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Sweet Spirit: The Pedagogical Relevance of the Black Church for African-American Males

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Sweet Spirit: The Pedagogical Relevance of the Black Church for African-American Males

by

Brandi Odom Lucas

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2014

Sweet Spirit: The Pedagogical Relevance of the Black Church for African-American Males

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This dissertation written by Brandi Odom Lucas, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts; it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us ...

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something, and do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the Master Builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

-A Step Along the Way
(Utener, 1979)

Upon entering this doctoral program, I knew I wanted to produce work that would be uplifting and inspirational. I fought, unsuccessfully, my desire to focus on the contributions of the Black Church. Now looking back, I'm so happy I lost that battle. God, I pray that the works of my hands are pleasing in Your sight and that anyone reading this will be able to see You through me.

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May the works that I've done speak for me.

May the life that I've lived speak for me.

May the service I give speak for me.

The works I've done, sometimes it seems so small,
it seems like I've done nothing at all.

But when I stand before God's throne and hear Him say well done

Then I know the works I've done Spoke for me.

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ABSTRACT

African-American student achievement is a pervasive problem for school communities. This qualitative research explores the Black Church's role in the bicultural development of six African-American male students. Using the critical theory of biculturalism this study seeks to determine what aspects of the Black Church experience influence the African-American male's ability to navigate the school environment and participate in school. This dissertation study utilized complementary methodologies, *testimonies*, and witnessing, to document the students experiences in the school and church communities. Data analysis included holistic-content analysis. Findings indicate the Black Church was an effective vehicle for the empowering process of biculturation. Through its critical teachings, cultural responsive care, and engaged pedagogy, the Black Church affirms the bicultural students and helps them contend with their personal experiences with oppressive individuals and structures. The findings support the need for the Black church to participate in the education reform efforts affecting African-American students. The findings also support a renewed focus on engaging teachers in the utilization of culturally responsive care in their interactions with African-American students.

CHAPTER ONE

“IT’S SOMETHIN’ ON THE INSIDE...”

The trouble with Black boys is that too often they are assumed to be at risk because they are too aggressive, too loud, too violent. Too dumb, too hard to control, too streetwise, and too focused on sports ... The trouble with Black boys is that most never have a chance to be thought of as potentially smart and talented or to demonstrate talents in science, music, or literature. The trouble with Black boys is that too often they are placed in schools where their needs for nurturing, support, and loving discipline are not met. Instead they are labeled, shunned, and treated in ways that create and reinforce an inevitable cycle of failure. (Noguera, 2003, p. xxi)

On the surface, Donovan¹ and Marcus seemed very similar. Both were 12th-grade African-American male students being raised by single mothers. Both had a profound interest in athletics, enjoyed a variety of music from Tupac to the Beatles, loved pursuing female companionship, and participated in multiple extracurricular activities. Both were extremely polite and respectful to teachers and administrators. They were to be enrolled in my senior Psychology class and, unbeknownst to me, this would be the beginning of a mentorship that would continue long after graduation.

A major difference between Donovan and Marcus would become more apparent as the school year progressed. Donovan seemed to have a resiliency that evaded Marcus. He had goals that were as numerous as they were far reaching. He would tell any adult that would listen about

¹ All names have been changed.

his goal of becoming the first African-American President of the United States and, only when Barack Obama was elected, did he concede to being the second. The politics of the school that could overwhelm other students—like new grading policies, new extracurricular requirements, and changes in behavioral sanctions—seemed to have no effect on Donovan. In some ways, he appeared to exhibit a type of disregard for societal expectations, more often found among students who are unfamiliar with schooling in the United States. Nothing seemed to disrupt a focus on his studies.

Marcus on the other hand struggled to focus. His goals were not as concrete. He seemed to have conceded to attending college, but his decision was more extrinsically motivated than born of personal aspiration. He seemed to have rather large expectations regarding what this educational process would entail. He was often disappointed, discouraged, and suspicious of the behavior of teachers and administrators. Marcus was honest about his lack of effort toward his classes. When Marcus did achieve academically, he often attributed that success to his relationships with his teachers, rather than his hard work.

Our Psychology class engaged in discussions on topics including motivation, identity, and self-determination. These discussions brought to my attention some other major differences between these two young Black men. In their final papers, students were asked to discuss the relationship between their identity and their community. Donovan's discussion centered on the role of the African-American church in his personal formation. He included in his discussion specific examples of what he considered to be the positive contributions of the African-American church to his personal identity. Marcus, in contrast, discussed his school and neighborhood

communities. He included vivid descriptions of neighbors and former teachers who he felt contributed to his identity.

I have often reflected on Donovan and Marcus' choice of communities. I questioned whether their communities had an impact on their ability to navigate the school environment and the mechanisms by which this could be accomplished. It was from my experience with Donovan and Marcus that I began to think more seriously about the connection between African-American youth and the pedagogical relevance of the African-American church to their academic achievement. Hence, this study represents a sustained effort to critically examine this connection.

Statement of the Problem

African-American student achievement has received much attention in scholarly literature. In what is referred to as the achievement gap, African-American students have been shown to fall further behind as they progress through school (See Table 1). There are aspects of the current discourse that are extremely problematic, namely, the failure to include data about environments that promote high achievement among African Americans and the fact that a systematic denial and limiting of opportunities to African-American students was prevalent just 40 years ago. What is not widely discussed is the lack of equality and equity in the school experience of working-class students of color, more specifically the national ideology of deficit that supports the notion of Black intellectual inferiority (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). In all measurable areas, African Americans have a very different schooling experience than their white counterparts.

Measures of African-American Schooling

Black children are over three times more likely to be poor than White children. Black families with children have a median income that is half that of White families. In 2011, the median income for Black families with children was \$35, 538 compared to \$72, 027 for white families with children. In 2008, Black males age 18 and over represented only five percent of the total college population, but 36% of the total prison population. In 2009, Black children constituted 15.1% of the population, but 31% of all juvenile arrests and 51% of all juvenile arrests for violent offenses. Black males born in 2001 are more than five times more likely to be incarcerated in their lifetimes than White males (Children’s Defense Fund [CDF], 2012).

In 2008, 35% of the nation’s Black students attended one of the 1,700 high schools that were labeled “dropout factories,” due to a graduation rate of less than 60% (CDF, 2012). The achievement gap between White students and their African-American and Latino counterparts continues to widen, despite state and federal efforts. Sixty-four percent of African-American students graduate from high school within four years of starting ninth grade compared to 82% of their White peers (CDF, 2012).

African-American children were 16% of sixth through eighth graders but 42% of students in those grades who were held back in 2009. The rates of suspension and expulsion of African-American students is proportionally higher than their white peers. Although African-American students comprise only 18% of students enrolled in public schools, they represent 40% of students who have experienced corporal punishment, 35% of students who received one out-of-school suspension, 46% of students who received multiple out-of-school suspensions, and 39% of all students expelled. Sixty four percent of Black students graduate from high school within

four years as compared to 82% of white students (CDF, 2012). Some data have indicated that African Americans attending private, parochial, and charter schools earn higher standardized test scores (Litton, Martin, Higareda, & Mendoza, 2010); however, critics suggest that social and economic advantages could explain the differences (CDC, 2012).

In addition to the disparity in discipline practices, African-American students contend with a lower quality academic experience. Although African-American students make up 19% of students enrolled at schools offering Gifted and Talented Education Programs (GATE), they make up only 10% of students enrolled in the program. In traditional programs, African-American students have unequal access to rigor, as demonstrated by the disparity in access to high-level Math and Science courses. Eighty-two percent of schools serving the fewest African-American and Hispanic students offer Algebra II, while only 65% serving the most African-American and Hispanic students offer Algebra II. Schools serving the most African-American and Hispanic students are twice as likely to employ novice teachers. Teacher absenteeism is also high in schools serving African-American and Hispanic children. (United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Data Collection [CRDC], 2014).

Table 1

Graduation, Drop out, and Special Education Rates by Ethnicity

Percentage of students who have completed high school or more nationally (2010) ^a	84.2	62.9	n/a	88.9	87.6
Percentage of students who have completed college or more nationally (2010) ^a	19.8	13.9	n/a	52.4	30.3
Dropout rates in California 2011-2012 ^a	22.1	16.1	18.4	5.5	8.2
Graduation rate in California 2011-2012 ^a	66.0	73.7	72.4	91.1	86.6
Average Freshmen Graduate Rate (AVFR) 2009-2010 ^b	66.1	71.4	69.1	93.5	83.0
Drop out rate, national 2009-2010 ^b	5.5	5.0	6.7	1.9	2.3
Percent distribution of fall enrollment for degree granting institutions (2010) ^c	14.5	13.0	0.9	6.1	60.5
Percent distribution of bachelors degrees conferred to US residents by degree granting institutions 2009-2010 ^d	10.3	8.8	0.7	6.5	72.9
Percentage of children ages 3 to 5 and ages 6 to 21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), by race/ethnicity: 1998-2007 ^e	12.2	8.5	14.4	4.8	8.5

a. Adapted from “Cohort outcome data for the class of 2011-2012,” by California Department of Education Data Reporting Office. 2013. Retrieved from <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/cohortrates/GradRates.aspx?eds=00000000000000&TheYear=2011-12&Agg=T&Topic=Dropouts&RC=State&SubGroup=Ethnic/Racial>

b. Adapted from “Public school graduates and dropouts from the common core of data: School year 2009-2010 NCES 2013-309rev,” by United States Department of Education. (2013). Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013309rev.pdf>

c. Adapted from “Total fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by level of student, sex, attendance status, and race/ethnicity: Selected years, 1976 through 2010 (Data set),” by National Center for Educational Statistics. (2011). Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_237.asp

d. Adapted from “The Condition of Education 2012 (NCES 2012-045), Indicator 47,” by United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=72>

e. Adapted from United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), 1998 through 2007. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010015/tables/table_8_1a.asp

Impact of Federal Policies

African-American education began in the church house. With help from missionaries and philanthropist, African-American communities were able to create literate communities focused on addressing the deficit ideologies of Black inferiority. Though these schools were not provided with the resources of their White counterparts, they were successful in creating generations of students able to read, write, and critically reflect on their identities. The conditions of African-American public education found little amelioration outside of federal policy mandates meant to create sweeping changes in the landscape of American education.

The Post-Reconstruction Era (1865-1877) saw a reversal of many of the advancements made to the quality of life of African Americans after the Civil War, the most important being the right to vote. At the state level, the inability for African Americans to vote affected the composition of school boards, which had a direct effect on the allocation of school resources. Black communities responded to the deficits in school resources through their donations. On the eve of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), most states operated two school systems, one serving Whites and one serving African Americans. In general, schools serving White students had better facilities and resources, offered smaller student-teacher ratios, and were in session for more days (Ashenfelter, Collins, Yoon & National Bureau of Economic Research, CA., 2005). To examine the racial gap during the period before *Brown v. Board of Education*, Peter Orazem (1987) analyzed standardized test scores. He found that, although there was indeed a gap, about 40% of the gap could be explained by the lack of school resources designated to African-American schools at the time. Even with these obstacles, many early African-American schools

did an excellent job educating their students. For Blacks, education was rooted in the antiracist struggle and provided an opportunity for affirmation (hooks, 1994). In his discussion of the effects of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Sheldon Richman (2004) recounted the Dunbar experience. Dunbar High School was an all-Black high school in Washington, D.C., in operation from 1870 through 1955. Dunbar is known for its 75% college attendance rate. Although most students attended agriculture and liberal arts colleges, Dunbar's success despite surmounting obstacles is a testament to the success of early African-American schools.

The institutional response to *Brown v. Board of Education* was to integrate white schools with African-American students, which negatively affected both African-American teachers and students, a fact ignored by society. In fact, the success of a school's desegregation plan was measured by the satisfaction of white parents (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Approximately half of all Black educators lost their job during this time, due to the dwindling numbers of Black students in these schools (Toppo, 2004). Desegregation also isolated Black students from their communities and from the educators whose pedagogy was congruent to that of their lived experience.

In the subsequent decades, the politics of integration prevailed across the nation's public schools, with marginal improvement to educational opportunities for African-American children. As a consequence, other federal policies and initiatives were introduced to improve education for African-American students. In 2001, Congress reauthorized No Child Left Behind (NCLB); this was considered groundbreaking in two important ways. First, it ended the practice of local control of education by extending federal government influence over public education. Second, it required schools to demonstrate that all students, regardless of their status or background, were learning. Although flawed, some researchers suggest a benefit to NCLB, invalidating the idea

that the relationship between race and intelligence is immutable (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). NCLB resulted in providing greater attention to the educational needs of the poor and oppressed; students with learning disabilities; recent immigrants and English language learners; and students of color (Miller, 1995). The requirement of NCLB to disaggregate test scores by subgroups, including race, exposed the fact that working class and students of color have been underserved in the public school systems (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Most recently, President Obama supported expanding funding for federal intervention efforts to improve education. Obama's education initiative, Race to the Top (RTTT), is a direct off-shoot of his predecessor's educational policy, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which applied strict mandates intended to close the growing "achievement gap" between students of color and their white counterparts.

Culture and Schooling

Although public schools, in accordance with federal mandates, have been racially integrated for 60 years, they remained culturally exclusive. In her historiography about African-American teaching in the south from 1940 to 1960, Vanessa Siddle Walker (2001) asserted that African-American students left environments that focused on their educational uplift for environments where their success was no longer paramount. Desegregation, in essence, created a need for African-American students to learn how to navigate two cultures, their primary culture and the mainstream school culture, successfully.

School is a cultural context involving structural, expressive, adaptive, and other fundamental cultural components. The structural components include student behavioral norms, school organization, and promotion of school personnel and students. Expressive elements

include extracurricular activities, art and music classes, and other forms of creative expressions. Adaptive components include grades, achievement test performance, and academic recognition. Fundamental elements include individualism, interpersonal competition, and material gains (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). These various elements collectively provide students a cultural experience in school that, in the case of most students of color is dismissive of their home environment thereby making them less successful.

Students who have a primary culture that is different than the dominant culture are said to be bicultural. Antonia Darder (2012) defined biculturalism as the process wherein individuals learn to function in two distinct sociocultural environments: their primary subordinate culture and the dominant mainstream culture. Biculturalism points to the condition faced by African Americans in which their lived histories are excluded from the discourse that informs curricular materials, pedagogy, and the overall school experience. In order to navigate the two worlds successfully, bicultural students undergo a dual socialization process. The contemporaneous socialization occurring in the primary culture and mainstream culture requires that a bicultural student negotiate both cultures in ways that support “interpsychic harmony” (p. 46).

The relationship between the bicultural student and the educational setting remains a contentious one. Although today bicultural students make up 40% of the national public school population, 80% of the nation’s teachers are white (Urlich, 2011). As a consequence, these students are seldom provided opportunities to experience their lived histories within the school culture, especially throughout the curriculum. Instead, they are exposed to and assessed on an assimilative or hidden curriculum that is often incongruent with their own cultural norms and values (Lea & Griggs, 2005). Black children continue to receive a compensatory education,

which views them as deficient compared to white children, to the detriment of their self-esteem, self-concept, and self-actualization (hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Powell, 1973).

One explanation for the inability of American education to address the needs of African-American children is the gross generalization of culture and the disregard of the powerful role that schools can play in the academic achievement of children (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). The assumption that Black students are exactly like white students without the resources and abilities prevaricates the needs of students. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) contended that the impact of systemic racism and distinct racial characteristics is rarely investigated thus resulting in the academic failure of Black students being viewed as “wholly environmental and social” (p. 10). The success or failure of students must focus on school conditions and not simply on the amount of the dominant culture they possess (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

Research also indicates a need to examine the relationship among race, culture, and teaching. Teachers must be provided the skill to teach effectively, regardless of race, class, or culture of their students (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Failure to do so has been shown to create classrooms that are more likely to be disruptive and disorderly (Irvine, 2003). A study of student-teacher relationships has yielded two approaches: assimilationist and colorblind. The assimilationist approach considers teachers to be emissaries of the dominant culture with the job of facilitating the assimilation of students from culturally different backgrounds (Katznelson & Weir, 1985). This approach acknowledges that education is not a neutral process. On the contrary, it occurs in social settings and is influenced by hierarchical arrangements that exist in society (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Students not acquiring this school culture tend to be less successful in school (Delpit, 1988).

The colorblind approach to education holds that the best way to educate children is to ignore differences related to race, class, and culture and to treat all children equally regardless of their background (Sleeter, 2000). The goal of this approach is to minimize the impact of teachers' prejudices and biases on their perceptions of their students. Critics of this approach state that, in practice, teachers are rarely able to ignore these differences (Sleeter, 2000).

The Black Church

The Black church has supported the Black community since the early part of the 19th century. The Black church is the only institution that the Black community governs (Woodson, 1933/2013). There has been much literature dedicated to the benefits of the African-American church in the educational advancement of African-American students (Barrett, 2010; Billingsley, & Caldwell, 1991; Gaines, 2010; Madyun & Lee, 2010; McCray, Grant, & Beachum, 2010; McKinney, 1971). Researchers have also found a positive relationship between religious involvement and educational outcomes among urban African-American students. William H. Jeynes (2010) contended that religious commitment may play a prominent role in closing the achievement gap for African-American students, given that religiously committed African-American and Latino children outperformed their less religious counterparts in core subjects. Brian Barnett (2009) also found that religious involvement has a large, positive impact on the educational outcomes of African-American students, which further suggests that the African-American church continues to have a positive effect on the educational outcomes of its congregants.

An attempt to identify and define the African-American church and its tradition has generated two contrary definitions. E. Franklin Frazier (1974) described the African-American

church as a replica of the white slave master's church with an appeal rooted in the slave's need for social tradition. In contrast, Benjamin Mays (1938) engaged in discourse that discusses the church as reflections of its people. The church, he asserted, resonated with slaves who needed a compensatory God to help understand their realities. James Weldon Johnson (1925), an African-American author, writes

At the psychic moment there was at hand the precise religion for the condition in which he found himself thrust. Far from his native land and customs, despised by those among whom he lived, experiencing the pang of the separation of loved ones on the auction block, knowing the hard taskmaster, feeling the lash, the Negro seized Christianity, the religion of compensations in the life to come for the ills suffered in the present existence, the religion which implied the hope that in the next world there would be a reversal of conditions, of rich man and poor man, of proud and meek, of master and slave. (p. 20)

The African-American church has been intimately involved in social justice issues since its inception during the mid-1800s. The Anti-Slavery and Civil Rights movements are excellent examples of how the church mobilized to meet the needs of its people. The African-American church began its involvement with education during the late 19th century. "Sabbath schools" were operated out of the church house on Sundays and during the week to respond to those post-Civil War African Americans who desired a formal education (Butner, 2005). Sabbath schoolteachers were those African Americans who had previously obtained a formal or informal education and possessed a commitment to further their communities. Between 1861 and 1890, the majority of African Americans enrolled in school were enrolled in church-affiliated schools opened with the help of private philanthropists and federal aid (Leavell, 1970). These schools

embodied the African-American church belief in the empowering and uplifting quality of education, in order to bring dignity and promote freedom (Butner, 2005).

The African-American church continued to focus on education into the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement was characterized by a collective consciousness focused on eradicating the injustices that were hindering the quality of life for African Americans and other oppressed groups. The Civil Rights Movement united the physical and material resources of multiple denominations of the African-American church to engage in a critical pedagogy that addressed the “ideological and theological underpinning of the movement” (Pinn, 2002, p. 13). Sermons were an effective pedagogical tool used to engage and inform congregants about current issues affecting their lives. The church was the setting in which the convergence of religion, spirituality, and issues of oppression were openly and readily engaged, resulting in a renewed consciousness of the people.

The Black church has enjoyed a history rich in educational theory and practice. There is ample documentation of its success educating students of color, as well as research that demonstrates the benefit of religious affiliation in academic achievement (Donahue, 1995; Smith, Denton, Faris, & Regnerus, 2002; Taylor, Lincoln, & Chatters, 2005; Jeyes, 2010). Yet, despite these obvious successes, the African-American church is noticeably excluded from public conversations or educational debates focused on questions of African-American student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

In many ways, today’s African-American community finds itself in a condition similar to the pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) African-American community. School segregation

is on the rise despite legal mandates for integration and the increasing cultural diversity of the U.S. population.

Although there is a push to provide an education that speaks to the lived histories of African-American students, much of the current curriculum, pedagogy, and structures of schooling relationships remain unchanged. This forces students of color to master fluency in their home culture as well as the mainstream school culture. An underlying assumption of this study points to the potential of the Black church to support the educational achievement of African-American male students. Thus, if the church functions as a socializing agent for both scholastic and social education, then it would seem that society could benefit from an understanding of its contributions to the academic success of its congregants. That said, the purpose of the research is to determine the ways in which the Black Church aids in the bicultural socialization of African-American high school male students and thus, indirectly, in the mainstream educational setting. And by so doing, this study seeks to create a place where the contributions of the church, at long last, can be included within public educational debates that focus on the academic achievement of African-American students.

Black students, in particular, are in constant battle for their authentic identity, while simultaneously forced to fight against prevailing notions of Black intellectual inferiority (Perry, T., Steele, C., & Hilliard, A.G., III., 2003). Negative stereotypes associated with Black men have been burdensome and debilitating. Historically, they have been the “ultimate other” (Noguera, 2003), lauded for their assumed athleticism and “coolness” and feared for their supposed sexual and violent nature. These stereotypes are also present in the school setting.

Black males, as mentioned earlier, are more likely than any other group to be suspended and expelled from school, to be labeled for special education, and to experience academic failure.

Daily interactions with stereotypes have been shown to affect the academic performance of African Americans. This phenomenon, as discussed by Claude Steele, is known as stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is defined as the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype (Perry et al., 2003). African-American males face insurmountable obstacles throughout their lives. Unfortunately for African-American males, the classroom remains an archetype of society at large and, as such, requires them to confront issues of inferiority rarely acknowledged outside their immediate communities.

Research Question

This research examines the contributions of the African-American church beyond simply that of material resources. As such, this study addresses the following three research questions:

1. What aspects of the African-American Church experience function to support the bicultural development of academically successful African-American male high school students?
2. What specific church experiences influence the African-American male student's ability to critically negotiate the school environment?
3. How do the church experiences of African-American students influence their participation in school and, thus, their academic achievement?

Students were chosen to participate in this study using criterion sampling. Subjects were required to meet the following criteria:

1. African-American male.
2. Enrolled in a public, private, Catholic or charter high school or college.
3. Attends an African-American church regularly and participates in a minimum of one church auxiliary group.
4. Has at least one parent or guardian who attends the same church regularly and participates in a minimum of one church auxiliary group.

Significance of the Study

This research examined the role of the African-American church as a pedagogical vehicle of biculturation that assists students in navigating their bicultural world. The study analyzed the *testimonios* of six African-American male students in an attempt to disentangle questions regarding the schooling experiences of African-American male students, racial socialization, and student achievement. Drawing on critical bicultural theory, this study contributes to the fields of urban education, critical pedagogy, and engaged pedagogy.

Theoretical Framework

This study focused on the role of the African-American church in assisting bicultural youth as they navigate their school environments. Drawing on the works of critical theorists, this study examined the mechanism by which the church engages its students in understanding issues of power and oppression while concurrently promoting healing from the oppressive structures that exist within the educational setting. In addition, the research draws on critical bicultural theory, as formulated by Darder (2012) in *Culture and Power in the Classroom*, to discuss the process by which individuals navigate the dominant and subordinate cultures. The study is also informed by the history of the African-American church (including origins, social justice

contributions, and educational involvement) in an effort to understand its role in the lives of its congregants. In addition, the study describes education as it pertains to the African-American student from the mid-1800s to the present, in an effort to provide a historical background to frame the educational experiences of African-American students in the United States.

Methodology

The study employed two complementary qualitative methodologies: *testimonio* and witnessing. *Testimonio* is a first-person oral or written account, drawing on experiential, self-conscious, narrative practice to articulate an urgent voicing of something to which one bears witness (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). Semi-structured interviews, email journaling, and participant analysis were utilized to capture each narrative. Witnessing refers to the act of listening to another for the purposes of self-liberation. Witnessing was the method used during the interviews to address the “silent trauma” that may evade the participant (Felman & Laub, 1992).

