate Malcolm's decision to drop out to being part of an unstable family life. Shortly after Malcolm's mother took welfare, state workers and agencies began monitoring

Malcolm's family. Malcolm's mother eventually became mentally ill. Due to this illness, state social agencies regarded Malcolm and his siblings as wards of the state. Although Malcolm has professed that it was possible for their family to continue living together, the state divided the Little children to foster families (Malcolm et al., 1992). Malcolm describes this experience in his autobiography:

I truly believe that if ever a state social agency destroyed a family, it destroyed ours. We wanted and tried to stay together. Our home didn't have to be destroyed. But the Welfare, the courts, and their doctor, gave us the one-two-three punch. And ours was not the only case of this kind. (Malcolm et al., 1992)

What is important to note is that these incidents happened prior to Malcolm's encounter with Mr. Ostrowski yet Malcolm persisted to be the top student in his class. It is reasonable to assume that these incidents in his home life did not affect Malcolm's ability to be successful in school nor did it lead to Malcolm dropping out of school. However, if one fails to isolate Mr. Ostrowski's treatment of Malcolm, the research schema in the parent involvement literature would likely deem parent traits and family life as culpable for Malcolm's school failure rather than the divergent maltreatment Malcolm received in contrast to his White classmates.

To circle back to Mutegi's (2013) argument, this treatment was grounded in the teacher's sociocultural construction of race. In the broader scope of parent involvement, I wonder if Malcolm's parents had been able, what would have been their reaction to Mr. Ostrowski's advice? What parent involvement practices would they have taken? I pose this question not to directly answer it but to draw attention to the lacking purview in the parent involvement literature, the function that racism and the sociocultural construction of race plays in Black education. One might retract from my assertion that the teacher's

actions led to Malcolm dropping out. One could suggest that if Malcolm's parents were around or did not have these issues of poverty and instability then they could have prevented Malcolm from dropping out.

However, those tendencies fall in line with the aforementioned research schematics in the parent involvement literature, in that it evades the issue of race and racism in schools. Moreover, these kinds of assertions deflect harmful school dynamics to parents, who have minimal control in preventing such school actions. However, if one centers racism and the sociocultural construction of race, there is a history of Black parent involvement tied to responding to these concerns in schools that is often treated as immaterial in the parent involvement research focused on Black parents.

### **Shifting the Analysis**

In this remaining section of the chapter, I will review the literature that has captured the parental involvement practices of Black parents in response to racism in education. I will do this by highlighting Black parent involvement through three significant time periods in African American history, enslavement, segregation (Jim Crow), and desegregation (post-Civil Rights movement) extending to our present day. I offer these counter-narratives to demonstrate that perhaps the parent involvement literature has taken a limited position on how Black parents have been involved. This expands Lopez (2001) critique of the literature but also these narratives demonstrate why race should be treated as a sociocultural construction as presented by Mutegi (2013). I will conclude this chapter with urging for a shift in the analysis of Black parental involvement by centering race as a sociocultural construct and racism in schools.

**Historical context.** It can be argued that Black parents have been involved for centuries. We can trace these responses as far back as 1787, when Prince Hall, Revolutionary War veteran, community leader, and parent petitioned the Massachusetts Legislature on behalf of Black children demanding a separate “African” school (Bell, 1980). Hall’s reasoning behind this demand was birthed from the tireless effort Black parents underwent when confronting white-operated schools. Hall argued before the legislature that Black children were met with continuous hostility and suffered maltreatment when attending white controlled Massachusetts’s public schools (Bell, 1980). If it was not through legislative efforts taken like Hall, parents attempted to devise other means to deal with racism in schools. Newby and Tyack (1971) detail that African American parents during the late 1700’s reported that their children endured immense "vex and insult" and had been driven out of community schools. As a result, parents opened and financed an all-Black school (Newby & Tyack, 1971). During chattel slavery in the Southern states, it was illegal and even punishable by death to educate enslaved African people—including children. Woodson (1919) reports that Blacks were not allowed to assemble, making it nearly impossible to have or attend schools. Blacks were prohibited from traveling, and thus could not travel to schools out of southern territory (Woodson, 1919).

Despite these state-sanctioned barriers (e.g. slave codes) African people formed secret learning communities, which included parents and fictive kin of enslaved African children (King, 2011). In these secret-learning communities, Black parents and fictive kin

taught their children to be literate and often used adages<sup>14</sup>, proverbs, folklores<sup>15</sup>, and real accounts of Africans to educate children on life lessons. These folklore's, called trickster tales, taught lessons of survival and self-confidence to African children, in a time period where they were often demeaned and thought of as lesser than. Even after the legal ending of chattel slavery in 1865, subsequent Reconstructive Era, and up until the end of the Civil Rights Movement, Black parental involvement seemed to be shaped by racism. For example in the Jim Crow Era, Black parents fundraised, provided school items to conduct the necessary business of schools (e.g. school transportation, books, paper), and in some instances, built and repaired portions of their children's school buildings (Edwards, 1993) to make up for the unequal distribution of state funds to all-Black segregated schools.

**Contemporary context.** Despite the traditional research themes of maligning student achievement with Black parental characteristics, some studies have demonstrated race and racism as salient issues of concerns for Black parents when it comes to their child's education (Allen, 2012; Fields-Smith, 2005; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Lareau, 2011; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Newby & Tyack, 1971; Rao, 2000; Reynolds, 2010; Shujaa, 1992; Slaughter-Defoe, 1991; Thompson, 2003). In Thompson's (2002) study (n=129), 51 percent of Black parents indicated that the school's racial climate was the most problematic school-related issue. Twenty-two percent of those viewed racism as a consistent problem. Overall, nearly 40 percent of Black parents "whose children had

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<sup>14</sup> Common adages like the "Blacker the berry the sweeter the juice" or "what goes around comes around" were used to evoke confidence in color pigmentation and raise consciousness against the institution of slavery.

<sup>15</sup> Folktales were used to promote models of behavior and satisfy the need of alternative dreams (King, 2011)

experienced racism said that adults on campus were the culprits” (p. 11). Moreover, these attitudes extended to parents of children in gifted-and-talented elementary classes.

Thompson reports that parents who had children in these programs “were more likely than others to perceive the school district to be racist” (missing). In Reynolds (2010) empirical study of middle-class Black parents of school age boys, parents purported that their children were met with “unspoken hostility, [and] received implied negative messages” (p. 510) about their sons from school officials.

In Lareau and Horvat’s (1999) study the majority of the parent participants claimed that racism was a prevalent concern. These findings mirror other studies where Black parents have claimed racism to be a problem in schools that they have to contend with. Both Howard and Reynolds (2008) and Allen (2012) detail in their study on middle-class Black parents, that racism was a prevalent concern in their child’s school and largely effected their parent involvement. This saliency transcends across SES, gender, suburban and urban environments, and moreover, throughout historical time periods. Considering this saliency and the problems of under-theorizing race/racism in the parent involvement literature, I have proposed this study that focuses on race/racism in schools and how Black parents are involved in relation to these constructs.

### **Summary**

I have presented several parent involvement and engagement articles to support my critique of how the literature has historically presented Black parents as deficient, treated schools and the process of education as neutral institutions, and/or have failed to identify the myriad of ways Black parents have been involved due to racism in educational institutions.

Although Black parents have been the centrifugal force in the struggle for education of their children for centuries, much of the literature focused on parent involvement has failed to recognize these modalities of participation. Rather, the literature has historically demonized Black parents, by pathologizing them. In tandem with pathologizing Black parents, the literature has failed to account for the endemic and systemic racial disparities caused by the education debt, recievement gap opportunity gap, etc. that demonstrates that these disparities are school specific concerns-not birthed from parent characteristics or their involvement. In short, this treatment in literature seems to mischaracterize Black parents and their involvement.

Because racism has been a reoccurring force in the pursuit of education of Blacks, from enslavement (1614 – 1865), pre-civil rights (1866 – 1965), to post civil-rights (1966 – to the present) it is possible that it (racism) has largely defined the way in which Black children experience schools and thereby Black parent involvement maybe influenced by these racialized experiences in schools. Due to the research schematics that have maligned Black parents with school dysfunction I argue for a shift in the analysis in the parent involvement literature by acknowledge schools as institutions that maintain systemic racial inequities and to analyze how Black parents respond to the hidden and not so hidden racist actions such as over-identification of Black children in special education (Sullivan & Thorius, 2010), negative teacher attitudes toward children of color (Pollack (Pollack, 2012; Wildhagen, 2012), racially biased standardized testing (Davis & Martin, 2008), and racialized discipline practices (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002) to name a few which leads to various educational “gaps.”

In summary, an in-depth understanding of racism is sorely lacking in studies of parental involvement in schools. In response, my study shifts the traditional analysis from if and how Black parental involvement practices leads to academic improvement to what Black parents do in response to school-related racism, a context that they perceive hinders achievement. Therefore, this study focuses on how Black parents respond to racism in schools.

## Chapter III: Theory, Methodology, and Research Design

### Introduction

This chapter discusses my theory, methodology and research design used in this study. The first section describes this study's theoretical framework, CRT. I will briefly describe CRT's origins in legal studies, its application in the education literature – expanding to the parent involvement literature, and three tenets that derived from this theory used to frame this study.

Additionally, I will detail this study's critical qualitative inquiry methods and research design. I will first discuss the criteria and selection process for participants, my positionality, and the limitations encountered in this study. Then, I describe the methods and analytical tools utilized to assist in answering this study's research questions. I also explain the trustworthy techniques used in this study.

**Critical Race Theory.** CRT provides a lens to analyze the pervasiveness of racism beginning with a premise that racism is pervasive (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Matsuda, 1987; Parker & Villalpando, 2007). CRT methodologists also posit that race and racism should be centered throughout the research process (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Tillman, 2002). By centering race, one of the purposes of CRT scholarship has been historically devoted to examining the experiences of People of Color (POC). Experiences of POC tend to be divergent from experiences among the dominant group—which is often presented to be the master narrative (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). These divergent experiences are often referred to as counter-narratives (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). More poignantly, drawing directly from Crenshaw (1995) description of CRT, these counter-narratives expose how the “regime of white

supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America [and allows us to] examine the relationship between that social structure and professed ideals such as rule of law and ‘equal protection’” (intro).

Another purpose of CRT is to understand how racism contributes to inequities in institutions in a post-Civil Rights society (Tate, 1997). The study of inequity in institutions has historically focused on how gender and class issues contribute to these inequities. However, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), as well as other scholars concerned with race (Crenshaw, 2010; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Matsuda, 1987), have argued that racism transcends the constructs of gender and class. There is substantial statistical and qualitative evidence that suggests that racism transcends in nearly all facets of life—even in a period heavily regarded to be race neutral (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Feagin, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

CRT scholars suggest theoretical perspectives that centralize race and in the context of racism in the post-Civil Rights era. In this next section, I will underscore three tenants pertinent to this study: a) racism is pervasive; b) race neutral paradigms developed in the post-Civil Rights era perpetuate racism, and c) counter-narratives assist in illuminating how racism is pervasive. I argue the use of these tenants will assist in untangling the sophistication of racism needed to analyze the racialized experiences of my participants and their parent involvement practices in response to these experiences.

**Relevant CRT tenants.** Racism is pervasive. Critical race theory recognizes that racism is endemic, normative, and pervasive in society (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate Iv; Matsuda, 1987; Parker, 1998; L. Parker, D. Deyhle, & S. Villenas, 1999; Tate, 1997). In these

contemporary times, I argue that much of our society would profess that racism is egregious. However, many do not understand what racism entails. Without this understanding, racism is often purported as something brewed from ignorance and occurs at the individual level (see López, 2003). López (2003) argues that this understanding of racism is “quite prevalent in American popular ideology: where racism is perceived as an individual and irrational act in a world otherwise neutral, rational and just” (p. 69). With this in mind, I have added a brief description of racism and its pervasiveness for understanding.

### **Explaining Racism’s Pervasiveness.**

According to Fuller (1964), "White supremacy (racism) means to practice the crime of dominating, subjugating, depriving, exploiting, and mistreating Non-White people by White people being White and Non-White people being Non-White" (2010, p. 93). This practice is similar to what Feagin describes as "white racism" and it is “centuries-long, deep-lying, institutionalized, and systemic” (2010, p. 9). Furthermore, the systemic nature of white racism "entails a complex array of racialized relationships developed over many generations and imbedded in all major societal institutions"(Feagin, 2010, p. 10).

Scheurich and Young (1997) illustrate the depth of racism, extending to hierarchal levels beyond Feagin's (2010) societal, institutional level. Scheurich and Young (1997) contend that racism operates at 1) the individual level (individual racism); 2) organizational and social level (institutional and societal racism); and 3) civilizational level (civilizational racism). Giroux's (2003) description of racism's nature can add to our understanding of how it protrudes and evolves through time and across multiple domains

(i.e. formal policy, informal policy, ideologies) and levels of racism as presented by Scheurich and Young (1997).

Giroux (2003) argues that over time, conditions, ideologies, policies, and practices have maintained and continued racism. Giroux asserts that the overt racism that is often considered to be indicative during enslavement in the Americas or within the Jim Crow era, etc., actually remain in contemporary times. However, these once pronounced identifiable markers of racism have just “transformed, mutated, recycled, and taken on new and...more covert modes of expression” (Giroux, 2003, p. 191). Joining these presented conceptions by Fuller (2010), Feagin (2010), Scheurich and Young (1997), and Giroux (2003), this is what I describe as racism.

To put this in a larger context, as to what it means to live in a pervasive system of racism as it relates to African Americans in the U.S., I will provide a statement released by the United Nations’ Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, on their conclusion of their visit to the USA. The UN states:

[T]he Working Group is extremely concerned about the human rights situation of African Americans. The colonial history, the legacy of enslavement, racial subordination and segregation, racial terrorism, and racial inequality in the US remains a serious challenge, as there has been no real commitment to reparations and to truth and reconciliation for people of African descent. Despite substantial changes since the end of the enforcement of Jim Crow and the fight for civil rights, ideology ensuring the domination of one group over another, continues to negatively impact the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of African Americans today. The dangerous ideology of white supremacy inhibits social cohesion amongst the US population...The cumulative impact of racially-motivated discrimination faced by African Americans in the enjoyment of their right to education, health, housing and employment, among other economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, has had serious consequences for their overall well-being. Racial discrimination continues to be systemic and rooted in an economic model that denies development to the poorest African American communities. (Descent, 2016)

### **Race-Neutral Ideologies Perpetuate Racism.**

Why does America fail “to make good on its promise of racial equality (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1333)?”

The law prohibits discrimination based upon race. As Freeman (1978) argues, “Black Americans can be without jobs, have their children in poorly funded schools, have no opportunities for decent housing, and have little political power, without any violation of antidiscrimination law” (p. 1050). Freeman’s assertion was pronounced over 30 years ago but many would suggest that given the enormous disparities in employment, education, housing, and so forth, that America has not made much ground in providing equal opportunities (see Descent, 2016). Although to many POC, continued race discrimination may seem evident. However, the rhetoric of race neutrality often camouflages these conclusions. In essence, race-neutral conceptions that are often projected as universal, the rule of law, meritocracy, equal opportunity and protection, and colorblindness have effectively masked the structural foundation of racism, which has never been eradicated in the United States (Matsuda, 1987).

To elaborate, race-neutral principles (i.e. merit, equality, and colorblindness) cannot be achieved through legal measures within structures built upon racism (Crenshaw, 2011). Even in a post-Civil Rights period, race-neutral ideas and laws have not been able to ensure fair and equitable distribution of opportunities and resources among racial groups (L. Parker, D. Deyhle, & S. A. Villenas, 1999). CRT scholar, Alan Freeman (1978) suggests that the “law serves largely to legitimize the existing social structure ” (p.1051). Moreover, Bell (1980) declares that “[i]n this country an inherited and nonviewable merit based on whiteness remains” (p. 291). In other words, in the grand scheme of things, the

law continues to uphold the status quo (Crenshaw, 2010) and that status quo is largely organized in a racial hierarchal order where Whites are on top, and Blacks are at the bottom. Not only does the concept of race neutrality continue the organization of a racial hierarchy--it perpetuates racial subordination.

### **Using Counter-Narratives**

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) argue that often the narratives of historically marginalized groups are told from a majoritarian perspective and disregards racism altogether. Moreover, they assert these majoritarian or master-narratives are generated from a legacy of White privilege that has defined the conjectures, beliefs, and mores that those of the dominant race (Whites) share. These master narratives “carry layers of assumptions” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28) about those being researched. Often these narratives position those from the dominant group as possessing positive traits and those that are on the other racial spectrum (i.e. Black), as having negative traits (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In summary, master narratives minimize the voice of those that are marginalized and “distorts and silences the experiences of people of color” (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 29).

Counter-narratives challenge these problematic master narratives. Counter-narratives are often utilized as an explanatory tool when CRT is applied as a theoretical framework. However, to clarify, these counter-narratives are not just rehashing of experiences as told by a person who identifies with a marginalized racial category. As argued by Ladson-Billings (2014), counter-narratives are more complex than “a vent or rant regarding one’s racial struggle” (p. 42). To illustrate the complexity of the counter-narrative, I argue, that they are like bifocals that perform dual explanatory powers using

two sets of lenses. One lens zooms in on a particular racialized experience, and the other lens widens and focuses on how that racialized experience fits into the larger dominant worldview. This methodological tool exposes and expounds upon an alternate worldview that is often overshadowed by a narrative presented as truth or universal (master narrative). In short, these stories underscore the way racism operates in one's worldview and connects it to a broader purview.

Counter-narratives can also have multiple scopes. Some narratives are constructed as parable, tales or chronicles as presented by Derrick Bell in *Space Traders* (1992). These tales or chronicles use past racial injustices or injuries to explain how racism operates and are usually embedded within a hypothetical scenario. Another scope can be using personal narratives to highlight racial realities. Again, the power in counter-narratives should go beyond telling a story about one's racialized experience. These stories should be linked in a way that illuminates the bigger picture—that is, how racism functions. In this study, I used counter-narratives to explore how racism is perpetuated and how Black parents responded to any forms of racism or race related issues. I connected these experiences to the larger purview related to race, racism, and parental involvement.

With these tenets in mind, this study will take a culturally responsive research approach as posited by Tillman (2002), that being the knowledge, historical, and cultural experiences of Black parents are centered, and the current sociocultural understanding of race and racism will be grounded throughout the research process. I used critical qualitative inquiry to explore my central research question. This next section is dedicated to discussing these methods and design.

## **Critical Qualitative Inquiry**

Because this study focuses on the pervasiveness of racism in schools and how Black parents respond to this form of power in these contemporary times, I used critical qualitative inquiry methods to conduct this study. In short, these methods were aimed at uncovering how agency and power were mediated (Carspecken, 1996; Kinchloe & McLaren, 1994) in parental involvement relationships. In this study, the typology of power was racism, which is mediated through the sociocultural construction of race as it pertains to those of African descent. These critical qualitative approaches included semi-structured interviews and critical hermeneutic processes (i.e. meaning fields and a reconstruction horizon analysis). Specifically, I used hermeneutic tools (i.e. meaning fields and reconstructive horizon analysis) to assist in understanding the broad meaning of participants statements drawn from the interviews.

**Sampling and participants.** This section discusses my sampling methods (purposive sampling) and the participants in this study. To explain my rationale for choosing purposive sampling and selecting Black parent sets that participated in this study it is important for me to summarize what I found in the literature.

In chapter two, It was highlighted that when researchers isolated individual demographics, racism seemed to be a variable that transcended across the primary researched demographic variable outside of being Black (Allen, 2012; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Rao, 2000; Reynolds, 2010; Shujaa, 1992; Thompson, 2003). Examples can be found in Lareau and Horvart's (1999) study when analyzing social capital across class among Black parents. Howard and Reynold's (2008) study analyzing Black middle-class parents. Allen's (2012) study that examined Black

fathers and their son's. Thompson's (2003) quantitative study that focused on Black parents of children that went to a public urban school district. Rao's (2000) study when interviewing a Black mother whose child was in special education, just to name a few. In summary, racism was a salient factor regardless of demographic features Black parents occupied in these studies. Thus, I found little reason to control for demographic features outside of race and the period in which parents have had children in schools.

In this study, I used purposeful sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009) to select 16 sets of Black parents. This sampling method was chosen in order to provide thick and rich descriptions of student and parent experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009) across demographics and to address the hyper-focus on low SES and urban demographics among Black parents in previous parent involvement studies. Purposive sampling addresses this by intentionally selecting a variety of demographics that are not limited to low SES, urban neighborhood demographics, and solely public schools. The criteria for participation were:

1. Must self-identify as Black or African American.
  2. Be considered one of the primary caregivers or parent in a child's education.
  3. Must have had a child currently in school or had a child graduate within three years.
  4. These children must have attended public (includes charter) and or private schools during the periods of (2001-2015) for majority of their school career.
- Thus, this precludes Black children that have been mostly homeschooled (mostly=over half the time a student has been in school).

The first criterion was necessary as this study focused on the racism related to the experience of African Americans. Although POC generally have been found also to experience racism in schools, I argue that the sociocultural construction of race has historically differed across groups. I am not arguing degree— rather the form of racism, although it is entirely possible to discriminate in the same way to varying racial groups. However, evidence suggests that the social construction of being Black is different than the social construction of other groups (Feagin, 2010). With this in mind, it was appropriate to focus exclusively on Black parents and guardians.

The second criterion of parents is that they must have identified as the primary caregiver. This was selected because this study relied on the accounts of parents to discuss how they were involved. I feel that the best account of the understanding involvement of Black parents was by exploring the primary caregiver or whoever considered themselves as one of the primary caregivers for their child's education.

The third criterion was selected because I wanted to isolate the experiences of Black parents within the years 2000-2015. Separating this period helps discern how and if any racial ideologies that are congruent with the post-Civil Rights era perpetuate any racial manifestation. At times, this period has been categorized as post-racial (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). With that in mind, it is important for me to capture experiences occurring within this period.

The last criterion allowed me to focus explicitly on public and private schools and how parents were involved in these types of schools. Both private and public schools were included because I have found that parents can have either or both: a) their children within the same household go to different types of institutions, and b) their children have

attended various types of public/private institutions across their school careers when searching early for participants. It is possible that parents may intertwine experiences in these different types schools when discussing their involvement and any race-related experiences. With this in mind, I believe that parents may speak about institutions holistically, and their parental involvement practices in the same way.

To address the selected sample size of 16, there is no prescribed number of participants for semi-structured interview data collection in critical qualitative inquiry. As argued by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Seidman (2013), the sample size must relate to the research questions and be adequate to ensure saturation, redundancy, and to reflect the overall population. Initially, there were 20 sets that were recruited, however, early in the research process, four were unable to be interviewed and therefore only 16 sets of Black parents that varied in SES, educational level, neighborhood demographics, school type, marital status, number of children, etc. who met the above criterion were participants.

