# "A NEW, BRAND-NEW CHANGE": INTERGENERATIONAL MOBILITY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH MAKING SENSE OF POSTSECONDARY TRAJECTORIES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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# ABSTRACT

This phenomenological case study explores the college and career readiness (CCR) and postsecondary trajectories of six African American youth, 18 to 20 years of age, who attended or graduated from a northeastern urban school district during 2021 to 2022. Drawing on social reproduction theory and critical race theory, interviews, school, district and demographic data were examined to understand how participants made meaning of their CCR experiences and the family, school, work, and community influences on their postsecondary trajectories. Findings demonstrated that the youth used community cultural wealth to support their education and career goals and to navigate structures and systems. However, as participants pursued their aspirations, dominant White capital (social, financial, and temporal) in education and employment structures increasingly created barriers to their goals. Participants continued to aspire toward their dreams; however, the obstacles they confronted and their ability to navigate those obstacles varied by parental educational and occupational background. In order to ready African American youth for postsecondary success, participants recommended that CCR school implementation (a) engage with students one on one and not rely on computers; (b) ready students for good-paying jobs as well as college; (c) employ caring, culturally responsive educators and staff with high expectations; (d) offer more creative and critical thinking learning experiences and a less regimented curriculum; and (e) provide support for postgraduation transition. This research has implications for social reproduction, Black habitus, caste, and intergenerational mobility.

For the Grands and the Greats

Charles L. Blockson

(My parents shared your message; I did “bring my blessings home.”)

Hask, Kristin, Toni

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# PROLOGUE

In 1870, Horace White and Sally Ann White, both listed as “mulatto” in the U.S. census, lived in the Forest Township of Bedford, Virginia, near Lynchburg. Horace was 45 and a carpenter. His wife Sally Ann, 31, was a homemaker. Neither was literate according to the 1870 census. They had eight children. The oldest child, Charles, was 16 and a farm laborer. Their third child, Sylvia, was 10.

Within a few years, assumedly under his father’s tutelage, Charles would become a carpenter like Horace. In time, he would build a home for his niece Hattie, his sister Sylvia’s daughter. Hattie, a teacher and graduate of Lynchburg Baptist Seminary and College, would marry Ed Gilmore, who only had a fourth-grade education. Their home would sit on the few acres of land gifted by Ed’s family to begin their new life.

Their grandson, Robert, would become a carpenter like his maternal second great-grandfather. However, his apprenticeship would not occur under supportive family guidance in Virginia. It would take place under the scrutinizing, competitive gazes of Irish, Jewish, Italian, and German union carpenters in Pennsylvania, nearly 100 years after his great-great-grandfather was first listed in the U.S. census as a citizen. Robert’s wife, Henrietta, would work as a librarian’s assistant in a public high school and hear from a coworker that she had to work with the Title 1 books because she had a Title 1 job. And soon, I would attend a magnet public school, integrating, too.

By 1970, my family would eerily mirror a Southern past, a Northern tale, an American myth. This would exemplify how property as power drives the competition for education and employment access and reinforces the constructed limitations for African Americans. These experiences are still clear to me, as are the subsequent high school, family, and community experiences that made me dream about, wonder, and decide what I would do after high school. Along with these experiences are the stories my parents shared about their days at work and the stories they never shared until much later.

Yet I am also reminded of the experiences that shaped me as a carpenter's daughter, librarian's assistant's daughter. Pride, accomplishment, and expansive possibilities filled my childhood home, once my maternal grandmother's home, as my father renovated our starter home. After work, my mother took real estate classes at a local college. My father would do the same. This was an avenue to build wealth. The smell of sawdust and old discarded books my mother brought home from work filled the air, the creation of the possible future, even with the discarded. But in time, it became a struggle to push toward the light as my parents' dreams were constantly cloaked with policy and economic changes and structural and systemic racism that made construction work inconsistent and relocated public school para-professionals.

As a Black woman who grew up during this window of time, 1970s and early 1980s, in the United States, and who has great-grandparents who were first-wave migrants to Pennsylvania from Virginia and Missouri and a grandfather from southwest Georgia, I carry this history of knowledge. I bring this experience as a member of an intersection of families that valued education, property, family, and generational mobility. I am also reminded of my generation that experienced the possibilities of integrated public education; free or subsidized high school summer programs that exposed Black youth to medical, business, and engineering careers; scholarships to private schools; and Hip-Hop, White backlash, and the crack epidemic that changed my neighborhood and a few of my childhood friends.

I am a single Black woman born in the 1960s. I am the eldest grandchild of my maternal and paternal grandparents, and a great aunt. I attended preschool at the public girl's high school that offered vocational training for childcare. There my mother worked. My father became a journeyman carpenter through an effort to integrate the building trades. My father found nooses at jobs where he was the only Black carpenter. But there were Black laborers who reassured him that nothing would happen to him. White women spat at my mother as she walked from the El train to the Kensington schools. But there were the Black librarians who mentored and empathized with her. I spent kindergarten with my grandmother. She taught me how to read and how to pray. My parents grew up in Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal churches, but we did not attend church as a family growing up. They told me, "There is a God; God is everywhere; God is in each of us." We blessed meals. We said prayers. We are all members of a Baptist church now.

My family's complexions range from the deepest, richest browns to the lightest, palest ivories. My father's eyes are blue, my mother's are light brown, and mine are hazel green. We are Black. I am Black.

"Are you a feminist?" I asked my mother one day after school when I was about ten. She was preparing dinner and I was watching, and probably getting in her way in our small kitchen. This was the routine then. She'd pick me up after work and when we got home she’d start dinner. My father would arrive not much later. “I’m a womanist,” she told me.

I attended an integrated public school for the first through eighth grades, and then attended an all-girls private high school on scholarship. I suspect now that the random test I was given in sixth grade that landed me in a very small Great Books group is the reason for the scholarship and private school. My friend and I lobbied our mothers to take Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a holiday. My mother agreed and made me write a paper. I graduated from the same ivy league university where I attended a summer business institute. There I met my best friend. We would go on to become college roommates. With fellow students I protested apartheid and a professor who called the Black students in his class “ex-slaves.” I watched the smoke rising from the police department’s firebombing of a Black neighborhood from that campus. And I ran into a high school classmate who invited me to share an apartment in London; we both would spend a semester abroad there.

I lived in Los Angeles for almost 20 years. I felt the anger and tension during the Rodney King incident and the O.J. Simpson trial. I reconnected my father with his paternal grandfather’s family in a chance encounter with a Claytor who was visiting a former student and noticed my name on the apartment directory. We discovered we were cousins, connected by my enslaved great-great-grandmother, my enslaved great-great-grandfather and the plantation owner. Many of those children who stayed in the Roanoke, Virginia, area and were related to the plantation owner became doctors and dentists. Unlike them, my great-grandfather, a coal miner, and his wife, a laundress, left Virginia and moved to Pittsburgh. He died when my grandfather was young. My cousins, grandchildren of my grandfather's sister, own that home now.

I grew up in a house where my grandmother once lived with her father and five siblings and where my parents still live. They are retired in what was meant to be their starter home. I remember the older White couple who once lived across the street, and soon moved away with their children's encouragement. The corner store was where I walked to buy penny candy for myself, and milk, bread, and cigarettes for my parents. It was owned by Mr. and Mrs. L., and on Sundays I was sent to buy a pound of hot sage sausage for breakfast and the Sunday paper.