Limitations and Delimitations

A research limitation for the study includes the researcher’s intimate connection with the Black Church. The researcher is the great granddaughter of a Baptist minister and currently attends a church in which her family has been active for over 50 years. She has experienced and observed the benefits of church participation. Secondly, the researcher is the mother of a 3-year-old African-American male. In this respect, this research has entailed a personal journey to discover ways to mediate the social pressures and stereotypes he inevitably will face during his academic career. A third limitation of the study is the small sample size, although the small number of participants enabled detailed and nuanced analysis of each participant’s experience.

A fourth limitation involves disengagement: as the research progressed, the researcher found disengagement difficult, since exchanging stories is often understood within a larger story of friendship. Researchers take peoples stories and place them into a larger narrative. As such, they are imposing meaning on participants lived experience. Hence, good research practice demands that researchers share their ongoing narrative constructions; therefore, the participant can never be free of the researcher's interpretation of their lives (Bell, 2002).

Definitions of Terms

Black/African American: these terms are used interchangeably to represent individuals with African ancestry.

Bicultural: the behavior resulting from an individual's simultaneous existence within two different cultures (Solis, 1980).

Biculturalism: the process wherein individuals learn to function in two distinct sociocultural environments—their primary culture and that of the dominant mainstream culture of the society in which they live. It represents the process by which bicultural human beings mediate between the dominant discourses of educational institutions and the realities that they face as member of subordinate cultures (Darder, 2012, p. 45).

Process of Biculturation: incorporates the different ways in which bicultural human beings respond to cultural conflicts and the daily struggles with racism and other forms of cultural invasion (Darder, 2012, p. 45).

Black Church/African-American Church: the institution derived from the experiential faith systems of the West African people as well as the religious and cultural traditions of the African-American slaves (Halley, 2010).

Desegregated schools: schools in which less than 10% of student population is comprised of students of color.

Segregated schools: schools: schools in which 50-100% of student population is comprised of students of color.

Summary

This research seeks to understand the relationship between the African-American church and the school environment by focusing on African-American male high school students. This research aims to provide the most vulnerable students an opportunity to discuss their lived experience as members of a bicultural community. In addition, this research contributes to an existing body of scholarship aimed at ameliorating the academic achievement gap. Finally, through recapturing the power inherent in the Black Church to support the process of biculturation of African-American youth, this study hopes to reinsert the voice of the Black Church into public educational debates and discussion related to their academic success.

CHAPTER TWO

BLACK CHURCH AND EDUCATION

The African-American church provides an environment where students are celebrated without being segregated. It is the one place where your success or shortcomings doesn't make you different. It offers students a parallel world where those in charge look exactly like them. I'm not sure even they realize how powerful that can be. B.K. Woodson, (personal communication, July 24, 2014)

The histories of the Black Church and of Black people in the United States are at times indistinguishable. Any attempt to provide evidence of one's effect on the other during the past 200 years would run the risk of over-simplifying the lives and histories of a people. What seems more authentic is to discuss these histories in terms of the shifts in conscientization or critical consciousness that have occurred within the church and its people. In his book, *Politics of Education*, Paulo Freire (1985) defined critical consciousness as the "dialectic of man's objectification of and action upon the world" (p. 69). Conscientization, he stated, is made possible only when "men's consciousness, although conditioned, can recognize that it is conditioned" (p. 69). Critical consciousness, then, requires (1) a comprehension of men and women as beings who exist in and with the world, (2) an understanding of reality as an object, (3) creative communication about the object by means of language, and (4) the plurality of responses to a single challenge.

Freire (1985) also discussed the responsibility that the church has in the formation of the critical consciousness of its people. He contends that churches should produce liberation or humanization with its people by challenging the ideology of the ruling class. The church, like its

people, “runs the risk of blindly accepting the dominant culture’s ideology as its own” (p. 122). Any church, he asserted, undergoing the task of transforming the world has to undergo a transformative process that Freire terms, Easter. Easter involved “a change in consciousness,” which is to be experienced “alongside the oppressed” who are being “born again in the process of liberation (p. 123). Simply put, it is a death of prior beliefs and a resurrection into a new, critical consciousness.

Unlike its biblical definition, this notion of Easter is not a onetime event of death and resurrection but rather a continuous exercise in praxis involving renewed consciousness. It was through a series of Easters that the Black church began changing the consciousness of a people. This historical examination of the Black church will demonstrate the following the points:

1. As the consciousness of Black Americans became more critical in nature, their focus on obtaining freedom from bondage was replaced with a focus of liberation from oppression.
2. The Black church contributed to the change in consciousness from freedom to liberation.

Freire (1985) asserted there are two types of consciousness, semi-intransitive and native transitive, which will be used in this discussion of the Black Church and the black experience. Semi-intransitive consciousness is typical of closed structures. This consciousness prevents the subordinate from understanding life’s complexities or distorts them. Individuals attribute the sources of their realities to a “superreality or something within themselves” (p. 76). With this consciousness, individuals are limited to meeting the challenges involved with their survival and therefore, are unable to reflect critically upon their reality.

Semi-intransitive consciousness describes the awareness of African slaves. The four centuries of slavery in the United States was an “economic mistake and a moral crime”

(Zuckerman, 2000, p. 70). Slavery began with the system of indentured servitude as a means of securing cheap labor. The switch from indentured servitude to slavery occurred for three reasons: (1) an increase in the demand for labor and land, (2) the unsuitability of American Indians for servitude because of their ability to retaliate, and (3) the powerlessness of Africans due to their displacement (Alexander, 2012).

The planter elite, wanting to exert division between poor whites and African slaves, sought to create a raced-based system of slavery. They took measures, now known as the “racial bribe,” which involved providing privileges to poor whites, which included access to Native American land and the ability to police the slaves. As Michelle Alexander (2012) argued, poor whites suddenly had a personal claim in the existence of a raced-based system of slavery. This new racial caste system was rationalized by the vulgar notion of white supremacy. As Alexander noted,

This deep faith in white supremacy not only justified an economic and political system in which plantation owners acquired land and great wealth through the brutality, torture, and coercion of other human beings; it also endured, like most articles of faith, long after the historical circumstances that gave rise to the religion passed away. (p. 26)

Most scholars agree that the inception of the African-American church can be traced to the psychological needs of the Negro slave. In his book, *The Negro Church in America*, E. Franklin Frazier (1974) asserted that the Negro church emerged from the need of the Negro to both understand his current status as a slave and achieve some form of social cohesion. The Black church, thus, became an “invisible institution” prominent in the Negro culture but virtually extinct in the society at large. This lack of recognition from the dominant society

allowed the early church and its members to develop strategies that provided remedies for contending with the physical and psychological pain intrinsic to the evils of human servitude. Frazier posited that the “social isolation,” “subordination,” and lack of “historical tradition” primed the American Negro for unconditional acceptance of religion from the White slave masters (p. 86).

Many theologians reject Frazier’s notion of passivity in the adoption of the slave’s religious beliefs. James Costen (1997), author of *From Strength to Strength: A Brief History of the Black Church in America*, contended that the Negro slave had been introduced to Christianity in their homeland, prior to the slave trade. Slave owners did not introduce Christianity, since it had spread through the continent at the same time that traders were looking for exports. Portugal, Spain, England, and a host of other European nations began using Christianity as a means to exploit the African continent and its inhabitants for their economic gain. Costen wrote, “When the Africans’ eyes were closed (for prayer), the traders and missionaries took the land and the Africans were left with the Bible and prayer” (p. 34). He insisted that the slaves’ ability to survive the intolerable conditions of the Middle Passage, without the comfort of family and community, forced them to rely on something other than themselves.

In contrast to Frazier’s (1974) belief, Costen (1997) argued that the slave was not void of culture or social cohesion, given they brought with them strong ancestral ties and a belief in a Supreme Being. Belief in God did not begin on the plantation, but slaves used this belief to understand their current lot and draw support through the dehumanization they were experiencing. In his book *The Black Church Since Frazier*, Eric Lincoln (1974) asserted that the Negro “found peace in a God that would bare his burdens and sanctify his oppression” (p. 108).

In *DuBois on Religion*, Phil Zuckerman (2000) utilized the writings of William Edward Burghardt (W. E. B.) DuBois to help the reader understand DuBois' views on religion and its connection to race and justice. DuBois also acknowledged how important the African's culture was to their experience on the plantation. Though displaced and separated from familial units, slaves maintained social kinships. Moreover, DuBois contended the priest or the medicine man is an ancestor of the Black preacher. Confined to the plantation, this individual was responsible for the "healing of the sick, the interpreter of the Unknown, the comforter of the sorrowing, the supernatural avenger of the wrong, and the one who rudely but picturesquely expressed the longing, disappointment, and resentment of a stolen and oppressed people" (p. 51). DuBois further argued that slaves understood slavery using the ethos taught in their homeland, which involved a clear delineation between good and evil:

Slavery, then was to (the slave) the dark triumph of Evil over him. All the hateful powers of the Under-world were striving against him, and a spirit of revolt and revenge filled his heart. He called up all the resources of heathenism to aid, - exorcism and witch-craft, the mysterious Obi worship with its barbarous rites, spells, and blood sacrifice ... the witch-woman and the voodoo-priest became the center of Negro group life, and that vein of vague superstition which characterizes the unlettered Negro even to-day was deepened and strengthened. (p. 52)

First Shift of Consciousness

When supernatural efforts to defend against the evils of slavery failed, the slaves began to seek other options of defense including revolt. The spirit of revolt could not withstand the unyielding oppression of the slave masters. By the middle of the 18th century, amidst perdition

of slavery, the Black slave was primed to form a new philosophy. Christianity was spread to plantations by Catholic and Protestant missionaries who elicited the help of African priests or religious specialists. Slaves were educated as early as 1695 specifically for the purpose of religious conversion. In 1774, the first Abolitionist Society established a school for African-American children in Philadelphia. This trend would continue until the exclusion of Negroes from public education in 1829 (Jackson, 2001).

In the early schools, slaves were instructed to read the Bible and write. Slaves were intensely attracted to the Bible. In his book, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, David Kelsey (1977) argued that all faith communities have a lens that guides their interpretation and use of scripture. Interpretation of scripture is often based on an individual's social situation. In the case of the slave, what emerged from his biblical studies was a specific biblical hermeneutic found in Black Theology that focuses on a sovereign, powerful God acting on the behalf of a dispossessed and marginalized people (Cone, 1997).

The Bible, according to James Cone (1997), helped the slaves deal with the burdens of their situation. As Bible reading increased for Blacks so did their empowerment, resolve, and resistance. In *God of the Oppressed*, Cone discussed the ways in which slaves were able to “endure the stress of human servitude, while still affirming their humanity” (p. 10). The Bible became a book of healing and rebellion. Slaves took solace in stories about God's responses to oppression and injustice. Through an understanding of the Hebrew's journey from oppression to deliverance, Blacks were able to “render the unbearable bearable, to make the gall of slavery if not palatable at least not as bitter” (Usher, 1983, p. 27).

In her book *Young, Gifted, and Black: Promoting High Achievement among African-American Students*, Perry et.al, 2003) described an African-American Philosophy of Education she titles “Freedom for Literacy and Literacy for Freedom.” This philosophy was forged out of slaves’ early encounters with literacy and their struggles to acquire literacy and education in America. African Americans pursued learning in order to obtain freedom, claim their humanity, and work to liberate their people. This philosophy was passed on in oral and written narratives, which became central to the identity formation of African Americans as intellectually capable people. Perry argued that this philosophy of learning was capable of developing and sustaining the desire for learning in a people.

A slave’s passion for literacy was intimately connected to his quest for survival. History is rich with stories of the slaves’ pursuit of literacy. Slave narratives described slaves trading marbles and candies with white children or paying large sums of money to poor white people in exchange for reading lessons. Literacy for the slave, although an individual pursuit, was a communal act affirming both their individual freedom, as well as freedom of their people (Perry et al., 2003).

Soon missionaries began the task of baptizing slaves. The slaves’ conversion to Christianity was heavily contested. Many Christian groups like the Methodist and Quakers condemned slavery and believed their mission was to convert the slave. Others felt that baptizing slaves would make them children of God, thereby, making slavery immoral. Others supported conversion because of the positive impact it would have on slavery. In their book *African American Religion in the Twentieth Century*, Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer (1992)

identified five functions of Christianity, in the process of exploiting slaves and maintaining capitalism.

1. Provide an ideological rationale for slavery and the (exclusive) social cohesion of white society.
2. Aid in the deculturation process that slaves experienced.
3. Effectively subdue and pacify slaves.
4. Enhance the profitability of the slaves by ensuring they would work under adverse conditions.
5. Create uniformity among people of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Despite the efforts of southern missionaries, legislation was passed between 1664 and 1706 denying that baptism would change the status of a slave. The lure of economic gains by the exploitation of free labor was too strong to be ignored. The slaves, having experienced Christianity in their homelands, understood the unethical actions of Christian slave owners and intuitively knew that their actions had nothing to do with God (Costen, 1997; Wilmore, 1990). Numerous accounts demonstrating the slaves' understanding of Christian doctrine can be found in the recounts of missionaries during this time. In his book, *The Religious Instructions of Negroes in the United States*, Charles Jones (2011) recounted a white minister's experience speaking to a slave congregation, "I was preaching to a large congregation on the Epistle of Phileomon; and when I insisted on fidelity and obedience as Christian virtues in servants and upon the authority of Paul, condemned the practice of running away, one half of my audience deliberately rose up and walked off with themselves" (p. 126). The Negro slave did not passively ascribe to Christian beliefs. They took from it aspects that would help ease the burden

of their oppression. The contradiction by slave owners and the hermeneutics of an oppressed people would provide the foundation for Black theology and the Black Church.

Black theology is the “story of black people’s struggle for liberation in an extreme situation of oppression” (Cone, 1997, p. 49). Differences between White and Black theology can easily be demonstrated through a study of thought, practice, worship, and theology. Cone (1997) writes,

White theologians built logical systems; black folks told tales. Whites debated the validity of infant baptism or the issue of predestination and free will; blacks recited biblical stories about God leading the Israelites from Egyptian bondage ... White theologians argued about the general status of religious assertions ... blacks were more concerned about their status in American society and its relation to the biblical claim that Jesus came to set the captives free....White thought on the Christian view of salvation was largely “spiritual” and sometimes “rational” but usually separated from the concrete struggle of freedom in this world. Black thought was largely eschatological and never abstract, but usually related to blacks’ struggle against early oppression. (p. 49)

Hence, in Black theology, God is historical. He was a liberator and proof of his works could be found in the stories of Pharaoh’s army or Daniel in the lion’s den. In fact, it would be this belief in a historical God that would inspire the action of black Christians in the Abolitionist and Civil Rights Movements. “The core values of black culture- such as freedom, justice, equality, African heritage, and racial parity in all aspects of human life were inherent in the black Christian ethos that gave birth to and nurtured the civil rights movement” (Gadzekpo, 1997, p. 96).

Scholars assert that one principal difference in theological views regarding the belief system of white and Black Christians is in the understanding of freedom (Baer & Singer, 2002; Cone, 1997; Gadzekpo, 1997). For white Christians, freedom involved their right to “pursue one’s destiny without political or bureaucratic interference or restraint” (Gadzekpo, 1997, p. 98). For the Negro slave, it was far more transcendental. Freedom in Christ allowed the slave to move to another level of being (Cone, 1997). Freedom was the release from the physical, mental, structural, and political bondage that prevented the Black Christian from living out his responsibility to God. Freedom was inherent to all followers of Christ, as they were made in God’s image (Gadzekpo, 1997).

By the 1800’s, African Americans had begun opening churches in Boston, New York and Philadelphia. The majority of these churches were Baptist. As Leonard Lovett (2008) explained, these early Black churches emerged for several reasons, including the limited space for the vast size of mixed congregations, frequent cases of blatant discrimination by white Christians, Black Christians’ desire for equal privileges within mixed congregations, and whites’ disapproval of Black worship and lifestyle.

Of the many traditions, the majority of slaves were attracted to the Baptist and Methodist traditions. Baer and Singer (2002) assert that the Christian traditions of the early Baptist church offered four important benefits to the slave:

1. an opportunity to form, maintain, and express African-American culture;
2. a social support network;
3. honorable titles and awards not achievable in the larger society; and

4. a context to achieve and practice leadership and organizing skills that were transferred to social activism in the large society.

The Baptist church attracted more African Americans than all the other Christian traditions. These Black churches were attended by free-people or ex-slaves and funded by slave owners. The autonomy of the Baptist churches provided opportunities for slaves or ex-slaves to worship with white congregants, as well as create independent Black churches. The local autonomy, however, prevented the Black Baptist churches from being recognized within the denomination. This is a problem that eluded the Methodist church. Initially, the hierarchical nature of the Methodist structure hindered independence and control within the individual churches, but eventually this hierarchy would provide the platform for African-American leadership in religious and educational affairs.

The early Black religion, with its vestiges of Judeo-Christianity, was an amalgamation of African spirituality and survival responses to oppression. The early church could not begin the arduous process of transforming the slave's social realities because the physical and mental well-being of its people was of paramount concern. A shift in consciousness emerged as slaves began to use education to articulate their current conditions. Literacy, along with his religion, provided an encounter with freedom that could not be ignored. The African slave, now equipped with the ability to voice his lived experience, became alive and, consequently, began to revolt. This action would have a profound effect on Black experience and Black religion in the years to come.

Many Black intellectuals acknowledged the change of consciousness of the Negro slave. DuBois described the intellectual awakening that took place as a result of slaves' religious instruction (Zuckerman, 2000). He wrote, "a few Negroes of the South have been taught, they

consequently have begun to think, they have begun to assert themselves, and suddenly men are face to face with the fact that either one or two things must happen- either they must stop teaching or these people are going to be men, not serfs or slaves” (Zuckerman, 2000, p. 77).

Frederick Douglass (1845/1995) describes the impact of this change of consciousness as follows:

I have observed this in my experience of slavery, that whenever my condition was improved, instead of its increasing my contentment, it only increased my desire to be free, and set me to thinking of plans to gain my freedom. I have found that, to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to annihilate the power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery; he must be made to feel that slavery is right; and he can be brought to that only when he ceased to be a man. (p. 58)

The response of this intellectual awakening was a series of revolts, the most popular of which was led by Nat Turner. The revolts led to a legislative response barring the meeting of slaves and preaching by slaves, unless by permission of the slave owner.

There was a direct connection between Black religion and Black insurrection (Wilmore, 1990). Specifically, there was an inherent fear among slave owners that slave religious meetings encouraged rebellion. Gayraud Wilmore (1990) maintained, “the very fact that rebellion and religion were associated with each other in the minds of many black preachers—particularly those who ran away and returned to preach secretly—means that the religious atmosphere was charged and would have exploded many more times by the incitement of a preacher or inspire lay person had not the odds been so heavily weighted against the possibility of success” (p. 33).

The religious services provided an optimal space to plan and organize resurrections. The ability to fraternize with other slaves from neighboring plantations, and to discuss freedom and dignity without the presence of white planters, made their time in service extremely beneficial. However, any discussion or planning of a revolt was prohibited. Some states began night security patrols to interrupt church services held in isolation. Slaves found at those meetings were beaten. Blacks also utilized pamphlets as a way to protest and dispute their bondage. This dissident literature utilized scripture and natural law. The Emancipating Baptist and the African Societies, for example, employed religious arguments for the abolition of slavery (Wilmore, 1990).

To be clear, there is evidence that some Negroes began to critically engage their oppression before these revolts. Literacy for the slaves became a mighty tool for their freedom. Literate slaves filed legal petitions to protest and challenge their enslavement, forged passes, and read antislavery newspapers and pamphlets that kept them informed about the movement (Perry et al., 2003). Wilmore (1990) discussed the radical anti-slavery critiques of Robert Alexander Young and David Walker. Robert Alexander Young was a freed Black man in New York who penned *The Ethiopian Manifesto, Issued in Defense of the Blackman's Rights, in the Scale of Universal Freedom*. This pamphlet appealed to Blacks to be aware of the injustices by whites and to prepare for judgment for their sins. Using Biblical mysticism, Young spoke of a Black Messiah that would return to right the injustices done to Blacks (Wilmore, 1990, p. 38). David Walker (2014), author of *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, criticized the American church and society for its corruption. He asserted the mission of Christianity was being thwarted by the system of slavery. Both Young as cited in Wilmore (1990) and Walker (2014)

demonstrated the beginnings of a transformation that sought to address the structural causes of oppression, as well as its effect on a people.

On September 22, 1862, the Emancipation Proclamation was issued by President Abraham Lincoln, freeing all enslaved Americans. The freedom that the Negro slaves had prayed for had finally been achieved. In 1865, the Civil War ended and the 13th Amendment outlawing slavery in all states and territories was passed. The South was in chaos. Plantation owners were desolate and the war left the economy broken. Former slaves began walking off the plantations. The slaves, now legally free, struck fear in the heart of the Southern plantation owners. The response was to adopt legislation that would return the slave to bondage legally and ensure their status as second class citizens. The slave soon realized that the freedom they had been given still subsumed them in much of the same way as slavery. Soon the venomous hate of oppression appeared in moral arenas. After the war, Negroes were expelled from White church congregations and Christianity became divided along color lines (Zuckerman, 2000). Thus began the progression into the second stage of consciousness, or Native Transitive Consciousness.

Second Shift of Consciousness

Freire described a historical-cultural configuration he calls the culture of silence. The culture of silence is born in the relationship between the dominator and the dominated that produces different forms “of being, of thinking, of expression” for both, those who are silenced, or the dominated, as well as those who have a voice, the dominators (Freire, 1985, p.72). In a native transitive consciousness, as dominated people emerge from silence, their capacity expands, and they gain the ability “to visualize and distinguish what before was not clearly outlined” (p.

77). The evidence that one has transitioned into a native transitive consciousness is the “phenomenon of emergence due to the structural transformation in the society” (p.77). The dominated begin to see what they were previously unable to see, which leads to the unmasking of the dominators as well. The unmasking of both the dominator and dominated induces anxieties caused by the contradictions that have now surfaced.

This consciousness also caused a change in the political lives of the dominated. A leadership emerges that can accelerate the process of unmasking the reality of the dominated. In addition, another political action involving the combined resources of youth, intellectuals, and the people arises in an effort to increase consciousness. Freire contended that the dominator’s response to this new consciousness is a coup d’état. The dominator’s attempt to repress the consciousness of the dominated challenges the dominated to find ways of “silent action” to continue progress, while not reverting back to the passivity of their former state.

The freedom officially authorized by Emancipation did not change the daily life of the Negro. Negroes were legally free but economically enslaved (Woodson, 1933/2013). The freedom, nevertheless, provided an impetus for a deeper understanding of their religious beliefs and social responsibility. Cone (1997) discussed the struggle of the Black people to “affirm humanity despite the dehumanizing conditions of slavery and segregation” (p. 169). According to Cone, early black Christians concluded that the God that had delivered Moses and the Israelites from bondage would deliver them from slavery. But when confronted with the injustices they now experienced as freemen, “the Negro needed to reconcile their religious faith with their bondage” (p. 170).

This reconsolidation between the Negro and his God did not always result in a strengthened faith. There were some who took their current lot as proof that God neglected the struggles of Negroes. In the book, *The Making of Black America*, Sterling Brown (1931) describes the songs of opposition of some black Americans.

One father, who is in heaven,
White man owe me eleven and pay me seven,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
And if I hadn't took that, I wouldn't had none. (p. 215)

In a response to the 1906 Atlanta Race Riots, which involved the slaughter of over 25 innocent Black Americans, W. E. B. DuBois (1906) wrote *The Litany of Atlanta* in which he extorted,

“Doth not this justice of hell stink in Thy nostrils, O God? How long shall the mounting flood of innocent blood roar in Thine ears and pound in our hearts for vengeance? Pile the pale frenzy of blood-crazed brutes who do such deeds high on Thine altar, Jehovah Jireh, and burn it in hell forever and forever” (para. 14).