Participants were recruited through a variety of measures, primarily snowballing using purposive sampling. After parents were identified, potential participants were asked to contact me via email if interested in the study. A recruitment email included the four criteria's noted. When an individual expressed interest, all information regarding the study was forward to their email address.

**Researcher's positionality.** Researcher positionality is vital to this process of inquiry as it positions the lens that I will use to approach the research process and interpret findings (Kaufman, 2014; Smith, 2004). To be consistent with critical qualitative research methodology, my positionality as the researcher will be discussed. This requires me to examine my values, biases, and assumptions throughout the process.

Additionally, past and present experiences, as well as my preconceptions will be detailed to increase this study's transparency and trustworthiness.

I am an African American mother of three children, two sons, and one daughter. I have one son, who is in elementary school. My children and my husband also identify as African American. For the past 15 years, I have worked in education within public urban school districts and have had primarily Black students as a teacher. In this period, my opinion of parent involvement has fluctuated. At the beginning of my career, which was before becoming a mother, I viewed parents as contributors to failing schools. For the most part, one could consider me an outsider not able to fully grasp the complexities of schools, parents, and academics from a parent's perspective. I would have to mention that it seemed that most of my co-workers viewed parents as the problem in schools as well.

However, at the onset of my son's school career, I noticed that the previous attitudes toward parents my former colleagues and I held perhaps were quick and rushed judgments. As I attempted to be involved it seemed like pertinent school information felt guarded by the school in a way that left me in the dark when it came to homework expectations and specific subject matters learned in school. My son could not take home the books from the school despite the fact that I had paid a book rental fee. It seemed that I learned everything after the fact and through my elementary age son. At times these issues have come to a helm, where I have become frustrated as a parent. Nevertheless, at home our family uses every opportunity as a learning experience. This is done purposefully to account for the lack I see my son receiving in school and to promote the value of education in our home.

The above reflection outlines how I view the world as I evolved as a teacher than a parent. This view informed my approach to this research and how I position myself in this study. For example, in my personal parent-to-parent conversations, I noticed that parent experiences tend to be highlighted through conversation. As a former educator, this positionality gave me a degree of insight to some of the expectations, attitudes, mores, and processes of schools. As a parent, this positionality gave me insight as to what questions to ask while interviewing parents of their processes. However, to remain aware of my reflexivity in these positions, I kept a research journal where I charted my responses to participants. This journal contained my immediate thoughts, opinions, observations, and biases that surfaced during the data collection and analysis process. When analyzing data, I reflected back on this record to assist in self-checking of any bias or assumptions I had about parents and their experiences. If questions rose, I followed up with the parent set.

### **Data Analysis**

A transcription service transcribed all interviews. These interviews were transcribed verbatim, and they include utterances such as um, uh, huh, and pauses, as they may imply meaning. Each transcription was kept in a secured folder with a password on a laptop, which also required a secure password.

The critical analytical tools I used to interpret the counter-narratives of Black parents were a critical hermeneutic process, meaning fields, and reconstruction horizon analysis, as presented by Carspecken (1996). These hermeneutic devices were concerned with integrating “the relationship between language, meaning, and understanding [with]

concrete empirical economic, social, organizational, and political conditions and practices that shape human beings as knowers and as social agents” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 140).

The process took place after all interviews, so I could consider the holistic experiences conveyed by the individual sets before I conducted high-level coding.

**Meaning fields.** The meaning field used in this study was intended to dive deeper into the meaning of Black parents’ narratives drawn from their interviews. This process is conducted by taking the transcriptions and primary record generated from each interview and selected segments to conduct a meaning field. To summarize, a meaning field analysis helps to bring the implicit meanings to discursive articulations by constructing more than one meaning (Carspecken, 1996). These meanings are not limitless as they can be bounded by plausible meanings related to the narrative given. To denote these constructed plausible meanings, the analysis will use “and,” “or,” or “and/or” clauses to suggest there maybe more than one meaning generated within the field.

In summary, a meaning field is conducted “to help researchers clarify the impressions of meaning they have received from observations [the field]” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 102) and can be expanded to interviews. Furthermore, meaning fields are a hermeneutic process that involves moving from holistic, to tacit or implied, and then back to holistic. Because meaning fields are an interpretive and intersubjective process, the meaning fields constructed in this study were created as if participants themselves would have articulated them.

**Reconstructive horizon analysis.** The second segment of analysis involved using a reconstructive horizon, which builds from the meaning fields constructed.

Reconstructive horizons seek to focus on the validity claims made by participants. These

claims are often divided into three groupings for analysis: objective claims, subjective claims, and normative-evaluative claims (Carspecken, 1996). Carspecken (1996) articulates that a researcher “can gain much insight into a culture by paying attention to validity or truth claims routinely employed in the construction of meaningful action” (p. 110). Within these horizons, it is important to delineate claims that are foregrounded and backgrounded.

In short, the meaning field and reconstructive horizon analysis is a process of reporting back interpretations taken from observations and interviewing. To diminish error in interpretation, each meaning field and reconstructive horizon analysis used to analyze reported data in this study underwent peer debriefing. This peer was familiar with Carspecken’s (1996) analytical tools and the critical ethnographic methods used in this study.

### **Low and High Level Coding**

Low-level coding was used to assist in creating themes in my findings from the data collected within the primary record (transcriptions, field notes, background data on participants). Low-level coding was primarily used to designate patterns and routines as well as signify anomalies, and unusual events (Carspecken, 1996). For example, multiple parents alluded to being involved by assisting their children with homework; this was a low-level code titled as “involvement at home” with explicit statements and examples that suggested this form of involvement. In chapter four, I discuss these findings.

High-level codes in this study were used to generalize findings that emerged from all forms of qualitative data collected. These codes were theme-matize then matched with statements made by the participants. However, these themes were created using the entire

context of participant experiences and the broader social context informed by my theory, CRT.

**Data software.** I used the extended Mac version of MAXQDA, a mixed-method software program that had the ability to upload taped interviews and the transcriptions that coincided to the taped interview. Information on this software was encrypted to protect the participant's identity. This software was located on my personal computer which is password protected.

**Trustworthy techniques.** A thick record of participants that included demographic information was kept throughout the duration of this study. Before conducting semi-structured interviews, I collected demographic information on all participants. Most of this information was collected through informal phone conversations with each parent collected over duration of three months. This frequent contact with the participants before the formal semi-structured interview helped established a rapport between participants and me. This also allowed me to have more time focusing on how participants were involved as Black parents during the semi-structured interview process.

A peer debriefer was used after data was collected, coded, and meaning fields and reconstructive horizons were generated. For this process, used a former educator, who had four school-age children, and had used Carspecken's analysis tools and was a critical scholar. My peer debriefer was White, middle class, and had a large degree of familiarity with the analytical tools used in this study. She was also a resident in Midwestern. The peer debriefer was provided with the original transcription and background information on participants in addition to the meaning fields and reconstruction horizon analysis

generated. With her insight and feedback from participants, the consensus generated was used for the analysis process used to understand how Black parents were involved. After this process, participants were provided with their final write up of their narratives to check for erroneous interpretations. No participant objected to any interpretations generated. Members also had access to their transcripts.

## Chapter IV: Findings & Analysis

### Introduction

This study explored how 16 sets of Black parents with varying demographics whose children attended a public, private, or charter school were involved and engaged in their child's PK-12 education. Specifically, the research question was, "*How is one involved as a Black parent?*" This chapter is devoted to reporting the findings related to this research question. There are two major sections of this chapter. The first section consists of a demographical overview that describes the 16 sets of parent participants and their children. In this section, I will briefly describe the participants' self-reported demographics, namely SES and family household dynamics that were drawn from my field notes (thick record). However it should be reiterated that I critiqued the mainstream research agenda concerning Black parental involvement, arguing that much of the studies have continuously maligned demographics, disparities, and proficiencies of Black parents, thus, this overview is only provided to give the reader a broad scope of the parents who participated in this study.

The second section in this chapter is devoted to reporting how Black parents were involved as it relates to race and racism across the 16 sets of parents. I focus on two high-level codes generated from participant counter-narratives, that being "racial vigilance" and "race socialization", found in high frequency among all parents in this study. Being racially vigilant and using race socialization was a consistent pattern of involvement and engagement across all parents in varying forms. Much like Lopez (2001) finds that immigrant families transmit vales of hard work, Black parents transmit messages about race at the home level, and at the school-level are racially vigilant. Both are enacted out

of protection of their children from the very least school-related racism. Out of the 16 parent sets, I will discuss at length, six parent narratives to illustrate these findings. These six were chosen because their narratives adequately represented all sets. Choosing sets that adequately represented how Black parents were involved had two characteristics. The first characteristic concerned the frequency of codes categorized within each set. Specifically, the six selected narratives have similar low and high-level codes that were found throughout all 16 sets, meaning there were no unique or significant coded fields within these families when compared between all other sets, or at least none that impacted the interpretation of my findings. The other characteristic of these representative sets was that holistically they show range in SES, family dynamics, type of schools attended in this study and simultaneously illustrate the complexity of Black parental involvement and the depth and breadth of how school-related racism were experienced across external variables such as SES, family dynamic, and type of school attended.

Although six cases are chiefly highlighted, I have weaved in discussions of other Black parents to support or demonstrate a divergent presentation of how Black parents attended to their involvement. I pay particular attention to how parents were racially vigilant and used race socialization their children since these were the major high-level codes identified in my findings. It is important to note that: a) at times parents were racially vigilant about race socialization, which often occurred at the home-level; b) parents were racially vigilant outside of schools for their child's education, and often times because of school-related issues (e.g. lack of diversity, culturally affirming curricula, racial maltreatment of school officials). Thus racial vigilance seemed to be an

ever-present contention, however I have chosen to limit this discussion at the school-level as this study did not focus on racial vigilance at the societal level. However, I do highlight evidence that suggest that this phenomenon does transcend to the societal level.

In this section, I also highlight the relationship between school selection or choice and race. These highlights are given not only to add to the description of the Black parents in this study but because the school selection process played a role in how participants decided to be involved as Black parents when considering race and racism.

### **Attending to Demographics**

The reported demographics in this section were mainly drawn from the unstructured interviews with Black parents<sup>16</sup> and the formal audio-taped semi-structured interviews. In this study 15/16 sets had at least two informal unstructured interviews that focused on their background and demographic profile. The parent set that did not undergo two informal unstructured interviews was added to this study later. This addition was made at the time I was gathering semi-structured audiotaped interviews. The reason for this addition was because one parent, a Black father, was unable to interview. Thus I added a Black father and I extended their interview time to 90 minutes; all other sets were interviewed between 60-70 minutes. This additional set received an extended follow-up interview as well.

There were a total of 22 semi-structured interviews taken. No set was required to have two parents for their interview, however, for three sets of interviews both parents were present. A total of eighteen mothers and four fathers interviewed outside of the mother/father sets. Follow-up interviews were done for six of the 16 sets of parents.

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<sup>16</sup> Not all informal interviews were recorded.

These follow-up interviews were conducted to clarify data from the initial interview and were conducted each of the representative sets reported.

All participants in this study were interviewed about their parental involvement practices when their children attended school in the state of Midwestern. Midwestern is located in the Midwest area of the U.S. Most parents resided in Urbantown or a suburb within 30 miles of Urbantown. Urbantown is a major metropolitan city. According to the 2010 census, this city had nearly 60 percent White Americans, a third African American, and less than five percent Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian together. One parent set resided in the state of Midwestern but lived in the fourth largest urban area, Tinkerville, approximately over a hundred miles from Urbantown. Another family lived in a state in the Pacific Northwest but had moved there within the time of this study and his children had attended primarily schools in Urbantown.

All children of the parents interviewed were PK-12 students primarily during the period of 2001 – 2015. Across sets, there were 35 children (18 girls and 17 boys) either currently in school, graduated high school within last three years from the time of the interview, or had completed their GED. The youngest student was in first grade and the highest grade level completed was a junior in college. The youngest was seven and the oldest child was 22 years old. The breakdown of student grade level is as follows: seven elementary students (1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup>), five middle school students (6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>), 14 high school students (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>), eight post-secondary students, and one child that had enrolled and completed a GED program during the time the parent was selected and had their last interview. The 35 children represented in this study were not all of the children represented by the sets of parents. Some parents had adult-age children that had been out

of PK-12 schooling for beyond the specified three-year criteria given for this study. These children were not the focus of the interview, however parents did discuss their involvement in a comparative manner and it was in reference to how they were involved or engaged during the time their older children attended school versus how they were involved during the time of the interview. I coded these comparisons as “*parental comparisons of adult children*”, and these are not widely discussed in this chapter.

**Challenging euphemisms and class-consciousness.** 15 out of the 16 families in this study self reported their SES status. Self-reporting was voluntary. Based on the 15, there were two affluent families, nine middle class families, and five families considered low SES. It is important to note that SES did not appear to be an idle variable for families in this study. Many parents in this study provided a narrative to describe their status and these stories demonstrated that SES was not stagnate, rather a fluid economic situation. For example, one affluent family shared their rise from middle class to upper class, which was primarily due to the performance of their growing business. Another middle class family also shared their fluid economic status, primarily due to the father being laid-off after twenty years of employment. They had considered themselves middle class at the time of their interview, but reported that “technically” they would be considered living in low SES.

Because of the economic fluidity within families and based on the responses of parents, it is plausible that class-consciousness among African Americans could be divergent than class-based theories. For even upon further examination of the conditions of African Americans as presented by the United Nations, African Americans are overeducated and underemployed, and they have one of the highest unemployment rate in

these contemporary times—which is not necessarily attributable to their level of education given the statistics. Further analysis and empirical studies should be conducted to explore the class-consciousness of Black Americans in comparison to how other theoretical frameworks position class and capital to this group.

SES was not always indicative of where families resided in this study. I mention this because “urban” and “suburban” has been presented as a euphemism for SES. Particularly “low SES” has been treated as an euphemism for “urban” or “inner-city”, and middle class has been treated as a euphemism for “suburban”. To demonstrate how these euphemisms’ were disrupted, an example would be Ms. Adams, a representative set.

Ms. Adams, had once lived in what she considered to be the innercity in Urbantown. Ms. Adams participated in a low interest home loan mortgage program requiring her to save for a substantial period of time, take home buying and financial literacy courses, and pay any outstanding reported debts. After completion of this program and requirements, Ms. Adams obtained a low interest loan and decided to move to Hilltop, a predominantly white suburb approximately five miles outside of Urbantown. Ms. Adams was a divorced mother of four and maintained her low-wage income. She reported that she was below the medium standard of middle SES, although she lived in a predominately suburban neighborhood. There were other examples of this disrupted euphemism. For example, one upper class and one low SES family had decided to reduce their living expenses by moving in with relatives for a period of time. Both families resided in suburban neighborhoods but within the city limits of Urbantown, despite their respective SES. Another middle class father of two was undergoing a divorce and was

living in a small apartment. His children were splitting their time between his home in an urban area and an suburban neighborhood where their mother remained.

**Beyond SES.** This study did not explore to what extent SES played a role in involvement of Black families; however, based on the discourse within the interview, economics was discussed as the *less* relevant point in achieving certain educational desires for children. For example, Mr. Dawson, a middle-class father of two daughters had expressed wanting a tutor for his youngest daughter. He discussed the affordability of math tutoring, specifically commenting that it was “too too costly” and then noted the price of tutoring. To circumnavigate his financial concerns, Mr. Dawson took his daughter to the library two to three times a week and tutored her in mathematics. Like Mr. Dawson, many parents tutored their children themselves or tapped into their immediate network of friends and family to assist in tutoring whether it was to mitigate financial costs or the time it took to find a tutor. Other parents discussed navigating costly programs at the school level. Some applied for vouchers for tuition assistance into private schools and others applied for scholarships for various educational activities. In other words, parents in this study may have had some financial limitations but parents discussed these constrains as roadblocks creating alternative solutions but they were not described as indefinite stopping points.

**Family household dynamics.** Like SES, in this study family dynamics also varied. Married, divorced, re-married, and “single-headed” were all represented among the sets of parents; however, in reference to parenting, using the term “single-headed” would be inaccurate as it implies that the parent is raising the child alone. Majority of the parents in this study were once married and co-parented with their former spouses in

varying capacities. Cox and Paley (2003) posit that co-parenting refers to “how parents interact together with their child” (p. 193). There were two parents that had considered themselves single parents. However, the two parents that did consider themselves to be single discussed how their immediate families assisted in raising their children. Families supporting each other in raising children was a consistent pattern found across this study. Specifically family members often carpooled, assisted in homework, and attend functions when parents were unable to for mostly work related reasons and/or because children in the household had multiple functions occurring simultaneously.

To summarize, at the time of the study seven sets were married, three sets were blended families, three reported that they were co-parenting (two lived with mostly the mother, the other with mostly the father), three single households. Out of the three single-headed, all three were headed by the mother.

**Other demographics.** The education of parents varied. The highest level of completion was a Ph.D. and the lowest level of completion was a high school diploma. Parents did not mention if and how their education played a role in their parental involvement activity. Some did discuss their expectations, in which all reported education was a high priority for their family. The type of schools attended by children varied as well. All children had attended a public school at some point in their school career except two. These children had attended only private schools, were siblings, and represented one of the affluent family’s in this study. An in-depth discussion of parental selection of school will be discussed within the six representative narratives to highlight that there is a relationship between race, school choice, and Black parental involvement.

## Major Findings

This section begins with discussing how I developed the codes, “race socialization” and “racial vigilance” out of the parental involvement actions reported by the participants in this study. Following this discussion, I will provide a brief explanation of the two terms. Thirdly, the narratives from the six representative sets will be the remaining focus of this chapter.

**Low-level “parent involvement” coding examples.** To begin the coding process, I used low-level codes in my analysis for every interview. The most prevalent low-level code was “parent involvement”. Below I offer some examples of low-level “parent involvement” codes from other families outside of the six representative sets.

Mr. Richardson, a father of a blended family with five children talked about how he was involved in his older children’s schooling. He detailed how he advised his high school children on how to interact with educators. Mr. Richardson provided an example of this advice; he states: “make sure you go to your teacher and find out what you need to be able to pass this class. And you need to make sure you’re on it”. Then Mr. Richardson detailed how he and his wife followed up with their children’s academic progress by using the school grading web portal. This portal provided the Richardson’s with real time access to current grades. Other examples of low-level parental involvement codes were noted when parents would discuss how they would assist their children with homework. For example, Ms. Sykes discussed how she assisted her partner’s daughter, whom she considered to be her stepdaughter. Ms. Sykes stated:

“I would actually, like, have her, [partner’s daughter] you know, try and do her homework and then he [partner/father] would go back over it and he would work through the problems with her or either—you know, just more and less just sitting back and talking with her and asking her what

does she need help on. Whatever he could do”.

Ms. Thompson, a divorced mother of two whose children primarily lived with their father but both took on equal roles in schooling, discussed how she integrated cultural activities and volunteered at the school level. Ms. Thompson says, “I’ll have him read books about Black—with Black people in it. I’ve taken him to the DuSable Museum<sup>17</sup> in Chicago, and then we’ve gone down to the Underground Railroad Museum”. Then she went on to discuss her role in volunteering, commenting that, “[I am] just helping...like, if they have like little worksheets or something, like just walking around... helping them with the worksheets”. There were a plethora of these codes assigned to parental involvement activities that occurred in and outside of school, however there was a pattern of themes that emerged that were related to race and racism that were discussed in tandem with these “parental involvement” codes.

**Developing high-level codes.** There were two other prominent low-level codes such as “parent decision or response” that were often coded within a sequence of low-level “parent involvement” codes. However, the code “racialized incident”, and “racialized motive or reason” was within these sequences. An example is Mrs. Collingsworth, a low SES mother of two sons. She discussed a racism related incident at school that led to her contemplation of removing her child from school in the middle of the school year or remove him. This dilemma grew out of the continuous bullying of her third grader, Chase and the inaction of school officials. Her contemplation came about after Chase was slapped across the face during his recess without any provoking from a perpetrating student. Mrs. Collingsworth believed that this incident stemmed from

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<sup>17</sup>The DuSable Museum is dedicated to the study of African American history.

racism, and during her interview she noted contemplation but decided that Chase would remain in school. Mrs. Collingsworth provided this rationale for keeping her son at the school in spite of her concerns:

At first we [her and Mr. Collingsworth] wasn't [going to withdraw Chase from school], but I said, 'well...this is the reality of the world, racial discrimination is not dead, it's still alive and he's [Chase] going to experience it through his life so he might as well get used to it now and learn how to deal with it...(shaking her head in disagreement). And I said, you know what, you can only protect him from so much and if he deals with it young, he'll know how to handle it by the time he's older. I said...said if it was vice versa they'd try to put him out...it would have been a real big deal just because he's a male and...'

Chase: "African American"

Chase was not interviewed, but was present in the Collingsworth home at the time of the interview. He interjected after hearing his mother discussing his recent situation. This excerpt was coded "Racialized reason or motive" because the mother was clear in framing her decision and reasoning in a racialized context. Throughout each interview, consistently, the low-level codes "parent decision", "parent response", and/or "parent involvement", were coded with low-level codes pertaining to "racism", "race", and "racialized motive" and "racialized incident". After I finished conducting low-level codes across the 22 interviews, I focused on the pattern of parental involvement, decisions, motive, and responses, which were often discussed in tandem with race, racism, and/or racialized incident. I then constructed a meaning field on the excerpts with this pattern.

To construct the meaning field, I used my thick record from informal discussions with parents, the interview, and any subsequent interview conducted to assist in generating meaning fields. Understanding the context to generate a meaning field is done so there is a bounded range in which I use these codes to generate high level codes. I have provided an example of a meaning field using Mrs. Collingsworth's discussion.

## Meaning Field Example

*At first we (her and Mr. Collingsworth) wasn't,*

[MF: Initially, as parents, we were going to withdraw our son from that school]

*But then I thought about it.*

[MF: however we or I reflected on the situation [and/or] we or I reflected on the racialized situation [and] we or I concluded]

*Well...this is the reality of the world, racial discrimination is not dead, it's still alive*

[MF: racism exists [and/or] the world is racist [and] racism never went away [or] racism remains an active part of society]

*and he's [Chase] going to experience it through his life so he might as well get used to it now and learn how wit it...(shaking her head in disagreement)*

[MF: my son will experience a lifetime of racism [and] racism is normal [and] he should prepare for its normativity [or] he should prepare to manage racism when he experiences it]

*and if he deals wit it young, he'll, know how to handle it by the time he's older.*

[MF: if my son manages racism as it exists in this present time (3<sup>rd</sup> grade) he will know how to manage racism later [and/or] he will be able to cope later [and/or] navigate it later]

*And I said, you know what, you can only protect him from so much*

[MF: As a mother/parent, I cannot protect my son from all aspects of racism [and/or] As a mother/parent I cannot protect my son from all affects of racism [and] therefore I/we decided to keep him at that school]

After constructing this meaning field, I concluded that this parental decision or response needed to be distinguished from other forms of parental involvement. Having to make a decision to withdraw or continue to keep a child in school because of a racialized incident or situation that involved bullying and then making the decision to keep a child in a school because one concluded that racism was a “reality”, was a different construct than other parent involvement constructs that have been previously identified as involvement or engagement in the literature (see Lopez, 2001). Moreover, in this case, the parent discussed socializing her child in order to prepare him for the realities of

racism. Because this was a frequent pattern of involvement, the code race socialization was generated.