The glass cabinet of penny candy was the best assortment of sugar, artificial coloring, and stomach-pain-inducing childhood pleasure. On the counter above the candy sat jars of pickled pigs' feet, bags of chips, and pork rinds. On occasion, a barrel of dill pickles during the summer months and the Black History calendar at the New Year. I loved reading that calendar. There was an entry for every day. There were other corner stores nearby, but Mr. and Mrs. L.'s store was the only Black-owned store.

There was another store up the street where I was sent for the slab bacon that Mr. H. hand cut with a butcher knife. This was also where you could play the "street number." Close to where my best friend lived was the other non–Black-owned store. I was sent there to buy pints of hand-packed chocolate and butter-almond ice cream and sometimes steak sandwiches and hoagies. When it was hot outside, before anyone could afford air conditioning, we were all outside, young and old, on steps and porches. We jumped double-dutch and played jacks and hands up to 85, and people-watched. Older boys would stand around talking, flirting with the girls who worked at the store.

Motorcycles roared to a quick stop at the corner and other older fellas would join in. Diagonally to this store was the church, whose members usurped our parking spaces every Sunday and sold barbecue during the summer months but were never part of the neighborhood. By the 1990s, as the crack epidemic persisted, this same church was tagged with graffiti and the side entrance steps were fenced in to prevent the corner boys from conducting business there. They never tried to do business outside Mr. and Mrs. L.'s store.

When I returned from Los Angeles in early 2007, many of my friends had left the neighborhood and moved to other sections of the city, and a few were caught up in the crack epidemic. There was the young man across the street who made us all proud with his new job at the fire department and happy for his purchase of a fire-engine-red sports car. There was the youngster who lived on the side street, infamous as a drug street, who became the young teenaged dealer who supplied those who lived in the neighborhood and those who passed through it. There was the young woman around the corner, whose quick wit I idolized as a teenager, who had three strokes and died before she was 30. There was the neighbor's oldest son who joined the marines, travelled around the world, and became a major. His nephew earned a full academic scholarship to the state university with a Division 1 football team. I lost touch with my childhood bestie. She married the summer I graduated from college. Her sister, who read the entire Bible by the time she was 13, received a full scholarship to the state university. She left after one semester. There were other neighborhood friends as well: the teacher, nurse, police officer, doctor. We had all moved.

My social group is more closely tied to my college experience and my middle and high school experiences leading to college. We all have at least a four-year degree. The majority have advanced degrees and professions as attorneys, corporate executives, doctors, and educators. The majority are homeowners, some with summer vacation or snowbird homes. We have all been driven to succeed academically and professionally and have taken advantage of the opportunities made available to us through Civil Rights legislation. We are also at a crossroads, watching how our children (and nieces and nephews) will fare as they begin to navigate today's world for academic and professional training and career and work advancement. Our communication about Blackness has been different from what our parents communicated with us. A friend told me that she and her husband do not talk about people as White or Black with their children. We all grew up with families who warned us, in one version or another—after a Thanksgiving layoff that would last until spring, a roundhouse hanging, a demeaning insult, change placed on the counter instead of in the hand, or being cut off in the grocery line or pulled-over by the cops—that all White people were not bad, but to be cautious. "Protect yourself at all times," my father says.

I have noticed on a few occasions African American youth being surprised in school spaces. Ten years ago, some of my African American high school students were accepted to colleges and shared that White students they considered friends had posted that they were only accepted because they were Black. This occurred after I stood in line when the polling station in my old neighborhood opened, all of us waving and cheering as cars passed and honked their horns. We were voting for Obama in 2008. In 2016 all African American college freshman at my alma mater were added to a racist online social media group and received text messages announcing daily Black lynchings. Trump had recently been elected. I was in a teacher leadership role at a new school that had a high percentage of Latinx students. Some students came to school crying the day after the election. The principal found a Trump poster taped to her office door when she arrived at work.

In the last 15 years, I have had Black youth question me about my heritage, asking if I was biracial. This has startled me. Two of my cousins, brother and sister, discovered that they were coded differently, one White and one Black, by a work supervisor who was administrating an employee count. Following his mother's advice, my great-nephew identified himself as "Other" on a carpenter's apprenticeship form. My father had him change it. My great-nephew—who I envisioned as a college-graduate electrical engineer—called my father after one year of college and said, "I just want to be a carpenter." Is it good to be Black and not recognize others as Black? Is this progress?

In the middle of the pandemic, while working from home, my nephew called to tell me he had been injured on the job. A turn block, a heavy metal equipment used to anchor large materials while raising them multiple heights for construction projects, fell two stories and just missed his eye as it knocked him down to the concrete sidewalk. He survived with a hurt leg and cracked tooth, but he was dizzy. He was sent home, but he had to go back to the job for paperwork. On my way to pick up my nephew, I called my cousin, who my father also helped into the carpenters' union. Furious that my nephew was told to go home in that condition, I planned to walk onto the jobsite with him and get some answers. My cousin told me to let my nephew handle it; there was male ego, respect, and maturity that could be compromised if I did not. Now, after COVID-19, at

25 my nephew is a journeyman carpenter, a homeowner, and father of a one-year-old. I'm proud. We are all proud. We still want him to get that degree.

My initial interest in intergenerational stories and their impact on subsequent generations began when I discovered the unspoken history of my great-grandmother as a college-educated teacher in Lynchburg, Virginia, and my great-great-great-grandfather's unknown story as a skilled carpenter in 1870 in Bedford County, Virginia. Their histories although unspoken, may have (or not) influenced the academic and career choices of the next generations. My father became a carpenter during the Civil Rights Era and the passage of Title VII; his sister would study foreign languages and all my great-grandmother's female descendants have at least an undergraduate degree. This deep desire for and belief in education has been passed along the generations. But attainment has skipped generations.

My generational history found me again when I returned to my college to volunteer for the Black alumni group. I was asked if I was related to the Claytor who had a plaque in the Du Bois College House at the University of Pennsylvania. Twenty-five years after I graduated from Penn, there in Du Bois House, past the multicultural room where we all used to gather to watch *A Different World*, was a plaque commemorating William Waldron Schieffelin Claytor, the third African American to receive a PhD in mathematics. He extended mathematical research but was never able to secure a faculty position at a university that had the resources for research because of anti-Black sentiment among universities and faculty. He returned south and was an instructor to Katherine Johnson for a bit before going on to Howard University to join the math faculty where he had earned his B.A. and M.A. One wonders what more he would have contributed, and what impact that would have had on the family or the country.

Some families improve economically with each generation, but many Black families do not. And if education is not a guaranteed mediating factor, then I believe a qualitative study on the intergenerational narratives of African American families may provide answers to identify systems and mechanisms that maintain power structures and prevent mobility. My personal, educational, and professional experiences have provided me with an understanding of and committed interest in this topic.

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

In June 2020, a news report (Garcia, 2020) depicted three young Black men draped in their graduation caps and gowns, proudly waving their high school diplomas as they marched in a Black Lives Matter demonstration. They joined the millions who protested the murder of African American citizen, father, and veteran George Floyd by a White police officer in Minneapolis in 2020. I wondered, When the marches end, where will they be next in the trajectory of their lives? How did the narratives they were told throughout their lives contribute to the habituses that would propel them to various dispositions? Had their habituses been fortified at the school site with cultural capital they could transfer positively as they transitioned from high school to young adulthood? How had their family, educational, employment, and U.S. history and experiences prepared them for postsecondary life?