Born out of the disappointment the Negro had with the freedom given to him by America, the resurgence of violence from their white neighbors, and confusion about their own religious belief, a new theology arose. This theology would provide an answer to the question of suffering and oppression, while providing the foundation for the social action of an oppressed people.

The Negro began a rebuilding of religious organizations and the social intuition of the Black Church. The current conditions of its people required the Church to be more than just a

religious center. It needed to serve a people who were lacking in experience, money, leadership, and vision (Zuckerman, 2000). Unlike white Christians, Black Christians needed the Church. Gayraud Wilmore (1990) writes, “the church was the one impregnable corner of the world where consolation, unity, and mutual assistance could be found and from which the master—at least in the North—could be effectively barred if the people were not of a mind to welcome him” (p. 76).

The Black Church needed to address both its theology and its ideology, in order to begin a healing process of humanization. The result was an understanding of the Negro’s suffering, within the context of the cross and resurrection. Jesus’ victory over death was a “once-for-all event of liberation” (Cone, 1997, p. 177). That is to say, because Jesus had triumphed over the grave, the oppressed will always triumph over the oppressor. Jesus Christ became One who was with them *in* their suffering and whereby bestowed on them the freedom to fight against their oppression (Cone, 1997).

This new ideology introduced a new passion for justice. Black Americans understood that God would be encountered in their fight against oppression. With the change in consciousness the church evolved to be more than just a respite for the souls of a downtrodden people. The church stood with the oppressed to create a critical understanding of their faith and their experiences. Congregants soon set their eyes on eliminating the social and political structures that created their oppression (Cone, 1997). Consequently, education and legislation became extremely important during this next phase of history.

The pursuit of education, more specifically literacy, became a vital component of this new struggle. In his book, *The Education of Blacks in the South 1860-1935*, James D. Anderson (1988) discussed the motivation and opposition African Americans experienced in their pursuit

of literacy and freedom. The former slaves were passionate in their pursuit of an education. Their desire to read and write was connected to their quest for self-determination and freedom. It also functioned as a counternarrative that stood in opposition to the dominant society's ideology about the intellectual capacity of the Negro, the role of learning in their lives, the meaning and purpose of school, and the power of intellect (Perry et al., 2003). Former slaves faced extreme opposition from the planters' ideology of education, which sought to maintain a labor-repressive system and racial supremacy (Anderson, 1988,). Their desire to reestablish the plantation system after the Emancipation was due to the planters' need to ensure labor costs would remain low and laborers would be plentiful.

Southern planters were extremely concerned about the education of African Americans. They believed that universal education would not only reduce the labor supply but could also bring down the planter class. In response to this fear, many planters relied on Black codes, which provided multiple ways to prevent Negroes from receiving schooling, including evicting and terminating employment for parents who sent their children to school. Enticement statutes, laws that made it a crime for a laborer to leave one planter to work for another, and vagrancy laws that gave authorities the right to arrest any poor African American without a labor contract, continued a regime of political and social control. Individuals found guilty of violating Black codes were jailed and hired out to plantation owners and private companies to work for little or no pay (Anderson, 1988). Black codes, enticement statutes, and vagrancy laws thus established another system of forced labor. However, soon Negroes would experience an abeyance of Black codes and an adoption of amendments that would temporarily grant them civil rights.

For the former slave, learning to read and write was not an exercise of futility. On the contrary, the former slave viewed reading and writing as a “contradiction of oppression” as well as a means to “liberation and freedom” (Anderson, 1988, p.17). In 1865, only 10% of the African-American community was literate. But Black Americans were not content to wait for the government to assist in their quest for literacy. In fact, by the mid-nineteenth century, former slaves had already established schools, educational associations, and a governing body to report on all educational activities (Anderson, 1998). In the South, native schools were popular. These schools were founded and funded by former slaves. Students who had learned to read and write would teach other students. Some accounts report schools with upwards of 150 students with just two teachers (Anderson, 1988). DuBois (1903/1994) articulated the power of this new education in his book *The Souls of Black Folk*:

It changed the child of Emancipation to the youth with dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, self-respect. In those somber forests of his striving his own soul rose before him, and he saw himself, darkly as through a veil; and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another. (p. 6)

Thus began the public education system in the United States. In 1864, the Board of Education and the Freeman’s Bureau, an agency charged with providing assistance to former slaves, began governing the African-American schools. By December 1864, the Board of Education was operating 95 schools with over 10,000 students, including both children and adults. The schools were funded through federal contributions and property tax (Anderson, 1988). Between 1865 and 1875, 24 private Black colleges were established (Jackson, 2001).

After just two years of supporting universal education, the general tax for freedmen's education was suspended by military order. Federally-funded schools became local free schools whose funding was provided for by African-American communities, which undeniably included the Black Church. There were also a number of private schools for African-American students.

Likewise, in Sabbath schools, the Black community took control of their members' educational needs. These church-sponsored schools operated on evenings and weekends for individuals unable to attend weekday schools. Sabbath schools educated students in "elementary and Christian instruction". Sabbath schools were largely funded by African Americans and had all-African American teaching staffs. In 1869, over 100,000 students were enrolled in Sabbath schools. The number of students increased to 200,000 by 1885 (Anderson, 1988, p. 12).

Despite the lack of support from the government for universal education, African Americans remained steadfast in their support of Sabbath and privately-owned schools. African-American education held to the tenets of emancipation (Jackson, 2001). The purpose of education for African Americans was to transform students from their slave heritage.

Undoubtedly, the meaning of this transformation was different to Blacks and Whites. The goal of the dominant culture and its educational system was to educate the Blacks about United States history and culture from the perspective of the dominant culture. The education Blacks received, however, was preparing them to engage in the society dictated and prescribed by whites.

Early Black educators, recognizing the inequalities inherent in the curriculum, assumed a role that was more substantial than their white counterparts. Black teachers served as counselors, role models, and spiritual leaders (Clem, 1986). Teachers often taught in their own communities, thereby incentivizing teachers to create students that were not only book-smart but socially

aware and responsible. The education that took place in Sabbath schools and freedom schools involved developing fluency in the dominant culture, while simultaneously developing the necessary academic competencies. Black teachers in Black schools were unwavering in their pursuit to make students bicultural (Perry et al., 2003). Arguably during this time, the need was predicated on survival, as the ideologies of white supremacy and black inferiority were much more explicit. These schools were intentionally organized in opposition to the deficit ideology of Black inferiority. At these sites, students were socialized to the practices and expected behaviors and outcomes designed to counter these ideologies (Perry et al., 2003; Woodson, 1933/2013).

Critics of the quality of early Black schools point out the poor quality of books, facilities, and teachers. Books were often used books from white schools, facilities were often in need of repair, and teachers were often undereducated. Despite these obstacles, this era in the Black experience reflected a unity among family, school, church, and community that deepened the quality of education of Black students, undoubtedly preparing them for the civil rights struggle that would be on the horizon. The Black segregated school affirmed Black humanity, Black intelligence and Black achievement and became, for an oppressed group, a powerful act of resistance (Perry et al., 2003).

The goal of the curriculum in early Black schools was to increase awareness through an understanding of their “historical development and sociological uniqueness” (Anderson, 1988, p. 29). Black leaders and educators adopted the New England classical curriculum, which offered Latin, Greek, mathematics, science, philosophy, and modern language. In contrast, the opposition sought an education that would maintain the oppressive caste system of the south.

They supported an education that would train African Americans to labor more efficiently (p. 29). These opposing views would be debated for the next 40 years.

Booker T. Washington was a leader and spokesperson for the African-American community. He, along with W. E. B. Dubois, espoused strong feelings about the type of education that should be made available for the Negro. Washington supported a practical focus on agriculture, mechanics, domestic service and the professions. In his famous speech, “The Atlanta Compromise,” Washington (1895) compels the black man to “learn to dignify and glorify common labour” (para. 4). Using his famous phrase, “Cast down your bucket,” Washington urged the Negro to make the best of his immediate opportunities and not be overly concerned with “questions of social equality” but rather focus on being “prepared for the exercise of the privileges” (para. 11). This preparation, he believed, could only result from “constant struggle rather than artificial forcing” (para. 11). Washington’s ideology opposed the interests and goals of the freemen.

In response to the educational interest of the ex-slaves, Washington and Chapman Armstrong, a Yankee, established the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute. This institution centered on training teachers to embody, accept, and preach the ideology of hard toil and “dignity of labor” (Anderson, 1988, p. 34). The goal was to graduate Southern teachers who would develop the appropriate values to teach the ex-slave working class and prepare them for service jobs in various occupations. In a now-famous quote, Armstrong stated, “Let’s make teachers and we will make the people.” Armstrong understood the importance of pedagogy and attempted to use it to contain the evolution of the black masses. The industrial schools provided

a subpar education to the Negro as he was trained to master techniques that had already been discarded (Woodson, 1933/2013).

The Hampton programs were not as rigorous as those offered at other schools. The Hampton curriculum was only two or three years in length and did not grant a bachelor's degree. Students enrolled in the school received menial pay for hard labor. The teacher training system consisted of three areas: the elementary academic program, the manual labor system, and a strict social discipline routine. The elementary academic program prepared teachers for certification exams, while imparting Armstrong's ideology. The manual labor system sought to shape attitudes and build character through hard labor. The discipline routine was designed to weed out those who disagreed with the Hampton model, which was organized around "a conservative sociopolitical ideology that advocated the political disfranchisement and economic subordination of the black race" (Woodson, 1933/2013, p. 67).

W. E. B. DuBois and others criticized the philosophy of the Hampton model and its spokespersons, Armstrong and Washington, heavily. DuBois (1994) addressed the error in Armstrong's assertion that silence and submission would lead to equality. DuBois also criticized Armstrong for his focus on work and money, over self-respect and reliance. In DuBois' view, Armstrong was urging Blacks to give up political power, civil rights, and higher education, in order to focus their attention on industrial education, the accumulation of wealth, and conciliation of the South. DuBois cautioned that Armstrong's proposed strategy would lead to disfranchisement, legal discrimination, and withdrawal of aid from Negro institutions. The ideology of W. E. B. DuBois could not be more different than that of Booker T. Washington. DuBois fought for the full participation of Blacks within society because his focus was on

freedom, not equality. For DuBois (1994), freedom was “the long-sought, we still seek, the freedom of life and limb, the freedom to work and think, the freedom to love and aspire” (p. 7).

Despite the critique of many Black leaders, the Hampton model gave rise to an expansion of industrial education during the 1880s. It was lauded in the South and won the admiration of many Northerners as well. However, most black normal schools and colleges remained focused on a traditional liberal or classical curriculum, throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. The Hampton model lost support by the end of the 19th century. Recent researchers have concluded that the Hampton model was not a reflection of the popular Black thought at that time (Anderson, 1998).

Black colleges began to open as early as 1833 and most were under the direction of four major mission societies: the American Missionary Association, the Freedmen’s Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the American Baptist Home Mission Society, and the Board Missions for the Freedmen of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. The African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church established nearly all the major colleges while also controlling and articulating the educational policy of the Black community. These missionary schools focused on job training and emphasized literary and professional training to “develop black intelligentsia that would fight for political and civil equality” (Anderson, 1988, p. 68). The missionary schools also provided strong leadership. Leaders discussed “negrophobia,” which they defined as the fear of a highly educated Black mass, and which presumably stoked mainstream (white) efforts to maintain Black servitude. In contrast, the missionary schools advocated the humanization of the Black male.

Perry et al. (2003) proposed that Black segregated schools, Black colleges and universities, the Black church, and other community organizations provided students of color with opportunities to critically engage their identities within the context of the dominant ideology. Counterhegemonic communities are “intentional educational communities, collectively constituted, “as-if” communities, imaginary communities that were capable of modeling possibilities (p. 91). Counterhegemonic communities are defined by their ability to (a) organize in opposition to the dominant ideology of white supremacy and Black intellectual inferiority; (b) design a way to forge the collective identity of African Americans as a literate and achieving people; and (c) continually articulate and pass on a counternarrative.

The strength of the Black Church became evident in that it countered the larger society’s deficit ideology of Black intellectual inferiority. Black humanity, Black intelligence, and Black achievement were reinforced in both the traditions and activities of the Black Church. During this time, Black students had a triangulation of influences providing a counternarrative to society’s ideology: their parents, their school, and their church (Perry et al., 2003).

The Reconstruction Era was a time of progression for the Negro. With the adoption of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, educated Negroes enjoyed advancement never before seen. DuBois (1994) recounts the impact of this time for the Negro, “As the time flew, however, he began to grasp a new idea. The ideal of liberty demanded for its attainment powerful means, and these the Fifteenth Amendment gave him ... A million black men started with renewed zeal to vote themselves into the kingdom” (p. 4).

Concurrently, as Negroes seemed to be reaching the pinnacle of their newfound freedom, namely political influence, many Negro ministers began holding political office. Political

influence was only one of many advances introduced during the Reconstruction Era. This period was also characterized by severe backlash from white residents in the South. The federal government, after ensuring numerous acts to help the Negro, no longer made any effort to ensure Negroes' federal rights. Jim Crow laws gained prominence in the South after 1900, in an attempt to create a political barrier between poor Whites and Blacks (Alexander, 2012). Wilmore (1990) further expounds on this phenomenon:

States and local communities passed legislation prohibiting the races from working together in the same room, using the same entrances, stairways, drinking water, and toilets. Blacks were excluded from public institutions such as theaters, auditoriums, parks, and residential neighborhoods. In Baltimore, Atlanta, and other cities all-white and all-black blocks were so designated. In 1909 Mobile passed a curfew law exclusively for black citizens that required them to be off the streets by ten o'clock at night. The journalist Ray Stannard Baker even found that Jim Crow Bibles were being used for black witnesses in the Atlanta courts. (p. 139)

Black leadership resistance during this time was consistent but moderate (Wilmore, 1990). Black preachers' stance of non-violence and patient suffering was consistent with the ethics of white Christianity. The suffering Jesus provided an example of what it means to be a Christian. To be sure, there were radical responses to this opposition, as demonstrated by riots in Philadelphia, St. Louis, and several cities in Illinois, in which Blacks engaged in retaliatory violence against lower-class Whites who were both terrified and angry at the new competition for economic and political power (Wilmore, 1990). These compromising practices expressed an idealism that ultimately maintained the status quo (Freire, 1985).

Despite the critical discourse of W. E. B. DuBois, Bishop Henry Turner, and Robert Charles, many Black Americans nevertheless subscribed to the dominant ideology of the time. Wilmore (1990) contended that Black Americans, now able to earn a decent living, assumed a level of dignity, despite the humiliation they experienced, by means of the very discrimination they faced. This Black privileged class began to subscribe to a myth of superiority.

Affirmative Action was introduced in 1941 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Its main goal was to address the discriminatory practices in employment by agencies receiving federal funds. Under Roosevelt's executive order, employers receiving federal money must not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin" (Executive Order 11246). Any educational institution accepting federal contracts had to abide by the provisions as well. This action by Roosevelt helped to further open the political field with respect to the question of civil rights across the society, particularly for disenfranchised communities of color.

Brown v. Board of Education: A Seminal Moment

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), proved to be a seminal moment in Black history, as it ushered in a turning point in the education of Black students. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) grew out of the need felt by Black parents to address the inequalities their children faced in public schools. Led by attorney Thurgood Marshall, the case focused on revitalizing the 14th amendment through legal victories (Dentler, 1991). This litigative process consisted of five separate cases that sought to create equity through redistributive justice (See Table 2). Marshall's goal was to create policy whereby white

parents would be required to send their students to black schools, which, he reasoned, would spontaneously address the issues of equity and segregation.

Table 2

Cases that Sought to Create Equity through Redistributive Justice

Name of Case (Year)	Description
Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1951)	Black parents attempting to reverse policies under which their children traveled to black schools far from home while passing white schools closer to home.
Davis v. Prince Edward County (1951)	Lawsuit filed on behalf of high school students protesting intolerable school conditions caused by underfunding.
Briggs v. Elliott (1951)	Black parents requesting equal educational opportunities for the children.
Gerbhart v. Belton (1954)	Parents of eight black high school students protested being forced to attend a sub-par school in another neighborhood. The only lawsuit that found segregation unlawful.
Bolling v. Sharpe (1954)	Lawsuit attempted to get students admitted into a new high school opened by the Board of Education.

However, the full implementation of the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling would be problematic due to three distinct features. In the 1954 Warren Court ruling, the Court repudiated the “separate but equal” idea. This ruling would extend to issues outside the educational realm. The second feature was written in the clause of the ruling: “We are first to suggest. . . .that if the Court should hold that racial segregation in public school is unconstitutional, it should give district courts a reasonable time to work out the details and timing of implementation of that decision”; in other words, “with all deliberate speed” (Elman, 1987, p. 827). This clause allowed for the prolonged, and at times, nonexistent fulfillment of the adjudication. The third and final feature that prevented the full implementation of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling

was the decision to leave implementation to local authorities, thereby giving obstinate states a way to stall implantation and pursue their own segregationist agenda (Dentler, 1991).

Compliance with *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) therefore varied. Immediate steps toward compliance occurred in the northeast, whereas immediate resistance occurred in the Deep South (Dentler, 1991). Most southern states were very vocal in their resistance, as evident by the necessity of federal intervention to ensure the safety of the Little Rock Nine students. By 1962, no more than two percent of black students were enrolled in desegregated schools. In response to the lack of compliance, the federal government granted responsibility to the Department of Justice and the U.S. Office of Education, within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), to oversee the progress toward implementation of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

The series of educational changes demanded by Black communities and their allies during the Civil Rights Movement included:

1. Dissolution of structures of segregation and planned deprivation as further guarantee of equal education.
2. Employment of black personnel on all levels of schooling as an extension of traditional patterns of ethnic representativeness.
3. Democratization of educational policy making by city authorities and school boards through black and other minority participation.
4. Eradication of institutional and personal racism from curriculum, instructional materials, student learning, employment and promotion practices, distribution of school funds, and other areas of schooling. (Weinberg, 1991).

As would be expected, these changes were met with resistance, as it was common belief that the problem with Black student performance was due to the deficiencies of Black cultural practices. Numerous cases were brought before the Supreme Court involving equality and access to education (See Table 3). Similar to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1965), the administration of Civil Rights legislation was frequently evaded, which impeded the fair treatment of Black citizens. As Weinberg (1991) stated “Black children lost most from this regressive stance: they were not only denied the respect due every child, they remained academically ill served” (p. 4).

Table 3

Court Cases

Name of Case (Year)	Description of Case Outcome
King v. Gallagher (1883)	The Court of Appeals of New York upholds segregated schools where black schools have equal facilities.
Cumming v. Richmond Board of Education (1899)	The Supreme Court upholds a local school board's decision to close a free public black school due to fiscal constraints, despite the fact that the district continues to operate two free public white schools.
Missouri ex. rel Gaines v. Canada (1938)	The Supreme Court decides in favor of Lloyd Gaines, a black student who had been refused admission to the University of Missouri Law School.
Sipuel v. University of Oklahoma Board of Regents, (1948)	Supreme Court holds that Lois Ada Sipuel cannot be denied entrance to a state law school solely because of her race.
Sweatt v. Painter (1950)	The Supreme Court holds that the University of Texas Law School must admit a black student, Heman Sweatt.
McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Ed.(1950)	George W. McLaurin, a sixty-eight-year-old black man, sought admission to Oklahoma State University to pursue a doctoral degree in education.

In her book *African American Education*, Cynthia Jackson (2001) asserted that following desegregation, “public schooling of African-American children systematically requires them to forfeit their cultural ties, demeans their self-esteem, and has them relinquish their diverse forms of expression” (p. 60). The desegregation of the nation’s public schools was not beneficial to African-American students. For two decades following *Brown*, the Supreme Court only focused on desegregating schools in the South, the boarder states, and Washington D.C. The Supreme Court rulings after *Brown* (See Table 4) made city-suburban desegregation almost impossible (Orefield & Lee, 2006).

Table 4

Aftermath of Brown v. Board

Name of Case (Year)	Description of Outcome
Brown v. Board of Education (1955)	Stated that school segregation had to be ended everywhere but, in recognizing the conditions required for segregation, it could proceed “with all deliberate speed.”
Griffin v. School Bd. of Prince Edward Cty. (1964)	Held that the county school board ‘s decision to close the county’s public school and fund private segregated schools in an attempt to avoid the desegregation order was illegal.
United States v. Montgomery County Bd. of Ed (1969)	Federal district judge may order Alabama school board to desegregate faculty and staff of schools according to specific mathematical ratio.

The federal government has subsequently attempted to address the lack of achievement of both students of color and the working class (See Table 5). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (1965) was part of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, as education was seen as an integral part of addressing the needs of America’s low-income residents. The Act called for the federal financial assistance for the education of low-income children (ESEA, 1965). From the early 1970s through the late 1980’s, the achievement gap in both reading and mathematics narrowed considerably (Barton, P.E. & Coley, R.J., 2010). Studies indicate that improvements in the circumstances of families of color relative to white families explained one-third of the gap decrease. Explanations for other causes of the achievement gap led to federal and state investment in early education and nutrition, more rigorous course loads, and a reduction in class size (Grissmer, Kirby, Berends & Williamson, 1994).

Table 5

Federal Responses to Student Achievement

Name of Act (Year)	Description
Civil Rights Act (1964)	Outlawed discrimination based on color in public arenas. Prohibited states from denying access to public facilities based on race, color, religion, and national origin. Encouraged desegregation of public schools. Expanded Civil Rights commission.
Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965)	Ensure equity and quality in education.
Higher Education Act (1965)	Strengthen the education resources of colleges and universities. Provide financial assistance to students in post- secondary higher education.
Improving America’s School’s Act (1994)	Reauthorization of Title I funding. Increase in bilingual and immigrant education funding.
Excellence for all Children (1999)	Reauthorization of ESEA. Emphasized high standards, instructional staff quality, accountability, and safe school environment.

The 1980s saw a major push for national school reform brought on by (1) shifts in the demographic composition of schools, (2) increased use of technology as an instructional and management tool, (3) the practice of revisiting and redirecting the focus on educator professionalism, and (4) changes worldwide (Jackson, 2001). Reforms during this period were crafted in line with the conclusions made by *A Nation at Risk*, a 1983 national report commissioned by the Reagan administration on the status of education. Specifically, the reforms included more rigorous graduation standards, increased mathematics exposure, high-stakes testing, and new curriculum standards. Noticeably absent from the discussions of reform were concerns of equity, equality, and desegregation (Weinberg, 1991). Consequently, since 1980, there have been increases in segregation for Blacks and Latino students nationwide.

The 1990s continued trends from the previous decade by maintaining focus on student proficiency. Unfortunately, the narrowing of the achievement gap that was prominent in the

1980s was generally halted during this time (Barton & Conley, 2010). This new emphasis on outcomes (scores in statewide assessments) instead of inputs (per-student expenditures) involved (1) standards, assessment, and accountability, (2) school finance reforms, (3) teacher training and school resources, and (4) school choice (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2003). The education system continued the practice of viewing the lack of achievement for Black students in terms of personal and social deficits, instead of deficits of the classroom or the structure of schooling. Consequently, Black Churches, with support from private philanthropists and foundations, were approached to assist with the academic achievement of Black students. Churches began offering math and science enrichment programs, parenting classes, and preschools (Chira, 1991). Great strides were taken to ensure the current educational system was more efficient; however, the new initiatives did not yield the promised results for Black students.

Soon it was clear that African Americans were expected to obtain an education in a system that hindered their development and opportunities through its endorsement of oppressive notions of their (in)abilities. Although there is little disparity between Black and White students when they begin preschool, the achievement gap can already be observed beginning in first grade (Fryer & Levitt, 2004). The disparity emerged even after controlling for socioeconomic status. African-American students are plagued by discrepancies in special education referrals, unfair disciplinary actions, overrepresentation in the lowest academic tracks, and cultural suppression.