**Race socialization.** There are many plausible theories presented in empirical studies explaining the socialization of children. However, parents or guardians are often considered the center of the socialization process. This consideration is mainly attributed to the idea that parents and primary care givers are a child's chief agents of understanding the social norms of any given society (Lesane-Brown, 2008). However, it has been argued that African American parents must also consider the consequences of living in a racial hierarchy in which anti-Black messages are embedded in one's everyday encounters (e.g. microaggressions), and thus racial socialization is a way of protecting children from and preparing children for a racist hierarchal society. Specifically, Lesane-Brown reports that Black parents:

have the additional task [of] raising children able to survive and prosper in a society that devalues 'Blackness'. Black parents often act as a protective buffer between the reality of racism and discrimination and their children by transmitting socialization messages that prepare their children to deal with racial issues (p. 27)

The use of race socialization as a “protective buffer” or factor to assist children in navigating a racist society unscathed has been a reoccurring finding among Black parents across various fields. From mental health (Hughes & Chen, 1997) to Black psychology (Brown, 2008; Thompson & Vetta, 1994, Thomas & Speight, 1992), and so forth (e.g. counseling, cultural diversity, social psychology) (see Demo, David, & Hughes, 1990), consistently studies have found that African American parents regularly facilitate racial messages to their children and quite often these messages are centered on racial and cultural pride assisting them in their resiliency—particularly in school (Brown, 2008;

Brown, Linver, Evans, & DeGennaro, 2009; Neblett et al., 2009; Neblett et al., 2008) Brown (2008), reported that the resiliency to withstand racial discrimination among African American youth was positively associated with race socialization messages transmitted by their parents. Specifically, Brown concludes that the African American youth “participants who scored high in resiliency reported receiving higher levels of ‘coping with cultural antagonism’ and ‘cultural pride socialization [messages]’ (2008, p. 39). There was also a positive link between race socialization, resiliency, and academic achievement.

Aside from contemporary studies, race socialization has been found to be protective strategy and factor propagated by Black parents to their children since the period of enslavement in the America’s. Williams (2005), author of the book, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*, gives a number of examples of parents and fictive kin that purposefully taught their children how to interact with Whites to avoid brutal punishments that were often inflicted on African people. Williams (2005) notes that children were often taught to be adult-like in their interactions with Whites citing historical narratives that revealed that parents taught their children to act beyond their developmental years because they were unable to be “child-like” and make mistakes among Whites.

Considering the research on race socialization among Black parents, Mrs. Collingsworth’s description of her involvement tethers on the side of “race socialization” more so than what is considered to be “parent involvement” and/or “parental response” but still within the purview of parental involvement, as she was in hope that these messages would help her child cope with the issues in school that may impact his

academic achievement. These messages and motives may encompass other things, but nonetheless, this finding was significant as it is a narrative that is worthy of being understood in the racial lens that the participant gave.

The term, “race socialization”, was not used by participants but the actions taken undoubtedly fit the description. Acts of race socialization primarily occurred at the home level when transmitted by parents. The method, frequency, and topics of racialized messages seemed to range. Some parents had discussions of race and racism in the aftermath of a school related incident or public tragedy like the murders of Trayvon Martin (Brown, 2013; Leonard, 2014; Tepperman, 2013) and Michal Brown (News, 2015). Some parents could not recall when they began discussions of race but mentioned that they had “always discussed race” with their children. Only one choose not to deliver messages of race until after adolescence but like some, in an effort to protect their children the “burden of being Black” and what that meant in a racial hierarchy. One mother, Mrs. Adams, a single mother of four, regretted that decision and her counter-narrative will be shared in this chapter.

The varying ways race socialization was transmitted will be highlighted in this through the presentation of participant counter-narratives of each reported set. It should be noted that the goal of this study was not to identify which messages aligned with racial pride, racial status, or other varying form of racial socialization, rather I focused on any occurrences that evoked race socialization or demonstrated race socialization, which I argue to be the ways in which Black parents were involved at the home level, but not certainly the only way for their involvement was complex but race socialization was nevertheless a significant part of their home-level involvement.

**Racial vigilance.** Amongst race socialization, parents often discussed their children's racial dynamic in schools. During these discussions, parents detailed how these racial dynamics played a role in their parental involvement and engagement strategies at the school and home level. Amongst racial dynamics, racialized incidents occurring at the school level played a role in parental involvement and engagement strategies as well.

Whether parents were drawing from racial dynamics or responding to school-related racism this response played a central aspect in the way they were involved as Black parents. Primarily, their actions straddled hegemonic ideas of parental involvement but were often times grounded in *anticipation* of racism occurring at the school-level. For example, parents who had children in White dominated schools discussed how they constantly addressed mitigating what they believed would become an issue for their child because their children were among the few African American children in classroom or school.

Primarily parents addressed these race-related concerns and/or individual acts of racism in an anticipatory manner. For example, drawing from her understanding of racism in a White dominated environment, Mrs. Goode decided to volunteer on a weekly basis—but also because she wanted to support her children in their education. Both were synonymously intertwined, but based on a series of parental involvement accounts the high-level code of “racial vigilance” was a prominent feature of her involvement in her daughters education.

Social scientists have long documented that groups of color mentally prepare for the possibility of experiencing racial discrimination (Du Bois and Eaton 1899; Feagin &

Sikes 1994). This anticipation of racism has been described as a protective stance. Some researchers have termed this stance as, ‘racism-related vigilance or racial hypervigilance in the hard and social sciences (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Henson, Derlega, Pearson, Ferrer, & Holmes, 2013; Hicken et al., 2013).

For example, to return back to Mrs. Collingsworth, she discussed how she kept a “watchful eye” on Chase after the incident, and eventually she withdraws him from the school because of the continued harassment. Keeping a “watchful eye” because one believes their child is being harassed because he is Black, is a form of racial vigilance.

### **Additional Notes**

At times parents intertwined discussions of race with their notions of diversity. Some parents expressed that being around White people was considered “diverse” or what constituted “diversity”. Other Black parents considered being with other Black people as “diverse” or “diversity”. These varying notions of diversity were made more apparent when I constructed a reconstructive horizon analysis. This dynamic was also revealed in some of the narratives provided. Additionally, Black parents often referred to White educators and/or children as “they” or “them”. To clarify this reference, I asked the participants during the interview as to who “they” or “them were. I note their answer in the descriptions of representative cases.

### **Representative Sets**

This next section will highlight the six representative cases of the 16 parents in this study. Represented within these cases are eight daughters and ten sons. Out of the six narratives provided, three sets of parents were interviewed together and three sets were interviewed with just one parent. One parent out of these sets considered herself to be a

single-mother, the other five were married. Three parents sets reported that they were middle class, two reported low SES, and one did not report their status. The children within these cases go to a range of schools, however, only one set attended the same school system throughout their schooling thus far, the Goode Family. In this section, I will give a description about the family, provide a short discussion of the school selected, and then focus on how racial socialization and racial vigilance were enacted as forms of involvement. At times, acts of racial vigilance and race socialization seem to be intertwined.

### **The Goode Family**

Mr. and Mrs. Goode are the parents of three school-age girls. In our interview, Mrs. Goode described her three daughters, Olivia, Emma, and Sophia. Their youngest daughter, 11-year old Olivia, was entering the sixth grade. Olivia was described as studious and “self-driven”. Mrs. Goode mentioned that Olivia “enjoys school [and] has been a straight A student... [but] she got one B”. The Goode’s second daughter, 12-year old Emma, was in the seventh grade. Mrs. Goode described Emma’s excitement about the opportunity to take “high ability” classes the upcoming school year. The oldest is 14-year old, Sophia, is a “star athlete” that was entering high school that fall. According to Mrs. Goode, Sophia had a “rough middle school transition” but added, “she had to learn how to become a student”. Overall, Sophia was still doing well academically and was on the college-track.

Mr. Goode works in corporate America, and although Mrs. Goode had earned her Bachelor’s degree, she had been a stay-at-home mom since Sophia was born. But the notion of “staying-at-home” would be an inaccurate description of her daily undertakings.

Her days were jam-packed with school and educational-related activities, whether it was for her daughters' or other people's children. Mrs. Goode had served as a regular classroom volunteer at her daughters' school since Sophia entered kindergarten but was recently hired as a Teacher's Assistant (TA) for the next school year.

Mrs. Goode had coached two sports throughout the year for the last few years. Coaching was a decision made after the girls were older and participated in sports themselves. Mrs. Goode chauffeured her girls every day to school, volunteered during the day, and then on to a substantial range of educational and extracurricular activities after school. At home, Mr. and Mrs. Goode expected their daughters to complete their homework first. To assist and supplement support for the children when Mr. and Mrs. Goode needed to be at a school event as a coach or as parents, Mrs. Goode's mother came to their home during the after school hours each day to assist the family. Although Mr. Goode worked during the day, he too was heavily involved. Mrs. Goode detailed how she and Mr. Goode were highly active in school-community affairs, noting that it was important to them to be visible in their community.

Given all the activity, Mrs. Goode referred to herself, as a "soccer mom". This archetypal self-description was in congruence with many parts of her lifestyle, and thus, she seems to embody the social construction of a "soccer mom". Not to mention, her girls had played the sport for some years. In this study, in addition to Mrs. Goode, a number of other Black mothers' across demographics, described themselves as mothers who balanced work, the needs of their children, and their child's education—much like the presented archetype of a soccer mom even though White women are often presented as soccer moms in the mainstream media and even in empirical research White-Johnson,

Ford, and Sellers (2010). However, not everyone was able to have the ability be involved at the school level like Mrs. Goode. To compile the mother participants daily work across sets, two mothers had built successful companies in which they were the primary owners, two worked for themselves, seven had balanced full-time jobs while returning to higher education, and four had at least worked the same place for over twenty years, one of these mother's were preparing for retirement. Only one was unemployed at the time of the interview, but she had found employment shortly after our interview.

**Choosing schools.** The Goode Family reside less than 10 miles from Urbantown, in a suburb called Archfield. Since the Goode daughter's entered kindergarten, they have attended Archfield School District (ASD), the only district in the suburb. The process in which Mr. and Mrs. Goode choose the suburb to live in was similar to how other Black families in this study selected their residence. The majority of the Black families made this choice based upon how *they* perceived the school and school districts. These perceptions hinged on many different considerations. Some parents in this study relied on the experiences of other known Black children to gauge the quality of a school for selection. Others relied on their perception of magnet programs and themed-focus charter schools. Particularly, these parents believed the designed curriculum would tap into their child's potential –despite failing reputations of the school. But some relied more heavily on school data to guide their school selection, like the Goode's.

The Goode's decided to move to Archfield after extensive research on ASD, which encompassed investigating mainly graduation and college entrance rates by race, particularly African Americans, but also the overall performance of the school district. According to Mrs. Goode, although there were not as many African American students in

the district, overall ASD performances were better than other districts. Mrs. Goode mentioned that they did not choose a “too, too Black” school, as she believed a nearly all-Black school was unrealistic for her children, thus they opted ASD. ASD was mostly White at the time they selected Archfield as their place of residency. To speak to choosing this White space, Mrs. Goode stated:

*...diversity can be good because that's reality. This is life. It's not all, everybody's gonna be the same color [i.e. Black]. You know, so I felt it was important for them to have that experience, for them to be able to go out there and learn these things. Because this is how life is. And it's not to the point where I ever wanted to shelter them from these things that will happen to 'em. So I feel like it was a—a good joint decision. To bring them into a predominantly White population.*

Several questions raised as she said this, What did Mrs. Goode want to expose her children to that she believed “*will happen to [th]em*” in their *life* and that was their *reality*? What is it that their African American daughters would experience about *life* and *reality* in a predominantly White school that was believed to be unrealistic at a predominantly Black school? Mrs. Goode provided the answers to these questions after she told me about Emma’s experience with race and racism.

**Being “dark”.** According to Mrs. Goode, a White female classmate in Emma’s kindergarten class was passing out birthday party invitations to her fellow female classmates. Every girl—except Emma, received an invitation. Emma was informed by one of her peers that she did not receive an invitation because she was “dark”. The racial makeup of the class was Emma, being the only African American student and two bi-racial girls in the classroom. According to Mrs. Goode, Emma came home that school day and asked, “why didn’t I get invited to the party Mommy?” Mrs. Goode replied,

“why do you think you didn’t get invited Emma?” Emma responded, "Oh, I kinda think I didn’t get invited because I’m dark?”

According to Mrs. Goode, the difference in *colorism*, that being Emma being Black versus everyone including the bi-racial children, played a role in her classmate’s decision to invite all the White girls, the two biracial girls—but not Emma. Colorism (e.g. Swanson, 2009) is the “allocation of privilege and disadvantage according to the lightness or darkness of one’s skin” (p. 442). Burton et al. (2010) go on to state “the practices of colorism tend to favor lighter skin over darker skin as indicated by a person’s appearance as proximal to a White phenotype” (p. 440).

Mrs. Goode explains how she addressed Emma’s experience:

“I had to sit down and explain to her, 'Yes, you are different because of this [the color of your skin]--but that doesn’t make her [White female classmate], or anyone else, any better than you are'. And after some tears then she kinda understood”.

This response is an example of racial socialization. Mrs. Goode never informed the school, although she expressed some torment because the White female was a classmate with Emma until they were assigned separate classrooms by the fourth grade. She expressed relief when her daughter did not have to be in the same class with her after three years.

Mrs. Goode thought of this incident as "a learning experience". She specifically she says, "I think it was a good thing, so she’ll know that those kind of things exist. That’s *real life*. That’s *reality*.”

**Racial vigilance: The origins of parental involvement.** The interview with Mrs. Goode took place one week before the start of the new school year. I asked Mrs. Goode to tell me what she was doing to prepare for the upcoming school year. She described the

supplies purchased, the outfits selected, and the back-to-school activities planned. I asked Mrs. Goode to describe the kinds of parental involvement activities she had regularly engaged in throughout the years. In a reverse chronological fashion, Mrs. Goode began discussing their current level of involvement. She shared her involvement as a parent in the capacity of a volunteer and detailed a multitude of sporting, fine arts, and community events that her and Mr. Goode were involved in that were in support of their daughters' education.

Mrs. Goode also described their home-level support. Specifically, for Sophia, Mrs. Goode talked about how she focused on assisting Sophia on the difficult academic transition from middle to high school, like helping her understand how to manage her time, make safe decisions when dealing with social media, and “staying out of [school-related] drama” among peers. Mrs. Goode reflected on how they assisted Emma, who was beginning high ability classes when school resumed. The mother discussed how her and Mr. Goode worked side-by-side with Emma each evening using one of the booklets her school sent home to assist in their preparation for Emma’s state standardized test. Mrs. Goode talked about Emma’s rise from low performances to a high performance under their guidance.

Mrs. Goode began tracing their involvement at the school and home level, reaching back to when it all began, which was when their oldest daughter, Sophia was in kindergartner. Mrs. Goode specifically says:

I always volunteer in classrooms...I've always volunteered inside the classroom. Any performances they have, we've made sure were there, like fine arts, like band, and stuff, we make sure we attend. We make sure we attend any parent meetings. Just to be involved and be active in the community...So *they* know *we* [the word *we* was emphasized] exist...that's real important.

I asked Mrs. Goode to clarify as to who "they" were in this last statement. She replied,

"Those [in a soft spoken tone] teachers, principals. It's important to be out there just so they know that these [she points toward herself] kids do have parents. That's important. Because our school population is not very diverse. African American population is, for the most part, it's really small. So they all know that *we* [is emphasized] exist. It's important and I think being that the staff is primarily Caucasian, I'm pretty sure it's 90 percent Caucasian, it's—I feel that it is important that they [is emphasized] know that the parents of these [emphasized] African American kids are involved. If there's any issues we can communicate with them. And I see it's also important for the kids so they know that somebody's there for them".

Mrs. Goode gives a number of reasons to explain their school level of parental involvement. But the reasons given were in tandem with racial dynamics, that being a high population of White students and educators and a small number of African Americans.

**Racial vigilance and race socialization.** There were two ways in which the Goode's responded to race and racism. To mitigate the high population of White's that her children went to school with, Mrs. Goode states, "we surround ourselves with people, like Black people". To meet the needs of her children's access to other Black people, she discusses making sure that her children are near extended family members. Moreover, she often discussed the importance of ensuring that her daughters have a positive identity as Black females, she states; "as Black females we made sure that they understood who they were and stayed true to themselves versus try[ing] to adjust for other people". This attention to mitigating the racial dynamics of schools by having access to Black people and attending to their daughters' identity as Black females can be considered racial socialization. The Goode's also discussed that it was important for their children to know that "they are not alone" given the racial dynamics. This spoke to their frequent and

continued presence at the school level. This level of presence and in order to mitigate racial isolation can be considered racial vigilance.

There were other Black parents in this study whose children went to schools with similar racial dynamics as the Goode daughters. These parents also attended to mitigating the possible affects of these racial dynamics. For example, Mrs. Davis, a single mother who actively co-parented with her third grade son's father, discussed the imbalance of White students to Black students at her son's , school. Mrs. Davis complained that because Omar, her son, went to a predominantly White private school, that he never had access to other Black children in a learning environment-aside from recreational centers (i.e. local Boys and Girls Club). Miss Davis complains,

...Like the only place that you can go to learn was some space that they would turn into like a rec center, and like the city [Urbantown] is full of that...I wasn't that great academically at school, but it was the extra-curricular stuff that provided opportunities for me to learn and explore from a culturally conscious, black-centered experience.

She discussed how her mother deliberately placed her and her brother in activities with at least other Black people that could be considered culturally affirming:

I know growing up, my mother had us involved in every damn thing. Everything and everything that we were a part of was led by Black people. If I went to like Saturday enrichment program at the community college, the teacher was Black. My teachers at school wasn't Black. My dance teachers were Black. You know, the after school program that we went to, and we did all of the Kwanzaa celebrations. Now, my mama doesn't celebrate Kwanzaa, but at the after school program, we had our Kwanzaa program. You know, like in the community, there was those things, um, and I'm just like [she shakes her head]- I'm struggling to find that space.

When Miss Davis says she was “struggling to find that space” I asked her about a popular program in Urbantown called Pipeline to College (PTC). PTC was a college-bound program for “minority” children and it had received state and national recognition

for its success. Many Black children participated in their programming. Specifically, I asked, “what about PTC?”, because I wondered if she had and/or why she had not considered that as a “space” for Omar to have the “culturally conscious, Black-centered experience”. In her reply she said:

“that’s not [she pauses and then shakes her head no then shrugs her shoulders], that is what it is. It’s for older students, that’s one thing, but it’s also to me, a very Eurocentric place, I mean it definitely is. I mean it really [drawn out] is-it’s helping cultivate conservative Black Urbantowners<sup>18</sup> .

In a follow up interview, Ms. Davis eventually removed her child from this school and selected a diverse public school. She noted that this decision was made because she felt that his previous school could not meet his needs as a Black male. She thought the diversity would allow her child to have access to what she believed was more culturally affirming to Omar. The parental action to provide a more culturally affirming experience can be considered racial socialization. However, these actions also hinges on racial vigilance as Ms. Davis expresses that this is an ongoing parental pursuit that she feels is important in her son’s educational experience. Not only does she feel that this is important, she removes her child from this racial dynamic in anticipation that he will not receive this affirming experience, and then finds a school that she believe will be more culturally affirming. Although Mrs. Goode and Ms. Davis children went to schools with similar racial dynamics, they respond to their children’s needs as Black children differently, which demonstrates the complexity of Black parental involvement, but nonetheless race and racism was part of their decision and informed their response as Black parents involved in their child’s education.

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<sup>18</sup> Participant stated city in Midwestern, which she was discussing.

## **The Collingsworth Family**

Mrs. Collingsworth is the mother of two school-age sons. At the time of the first interview, her oldest, Miles was in the tenth grade and her youngest, Chase, was in the third grade. During our second interview, both boys had been promoted to their next grade levels. At the time of the second interview, Miles was away at an engineering camp at a local university. Earlier that year, Miles went on a college tour and participated in a long-term mentorship program for Black men that enhanced his understanding of the expectations of college. Chase was also in a multitude of activities. At the time of the second interview, Chase was a youth docent at a local museum. That school year Chase played basketball and participated in an afterschool camp focused on science and archeology.

Mrs. Collingsworth was a hairdresser and Mr. Collingsworth had been recently laid off after twenty-years of working for the same employer. During the course of staying in contact with Mrs. Collingsworth, she had returned back to higher education and had begun her own hair salon business in her home to save money on renting a booth at a salon shop. Being in this flux, Mrs. Collingsworth discussed her tenacity to maintain what her children had access to and thus she explained the multitude of scholarships she had applied for so her children could continue to participate in activities she deemed as important.

Church was one of the cornerstones of the Collingsworth family activities as well and the mother noted it as intricate in assisting her children in their schoolwork, like providing them with good habits. Habits such as reading the Bible daily for reading practice were notes as an early form of involvement for the mother. She detailed how she

read to her son's on a daily basis and the Bible was the first book that her children began to read. The Collingsworth boys were heavily involved as church members. Mrs. Collingsworth mentioned that the boys had been active in their church since they were born. Other families discussed the importance of church when they detailed how they were involved as parents and what their children were involved in.

However, their involvement served another purpose, as it was one of the ways in which parents sought after "diversity" for their children. For example, Mr. Dawson, a parent of two daughters that went to a predominantly White private school discussed why his wife and him choose a "multicultural church". He mentioned, "the girls do not see other people like them. This is not a good thing, particularly when it comes to dating". He had stated that he worried about his oldest teenage daughter having access to other boys, aside from the White young males. Mr. Dawson believed that taking his daughters' to a multicultural church would allow them to have access to other young men of color. Another parent, Mrs. Adams, who I will discuss later on, she too used church as a place where her children could have access to other people of color, shortly after she moved to the suburbs.

**Choosing schools.** The Collingsworth oldest son, Miles, went to a mostly all-Black intermediate (9-12) charter school called Statesville College High (SCH) in Urbantown. Mrs. Collingsworth selected SCH for Miles because of its high graduation rates, intensive college-readiness programming, and high college acceptance rates. To Mrs. Collingsworth, the school's academic success rate was impressive. However, she frequently complained of the school's harsh zero-tolerance discipline policy.

According to the mother, the school frequently suspended students for frivolous reasons, such as incompleteness of homework or being disrespectful to teachers. Moreover, Mrs. Collingsworth considered the discipline approach as counterproductive to the goals of education and she highlighted several times when her oldest was suspended for mild offenses such as disagreeing with his teacher or forgetting homework. She detailed the work she had to do to keep her son on track when he was suspended for these reasons.