Spring 2020 shook America to consciousness with Black Lives Matter rebellions igniting global citizens to protest a police officer and his complicit partners in the eight-minute, 46-second murder of a 46-year-old Black man. This act was digitally video recorded by a 17-year-old Black girl with her cellphone. In the years since the 2020, 2021, and 2022 high school graduates were approximately 10 years of age and younger, violent, deadly anti-Blackness has been witnessed, recorded, and reported. Trayvon Martin, nearly transitioning to his postsecondary future, was 17 when he was murdered by a White man whose perception of African American youth excluded Trayvon’s right to exist in the community where he lived.

The COVID-19 pandemic that shuttered American schools and businesses exposed poverty, homelessness, food deserts, and internet wastelands as invisible communities and public schools struggled through remote learning. Given these societal tensions, understanding the habitus (or dispositions) that Black youth develop may provide an observation of future orientation that is present or not among this population.

In the 21st century over 60% of all jobs and 80% of middle-class jobs require some postsecondary education (Carnevale et al., 2012), and a two-year degree may be the minimum requirement for self-sufficiency (Carnevale et al., 2018). Wages of high school graduates are typically 58% of those of individuals with a bachelor's degree (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). However, the promise of improved income with higher education delivers inequitable realities for African Americans. In 2022, Black and White workers' salaries were nearly similar in service industries, but Black workers' salaries were significantly less than White salaries in management and professional industries. Annual incomes were consistently lower for Black Americans, even when they held more advanced degrees than other Americans. In fact, Black women with a bachelor's degree earn only $45 more per week than White men with a high school diploma (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). So, when education policy proclaims the significance of college and career readiness (CCR), is it also claiming to ready Black youth for inequality in education, employment, and intergenerational mobility? Given this pattern of mobility among African Americans after high school, what types of future narratives do African American youth develop while in school?

CCR skills are those that a high school graduate needs to enter and succeed in the college or labor market. CCR has been a catch phrase since the turn of this century and is now embedded in the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the 2018 Strengthening 21st Century Career and Technical Education Act (referred to as Perkins V). However, CCR became central to our country's implicit education policy leading up to the emancipation of enslaved Black Americans. It gained traction in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the rapidly industrializing world. It is now front and center of U.S. educational policy, linked to a global economy driven by advanced technology, knowledge, and information. The United States is the only member of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED) whose sovereignty and wealth were founded on an economy and constitution that normalized and regulated free labor produced by people enslaved because of their phenotype and mother's position as property or not. This history suggests that education policy created using a White-dominant global framework may create barriers for African American students in the United States.

What types of future narratives do Black youth develop in an environment of oppression awareness and restricted future opportunities after high school? What are the life trajectories that these youth will develop? How have they intertwined their family, community, school, and peer histories with the histories of the nation and the many interactions they have had in the last years of their K–12 education? How will their experiences prepare them for life after graduation?

## Background of the Problem

Social mobility has progressed slowly for African Americans and the working poor in the United States, despite Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society and the 1960s Civil Rights Acts for equal opportunity in employment, housing, and education (Bloome & Western, 2011; Jerrim & MacMillan, 2015). Every year, African American youth contend with the generational obstacles of time and exclusion that complicate their progress. Their slowed progress can be observed in the relationship between poverty and education, college enrollment and completion, and employment and compensation.

In 2015, young Black women ages 16 through 19 represented 22.4% of the labor force living below the poverty level; 18.7% were Latinx women; 16.7% were Black men; 14% were Asian men; and 10.10% were Latinx men (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Educators, parents, researchers, politicians, and activists extol the significance of secondary and higher education; however, high school teenagers living in poverty are already balancing school and work. Then they graduate from high school, with their next steps to college or employment linked to their high school performance and the economic and political state that awaits them.

After the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s, college graduation rates for Black and Brown students increased from 1970 to 1990. However, accusations of "reverse discrimination" and multiple challenges to the laws meant to rectify the exclusion of Black Americans from access to full citizenship rights began to impede their progress. The Bakke Case of 1978 (*Regents of University of California v. Bakke*) used legislation created to protect the rights of newly emancipated Black Americans to prohibit college enrollment goals. These enrollment goals, "quotas," meant to provide free access to higher education, increased the attendance of qualified Black students and African American educational mobility. However, with policy changes and time, college attendance and graduation rates decreased. During the 2015–2016 academic year, African Americans received 10.2% of bachelor's degrees, falling below the 1996 figure of 13.8%, and White students received 56.1% of bachelor's degrees (Ginder, S. A., et al, 2017).

This was a significant drop from the 2008 college completion percentage for African Americans, when 19.6% of African Americans over the age of 25 held college degrees (*Journal of Black Higher Education*, 2009).

In contrast, 93% of 18–24-year-old Americans possessed high school diplomas or equivalency diplomas in 2016, compared to 86% in 2000 (NCES, 2022). The scarcity of available jobs during the Great Recession of 2007–2009 may have influenced high school graduation rates similarly to the Great Depression of 1929–1939. Still, the technical skills needed for current occupations require advanced degrees or training. This training, available in some secondary schools, is championed by Perkins V. Career and technical education (CTE), formerly known as vocational education, has a history that could remain problematic despite a new name and tie to CCR.

Vocational education has a history of facilitating the exclusion of Black students from college preparatory classes or more advanced vocational classes (Delmont, 2010). The 2018 Perkins V legislation emphasizes academic competence and assessment of CCR. It is also linked to the 2015 ESSA. More than sixty- years after Civil Rights legislation, will secondary students' preparation lead them to intergenerational mobility? Or will it demonstrate social reproduction of racism-latent inequalities?

Analyses of the National Longitudinal Survey of Young Men (NLS66) of two cohorts of men, Black and White, born between 1945 and 1952 and between 1958 and 1965 (NLSY79), discovered that during the cohorts' career age of early 30s, although educational mobility improves for Black men, income mobility declines for both Black and White Men, demonstrating the correlation between income and intergenerational mobility (Bloome & Western, 2011). The older cohort reached their 30s while the younger generation was growing up during this time period of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Civil Rights reforms had been institutionalized, but income inequality continued. Although the older cohort was able to take full advantage of the new reforms as they were implemented (high school completion, higher education, white-collar and skilled positions), the younger cohort experienced these reforms with limits. They entered the job force during an era when "declining unionization, declines in making job tenure, increased subcontracting and casual employment indicate[d] a de-institutionalization of the labor market" (Bloome & Western, 2011, p. 392).

Educational mobility may have limited correlation with income advancement in this context, especially if, as Bloome and Western (2011) write, "the income advantages of inherited wealth, inter vivos transfers, cultural capital and social connections, independent of education, may have increased" (p. 392). Thus, educational attainment has advantages but cannot necessarily mediate for income inequality and intergenerational income mobility. Darity et al. (2021) argue that advanced education is among 10 myths (including homeownership, financial literacy, entrepreneurship, personal responsibility, and strong families) that are supposed to close the Black/White wealth gap. These myths place the onus on Black dysfunction rather than unequal, racist systems and structures. Darity et al. argue that closing the wealth gap, which also speaks to African American economic mobility, would require major policy initiatives (i.e., reparations) to compensate African Americans for historical racial injustice. Another option, they write, is a "substantial trust fund for every wealth poor American" (p. 4).

Structural power dynamics maintain the socioeconomic status and continual intergenerational mobility of wealthy White men in America by means of social reproduction (Bloome & Western, 2011). Social reproduction theory argues that those at the top continue to rise because of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990/2000), which influences the schools that individuals attend and the degrees they attain, and in the aggregate can have a significant impact on employment and income. Cultural capital is often the leading indicator of educational or economic mobility (Torche, 2018).