“God’s country”

In a letter to his wife proclaiming his excitement about his visit to Los Angeles in 1913, Harvard Law graduate Hugh MacBeth referred to California as “God’s Country.” The history of the Black experience in California helps to explain the residential and educational segregation

present today. Between 1880 and 1920, the African-American population in Los Angeles grew at an accelerated rate. African Americans, who numbered only 100 in 1880, had grown to more than 15,000 by 1920 (Flamming, 2005). African Americans, fleeing from the Jim Crow segregated South, fixed their eyes on California, a land replete with opportunities open to all citizens. Douglas Flamming (2005) contended that California inspired many African Americans because (1) it promised the equal opportunity they had never found in the East, (2) the West contained dozens of all-black towns, which were seen as symbols of civic freedom and race enterprise, and (3) Blacks were discovering an unusual amount of social and political freedom.

The beginning of the 20th century marked a brief period of relative prosperity and optimism for African-American Angelenos. In 1910, 36 % of Black California residents owned homes. There was tolerance among the different racial and ethnic groups. There was also a slight increase in the hiring of African-American teachers who taught mixed-race classes. However, as the number of southern African-American migrants increased, so did the number of white southern migrants who sought to promote segregation on the West Coast. These new conditions, which Flamming (2005) names Jim Crow West Coast-Style, created a division between California's white and Black residents. In a 1912 letter sent to *Crisis*, a California newspaper, Louise McDonald wrote,

We suffer almost anything (except lynching) right here in the beautiful land of sunshine. Civil privileges are here unknown. You can't bathe at the beaches, eat in any first-class place, nor will the streetcar and sight-seeing companies sell us tickets if they can possibly help it. I am speaking from experience. (Crisis, 1912)

Jim Crow West Coast-style was characterized by less overt forms of racial prejudice and discrimination. In the West, prejudice was imposed through residential restrictions that ensured racially segregated neighborhoods.

In her analysis of the unintended outcomes of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in the Los Angeles Unified School District, Carla McCullough (2012) discussed the effects of the slow implementation of *Brown vs. Board* in Los Angeles. The *de facto* segregation occurring in Los Angeles was present well into the 1960s. The district sought to address segregation by granting permits allowing inner city students and teachers permission to attend and work in schools outside their communities. At times, students were bused two hours away from their homes. Student transfers were stopped once minority enrollment reached 30%. The result of these transfers was the lost veteran teachers and students in inner city schools.

In 1963, President John Kennedy told the nation in a public address:

The Negro baby born in America today, regardless of the section of the nation in which he is born, has about one-half as much chance of completing high school as a white baby born in the same place on the same day; one third as much chance of completing college; one third as much chance of becoming a professional man; twice as much chance of becoming unemployed; about one-seventh as much chance of earning \$10,000 a year; a life expectancy which is seven years shorter; and the prospects of earning only half as much (Peters & Woodley, 2014).

It seems that not much has changed since Kennedy's televised speech in 1963. Today, African-American children continue to lag behind their white counterparts on all standard measures of achievement. In the post-Civil Rights Era, students continue to confront the

unfounded deficit ideology about Black intelligence, but they are now also plagued by an illusion of openness and opportunity (Perry et al., 2003). Moreover, as discussed previously, many of the debilitating issues faced by students of color in U.S. society today are far more pronounced among African-American male students.

Although schooling is considered an important vehicle for child socialization, American public education has yet to demonstrate its ability to provide a true democratic education for African Americans. Concerned by the persistence of this problem, Perry et al. (2003) asserted that the dilemma of achievement for African Americans is tied to four factors:

1. Their identity as members of a caste-like minority group.
2. Society's ideology of Black intellectual inferiority and its reproduction in the mass media.
3. Their identity as members of a group whose culture is seen as simultaneously inferior and attractive.
4. Their identity as American citizens.

Writing in 1933, Woodson (1933/2013) discussed the effects of the one-sided education of Negro youth. He stated, the Negro has been taught to imitate the history and, consequently, has never learned to think. He has never been educated, but instead he has been informed about his social allowances. He has not been invited to discover and invent himself through the past discoveries and inventions of others. If the Negro is to be elevated, Woodson suggests, "he must be educated in the sense of being developed from what he is, and the public must be so enlightened as to think of the Negro as a man" (p. 93).

Notions of intellectual, cultural, and academic inferiority of students of color is deeply rooted in U.S. History, media, and pop culture and these beliefs are often reinforced within the structure of the school (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Perry et al., 2003). The daily interactions with stereotypical representations of these fabricated inferiorities occurring in the classroom and the society at large continue to provide students of color with daily, racialized notions about themselves, which the dominant culture and its institutional agents, including teachers, often refuse to acknowledge (Darder 2012). Thus, African-American student achievement is affected by interactions with the dominant ideology and the absence of a counternarrative to combat its detrimental effects. Consequently, there exists a compulsory relationship between a student's belief in the power and importance of education and their teachers' ideology (Perry et al., 2003).

African Americans have been socialized to be conscious of their position with respect to the dominant society. During slavery this was a practice of survival. Today, this social awareness appears to be harmful to the academic achievement of students of color. In his discussion of the underperformance of students of color in academics, Claude Steele (2003) introduced the concept of Stereotype Threat. Stereotype threat is the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype or fear of acting in a way that would confirm the stereotype (Perry et al., 2003). Steele's work concluded with the idea that the academic underperformance of African Americans is grounded in social mistrust, rather than self-doubt.

Today's public educational institutions have much to learn from the counterhegemonic communities of the pre-Civil Rights Era. Perry et al. (2003) described the characteristics of the counterhegemonic communities like the Black school and the Black Church during the Civil Rights Movement. These counterhegemonic communities explicitly recognized the nature of

oppression and, as such, mobilized resources so African-American student achievement can be realized. The counterhegemonic communities of the mid-20th century acknowledged the nature and extent of ideological and material oppression of African-Americans students and organize to counteract the effects of this oppression. Despite research indicating the lack of understanding that teachers possess about students' cultures and backgrounds, teacher education continues to lack courses designed for teachers to confront racism and the prejudices it engenders (Gamoran, 2001). Civil Rights Era counterhegemonic communities explicitly passed on the dispositions and behaviors, and stances considered essential to academic achievement, such as persistence, thoroughness, and commitment to hard work.

In contrast, contemporary U.S. schools, with their unilateral focus on high-stakes testing, create environments that promote drill-and-practice instruction, resulting in disengagement from the learning process for all students (Moon, Brighton, Jarvis, Hall, & National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, 2007). There is also a greater focus on grade-level performance rather than high academic achievement (Perry et al., 2003). Finally, a counterhegemonic curriculum includes African-American classical and popular cultural formations. However, modern curricula in the U.S. rarely include the African-American perspective. In his book *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Woodson concluded that the exclusion of Negro history in schools, colleges, and university is evidence that schools are places where Negroes must be convinced of their inferiority (Woodson, 1933/2013).

Scholarly research has always lagged behind the needs of African-American students and their educators. In the 1960s and 1970s, educational literature contained notions of cultural deprivation and disadvantaged youth. These notions “contributed to a perception of African-

American students as deprived, deficient, and defiant” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 8). The interventions, then, were designed to “remove the students from their homes, communities, and cultures, in an effort to mitigate against their alleged damaging effects” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 9). To truly address academic achievement for African Americans, it is essential to address the institutional practices and social conditions that produce, perpetuate, and give meaning to the academic disparities. This will necessitate students to address ways in which racial identity and stereotyping are reinforced and reproduced within the school setting (Boykin & Noguera, 2011).

In his work *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Woodson (1933/2013) discussed the lack of control the Negro has on his education and what affect that intimately has on the students’ experience. The goal of education, he maintained, is to get people to think so that they might help themselves. The lack of interracial cooperation surrounding the planning and implementation of a school program as well as the omission of topics like race, tradition, hate, and segregation creates an environment conducive for training, rather than transformation.

In her work, *Dream-Keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) discussed the importance of cultural appropriateness and cultural relevance in teaching African-American students. Cultural appropriateness in education involves utilizing a communication and interactional style that is reflective of the students’ home culture. Cultural relevance uses the student’s culture “in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture” (p. 19). Culturally relevant teaching involves making connections between course content and student identities. The converse of culturally relevant teaching is assimilationist teaching, which involves teaching in a manner that ensures students fit into the society or are pushed out. In her work, bell hooks (2003) made a similar distinction

between liberative and oppressive schooling. In her book *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, hooks (2003) discussed a democratic education, which she states, results in “healing and wholeness” (p. 43). Through this practice, students learn to find and claim their place in the world. In contrast, authoritarianism in the classroom creates a space that is repressive and oppressive which results in disengagement and passive learning.

Boykin and Noguera (2011) asserted that the failure of students of color can become normalized as educators and others rationalize low performance as the by-product of factors they cannot control. They term this phenomenon *normalization of failure*, and they contend it can reinforce beliefs about the link between race and intelligence. Factors that contribute to normalization of failure include student motivation, school strategies to encourage student investment, and parents who do not reinforce the value of education. Boykin and Noguera asserted that in order to close the achievement gap, teachers must “change the discourse about the relationship between race and achievement from one that is focused on who’s to blame to one in which all of the key stakeholders—teachers, parents, students, and administrators—accept responsibility for their roles in raising achievement” (p. 34).

Rethinking the Role of the Black Church in the Education of Black Males

Current conditions point to the need to examine all possibilities that might better assist us in effectively educating African-American students, particularly Black males, who lag behind their female counterparts (Pollard, 1993). Given the history of the Black Church in resisting systems of oppression and supporting the reformation of education at an earlier historical moment, perhaps it is time to look once again toward the Black Church with respect to its pedagogical relevance in supporting the biculturalism of its youth. This process can illuminate

the ways in which the Black Church might also more deliberately support the academic achievement of Black males.

It is important here to define the Black Church that will be referred to in this study. W. E. B. DuBois is known for his criticism of religious practice of the Black Church that was disassociated from the social and political injustices affecting the Black community (Evans, 2007). In her book *Exploring Prosperity Preaching*, Debra J. Mumford (2012) made a similar observation when she distinguished between the practices of Black Prophetic Teaching and Black Prosperity Teaching in the Black Church (See Table 6). Prophetic Teaching involves speaking truth to power in order to address oppressive structures and systems. It is the type of teaching found in the secret church meetings of the early slaves and the teachings that precipitated the Church's response to the injustices of the early 20th century. In contrast, Prosperity Teaching is based on the notions of American individualism and seeks to affect change through individual reform. The focus of this study is to analyze the effect the prophetic Black Church has on bicultural students.

This research asserts that Black Prosperity Teaching does not allow students to critically engage their environments in a manner to bring about true liberation. Liberation is accomplished when individuals are provided the tools needed to name their oppression. In contrast, prosperity gospel asserts that "race, age, education, and class do not matter ... if believers are faithful to the word of God and live their lives according to the word they can be rich and in good health" (Mumford, 2012, p. 9). Prosperity Teaching is grounded in the basic principles of capitalism, namely individualism and competition. In this teaching, our prayers, fasting, and offerings are done to directly benefit an individual and his or her family. Blessings are an indication of that

individual's faith; the more blessings, the more faith. Therefore difference among individuals is ascribed to differences among faith and allegiance to God's word.

Proponents of prosperity teaching tout its benefits of developing personal autonomy and self-determinism; however, those notions are not sufficient to handle the effects of dehumanizing ideologies that plague our societal institutions (Brooke, 2010). Numerous authors have discussed the danger of Christians, Black Christians specifically, adhering to the prosperity teachings (Henderson, 2013; Mumford, 2012). Perhaps Debra Mumford (2012) said it best when she asserts, "prosperity gospel threatens to lull good, God-fearing people into self-interested, vainglorious comas in which they live only for their own benefit versus living to serve humanity as well as God" (p.140).

Table 6

Comparison of Black Prophetic Teaching and Black Prosperity Teaching

Black Prophetic Teaching	Black Prosperity Teaching
<u>Communal</u>	<u>Individualistic</u>
Speaks truth to power while calling on reform for systems, communities, and individual behavior.	Seek to affect social reform indirectly through individual conversion through faith.
Blessings directly dependent on human interaction and the degree to which those interactions embody God’s kingdom.	Blessings (material) are dependent on their faith in God.
Emphasizes the need for personal responsibility to seek justice and liberate humanity.	Emphasizes the need for personal accountability.

Note: Adapted from *Exploring Prosperity Preaching: Biblical Health, Wealth, & Wisdom* by Debra J. Mumford, 2012. Copyright 2012

Although there are some studies that provide a correlation between participation in the Black Church and student achievement, few studies have considered the relationship more directly with respect to Black males and their academic participation. This study, then, seeks to better understand the relationship that may exist here, in order to develop recommendations that might help to bring the Black Church into a more direct collaborative relationship with schools, with the purpose of supporting the educational success of the Black male youth in U.S. schools today.

CHAPTER THREE
CRITICAL BICULTURALISM, CULTURALLY
RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY, AND THE CHURCH

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human
veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids about it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and
I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

- Langston Hughes, *The Negro*
Speaks of Rivers, 1920

In an effort to understand the church's role in the lives of Black male students, this study seeks to investigate the ways in which the Black Church helps to facilitate Black males' understandings of themselves as empowered, historical beings and thus, better prepare them for engagement with mainstream institutions. To truly consider and analyze this dynamic within the context of this methodological investigation, it is important to first engage in a discussion of power and culture, particularly with respect to how knowledge is understood within that dynamic.

Culture and Power

Henry Giroux (1985), in his introduction to Freire's *The Politics of Education* (1985), provides a description of power as articulated by Freire. Power, Giroux explained, is a dialectical force working on and through people. It is both positive and negative and therefore presupposes that there is always an opportunity for resistance. Power can be found in all public sectors including those thought to be absent of power and resistance. Power can take the form of domination. This happens most readily when "power, technology, and ideology come together to produce forms of knowledge, social relations, and other concrete cultural forms that function to actively silence people" (p. xix).

In *Theory and Resistance in Education*, Giroux (1983) discussed culture as a dialectical instance of power and conflict that results from individuals competing over material conditions and social relations in a capitalist society. Thus, one can conclude, the American culture is less a fusion of the many subcultures that find their home here, but instead, a reflection of the proclivities of the dominant group. And in fact, this is true. In her book, *Culture and Power in the Classroom*, Antonia Darder (2012) stated that the unified culture of a capitalist state is "a complex combination of dominant and subordinate relations that serve the function of the state" resulting in the "oppressive cultural forces" that primarily benefit the dominant culture (p. 28).

There are two types of cultures found in a capitalist society, dominant and subordinate. Darder (2012) defined the dominant culture as one where "ideologies, social practices, and structures affirm the central values, interests, and concerns of those who are in control of material and symbolic wealth" (p. 28). Knowledge, she writes, is always constructed in a historical context. Educators cannot truly teach unless students are assisted in a discovery of the

multiple truths and multiple histories that exist whenever we are discussing the past. A subordinate culture refers to the groups who exist in social and material subordination to the dominant culture. Domination is not solely expressed by the cultural norms that are experienced by the subordinate. Domination can also be expressed by the way in which the subordinate “internalize and participate in their own oppression” (Giroux, 1985). This internalization is often linked to the question of ideology.

Darder (2012) contended that subordinate cultures are maintained in oppressive conditions through an adherence to an ideology that serves to “legitimate the interests and values of the dominate group...(and) marginalize and invalidate cultural values, heritage, language, knowledge, and lived experiences which fall outside the purview of capitalist domination” (p. 29). She defined ideology as the ideas and practices through which consciousness is formed and expressed. It is apparent, then, that schools play an important role in the production and reproduction of these ideologies. For it is through these ideologies that domination takes on an internal form, affecting the psyche. It is here that we can see the potential demonstrative effects ideologies have on self-knowledge, knowledge of others, and knowledge of the world.

We cannot, moreover, understand the effect of the dominant culture and its ideology on the process of schooling without engaging the notion of hegemony. Hegemony is “a form of ideological control in which dominant beliefs values and social practices are produced and distributed throughout a whole range of institutions such as schools, the family, mass media, and trade unions” (Giroux, 1985, p. 94). It is an important factor in maintaining political control. It is maintained through “the selective silences and the fragmentation of social definitions, management of information and the shaping of popular attention, consent, belief, and trust”

(Darder, 2012, p. 33). In the educational setting, hegemony is associated with preferential treatment given to students from the dominant class, a process of inequality that functions to secure their advantage over students from the subordinate class.

Biculturalism

Cultural Difference theorists argue that the school failure of African Americans and other racial minorities can be attributed to the conflict between the students' home culture and the culture of the school (Delpit, 1988). W. E. B. DuBois (1994) points to the existence of a bicultural process at work in the lives of African Americans when he writes:

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with this second-sight of this American world- a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double- consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 2)

Darder (2012) noted in her work on biculturalism that only theorists of color have referred to the notion of bicultural existence. More specifically, several authors have discussed the idea of two identities for African Americans (Perry et al., 2003; Woodson, 1933/2013). In his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon (1952) discussed the effects on identity as the Black individual tries to imitate the dominant culture. The result is a negative self-concept and feelings of inferiority for the Black individual.

Culture, power, and ideology are aspects of socialization that affect the dominant and subordinate alike. All individuals acquire a consciousness that aligns their “ideas, feelings, desires, moral preferences, and subjectivities, to that of the dominant culture” (Darder, 2012, p. 45). The subordinate individual also undergoes socialization in their native culture. In many cases, this second socialization carries with it a different and often contradictory ideology. Biculturalism acknowledges the dual socialization process of subordinate cultural communities. Bicultural “individuals learn to function in two distinct sociocultural environments: their primary culture and the dominant mainstream culture” (Darder, 2012, p.45). The theory of biculturalism addresses the different strategies of survival adopted by people of color in response to the tension created between the two cultures. In her critical theory of biculturalism, Darder (2012) identified four major response patterns associated with the biculturation process:

1. Alienation: an internalized identification with the dominant culture and a rejection of the primary culture.
2. Dualism: a perception of having two separate identities- one that is identified with the primary cultural community and one tied to acceptance of mainstream institutional values.
3. Separatist: those associated to remaining strictly within the boundaries of the primary culture while adamantly rejecting the dominant culture.
4. Cultural negotiation: mediates, reconciles, and integrates the reality of lived experiences in an effort to retain the primary cultural identity and orientation while also functioning within the dominant culture for social transformation of the society at large.

Ideally, any responses of bicultural students should lead to a greater sense of empowerment and social agency. The cultural negotiation response allows students to critically engage with the tensions caused by their dual socialization, while still affirming their cultural identity and cultivating democratic participation in the classroom, in the process of better understanding themselves as historical beings (Darder, 2012).

There is nowhere greater a need for the “awakening of the bicultural voice” (Darder, 2012) than with respect to the injustices occurring in the educational process today. Darder and other theorists in the field contend that traditional pedagogical theories and practices serve to isolate and alienate bicultural students by preventing their natural expression of their lived experiences and histories while simultaneously rejecting any discourse surrounding the oppressive nature of their practice. Liberation of bicultural students is acquired only through the critical exploration of their experience related to their participation in the society (Freire, 1985). Therefore, any organization or persons committed to the struggle for liberation of bicultural students must provide an environment whose principal objective is empowerment. True to this point, Darder (2012) asserted:

If the bicultural voice is to be awakened and students of color are to become active social agents in the world, educators must create the conditions for a genuine form of cultural democracy to take root in the classroom- one that not only creates the space for all aspects of their humanity to be expressed but also allows their cultural particularities to be in critical conversation with the universal human dimensions that are also vital to their identities and relationships with others. (p. 55)

An educational setting committed to the empowerment of bicultural students is said to be anchored in a critical view of cultural democracy. A critical understanding of cultural democracy involves a conscious shift in power relationships, in order to provide bicultural students an opportunity to engage in an “active process of empowerment, assist them in finding their voice, enhance their intellectual formation, and support their development of both individual and collective identity and political solidarity” (Darder, 2012, p. 57). Critical cultural democracy provides an education that considers the whole student, including their “language, heritage, cultural values, and learning styles,” as equally important to the educational setting (Darder, 2012, p. 56). A critical practice of cultural democracy breaks the silence between bicultural students and the environment, thereby allowing for the development of bicultural voices (Darder, 2012).

The bicultural student voice involves “the ability to participate in and influence the manner in which power is relegated” (Darder, 2012, p. 62). This focus on power and its relationship to the organization and evolution of culture is an important distinguishing aspect of Darder’s concept of biculturalism, in that she deliberately moved the analysis beyond solely a pedagogical or psychological explication of the lives of communities of color to a perspective that understands that the voices of bicultural students must emerge within a political context where the tensions of the dominant/subordinate dynamic must be challenged.

Darder (2012) contended that voice is nurtured within the classroom when bicultural students are provided opportunities to dialogue and critically engage thoughts and ideas related to both their lived experiences and the relationship of their collective histories to the curriculum, in an open, free, and democratic manner. Critical to this process is the bicultural educator. The

bicultural educator functions as a “bicultural mirror” through which the process of awakening is supported. These educators, having found their own voice, are able to validate, support, and encourage students engaging in this process. Bicultural educators can assist students in the process of healing, whereby they are renewed as complete historical beings in their lives.

The Black church transmits an oral history that is interwoven with lessons on resiliency, motivation, and self-acceptance. This critical pedagogy that occurs in the pews provides more than a simple self-esteem boost. It provides Black youth with a culture that is rich, fruitful, and long-lasting in comparison to the assimilated, mass media culture they are expected to consume in the school setting. As such, this study asserts that the Black Church in its role as a bicultural educator guides, models, and supports the critical journey of young people toward the bicultural discourse, thereby awakening the voice of its congregants. This study also contends that, through this process, the Black Church promotes healing and empowerment, which strengthens the bicultural students’ ability to function in school settings that are known to fragment and dilute the identity of working-class Black male students.

Bicultural Theory Research

In her article *Bicultural Socialization Factors Affecting the Minority Experience*, Diane de Anda (1984) discussed six factors that are significant to bicultural socialization, insofar as these factors increase an individual’s or group’s chances of being successful in the mainstream culture. These include the availability of cultural translators, mediators, and models, the amount and type of corrective feedback, and the conceptual style and problem-solving approach of the minority individual.

Teresa LaFromboise, Hardin L.K. Coleman, and Jennifer Gerton (1993) proposed a model of bicultural competence in their article *Psychological Impact of Biculturalism: Evidence and Theory*. They contend that bicultural competence is a result of personal identity, positive attitudes toward both the culture of origin and the second culture, and bicultural efficacy. LaFromboise et al. defined bicultural efficacy as “the belief, or confidence, that one can live effectively, and in a satisfying manner, within two groups without compromising one’s sense of cultural identity” (p. 405). The model, consisting of both cognitive and behavioral dimensions, departs from previous models, which focus on the skills needed to successfully navigate between two cultures. The focus of a successful bicultural individual lies in positive attitudes and beliefs about self, communication skills and role repertoire, and effective support systems in both cultures, which contribute to the individual feeling grounded. As LaFromboise and her colleagues asserted, “being grounded in both cultures will allow the individual to both maintain and enhance his or her personal and cultural identities in a manner that will enable him or her to effectively manage the challenges of a bicultural existence” (p. 408).

In the article *Biculturalism and the Academic Achievement of African American High School Students*, Jonathan Rust and Margo A. Jackson (2011) determined that cultural identity was an important factor for academic achievement. Hence biculturalism serves as a significant construct in considering the socialization of Black males, within the context of their formation in the Black Church.

Today, the need for a critical examination of the context of schooling is even more apparent. Perry et al. (2003) asserted that the school environment contributes negatively to the achievement of African-American students in the following three ways:

1. The stigmatization of the culture, more specifically the language, of African-American children.
2. The requirement of cultural adaptation as a prerequisite for skill acquisition.
3. The implication that African-American culture cannot be intimately connected to African-American academic achievement.

According to Perry et.al (2003), these three aspects of contemporary mainstream school environments contribute to a variety of unfair practices directly related to student achievement, including but not limited to the influence of Black language and communication style on teachers' judgments about the intellectual capabilities of African-American children.