Mrs. Collingsworth made a joke about the high frequency in which she was called to pick up her son stating, "I am up at the school 24/7". She was not alone in feeling this way, there were numerous community conversations about schools with high suspension rates and SCH was one of these known schools. SCH publically justified these practices as well. Nevertheless, Mrs. Collingsworth thought the hassle over suspensions was worth the access to other Black students who were successful in school as well as a school that was dedicated to getting students into college. She stated, "You know, there ain't as many schools that can do with what they do—and with Black boys...Miles and Chase don't have an option. They will go to college."

Chase was in a drastically different demographic. Chase attended a prestigious private school that housed an International Baccalaureate (IB) program with an intensive foreign language program, called Foreign Language Academy (FLA). Chase was on a full-scholarship that Mrs. Collingsworth had to annually apply to. Chase began attending FLA in the first grade. But unlike SCH, FLA was mostly White and Chase was the only African American student in his class. Although Chase was academically doing well, particularly already fluent in one language, Mrs. Collingsworth had expressed some discomfort with the dynamic of Chase being the only Black person in his classroom. In

Mrs. Collingsworth first interview she focused on a recent incident that involved Chase and his classmates.

**The slap.** While Chase was playing on the playground a “little Asian girl” had slapped him in the face. According to the mother, Chase did not have any understanding as to why this happened. She mentioned that Chase had told her to leave him alone and Chase had thought the girl was infatuated with him. However, his mother discussed Chase had been experiencing an ongoing problem with his classmates, particularly them hitting Chase without any provoking. She questioned if this had anything to do with Chase being the only Black child in the classroom. Although she had informed his teacher, Mrs. Collingsworth did not believe the teacher ever did anything about these ongoing issues. Many parents expressed this sentiment with teachers, where they were uncertain what was done if anything. Mrs. Collingsworth firmly believed that the ongoing teasing had led up to Chase being slapped without any provoking reason by the young female student.

When asked how the school handled Chase being slapped on the playground, Mrs. Collingsworth passionately shouted "nothing" and went on to say, "all the principal made the little Asian girl do was write a letter of apology". Although Mrs. Collingsworth insisted that the principal take some type of restorative action, the principal did not. The lack of action made Mrs. Collingsworth upset, mistrusting, and she believed that the principal lacked concern because Chase was Black. She expressed that she and Mr. Collingsworth contemplated taking Chase out of FLA and then juxtaposed the idea using a hypothetical racial situation, as if Chase was the culprit. Mrs. Collingsworth states:

Mrs. Collingsworth: At first we [her and Mr. Collingsworth] wasn't [going to withdraw Chase from school], but I said, 'well...this is the reality of the world, racial discrimination is not dead, it's still alive and he's [Chase] going to experience it through his life so he might as well get used to it now and learn how to deal with it...(shaking her head in disagreement) And I said, you know what, you can only protect him from so much and if he deals with it young, he'll, know how to handle it by the time he's older. I said...said if it was vice versa they'd try to put him out...it would have been a real big deal just because he's a male and...'  
Chase: "African American"

**Racial vigilance and race socialization.** Like Mrs. Goode, Mrs. Collingsworth expresses that racism is a reality for her children, and believed that if Chase experiences it during his childhood that he will be able to handle racism as an adult. This message, coupled with the fact that Chase had demonstrated that he had received this message shows that Mrs. Collingsworth used racial socialization as an act of involvement.

In the second interview, Mrs. Collingsworth professed that because of this incident, that she kept a "watchful eye" over Chase by increasing her contact time with the school through volunteering, "drop[ping] by to 'check' up on Chase", asking Chase questions about interactions he had with his teachers' and peers. However, she had decided to withdraw Chase and enroll him at a new charter school that is under the control of the school Miles attends. This decision came about because of another playground incident.

"Hang Him". On the playground, three of Chase's classmates took a jump rope, put it around Chase's neck, and then shouted that they were going to "hang him". The principal did not believe that this was an incident that was worthy of serious consequences. Mrs. Collingsworth stated, he said "kids will be kids". She retorted to me,

“What kind of sense does that make—where these kids take a rope [pauses], put it around my baby’s neck [pauses], tell him they goin ‘hang him’ [pauses] and you tellin me ‘kids will be kids’. No! Sorry! I know he is on a full-ride scholarship, but no Mame...no Mame [she shakes her head]! I got what I needed. My baby can speak a foreign language and fluently!”

Mrs. Collingsworth eventually removes Chase from FLA because she believed this incident was racially motivated and that the principal lacked an empathetic stance, unable to see her child as a victim in this incident. This removal was done so despite the access to a prestigious school and her child’s favorable educational outcomes. For Chase, Mrs. Collingsworth chooses a new charter school under the umbrella of SCH, where her eldest son Miles attended. She mentions that chooses this school despite the reputation SCH has and her ill feelings toward their disciplinary policies. She felt that these particular battles were less of a threat than the direct individual racial violence Chase endured at FLA.

### **The Wheaton Family**

Mr. and Mrs. Wheaton is an affluent couple with two elementary children, eight year old Brody and nine year old Hannah. Brody excelled in school. Mrs. Wheaton said that for Brody, “school is easy for him and he’s like the man in his class because he knows how to do all the math and everybody thinks he’s cool”. She went on to describe his ability to keep up with his school responsibilities adding that for the most part

his homework [is] pretty much done. He’s done it in-between classes; his teacher says that... like, if there’s a spare second – he’ll finish his homework at school. He’s on t! He has homework sometimes [at home], but he can pretty much manage it himself.

To challenge Brody, Mrs. Wheaton enrolled him in a brain-based program that allowed him to work on his left and right brain skills. Brody was also a fantastic athlete

and at the time of the interview he was active in in two basketball leagues and was in swimming class along with his sister.

Fourth grader, Hannah, was very inquisitive. Mrs. Wheaton talked about her many curiosities and as parents, they fueled her interests by providing her with literature and assessing any activities that may have related to these new interests. Hannah was like Brody, very athletic. Along with swimming she played volleyball. However, according to Mrs. Wheaton, school did not come as easy for Hannah like it did for Brody. Her mother stated,

“I think it’s a little harder for Hannah because she does struggle and she does have to work so hard...Hannah struggles a little bit more with school in general. Although she struggled in school, Mrs. Wheaton thought volleyball was great experience for Hannah. Specifically Mrs. Wheaton stated, “[volleyball] was really important to me, because it gave her a place to, kind of, excel, you know, and do well. She did very well”.

Mrs. Wheaton expressed that there was nothing wrong with Hannah cognitively, yet they were using a variety of measures in the last few years to assist Hannah in school. The Wheaton’s had employed tutors, paid for special programs, solicited help from relatives that had been licensed elementary teachers. Mrs. Wheaton informed me that they even went to doctors and had agreed to place Hannah on medication to help her focus in class. She talked about this experience, but stated that she eventually concluded that Hannah just needed one-on-one help. She summarized her conclusion mentioning that

Hannah needs a lot more review of what they did during the day and help. It takes a lot longer with her... Hannah always needed a little extra help, so we were trying to do what we can to help her”.

**Choosing schools.** The Wheaton children attended Valley Academy, one of the premier private schools in the Midwest. This choice was made after vetting about six

other private schools in and around the surrounding areas of their major metropolitan city of Urbantown. Valley Academy was top-ranked in every academic category but specifically what attracted the Wheaton's to Valley were their resources, specifically their opportunities for studying abroad and their state of the art campus. At first, the only negative critique the mother mentioned of the school at the time of selection was the lack of diversity in both the teacher and student body. Mrs. Wheaton says,

I like it, for the most part. I like that they have lots of resource...that's the thing I like about it. Diversity, of course, could be better, but we live in Urbantown, so...[she laughs] you know, you get what you get, but it could be better even still.

I asked Mrs. Wheaton to discuss the other school that Hannah and Brody were at prior to Valley. The Wheaton children once attended FLA, where Chase Collingsworth had attended, however, Hannah and Brody were in separate language programs and had left nearly two years prior to the time of the first interview with Mrs. Wheaton. Mrs. Wheaton described why she left FLA:

It just didn't seem like the teacher had enough knowledge to, maybe, reach her [Hannah]. And so then we kind of found out that some of the teachers weren't licensed teachers. And then we were like, "What?" you know? [She laughs] When you have kids that are kind of on extremes, you need... I mean, kids need a licensed teacher anyways, but you need the one that's going to reach that child and is also going to push Brody\*. And so that's kind of [why] They weren't accredited teachers so it just didn't work out. And [FLA] is a pretty young school, so they just didn't have... I didn't think they had the resources to do what they need to do, for the language. I kind of felt it was a subpar public school... You know what I mean? Because they didn't have the technology and everything that you need to support, studying a different language. You should have everything in that language. You should have the iPads, you should have apps, you should have, you know, manipulatives, you should have all that stuff in a language. And when Hannah got to first grade, we were just not impressed. And we thought the math that she was learning, like, math is universal, she should be learning first-grade math. And we felt like it was, not on the level of where it should be, so we were just, really confused

Mrs. Wheaton noted that the decision to leave FLA was difficult:

It was a really hard decision to leave because we really liked the diversity there because it was just such an international community, you know? You have people from all over the world. They had a lot of Africans that had their kids in school there. And so it was really diverse.

Valley Academy was different from the Wheaton's perception of the racial dynamics at FLA in their children's foreign language program. Valley was predominantly White, and the Wheatons's believed that they could navigate the lack of diversity by providing opportunities for their children to be part of activities outside of school that likely had access to other children, particularly Black children. The Wheaton's discussed enrolling their children in camps with other known African American children and deliberately placed their children in programs with many African American children, but particularly in the summer. They also discussed how their international trips were ways in which they attempted to expose their children to other non-European cultures. These are examples of racial socialization.

*"...nigger girl"*. In honor of Black History Month, Hannah's fourth grade teacher, Mr. Aaron, was reading the book, "The Liberation of Gabriel King" (e.g. Swanson, 2009). To summarize, the setting takes place during a racially paralyzing time, particularly directly after desegregation. It is focused on soon-to-be fifth grade classmates and friends, Gabriel and Frita. Gabriel is a young white male, and Frita is a young African American female. The two friends spend the summer together focusing on conquering Gabriel's fears. Gabriel is fearful of many things from spiders to going into the fifth grade next year. However, the summary of the book details that Frita has fears of her own. The summary goes on to discuss how Frita is the only African American in her school and the KKK was active in her town.

There were striking similarities between Frita, the character, and Hannah, the student. Both were similar in age and grade level. Moreover, like Frita, Hannah was the only African American girl in her primarily White class. Mrs. Wheaton said that Hannah related heavily to Frita.

According to Mrs. Wheaton, Mr. Aaron, along with his fourth graders, was reading a passage within the book. Mr. Aaron reads aloud, “Then his pop yelled, You got beat up by a nigger girl?” According to Mrs. Wheaton, Mr. Aaron checks to see if the students know what the word “nigger” means. Mrs. Wheaton stated that in response to Mr. Aaron, several White students mentioned that they heard their parents say “nigger”. Hannah, did not know what the word meant. Mrs. Wheaton detailed how she learned about her daughter’s experience in class:

Hannah came home and she told me that she had learned the word “nigger”. And what it meant. I’m like, it kind of shocked me, and I was like, “Well, what are you reading?” And she’s like, “I’m reading...” What was it called? Something of Gabriel King. And I was like, “Okay,” so then I immediately, downloaded it on my phone. And I started reading it because I thought, “What is this book about and where is the word ‘nigger’?” So, I started reading it and then I realized it was about this young African American girl [Frita] who befriends this young White boy. And the young White boy’s kind of afraid of everything. He’s, a big scaredy-cat, he gets bullied at school. And the Black girl becomes his, best friend and she helps him face his bullies and face all his fears. Like, he has this fear of...I think it was of spiders or something. And so she made him catch a spider, you know? You know, just, all that kind of stuff. But, during the whole situation, she also ends up taking heat for him, and people call her names. Like “nigger” and all kinds of different things. And so, they had a discussion about the word in the class.

Hannah detailed this discussion with her mother

Hannah was telling me some of the kids in her class already knew the word [“nigger”], and [posed the question to Hannah] ‘why would they say that to that little girl? No one should ever call anyone ‘nigger’...And she didn’t know the word, then she felt very uncomfortable because of what the book was about and the word—it said “nigger girl”. It was in the

context of the book, and calling it to the little Black girl. And, she's the only Black girl...in her class. And so, she felt some kind of way about that.

Mrs. Wheaton discussed how she felt after she learns of the incident from Hannah.

It was very. At first I was very upset and very angry and I felt all kinds of ways about it, so I just started reading the book. And then I read it with her, when she had chapters to read at home, we would read it together. And discuss it, and talk about it.

Mrs. Wheaton discussed why she did not interfere with the teacher's decisions.

Because, her teacher's a White male, I feel like he was trying to talk about race in the class. And I felt like his heart was in the right place, although I would have liked to have known that they were reading a book like that beforehand, because I would have had some discussions with her so she just wasn't caught off-guard. So I felt like, I didn't want to impede what he was trying to do, because I felt like there could be some good come out of it, but I also just kind of wanted to make sure Hannah felt comfortable and safe, and I told her, if you don't feel comfortable reading the book, you don't have to read the book. I told her, 'I'll talk to your teacher about it', so I kind of tried to support her with it, but... But, yeah, it was very, it was very difficult. Yeah, [she shakes her head] she's the only Black girl.

Later on during Black History Month, Mrs. Wheaton discusses an additional incident. Mrs. Wheaton shares that Mr. Aaron shows a video that focused on the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and chattel slavery in Colonial America. As Hannah watches the video, she begins to cry and hyperventilates. Hannah became so hysterical that Mr. Aaron, called the nurse. As Hannah leaves the classroom her peers began saying "we're so sorry Hannah". Hannah was eventually referred to the school counselor that day.

A few weeks later at an end of the grading period parent teacher conference, the school counselor sees them in the hallway and approaches them commenting "we are so sorry about what happened to Hannah". After Mr. and Mrs. Wheaton were given the details of Hannah's experience:

he sent her to the nurse, and she spoke with the counselor, as well, about it. And I didn't find out about that until Parent-Teacher Conferences. So I was kind of upset...that they didn't tell me that my daughter was upset, because she didn't tell me about it when she came home...They mentioned it in passing, then I was like, "What?! When did this happen?" That was a little disturbing!

**Racial vigilance and race socialization.** Mrs. Wheaton had expressed discontent for the way African American people were portrayed at Valley Academy. She discussed this portrayal of African Americans and how this imagery affected her children.

Yeah, it's kind of a hard thing for kids, because, they're growing up in a school, they're trying to be accepted. And, it's kind of, the way they portray slaves in books and things. It's just all so...so victim-y and helpless. So, it's hard and you kind of get singled out a little bit. Well, when there's just a few African Americans, people are looking at you when they're talking about slavery and what happened, and all of that. And when you're a kid you just want to be part of the group. But, they have to understand their history, and, we talked about it... because I wanted them to understand – just, the importance and the significance of it.

In the excerpt above, Mrs. Wheaton demonstrates how she becomes involved through racial socialization, particularly in order to contrast the actions of the schools. She discusses the importance of having an understanding of African American aside from the "victim-y and helpless" narrative her children were exposed to. In a follow up interview, Mrs. Wheaton detailed another book Hannah was reading during Black History Month, which again portrayed African Americans in the expressed troubling way. This book took place in the segregated South and referred to African Americans as "Negros". According to Mrs. Wheaton the book had a similar plot in which White and Black people help each other out and the Black family is in some way oppressed. Mrs. Wheaton was upset questioning "why each time they [the school] talk about Black people

that it has to focus on all this bad stuff, like we are always victims when were the epitome of comin from nothing [emphasized]”.

Drawing from Hannah’s experience in class concerning the continual “victim” portrayal of African Americans, Mrs. Wheaton began describing her racial vigilance. She said, “I said that...is...it! And I went and bought every positive Black book I could find” Mrs. Wheaton elaborated on her need to assist her children in understanding African Americans, as she also encouraged her children to select African Americans for school reports or projects.

The Wheaton’s were not alone in this racially vigilant endeavor as parents. Majority of Black parents discussed using school or out-of schoolwork as an opportunity to learn about African Americans. Many talked about going to museums focused on African Americans to supplement what their children were not learning in school or refute what their children were learning.

Mr. Hubbard, a middle class father undergoing a divorce, discussed what he and his former wife did with their children throughout the years. At the time of the interview his youngest son was entering into the tenth grade and his daughter was a sophomore in college. Both attended an urban school and were enrolled in the school’s Magnet program. To address the need for more African American centered cultural activities, Mr. Hubbard created a cultural based program in conjunction with a local museum. This program focused on traveling to Underground Railroad sites, and having the children learn about prominent members of the African American community during the implementation of the Underground Railroad.

Other parents discussed that they used weekends to focus on African American history or gave projects and assignments themselves to their children periodically when they noticed that they misunderstood African American history from what was previously taught in school.

**Being on “code red”.** In addition to teaching their children about African Americans, Mrs. Wheaton discussed an incident, which forced her to have an in-depth conversation about racism with her children. Although this incident occurred in the Wheaton’s community she detailed how she began to become racially vigilant when interacting with her children’s school.

We [Mrs. Wheaton and Brody] were coming home from working out at the gym. I was working out, Brody was in the kid’s club, and we were coming out and Brody saw a car that looked like [his] babysitter –And he said, ‘I think that’s Becky’s car, I want to go see if that’s Becky’s car’ and I knew it probably wasn’t her car. But I wanted to indulge him because he had been so patient in the kid’s club, waiting for me to work out, so. So I let him go look in [the window] real quick. And then, we got in the car, and we left. And, as we left, there was this cop car and it was, like, facing us. And I was turning left, and he had come up first so I was waiting for him to turn and he never turned. And I waited, waited, waited, waited... And then finally I was like, “Well, I’ll turn,” and so I turned left and went all the way down [the street]. Next thing I know, he’s behind me and he’s got his lights on. He comes around and asks me, my name, my information, or whatever. And he says, ‘Well, how many cars did you and your son try to break into today?’ And I was just like, ‘None?’ And he kind of got more forceful with us, ‘Well, that’s not what I was told, I was told you guys were trying to break into cars, blah blahblah’ And I’m like, ‘No, I have a business in the area, I was just working out’, you know. Basically I’m not doing anything. And then another cop comes up, he comes on the right side of my car, and then he starts interrogating me. And so I was just feeling... I was just like, ‘Why would they believe this about me? There’s no way I would ever try to break into anybody’s car’. And so I gave them my business card, thinking, well maybe he would see that I’m an upstanding citizen. And he was like, ‘Well, I don’t care what you own’ ...and after that...he walked back to his vehicle –he had walked back and forth several times, interrogating me. And then, the last time he walked back, he didn’t say anything. So I turned around and I was like, “Am I free to go?” And he’s like, “Yes.” And so I left. I didn’t want to be caught

resisting arrest or something... When we were leaving [Brody] said, 'Mom, that wasn't right, why would they think we would do that?' And I told him that, sometimes people are unfairly profiled—thinking that they would do something like this. And I explained that racism exists, and that sometimes people are unfairly targeted because they're African American. That's basically what I said. I said, 'There's no way to know what reason they targeted us, but that's part of the burden of being African-American that you, kind of have that threat at any time'

Mrs. Wheaton stated that this incident made her feel like she had to be “on code red”.

In regards to protecting her children from being unfairly judged or misunderstood. She says, “It's like I am...I feel like I have to be on code red all the time”. She gave several exemplars of her angst. For example, Brody yelled at another classmate, a White girl, for making fun of him at school. Mrs. Wheaton stated that she felt compelled to explain to Brody's teacher why he yelled for being made fun so that the teacher would not mistaken Brody as “some stereotype”. This is another example of racial vigilance, as it shows that out of anticipate of possible racist notions of her children, she attempts to demystify any by explaining her child's behavior to his teacher. Again she was not alone many parents expressed the need to talk with educators to demystify stereotypes for what they believe was normal “child like” behavior, but mistaken for deviance.

For example, Ms. Edwards, who identified herself as low SES, divorce, and single mother of three detailed how she had to make sure she had to go to the school and speak with her son's second grade teacher. She explains:

one time in art, he had an outburst. His art teacher said, “I have never had any problems with him because he's a good student, but he had an outburst today”. And I'm like, “Okay?” And you don't know how to handle the outburst, if you've had a student that never gave you any problems?”

I asked her what the outburst was she replied, “he just wouldn’t shut up. So to them, that’s like an outburst”. She talked about another incident where her son was sent home with a note that stated “he had a bad day”. She retorted, “he had a bad day? He’s a child...what do you mean ‘bad day’”. She added her thoughts on why she thought there was this disconnect between her child at times and White teachers versus Black teachers, in her children’s school:

You got to understand the White people lingo versus the Black teachers’ lingo. Black teachers would’ve been like, “No. We’re not going to do this.” You know, Black teachers will handle the situation differently with a Black student versus the White teachers are, you know, they’re gonna put you in timeout. Timeout is not always the answer. Well, a Black teacher is gonna, how can I put this politically correct? A White teacher really don’t know how to deal with Black kids because they already have in their mind how Black children are gonna act. A Black teacher goes into a Black kid’s, part of him must know how to handle their own race perfect. Now you do have some teachers that have, have been teaching for a very long time, that do know how to deal with all kids. Well it’s like, how can I put this, when your child goes to a Black school, black teachers know how to deal with them because they have all types of children. [In Black schools with Black teachers]... you could see a difference in in how they treat your child versus how a White person because they’re not handling children, you know, it’s not, in them to grab your child and hold them like this (see hugs herself) and talk to them, you know, versus other children. So, it’s also more of hands on interaction and how they treat your kid.

To attend to the “outbursts” and the “bad day”, Miss Edwards contacted the school to explain other methods that the classroom teacher could use to assist her son in preventing “outbursts” and having a “bad day”. Additionally, she disciplined her son at home.

### **The Jones Family**

[The Pacific State] had always been open, an open door for us... We had contacts here who were actually trying to persuade us into moving. I was a little slow-footed on moving. I had a fairly successful construction company. We had just paid off our house... But, by this time, by the time of Xavier being [suspended], them trying to give Xavier a felony... we started getting a feeling that they were actually targeting him... I thought

that they were targeting him. And this is when I start trying to persuade my family. It's like what would you give to save a kid's life? Would you give your life savings if it's life or death? Would you give up everything that you own, you know?...I don't say anything else—the experiences of Xavier in the public school system, it didn't hurt our decision on moving it actually helped us decide to move.

**Choosing schools.** Mr. and Mrs. Jones are the parents of three children and recently moved to Pacific State after living in Urbantown for decades. Like some other sets of parents in this study, when the Jones selected schools for their children in Urbantown, the Jones specifically looked for schools that they thought would tap into the interest of their children when they decided to move to Pacific State. For example, before arrival, the Jones sought after robotics programs, particularly for their oldest son, Xavier, who was preparing for college at the time. Mr. and Mrs. Jones also researched the school's academic history. For the school that was selected, Mr. Jones stated:

We checked with the school and their history of kids getting scholarships to different universities, and this particular public school, you know, had a lot of students that, you know, got scholarships to MIT.