However, the growth and transfer of capital is not an exchange that can be understood solely in that moment of exchange. Bourdieu (2005) argued that those moments are informed by layers of social information acted upon by individuals, that is, agents. These agents (students, staff, administrators, stakeholders) in the secondary education field, for example, act and interact in the process, presenting their habituses and expressing cultural capital. Bourdieu (2005) explained:

> In so far as he or she is endowed with a habitus, the social agent is a collective individual or a collective individuated by the fact of embodying objective structures. The individual, the subjective, is social and collective. The habitus is socialized subjectivity, a historic transcendental, whose schemes of perception and appreciation (systems of preferences, tastes, etc.) are the product of collective and individual history. (p. 211)

Therefore, we can expect that agents traversing the social field to behave in ways that express their internalization of social structures, history, and culture (“systems of preferences, tastes”), both experienced and learned. Habitus forms their dispositions.

Social reproduction theory provides a framework to understand the reproduction of structural inequality, in particular, how the educational system educates using the dominant culture its linguistic and cultural competence as the measure of ability and achievement (Bourdieu, 1984). Absent in Bourdieu’s discussion of social and cultural capital is how they operate within U.S. racialized hierarchies. In other words, networks of information operate within and across groups based on a hierarchy of Whites setting the valued capital (Giroux & McLaren, 1989). However, this network exists in a world inhabited by different cultures and language speakers, and, in the United States, citizens identified by the socially constructed marker of race. For this reason, critical race theory (CRT) is essential to my research on CCR and intergenerational mobility.

CRT scholars emphasize this notion of value and capital by arguing that Whiteness is the value that establishes the framework of capital. In her seminal article, Cheryl Harris (1993) wrote:

> Slavery as a system of property facilitated the merger of white identity and property. Because the system of slavery was contingent on and conflated with racial identity, it became crucial to be "white," to be identified as white, to have the property of being white. Whiteness was the characteristic, the attribute, the property of free human beings. (p. 1721)

Early on in U.S. history, then, Whites are part of a racial contract (Mills, 1997) that elevates their status, assigning value to their "possession" of Whiteness. And, because "possession" and "property" are markers of status and Whiteness, possession and property cemented Whiteness as a marker of superiority. White people were empowered to take possession of the land of Indigenous people and the bodies of enslaved Africans as their property by "force" and then "ideology" (Mills, 1997). Through a CRT lens, African American youth are without a racial contract, Whiteness as property, or the requisite U.S. dominant social and cultural capital. Still, "history teaches us to resist," writes Berry (2018, p. 5). Will analyzing African American youth narratives of opportunity reveal an understanding of inequities as these youth navigate opportunities for their futures?

## Research Questions

This study explored how recent African American high school students, aged 18 to 20, espouse their habitus involving their individual and collective histories and culture regarding understandings of opportunity. More specifically, I investigated how six African American youth from an urban northeastern public school district make meaning of educational and social opportunity through an exploration of their experiences with school, family, and work. This study provides ways for understanding the threads of social reproduction and Whiteness as property, and its right to exclude in the sense-making of African American youth as they transition from secondary school to adulthood. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ 1: What are the narratives of aspiration leading to intergenerational mobility that African American youth espouse?

RQ 2: What education aspirations do African American youth have?

RQ 3: What career aspirations do African American youth have?

RQ 4: How are the college and career aspirations of African American youth influenced by their interactions with families, communities, peers, and teachers?

# CHAPTER 2

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

I begin this chapter by discussing my theoretical framework—Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction and concepts of habitus. I follow this with the epistemological lens of critical race theory, and then a brief overview of U.S. education, race and education, secondary education, and early roots of college and career readiness. The subsequent literature review organizes previous research (including some from OECD countries, South Africa, Australia, and countries similar to the United States in colonization and White supremacist laws and ideologies) on (a) the ways schooling operates to reproduce inequality and resistance to that operation of inequality reproduction; (b) the reproduction of Black educational and work mobility; (c) Whiteness as property to conceptualize how reproduction occurs for Black youth; and (d) community cultural wealth (CCW) and other methods to exercise agency in order to overcome obstacles and support mobility.

## Theoretical Frameworks

My theoretical frameworks consist of Bourdieu's social reproduction theory and critical race theory. Because Bourdieu's theory does not address the specific considerations necessary when applying it to the United States, a nation that originated with an economy and land mass designation based on violent land theft from Indigenous peoples and violent enslavement and labor theft from Africans, I use CRT and Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) and its right to exclude to address these missing components. My epistemological lens is also rooted in CRT, particularly racial realism.

### *Social Reproduction*

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990/2000) theorized intergenerational mobility—the economic and educational advancement of each successive generation—as social reproduction, dependent on and formulated by the cultural capital possessed and developed by some social agents and then transferred to their children, thereby reproducing and maintaining a continuous social hierarchy. Bourdieu's social reproduction theory explains social reproduction within and across the power relationships that exist in society and operate structurally, interpersonally, and culturally. He uses the term "capital" because of its familiarity in the context of a capitalist economy; however, according to Bourdieu, the definition of capital as money is inexact and negates the significance of other forms of capital, including cultural and social capital. According to Bourdieu (1984), economic capital is convertible to money and institutionalized in the form of property; social capital may be convertible into money and is institutionalized in the form of titles or nobility; and cultural capital may be convertible into money and is institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications, such as degrees, diplomas, and certifications. Cultural capital must be understood as capital of the dominant culture.

**Cultural Capital**. As an integral component of social reproduction, cultural capital can be understood broadly as capital in the guise of information. It comes in three forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Cultural capital has the force to influence and wield power because it embodies the dominant culture—White American culture, in the case of the U.S. education field. Cultural capital represents informational knowledge (education, learning, literature, art, music, knowledge) of the dominant class, which is embodied and can be understood in the manner of speech (linguistic capital) or dress and appearance, or objectified, books, art possessed by the bearer, and, significant to this research, institutionalized in the form of academic qualifications (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990/2000). Cultural capital, represented in these multiple forms, is then often the lead indicator of educational or economic mobility, and the educational system maintains and produces it. Cultural capital is significant because it wields power in its institutionalized form of educational qualifications, its projection of the dominant culture, and its integration and projection in the habituses and dispositions of actors.

**Social Reproduction by Exclusion**. Bourdieu & Passeron (1990/2000) argued that the school system trains, channels, and eliminates in order "to be conceived as an institution for the reproduction of legitimate culture" (p. 101). Instituting a school system that determines what is "legitimate" culture and is responsible for its reproduction immediately establishes the school site, space, or field as one of struggle and conflict. The educational field is then traversed by social actors with "imposition and inculcation of academic culture, and, on the other side, the social classes, characterized by, with respect to the efficiency of pedagogic communication, unequal distances from academic culture and different dispositions to recognize and acquire it" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000, p. 101). Therefore, the educational system is "legitimating culture" with its use of dominant culture, which facilitates the exclusion of some populations and implies the "illegitimacy of the cultures of the dominated groups or classes [through] exclusion" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000, p. 41). To understand how this exclusion occurs and is resisted, habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) and Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993), a key tenet of CRT, must be understood.