Critical Pedagogy, Culturally Responsive Teaching, and Engaged Pedagogy

A critical aspect of healing and empowerment within the Black Church is found in critical pedagogy as a form of public pedagogy, which unfolds from the pulpit. Freire (1970) discusses a humanizing education, as one that affirms men and women as fully human persons. This humanizing education, as a result of a liberating pedagogy, seeks to eradicate the duality of their existence, which is characterized by a dehumanization resulting from their attempt to be like their oppressor.

Similar to Freire's (1970) idea of a humanizing education, critical pedagogy and engaged pedagogy both propose that teachers encourage students to confront the realities of power and privilege in the larger society (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Critical pedagogy is rooted in the belief that students' experiences outside the classroom can be a resource inside the classroom (Morrison, Robbins, & Rose, 2008). In critical pedagogy, instructional strategies are intimately

connected to the lived experiences of the students. According to Peterson (2009), critical educators inspire learning by:

1. Using the students' language and experiences.
2. Empowering students.
3. Providing an issue or topic that is relevant to the students and can be expounded upon.
4. Teaching social responsibility.
5. Critiquing the curriculum and society.
6. Engaging in dialogue. (p. 320)

In light of these factors, the black minister can be considered a critical educator, within the context of the pulpit. Black preachers have demonstrated a keen understanding of their congregants, which has allowed them to meet the social needs of the community (Woodson, 1933/2013). In *The Heart of Black Preaching*, Cleophus J. LaRue (1999) discusses black preaching as an encounter between the Bible and struggle of the marginalized. Black preachers are required to be aware of issues of relevance for their parishioners. LaRue discussed domains of experience. These domains are important for understanding how the biblical hermeneutic navigates the "teaching moment" on Sunday mornings (p. 20). The five domains found in the black sermon are personal piety, care of the soul, social justice, corporate concerns, and the maintenance of the institutional church. Personal piety is concerned with prayer, personal discipline, moral conduct, and the maintenance of a right relationship with God. The focus on the individual serves to strengthen their resolve. Care of the soul focuses on collective restoration of people to wholeness. This focus of renewal and healing is necessary for a people who have endured the physical and psychological atrocities of the Black population. The

resulting wholeness and empowerment gives the oppressed power to create meaning in a society not been defined for them. Through the care of the soul the black church teaches how to “remain physically alive in a situation of oppression without losing one’s dignity” (Cone, 1997, p. 2).

Social Justice in the context of the Black Church refers then to the teaching of principals of empowerment that move congregants toward constructive personal and social change. It is based on the idea that God is the source of social justice and seeks to restore equity. Concerns incorporated within this form of public pedagogy involve those matters that are important specifically to the Black community. Hence, the critical educational formation of Black males within the educational system fits well into the domains of empowerment articulated earlier. Social justice and social inequalities provide the preacher ample opportunity to engage relevant topics to the lives of the black community, while teaching social responsibility and providing a needed critique of society.

Geneva Gay’s (2000) work on culturally responsive teaching builds on the work of critical pedagogy. Culturally responsive teaching uses “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective” (p.31). The characteristics of culturally responsive teaching are validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory (See Table 7). Culturally responsive teaching is *validating* because it acknowledges and develops value in cultural heritages, lived sociocultural realities, and learning styles. Culturally responsive teaching is *comprehensive* as a result of its concentration on identity and community as well as academic success and social consciousness. Culturally Responsive teaching is *multidimensional* as a result of its comprehensive focus on the

teacher and school practices. Culturally responsive teaching is *empowering* Results in academic competence, personal confidence, courage, and the will to act. It is *transformative* because it compels students “to become change agents committed to promoting greater equality, justice, and power balances among ethnic groups” (p. 37). Finally, culturally responsive teaching is *emancipatory* because it allows students to focus more on learning because it “releases students of color from the constraining manacles of mainstream canons of knowledge and ways of knowing” (p. 37).

Table 7

Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Teaching.

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Description</u>
Validating	Culturally responsive teaching (1) defends the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect student's dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum. (2) Builds bridges and meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities. (3) It uses a variety of instructional strategies to meet the needs of different learning styles. (4) It teaches students to know and praise their own and one another cultural heritage (5) It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools.
Comprehensive	Culturally responsive teaching (1) is committed to developing a sense of community, camaraderie, and shared responsibility, (2) Includes instructors who function like members of an extended family assisting, supporting, and encouraging one another. (3) Provides a sense of belonging. (4) Honors human dignity, and promotes individual self-concepts. (5) Defines educational excellence to include academic success as well as cultural competence, critical social consciousness, political activism, and responsible community membership.
Multidimensional	Culturally responsive teaching focuses on teacher and school practices including curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, classroom management, and performance assessments.
Empowering	Culturally responsive teaching empowers students to be better human beings and more successful learners. This results in academic competence, personal confidence, courage, and the will to act.
Transformative	Culturally responsive teaching is concerned with confronting and transcending the cultural hegemony found in the curriculum and classroom instruction and developing social consciousness, intellectual critique, and political and personal efficacy in students so they can combat prejudices, racism, and other forms of oppression and exploitation. Academic success and cultural consciousness are developed simultaneously.
Emancipatory	Culturally responsive teaching is liberating and validating. It encourages students to find their own voices in order to contextualize issues in multiple cultural perspectives. It also engages students in ways of knowing and thinking and to become more active participants in shaping their own learning.

Note: Adapted from *Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Teaching* by Geneva Gay, 2000, Copyright 2000

If culturally responsive teaching is the vehicle to help students arrive at social consciousness, then culturally responsive caring is the driver. Gay (2000) defined culturally responsive caring as the “expressed concern for [students] psychoemotional well-being and academic success, personal morality and social actions, obligations and celebrations, communality and individuality, and unique cultural connections and universal human bonds” (p. 48). Teachers who embody culturally responsive caring honor the humanity of their students, carry high expectations for student performance, and incorporate strategies to fulfill those expectations. There are four aspects to culturally responsive caring. First, culturally responsive caring requires the teacher to characterize caring. Caring is an action-driven exercise more than an emotionally-centered one. Caring requires teachers to “place student in learning environments and relationships that radiate unequivocal belief in their promise and possibility” (p. 52). Second, culturally responsive caring attends to the person and the performance. It directs teachers’ attention to aspects of the students that are beyond the academic realm. Caring teachers employ instructional practices that involve skills for self-determination. Third, culturally responsive teaching is action-provoking through its empowerment of student voice and student visibility. Finally, culturally responsive caring is multidimensional responsiveness. Caring teachers are able to respond to appropriately to cultural influences through their understanding of their effects on students’ “behavior and mental ecology” (p. 58).

Black Church congregants can be considered culturally responsive care agents. Congregants create spaces where individuals are “nourished, supported, protected, encouraged, and held accountable” (Gay, 2000, p. 53). Congregants do not limit their interactions with students to church-related matters but incorporate all aspects of the student’s life during their

interactions. Research indicates that the Black Church members play an essential role in the social support of Black Americans (Taylor, Lincoln, & Chatters, 2005).

Engaged pedagogy, similarly, is the process of teaching for the purpose of student empowerment. This pedagogy emphasizes the union of mind, body, and spirit. In this form of pedagogy the teacher's role is that of a healer. The view of the healer is in response to the metaphorical disease that occurs when the mind, body, and spirit are disjointed. Engaged pedagogy acknowledges how power and authority in the classroom and curriculum materials limits the ability for teachers to become self-actualized and empowered students (hooks, 1994).

Engaged pedagogy seeks to heal the dismemberment of identity caused by the oppression students of color face in society. Dalia Rodriguez (2006) discussed the survival strategy utilized by African Americans and Chicanos called *masking*. She stated, "masking ourselves can serve the need to conceal part of our identities, essentially serving our need to survive in a racist and patriarchal world" (p. 1068). Engaged pedagogy heals students by providing a new language and a new understanding of the experiences of those marginalized by society. The language and understanding of engaged pedagogy creates a counternarrative that challenges the dominant culture's perspective thereby empowering students (Rodriguez, 2006).

An example of engaged pedagogy comes from the Christmas sermon *Ready or Not* by Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Senior Pastor of the Trinity United Church in Chicago, Illinois. In the sermon, he discusses God's omnipotence and sovereignty in addressing societal problems:

This message of Christmas, a baby, in rags in a manger, this Christmas message should not come as a surprise to us as a people of faith living in the 21st century. We know as a people and we know as individuals how God shows up in God's own time and in God's

own way. God showed up on the island of Haiti, God showed up with Harriet Tubman and the underground railroad. God showed up in Paul Robeson ... Malcolm X and Martin Luther King ... God showed up in the civil rights movement, in the 1950's and 1960's and God showed up in the presidential election of 2007 and 2008. God shows up in God's own time and in God's own way. And whenever God shows up God shows out. For someone God showed up when you didn't know where the next meal was coming from. For somebody else God showed up when you were down to your last dime. For somebody else God showed up when tuition was due, when the rent was due. God showed up when the diagnosis was not good and God showed up when the death angel took somebody you loved. God shows up in God's own time and God show's up in God's own way ... God's terms lift up the lowly. God's terms fill the hungry with good things. God's terms send the rich away empty. God's terms disrupts the status quo. They disturb pretenders and politicians. And they disrupt the status quo. (NowFaith2, 2010)

This excerpt is an example of the critical consciousness that is present in the Black Church. It is this consciousness that, when used by people of color, is able to circumvent exploitation and oppression (Rodriguez, 2006). The creation of an oppositional worldview, bell hooks (2003) asserts, encourages an identity that opposes dehumanization, while inspiring self-actualization. Through the stories about oppression, for example, Dr. Wright guides his listeners to an understanding that surviving oppression produces healing through the legitimization of personal experiences and perspectives normally excluded from the dominant discourse (Rodriguez, 2006).

Religious Socialization

The Black Church and the Black family have been “enduring institutions” (Williams, 2009, p. 41). It was the Black Church that made informal slave marriages legal, challenged black male infidelity, and encouraged families to function as extended church families (Williams, 2009). Research has documented benefits to church congregates as a direct result of the kinship relationships. Robert Taylor et.al (2005) found that Black parishioners receive substantial support through church-based relationships characterized by high levels of emotional closeness and frequent interaction.

William Jeynes (2010) researched the relationship between religiosity, religious schools, and the achievement gap. His findings indicate that personal religious faith among African Americans may play an important role in reducing the achievement gap. He also found that other factors, including family factors and curriculum changes, may also reduce the current performance gap. He concluded that a combination of both a high degree of personal religious faith and student family structure can be an important places of academic discovery (Jeynes, 2010).

An examination of how the Black Church affects the development of its congregants would be incomplete without examining black religiosity and spirituality. Religiosity is the belief in the “existence of God,” to maintain the dogma of a prescribed faith, and to participate in practices associated with that belief system (Mattis & Jagers, 2001). For African-American students, families and religious institutions contribute tremendously to the development of their religious lives. Each vehicle communicates the values and acceptable behaviors of the religion. Parents communicate religious values through the rites and rituals of their religion. Baptisms,

Christenings, Sunday School, and youth activities all provide opportunities for Black children to receive instruction, appreciate cultural norms, and identify with an authentic cultural narrative.

African-American youth attend church more frequently and are more likely to be involved in church-related youth groups than youth of any other racial group (Donahue & Benson, 1995; Smith et al., 2002). A variety of scholars consider the benefits of church attendance to be remarkable in the lives of congregants. Religious involvement and the importance of religion in one's life are also associated with lower prevalence of substance use (Brody, Stoneman, & Flor, 1996; Foshee & Hollinger, 1996), less at-risk behavior with respect to sexual intercourse (Lewis, Mellins, & Brackis-Cott, 2006), and fewer reports of conduct problems (Pearce, Jones, Schwab-Stone, & Ruchkin, 2003). Religiously committed Black youth also outperform their less religious counterparts academically (Jeyes, 1999). Research seems to indicate this effect is due to the social or communal dimension of religiosity, rather than simply individual competency.

African-American students who are more involved in church report a positive academic self-concept (Sanders, 1998) and more self-regulation (Brody, Stoneman, & Flor, 1996). A study conducted by M Al-Fadhli Hussain and Thomas Lersen (2010) found that family and religious social capital are the strongest predictors for positive study college aspirations in African-American youth. Jaqueline Mattis and Robert Jagers (2001) concluded that positive academic outcomes may be especially likely when religious values that inspire success are consistent and presented during childhood. Kay Cook (2000) found that churches play a major role in buffering stress among inner-city teenagers. Among the teenagers in her sample church was found to serve

multiple functions including fostering identity development through strengthening in self-worth and instilling faith that their lives have meaning.

The Black Church has had very positive effects on the academic success of its youth. Religious socialization has been associated with positive educational outcomes for African-American students. There has been a significant and positive relationship between religious socialization and IQ scores (Blau, 1981). There is a significant and positive association found between religious involvement and African-American student attitudes, behavior, and success in school (Sanders, 1998). Jeyes (1999) found that religious schooling and personal religious commitment has a positive effect of achievement and school-related behavior for Black and Hispanic students, even after controlling for demographic factors. Students reporting that they regularly attend church service have a higher mean grade point average than those who attend church rarely or never (Barrett, 2010). The success of Black churches may be due in part to their ability to socialize their congregants. Brian Barrett (2010) suggested that the positive effects of Black churches derive from their ability to change the minds and habits of their congregants, the presence of social networks and positive role modeling, and the positive value placed on the Black student.

Robert Gaines (2010) suggested that the Black Church must engage the larger community through basic charity, sustained support, social service delivery, political advocacy, and comprehensive community development. He discussed the importance of the Black Church as a voice for the underrepresented and oppressed. He engaged in a discussion about the Black Church's need to become a space where both educational and spiritual needs of congregants are addressed. Finally, Gaines encouraged collaboration between denominations to address the

social justice issues affecting the church and its congregants. This multi-faceted, collaborative approach was present in the Civil Rights era but seems to have lost its vigor during the 1970s and 1980s, with the rise of the African-American educated elite. Arguably, the Civil Rights Movement would not have been as influential and powerful without the collective forces of all Black church denominations. Today, the social justice awareness seems to be more focused on in-group needs (e.g., raising money for a congregant's family in need), rather than the needs of the neighborhood, broader community, or world at large.

In order for African Americans to achieve in school, they must be able to negotiate three social identities: their identity as members of a caste-like group, their identity as members of mainstream society, and their identity as members of a cultural group in opposition to the racialization and distortions that whiteness continues to negatively define (Perry et al., 2003). This study contends, then, that the Black Church is an effective vehicle for the empowering process of biculturalization, in that it creates multiple social contexts in which biculturalism is normalized. With this in mind, this study closely examines the impact of this process upon the lives of young Black males and their academic formation.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Testimonio provide[s] a means to reflect, engage, and theorize. It allows us a space to be vulnerable—to share the pain of oppression and to rejoice in our struggles to overcome (Huber & Cueva, 2012, p. 406).

This study examined the contributions of the Black Church to the bicultural socialization of African-American males. More specifically, the research investigated how African-American high school and college male students describe the impact of the Black Church on their lives and on their ability to navigate the their school culture.

As such, this study addressed the following three research questions:

1. What aspects of the Black Church experience function to support the bicultural development of academically successful African-American male students?
2. What specific church experiences influence the African-American male student's ability to critically negotiate the school environment?
3. How do the church experiences of African-American male students influence their participation in school and, thus, their academic achievement?

The participants were African-American male high school or college students. At the time of the study, all the young men were past or current students of Victory High School, an all-boys college preparatory Catholic high school in California. College student participants were all full-time students enrolled at four-year universities. Each student attends a Black Church regularly and participates in a minimum of one church auxiliary group. In addition, participants

have at least one parent or guardian who attends the same church and participates in at least one auxiliary group. McCray et al. (2010) asserted that the participation of both student and parent increases the opportunities for racial socialization, thereby providing opportunities to strengthen the self-efficacy of its congregants (McCray et al., 2010). The study participants included three high school students and three college students. High school participants were identified with the help of Victory High School Theology teachers. The researcher was provided with a list of students and their church affiliation was collected at the start of the 2012 school year. Three young men were randomly selected from that list and were found to meet the study's criteria. The researcher obtained parental consent prior to speaking with the young men. College students were notified about the study over Facebook. Five students responded to the initial request. The three students meeting the criteria were selected.

The study took place in the Western United States. Data were collected at Victory High School during the spring and summer of 2013.

Table 8

Participant demographics

Name	Age	Household	Siblings
Aaron	16	Lives with Grandmother	1 half-brother (lives outside the home)
Brandon	21	Lives with mother	1 brother (twin)
Christian	15	Lives with Dad and Stepmom	2 half-sisters and 1 half-brother (lives outside the home), 2 stepbrothers
DeVante	21	Lives with Mom and Dad, lives on-campus during the school year	1 brother
Dallas	20	Lives with Mom and grandfather, lives on-campus during the school year	None
Sean	15	Lives with Mom and Dad	2 sisters

As indicated in Table 8, only two of the six participants live with both mother and father.

The following are brief descriptions of each participant:

Aaron is 16 years old and is currently a junior at Victory High School. He began living with his grandmother in the 6th grade when his father was arrested. His father is currently incarcerated and his mom died when he was fifteen years old. He has one half-brother who lives with another family member. Aaron attended desegregated public schools in both Nevada and California before attending Victory High. Aaron has a high school cumulative GPA of 2.6. He is a member of the Junior Varsity basketball team and Black Student Union. He is also active in his church’s Youth and Young Adult group and Usher board.

Brandon is 22 years old and is currently enrolled at a four-year university within the California state's university system. He was raised predominately by his mother and grandmother. His mother married when he was in elementary school, but his stepfather is no longer in his life. Brandon has one sibling, a brother. He has experienced both segregated and desegregated public schools prior to attending Victory High School. Brandon is currently majoring in Sociology and has plans to be a life coach. He is very active in his church and also works full time in the food services sector.

Christian is 15 years old and is currently a sophomore at Victory High School. Christian began living with his father at the age of nine when his mother was arrested. When Christian was 13, his father remarried. He currently lives with his father, stepmother, and two stepbrothers. Christian has a two older half-sisters and one older half-brother that live outside the home. Christian has experienced both segregated and desegregated public and charter schools prior to attending Victory high School. His high school cumulative GPA is 3.4. He is a member of the Varsity Football team, school choir, and Social Justice Interact Club. He is also active in his church's Youth choir, Men's Department, and YCM (Young Christian Men) group.

DeVante is 21 years old and is currently enrolled in a private, co-ed university. He was raised by his mother and father and is the older of two children. DeVante experienced a private segregated and a public desegregated school environment before attending Victory High School. He received a full academic scholarship to attend his university. DeVante is currently majoring in engineering. He remains active in both church and school. He is a member of the university's basketball team as well as the African Student Union. He is also active in his church's Young Adult activities both at his home church and the church he attends while at school.

Dallas is 20 years old and is currently enrolled in a private, co-ed university. He was raised by his mother and grandfather. Although he knows his father, he acknowledges that they do not have a close relationship. Dallas experienced a public segregated school prior to enrolling in Victory High School. He was the valedictorian of his graduating class and received a full scholarship to the university he presently attends. Dallas has a double major in Government and Theology. His future aspirations are to become a lawyer and a minister. He remains active in church and is also a member of the university's Black Student Union and Black Greek organization. He works part-time as a staff assistant in the university's Office of the President. He is also a member of the Junior Deacons and has recently begun giving sermons.

Sean is 15 years old and is a sophomore at Victory High School. He lives with his mother, father, and older sister. Sean has only experienced segregated school environments but has been enrolled in both public and Catholic schools. Sean's cumulative GPA is 2.6. He is a member of the Victory High School Junior Varsity Basketball Team and Church Usher Board. He also participates in his church's drama ministry and assists in children's church.

Table 9 describes the educational histories of the six participants. All participants have, at some point in their education been enrolled in the California public school system. All participants attended Victory High school, a Catholic all-boys college preparatory high school. Two of the six students attended segregated schools throughout their primary and secondary school experience. All student names have been changed to protect anonymity.

Table 9

Educational History

Name	Primary school (type/ environment)	Junior High (type/ environment)	High School (type/ environment)	College (type)
Aaron	Public/ desegregated	Public/ desegregated	Catholic/ segregated	n/a
Brandon	Public/ segregated	Public/ desegregated	Catholic/ segregated	State University
Christian	Public/ segregated	Public/ desegregated	Catholic/ segregated	n/a
DeVante	Private/ segregated	Public/ desegregated	Catholic/ segregated	Private University
Dallas	Public/ segregated	Public/ segregated	Catholic/ segregated	Private University
Sean	Public/ segregated	Catholic/ segregated	Catholic/ segregated	n/a

Victory High School

Victory High School is an all-boys college-preparatory Catholic school situated in an economically depressed city in the California. It was founded by the Divine Word missionaries in 1962 in response to pressure from Black community members dissatisfied with the lack of response from the Los Angeles Archdiocese to the plight of African Americans during the Civil Rights Era (Lopez, 2003). In 2000, amidst the threat of closure, Victory became a Jesuit-operated school. Victory High School is committed to educating students who are economically and academically underserved. They include in their mission a focus on service and justice.

Table 10

Church Participation

Name	Church activities	Denomination	Age Began Attending Church
Aaron	Youth activities, Usher Board, Youth and Young Adult group	Baptist	4 years old
Brandon	Drama ministry, Church choir	Non denominational	10 year sold
Christian	Youth choir, Men’s Department, YCM (Young Christian Men) group	Pentecostal	9 years old
DeVante	Youth and Young Adult Activities, plays, choir, usher board, Vacation Bible School	Non denominational (follows the Baptist traditions)	10 years old
Dallas	Choir, Vacation Bible School, Junior Deacons, Baptist Convetntions	Baptist	Since Birth
Sean	Usher Board, Children’s Church Assistant, Drama Ministry	COGIC	Since Birth

Testimonios and Witnessing

The qualitative approach of critical narrative employs the genre of storytelling to make meaning from experiences, which occur at a particular time, in a particular personal and social context, while also exposing, critiquing, and transforming inequalities (Maulucci, 2010).

Building on the work of Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin, critical narrative research captures both the individual and the context of participants, in an effort to produce meaning and understanding, which are created when voices are in dialogue with each other (Moen, 2006).

The specific type of critical narrative employed for this study is *testimonio*, an approach that incorporates political, social, historical, and cultural histories that accompany one’s life

experiences in an attempt to raise consciousness (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012). *Testimonio* has been used since the 1970s as part of resistance movements in developing countries, where it was used to advocate for justice against all crimes against humanity (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). This methodology helps to reveal an epistemology of truths and how one comes to understand them. This particular methodology is useful for marginalized groups and people of color, as it affirms and empowers the narrator, or *testimonialista*, by providing an opportunity to use his or her voice, ultimately allowing for his or her survival. In this study, the aim was to break through to those bicultural voices, as Darder (2012) contends, that provide witness to the experiences of young Black males.

In concert, Delgado Bernal et.al (2012) also asserted *testimonio* is concerned with “giving voice to silences, representing the other, reclaiming authority to narrate, and disentangling questions surrounding legitimate truth” (p. 365). *Testimonio* strives to share the authentic voice of the *testimonialista* by positioning the participant in the research. The researcher serves as an ally and activist bringing attention to the conditions and experiences of a particular group (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). *Testimonio* sheds light on the identity formation of people of color, while challenging the status quo. It reclaims a way of knowing that has been dismissed by the educational system and society at large (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012).

Much of the use of *testimonio* has focused on the experiences of Chicana/o and Latina/o communities in the United States (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Building on the work of *testimonio* as well as on the storytelling tradition of the Black Church, this study employed the practice of *witnessing* derived from the work of psychoanalysts Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992), as articulated in their book *Testimony, Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis,*

and History. Felman and Laub's (1992) work with Holocaust survivors and their children provides the backdrop for this type of methodology. Witnessing in the Church occurs when believers assert that they have experienced God in a similar way as communicated through the testimony (Ross, 2003). Witnessing, in this regard, deals with the creation of knowledge *de novo*. Through listening to another's testimony, the person comes to partially experience the trauma in himself and therefore "partakes of the struggle of the victim" (p. 58). The result of this symbiotic or empathic relationship is that (1) the narrator reclaims his position as a witness and thus, the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself; (2) listeners obtain an autobiographical awareness of their own trauma; and (3) both narrator and listeners reclaim their independent traumatic event, in order to continue and complete the process of survival and liberation.