At the time of the interview, Xavier was a freshman in college attending one of the nation's top HBCU's. He was studying engineering and was beginning to move forward on his aspirations on building affordable eco-homes. In the summer, Xavier was expected to participate in an internship program for one of the world's leading multinational conglomerate companies. The internship program would allow Xavier to study abroad in China and focus on renewable energy for eco-homes. The parents discussed how Xavier's aspirations were shaped and influenced by their teachings at home.

Mr. Jones: He wants to go to China because they have the only company in the world that studies a fuel system that they get out of the soil. He wants to do that, and he was just accepted at an internship at [Major

Conglomerate Company]...[he has] interest of building eco-homes. He really wants to take his degree and make living more affordable...the company that's working with this fuel allows him to get some education on renewable energy... he started off with the Engineering of wanting to do, be a rocket scientist. He wanted to, you know, design rocket engines. But, the more he gets into that, you know, he's at, that he doesn't want to build or design anything that will go for defense. You know, he doesn't want anything to do with the military. And that decision comes by him being culturally conscious. Because most of the wars that are being fought are fought with, you know, against non-white countries.

The Jones two other children were attending a public high school called Pacific Heights High School (PHHS). PHHS was a diverse urban school. Mr. Jones voluntarily lectured at the school. He detailed that it was his third year lecturing at PHHS. His lectures centered on African culture and were grounded in providing a positive influence for students. Mr. Jones described the deeper meaning of his lectures stating, "you know, like I explained to my oldest boy and his friends...we're not just here to live, but we're here to show a positive, Black influence in [Pacific State]".

As stated in the opening excerpt featuring the Jones, the family had contemplated moving, but Mr. Jones were "slow-footed" because of their financial security. However, due to a myriad of negative school experiences concerning Xavier, the Jones family decided to relocate. Before reaching the eleventh grade, Xavier had been expelled, suspended, and was threatened with a felony charge for school offenses. These events had a profound impact on Xavier and Mr. and Mrs. Jones involvement as Black parents.

**"Crumbs" and "cement"**. At the beginning of Xavier's eighth grade year, he was expelled from an urban and predominantly Black public elementary magnet school, Tarkington Elementary School. School police had discovered what Mr. Jones described as "crumbs" of marijuana in Xavier's locker. The discovery of marijuana had been incidental, as the school police had been searching student lockers in search of a stolen

laptop. According to Mr. and Mrs. Jones, Xavier tutored a few of his fellow classmates at Tarkington in Math and one classmate paid him with marijuana. The parents also acknowledged that their son was experimenting with marijuana and they were unaware until the incident. Regardless of the amount and for whatever reason Xavier was in violation of the school's zero tolerance drug policy. Thus, Xavier was expelled for the entire school year. During the interview, the parents described the principal's (Mrs. Cox) actions during the expulsion hearing.

At the meeting...she [Mrs. Cox] said...that she not only was asking for him to be expelled, but [was] suggesting that he goes to alternative school. And I know that, of course there's nothing I could really do... as far as...them expelling him...because they had a zero tolerance for substance. And you know, I sat there in the room and just watched how this middle-class White woman...related to Xavier...when she said he was going to be expelled, you know, he started to cry. Just as it was nothing...she reached over, she grabbed a tissue, and she handed it to him, knowing that she had, she's trying to put this boy into an alternative – she wanted to send him to Alternative School where good kids are trying to be bad and bad kids are waiting for their next step—which is jail or prison. I mean...she had no remorse. She handed him the tissue and I took it from her hand and handed it to Xavier myself.

Mr. Jones goes on to describe how he felt that these actions mirrored a period of time when Blacks needed to hide their intelligence in fear of being tortured for being literate.

Mr. Jones states:

I thought Mrs. Cox was being overly-cruel, but...you know, with having substances in the school there was nothing I could really say...just I didn't want him to go to Alternative School. But this is what they do, you know, if they have an opportunity to put you in jail or to put you on that road [school to prison pipeline], that's where they do. That's what they do...This goes all the way back to us [African Americans] being a slave...The slave masters...comes into the house and he's talking to the lady about her son, and "aw, he's a smart nigger isn't he?" ...But the slave master, as soon as he realizes that that slave can read, he's either beat, he's killed or he's put in such subjugation and he never wants to show his intelligence again.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones complained that Xavier's stellar academic record had no impact on his punishment and Mrs. Cox, who had known Xavier since he entered Tarkington in the first grade, advocated for this expulsion. Although the parents agreed that Xavier made a poor choice, his parents felt that he made a mistake that was common for someone his age to make. Again, like expressed by Mrs. Wheaton and Mrs. Edwards, Mr. and Mrs. Jones express that their children were not looked at as just "children".

Mr. and Mrs. Jones was asked to explain why the punishment for Xavier was so severe given the small quantity of marijuana juxtapose to Xavier's impressive academic performance at Tarkington. Mr. Jones stated his theory:

There's only one reason that it could be. I mean, this is actually a game that they play at – you know, these lectures and studies that show that they have these middle class White women spend their tenure in the jungle [urban schools], so to speak, and, I mean, it really seemed to me that...they are waiting...it's like they're an agent of the government...that they're seeing who they can get caught into this system and who they can bring down. I mean, it was even more evident when we dealt with Roberts High School.

**Racial vigilance and race socialization.** Roberts High School was the school Xavier enrolled in after his year of expulsion was completed. Before I provide some context to what Mr. Jones was referring to at Roberts, I will note that Mr. and Mrs. Jones declined to send Xavier to the Alternative School and instead home schooled Xavier for one year, although he had to repeat the grade level he was expelled from. Mr. and Mrs. Jones described what they did during this period of time:

Mr. Jones: We kept him out, we didn't send him to Alternative School. We homeschooled him, so he was watching Ashwa Quasi [African-Centered Lecturer] videos and, you know, keeping up on his Math and what not. And, you know we had conversations about the school to prison pipeline and you know, what he needs to do to navigate around all of that stuff, you know? And I kept telling him, you know, it doesn't matter how nice these people are to you, as soon as you slip up they're going to

crucify you... We would watch like the “Christianity, the Stolen Religion From Africa,” the one about Judeo-Christianity and just all of the Ashwa Quasi videos were the ones I really had at the time. And we would have conversations about... what he thought about it... what I believed... he would say that... he’d think that... they’re stealing our religion and our theology in our science and everything. And how do you feel about, you know, your relationship with White people? He explained, you know, what he learned from Ms. Cox... you have to be cordial, but you have to be on guard for them.

Aside from the messages about race and racism (race socialization), Mrs. Jones added what she did for Xavier’s homeschooling aside from obtaining a homeschool license:

...on his Algebra, you know, he would have to take Algebra I and II so I put him on his Algebra and his Biology. Those were the two subjects that I concentrated on... I looked at the 9th grade curriculum. I knew he was going to have to repeat the 9th grade, so I looked at the 9th grade curriculum and went to the library, I went to the Half-Price Book Store and purchased all the books that he was going to need so that he could stay caught up. You know, I didn’t want his education to lag behind... I would make the curriculum up and then I would go over his work, you know, to make sure that he was understanding. So it was more of him retaining what he was learning and also making sure that he was going to be prepared for if he had to take 10th grade class.

Before Mrs. Jones began homeschooling, she stated that she had to help restore Xavier’s self esteem. She states:

The first thing I really had to do before homeschooling and signing up for homeschool is to really make sure that his esteem, I do recall that his esteem was very low about himself because he felt they, she [Mrs. Cox] messed up his whole life, you know, at fifteen, you know, when you’re getting expelled from school, you know, it can be very traumatic for a child. So, the first thing I had to do was counsel him on, you know, his anger about the situation. His feelings of being helpless, just hopeless. With me concentrating on tutoring him in the homeschool it gave him the hope that... he still had to keep going and put his hands on what was tangible for him.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones discussed how she believed that the homeschooling helped Xavier.

Mrs. Jones:, I think it helped him know that we would go through any lengths to make sure that his education continued... he felt very supported during that time because his, I have to say, his morale was really, really

low.

Mr. Jones: Extremely low.

Mrs. Jones: It was real low. And just, even if they didn't accept any of the courses that I homeschooled him, the more important thing to me was for him to know that, you know, we took this time out. It wasn't him that messed up, I think, it was collective misfortune. So I believe that him taking those courses, me making sure that, he was up on his studies, allowed him to continue a 3.5 and above grade point average the next time he got into school.

Xavier returned back to the public school and enrolled in Roberts High School. It is important to mention that Roberts was a poorly rated school at the time Xavier entered and was identified as one of the lowest performing schools in Urbantown. Knowing that, I was curious as to why the Jones selected such a school, however I did not mention to them that Roberts was failing. They provided that they selected the school because it had a STEM Magnet focus that the Jones wanted Xavier to be in to tap into his love for the STEM subjects. In my thick record, I noted that this decision made sense to me as a parent but not as an educator. However parents do not have the elaborate knowledge-base of schools as parents and schools maybe protecting their images misleading parents about their decisions. I also noted, that it seemed as if they believed that their child's anticipated performance was an individual act.

Shortly after attending Roberts, Xavier was suspended for several offenses, particularly twice for selling candy, and then over three weeks for writing his name in cement. For writing his name in cement, Xavier was threatened with a felony for "criminal misconduct".

Mr. and Mrs. Jones began to get emotional when discussing Xavier's punishment. They first discussed why Xavier was around the school building when the cement incident took place.

During one of the [school] breaks, when all the rest of the kids were on break for two days, he [Xavier] had signed up for some type of class and he built a computer. Now, Xavier just was doing leaps and bounds. You know, but, the school was under construction and, you know, they had just poured about fifty feet of concrete sidewalk and, you know, this is in any neighborhood, all over the United States, everywhere—if you have wet concrete and a bunch of kids they’re going to put some type of writing or imprint or something in the concrete, you know? No different. So, I get a call from the school, that, you know, they had Xavier in the office, you know, that he wrote his name in this concrete. And, you know... I own a construction, I mean, at the time, you know, I’m doing a million dollar job at the state convention center. So, I [have] employee union carpenters, you know, we do everything from concrete forms to drywall, acoustical ceilings, all those things, so, I go up to the school and they said that they had him for writing his name in concrete. And I go look at the concrete. There are names and things written all over the sidewalk. All over. You know, some of them are names, some of them are profanity, some of them are, you know, pictures, you know, all sorts of things. They caught five students. Out of those five students, two of them were being expelled and being charged with a felony, Joseph being one of them. The other student, you know, was, he wasn’t really the best student in the world, but they had him and Xavier... they informed us that he was being expelled and that he was being charged with criminal misconduct, which is a felony.

Mr. Jones discusses how he advocated for his son at school.

I talked to her [Mrs. Daisy] about the incarceration rate for African American men. I talked to her about dropout rate for African American men. She is not budging. I walk from her office to the Vice Principal’s [Mr. Nichols] office... And by this time I’m irate, you know, you’re not going to do this to my son, you know, and I go into Mr. Nichols office and I begin to give him a tongue lashing that he will never forget, you know? “You are not a man. You’re not a Black man. You’re White, and you let these White people do this to our boy,” you know, “You’re not going to get away with this. You’re going to get this done.” You know? [as if Mr. Nichols is speaking] “Well, Mrs. Daisy is the Dean... she knows school policy and this is our school policy.” [as if Mr. Jones is responding to Mr. Nichols] “Then if this if this is the school policy, you caught five students. Why are you not doing the same thing to all five students? Why are you taking this honor roll student, who has a letterman jacket for God’s sake? Why do you want to throw away his entire life by giving him a felony for writing,” – he didn’t write any profanity. He didn’t draw any pictures. He put his name, which, it’s not smart [laughter] His name. [as if speaking with Mrs. Daisy] “Why are going to give him a felony and end his life at sixteen”? She answered that with a question. “Well, if your son is such a good student, why did he do it?”

Mr. Jones replies:

Because he's a kid. You ain't never smoked no weed when you was, you know, around the corner from your parents' house? Did you ever have sex before you got married? Did you ever do any drugs? I mean, did you ever do anything that was like, that kids do? He's a kid. Why are you treating him like an adult? Why are you trying to end this kid's life? She was not having it one iota.

After consulting with lawyers, school consultants, and the NAACP, Mr. and Mrs. Jones manages to use some political leverage, mainly with the NAACP to help Xavier. Xavier was not charged with a felony, however because of this incident, the Jones made the decision to leave Urbantown at the end of that school year. These actions are examples of racial vigilance.

### **The Tanner Family**

Asher and Cole are the children of Mr. and Mrs. Tanner. Asher is the oldest and attends a small liberal arts college. At the time of the interview, Asher was currently in his second year in college and was majoring in Music with a focus on business and music production. Mrs. Tanner raved how smart and creative Asher was while she detailed his gifted music ability, particularly his lyrics to songs. Mrs. Tanner excitedly pronounced, "he's [Asher] very brilliant and he critiques many things, including religion, I didn't know that until later". Mrs. Tanner talked about the regret she had in not recognizing Asher's ability until mid-high school. She suggested that this lack in recognition had more to do with her upbringing, which she claimed focused on more traditional forms of academics. Mrs. Tanner explained, "it was academics! "A"'s, "B"'s, academics! And then you work". After Mrs. Tanner realized Asher's ability, her and Mr. Tanner began supporting Asher's passion and love for music in addition to assisting him with other academic areas

that Asher had struggled with throughout his schooling.

Cole, the youngest son, was in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Mrs. Tanner detailed how Cole, unlike Asher, had less trouble in school and was slightly more studious. Cole had an “A” average and was looking at receiving a number of academic scholarships. In preparation for college in two years, Cole had visited several college campuses and attended many college fairs. Mrs. Tanner detailed how Cole was highly organized during his college search to demonstrate the dynamic ways Asher and Cole were different. At the time of the interview, Mrs. Tanner stated that her and Mr. Tanner were assisting Cole in completing his college applications. She discussed how they assisted him as parents:

He [Cole] had copies of his resume, copies of his transcript, and he had labels. So that way, when they have the postcards, or the... little sheet where they want you to write all your information so they can send you more detailed stuff. Cole would just pull out his label, and just go—and maybe there was one thing that he didn't have on his label. It had his name, his GPA, his school, his email address, [and] phone number.

The Tanner's were a middle class family that lived within Urbantown. The Tanner's had worked corporate jobs and Mrs. Tanner was a few years from retirement. Throughout her children's career, she detailed the many things she did as a parent being involved in her sons' schools, aside from the current concentration on college applications. At the school level Mr. and Mrs. Tanner attended regular meetings and volunteered about twice a year. Mrs. Tanner complained that she felt penalized for not being in the “social circle” so that she could get all the information needed to help her make an informed decision about her children, particularly at Cole's private school. She also noted that she felt her son and her were not made aware of information because Cole didn't fit the stereotype Black male that she felt others expected from him at the school.

Here's what I feel like the majority don't get, I'm not part of the social scene. So as I think about this system, Cole has a responsibility [to get information]. But if I were hangin' with the Moms, Moms talk. You know, if I were hangin' with the 'Moms' [she added air quotes-I confirmed what this meant "white moms"], I would have known about it and what the majority don't get is that, a lot of times with us [Black parents], we're not part of the circles, we're—not part of the social scene. I'm not hangin' at their houses. So I'm not getting the informal communication where folks normally get. And they take that for granted, 'cause they [the school] do a lot of things that way, and they just kinda assume you know.

Mrs. Tanner detailed what she has to do to receive school related information

And I have to ask, so, you know, 'What's the background, what does that acronym stand for?' and they're, like, "Oh, oh," 'cause all of them know and I don't. And it's just like for this recent round of SAT's that were taken and there was a terrible error in the SAT's but College Board was trying to say the results were still valid. But anyway, just recently they said that the kids could retake it for free. I found that from a Mom in the neighborhood. You know, that's how we find out things—because a lot of things aren't always on the "right side".

Mrs. Tanner discusses why she feels that she does not get all of the information needed to make an informed decision as a parent.

So, I looked in myself, and I said, 'Okay, I should have known, but this isn't uncommon. You know, I think this is information that maybe we should have. But anyway, I was just ticked, because I'm looking for more—And, again, I don't know if it's because, and it's probably a combination. Cole is introverted, and he doesn't know how to connect to the 'Black' kids.

Mrs. Tanner makes air quote jesters when she says the word "Black". She continues to explain.

And I think it's both. Cole's not an athlete, and I brought that up to the larger circle when they had the meeting with the Black families. And I heard some of the mothers of the athletes talking, and they knew a little bit more. And I spoke up and I said, 'Well, not all the Black [air quotes] kids are athletes! Okay, and not all of them are extroverted. So my expectation is that you're working with all the kids—it's non-athletes, athletes, cheerleaders, not cheerleaders, introverted, extroverted, and they all get information, and are notified of opportunities. And I don't know, I just, I

think they see me as, just, you know, it fits their stereotype, I'm just a Black mom [air quotes] fussin'.

Mrs. Tanner had complained later during the interview of how teachers seem to be gatekeepers of information, particularly because of the enormous difficulty to get exact answers. Another father discusses this as well, whom I will highlight in an upcoming segment. Mrs. Tanner also discussed how two incidents related to this led the couple to removing their children from urban public schools, although she favored public schools over private ones. Mrs. Tanner explains the catalysts for changing from a “diverse urban” public school to a nearly all-White private school.

Asher, he struggled with the state tests, I think he had failed it for the second time, and, again, I'm trying to be proactive. No, it was two things. I can't remember which one was the absolute last straw. But I remember talking to the teacher and I said, "Okay, you know, it's a partnership. I know you'll be doing things. I want to mirror what you're doing, and you know—support. So let me—you know, let's talk through, what's the plan because we've been through this before, but we don't want to end up failed again, and blah, blah, blah.

Mrs. Tanner details the teacher's response. The teacher says:

“Well, you know, your son is quiet. And he doesn't sit in the front...kids like yours tend to fall through the—” and she stopped. It was, like, Oh my God. So I know she was not going to say ‘fall through the cracks’...My son is not falling through anybody's freakin' crack!”

Mrs. Tanner discusses the other incident that was her “last-straw” leading her to leave urban public schools.

You know, and then, you know, there was stuff before that, like before them, Cole was struggling with something [and] I wanted to talk to the teacher, and somehow I never got a reply from the teacher, and the principal comes swooping in, and it's, like, ‘Well, I can talk to you’ And I was, like, ‘No, no thank you, I want to talk to the teacher’ and he's, like, ‘Well, you know, I can handle [she stops in mid-sentence]—I don't know what it was, the back and forth. And I'm like, what the—What? What is this? And I got really sick of—you would think that I'm some yellin', stompin' Mom, raisin' hell, and it was, like, ‘I don't raise hell’, I really

don't. I don't. So I'm thinking, what is this? I'm just, you know, I'm calling, I'm trying to be proactive, I want to be involved. I know how to talk to them professionally, and I, I know how to put on the mask—when I need to and talk appropriately. I thought, what on earth? And I didn't get good answers. So I don't know if that was just standard, where they act as a buffer, the leadership acts as buffers for the teachers?

Despite these issues, Mr. and Mrs. Tanner continued to work at the home-level. Mrs. Tanner details that she purchased workbooks and hired tutors to assist their children in lieu of working with the teachers because she was not getting the information needed to support her children.

**Choosing schools.** Mrs. Tanner was hesitant about selecting predominantly White schools for her children. Asher and Cole went to separate high schools that focused on their needs as students. Both Asher and Cole selected their respective schools. Asher attended Lily High School (LHS) and Cole had graduated a year ago from Garfield Preparatory High (GPH). Mrs. Tanner noted her apprehension toward allowing her children to go to these schools and it was largely focused on the lack of diversity. For example she detailed how she wanted to withdraw Cole after his first semester of attendance at GPH because of the diversity issue.

Mrs. Tanner said, “Well, I did look for diversity at the school. How much diversity they had [and] after the first semester at GPH...I said, ‘Oh my gosh, this is not going to work. Can we get our money back for the first semester?...Oh my gosh’” Although Mrs. Tanner wanted to withdraw Cole, the Diversity Director of GPH, Mrs. Quinn, encouraged and convinced Mrs. Tanner to allow Cole to remain at GPH. Mrs. Tanner expressed a deep appreciation for Mrs. Quinn in working with her. She also noted that Mrs. Quinn was intricate in helping her realize Cole’s music potential. Mrs. Tanner remarks:

What really made a difference [was] the Diversity Director, Mrs. Quinn— She said, "No, Mrs. Tanner. Don't, don't give up like that... She said, "Stick with it." And she seemed like she was, she had a sense for Cole. In fact, she was one of the early people that told me he had a really deep soul, and he was really wise... [Mrs. Quinn] kind of made sure he's engaged. But I, you know, I still think that the school leadership has a responsibility—to get to know the kids and find out what makes them tick. Mrs. Quinn did. The Diversity Director did. And she would talk to him, and tell us to hang in there. And she was very patient—and would talk to him. That made a world of difference.

The experience Cole had with GPH faculty was divergent than what Asher experienced at LHS.

**Suicides and honor society.** As stated previously, Asher was preparing college applications at the time of the interview. Mrs. Tanner wanted Asher to apply to the National Honor Society. Additionally, there was a rash of suicides among students who attended private school. Thus Mrs. Tanner reached out to the school counselor, Mr. Ward, to solicit his assistance with Asher. First Mrs. Tanner wanted to make sure Asher was emotionally sound given the consecutive number of teenage suicides among students attending private schools. Additionally, Mrs. Tanner wanted the counselor to discuss the importance of the National Honor Society, particularly because Asher was in the thick of preparing to apply to colleges that upcoming semester. However, Mrs. Tanner discussed that a meeting with Black families held by the faculty of LHS was the reason she primarily felt that Mr. Ward would make time to speak with Asher. She explains:

At the beginning of the year, they had a meeting with Black families about some different racial issues that were goin' on with the school—and they didn't understand why the Black kids weren't comfortable in coming to them. So that meeting had occurred. Then I called the school because there were a rash of suicides across the private schools. I'm, like [as if talking to Mr. Ward] 'Well, you've already talked to Asher, right? Cause I have seen you reaching out to the Black kids since that meeting, No? Well, I'd like for you to re-talk to Asher because he's an introvert, so I worry about him'

A few weeks later, after speaking with Asher, Mrs. Tanner realizes that Mr. Ward had not spoken with Asher. She calls Mr. Ward for a second time.

I called again, 'You've talked to him, right? Well, no?' And that's when it was, Look, I don't, I don't get this [she laughs and shakes her head] You [LHS faculty] guys had a meeting with all the Black parents, talking about you were concerned, so I thought you [Mrs. Ward] would have talked to him. So out of that initiative I then asked you to talk to him because I say I'm worried about him. Then I call you again and you haven't talked to him? You know, so I was really pissed off!