**Practice and Habitus**. As suggested by Bourdieu (2012), "the habitus, which is constituted in practice" is "always oriented toward practical functions" (p. 346). As social actors (students and staff) traverse the educational field, they interact with one another across the socioeconomic, cultural, and political structures that are part of the field and part of them. They use their habituses, building and adjusting them according to their prior knowledge and real experience. Bourdieu (2012) explains that habitus is

> a realistic relation to what is possible, founded on and therefore limited by power. This disposition, always marked by its (social) conditions of acquisition and realization, tends to adjust to the objective chances of satisfying need or desire, inclining agents to 'cut their coats according to their cloth,' and so to become the accomplices of the processes that tend to make the probable a reality. (p. 357–358)

In the context of high schools structured for the CCR of graduating youth, the idea of what may be "limited by power" is important to consider in the analysis of discourse. It acts as a status symbol of supremacy. Thus, it is ubiquitous in all social structures. As high school students progress through the years, they are increasingly aware of the transition they will make from the "school world" to the "real world." This need to balance and process what is current and what the future holds is also formed by the family, education, and community structures of adolescents of color attending public high schools in low-income urban communities:

> As a social actor, a student's practical relation to the future, which governs his present practice, is defined in the relationship between, on the one hand, his habitus with its temporal structures and dispositions towards the future, constituted in the course of a particular relationship to a particular universe of probabilities, and on the other hand a certain state of the chances objectively offered to him by the social world. (Bourdieu, 2012, p. 357)

In consideration of the socioeconomic and racial history of the United States, these chances cannot be assumed to be "objectively offered." Although the potential for objective chances to occur due to shifts in habitus is understood, the reality of power and racism as a form of power in those “universes of probabilities” must also be understood for students of color. The relationship between education and employment underscores the dynamics of power and racism for students of color. Students and families living in low-income communities are eager to improve academically and economically, but they are exposed bluntly and forcefully to “a world structured according to the categories of the possible (for us) and the impossible (for us), of what’s appropriated in advance by and for others and what one can reasonably expect for oneself” (Bourdieu, 2012, p. 357). This does not render youth powerless; it does, however, push them to understand and navigate the structure to actualize ways to succeed, which would be an enormous undertaking for most adolescents. It fosters even greater challenges and dissonance, as Du Bois argued in his explanation of double-consciousness (1903), when they are experiencing these challenges as secondary students being readied for “college, career, and civic life” (Conley, 2015, p. 4).

### ***Critical Race Theory***

Legal scholars of color, frustrated with the limitations of critical theory to effectively analyze U.S. law and its inconsistent treatment of citizens of color, specifically citizens of African descent, developed CRT. Evolving from critical legal studies and radical feminism, CRT addresses the ever-changing rulings on race and the relationships and structures that maintain racism. CRT draws on Gramsci, Derrida, and American thinkers and leaders such as “Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. DuBois, Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Power and Chicano movements” (Delgaldo & Stefancic, 2001, p. 28). The fundamental tenets of CRT are the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, counter-storytelling, critique of colorblindness, and restrictive versus expansive views of equality. I draw on Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) and historical realism and permanence of racism to support my theoretical framework.

**Whiteness as Property**. When Black Americans desired higher education, better employment, and better pay and were excluded from those opportunities as freedmen and legal citizens, their status as Black and possibly former property was determined by those who held Whiteness as property. These former histories and ideologies, whether accepted or resisted, informed the social and cultural capital of Black and White Americans, and thus their habituses. These histories formed the educational structures that would reproduce inequalities.

Accepting that racism is normal in the United States also means that the racial contract maintains protection of the socioeconomic positioning of “Whites” and “non-Whites.” Public education, as constructed by the state and its agents, promulgates and protects the state’s power structure. Therefore, public school graduates of color prepare for work that casts them in inferior positions. Education, therefore, is used to objectify and subjugate “non-White” students; public schools are sites of role preparation, a form of social reproduction and representative of human capital investment. Thus, education operates in multiple forms in addition to academic instruction. It informs employment and thus intergenerational mobility.

In the United States—the political state—normalcy of racism is a key tenet of CRT. This tenet extends to the principle that all attempts at legal correction of racism are undermined over time because of the permanence and normalcy of racism (Bell, 1992). I use this definition of racism (as a contractual agreement) within the context of CRT, including CRT in education, because Mills (1997) argued that the social construction of race is a binding agreement between Whites, exclusionary of Blacks. This form of social contract is why racism is so evident in the macro/microinterplay of inequality in the United States, and it is important to understand the “informal,” “formal,” and “meta-agreements” that Mills referenced. This is an additional layer to cultural capital. The social capital that Bourdieu proposed also has a distinct and unique aspect in the United States. The U.S. racial contract intensifies and reinforces the social capital that Bourdieu posited in his reproduction theory.

Anti-Blackness, as exclusion, is evident in the social construction of race and its cultural perpetuation in economic and educational structures. Notably, when appearance (skin color, hair type, facial features) is used to distinguish between individuals of European versus African descent to enact slavery, exemplified in the disproportionate sentence of lifetime servitude for a runaway African indentured servant compared with four years of additional servitude for European runaways in the 1600s, this early construction of race distinguished White and Black workers to maintain power by an elite group of White men (Appiah, 1985). It cemented the racial contract, ensuring White supremacy, Whiteness as property, and the right to exclude. As Black youth progress through their high school senior year, in preparation for college or their career, their experiences may give insight into the current expressions of social reproduction impacting them in today’s socioeconomic and political climate.

Whiteness as property, evident in its ability to exclude, supports social reproduction and the permanence of racism evident in the current disparities despite Brown V. Board of Education and Civil Rights legislation. As Ladson-Billings and Tate

(1995) explained, Whiteness as property “has been demonstrated by white flight and the growing insistence on vouchers, public funding of private schools, and schools of choice. Within schools, absolute right to exclude is demonstrated by resegregation via tracking” (p. 60). Separating Black students from other students by use of testing and other instruments maintains an institutionalized caste system readied for social reproduction.

**Employment**. Whiteness as property provides elevated status to White U.S. citizens, including the right to exclude. In education, this manifests in ways to avoid integration with non-Whites. White citizens are afforded power that not only creates inequality in the status of being, but seamlessly extends to the means of educational, economic, and social mobility. Whiteness as property and the racial contract help maintain the permanence of racism.

In labor, this manifested during reconstruction in the exclusion of Blacks and freedmen from skilled work to protect White workers and their “public and psychological wage” (Du Bois, 1935/1998, pp. 700–701). By the end of the 19th century and the institution of the Black Codes, an influx of immigrants were hired for work rather than Black Americans. Black Americans were reminded of their perceived and legislated position by White America as an inferior caste. Booker T. Washington (1895), however, insisted—more than 30 years after emancipation—that Black freedmen, who had already had their labor stolen from them, understand that in working “at the bottom of life we must begin.” Leveraging a false belief in brotherhood, Washington appealed to White America to hire African Americans rather than “those of foreign birth and strange tongue.” In this plea, however, he overlooked what Du Bois understood and documented:

White Americans had already actively blocked access to employment for skilled Black workers who were free men.

**Exclusion and Employment**. Union discrimination against Blacks in America can be traced back to a 1724 Boston union's restriction of membership to Whites (Hargrove, 1970). Although he worked in the government printing office, Frederick Douglass's son, Lewis H. Douglass, was prohibited from joining the Printer's Union in 1869 (Du Bois, 1935/1998, p. 359). This practice eventually excluded all Blacks "from certain skilled trades entirely, regardless of their union status" (Du Bois, 1935/1998, p. 188). African Americans, skilled and able, were excluded from work. Despite Black freedmen who had labored skillfully as carpenters, blacksmiths, and wheelwrights (Du Bois, 1935/1998) without pay during slavery and, finally, for pay during emancipation and reconstruction, White industrialists would welcome waves of European immigrants and educate and support them and hire them, and restrict from work those who were not White. Blacks would also face limited access to advanced training and education required for professional occupations, evident in "the steady withdrawal of aid from institutions of higher training of the Negro" (Du Bois, 1903/2019, p. 66).