Witnessing is a process that, unlike *testimonio*, focuses on the experiences of the listener, rather than the narrator. The listener or witness is said to "partake of the struggle of the victim with the memories and residues of his or her traumatic past" with the goal of creating knowledge (p. 57). Felman and Laub (1992) state "The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to—and heard—is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the "knowing" of the event is given birth to" (p. 57). Through the act of *witnessing* "the listener of the trauma comes to be a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event" allowing the listener to "partially experience the trauma himself" (p. 57). According to Felman and Laub (1992), *witnessing* requires the listener to follow three rules:

1. The witness must be obtrusively present throughout the testimony.
2. The knowledge of the witness should not hinder or obstruct the listening.

3. The listener must maintain his own perspective and position careful not to become the narrator. (p. 71)

The result of the listener experiencing the testimony of the narrator is the listener's own "liberation from the captivity of silence" (p. 63). It is the continued power of this silence that contributes and perpetuates the oppression reinforced and experienced within the self. In the context of this study, witnessing refers to the action of the researcher. The researcher, although careful not to insert herself in the story of narrator, affirmed and supported the narrator's *truth* by offering her own testimony. It is the assertion of this study that the responses from the participants following witnessing helped to uncover thoughts and feelings that had been silenced previously.

In addition to their methodological benefits, testimony and witnessing are also central features in the Black Church tradition. This population's familiarity with testimonies strengthens the appropriateness of *testimonio* as a method for this study. In the Black Church, testimonies are an act of people speaking truthfully about their experience. According to Regina Shands Stoltzfus (2009), testimony has five distinct purposes for the Black Church and its congregants:

1. Edification: occurs when the individual's experience becomes part of the community's experience. The community is encouraged in the retelling of the individual's encounter with the divine.
2. Fortification: occurs when the individual tells the story of being created in the image of God, and being loved and cared for by God. It strengthens the individual to continue in the struggle and promotes healing of the mind body and spirit.

3. Transformation: occurs when the individual’s traumatic story changes from shame and humiliation to one of dignity and virtue.
4. Affirmation: occurs when one shares their story in the presence of witnesses who have seen or experienced God’s work and therefore certify or attest to the truth of God’s activity.
5. Renewal through Liberation: occurs when the narrator and the listener create a new story together and are able to anticipate imminent Kingdom of God. (p. 45)

The Research Design

The research design used for this study was a modification of the approach utilized in the study of aspirations of Chicana doctoral students by Rebecca Burciaga (2007) that employed semi-structured interviews, email journals, and participant analysis. The study also utilized the “stage outline” method proposed by Libelich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Xilber (1998) which allows the researcher to obtain rich life stories, while addressing time constraints. This method requires the participant to think of their educational experience as though they were writing a book.

Three questions structured this part of the interview: (1) Tell me about a significant episode or memory that you remember from this stage. (2) What kind of person were you during this stage? (3) Who were significant people for you during this stage? The complete interview protocol is given in Appendix A.

The data were collected throughout four interviews as detailed in Table 11.

Table 11

Data Collection by Interview

Interview	Data Collected
Interview One (Baseline)	Consent

	Demographic collection Rapport Building
Interview Two (<i>Testimonio</i>)	Educational Experience Stage outline (Lieblich, 1998)
Interview Three (<i>Testimonio</i>)	Church experience Stage outline (Lieblich, 1998)

Interview One (Baseline)

An essential component to *testimonio* and witnessing is the relationship between the researcher and participant. As such, Interview One focused on building rapport, collecting demographic information, and explaining the purpose of the research. Participants also signed consent forms.

Interview Two (*Testimonio*)

This *testimonio* focused on documenting the participants' educational experiences. The interview addressed the following themes:

- Perceptions of parental aspirations for them
- Perceptions of parental and extending families' views of their education
- Perception of their school's views on their education
- Description of school culture
- Memories of school- critical events
- Relationships to their teachers, professors, school peers, school mentors
- Professional aspirations
- Reasons for attending school

Interview Three (*Testimonio*)

Phase three of the *testimonio* focused on understanding how participants came to understand the Black Church's role in their educational experience. The interview addressed the following themes:

- Perceptions of their church and church family's views on their education
- Description of church culture
- Memories of church- critical events
- Relationships with their pastors, auxiliary leaders, church peers, church mentors
- Reasons for attending church
- Personal aspirations

The complete interview protocol is given in Appendix A.

In addition to the interviews and focus groups, data were also collected through email journaling, and participant analysis. Email journaling provided an opportunity for participants to develop their *testimonio*, by clarifying and reflecting on their responses while allowing the researcher the opportunity for follow-up questions (Burciaga, 2007). The critical narrative character of *testimonios* and witnessing necessitates the importance of collaboration. The researcher and participants worked together in a collaborative dialogic relationship (Moen, 2006). Participant analysis served to confirm and verify the authenticity of their voices (Burciaga, 2007).

Data received from *testimonios* and witnessing were analyzed using the holistic-content analysis proposed by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Silber (1998). Holistic-content analysis looks at the text in its entirety to find themes. Narratives and email journals were coded and grouped into coded groups. The theoretical methodology utilized to organize the experiences and events

of the study and assess themes pointed to concepts of cultural negotiation and bicultural affirmation, as found in Darder's (2012) critical bicultural theory.

This study offered three advantages to the narrator and listener through the use of *testimonios* and witnessing. First, *testimonio* and witnessing are situated in liberation pedagogy in that it seeks to name the oppression and loosen the chains of institutionalized marginalization. Second, *testimonio* voices the journey from oppression, thus, leading the narrator to recognize him or herself as a survivor. Finally, *testimonio* upholds the Freirean promise of conscientization with respect to hope, faith, and autonomy (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012).

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

High school is a really important time in development. The lessons you learn when you are maturing....to have a positive to balance out the negative. To have people saying yes it's okay to be Black. To have people out there that won't judge you for that. To see it is possible to get along with other races. I feel like to have ... people foster the idea that it doesn't matter that you're Black, you are still capable of being great, that's definitely something I needed because if not I probably wouldn't have tried as hard or had as much confidence in myself.

DeVante, Participant, Meeting Three

The *testimonios* or voices and perspectives of the young men who participated in this study is the focus of this chapter, which provides an understanding of their journey as bicultural individuals in schools that do not always value their experience. The support the bicultural young men received is presented in categories of family, teachers, and church, according to the descriptions they provided. The final section of this chapter discusses how the notion of being Black in the Black Church was presented by the young men.

Family

For the young men, the term *family* referred to parents/guardians and siblings, as well as extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. This is important to note as this idea of family runs counter to mainstream notions of the nuclear family found in most educational literature. All the young men shared that family aspirations for them included college and an expectation that they would make exceptional achievements. During the first

interview, Christian shared, “That’s always been the rules (in my house). Go to school, do good, get As.” These expectations were extremely common among the young men as were their family’s desire for them to be “good people.” The young men also noted the expressed aspiration of their family that they would succeed in school and in life.

The young men’s families and church relationships were instrumental in substantiating their identities as bicultural individuals. In the classroom, the students encountered standards that were negative and restrictive. Most students were able to articulate the different standards they encountered at home and at school. In a discussion with his mom about a teacher in whose class DeVante encountered some behavioral challenges, during Interview Two DeVante recalled him mom saying,

Some people won’t like you because you’re Black. They look at you different; they look at what you do different. They look at how you talk and how you dress and it’s all different so they don’t like it.

Aaron articulated the differences in academic expectations between his family and his school.

During Interview Two he stated,

I was designed to go in the lower class. [Teachers] didn’t expect me to do that well. They expected all the white kids to be at the top. [My grandmother] said I don’t care what you want to be, you can be whatever you want to be as long as you take your butt to college.

During his second interview, Brandon discussed the confusion about his Blackness that he experienced in junior high school and the counternarrative provided to him by his family:

For me it was like okay ... I know I’m Black ... and I like being Black but there’s a different type of Black people. So who am I? Am I the good Black? It really didn’t make sense to me. ... Once I got into the 8th grade I accepted it more that I was Black. And Black ... you were beautiful. You were victorious. You were a king. It was something to be proud of ... my mother, my grandmother, my aunts, and my uncles [taught me that].

The family of the young men provided lessons regarding Blackness that prepared them for interactions with oppressive individuals and systems. These lessons revealed the degrading labels and standards society would project onto the students and the corresponding feelings those projections would generate. Most students recounted lessons from family members that discussed the struggle and the adversities they might encounter because of their skin color. These families acknowledged the experiences would be “hard” and “not fair” but would be more manageable with an education. For many students these lessons were accompanied with a corresponding personal experience of the narrator. For example, Dallas discussed his mother’s teaching him about how, as a Black person, he couldn’t trust everyone. She situated that lesson in her experience as a young Black child hearing about the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Dallas, Interview One).

Throughout our discussion of their elementary school experience, parents and guardians remained the most influential people in the young men’s lives. Only one student, Dallas, noted the influence of his pastor during this time. In junior high school, parents continued to be influential; however, most of the young men recalled at least one friend who became more significant during this time. Interestingly, all of the college students noted the importance of at least two African-American teachers being influential during high school. They also noted the significance of administrators, their parents, other family members, and friends. The high school students reiterated the importance of their parents or guardians but most did not mention individuals outside of their family units.

Teachers

Relationships with specific African-American teachers were discussed in the majority of the interviews. Most students were able to recall the names of educators who initiated a more intimate kinship-relationship. This kinship-relationship seemed comparable to the students' relationship with their aunts, uncles, or cousins. DeVante discussed his appreciation of his relationship with three of his high school teachers and described it as "more than just teacher-student" (DeVante, Interview Two). Aaron described being close to his Black elementary school principal who, he believes, was instrumental to his success. He described how she "talked the way I did" and advised and affirmed him throughout elementary school. Aaron states, "I could tell her all that was going on (with my dad). And I went to her just to talk to her. She would give me advice and tell me to calm down if I got in trouble" (Aaron, Interview Two). Brandon discussed his middle school Assistant Principal, Ms. Hanks, who "shared with [him] about her personal life and treated [him] like a son" (Brandon, Interview Two). For the young men, these relationships provided support for issues occurring both inside and outside of the classroom.

Students' interactions with their white teachers varied. Most students described positive relationships with white teachers during elementary school. In their reflections on teacher interactions in middle school, young men who attended desegregated middle schools described racialized incidences with teachers occurring inside the classroom. Brandon's recollection of a racialized experience that occurred during sixth grade demonstrated a more covert nature to racialized experiences. During Interview Two, Brandon described his experience in the following terms:

(The teacher invites the class to read aloud in class.) I stumbled on a word and the girl sitting next to me said the word for me. So Mrs. Lucas said, "Yeah Brandon, she can

help you because her parents know a little bit more than yours. What does your mom do?" I was like you didn't have to go there with me. And she said "parents" to her and "your mom" to me. How did she know I didn't have parents? I think she was just judging my situation because I was black and I was a boy ... so I must not have a daddy.

DeVante and Aaron's experiences were more overt. They stated:

I had one male teacher [in elementary school], Mr. Harris. I didn't like him 'cuz he called me a hoodrat in fourth grade because I wore a chain. I was the smartest kid in the class but I'm a hoodrat because I have a chain on? Ms. Cook ... and old white lady. I can't remember now what she said but it was something about me having braids ... I had a hard time in her class. I came in there with braids and she was like "Oh you're one of them!" and I'm like, not really ... I just wanted to braid my hair. (DeVante, Interview Two)

In seventh grade people were making different racial jokes towards me. But I took it as a joke. I didn't really understand what they were saying. My Math teacher called me a monkey in class and I laughed. (Aaron, Interview Two)

Dallas' recalled a racialized experience that occurred during a summer program:

There was this one white kid from Montana that would always [say] snarky comments. But in this case, those snarky and sarcastic comments were directed towards me as the only black man in the group from this one white kid from Montana that comes from this town. And so one day we go into the town for a rally ... no a rodeo and it's Fourth of July and I see all these white people and the kid asks me "are you going to feel safe in this town full of white people". Now I'm the only black man in this group and I'm possibly the only black person for miles and miles in this town and I actually began to feel scared for my safety. (Dallas, Interview Two)

Christian and Sean contend that they have never encountered a racialized experience inside school. It is interesting to note, that those participants who experienced a racialized event tended to view the Black church as more influential, than those who did not have a racialized experience.

Church

Most students discussed receiving affirming teachings about their Blackness from their churches. All students shared positive relationships with church members. These relationships ranged from casual to intimate kinship-relationships. The intimate kinship-relationships

provided students with support and encouragement but also included reprimanding and correction if needed. As an example, Aaron shared his interactions with Mrs. Cobb, an elderly member of his church, “Sister Cobbs (is) one of the nicest ladies in the world. Every time I see her she’s like ‘Hi Baby.’” Later, he described an interaction with Mrs. Jenkins, a member of his church and a close friend of his grandmother, concerning his behavior in school. He stated,

Sister Jenkins walked up to me and said “I heard your grandma had to talk to Mrs. Lucas’ and I was like “How do you know who Mrs. Lucas is?” And she said “Isn’t that the Assistant Principal at your school?” and I’m like “Yes, the Vice Principal.” She said “Oh, okay, well make sure you don’t get in trouble anymore!” (Aaron, Interview Three)

DeVante shared the excitement church members shared when he was accepted to the university.

They made a big deal (when I got accepted) ... not just for me ... they do that to all the kids ... They always really ... just walking around church they would tell me good job for being a good kid. They were always really supportive. (DeVante, Interview Three)

Most students were able to share lessons they learned in church about the Black experience.

Particular comments that especially stood out among the *testimonios* include:

I feel like it was real at church. Just like the older dudes at my church ... they talked real. They don’t sugar coat nothing. We had sermons about it...like Yo! We living in a time for Black people (when) it’s hard ... I feel like it’s always good to hear someone else’ point of view on the same subjects as you so you know you’re not crazy. Especially an older black male ... sometimes you just forget about it ... especially going to [a school] like Victory...you forget you’re black in a white man’s world. But sometimes to really just be reminded that you have to be careful and you have to work a bit harder than everyone else. You have to plan. You can’t get comfortable. When they [talk to me] it’s funny as hell. It’s partially the delivery of that message. They weren’t saying it to scare me. It’s just the world we live in. It’s life...I feel like it was more of a sharing experiences thing ... people just genuinely looking out for you and caring for you. (DeVante, Interview Three)

[My church] taught me that Black people [are] able to articulate themselves and go to college and go to school ... and work hard. I understood that being Black [meant being] very proud, very strong, and resilient ... I really got that from [church] because I saw and heard stories about people coming from nothing really ... and now they are living in mansions. Black people were able to develop their own value system that was not necessarily overwritten by the white social standard. Seeing my pastor, to a white person,

he probably was not culturally acceptable or culturally verified in a white community. But in the black community that's what we endorsed. Black people were able to have their own value system. (Dallas, Interview Three)

Being Black is not a privilege. It's not something that's given to you but it comes from the inside. It's not just your race ... it's something like you should look forward to ... you should want to be like "I'm Black so I'll prove you wrong, and I'm looking forward to proving you wrong!" (Sean, Interview Three)

The Church believes that everyone has potential to be great and that all they need is a little encouragement to be steered in the right direction and to not be influenced by the negative things around them. (Christian, Interview Three)

The Church's lessons surrounding the Black experience seem to have influenced the young men's personal definitions of Blackness. In his description of the Black experience as communicated to him by the Black Church, DeVante stated the Black experience is "difficult, humbling, (and) unfair. Even though it is difficult, it's like an honor to be Black." Sean stated the Black experience meant "hard work, motivated, work ethic, pride." Some students were able to articulate the struggles of the Black community in terms of Jesus' death and resurrection. Aaron remarked, "We were slaves. And then Christianity was always right there ... When Jesus died and rose again it was like us [African Americans]. We were dead, and then we came back."

The Black Church also supported these bicultural students by modeling dialectical thought and knowledge as seen in the students' recollections of how their pastors addressed the Trayvon Martin case. On the night of February 26, 2012 George Zimmerman, a 28-year-old man of mixed race shot and killed Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African-American high school student as he was walking home from the store. Zimmerman was charged with second-degree murder but acquitted under the Florida Stand Your Ground statute. In response to this case, peaceful rallies and vigils were held in more than 100 cities nationwide to protest racial profiling

(Alvarez, 2013). Dallas disclosed that his pastor received national attention for his message about America not being a post-racial country. In a sermon entitled *Rizpah's Response*, Dallas' pastor, Dr. John Howard Wesley, of Alfred Street Baptist Church stated,

In one sense saints, I'm outraged. I know you want me to be sanctified and quote scriptures all day long but there is a Howard John in me that is outraged that a 17-year-old Black boy is buried in his grave while the man who kills him in cold blood walks around a free man. God directed me to a woman ya'll may not have known until today. Her name is Rizpah. (Pastor begins to tell the story of how Rizpah's sons were killed because King David's was threatened that one of the sons could be king).

David is threatened by these young men because of their biological DNA. He is threatened because of their bloodline. He is threatened because of their color of the background that they come from. He is threatened by their possibility and their potential. And because he's threatened he allows them to be killed. And to make matters worse, after they are hung, David refuses to give them a proper burial. And the Bible says, Rizpah refuses to allow that to be the fate of her children. It is this mother that models to us what we ought to do in moments when we are outraged and angry when we're hurt and when we're scared. Look at this Rizpah's response.

First, we must make a stand and declare that this mother and this father do not stand all by themselves. This is not just their issue...this affects all of us. Notice that [Rizpah] just doesn't protect the 2 dead bodies of their children, but all seven of them. It didn't just happen to mine, it happened to more. This is not an isolated injustice. This is not a one-time occurrence. It got national media coverage. Can I tell you the truth of the matter? There is injustices that happen to Black and Hispanics every single day. This is not the first type that stereotypes and ignorance have led to the loss of life. This is not the first time that there are laws in our land that challenge our civil and human rights. This is not the first time. This is not the first time that we are forced to be reminded that even in 2012 race still matters.

Race still matters. If you don't believe me, look at the disproportionate incarceration rates of black and Hispanic men vs. White men. If you don't believe me, look at the color of the underperforming schools. If you don't believe me, look at the money that the federal government puts into prisons but allow historically Black colleges and universities to struggle everyday. Rizpah says I won't move until the right thing is done. The good news of this Rizpah response. Don't ever succumb to the thought that human power has the last say. Don't ever give in to the depressive ideas that laws cannot change. No matter how deep the laws may be, no matter how much power are in the hands of the police, we the people of faith yield a tool by God that causes kings to change, that causes legislations to change. We've got the power to make a change.

Dallas also noted that his Church's response was instrumental in his decision to become involved in multiple protests surrounding the Trayvon Martin case both on his campus and in his Church.

Sean also discussed how his Church used the entire Sunday service to focus on Trayvon Martin. He recalled,

We had shirts and signs made. The shirts said "TRAYVON MARTIN IS THIS JUSTICE?" and it had a picture of him in the middle and the signs said "THIS IS NOT JUSTICE". We [the guys] walked in [whispering] "justice, justice". Each one of us (three guys) gave a speech. And the girls walked in and whispered "This is not justice" and They also gave speeches. (Sean, Interview Three)

Speeches were written with the help of the Sunday school teachers and members of the Church community discussed African-American men's need to take action.

Racialized Experiences and Evidence of Transformation

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that there was a connection between the young men's racialized experiences and their view of the Church's role in their experiences as bicultural individuals. The young men who reported not having a racialized experience expressed their understanding of their Black experience in terms of historical events. They demonstrated an awareness of the dehumanization faced by African Americans in the past, but were unable to articulate any effects that dehumanization had on their personal experiences today. For example, when asked what his family taught him about being Black, Christian responded,

I'm always going to be faced with some type of struggle or adversity because of the color of my skin. That it's going to be harder in the world as opposed to a white man because of my ancestry. [My parents also told me] how [when] we became free it upset a large number of people and there is a large number of people against people of my color. (Christian, Interview One)

Also during Interview One, when asked about his personal experiences as a person of color, Christian did not link any direct personal experiences with issues of discrimination. In the following conversation this absence is noted.

Interviewer: Are you a minority?
Christian: Yes
Interviewer: What does that mean?
Christian: There are not many Black people. There are only a small number of them, and plenty of other racial groups that have higher numbers than we do.
Interviewer: Do you feel you have less respect as a minority?
Christian: Yeah.
Interviewer: Has there ever been an occasion when you were reminded that society feels that way?
Christian: No.

In contrast, Brandon encountered racialized experiences in middle school and his description of the Church is both historical and religious, but he described how this institution also provides networking and support for him. Both DeVante and Aaron experienced racialized events and directly attributed their academic and personal successes to the Black church. DeVante explained:

I feel like junior high school was the manifestation of what I learned about being Black (as viewed by society) at church and at home. I was like “Oh ... there it is!” I saw how other people soaked up the media [representation of Blacks] and that led to how they treated us in real life ... (without the church and my family) I wouldn’t have been as confident as a person in my ability or in the world in general. (DeVante, Interview Two)

The *testimonios* provided by Aaron and DeVante seem to demonstrate a transformation, or shift in consciousness, in their reflections on past and current racial experiences. In discussing how he dealt with racial jokes the year after his teacher referred to him as monkey, Aaron said,

One time this girl tried to talk to me, and this boy was like “Why are you talking to my girl?” He got mad and threw my chips. I pushed him, and he pushed me into the bushes. I punched him in the face. One of the teachers came running through the hall and said

she could hear the hit way on the other side of the hallway. At the end of the conversation [with the teacher] I got sent to the office. It bothered me that that happened. It seemed like everything was set up for them and for me I was like designed to get in trouble. After this [incident] I got mad at the racial jokes and in 8th grade I told them “Don’t say that!” A couple of times I would get mad ... and tell the teachers. (Aaron, Interview Two)

DeVante shared how different his responses are as a college student. In describing his interaction with a college classmate, DeVante reflected:

When she got there she said some very ignorant things. Not on purpose, she wasn’t trying to be racist, but she was honestly ignorant about black people and culture. Like, she said something about this one girl’s weave ... and there were a lot of situations like that. There were times when people who weren’t black said or did something’s that was ignorant towards black culture and they had to be educated on that. It never escalated to a shouting match. Sometimes they agreed and sometimes they didn’t, but we just sat down and talked about it which I think is a good thing. Because it could’ve gone a very different way ... I’m doing things on campus to change and make sure things like that go away over time. (DeVante, Interview Two)

Culturally Responsive Caring

The young men provided in their *testimonios* evidence of culturally responsive caring occurring among their Church members. The young men felt that the Church members demonstrated culturally responsive care toward them. The following are examples of how this caring was enacted by the Church:

Church members clearly communicate their affection for the young men.

I feel like [my relationship with church members] was more casual but like closer level ... we had time to get to know each other personally. (DeVante, Interview Three)

Church members clearly communicate their behavior and academic expectations.

You hear your mom and family say “Okay ... you can’t be around her acting like this because white people are going to see that and treat you like this.” I’m like ... I don’t even see white people around. Then you get to junior high school and see they [white people] actually do take that to heart and treat you a little bit differently. (DeVante, Interview Two)

Church members provide academic assistance.

There's this lady at my church named Janette. I don't know if she has a degree but I know she goes to college and she's really good at science and writing and just about everything so sometimes I'll take my homework to her on Wednesdays at Bible Study or something and she'll help me out with that and then she'll go back in the sanctuary. Like certain people if they need help, someone will say "oh talk to so and so and they'll help you out with it" so there's different resources. (Aaron, Interview Three)

[My Assistant Pastor] helped me on several projects. He's taught me different things, he's helped me study because he's a teacher as well. (Christian, Interview Three)

Church members offer networking resources and support.

Most of the people at church are in the field that I want to be in so they're more business owners and they do electronics. I see their path and I want to do it this way. I see their path as like if I focus more on this path, I'll be successful just like them. (Sean, Interview Three)

Church members model acceptable behavior.