Mrs. Tanner says she told Mr. Ward that she would like for him to speak with

Asher within a few days and she would do a follow up phone call. She calls for the third time.

'Okay, you've been talking to him on my demand. Did you guys talk about the National Honor Society?—No. Why? And he said, he gave me this mumbo-jumbo about at 17, the juniors, and we expect them to take full responsibility. And they're old enough now and blah, blah, blah. I said—I get that. But you were already talking to him, and you supposedly have a relationship with him, and you're supposed to care about his success so I said, 'I'm not paying 'X' amount of dollars [she transitions] cause this is private school. I said, "I'm not paying 'X' amount of dollars for you to say, 'Well, he's on his own' and I said, 'This was important! It would have been one thing if there were an invitation to join the chess club—If he ignores it, I don't care. But this is National Honor's Society!' And he said, 'Well, he can apply next year' I said, [she slams her hand down on the table] 'Next year doesn't help, hr would have already applied to school and have already been accepted. So, um, and I told him, I said, "This is what I expect from you in your interactions with my son. And I don't like talking to him that way.

According to Mrs. Tanner, when Mr. Tanner heard of the news he was adamant that Mr. Ward had no sense of urgency to speak with Cole about his well-being and NHS because their child was Black. But he was also convinced that the White children were being attended to as expected by their parents.

He [Mr. Tanner] did not believe that the counselor was not saying that to other kids. 'Cause I was, like, "Well, you know, Asher was responsible, and he said this is his, their policy. I just don't agree with it." But, Mr. Tanner was absolutely convinced that they're probably saying something

to the White kids. I don't know, 'cause I'm not hangin' around with them [the White moms]. I don't know.

**Racial vigilance and race socialization.** Like Mrs. Tanner, other parents had similar sentiments. Based on experience, many parents suggested that their school faculty attended to White children in a manner that was indifferent to the African American children. These parents also connected this indifference to White parents and their social circles, suggesting that the White educators and White parents work closely with each other but excludes other people of color. One example was a middle class working father, Mr. Long, father of two daughters that had attended a mixture of private and public schools throughout their school careers. His oldest daughter, Jasira had received one of the highest scores in the school on a national science assessment placement test given to all students in her grade level. Mr. Long noted the school-to-student comparison score detailing that Jasira was in the top tier in her grade level overall and there was only eleven or less above her. He

Although Jasira had demonstrated this aptitude for science, she was not recommended for Honors Science for that upcoming school year. Once Mr. Long noticed that Jasira was not enrolled in Honors he scheduled a parent-teacher conference. He stated that he was not given a “straight answer” as to why Jasira was not recommended by her teacher. Mr. Edward detailed his sentiment regarding the interaction between the White teacher, White parents, and access to school information:

If you are not part of the Euro group then you have a tendency to be left out, like when it comes to the advanced programs, those things tend to be communicated once a year and then no more. Then when you ask the teacher about it, it tends not to be a straight answer. Those parents [white parents] tend to communicate between each other and they have a tendency to act very quickly too. So we have to keep up.

The Tanner's, Mr. Long and majority of the parents in this study expressed that they had to go through extra measures to receive information, particularly opportunities, for their children. When discussing White parents some expressed feelings of alienation but overall there was a general sentiment that White parents had a leg up on opportunities over them, as Black parents. Thus to mitigate this exclusion, many Black parents who had these issues discussed getting information themselves, without the assistance of educators. This is an example of parents being racially vigilance because they perceive that they will be excluded because they're Black.

### **The Adams Family**

Ellen Adams is a single mother of four boys. Miss Adams' oldest sons, Lucas and Benjamin, have successful professional careers. Her youngest two, Matthew and Dylan, are school-age. Although the interview primarily focused on Matthew and Dylan, Miss Adams detailed her older sons success in school. She proudly discussed their accolades and added that Benjamin received nearly \$100,000 in academic scholarships to fund his undergraduate degree. Benjamin graduated from one of the nation's top ranked programs in the STEM fields. Lucas was in the armed forces, and had a number of honors granted to him during his military career thus far.

Mrs. Adams discussed her younger set of sons' detailing their bright and creative behaviors as well as their enthusiasm for technology. At the time of the interview, Matthew had dropped out of high school, but had been in a GED program. In the follow up interview, Matthew had completed the program and had just recently been hired for full-time employment. He had planned to go to community college, but Miss Adams

stated that he decided not to. Dylan attended a charter high school but his mother noted that he too was struggling to remain in school.

**Choosing schools.** During the interview, Miss Adams discussed the divergent school experiences between her older set and younger set of boys. She attributed much of these differences to school demographics as they shaped the boys academic experience. On one hand, her older sons grew up in an underserved African American community and went to primarily Black and urban school. During high school, the older set went to two separate schools. Benjamin sought out an exclusive private school, and Lucas chose to stay at his local high school. On the other hand, Miss Adams' youngest sons primarily went to suburban schools in an affluent to middle class community, Mountain Top. Their school district, Mountain Top ISD was primarily White.

**Suburban living.** Miss Adams felt very strongly that White educators targeted Matthew and Dylan's as African American boys. Moreover, they seem to face continuous racial harassment by their White peers throughout their time as students in their suburban schools. Here is how she begins discussing these racial dynamics between her older and younger sons.

Miss Adams: I didn't have a problem, you know, living in a poor area, inner city. I lived in area, a neighborhood where they called it 'X City'. And the reason why they call it that is because you was dogging bullets But, I didn't have a problems that I had when I moved up to the suburban area.

Author: Right, yeah. So what kind of problems are you talking about?

Mrs. Adams discusses these problems chronologically as they happened to both Matthew and Dylan. However, in these next two segments I have chosen to discuss them in order of type of problems encountered. One problem encountered was Miss Adams felt that the educators were “building a record” on her sons.

## Building a Record

Miss Adams: Children like to play, They're gonna do things, Like they're gonna have gum or candy. They [white educators] started documenting everything that they did. You know, building record....Like, I was getting calls every week saying you know, 'your child had gum', instead of telling him to put his gum in the trash can. I was being called and they were documenting everything, writing it down... for both of them!

This was not the first time I heard parents being concerned over their children being penalized harshly for child-like behaviors. Ms. Adams details how this “building record” unfolded and led to Matthew being expelled.

My son, [Matthew] didn't show up from school, he skipped school...I was looking for Matthew. I came up to the school to bring him some lunch money. She said [school attendance office worker], 'your son isn't here.' I said, 'oh okay.' [later that afternoon] I asked, 'Matthew where were you...I came up to the school and you weren't even there? You weren't—this is high school!'. Okay, so I found out he was over his friend's house. He didn't go to all his classes. Well the next day, they drug tested him. The school did. The Dean did, they drug tested him!

The Dean told Miss Adams that Matthew had THC in his system. Miss Adams details her immediate response:

I came up to the school and I said, 'you drug tested my son without my knowledge, without me knowing that?' He said, 'yeah we just, we do random drug tests' I said, 'do you do drug tests just on every child that doesn't show up for school? He said, 'No, the only reason why you would drug test them is if that they act like erratic behavior.' I said, 'my son was not acting like erratic behavior.' [Since] He was on the football team they were doing the drug testing under the athletic code.

I asked Miss Adams what came of this situation and she detailed the outcome and also provided some context as to why this happened to her and her children.

Actually I couldn't do anything about it. I felt that small in the system, I felt helpless. I felt helpless, I felt like [she transitions] I had these teachers, you got teachers, you got principals, who takes advantage that I am a single mom, so I felt vulnerable. Nothing ever really came out, so now that's [the positive drug test] record. I'm a single mom, you know, out in a mostly a predominant White school. “Oh, we can do whatever we want.”

That's what I felt like, "We can do whatever we wanna to do with them." That's how I felt. And it's kind of sad because it scars your children. It scars. That's the best permanent scars. And they [teachers] went to school. They got their degrees. You finished school, did what you suppose to, but you can look at my child who was slightly melanin-nated or dark or brown - black and brown, they got a problem with it!

She details how the school went as far as calling Child Protective Services (CPS).

This is the key, this is what bothered me, they sent a letter to the house. I read the letter. They wanted me to give my son over to CPS they wanted me to sign a form, and I said 'no'. They actually tried to get me over to CPS because they were building a record on me. They was building record on me, to the point where they build record on me so bad that they actually just put him out of school. For almost a year [for] expulsion for attendance.

The record that they were building stemmed from attendance. She details that the principal went back from tenth grade to middle school. Miss Adams notes that it appeared that Matthew had seven total unexcused absences across classes. Miss Adams complained that she was never informed. Miss Adams hired an attorney and filed a racial discrimination lawsuit claiming that there were other children, particular the White student that Matthew skipped class with, that did not get drug tested and no one perused expulsion on him. Miss Adams details her involvement:

I got an attorney—I should have never got. But I got an attorney. But even then, I was trying to get them [the school] to forgive my son. You know trying to really plead for my son. I had to be exposed to keep him from being expelled from school. He ended up with an expulsion, I ended up going to the [local DOJ district]. And they ended up helping me. The result was, that he would only be out of school; a semester and they would give him, 'home bound', so that he can still finish his credits. He would go to library and meet up with his teacher, and she would give him what all he needs to work on. That whole semester he was out of school. Then he was able to go back to school.

She discussed when Matthew returned back to school, that she would get phone calls from the teacher about what she perceived as trivial reasons. Less than a year later

Matthew drops out of school and enrolls in a GED program. Her son Dylan, who was in eighth grade began to get phone calls from his teacher's as well. Miss Adams stated that Dylan overhead someone refer to him as "one of those Adams Boys" when he was referred to the office. Miss Adams withdraws Dylan at the end of the school year and places him in the nearest charter school closet to their home. Her tenacity from getting an attorney for Matthew to removing Dylan from school, exhibits parental vigilance but later on, I will provide more context as to why this should be considered racial vigilance.

### **"Nigger on a Stick"**

He (Matthew) told me that this white girl-same class as he was, I think it's about the 4th or 5th grade. He told me that she called him a 'nigga on the stick', she did like this [she began motioning by taking her thumb and putting it under her chin]... 'Nigga on a stick', like this [she repeats the motion and I asked her to clarify] Like the heads? Like, you're trash. You know this is 'nigga on a stick', this is what she did.

Miss Adams detailed what she did as a result of this incident.

So I went up to the school and I discussed it with the teacher. Nothin' ever happened to that. Uh, I told her what happened... I never heard of what they was gonna do to the little White girl, who said that to my son... she said she was goin to talk to her, the parents... I don't think nothin ever was done about that, to be honest with you, I don't know if they ever talked to the girl's parents. You don't say anything like that. They never got back with me, nothin like that. I just told her what happened and I guess she considered herself handling it but I don't know how she handled it.

There was another time Matthew was called a "nigger" in seventh grade. Miss Adams said that Matthew was approached by a fellow football teammate during lunchtime in the cafeteria. The player, who was White, walked up to Matthew and called him a "nigger". According to Miss Adams, the White male student was dared to call Matthew a "nigger". Matthew's African American friend was sitting next to him. He too was also on the football team. Matthew and his friend informed other African American friends in the

lunchroom. Miss Adams reported that:

“Matthew told some of his friends what he called him, so they got animated. Some guys said they got this animated look on their face. So after they [students and teachers] cleared the lunchroom they [African American friends] started playing with this boy. Not really playing—it was more like tripping him, then they started to wrestling him. Matthew didn't do anything.

Miss Adams details what the Assistant Principal told her.

The Assistant Principal told me that the boy was stomped and kicked and went to the hospital. That wasn't true. That wasn't, I found out, that wasn't true. Because if a child is stomped and kicked, they don't show up at school the next day. You know, they don't show up at school. Come on now, you know those parents would've been knocking on my front door. Even Matthew came home, he said, “Mom...he came to school the next day.” Now, if somebody's kicked and stomped, and in the hospital, you know they would have had it all over the news ‘Black boys kicked and stomped this White kid’ Come on, now. Now you know better than that.

Miss Adams also describes her reaction to what was written in Matthew's disciplinary report regarding the incident:

‘They [Matthew and his friends] started looking animated’, and this is what was said on the report... ‘they started looking animated’, and ‘they started playing with the White little boy’, you know? So they started trippin [and] pushing him around... They called him a 'Nigga'! And instead of [she transitions], let me tell you what they did. They called my son to the office and said, ‘we are putting him off the football team because he ‘incited anger in other children’. The boy actually called Matthew, the 'N' word. Matthew ‘incited anger in the children’ and they kicked him off the football team so to cover it up. The principal kicked him off the football team... But if my son had called one of them [White students] a nasty name, believe me, he probably, would've been thrown out of school or suspended.

**Racial vigilance and race socialization.** In response, Miss Adams attempted to fight the removal of her son from the football team.

I contacted Congressman Allen. Yeah, I called her, I called. I wrote a letter. I never got a response back. I even called, what's his name, on the radio, he's a Black man? Bobby Canton. I called the radio station and explained to Bobby Canton what the situation was, he gave contact of the

pastor. I called Pastor Dwight Easter. I couldn't get through to Pastor Easter for some reason. I even emailed him. Nothing ever came of it. You know I was waiting on somebody to respond back to me concerning this issue. And it kinda like was just swept under the rug.

Miss Adams paused for a moment without speaking. Her voice began to tremble.

Miss Adams says, “so, Matthew never got to join back the football team. I’m working 12 hours a day, 5 or 6 days a week. A single mom with sons. Four boys. As stated before, Miss Adams actually began telling me about this incident in a chronological fashion. Before she discussed the incident, she started with detailing Matthew’s aspirations as a child.

Miss Adams: He joined [the football team] in the 7th grade. And I thought that was a good thing that he wanted to be in football. And that was his dream. That actually was his dream, he told me when he was about 12, [or] 11 years old. He said, 'I’m gonna play for Midwest State [NFL Team]. And that was one of his dreams. So he joined the football team and what happened?.. I’m getting emotional [she laughs nervously and then tears roll down her face]

Interviewer: Oh, I'm sorry.

Miss Adams: No. [Indiscreetly said]. I have to stop, stop, right, right okay, please.

Miss Adams needed to take a moment. She resumed after a 20 second pause but she had trouble talking in this next excerpt.

Miss Adams: But anyway, uhh cause when a when a, when a...a child has a dream like that...[another long pause] they mean that. They mean that [she repeats] Uhh, and uhh- well this is what happens they were in the lunch room.

Miss Adams describes the impact this disciplinary action had upon Matthew. It should be noted that Miss Adams was crying while describing this impact. After the incident there were dramatic changes in Matthew’s behavior and academics. She detailed that his grades dropped and then she discussed his frequent absence’s leading up to the expulsion in tenth grade. However, with the assistance of his mother and older brothers

Matthew, as previously mentions, eventually received his GED.

Miss Adams discussed that she realized that her children were experiencing a tantamount of experiences that she believed was rooted in racism but happening because her children were in a mostly White school district. This why, as mentioned earlier, her acts of getting an attorney for Matthew for his expulsion hearing and removing Dylan and placing him in a charter school (despite transportation issues), should be considered racial vigilance.

#### The Regret of Lack of Racial Socialization, Christianity, and Learning from Pain

During the interview Mrs. Adams, stated that she wished that she had spoken to her children about racism earlier in their lives. Miss Adams stated that she began having conversations about race with Matthew and Dylan but the two became resentful at that assertion and she believed that this was because they had many White friends. She says:

When I told them that, “You know, Hey you know what? It’s because you’re Black.” And they said, “Mom, you know”. They felt that, maybe because I should’ve told them when they were a lot younger. They also said, “you know what, mom? It’s not always about that, you know everybody’s racist”. And I said, “No.” I said...and they were very defiant toward me. That’s what I’m thinking. Maybe I should’ve taught them while they were a lot younger.

During this discussion she provides some context as to why she had not had discussed racism with her children.

I didn’t look at it like that because we were in Christianity, you know, God doesn’t look at color. So we’re kind of, taught in Christianity that, Well, God loves red, white, blue, you know, what’s that song we used to sing? Red, Yellow, Black, White, We are precious in His sight... We’re all precious in His sight. Jesus loves the children of the world. Yeah. So it wasn’t until I got to Mountain Top Community where I saw the ugliness of the ugly raising head off the prejudiced White people. I never ever--I’ve never! And I felt that pain that my sons was going through; because it’s like, “This is ridiculous.” Especially that little boy that called, and that dared to call—my son a Nigger, and didn’t get in trouble.

## **Chapter V: Implications**

### **Overview of Findings**

Aligning with the general definition of parental involvement (Auerbach, 2010; Barton, et al, 2004; McNeal, 2014; Warren, et al, 2009), Black parents in this study participated in a variety of home and school level activities that assisted their children with understanding, meeting, and exceeding academic expectations. Activities ranged from assisting with homework to volunteering at school. However, some of these activities served a dual purpose. On one hand, parents were involved in home and school level activities to support their child's education, but on the other hand much of the activity hinged on addressing issues related to race and racism.

In reference to the major codes reported in chapter four, overall school level involvement was intertwined with racial vigilance. Although parents were racially vigilant outside of school institutions, for the purpose of discussing parental involvement as it relates to education, I will primarily focus on the parent-school interaction but further research should explore how racial vigilance plays a role in the parenting practices of Black parents and other parents of color. At home, racial vigilance continued but entailed race socialization of children. To say the least racial vigilance was a prominent feature of parental involvement that transcended across home and school.

The use of racial vigilance ranged. Some parents sought access to children of color to address nearly all-White racial dynamics in schools; other parents confronted what they regarded to be racist or anti-Black teacher and leadership sentiment and subsequent practices and thus were vigilant at the school level to curb these racial concerns. At times school level racial vigilance seemed cloaked as mainstream parental

involvement activities (e.g. volunteering, contacting educators, etc.). However, the activities were avenues used to support their children in spite of the anti-Blackness practices and attitudes at the school-level. This vigilance was in an attempt to ensure their children were not harmed or further injured from various forms of anti-Black racism.

Like Mrs. Collingsworth, the mother of two sons, her strategy involved increasing the frequency of school-visits in order to keep a watchful eye on her third grader, Chase. This was in response to 1) classroom-level harassment of Chase by peers, which escalated, to; 2) being slapped by a peer and then; 3) the school principal's inaction. In this example, Mrs. Collingsworth racial vigilance increased as the hostility increased. This response did not mean that Mrs. Collingsworth only performed school-level activities when racial issues occurred, on the contrary, she was actively involved but her motives had extended to protecting her son from school-related racism.

However, at the home level, it can be argued that racial vigilance continued as parents transmitted messages about race and racism to their children. At times messages were centered on instilling racial and cultural pride while others taught children the current racial structure that applied to them in and out of schools. I have provided an exemplar of this phenomenon presented by Mrs. Collingsworth:

At first we [her and Mr. Collingsworth] wasn't [going to withdraw Chase from school], but I said, 'well...this is the reality of the world, racial discrimination is not dead, it's still alive and he's [Chase] going to experience it through his life so he might as well get used to it now and learn how to deal wit it...(shaking her head in disagreement) And I said, you know what, you can only protect him from so much and if he deals wit it young, he'll, know how to handle it by the time he's older. I said...said if it was vice versa they'd try to put him out...it would have been a real big deal just because he's a male and...'  
Chase: "African American"

The line, “if it was vice versa they’d try to put him out...”, demonstrates that Mrs. Collingsworth was preparing Chase for understanding the way she believed Black males are treated if they were the perpetrator instead of a victim. Specifically she has eluded to Chase being suspended or expelled, which is probable given the empirical research demonstrating Black males are likely to be suspended or expelled for similar offenses that White or Asian American students commit, however Black males are suspended at a much higher rate and with harsher punishments (Skiba et al., 2002) . Regardless of the content of the messages transmitted, all messages hinged on the sociocultural construction of being Black. This protective aspect of involvement is known as race socialization, and in this study, it was done to assist children in their preparation of what parents deemed a racial reality for their Black children in and out of schools.

**Connecting to CRT.** The lens that CRT has provided has allowed us to see two dynamics as it relates to how one is involved as a Black parent in this study. In one frame, Black parents appear as if they are participating in scripted acts of involvement at the school level. These are sophisticated strategies exercised at the school level but was also enacted on a much larger scale as well that was not completely explored in this study. At the home level, Black parents were preparing their children for the real “racialized” world as understand by their own context. Falling in line with Lopez (2003), as it relates to the use of CRT as a tool for exploring parental involvement of five migrant families, CRT in this study was able to capture the “racial terrain that surrounds parental involvement but also transgress our taken-for-granted assumptions surrounding appropriate home-school interactions and/or parental behaviors” (p. 75). Drawing from Lopez (2003) the ways Black parents were involved “stand outside traditional

involvement configurations” (p. 87). However, I argue that these outside configurations demonstrate two oddities. On one hand Black parents are attempting to use measures, such as racial vigilance and race socialization to protect children from racism in schools. In tandem they are supporting their child’s education, which takes place in racist schools where Black children are receiving that education. Because of this oddity, I argue for a reframing of parental involvement of Black parents.

### **Black Parent Protectionism**

This evidence supports my theoretical framework, CRT, which argues that racism, is a pervasive construct and consequently, in response to this pervasiveness, all sets of participants anticipated and contended with issues related to race and racism, in their child’s education. Given these findings, I argue that these parental involvement and engagement measures, racial vigilance and race socialization, was conducted to protect children from racism within brick and mortar schools that were primarily dominated by Whites. I consider the totality of these parental involvement actions as Black parent protectionism in schools.

Black parent protectionism expands the role of racial protectionism as presented by Mazama and Lundy (2012) and protective carework as presented by Elliot and Aseltine (2013). According to Mazama and Lundy (2012), African American parents employed homeschooling as an act of racial protectionism from school-related racism. Specifically, the researchers identified the substantial surge in African American involvement in homeschooling as grounded in “their [parents] strong desire to protect their children from the ill effects of school-related racism (p. 724).” Mazama and Lundy’s observations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century exodus of Black parents and choosing to

homeschool<sup>19</sup> because of racism mirrors the findings of other recent studies of homeschoolers (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Ray, 2015). According to the U.S. Department of Education the rate of Black families' homeschooling has doubled from 1999 to 2012 (Ray 2015).

Black parent protectionism is also drawn from Elliot and Aseltine (2013) protective carework among Latinx, White, and African American mothers whose children face "hostile environments" (p. 720). Protective carework included "gauging potential threats to children's well being, determining how much autonomy to allow them, and employing strategies to monitor children's activities, peers, and surroundings" (p. 720). Hostile environments encompassed "antagonistic social contexts", particularly institutionalized racism.

The remaining chapter addresses the implications of Black parent protectionism overall and then discusses the implications of racism in schools for parents, school leaders, and scholars.