The historical limitations and prohibition of education for African Americans speaks to the powerful significance of the use of education for social reproduction and its racial embedment in the United States. Political and economic forces use education to Americanize and train labor for needed American professions, but this Americanization and training is founded on White supremacy, the dominant culture. Today we see it in the job discrimination evident in response patterns to names that are perceived to be Black. In research by Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004), applicants whose resume indicated a name identified as White received 50% more callbacks than those identified as Black. This underscores how dominant White cultural supremacy reinforces and maintains White economic and educational dominance. Thus, an educational structure that functions to Americanize and train students for employment will do so in a manner that upholds White economic dominance.

After slavery, this was clearly specified in the de jure Jim Crow laws of the South and the de facto Jim Crow laws of the North. These laws and customs that support White supremacy did not disappear after the Civil Rights legislations; they merely transformed and shifted. Whiteness as property provides elevated status to White U.S. citizens. It is a status that U.S. systems and structures make difficult to relinquish. In education, this manifests in cultural legitimacy through diplomas, degrees, certification—legitimized by the dominant White culture—and ways to avoid integration with non-Whites. In labor, this has manifested in the exclusion of Blacks from unions, managerial positions, and high-salaried employment. It follows that an educational structure that functions in a context where racism is normal would prepare students for employment where racism is normal. It is for these reasons that the latest iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965) and the 1917 Workforce Act, present in the ESSA (2015) and Perkins V (2018) CCR policy, could maintain White privilege and exclude Black youth from education and training that would lead them to advanced learning and higher-paying employment that would increase intergenerational mobility. Understanding how this stratification is maintained can also lead to understanding how stratification is resisted and how African American mobility operates.

A primary tenet of CRT is that racism in the United States is normal. It acts as a status symbol of supremacy. It is ubiquitous in all social structures. As African American youth progress through secondary school, they are increasingly aware of the transition they will make from the "school world" to the "real world." Students, like all agents, have habituses that operate in relationship to the field and in the moment. These concepts are especially applicable to Black students who aim to improve academically and economically but interact in "a world structured according to the categories of the possible (for us) and the impossible (for us), of what's appropriated in advance by and for others and what one can reasonably expect for oneself" (Bourdieu, 2012, p. 357). This "us" and "others" mentality has a specific context in the United States because of its history of chattel slavery and anti-Blackness. CRT and its tenets untangle the intricate embedding of race in every aspect of American society and an educational system that reproduces social inequality.

## Education and Race in the United States

Education is not referenced in the U.S. Constitution. States establish schools and the policies that regulate them. The United States has a long-standing history of believing in education for only a select few: Whites, males, and the elite. In contrast, it was not only illegal for African Americans to seek education, it was also illegal to educate them. Yet public education eventually became available to the northeastern masses, including poor Whites. President Thomas Jefferson proposed free public education for males, excluding girls, in 1787 because of his belief in an educated citizen to fully participate in democracy.

Jefferson believed that students should be prepared to transact business, express ideas, improve their morals through reading, understand their duties to their neighbors and country, and understand their rights (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003). Prior to this, in 1740, the Stono Rebellion in South Carolina resulted in laws prohibiting “teaching any slave to write or employing any slave to write” to avoid “great inconveniences” (Williams, 2005, p. 13). Despite the laws that forbade education, enslaved African Americans risked physical violence to attain it. Anderson (1988) shared the words of a former slave: “It was against the law for any person to teach any slave to read; and any slave caught writing suffered the penalty of having his forefinger cut from his right hand” (p. 17). Despite the violent consequences, enslaved African Americans still pursued literacy, and those who knew how, enslaved and free, shared what they knew.

Approximately 5% (Anderson, 1988; Du Bois, 1935/1998) to 10% (Woodson, 1915) of enslaved Black people learned to read. As a result, after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, during the Civil War, and after the implementation of the Freedmen’s Bureau, underground literacy schools came to the forefront. This history also serves as a social justice reveal. Frederick Douglass was one of many formerly enslaved leaders who learned to read while enslaved. He did this partially with guile. In his autobiography, he shared how he used bread and competition to learn what he did not know from some of the poor White boys he befriended. Young Douglass would exchange bread for knowledge and later compete with a White youth who did not believe Douglass knew how to write. Douglass would write a word he could write, and his competitive White acquaintance would write a word he believed Douglass could not write. This is how Douglass navigated learning to write (Douglass, 1845).

The act of learning to read was an act of rebellion against relegation to a class position without rights, a caste, as defined by Du Bois (1910/2001). In his essay *The*

*College Bred Community* (1910/2001) Du Bois describes the status of recently freed enslaved African Americans after emancipation: “They became a part of a rigid caste system, out of which they could seldom legally rise, and their social organization among themselves was reduced to barest minimum for existence” (p. 51). Journalist and author Isabel Wilkerson (2020) provided a definition that contextualizes caste as experienced by contemporary African Americans:

> Caste is the granting or withholding of respect, status, honor, attention, privileges, resources, benefits of the doubt, and human kindness to someone on the basis of their perceived rank or standing in the hierarchy. Caste pushes back against an African American woman who, without humor or apology, takes a seat at the head of the table speaking Russian. It prefers an Asian-American man to put his technological expertise at the service of the company but not aspire to CEO. Yet it sees as logical a sixteen-year-old white teenager serving as store manager over employees from the subordinate caste three times his age. Caste is insidiousness and therefore powerful because it is not hatred, it is not personal. It is the worn grooves of comforting routines and unthinking expectations, patterns of a social order that have been in place for so long that it looks like the natural order of things. (p. 70)

Although Wilkerson argued the throughline of caste in India, Nazi Germany, and the United States, for the purposes of this research, I share her description as one way to understand the racialized social interactions of contemporary White and Black Americans. However, the definition that Du Bois (1899/2007) provided saliently establishes caste as rooted in law. Caste exceeds impolite, racist interactions; in the U.S. it describes the created and maintained social and economic stratification of African Americans to the bottom of the social and economic ladder.

Caste is rigid and it is maintained by law. Du Bois (1899/2007) grounds the notion and recognition of caste for African Americans in the emancipation of enslaved African Americans who were used as free labor. Although emancipated, African

Americans would then face a “rigid caste” system based in new laws. These Black Codes would often commit African Americans to forced labor. In the colonial United States, laws regulated knowledge and access to knowledge (Black literacy was illegal), work relations (African Americans were regulated and viewed as free labor), and personal relations (African Americans were legislated as property and three-fifths of a person). Michelle Alexander (2012) explains the origins of caste in slavery and its rebirth in postemancipation vagrancy laws and most recently in 1990s crime laws. Caste, then, in addition to stratification, may also be viewed as an element of habitus.

The social construction of race in the United States implicitly determines the socioeconomic hierarchy and is embedded in the country’s laws and mores. This social construct, which Omi and Winant (2015) define as racial formation, has formed our nation for the past four centuries. British colonial ties facilitated the international slave trade. This construction began to take hold by 1649 when one African and two European indentured servants were discovered escaping from servitude in. The European indentured servants were given four additional years of servitude. The African indentured servant was sentenced to servitude for the remainder of his life (Quarles, 1996). This set a clear marker in the distinction of future Americans by phenotype that also was linked to their treatment. People of African descent were no longer indentured servants, colonists, women, or men. They were Black; they were not White. They could be easily identified by their darker complexion and distinguished as a caste.