They have a mentoring program at our church, I believe it's called the Sons of Success and they bring a lot of speakers to come talk to the guys around age 12 and up and sometimes they bring their own sons. They come and they tell us little things to keep us on the straight path and they tell us that being a man doesn't just come immediately. (Sean, Interview, Three)

Church members review individual and community goals.

There's a lot more encouragement [from my church] to become successful and still giving glory to God. (Christian, Interview, Three)

Church members offer public and private acknowledgement.

Every year [my church does] academic awards. They announce your GPA to the church and congratulate everybody or they made a big deal when I got into my university....not just me they do that to all the kids. (DeVante, Interview Three)

[My church] has a special service set aside for us in the summer break. It's called Youth Appreciation Day and they recognize all of your achievements throughout the year. The graduates for the entire year, preschool all the way up to college, and we even get free school supplies. (Christian, Interview Three)

Evidence of Witnessing

Beyond the powerful experience of having the researcher, a Black Church member, listen, affirm, and thus participate in witnessing their *testimonios*, a variety of examples of witnessing occurred during the collection of data. Two examples, in particular, well-illustrate this phenomenon. The first occurred during Interview Three in a discussion with DeVante about how he had utilized the Church's teachings during his time in college.

Interviewer: Is there a song, a saying, or lesson that was taught at church that helps you in bad times?

DeVante: Grateful by Hezekiah Walker

Interviewer: Can you remember a time when you played that? What situation were you going through?

DeVante: I think probably ... my first quarter playing basketball when I got my grades. I was going through it right then. It was all bad. That's the only time I can specifically remember playing that song but I know it's been other times. That's the song I play the most.

Interviewer: You know what song was my song...that I cried to at my university?

DeVante: What?

Interviewer: My freshmen year it was when God's Property came out. It was *It's Over Now*. I was studying for tests crying. It was all bad!

DeVante: *(laughs)*

Interviewer: But it was that once song ... for me ... this idea that you cry because you're sad. I wasn't sad. I knew that I had to get through something. I knew that I could get through it ... tear stains were on the Chemistry book.

DeVante: Yeah ... I know ... no matter what I'm going through I'm always like I'll be alright. No matter the outcome is ... I'll be alright.

A second example was during Interview Three when Aaron was asked about a lesson he learned in Church that had helped him. He shared,

Aaron: There was this story about a mom. She was an older mom but it was at her daughter's graduation. At the graduation they called all the people's names and she told her mom, "Mom do not shout at my graduation, just don't do it. If they tell you to hold your applause, just don't do it." [The mom] said "Okay I will try, I can't guarantee but I will try". (At the graduation) The mom was holding the family's hand and just shaking. When they called the daughter's name the mom started thinking of all the floors she washed and all the different things she did to get the daughter where she was and all she could say was "Thank you". And (the mom) just got louder and louder and finally it just erupted and she just shouted at the graduation. So it was kind of like I don't want my grandmother to shout but I want to make her happy so it kind of made me like I want my grandmother to be like that. I want to make her happy like that when I graduate.

Interviewer: I've heard that story before actually. The mom has a different thought with each shout. So I think about the floors I've washed, and then I say thank you. And then I think about the people who said I wouldn't amount to nothing, and I say thank you. In that story you could definitely take the role of that graduate or the grandmother. There are going to be those times when you're going to have to wash those floors metaphorically speaking, right?

Aaron: Definitely

Interviewer: And there is going to be some groundwork that nobody else is doing but in the end it'll pay off.

Aaron: *(laughs)* That's what my grandma says.

Summary

The *testimonios* of the six young men provided insight into how bicultural students were perceived in their family, school, and church communities. *Testimonios* also seem to indicate a relationship between the occurrence of a racializing experience and a transformation or shift in

consciousness. In addition themes that linked to critical pedagogy and culturally responsive care appeared. Finally, the researcher's role as a witness to the *testimonios*, in contrast to traditional research notions of distanced and "objective" researcher, was shown to positively impact the research process, through affirming the experiences of the young men. The next chapter discusses how those *testimonios* position the Black church to positively contribute to policy concerning the academic success of African-American male students.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men”
Frederick Douglass
(as cited in Nazari, 2013)

The Black Church’s role in providing encouragement in the face of dehumanization for its parishioners has been well documented. The Church’s success in striving for humanization and liberation during the Jim Crow and Civil Rights eras led to changes in all areas of the Black experience. There are great similarities between the humanization needed then and the bicultural affirmation needed in the school environment today.

This study seeks to understand the ways the Black Church liberates young African-American male students thereby impacting their ability to enact their social agency and transform their worlds. The critical emancipatory lens used to understand the Black Church’s contribution recognizes the ideological conflicts, contradictions, and limitations found in all human contexts, including the Black Church. The focus on affirmation does not negate the presence of patriarchy, authoritarianism, and heterosexism that are present in the Black Church. This research, however, is focused on the power of affirmation and therefore focuses on ways African-Americans males are humanized through their church experience.

The *testimonios* of six students were analyzed for evidence of specific experiences of the Black Church that assisted African-American males with the challenges found in academic settings. The analysis of their Church experiences begins with a discussion of how the Black Church affirms the bicultural identity of Black males. This is followed by an examination of the

bicultural response patterns of the young men. Finally, the chapter concludes with a consideration of the similarities and differences between culturally responsive care, as demonstrated by church members and the students' teachers.

Affirmation of Bicultural Students

Critical bicultural pedagogy holds that academic success and failure is determined by cultural and economic forces that grant privilege and opportunities to students from the dominant class or who have demonstrated a mastery of the dominant culture and its knowledge. The Black Church, according to the *testimonios* of the participants, seems to affirm bicultural students in at least three specific ways:

1. Acknowledgement of the bicultural identity.
2. Providing a message of community, hope and persistence.
3. Utilization of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Students who disclosed personal experiences with the dominant culture's ideals of Blackness first encountered those ideals in school settings. The overt and covert labeling of the students as mischievous, mediocre, or inferior was often first experienced in the middle school classroom. This seems to have affected young men's enjoyment of a specific academic subject, even if they had demonstrated mastery of and pleasure in the subject during previous school years. When asked about why his favorite subjects changed each year during middle school, DeVante stated:

Back then it was very teacher dependent, so I had favorite classes, not favorite subjects. I don't think I really had a favorite subject until I got to high school. I could really love math and science, but if the teacher sucked, then I would hate the class. (Interview Two)

The interconnectedness of subject matter and instructor can be extremely problematic for the bicultural student encountering teachers who withheld privilege and opportunity because of their own oppressive beliefs and deficit notions of Black intellect and Black masculinity. Without intervention from the young men's communities, this experience can engender lasting effects academically.

The Black Church provided a critical understanding of the dominant culture and, like the young men's families, was clear about how dominant cultural values were often in opposition to those of the Black community. This understanding was not confined to messages from the pulpit but also appeared in interactions with Church members. It is important to note that the Black Church, in its role in the bicultural affirmation of African-American males, references both the communal dimension of the Black church, including the norms, values, customs and traditions, as well as the interpersonal dimension, which includes the kinship, mentoring, and supportive relationships found between church members. The affirmation occurs where the dialectical relationships between the larger community and the interpersonal kinship relationships are allowed to flourish.

The Black Church carries with it value systems and standards that seem to provide the young men with a completely different reality than they believe they experience in the classroom. The findings here indicated that the church establishes an expectation of community success and empowerment, while affirming the young men and strengthening their self-esteem. Students' academic success is not considered an individualist pursuit but one, that the Church teaches, contributes to the overall success of the community. Although the young men were unable to recall specific sermons from their pastors, they were all able to recall general themes of

community, hope, and persistence in those sermons. The influence of these themes continued to be impactful for the young men now attending college.

Contending with Racialized Experiences

Beverly Tatum (2003) describes a racialized experience as an event or series of events that force a young person to acknowledge the personal impact of racism. The impact of this event seems to be based on its persistence and authority differential. Thus, a racialized experience triggered by a teacher in a classroom setting will have a greater impact than an experience with a stranger because the student has more exposure to the teacher and the teacher yields substantial authority. This is evident in the racialized experiences of DeVante and Dallas. DeVante's experience of the teacher calling him a hoodrat was pervasive. Not only did it affect DeVante's grades but also had an impact on his general affection for the academic setting. Dallas' experience at the summer program was an isolated event. Once removed from the environment, the experience seemed to carry with it little to no impact, according to Dallas. Inherent in DeVante's experience, however, was a withholding of privilege that took place in the form of discipline and academic sanctions. Dallas' experience, although extremely uncomfortable, carried with it minimal repercussions, once he was out of the brief setting.

The impact of a racialized experience seemed to affect the young men's perceptions of the influence of the Black Church. Following a significant racialized experience, the young men were more receptive, finding the critical teachings of the Black Church to be fertile ground for their understanding of the world. Direct instruction in the form of sermons and biblical lessons, as well as the indirect instruction occurring in conversations with Church members provided multiple opportunities for the Church community to critically inform the daily lives of the

students. Students experiencing messages of inferiority and inequality in the classroom found support and relevance in the lessons of the Church.

According to the *testimonios* of the participants, the Black church courageously identifies the issues cause by white supremacist values present in the dominant culture and provides a space for students to reflect on their lived experiences. It is important to note that the Black Church is only one vehicle that Black males utilize for the transmission of critical teachings. For example, most of the study participants noted a form of critical teachings occurring from family members and African-American teachers. However, it is worth noting that it is most probably that the guidance of family members may have also been influenced by the Black Church during their lifetime. Dallas shared lessons he received from his grandfather:

My grandfather always told me stories about his childhood and how he only went to third grade. He didn't really know how to read. He worked in a winery plant. This Jewish man made him the manager of the plant over white people ... and some white men left because they said they would never be managed by a Black man. [My grandfather] said everything that he needed was in his mind. Whatever he learned and whatever he secured in his mind and in his understanding, nobody would ever be able to take away from him ... That story speaks volumes ... If he did that with a third grade education what am I going to do with a college degree. The potential that I have to get so much further ... only because I have greater access to opportunity. (Dallas, Interview One)

These critical teachings are more than feel-good stories. These stories are situated in a historical reality that helps validate the young men's current experiences, provide healing, and share expectations for the young men's future. Aaron provided a reflection on a lesson of Black manhood taught by Mr. Washington, a Black teacher at Victory High School:

[Mr. Washington and I] had a huge talk about what a man should be. I learned a lot... We looked up the words character and spiritual ... and these words were descriptions about what a Black man should be. [He] said, "Whenever I don't see you living up to these words, I'm going to let you know." (Aaron, Interview Two)

Other critical teachings provided a counternarrative for deficit assumptions surrounding Black humanity or the notion of Black inferiority in the school environment and society at large. The benefit of these critical teachings seemed to be invaluable for respondents in the sample. The critical teachings of the Black Church (1) validated the students' personal experiences, (2) supported a positive self-concept by denouncing white supremacist values and norms, (3) modeled appropriate ways to respond to the dominant culture's views, and (4) reaffirmed positive expectations.

Once the young men in this study had an opportunity to experience the critical teachings of the Black Church, their consciousness—their understanding of their personal histories and their environments—seemed to be redefined in ways that affirmed their own humanity. The young men, able to explain racialized experiences in historical, cultural, and spiritual terms, were able to create a response to the racial incident as well as anticipate their responses to future incidents. Aaron's transformation was demonstrated in his passive response to being called a monkey by this teacher and his active response to the racial jokes by classmates a year later. Aaron's new response to the racial jokes indicated a shift in his understanding of the problem and an greater empowered sense of his ability to respond. The behavior demonstrated by his classmates, initially seen as a personal issue between Aaron and the aggressor, was re-envisioned (and more accurately so) as part of a larger historical and cultural issue faced by Black men, that consequently became unacceptable. The transformations that followed the students' responses to racialized events seem to create permanent changes in their understandings of self and community. New identities, when acted upon by the young men, also seem to inspire change in

their surroundings. Here, the praxis described by Freire is at work, namely, “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 51).

The Bicultural Critical Praxis Cycle

The *testimonios* gathered provided useful descriptions of the ways in which participants engaged racialized experiences and then moved to make shifts in their responses according to the support and guidance they had received from the Black church, their family, and teachers. The Bicultural Critical Praxis Cycle proposed below is a dynamic, continuous process based on their experiences, which can help to better illustrate the dynamic of transformation experienced by the bicultural individual. Transformations are evident in the future responses to racialized experiences, as unlearning racism and oppression requires a change in both thinking and action (hooks, 2003). At the onset of another racialized experience, the young men spoke about being able to use the knowledge and language acquired from the previous critical teaching to address the oppressive conditions they experienced.

Utilizing Darder’s (2012) description of praxis, the right half of the cycle is known as the concrete context. In this condition, students are subjects in a dialectical relationship with the world. In the left half of the cycle—the theoretical context—the student plays the role of a cognitive subject in the concrete moment. The Black Church then, in its role as a prophetic and liberatory vehicle, affirms the bicultural identity of an African-American male through its critical teachings, which in turn changes the individual’s consciousness, directly altering his responses to the world in ways that affirm his humanity and empower his sense of social agency as an individual and as a member of the Black Church and larger community. The bicultural affirmation experienced by the students supports the humanity of these young men and by doing

so prepares them to more effectively contend with experiences of racialization and other forms of oppression.

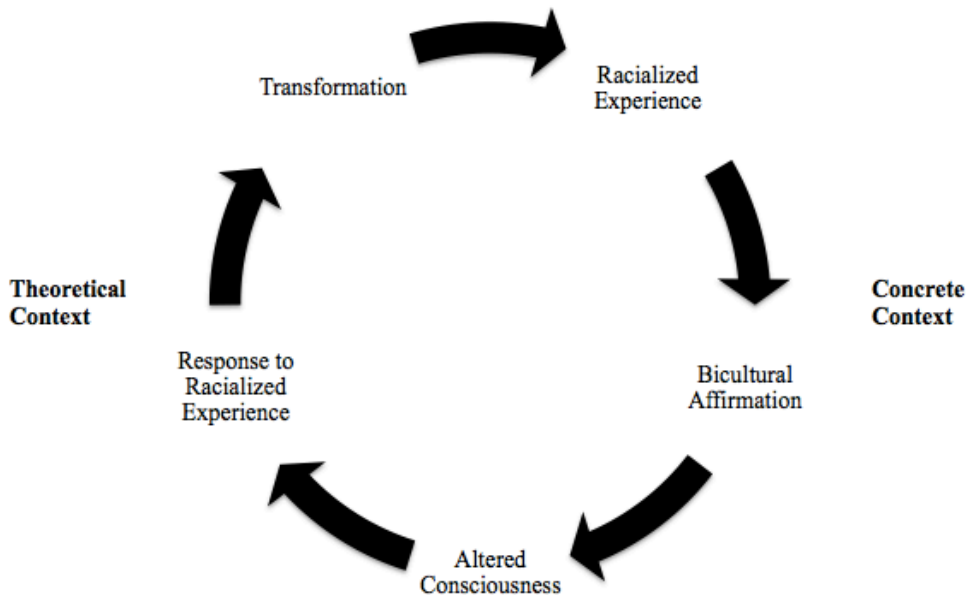


Figure 1. The Bicultural Critical Praxis Cycle. Adapted from *Culture and Power in the Classroom* by Antonia Darder, Copyright 2012. This figure illustrates the process of transformation bicultural students experience after the onset of a racialized experience.

Bicultural Cultural Response Patterns

As discussed earlier, Darder (2012) purposed four response patterns to the biculturation process. Three of these response patterns were identified as most prevalent among participant responses. There seemed to be a relationship between the participant's cultural response patterns, the absence or presence of acknowledged racialized experiences, and the participant's articulation of the Church's role in his school experience. The first cultural response pattern to

be discussed will be cultural dualism, followed by cultural separatism, and then cultural negotiation.

Christian, Sean, and Dallas: Cultural Dualism

The Cultural Dualist response pattern indicates the individual may utilize two separate identities or predominant response patterns: one that identifies with the primary cultural community and one that is tied to acceptance of mainstream values. Christian, Sean, and Dallas all communicated an acceptance of mainstream values of individualism, freedom, and egalitarianism, while simultaneously acknowledging unfair practices of the dominant culture. What is key here is that these hegemonic values are anchored within solely the locus of control of the individual, with little to no concern for the communal epistemologies that might inform these values, particularly within cultural contexts where communal identities are considered to be more significant to social and political survival (Darder 2012).

For example, Sean reflected on his family's lessons about negative stereotypes that come with being Black. He stated, "[I learned] you have to prove others wrong when they give you a stereotype...like oh he's Black so he doesn't care about school." But when he is asked about his personal beliefs about his Black identity he omitted obstacles the dominant culture's beliefs could have had on his experience:

Just because you're black doesn't give you an advantage or doesn't give you a disadvantage. It's who you are. I had to take that and it doesn't deal with skin color, although people make it about that in society, it deals with you as a character. I continue to strive and ignore the fact of people saying "Oh it's because [I'm] black I'm always in trouble" or "The teacher picks on me just because I'm black" I had to just ignore them and remember that. It's not because I'm black it's because of my character. (Sean, Interview One)

Sean, Christian, and Dallas demonstrate knowledge about their primary culture as taught to them by their families and Church communities; however, that knowledge bears no influence on their own experiences with the dominant culture, leaving the dominant culture unchallenged and the contradictions and tensions that might result from epistemological difference in these worldviews unaddressed. It should be noted that unlike the other young men, Christian, Sean, and Dallas reported having no racialized experiences during their time in school. Their limited exposure to racialized experiences in the school setting seemed to restrict their ability to engage in a bicultural critical praxis, thereby resulting in what might be considered separate primary and dominant cultural identities. Although Dallas encountered a racialized experience during a summer program, it was confined to a specific time and place, and the individual held little power over Dallas. The absence of significant racialized experiences supported, for these respondents, an assimilated understanding of equality and individuality, thus legitimizing values of the dominant culture.

Brandon: Cultural Separatism

Cultural Separatist response patterns are associated with remaining predominantly within the primary culture, while rejecting the dominant culture. Brandon exhibited a clear predisposition toward a preference for his primary culture when he shared:

My family reassured me by the different food that we ate ... different music that we listened to. I knew I was Black because of the food that we ate. I knew I was Black because of the music we listened to. I knew I was Black because of how we danced. We are a bit more free than [other cultures]. I knew I was darker than others ... but it was something deep down in my soul ... I mean ... this is me. I love being Black. You should want to be Black because of our history. I have histories inside of me. I'm walking history in a sense. So that made me so proud to want to be Black. (Brandon, Interview One)

Brandon had his first racialized experience during middle school. Brandon shared a comment made by a teacher in which the teacher made assumptions about the educational level of his parents. He also described feeling like an outsider once he transitioned to his desegregated middle school. It seems plausible that his rejection of the dominant culture is related, in part, to the dismissal he experienced by his teacher. His desire to be accepted and valued attracted him to a community that affirmed his existence. Brandon has made a decision to embrace his primary culture. He remains very active in the Black Church and most of his extra-curricular activities involve the Church in some capacity. Although he engages with the dominant culture for school and work, he is clear about his social preference for those contexts anchored in Black culture.

DeVante and Aaron: Cultural Negotiation

The Cultural Negotiation response reflects an attempt to mediate, reconcile, and integrate the reality of lived experiences in an effort to retain the primary cultural identity and orientation, while still functioning within the dominant culture for social transformation of the larger society. Both DeVante and Aaron most clearly articulated the differences between the dominant culture and their primary culture and how they utilize the Church to mediate the negative effects. Both of these young Black men had extremely persistent racialized experiences at early ages. These experiences involved individuals who held power and influence over them in school. DeVante and Aaron demonstrated respect and admiration for their primary culture. They also recognized their role in affecting change within the dominant culture, through their critical reflections and actions on its oppressive structures. In his response to the question of how he understands his blackness today DeVante states:

I think [about] hope and progress we as a people have made as a people in this country. I think sometimes our goals can become kind of short-sighted (graduate, get a job, house, car, etc.), and we forget that there are other sections of our lives that require just as much dedication and focus. Personally, looking back on my four years at [my university], there were a lot more things I could have become involved in outside of the classroom., I believe that this is what my mom had in the back of her head while raising me. Not necessarily to be the next MLK or Obama, but to strive to be a man that changes and inspires. (DeVante, Interview Three)

The cultural response patterns seem to be wholly affected by the presence of racialized experiences. Students who reported having persistent racialized experiences, with a significant authority differential, were more likely to mediate the values and standards of both the primary and dominant culture. In contrast, students who stated that they had never encountered racialized incidents were more likely to respond in ways that incorporated a dualism in values, despite contradictions and tensions that might exist between the two cultural value systems.

School Segregation and Culturally Responsive Adults Who Care

The racialized experiences of the participants attending desegregated schools were alarming. Desegregated communities seem to provide environmental cues that often trigger an examination of racial identity during middle school or junior high school (Tatum, 2003). The *testimonios* also support this conclusion. In his attempt to explain the differences in his understanding of his own racial identity from his segregated elementary school to his desegregated junior high school, DeVante asserted,

[Middle School] was the first time I was regularly in an environment where I was Black. Before that my schools were Black, my friends were Black ... if I had a white teacher, in that situation, he's (the teacher) white. I'm not Black, he's white. It's different. [Middle school] was the first time I was like I'm a minority here. (DeVante, Interview Two)

Aaron articulated this incongruous definition of his Black identity when he described how he felt during his junior high school experience:

It was kinda like people don't believe in how Black people really are. They believe in stereotypes and what other people believe we are. They believe in like the funny jokey type black person instead of the history behind it. (Aaron, Interview Two)

In a discussion about teachers' relationships with Black students in his desegregated middle school, Brandon stated, "All the Black kids were all in trouble all the time ... being kicked out of class. The white-black kids acted a certain way. When they got in trouble they weren't back talking ... the Black-Black kids had a mouth on them."

As middle-school students, DeVante, Aaron, and Brandon responded to their racialized experiences very differently. DeVante stood in constant opposition or resistance to the teachers. He routinely challenged the teachers about their rules, often making a point to highlight mistakes teachers had made. Aaron's frustrations routinely resulted in behavioral sanctions. Aaron chose to act out his frustration. He frequently was sent to the principal's office or had to serve detentions for talking in class or not paying attention. Brandon withdrew from the academic setting. He admitted to being very quiet in those teachers' classes. His grades were not strong, and he recalled being detached from the school culture. For all three students, their behaviors in the classrooms of oppressive teachers were drastically different from their behavior in other classes. Thus, it seems, an oppressive classroom can have extremely negative effects on the academic performance of bicultural students, in that it not only isolates them but also can cause them to feel abandoned and disconnected within the classroom.

Among the young men in the study, those who attended desegregated middle schools reported having racialized experiences in the classroom. Whereas it is premature to conclude that teachers in desegregated schools are unable to engage in culturally responsive care, it seems plausible that a lack of exposure to bicultural students increases the likelihood that teachers are

more apt to maintain and reproduce dominant cultural values in ways that diminish and inferiorize students from subordinate cultural communities. Students seem more likely, on the other hand, to encounter teachers who more frequently engaged in culturally responsive care in segregated environments. Although the reasons for this fall outside the scope of this study, a discussion about the culturally responsive care agents in the Black Church may shed light on the obstacles preventing culturally responsive care from existing in desegregated school environments.

The young men's descriptions of how the Black Church engaged students were aligned with Gay's (2010) description of a culturally responsive care agent. Church members as well as African-American teachers were able to provide the young men with a kinship-relationship that emphasized community over individuality and psychological well-being over solely academic success. This support, although noted by all students to be occurring at Victory High School, was noticeably absent in the lives of students attending desegregated schools. Catholic schools have been documented to be extremely successful in fostering academic achievement among working-class, bicultural students. Perhaps this is due to the increased likelihood of the school staff to assume a theological philosophy rooted in the life and dignity of the human person, care for God's creation, and the importance of family and community (Massaro, 2011). Although alone this is not adequate to effectively respond to all the needs of bicultural students, it may however account for the success of Catholic schools over traditional forms of schooling.