### **The Implications of Black Parent Protectionism**

**Draft one: A history of racial hostility.** I struggled to write a final draft addressing the implications of "Black parent protectionism". After each draft, I was left feeling sourly for I was highly dissatisfied with what I critiqued, implicated, and provided as next steps for parents, school leaders, and scholarship in this area. The first draft followed the nomenclature of most studies. First, I rehashed the introduction provided in this manuscript beginning with the story of a parent, Prince Hall, who petitioned the

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<sup>19</sup> Homeschooling is "parent-led home-based education, a form of private education that is parent led and home based" and "homeschooling does not rely on either state-run public schooling or institutional private schooling for a child's education" (Ray, 2013, p. 324).

Massachusetts state legislature for a separate African school in 1787. Hall's reasoning grew out of frustration from the continuous racial hostility Black children faced (Bell, 1980). In this draft, I also highlight other Black parents who had similar claims throughout the history of Black Education (see Fields-Smith, 2005; Shujaa, 1992) and I linked these proclamations to the counter-narratives in this study.

In this draft, several parent excerpts demonstrating school-related hostility, specifically calling attention to situations involving children being called "niggers" and their school leaders treating these incidents haphazardly, illuminated findings from other recent studies demonstrating a congruency of parents that have claimed and responded in a protective way for centuries. These excerpts flowed into another section dedicated to past mainstream literature on parental involvement (e.g. Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein & Salinas, 2004)

**Connection to literature review.** In this next section of my draft, I rattled an exhaustive list of ways the sets of parents were involved from attending school functions to tutoring their own children. I added that demographics (i.e. SES; urban-ness) provided little explanation as to how or why Black parents were involved. In this draft I continued to show how Black parents were involved grounded in their racial reality. For example, in one section I had detailed how most parents taught their children about African and African American history. Many also organized ways their children could interact with other African American children. Here, I affirmed Lopez's (2001; 2003) argument, that parent involvement studies should be expanded outside the hegemonic scripted acts, particular among marginalized groups.

**Expanding parent involvement.** However, in this draft I mentioned that Black parents did understand parental involvement to mean scripted forms (e.g. school visits, helping with homework) of involvement as present by Lopez (2001). However Black parents considered what they knew as their conditions as Black people and their understanding of race as a sociocultural construction, to help determine their level or type of involvement as Black parents. In other words, I argued that being a Black parent compelled them, whether it was out of necessity or foresight, to account for race and consider racism as a pervasive system in schools and thereby subsequently act at the home and school level.

I then proceeded to hone in on acts of vigilance and socialization by providing examples of parents keeping “watch” for their children, organized African American centered fieldtrips to counter the Euro-centered curriculum in their child’s school. Three parents hired lawyers to protect their children from expulsion and suspension policies perceived to be racist. I argued that these motivations, although in appearance where hegemonic acts, were also ways Black parents protected their children from racism in schools.

**What are the implications?** In this draft, I gave a short caveat on how racial dynamics played a role in school selection, underscoring the lengths parents went through to ensure their children had what they considered to be good schools and were protected from racial dynamics that parents thought to be harmful. I also noted that the school racial dynamics spoke to how parents proceeded to “act” at the school level. For example, Mrs. Goode volunteered throughout her three daughters schooling because her children were often the only Black children in class. I attended to how some parents moved,

sacrificed careers, and forewent any sense of community by moving to circumnavigate the ill effects of racism—whether out of necessity or foresight. I also reflected on how Mr. Jones and his family left the state of Midwestern because Xavier was nearly charged for a felony because he wrote his name in cement. I provided one of his excerpts that demonstrated these lengths (“It’s like what would you give to save a kid’s life? Would you give your life savings if it’s life or death? Would you give up everything that you own, you know?”). Near the end of this draft, I began to discuss the implications of Black parent protectionism.

**Questioning.** Unfortunately, the cursor on the screen blinked for long periods of time when I approached this end. I had no words to offer that could adequately speak to the idea that my findings demonstrated that Black parents appear to be involved in schools by protecting their children from racist school officials and their fellow peers. I had no words to write that spoke to the pervasive racism that penetrated across high, middle, to low SES, single, two-parent, and blended families, educational level by parents, various career paths, and in both private and public sector. As the cursor blinked, I asked myself, “can Black children receive an optimal education in a pervasive system of racism in schools?” I did not know what exactly optimal was, but given the vast racial disparities across all areas of education coupled with the parent narratives in this study, it was easy to suggest that whatever Black children were receiving as students—it was not “optimal”.

I called a few of my committee members and stated I was having issues writing this chapter because I was constrained by this question that forced me to explore two dynamic constructs, optimum education and racism in education. These ideas were at

odds with each other and I was uncomfortable defending a draft that did not adequately address these findings. Perhaps this is why I stated previously that Black parents faced a duality in which they were protecting their children from racism in education and in tandem was supporting their child's education. This dual paradigm seemed polarizing. Calls to committee members were made to assist with this struggle. A suggestion made by one member was to provide implications for people who were "interested in the needs of Black children". This was proposed because I foresaw that my implications would be unsatisfying if some readers were beholden to meritocratic, colorblind, and equal opportunistic values. Thus, this new draft would be beyond the realm of attempting to convince post-racialist into believers of racism in education that parents had to contend. In this purview, another member added to propose a radical implication for I was unrestrained if these were my findings. A third stated to think more about the application of antiracist policies for educational leadership. I took the advice of all three. I constructed another draft.

**Draft two: The contemporary history of racial hostility.** In this second draft, I added to my original opening and gave a complete history of how Black parent protectionism appears to have existed since the birth of America. I reiterated the secret learning communities formed despite learning being a punishable offense (King, 2011). I even linked the socialization messages given on the plantation by Black parents and fictive kin<sup>20</sup> (King, 2011) to the messages that some parents were sending to their

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<sup>20</sup> Further examination would need to be conducted but much of the socialization messages seemed similar to how King (2011) discusses how Black children were socialized to live on the plantation system by their parents or fictive kin. King states that [e]nslaved parents viewed compliance with the deference ritual as a way of avoiding slavery's punitive arm; however, they knew that it did not represent their true feelings...This behavior required a degree of sophistication that encroached upon childhood since it compelled boys and girls to behave like men and women long before they became adults. (174)

children in this study<sup>21</sup>. Based on this conceivability of messaging throughout time, I began to argue that perhaps Black protectionism is in response to the accumulating phenomenon's revealed in the racial disparity literature that describes the landscape of Black Education. To be specific, I suggested that Black parent protectionism in this study were protecting their children from the effects of the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006), standards gap (Sandholtz, Ogawa, & Scribner, 2004), opportunity gap (Akiba, et al, 2007), receivment gap (Chambers, 2009), discipline gap (Gregory, et al, 2010), Eurocentric curriculum (Asante, 1991; Pinar, 2011), racial trauma in education (Truong & Museus, 2012) racial battle fatigue in education (Smith, 2007), John Henryism in education (McKetney & Ragland, 1996), and the school to prison pipeline (Wald & Losen, 2003) to name a few.

In this draft, after considering the counter-narratives and comprehensively the literature demonstrating a racially hostile educational pattern in schools, I chastised the idea of proposing parental involvement efforts to assist in circumnavigating racism—for the problems are embedded within the institution that are forcibly placed upon the parent to address. It seemed odd to assert that victims of race discrimination, which involves or includes parents, go to the racist institution for remediation or that schools provide strategies to parents to assist in combating racism at the school level.

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<sup>21</sup> Mr. Jones discussed how he helped his son, Xavier, understand the negative school experiences Xavier had with school officials: we had conversations about the school to prison pipeline and you know, what he needs to do to navigate around all of that stuff, you know? And I kept telling him, you know, it doesn't matter how nice these people are to you, as soon as you slip up they're going to crucify you... We would watch like the "Christianity, the Stolen Religion From Africa," the one about Judeo-Christianity and just all of the Ashwa Quasi videos were the ones I really had at the time. And we would have conversations about...what he thought about it...what I believed...he would say that...he'd think that...they're stealing our religion and our theology in our science and everything. And how do you feel about, you know, your relationship with White people? He explained, you know, what he learned from Ms. Cox...you have to be cordial, but you have to be on guard for them.

This idea seems to place the victim in a more vulnerable position of victimization. To reiterate this vulnerability, I called attention to Mrs. Adams, who had four African American boys living in low SES, and had to hire a lawyer to help mitigate a wrongful expulsion. I described how Mrs. Adams, was so traumatized by the experience of racism, that she had to take moments to wipe her tears away and gather her thoughts during the interview. It seemed nefarious to suggest that the victim receive some sort of assistance to address racism at the school level that would potentially place her in more harms way.

**Expanding leadership.** Instead, I suggested that parents look at African centered independent schools (Boyd & Correa, 2005; Davenport & Bogan, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Lomotey, 1992; Richards, 1997), alternative forms of unconventional learning, and out-of-school spaces. One example, I provided was homeschooling based on the increasing rise of Black parents, which I previously stated was because of school-related racism (Mazama & Lundy, 2012). However, feeling compelled to acknowledge a need to cope with the reality of racism in schools, I advocated adopting an anti-racist philosophy of school leadership and suggested a feasible place to begin was exploring the harm principle, crafted by Mills (Vernon, 1996).

This idea of the “harm principle”<sup>22</sup> grew out of the need to address principals that

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<sup>22</sup> Envision a student swinging his arms. The characteristics of the student and the direction, manner, and speed of the student’s swings are left up to the reader to select. The student hits another student. Intentionality of the swinging, as well as where and how badly the student victim was hit is also left for the reader to decided. Considering the reader’s envisioned scenario, I pose this question; if any school official was responsible for these students, what would be the standard first response to this scenario? I would hope the answer would be grounded in tending to the student that was hit—the victim. Certainly apprehending the student that hit the other child—the perpetrator, may be of equal importance as well. In any scenario, I believe most would regard our standards for educators would be that they first attend to the victim’s needs and in tandem, ensure that the perpetrator does not swing their arms in a manner that harms others going forth. I use this scenario to contextualize what is of the utmost importance when it comes to dealing with racism exhibited by teachers and students—that is tending to the victim while ensuring that the perpetrator does not harm others. Debating as to whether the harm was intentional or unintentional does not mean the victim was no less harmed. In other words, making decisions about intentions does not lessen the harm and damage to the child. Moreover, it has been established in the legal and scholar field that intentionality does

seem to fall back on issues intentionality when deciding if children were racists. To illustrate the harm principle, I provided a scenario of a student swinging his arms in a classroom (however imagined to the reader). In this scenario, the student then hits another student (however imagined to the reader). To contextualize what is of the utmost importance when it comes to dealing with racism exhibited by teachers and students—that is tending to the victim while ensuring that the perpetrator does not harm others, I argued that what should be primary to any school leader is a) ensuring the student harmed (the victim) has been treated and b) ensuring that the student that committed the offense (perpetrator) can not harm others moving forward. But this debate of intentionality

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not need to be present for someone or something to be racists (see Lopez and Freeman). And then again, no one can travel in the mind of individuals to know for sure if someone was intentionally racist.

Counter-arguments to my claim may suggest that unlike being “hit,” name calling (e.g. being called a ‘nigger’) or other forms of racism, is just as nuanced as deciding one’s intentionality. But there is a foundational history of violence erupting in the U.S. stemming from racist expressions whether they were blatant or subtle forms. Moreover, folding in freedom of expression standards as previously explained, if racist speech on the part of students or teachers violates the rights of students being protected in schools and their pedagogical right to learn, then again subtly and intentionality do not have to be hard-lined exemplars.

But to speak to counter-arguments that may suggest that a physical hit is not the same as name-calling or a highly racist history lesson. I would agree, victims of racism had discussed the permanent scars or the open wounds still feel as real as they were when it took place, which suggests that the harm is done psychologically maybe greater (see Smith, 2008) than being hit. In short, the harm done should be primary as well as preventing harm to others. I believe this logic, which stems from the harm principle is how one leads an anti-racist leadership platform when it comes to dealing with racism.

Moreover, it reduces the reliance on excuses on the part of teachers who do culturally irresponsible lessons or actions. Principals can easily discuss the pedagogical harm and stand on the fact that being a highly qualified teacher constitutes that one should understand appropriate and safe pedagogy for all children regardless of their intentions. Again, this does not have to be a formally adopted approach, merely a leadership philosophy statement when it comes to servicing the needs of those historically marginalized.

This can work in for deciding appropriate discipline measures. When parents discussed that teachers were documenting their children for having things like “gum,” principals should look at this as a victimless offense that deserves a reminder. For the “crumbs” of marijuana in Xavier’s locker that he was expelled for one school year for, this was also a victimless offense. Xavier deserved drug-counseling education. In the case of the children calling Black children “nigger’s”, there were victims who were harmed but never received protection. But again, this should be used on an individual basis, not relating to whole group classroom. For example, I have had many teachers exclaim that student outburst impedes the progress of education of others. This harm principle is not intended to use on a holistic level that includes people who do not have any proclamation other than what their teacher stated as such. Using this approach, I believe systemic issues can be disrupted as it refocuses the attention on the part of the perpetrator.

among school leaders should be casted away for regardless of one's intentions the victim was no less harmed. In other words, making decisions about intentions does not lessen the harm and damage to children.

Moreover, it has been established in the legal field that intentionality does not need to be present for someone or something to be racist (Freeman, 1977). Nevertheless, I conjured up case law, specifically *Tinker*, *Fraser*, and *Hazelwood*, to support that there is no freedom of expression to be racist in schools (calling someone “nigger” or pretending to hang a Black child with a rope). I explained the limits to student freedom of expression (i.e. speech, press, assembly, and petition). I added that these standards of speech along with the adoption of anti-bullying legislation in many U.S. states, Civil Rights Act of 1964—particularly the Equal Protection Clause, as well as standard school discipline policies means there should be ample protection of children from most forms of racist and offensive language. In other words, racist children or negligent school leaders that leave children unpunished cannot simply violate and ignore the pedagogical rights of Black children. This is important to understand when deciding “intentionality”- as it does not matter. I also offered antidotes of how many children (in my days as a teacher) were suspended for calling children a “Bitch” or a “faggot” and there was no question of intentionality that rescued children from being reprimanded.

**Shifting to parents.** Given these concerns in this draft, I advocated for a shift in efforts related to racial equity to a platform that addresses issues embedded in Black parent protectionism. I offered that perhaps efforts in reform should be reconsidered and reoriented toward the marginalized groups independent efforts. I thought that this may help one to gain an honest perspective of the racial occurrences in their schools and

approaches that worked for the needs of Black children. I offered implications for school leaders, suggesting that they create these spaces in schools for parents that were unregulated by school officials and facilitated by Black parents themselves as a start. I provided some exemplars for exploration, such as the Black Parent Initiative established in 2006 in Oregon (see <http://thebpi.org>).

### **A New Draft**

“A place where they can be themselves”; “where they would have teachers that love them”; “where they would learn their history”; “Borderless”; “Unrestrictive”; “Healthy”; “Where they can just be happy”.

I gathered that this second draft was the final although I felt restless about my pending question (Can Black children receive an optimal education in a pervasive system of racism?). However, I submitted my final draft. In the interim weeks, I noticed a flyer circulating on my Facebook newsfeed regarding a meeting held at a local book and coffee shop during one of the largest conferences in P-22 academia, American Education Research Association (AERA). The meeting was not sponsored by AERA or any Special Interest Group (SIG) within the organization, for it had been prompted by a small group of critical researchers that was focused on Black Education. I contemplated going to the meeting, but the title of the flyer, “Stop Fucking with our Children”, was intriguing enough that it ultimately won me over.

There were over 60 Black scholars from all across the country that filled the Black-owned book and coffee shop. Scholars that organized the meeting greeted the scholar patrons and handed us a paper filled with open-ended questions. They instructed

us to form a small group, and work together in answering the questions. I became the designated note taker for the group.

Question one: “what would a radical education look like for our Black children?”

We immediately began to unnerve a list:

- “A place where they [Black children] can be themselves”;
- “A place where the teachers and the adults love Black children”;
- “Where they [Black children] would learn their history and culture”;
- “Borderless and unrestrictive”;
- “Healthy”;
- “Where they [Black children] can just be happy.”

We all subsequently, gave each other praises to each item proposed. The praises were not spawned because these were out of the box ideas, but because we all agreed that most Black children did not have access to this idea we were developing, that is a “radical” education. From “a place where they can just be themselves [to] where they can just be happy”, I began to become troubled and frustrated by the items listed. I could feel other scholars become distress. However, we continued to discuss. While discussing, the discourse shifted and we began to open up in dialogue. Previous random listing of radical descriptions grew into a storytelling of horrors happening in schools in order to provide a rationale for any subsequent suggestions made. From then on, radical suggestions were often followed by horrific tales. These tales were echoed in similar storylines around our small group. Some gave elaborate details, others a preview, others a head node in affirmation of the shared stories.

**Radical change.** As the stories were told, we digressed into bewilderment and slipped into despair. The misery we felt about Black Education, in which we all had children in proved too much to make small talk and we resumed with rattled off listings. It grew into anger, and some of us started to politely curse in an apologizing posture. Older parents expressed relief that their children only had so many years in school. Younger parents expressed that their children had not started but they were “scared already”. I had heard this before—Black parents having anxiety over the thought of sending their children to school. We then took deep breaths as parents and laughed about our rage. Then we moved on to the next question that required us to think, where has this radical education taken place. No one mentioned public or mainstream private schools.

As I noticed that the list was mostly community based programs, independent schooling, and home-schooling, I asked a question that I had originally posed in this chapter, “can Black children receive an optimal education in a pervasive system of racism?” A reply took the form of a question. “What is optimal?”, I retorted, “the list that we came up with.” Everyone stared. I thought maybe I asked that “dumb” question one regretfully loathes. Someone broke the silence, “no-they can’t”. Then there was more silence. I do not mention this exchange in order to bask in the fact that I stumped some scholars with this question. But given the counter-narratives, and the outcomes described in the larger array of scholarship devoted to schooling of Black children, this question should be posed.

Perhaps a start is to consider other choices that do not involve attempting to change the people in schools, but perhaps consists of the people who would create these optimal spaces and in a space that was not necessarily state governed, extending to

unschooling, homeschooling, online learning, and other unconventional forms of education.

I shopped this out-of-school option to other scholars later at the conference. I was provided with reactions that seem to be part of narrative grounded in the effort to protect *Brown* (Edwards, 1993). Reasons commonly given were: “That is something that only Whites and the privilege can do?” ;“I pay taxes”; “I believe in public education”; “We can’t let them off the hook that easily”; “I fear that the effort would be coopt”; “What about the parents who have hegemonic philosophies?”. Although this idea of children choosing out-of-school options is grounded in the goal of *Brown*, these reactions should be further explored.

The idea that only White people and the privilege participate in these out-of-school options disregards and silences the growing number of Black parents opting out of school and choosing coops and home education (Ray, 2013). Claims of taxes and not allowing people off easily did not seem as reasons worth investing in the schools that have produced the same Black misery for parents throughout three centuries.

It is important to note that *Brown* was about choice-not just the choice to select public schools and certainly not the choice to continue to feel inferior. Perhaps as scholars, the implications for us are to explore alternative options which require us to examine out-of-school spaces—not to behold *Brown* in the purview of parents as their only option. I will end this last draft where the origins of this study began and list three posing questions that relate to what these implications may mean to us as leaders and scholars in this space.

On August 9, 2014, I was watching television and a series of breaking news reports were developing. On the screen was an African American woman who appeared to have been crying. Her name was Lesley McSpadden and she had a son, named Michael Brown. I later found out that although Michael Brown attended a high school considered to be “the most dangerous” in a nearly all-Black school that district had been publically characterized as “entrenched dysfunction” (Wax-Thibodeaux, 2014) due to the inordinate years of financial and academic malpractice, he—with apparent strong support from his mother, had successfully weathered this dangerous dysfunction. However, eight days after his high school graduation, news reports claimed that he had been gunned down by a police officer. Michael was unarmed. As the teenager’s body laid in the street his mother bellowed:

You took my son away from me! You know how hard it was for me to get him to stay in school and graduate! You know how many Black men graduate...not many! Because you bring them down to this type of level—where they feel like shit, I ain't got nothin to live for anyway...they goin try to take me out anyway! (KMOV.com, 2014)

This moment that I witnessed on television gave rise to this study. I wondered what did she go through as a parent to evoke her parenting experience-her involvement, as her child lay dead in a city street? Based on the counter-narratives of the participants, and my own parental experiences in schools, I gathered her cries and in that moment was because she had been protecting her child from racism in schools, and finally, when Michael had successfully completed this journey through the racist dysfunction, he still seemed to die from racism.

- Can Black children receive an optimal education in a pervasive system of racism?
- What does a radical education look like for Black children?
- What does educational leadership look like that assists parents in this endeavor?

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Williams, H.A. (2009). *Self-taught: African American education in slavery and freedom: African American education in slavery and freedom*: Univ of North Carolina Press.

Williams, T.T., & Sanchez, B. (2013). Identifying and decreasing barriers to parent involvement for inner-city parents. *Youth & Society, 45*(1), 54-74.

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## Curriculum Vitae

**Jada Phelps Moultrie**

### Education

- |                     |              |   |
|---------------------|--------------|---|
| <b>October 2016</b> | <b>Ph.D.</b> | <b>Urban Education Studies (UES)</b><br><i>Minor:</i> K-12 Educational Leadership<br>School of Education, IUPUI, Indianapolis, IN<br><i>Dissertation:</i> Black parents preparing their children for racial battle fatigue in schools.<br><i>Dissertation Chair:</i> Dr. James Joseph “Jim” Scheurich, IUPUI<br><i>Committee Members:</i> Dr. Jomo Mutegi, Dr. Samantha Parades-Scribner, Dr. Carlton Waterhouse, IUPUI;<br>Dr. Gerardo López, University of Utah |
| <b>2003</b>         | <b>M.S.</b>  | <b>Recreation and Sport Management</b><br>College of Education, Health and Human Sciences, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN   |
| <b>2001</b>         | <b>B.S.</b>  | <b>Secondary Education, Social Studies</b><br>Teachers College, Ball State University, Muncie, IN   |

## **Professional Experience**

K-12 Education Leadership & Teaching Experience

**Lead Teacher & Curriculum Developer,**

**2010 - 2012**

K12 Online Public Schooling

Herndon, VA—Home Office: Milwaukee, WI and Indianapolis, IN

As lead teacher, duties included creating online professional learning seminars for teachers. Seminars focused on designing online courses that met the varying needs of virtual academies. Assisted teachers in providing individual curriculum and instructional plans for students. Oversaw course platforms for nearly 2000 students in virtual academies expanding to the United Arab Emirates to Germany. Used several course management and web conferencing platforms to facilitate teaching and learning (e.g. K12 Online Learning System, Blackboard Learn, and Elluminate Live). As a curriculum developer, ensured course alignment to state standards across multiple states and created supplemental activities to address curricular gaps.