This local action, which evolved into legislation, designated servants of African descent as a class separate and distinct from their fellow workers of European decent, separating a union of workers and raising the status of White workers above that of Black workers. This quickly evolved into the prohibition of “lying with a Negroe” (Quarles, 1996), making interracial relationships illegal. Fewer than 20 years later, the status of freedom was designated by the “condition of the mother,” creating an enslaved caste. This early construction of race distinguished White and Black workers to maintain power by an elite group of White men (Appiah, 1985). It cemented the racial contract (Mills, 1997), ensuring White supremacy, Whiteness as property, and the right to exclude. By initiating the peculiar institution, it also legalized, demanded, and enforced a parallax view of reality that dehumanized all African Americans, enslaved and their free kin, and sanctioned the rape of women of African descent for the increase of property. If the purpose of race is to establish a permanent working underclass in the national indoctrination of caste and stratification of social status, it was essential to establish these elements. This foundational restriction of Black and White socialization of family and labor underscores that intentional inequity was part of the deal, which Mills (1997) called a racial contract, and speaks to the sociopolitical realities that were the foundation of the nation and continue to exist.

As Black youth progress through high school, in preparation for college or their career, their experiences may give insight into the current expressions of social reproduction impacting them in today’s socioeconomic and political climate. Issues of race and equity were inherent to the Civil Rights legislation of the 1960s and connected to the country’s racial policy of anti-Blackness, which included the segregation, dehumanization, and exclusion of Blacks from social, educational, and economic mobility. These were manifest through physical and ideological violence and culture

(Mills, 1997). This violence still exists to maintain the social contract of racism and instruct African American youth to learn their caste as they enter adult life.

### ***Roots of Secondary Education and College and Career Readiness***

During the 17th century, secondary education was mostly limited to families who could afford to have their children attend school rather than contribute to the household income. The Latin Grammar School, established in Boston in 1635, was based on the British Latin School. The Town of Boston provided salary and housing to the instructors. Boys, only, attended for free to prepare for university, the necessary training to become religious or political leaders for the community. Later in the 18th century, the Academy School emerged. By the mid-19th century, public high schools began to replace academies as urban areas developed with industrialization. More than two centuries after public high schools were created to prepare the wealthy, male, and White students, public colleges were established following the Morrill Act of 1862 to train Americans in the knowledge and jobs that the new industrial economy needed. Public high schools soon gained greater attention and significance. They also remained segregated.

Ratified during the Civil War, the Morrill Act provided 30,000 acres per state representative (senators and congressmen) to each respective state to sell and invest in order to fund an existing or new state university program to prepare graduates for new careers for a changing economy related to agriculture and the mechanical arts, (Morrill Act 1862, sec. 4). Addressing the end of slavery and an agrarian economy, this act subsidized the 1862 land-grant colleges to train workers for the rapidly emerging industrial economy. Public college became affordable for those who could not afford private college.

The act, which funded 69 colleges (including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Wisconsin) became law during a pivotal social, political, and economic time in the country’s history, and states had two years from its enactment to accept funds. Although the country battled over the right to maintain African Americans as property and free labor, the Morrill Act claimed as federal property vast parcels of land where Indigenous people lived and sold it to invest in an educational system to train its citizens and workers for a transitioning, globally influenced industrial economy. In preparation for the loss of free enslaved labor, the Morrill Act subsidized the education of White Americans needed for new agricultural business in the new territories and mechanical arts industries for an economy that required less manual labor. When public education was provided through the establishment of the Freedmen’s Bureau after the civil war, education became available to both Black and White Southerners.

After the Civil War, literacy rates increased quickly during Reconstruction. Unfortunately, after Reconstruction and the shift in federal administration, once again laws were instituted to oppress Black Americans’ access to education, civil rights, and legal protection. This also marked the need for secondary schools as the Industrial Revolution expanded along with interest in higher education.

When Southern states refused to admit Black Americans to the 1862 land-grant colleges and universities, the Morrill Act of 1890 legislated to rescind funding if those colleges discriminated against Black students in admissions. The other option was to create a separate college for Black students with a portion of the funding. Southern states chose the latter, foreshadowing the *Plessy V. Ferguson* (1896) separate-but-equal case, and subsequent segregated U.S. school systems. Eighteen of the historically Black colleges and universities, such as Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University and Southern University, resulted from this decision. Known as the “1890 colleges,” they would not receive the 1862 funding of 30,000 acres of land (per state senator and representative) for funding. This disparate provision of funding and access to education, after emancipation and the ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, added to the “education debt” (Ladson-Billing, 2006) of 250 years of prohibited and inequitable education of African Americans. This gives insight into the early legalized financial and temporal disparities in education for African Americans compared to White Americans.

These disparities in access created a higher education time loss in access for African Americans, and an additional economic loss for schools that were denied the same initial investment that was provided to the 1862 land-grant schools. This disparity expanded to secondary schools. State-funded public schools were segregated, if they were available at all for Black students in the South. In the North, Black educators were forbidden from teaching secondary school; the first Black senior high school teacher was not appointed until 1946 in Philadelphia (Delmont, 2010). Furthermore, Black educators were paid substantially less than White educators at multiple levels of teaching, despite their training and education.

### ***Secondary Education and Race***

The Northern view of African American public education had peculiar contradictions of its own, particularly in the mid-1850s. Although initially integrated, Pennsylvania schools were segregated in 1854. Antebellum Philadelphia had the second largest Black population outside of Baltimore and the South, with established churches, schools, and voluntary societies (Hershberg, 1971). A national meeting of the National

Negro Convention occurred in Philadelphia in 1830, typifying the exceptional intellectual and activist African American Philadelphian community. Philadelphia was already an Underground Railroad stop, center for abolition, and birthplace of the first African-centered Christian church in America. Philadelphians vehemently opposed the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and freemen like Robert Purvis pledged to protect any runaway if "any wretch enter my dwelling . . . to execute this law on me or mine" (Harding, 1983, p. 159). Shortly after this, de jure school segregation was implemented in Pennsylvania in 1854, requiring the separate education of 20 or more pupils. This shift to de jure school segregation that restricted Black teachers' employment would reverberate long after schools had to desegregate after the Civil War. Despite the existence of African American educators during this period, their employment was not guaranteed.

In most Northern states, Black educators were prevented from teaching secondary school because many urban school districts refused to fund their employment. According to historian Vincent P. Franklin (2009), Pennsylvania public school districts "throughout the state [decided not to] employ African American educators. In keeping with the predominant social mores of the period, public school officials would not allow African American educators to teach White students" (p. 41). Philadelphia public schools did not have an African American senior high school teacher until 1946 (Delmont, 2010).

Opposition to the education of African Americans resurfaced from both wealthy and poor White Americans, especially Southerners, after the Civil War. Planters refused to rent to teachers who taught African Americans in Louisiana and threatened to evict parents who sent their children to school in Virginia (Anderson, 1988). Furthermore, Anderson writes, freedmen schools and the African American thirst for public school education created a conflict of “an emerging literate black working class in the midst of a largely illiterate poor white class” (p. 27). Although Northerners believed that “universal education was a sound investment in social stability and economic prosperity . . . a means to make society run more efficient” (p. 80), Southerners saw this as a disruption to their free labor and property rights. Neither Northern nor Southern states believed in funding African American education. Not deterred, and recognizing the value of education, African Americans established their own schools.