Researcher as Witness

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the experience of having the researcher, as a Black Church member, listen, affirm, and thus participate in witnessing their *testimonios* was a

powerful dialogical experience for both participants and the researcher. The power of this experience of “researcher as witness” incorporates the critical concept in Darder’s (2012) critical theory of the bicultural teacher as bicultural mirror, who can affirm the voices and lived experiences of bicultural students. This was enacted in this study through my presence as a member of the Black Church and as a bicultural researcher knowledgeable of the biculturation process. In using my lived and theoretical understanding of this phenomenon, I was able to not only create the conditions for participants in this study to share their *testimonios*, but also to sit as a witness and bicultural agent of affirmation for them. To listen and engage their experiences within the context of this powerful research dynamic could only be made possible given my subject location as a member of the Black Church and a bicultural human being.

This phenomenon is again well-exemplified by my conversations with participants. As a bicultural researcher, I was in a position to affirm the *testimonios* of participants, by affirming their experiences of self as Black students and critically engaging their responses, at times based on my own lived history and personal knowledge as a member of the Black Church. The result was that my personal story also invited participants to think more deeply about their own experiences, in a more liberating context. In the conversation with Aaron, for example, I connected two previously isolated ideas or thoughts, namely, the church lesson and a lesson from his grandmother. By so doing, Aaron was introduced to a new way of looking at his own personal experiences that utilized his personal history and experiences.

Hence, just as the bicultural teacher can participate *with* and affirm the voices of bicultural students, within those cultural experiences that generally exist outside the purview of mainstream classroom discourses; so too can the bicultural researcher as witness not only

observe, but also engage with participants in ways that provide opportunities for deeper reflection and affirmation of their lived moments of social and material oppression. The underlying intent of this process of bicultural researcher as witness is to open up research participants to unexamined possibilities that can truly support participants in becoming full subjects of their lived histories.

Conclusion

The Black Church offers young African-American males more than material resources. First, the Church provides the students with a lucid understanding of their bicultural identities by clearly identifying the values of both Black culture and speaking to the tensions inherent in the racialization often experiences within settings with members of the dominant culture. Second, the Church, as an emancipatory institution, teaches dialectical thought and a dialectical form of knowledge through critical engagement and analysis of the world. This introduces students to contradictions and tensions, which in turn allows them to become aware of limitations that can suppress their aspirations and achievements. Third, the Black Church provides consistent access to critical teachings through exposure to care agents. This is a crucial step in the Bicultural Critical Praxis Cycle, which ultimately has the potential to transform their self-concept and view of the world. This is evident in the resultant change of participants' responses to racialized incidents. Finally, the Black Church provides a counterhegemonic community for African-American male students, thereby allowing them the space to speak about their experiences of oppression in the larger world. The Black Church has evolved from a space of refuge during slavery, to a site of renewal and resistance during the Civil Rights Era, to a community of

democracy, dialogue, and transformation. And when so doing the Black Church can serve its mission as a liberating force for those in physical, mental, or emotional bondage.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Teachers who seek to be caring, but refuse to care in a culturally appropriate way are still unfair. Likewise, teachers who seek to do justice, without attention to caring for the individual, are still hurtful (Siddle Walker & Snarey, 2004, p. 112).

The purpose of this study was to situate the Black Church in the discussion of ways to support the development of bicultural students. Through an analysis of the *testimonios* of six African-American male students, this study contends that the Black Church provides an authentic space for bicultural students to engage in a critical analysis of their personal experience and their world. The Black Church accomplishes this in three ways:

1. The Black church helps students articulate their bicultural identities.
2. The Black church teaches dialectical thought and dialectical forms of knowledge through its critical analysis of our world.
3. The Black church offers the bicultural student regular access to critical teachings through direct and indirect care agents.

For African-American male students who readily encounter dehumanizing and oppressive messages from the dominant culture, the Black Church uses formal and informal interactions to demonstrate empathy, love, and a critical bicultural pedagogy.

Significance and Implications

Noticeably absent from the educational debate surrounding educational reform is the voice of the Black community. The causes of this omission become more apparent as issues of culture and power are disentangled. Despite the successes of the Black community in educating students prior to *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), the Black community has been silenced and forced to support the implementation of reform efforts that are culturally dissonant and detrimental to the psychosocial health of Black students.

History is rich with failed educational reforms focused on the achievement and education of Black students. Those reforms had very distinguishing similarities. First, past reform efforts were influenced by wealthy individuals unaffiliated with the Black community. Second, these reforms were typically endorsed by a few African Americans who are detached from the current realities of the community and its inhabitants. Finally, the reforms included assumptions based on values of inferiority, thus each reform attempted to *change* African Americans instead of changing the societal structures, beliefs, and values that created the problem. In *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Carter Godwin Woodson (1933/2013) reminds us that the “education of people should begin with themselves” (p. 26). There is, therefore, value in the Black community establishing the agenda for educational reform.

Hence, the Black church stands to be a significant contributor to educational reform. Conditions supported by both the literature and *testimonios* collected for this study suggest that the Black church is situated in a key position to offer a critical voice to educational reform, as it pertains to the pedagogical practice of schools and the needs of Black male students.

1. The Black church has an intimate connection to the African-American community based on mutual respect and common goals.
2. The Black Church has an authentic understanding of the history of the African-American people since both the history of the church and the people are interwoven.
3. The Church has experienced success in their pursuit of academic achievement of Black students in schools pre *Brown vs. Board of Education*.
4. Today, many Black churches have cultivated relationships with inner city schools to offer assistance inside and outside of the classroom.

In addition to the Black Church's ability to directly impact the achievement of Black males through its participation in educational reform, the Black Church can also offer support in rethinking the mainstream classroom experience. The Black Church demonstrates innovation in the areas of classroom instruction and student-teacher relationships. Bicultural students excel when their lived histories are incorporated into the teaching moment. The Black Church accomplishes this by incorporating the daily realities of Black male students, as seen in their approach to raising important issues related to the Trayvon Martin case.

Focusing on the pedagogical aspects of the Black church that have shown to be beneficial to the educational experience of Black males, this study recommends the following strategies:

1. Black male students should be provided with content material and strategies that strengthen their bicultural voice thereby developing their ability to understand their own experiences (Darder, 2012).
2. Black male students benefit from participating in a bicultural classroom community.

This type of classroom community offers kinship relationships among students and

teachers. The community provides both individual and community goals that all participants are to achieve. These goals support the belief that all members in the community are intelligent and more than capable of success (Gay, 2000).

3. Black male students must have a counterhegemonic space to critically analyze the oppressive messages of Black intellectual ability and masculinity (Darder, 2012).
4. Black male students benefit from having models that provide networking resources, academic support, and enhance the classroom learning community by openly communicating their affection and confidence in the abilities and intellectual capabilities of Black male students.

What may stand in the way of inviting the Black church's voice to be heard is the dominant culture's discourse surrounding the purpose of schooling and its assumptions relative to who possesses knowledge. As the purpose of education became aligned with workforce preparation, society began seeking input from corporate philanthropist on how best to educate students (Davis et al., 2012), while marginalizing further community voices. This methodically dismissed the voice of the Black community from all discussions surrounding educational reform. However, even when allowed to join in the discussion, those opinions deviating from the dominant discourse related to standardized testing practices and workplace readiness have been quickly dismissed. Educational reform has been initiated by individuals who desire to make an appropriate response but are unable to do so, because the resulting response is dominated by the deficit perspectives of individuals outside of the community.

Current initiatives like Common Core State Standards as well as reforms from the philanthropic and corporate sectors have succeeded in standardizing both the content and process

of learning, witting or unwittingly homogenizing the classroom environment. The use of assimilative educational approaches, so common today, continues to negatively impact the academic formation of bicultural students and, in particular, Black male students. Undoubtedly, reform is needed with respect to both content and standards, but the findings of the present research study suggest a dire need for renewed focus on the cultural understanding of teachers and a greater need for bicultural educators, who today make up only a very small fraction of classroom teachers, to meet the needs of Black male students who have historically struggled to achieve in mainstream classroom environments.

There are two types of standards currently guiding classroom learning. The first, content area standards are typically a derivative of state and federal standards and these determine what is to be taught and the tools used to accomplish the task. As previously stated, these culturally assimilative standards have focused on workplace preparedness at the expense of the Humanities and the Arts (Davis, Hartoonian, Van Scotter, & White, 2012). The second, less acknowledged, set of standards is the teacher's personal, political, and philosophical standards, which are anchored in their particular cultural experience. These standards include the teacher's personal cultural beliefs surrounding knowledge, behavior, and language. But these standards, moreover, determine teachers' expectations as to which and how much particular student can achieve; and these expectations are well-communicated, covertly and overtly, to the students they teach.

Clearly articulated in the *testimonios* of the young men is the importance of adult-student interactions on middle and high school students. The young men described the benefits associated with having their histories, culture, and current realities acknowledged and understood by the adults in their lives. They described the importance of having adult interactions that

affirm their identities. Finally, they shared the significance of hearing messages that offered encouragement through stories of community, hope, and persistence. Simply stated, Black male students require experiences of support in the cultural manner that is most appropriate to their understanding of the world and in ways that counter the deficit notions of the dominant culture. This bicultural ethos of teaching and learning is often lacking within most mainstream classroom environments (Darder 2012).

In the attempt to standardize education, we have also, in theory, standardized the pedagogical practice of the teacher. The teacher is no longer given the flexibility to respond to the various needs of students, as required, instead their focus is placed on standardized curricula and high stakes testing. Consequently, teacher preparedness programs focus on preparing teachers for the implementation of standards, rather than preparing them to enact and inspire critical consciousness among students, particularly those whose community histories have been mired by slavery, colonization, and genocide. Teacher preparation programs, moreover, continue to ignore the significance of the cultural worldviews and personal histories of teachers. Mainstream teacher preparation programs, for the most part, tend to fall into traditional assimilative practices of schooling and thus, is incapable of addressing the oppressive pedagogical beliefs and values that prevent Black male students from experiencing a genuinely democratic education.

In many ways, schools have become analogous to hospitals. Teachers, like doctors, are assumed to provide a prescriptive treatment for a diagnosed deficit. This idea omits the contributions of black male students to the classroom environment and, equally as detrimental, ignores the experiences of the Black bicultural teacher that could establish and enhance true

learning classroom environments. Contemporary teachers encounter numerous obstacles within the structures of mainstream schools not found in the Black Church—obstacles that prevent them from enacting a bicultural affirming pedagogy for Black male students. Some of these obstacles include the following:

1. The established power differential found in the classroom between teacher and student. This power differential is, in part, due to the history of schooling as well as unchallenged issues of culturally hegemony, racism, and classism.
2. Limited interactions between teachers and communities as well as a propensity to create norms and beliefs based on those limited interactions.
3. A heightened emphasis on content knowledge, fragmented from cultural knowledge, which dictates the allotment of resources like time, personnel, and money.
4. Lack of opportunities to challenge deficit notions and racializing processes inherent in mainstream U.S. culture of schooling, beyond the teacher's personal experience.
5. Limited opportunities to engage in meaningful critical dialogue that would allow teachers and students to reflect together on disabling beliefs and values, as well as on ways to remedy the obstacles these create in the classroom.

Un-standardizing the teacher is a task, from the perspective of this study, which should substantively involve teacher education programs, Black Church leaders, and school leaders. Teacher education programs must be intentional in their efforts to challenge the racializing assumptions of pre-service teachers, especially those assumptions surrounding intellectual ability, if there is to be a positive shift in the academic formation and achievement of Black male students. It simply is not enough for these programs to focus on content pedagogy, while ignoring the

personal or cultural pedagogy of teachers, consciously and unconsciously imparted on their students. Teacher education programs, especially those focused on social justice, must commit themselves to graduating bicultural teachers, in this case Black male and female educators, who are clear about their role as culturally responsive care agents who can both support and create the conditions for the empowerment of Black male students in their classrooms. This is only possible when teachers are genuinely conscious of those ideologies that hinder the freedom of African-American male students, recognize best pedagogical practices that benefit bicultural students, and possess a strong conviction surrounding their ability to empower African-American male students, by encouraging them to name their experience, reflect on its meaning, and act in such a way that will support them in changing their world.

Principals and other school leaders also have a responsibility to support teachers in their pursuit of critical consciousness. The classroom, as was discussed earlier in this study, can be the site of liberation or domination (Darder, 2012; Freire, 1985). All school leaders, especially those in desegregated schools, must create a school-wide expectation that all teachers are responsible for creating liberatory spaces. School leaders must be critical of their own cultural practices that ignore or minimize the teachers' ability to meet the individual and communal needs of Black male students. Finally, school leaders, in conjunction with the Black Church, must continue engaging all educators in critical teachings on racism, cultural hegemony, and other issues of oppression and that impact the general student body's understanding of social justice concerns related to the racialization of African-American and other populations of color.

Further research that investigates various models of collaboration between school districts and Black Church communities is required, in order to enhance the participation of

community members in the empowerment of our children. Research is also needed to better explain and consider how bicultural educators can better participate in mediating the negative effects of dominant ideology in the lives of their students. Research could also potentially examine the role that bicultural educators play in providing an emancipatory or counterhegemonic space for bicultural students on campus. Finally, through a critical bicultural lens, further research could investigate segregated schools for their ability to support the academic formation of bicultural student.

The Black Church provides its young members with a liberatory space, thereby allowing them to exist and grow without the restrictions inherent in contending with oppressive racializing societal forces. Through its direct and indirect critical lessons, the Black Church provides critical teachings for its Black students, thereby altering their consciousness and strengthening their resolve to become conscious members of their communities and full subjects of history. The benefit of this experience seems to protect students from oppressive beliefs and false notions of Black inferiority. The academic profession can learn a great deal from the Black Church; the most important lesson being to genuinely acknowledge the racializing experiences of its students and teachers and to seek solutions anchored their everyday experiences. In doing so, the education community can better position itself to inspire authentic learning for all students, by acknowledging the cultural wisdom to be found within communities that have struggled to survive and create a place where Black children, particularly young Black males, can thrive and contribute to the world.

EPILOGUE

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

- Matthew 5:5

To My Beloved Community...

There are many sons and daughters who owe their success to the transformative teaching of the Black Church. I am honored to count myself in those numbers. Thank you for validating my existence in a world that fragmented and trivialized my being by solely focusing discussions upon my physical characteristics. Thank you for redefining Black intelligence in a world where to be Black and to be intelligent sometimes means to be quiet, passive, and accommodating or frustrated and enraged, instead of critical, forward thinking, and consciously empowered. And thank you for teaching me about a radical Jesus who always sought to affect change in the most substantial ways possible, through openly challenging injustice and social conditions that disable our potential to transform our world.

It is with this grateful heart that I appeal to you to continue your prophetic work for the cause of Christ. There are generations of children who have been taught a pedagogy of inferiority, otherness, and self-hate in U.S. schools. For eight hours a day, they are required to engage in a world that does not acknowledge nor understand their personal experiences and histories. They are required to learn from teachers who are, at times, oblivious to their own bias and prejudice and replicate inequalities and injustice in the one environment, other than the home, that should be a space of liberation. And yet, our children still survive. They survive because of their strength and their resilient spirit. They survived because they are genuinely meek of spirit.

I am reminded of the poem by Mary Karr (2002) entitled “Who the Meek Are Not”. In her discussion about the misconceptions of the term meek she writes:

My friend the Franciscan nun says we misread that word
meek in the Bible verse that blesses them.
To understand the meek (she says) picture a great stallion
at full gallop in a meadow, who — at his master's voice —
seizes up to a stunned but instant halt.
So with the strain of holding that great power in check,
the muscles along the arched neck keep eddying
and only the velvet ears prick forward, awaiting the next order.

So it is true of our children who, in their fragile, developmental stages, encounter environments that see them as incomplete, weak, and in need of “human” formation instead of realizing that at their feet sit pillars of strength; our future healers, teachers, and fighters for social justice.

But the Black Church has always known this. In the same spirit of healing that the Black Church used to address the issues of slavery and Jim Crow, the prophetic Black Church responds to the needs of our Black children, who are being kept from experiencing a transformative education. I beseech you to continue your critical teachings and fight for social justice. I hope my work here demonstrates the healing power of your communities and the equal importance of the preaching moment and relationships with Church members towards the success of our students. It is in the totality of the church experience, the critical bicultural teachings, the

scripture, the ministry in music and dance, and the Christian education department and relationships with congregants that the Black child is made whole.

There is an arm of the Black Church that has found worldly success in sharing of a prosperity gospel. This gospel subscribes to the idea that God will bless the individual, according to their faith in God. This gospel is extremely popular and accessible as it gives individuals a perceived autonomy over their lives. However, we must be cautious of prosperity gospel because it is antithetical to the theology of liberation that has delivered us from the oppressive structures of our past. To embrace the capitalistic notions of prosperity gospel, we are also embracing notions of individuality and competition, beliefs that separate us from our families, communities, and ultimately, ourselves and God. Bicultural students attending these churches may lack a critical understanding of their histories and personal experiences, which directly impacts their ability to handle aspects of the school environment that may be disparaging to their sense of self.

The Black Church has been a place of healing and transformation since its inception. May we continue working for the cause of Christ, healing and transforming this world today and the future world for our children to come.

Your Daughter,

Brandi

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW ONE- FAMILY

- I. Established norms.
 - i. How did you learn about your options to continue your education and pursue career opportunities in the future?
 - ii. How did you family support your academic success?
 - iii. What were your responsibilities/expectations with respect to school?
 - iv. What did you learn from your family about being male? How did they teach this? Was that similar or different that what you learned at school? How?
 - v. What did you learn from your family about being Black? How did they teach this? What this similar or different that what you learned at school? How?

INTERVIEW TWO- SCHOOL

- I. Describe yourself in elementary school.
 - i. What was your favorite subject?
 - ii. What extra-curricular activities were you involved in?
 - iii. Describe your interactions with your teachers. Other students?
 - iv. Who were influential people during this time?
- II. Describe yourself in junior high school.
 - i. What was your favorite subject?

- ii. What extra-curricular activities were you involved in?
 - iii. Describe your interactions with your teachers. Other students?
 - iv. Who were influential people during this time?
- III. Describe yourself in high school.
- i. What was your favorite subject?
 - ii. What extra-curricular activities were you involved in?
 - iii. Describe your interactions with teachers. Other students?
 - iv. Who were influential people during this time?
- IV. Describe yourself in college (if applicable).
- i. What was your favorite subject?
 - ii. What extra-curricular activities are you involved in?
 - iii. Describe your interactions with teachers. Other students.
 - iv. Who were influential people during this time?
 - v. What did you learn from your school about being male? How did they teach this? Was that similar or different that what you learned with your family? How?
 - vi. What did you learn from your school about being Black? How did they teach this? What this similar or different that what you learned at family? How?
 - vii. Describe an academic lesson that has helped you personally. Who taught it? Where did you learn it? How did it apply to your life?

INTERVIEW THREE- CHURCH

- I. Describe yourself in church.
 - i. What is your favorite church activity?
 - ii. What other activities were you involved in? Did your involvement in those activities benefit you at home? At school?
 - iii. Describe your church relationships? Did those relationships benefit you at home? At school?
 - iv. In what ways were the relationships at your church and at your school similar? In what ways were the relationships at your church and at your school different?
 - v. How did the church support your academic success?
 - vi. What did you learn from your church about being male? How did they teach this? Was that similar or different that what you learned at school? How?
 - vii. What did you learn from your church about being Black? How did they teach this? What this similar or different that what you learned at school? How?
 - viii. How involved was your church with your school?
 - ix. Describe a church lesson that has helped you personally. Who taught it? Where did you learn it? How did it apply to your life?
 - x. Was your black experience as it was described by your elementary, junior high, high school more positive or negative than what was described by the media/ society.

- xi. Using short words or phrases describe the black experience as communicated to you by the church.
- xii. Using short words or phrases describe the black experiences as communicated to you by your junior high or high school.
- xiii. What are the differences between the Black church and the school?
- xiv. How did your church address Trayvon Martin issue?

APPENDIX B

IRB FORMS

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Assent for Minor Participants

Date of Preparation: _____

I, _____ understand that my parents (mom and dad/ guardian) have/has given permission for me to take part in a research project titled **Sweet Spirit: The Pedagogic Relevance of the Black Church for African American Males** under the direction of Brandi Odom Lucas, MA.

I understand that I have been asked to participate because I am an African American, male high school student who attends a Black church and participates in at least one church group/ auxiliary.

During this study, I will be asked questions about my church and school experiences. My responses will be audio taped.

I understand that possible benefits of the study are a better understanding about my school and church experiences and how they contribute to my identity. I also understand that I may experience possible discomforts when recalling past school or church experiences.

My participation in this project is voluntary and I have been told that I may stop my participation in this study at any time without penalty and loss of benefit to myself.

I understand that Brandi Odom Lucas who can be reached at 562-412-8389 will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study. In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form.

Subject's Signature _____ Date: _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date: _____

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Experimental Subjects Bill of Rights

Pursuant to California Health and Safety Code §24172, I understand that I have the following rights as a participant in a research study:

1. I will be informed of the nature and purpose of the experiment.
2. I will be given an explanation of the procedures to be followed in the medical experiment, and any drug or device to be utilized.
3. I will be given a description of any attendant discomforts and risks to be reasonably expected from the study.
4. I will be given an explanation of any benefits to be expected from the study, if applicable.
5. I will be given a disclosure of any appropriate alternative procedures, drugs or devices that might be advantageous and their relative risks and benefits.
6. I will be informed of the avenues of medical treatment, if any, available after the study is completed if complications should arise.
7. I will be given an opportunity to ask any questions concerning the study or the procedures involved.
8. I will be instructed that consent to participate in the research study may be withdrawn at any time and that I may discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.
9. I will be given a copy of the signed and dated written consent form.
10. I will be given the opportunity to decide to consent or not to consent to the study without the intervention of any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, coercion, or undue influence on my decision.

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form

Date of Preparation – March 27, 2013

Loyola Marymount University

- 1) I hereby authorize Brandi Odom Lucas, MA to include me (my child/ward) in the following research study: Sweet Spirit: The Pedagogic Relevance of the Black Church for African American Males.
- 2) I have been asked to participate on a research project, which is designed to investigate the benefits the Black church provides to its African American male youth and young adults and which will last for approximately 3 months.
- 3) It has been explained to me that the reason for my inclusion in this project is that I am a male, African American student in an accredited high school, college or university who is active in my church community and who has at least one parent/guardian active in the same church community.
- 4) I understand that if I am a subject, I will be asked to discuss my educational and church experiences.

The investigator(s) will conduct three (3) interviews with me at a time and location of my choice. The interview will involve questions about my family, education, and church experiences. These interviews will be audiotape and the investigator will take notes during the interview. Follow-up conversations may be required in order to provide clarification. I understand these conversations may take place over the telephone or email.

These procedures have been explained to me by Brandi Odom Lucas, MA.

- 5) I understand that I will be videotaped, audiotaped and/or photographed in the process of these research procedures. It has been explained to me that these tapes will be used for teaching and/or research purposes only and that my identity will not be disclosed. I have been assured that the tapes will be destroyed after their use in this research project is completed. I understand that I have the right to review the tapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.
- 6) I understand that the study described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: Discomfort recalling past educational and/or religious experiences.

- 7) I also understand that the possible benefits of the study are a deeper understanding of my past educational and religious experiences and how they contribute to my identity today.
- 8) I understand that Brandi Odom Lucas. who can be reached at (562)412-8389 will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study.
- 10) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained.
- 11) I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without prejudice to (e.g., my future medical care at LMU.)
- 12) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.
- 13) I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.
- 14) I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.
- 15) I understand that in the event of research related injury, compensation and medical treatment are not provided by Loyola Marymount University.
- 16) I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact David Hardy, Ph.D. Chair, Institutional Review Board, 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3000, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659 (310) 258-5465, david.hardy@lmu.edu.
- 17) In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the "Subject's Bill of Rights".

Subject's Signature _____ Date _____

Witness _____ Date _____

OR

Subject is a minor (age _____), or is unable to sign because _____

Mother/Father/Guardian _____ Date _____

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