**Title I Reading Coordinator-Contract Position,**

**2010 - 2011**

Cornerstone Achievement Academy

Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS)

Milwaukee, WI

This was a contract position requiring 15-20 hours per week. Responsible for coordinating and directing the Title-I Reading Program at Cornerstone Achievement Academy, an alternative urban high school serving “over-age” students who were “under-credited”. Provided instruction in reading for students who were below grade level in a small group setting. Collected and disaggregated assessment data and reformed instruction to improve student progress and performance. Produced monthly progress reports for parents and students that incorporated student assessment scores, record of reading progress, and plans for continued progress. Developed quarterly reports for MPS. Hosted and attended monthly team coordinator meetings to improve the Title-I Reading programs across MPS.

**Principal & Academic Dean,**

**2008 - 2010**

Outlook University Independent School Network (OUISN)

Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP)

Milwaukee, WI

Appointed to principal in Nov. 2009. Major responsibilities included overseeing Saturday school, all athletic programs, and after school activities. Implemented positive behavioral intervention supports (PBIS) and restorative justice practices. Responsible for grade reports and distribution to parents. Designed emergency contingency plans and procedures (e.g. fire drills, winter storms, school shootings, social media threats) and coordinated drills accordingly. As Academic Dean, collaborated with principals to develop culturally responsive teaching methods and the implementation of alternative discipline strategies. With teachers, developed project based learning (PBL) curriculum for students. Coached instructors in PBL, curriculum design and development, and cultural competency and relevancy. Developed individual learning plans for students with a 504 or IEP plan.

**District Instructional Coach,**

**2006 - 2008**

Department of Secondary Education

Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS),

Indianapolis, IN

At the district level, collaborated with secondary principals, district coaches, and principal investigators from the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning (CELL) of University of Indianapolis in the development and implementation professional learning community (PLC) plans for faculty members. This plan focused on culturally relevant teaching practices and alternative discipline strategies. Responsible for the facilitation of PLC, coaching teachers toward implementing evidence-based practices, and using positive behavioral supports in the classroom. Assisted in the coordination and facilitation of learning opportunities for principals. Used guided protocols of Critical Friends Group (CFG) to assist with coaching and facilitation and created summative evaluations for teachers and principals.

**10th Grade Lead Social Studies Teacher,**

**2005 - 2006**

Willowridge High School

Humanities Department

Fort Bend Independent School District (FBISD)

Fort Bend, TX

Used the districts curriculum framework, *Understanding by Design*, to develop and plan the social studies curriculum, instruction, and assessment for the social studies department.

Developed the 10th grade social studies team curriculum and instructional calendar.

Directed the team in lesson planning. Developed diagnostic assessments to determine student academic needs. Analyzed data to assist in developing lessons that were congruent to student needs. Modeled and implemented effective teaching practices team. Observed and coached teachers toward best teaching practices for students. Coordinated the 10th - 12th grade Texas Assessment Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) tutorial programs. Team efforts resulted in high performance rates in the TAKS examination and Willowridge received merit-based accolades for this performance. Served as head coach of the girls freshman basketball team, assistant coach to girls junior varsity basketball team, and assistant coach to girls track and field team.

**Social Studies Teacher,**

**2002 - 2005**

Ross Shaw Sterling High School (RSS)

Social Studies Department

Houston Independent School District (HISD)

Houston, TX

Taught social studies to high school students including AP History. Developed and implemented lessons. Graded student work. Appointed to advocacy teacher for ESL students and the social studies representative on the HISD curriculum development committee. Member of the Site-Base Decision Making (SBDM). Served as assistant track coach. Nominated for 2003-2004 Teacher of the Year for RSS.

## **Higher Education Experience**

+Denotes Graduate Level Course

### **Graduate Student Assistant,**

**2013 - 2015**

Urban Center for the Advancement of STEM Education (UCASE)

Carver Teaching Initiative (CTI)

School of Education, School of Science, School of Engineering

IUPUI, Indianapolis, IN

Assisted in the development of CTI, which focused on recruiting and retaining underrepresented groups into the STEM teaching field. Collected, analyzed, and reported data related to campus enrollment, retention, attrition rates of STEM teacher education students, and national data related to science and math teaching certifications. Researched eligible grants. Assisted in leveraging \$35,000 to begin CTI. Other duties included recruiting, monitoring academic performance of CTI scholars, and organizing promotional events

### **Co-Instructor,**

**2014**

Urban Principalship Program (UPP)

School of Education

IUPUI, Indianapolis, IN

- +EDUC A510, *School Community Relations* (Hybrid Course)

**Graduate Research Assistant,**

**2012 - 2013**

Great Lakes Equity Center (Center), Equity Assistance Center (EAC)

Office of Elementary and Secondary Programs, U.S. Dept. of Education

School of Education

IUPUI, Indianapolis, IN

Primary responsibilities centered on technical assistance (TA) and professional learning for stakeholders (e.g. schools, school districts, state education departments) that focused on equity and inclusion within Region V (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin). Led the Networking and Dissemination team, which was responsible for preparing and disseminating Center publications (e.g. *Equity Dispatch*), managing social media, production of Center podcasts, and co-developing professional learning opportunities for stakeholders with the PI, Co-PIs, and Center Director (e.g. Equity Leaders Institute, State Equity Leaders Summit). Assisted with researching data related to stakeholder needs and coordinated TA efforts. Assisted in developing equity tools.

**Adjunct Faculty Instructor,**

**2004**

Adult Education Program,

Houston Community College, Houston, TX

- HIST 1302, *Civilization after 1877*
- HIST 2321, *The Origins of Development of World Civilization*
- HIST 2322, *Modern World Civilizations 1500 to Present*
- GOVT 2305, *Federal Government*

## **Honors and Awards**

- 2015 - 2016      **David L. Clark Seminar Scholar,**  
University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA)
- 2014 - 2016      **Barbara L. Jackson Scholar,**  
University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA)
- 2013 - 2016      **Southern Regional Education Board (SREB)-State Doctoral  
Scholar,**  
The Institute on Teaching and Mentoring, The Compact for  
Faculty Diversity
- 2012 - 2016      **Executive Dean, School of Education Doctoral Fellowship  
Recipient,**  
Urban Education Studies (UES), School of Education, IUPUI
- 2003 - 2004      **Teacher of the Year Nominee,**  
Ross Shaw Sterling High School, Houston Independent School  
District (HISD)
- 1999 - 2001      **Dean's Honor List,**  
Ball State University
- 2001              **Academic All Mid-American Conference (MAC),**  
Ball State University
- 2000              **NCAA All American (Division I) – Long Jump,**  
Women's Track & Field, Ball State University
- 1999              **Judy Cress Memorial Scholarship Recipient,**  
Ball State University

## **Research Agenda**

My agenda is centered on exploring the confluences of race, policy, and practice, on one hand, and educational leadership, on the other. This agenda is comprised of two strands. In the first strand, I explore how and where racial inequities manifest in K-12 schools. I examine the effects of racial inequities upon underserved students, stakeholders, and school organizations. In this work, I pay particular attention to students of African descent in K-12 urban schools. In the second strand, I explore how educational leaders disrupt or maintain racial inequities through various modalities ranging from the implementation of policy to evaluating educators. I pay particular attention to leaders in K-12 urban schools, and their efforts to implement state and district policy intended to address racial inequities. I investigate how these leadership efforts influence underserved groups, their school organizations and their communities.

## **Publications**

### **Refereed Articles**

Magee, P., Paredes-Scribner, S., & **Moultrie, J.P.** (accepted). Talk about a Racial Eclipse [Special issue]. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*.

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.** (2014). Pedagogy of the oppressors: An examination of the White ownership and control of hip-hop [Special issue]. *African American Learners*, 3(1).

### **Refereed Book Chapters**

Scheurich, J. J., **Phelps-Moultrie, J.**, Williams, N. A., Cannon, M. A., Sosa, T., & Shaver, E. (in press). Racism in pk-12 schools. In K. Lomotey (Ed.), *People of color in the United States: Contemporary issues in education, work, communities, health, and immigration*.

(Vol. 1). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO Greenwood.

Scheurich, J. J., Bonds, V. L., **Phelps, J. A.**, Currie, B. J., Crayton, T. A., Elfreich, A. M., Bathena, C. D., Kyser, T. S., & Williams, N.A. (2015). A new definitional framework for educational equity with explicated exemplars. In M. Khalifa, C. Grant-Overton, N. Arnold, Osanloo (Eds.), *Handbook of Urban Educational Leadership*. Lanham, MD: Rowman& Littlefield.

### **In Preparation**

#### **(Intended For Refereed Journals)**

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.** (in preparation) Black parents, Black children, and the preparation for racial battle fatigue: Implications and considerations for school leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration*.

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.**, & Waterhouse, C.M. (in preparation) Perpetuating racism through race-neutral conceptions in K-12 education. *The Journal of Law and Education*.

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.** (in preparation) Heirs of a struggle: A historical perspective of parental involvement in Black education. *Journal of Negro Education*.

### **Other Publications**

#### **Newsletters**

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.A.** (2014). Finding my calling: A UCEA convention journey. *UCEA Review* 55(1), 12. Retrieved from <http://3fl7112qoj4l3y6ep2tqpwra.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Winter2014.pdf>

Chen, K., Kigamwa, K., Macey, E., **Phelps, J.**, Simon, M., Skelton, S., & Thorius-King, K. (September, 2013). Silent school bells: School closures and equity. *Equity Dispatch*.

Retrieved from <http://glec.education.iupui.edu/assets/files/Sep2013Newsletter.pdf>

Chen, K., Kigamwa, K., Macey, E., **Phelps, J.**, Simon, M., Skelton, S., & Thorius-King,

K. (August, 2013). Who's not coming back to school? The pushout. *Equity Dispatch*.

Retrieved from <http://glec.education.iupui.edu/assets/files/August2013newsletter.pdf>

Chen, K., Kigamwa, K., Macey, E., **Phelps, J.**, Simon, M., Skelton, S., & Thorius-King,

K. (July, 2013). Summer vacation: A vacation from learning? A critical view. *Equity*

*Dispatch*. Retrieved from <http://glec.education.iupui.edu/assets/files/JulyPDF.pdf>

Chen, K., Kigamwa, K., Macey, E., **Phelps, J.**, Simon, M., Skelton, S., & Thorius-King,

K. (June, 2013). "sTEM" technology and equity. **Equity Dispatch**. Retrieved from

[http://glec.education.iupui.edu/assets/files/June\\_2013\\_Dispatch.pdf](http://glec.education.iupui.edu/assets/files/June_2013_Dispatch.pdf)

Chen, K., Kigamwa, K., Macey, E., **Phelps, J.**, Simon, M., Skelton, S., & Thorius-King,

K. (May, 2013). Using multi-tiered systems of support to advance educational equity.

*Equity Dispatch*. Retrieved from

<http://glec.education.iupui.edu/assets/files/The%20Great%20Lakes%20Equity%20Center%20May%202014%20Newsletter.pdf>

Chen, K., Kigamwa, K., Macey, E., **Phelps, J.**, Simon, M., Skelton, S., & Thorius-King,

K. (April, 2013). Will the common core promote equity? *Equity Dispatch*. Retrieved

from [http://glec.education.iupui.edu/assets/files/April%202013\\_final.pdf](http://glec.education.iupui.edu/assets/files/April%202013_final.pdf)

Chen, K., Kigamwa, K., Macey, E., **Phelps, J.**, Simon, M., Skelton, S., & Thorius-King,

K. (March, 2013). A closer look at high stakes testing. *Equity Dispatch*. Retrieved from

<http://glec.education.iupui.edu/assets/images/FebMarch.pdf>

Chen, K., Kigamwa, K., Macey, E., **Phelps, J.**, Simon, M., Skelton, S., & Thorius-King,

K. (January, 2013). Beyond Black history month: Engaging a multicultural curriculum year-round. *Equity Dispatch*. Retrieved from

<http://glec.education.iupui.edu/assets/files/Jan2013Newsletter.pdf>

**Phelps, J.**, Kigamwa, K., Macey, E., Simon, M., Skelton, S., & Thorius-King, K.

(December, 2012). The transformative power of language. *Equity Dispatch*.

Balmer, L., **Phelps, J.**, Kigamwa, K., & Macey, E. (November, 2012). Beyond the buzzwords: Examining culturally responsive teaching. *Equity Dispatch*. Retrieved from

[http://archive.benchmarkemail.com/Great-Lakes-Equity-Center/newsletter/November Newsletter](http://archive.benchmarkemail.com/Great-Lakes-Equity-Center/newsletter/November%20Newsletter)

Balmer, L., **Phelps, J.**, Kigamwa, K., & Macey, E. (October, 2012). School-family

partnerships: Creating democratic and responsive schools. *Equity Dispatch*. Retrieved

from [http://archive.benchmarkemail.com/Great-Lakes-Equity-Center/newsletter/October Newsletter\\_Corrected](http://archive.benchmarkemail.com/Great-Lakes-Equity-Center/newsletter/October%20Newsletter_Corrected)

### **Print Blogs and Audio Media**

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.** (2013, November 15). Jackson scholar presentations: A systemic support network [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://ucea.org/home/2013/11/15/jackson-scholar-presentations-a-systemic-support-network-1.html>

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.** (2013, November 8). It's a family affair: UCEA awards luncheon [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://ucealee.squarespace.com/home/2013/11/8/its-a-family-affair-ucea-awards-luncheon.html>

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.** (Producer). (2014, April 4). *Using peer mediated learning to advance equity* [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from

<http://podcast.iu.edu/upload/glec/2d35ecf3-514f-48e0-ae82>

b22ae3206a45/2014\_5\_10\_CritCon\_Draft3\_emm.mp3

**Phelps, J.** (Producer). (2012, November 27). *Engaging school communities in critical reflection on policy*

### **Refereed Presentations**

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.** (2016, April). *Navigating racism without racist? Analyzing Black parental involvement in the age of race neutrality*. Accepted paper to be presented at the 2016 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Washington, D.C.

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.** (2015, November). “*Racism without racist*”; “*Victims without ‘crimes’*”: *Black parental involvement in the age of race neutrality*. Paper presented at the 2015 annual conference of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), San Diego, California.

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.** (2015, November). *Heirs of a struggle: A historical perspective of parental involvement in Black education*. Paper presented at the 2015 annual conference of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), San Diego, California.

Scheurich, J., Rogers, J., Williams, N., **Phelps-Moultrie, J.**, & Kyser, T. (2015, May). *Reframing anti-racist scholarly activism*. Symposium conducted at the 2015 annual meeting of the Eleventh International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois.

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.** (2014, November). *Parent involvement or racial hypervigilance? How Black parents navigate hostile K-12 systems.* Paper presented at the 2014 annual conference of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), Graduate Student Session, Washington, D.C.

**Phelps-Moultrie, J., & Mutegi, J.** (2014, November). *Voices of the oppressor: What educational leaders should know about hip-hop.* Paper presented at the 2014 annual conference of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), Washington, D.C.

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.** (2014, June). *Fight, flight, or freeze: Black parents response to hostile K-12 systems.* Paper presented at the annual 2014 meeting of the Critical Race Studies in Education Association (CRSEA), Nashville, Tennessee.

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.** (2014, April). *Whose culture is it really? Pedagogy of the oppressors: A critique of the premise behind hip-hop pedagogy.* Paper presented at the 2014 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**Phelps-Moultrie, J., Williams, N., & Scheurich, J. J.** (2013, November). *Defining urban education.* Symposium conducted at the 2013 annual conference of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), Indianapolis, Indiana.

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.** (2013, May). *Hip-hop youth: owners, borrowers, users, or slaves.* Paper presented at the 2013 bi-annual empirical conference of the Institute for the Study of the African American Child Conference on Research Direction, Hilton Head, South Carolina.

**National Service**

- 2015 - present**      **Conference Committee Administrator,**  
Critical Race Studies in Education Association (CRSEA)
- 2014 - present**      **Graduate Student Council Member,**  
University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA)
- 2013 - 2015**      **AERA Campus Liaison IUPUI, Indianapolis & IU,**  
**Bloomington,**  
American Educational Research Association (AERA), Division G,  
Social Context in Education
- 2013 - 2014**      **Student Reviewer,**  
International Journal of Qualitative Research (QSE)
- Conference Reviewer**
- 2015**      Graduate Student Session, University Council for Educational  
Administration (UCEA)
- 2014**      Research Focus on Black Education (RFBE), American  
Educational Research Association Annual Meeting (AERA)
- 2014**      University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA)
- Chair/Organizer**
- 2015, Fall**      **Organizer,** The University Council for Educational  
Administration (UCEA) Graduate Student Summit (GSS):  
*Dissecting the curriculum vitae (CV) for job winning success.*  
**Chair:** Dr. Jim Scheurich, IUPUI

**2015, Fall**

**Participants:** Colleen L. Larson, New York University; Anthony Rolle, University of Houston; Noelle Witherspoon Arnold, Ohio State University; Kevin Foster, University of Texas at Austin

**Organizer,** The University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), Graduate Student Summit (GSS):

*Jigsawing puzzles while traveling in a maze: Simplifying the complexity of writing a literature review*

**Chair:** Samantha M. Paredes Scribner, IUPUI

**Participants:** Catherine A. Lugg, Rutgers-The State University of New Jersey; Enrique Aleman, University of Utah

**2015, Fall**

**Co-Chair/Organizer,** The University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) Graduate Student Summit (GSS):

*Graduate Student Closing Session.*

**Co-Chair:** Daniela Torre, Vanderbilt University.

**Invited participant:** Dr. Gary Crow, Indiana University, Bloomington

**Session participants:** Amy Reynolds, University of Virginia; Hilary Lustick, New York University; Isaiah McGee, University of Iowa; Kristina Brezicha, Pennsylvania State University; Wesley Henry, University of Washington; Bryan VanGronigen, University of Virginia; Elizabeth Gil, Michigan State University; David Aguayo, University of Missouri; Rachel White, Michigan State University

**2015, Fall**

**Co-Chair/Organizer,** The University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) Graduate Student Summit (GSS):

*Graduate Student Opening Session.*

**Co-Chair:** Amy Reynolds, University of Virginia; Hilary Lustick, New York University; Isaiah McGee, University of Iowa; Kristina Brezicha, Pennsylvania State University; Daniela Torre, Vanderbilt University; **Jada Phelps-Moultrie**; Indiana University, Indianapolis; Wesley Henry, University of Washington; Bryan VanGronigen, University of Virginia; Elizabeth Gil, Michigan State University; David Aguayo, University of Missouri; Rachel White, Michigan State University

**2014, Fall**

**Co-Chair/Organizer,** The University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) Graduate Student Summit (GSS):

*Graduate Student Opening Session*

**Co-Chair:** James Vines, Clemson University; Yinying “Helen” Wang, Georgia State University; Jasmin Ulmer, University of Florida; Rod Whiteman, Indiana University, Bloomington; Amy Reynolds, University of Virginia; **Jada Phelps-Moultrie**; Indiana University, Indianapolis; Hilary Lustick, New York University; Isaiah McGee, University of Iowa; Kristina Brezicha, Pennsylvania State University; Daniela Torre, Vanderbilt University; Wesley Henry, University of Washington

**University Service**

**2013 - 2014** IUPUI School of Education Grievance Committee, Student Representative

### **Community Service**

#### **Invited Presentations**

Craig, C., Williams, N., **Phelps-Moultrie, J.**, & Brown, Amos. (2014, July). *An examination of disparities in school disciplinary practices in suburban schools*. Panel presentation given for Indiana Black Expo Education Conference, Indianapolis, Indiana.

**Phelps, J. A.** (2012, June). *Misplaced priorities open forum: Understanding the school to prison pipeline*. Research presentation given for NAACP, Indianapolis, Indiana.

#### **Community Presentations**

**Phelps, J. A.**, Smith, S., & Currie, B. (2012, March). *Issues in African American education*. Colloquium. Center for Urban and Multicultural Education (CUME) Colloquium, Indianapolis, Indiana.

**Phelps, J. A.**, Helfenbein, R., Mutegi, J., & Douglass, T. (2011, July). *Using transformative measures to dismantle America's apartheid-the cradle to prison pipeline*. Panel presentation given for Indiana Black Expo Education Conference, Indianapolis, Indiana.

#### **Boards and Committees**

**2012 - 2014** **Board Member, Community Representative**

Our Kids (O.K.) Program, Indianapolis, IN

**2012 - 2014** **Education Committee Member**

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

Branch, #3053, Indianapolis, IN

**2008 - 2013**

**Education Conference Planning Committee Member**

Indiana Black Expo (IBE), Indianapolis, IN

**2008 - 2013**

**Education Summer Conference Planning Committee Member**

Indiana Association of School Principals (IASP), Indianapolis, IN

### **School Consultant**

**2013 - 2015**

Muncie Community School Corporation, Muncie, IN

**2012 - 2013**

Indianapolis Public Schools, Indianapolis, IN

### **Grant & Award Efforts**

#### **Funded**

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.** *Travel Student Fellowship Award*. IUPUI Graduate Student Office.

(\$1,500; Submission Date: March, 2014; Funded).

Mutegi, J. W., Flowers, N., & **Phelps, J.** *Mitigation of Racial Bias: An Experimental Study of the Impact of Diversity Courses in Pre-Service Teacher Education*. Indiana University, IUPUI, School of Education Research Fund. (Student Researcher; \$5,000; Submission Date: February, 2010; Funded)

#### **Not Funded**

**Phelps-Moultrie, J.** *Travel Student Fellowship Award*. IUPUI Graduate Student Office.

(\$1,500; Submission Date: September, 2014; Not Funded)

### **Professional Memberships and Affiliations**

- American Educational Research Association (AERA)
  - Division A: Administration Organization and Leadership
  - Division F: History and Historiography

- Division G: Social Context of Education
- Paulo Freire, Critical Pedagogy, and Emancipation
- Urban Learning, Teaching and Research
- Research Focused on Black Education
- Critical Race Studies in Education Association (CRSEA)
- University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA)
- Indiana Association of School Principals (IASP)
- Indiana Urban Superintendent Association (IUSA)
- National Council on Educating Black Children (NCEBC)
- National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa (PDK), Tau Chapter, Indianapolis, IN

### **State Licensures**

**Indiana**      *P - 12, Building Level Administrator*

*5 - 12, Social Studies Teacher*

**Texas**      *8 - 12, Social Studies Teacher*

**Wisconsin**      *6 - 12, Social Studies Teacher*

### **Highlights of Technology Skills**

#### **Course Management Systems:**

BlackboardLearn, K12 Online Learning

School, Moodle, OnCourse

#### **Multimedia and Communication:**

Adobe Connect, Audacity, Elluminate

Live, Google Hangout, FaceTime,

Jabber, Skype

#### **Operating Systems:**

Mac OS X, Microsoft Windows 8, 10

#### **Research & Transcription Software:**

Atlas.ti, Dedoose, ExpressScribe,

MAXQDA, NVivo, SPSS, StataSE13

#### **Reference and Edit Manager**

#### **Platforms:**

EndNote, Grammarly, Mendeley

**Social Media & Management:**

Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter,

Everypost, Hootsuite

**Software Applications:**

Adobe Reader, Adobe Creative Cloud,

Mac Productivity Apps, Microsoft

Office Suit