The Institute for Colored Youth (ICY), now Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, became the first institute of higher education for African Americans in 1837. Established with funds inherited from Quaker Richard Humphreys, ICY was founded to train African American teachers for African American children. This was especially significant because schools that accepted Black students were not always received well by Black Philadelphians because of untrained and uncaring White teachers (Silcox, 1973). ICY became an educational and cultural hub where accomplished Black male and female educators prepared African American students for health professions and university education and teaching and provided community enrichment. ICY educator and political activist Octavio Catto argued at the 1865 Equal Rights Convention in Philadelphia, “The colored man was the best teacher of colored children [because] . . . the colored teacher had the welfare of the race more at heart knowing that they rose or fell together” (Franklin, 2009, p. 41). ICY proved this repeatedly. Its faculty included the first African American doctorate in physics, and by 1881, ICY was one of the best “classical secondary schools in the United States” (Franklin, 2009, p. 41).

Dynamic educator Fannie Jackson Coppin was key to this stellar reputation. Beginning in 1879, she expanded ICY to provide industrial training. The school created an industrial department that offered evening classes in bricklaying, plastering, carpentry, shoemaking, printing, tailoring, stenography, typing, and millinery (Coppin, 1913; Perkins, 1987). ICY graduates taught at segregated schools in the North and South and went on to become doctors, dentists, lawyers, and judges. Although ICY closed in 1902, relocated to rural Pennsylvania outside Philadelphia, and followed a Washingtonian model of industrial education, the nation expanded the “high school movement” (Goldin & Katz, 1997, p. 1). ICY would soon return to its classical model, evolving into a more defined college with a campus.

Similarly, in Washington, D.C., Dunbar High School was a model for many of the private secondary schools that were established for Black students across the nation by Black parents, churches, and communities. Located in the nation’s capital, by 1870, Dunbar would become the first public high school, White or Black (Sowell, 1974). As a secondary school in the nation’s capital, its teachers and students experienced the shifting domestic and educational policy during Woodrow Wilson’s tenures as a member of the Committee of Ten to Secondary Schools in 1892–1893, president of Princeton University, and U.S. president in 1913–1921. Wilson’s screening of *Birth of a Nation* (1915) at the White House underscored his White supremacist values and the interconnectedness of social actors in secondary schools and U.S. structures and laws.

Wilson’s tenure as an ivy league university president and U.S. president instituted new federal employment laws that segregated public facilities, relegated African Americans to certain employment, required photo identification to facilitate segregation

(MacLaury, 2000), and required one African American employee to work behind a screen so as to not offend his White coworker. Independent Black filmmaker Oscar Micheaux responded with a media counternarrative to *Birth of a Nation*, the White supremacist film that glamorized the Ku Klux Klan and lynching of African Americans. *Within Our Gates* (1920) tells the story of a Black woman educator who secures financial support from a wealthy White Northern woman and successful Black doctor to prevent the closure of a school for Black children in the South. However, she is nearly raped by a White landlord and is saved only when he realizes that she is his daughter. The film is also representative of the creation and distribution of counternarratives to address erroneous White narratives. Micheaux countered the White lie of the Black male sexual predator of White women, with a recognizable historical truth—White male sexual predation of Black women. Micheaux countered the lie of the lazy, ignorant, predator Black man with the caring, socially conscious Black doctor and the driven Black scientist, both suitors of the African American female character.

I bring attention to these events to contextualize secondary education, race in America, and the social, cultural, political, and ethical events that are ever present—aligning with the constructs that Ladson-Billings (2006, 2013) extended in her holistic definition of the education debt. Ladson-Billings (2006) expanded her critique of the achievement gap as the educational debt and articulated a holistic look at four constructs or decisions that created that debt: historical, economic, sociopolitical, and ethical. She argued that the achievement gap is an education debt and that the education debt as an economic debt is actually the wealth gap. The historical gap that existed due to gender and class disparities has dissipated with time; however, race disparities continue.

Sociopolitical debt is tied to the laws and policies that created and engendered debt as a result of a society based on racial supremacy. The moral debt is what we owe to the descendants of those people who were sacrificed as citizens and did not receive the full benefits of citizenship skills and application.

Ladson-Billings (2013) emphasized that the "stakes is high" for our new-century students. The educational debt they are owed is rising. Ten years later, the stakes are higher. In her text *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* (2015), Aimee Meredith Cox argues that understanding today's high schoolers as "shapeshifters" and educating them is still "the most important task" (p. 110). She explains,

> Shapeshifting describes how young Black women living in the United States engage with, confront, challenge, invert, unsettle, and expose the material impact of systemic oppression. Shapeshifting is an act, a theory, and, in this sense, a form of praxis that—although uniquely definitive of and defined by Black girls—reveals our collective vulnerabilities. (p. 7)

Shapeshifting may also be a necessary survival strategy for all to navigate and thrive in structures meant to confine and deny mobility beyond a caste.

### ***Secondary Education, the United States, the World, and Work***

The early decades of the 1900s marked a shift in secondary education amid economic, international, and sociopolitical changes. Manufacturing was the economic engine for the country and required different training. The United States expanded westward, welcoming European immigrants fleeing famine and political persecution to fulfil America's labor needs and populate land stolen from Indigenous people, who were either murdered or moved to reservations. American expansion turned the colonized into the colonizer, elevating the U.S. status as a world leader that was a World War I force.

The significance of education for the future of the United States was so great that it distinguished itself as the first Western nation to provide public high school, graduating more high school students than any European nation for the first half of the 20th century. Americans with high school diplomas increased from 9% in 1910 to more than 50% in 1940 and U.S. secondary school students had greater educational attainment than their United Kingdom peers. Some argue that this rapid growth was not only a result of the U.S. form of secondary education, but also the result of the Great Depression due to the lack of available jobs (Mordechay, 2017). The significance of a high school education was not lost on the Black community.

As more African Americans had access to higher education, they promoted high school as the route to college. In 1919, African American fraternity Alpha Phi Alpha introduced a national program, “Go-to-High School, Go-to-College,” to support and encourage high school and college enrollment, demonstrating the significance of education to the Black community. A century later, the “Go-to-High School, Go-to College" program still exists. However, the United States, once an international forerunner in public secondary education, now ranks below its OECD peers in high school reading, math, and science achievement.

The secondary education success experienced in the first half of the 20th century existed mostly in homogenous, wealthy areas with few immigrants, and “the state’s prior commitment to publicly-funded colleges” (Katz & Goldin, p. 3). Therefore, generations-old demographic homogeneity, wealth, and spatial proximity to publicly funded colleges potentially provide insight into the 21 century state of secondary education, particularly how these factors impact policy in today's diverse United States, which depends on testing measurements based on a homogeneous White norm.

### ***Vocational Education***

The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 recognized a state board of vocational education; provided for funding for education in agriculture, trade and industry, and homemaking; and paid for vocational teacher and staff salaries (Lynch, 2000). In addition, vocational students were to spend half of their instructional time in practical work (Hayward & Benson, 1993). Vocational education was the answer to a changing economy and country in the early 20th century. As industrialization spread across the globe, it came to the United States with an influx of European immigrants answering industrialists' calls for laborers. The burgeoning manufacturing economy activated proposals from education reformers and labor leaders for vocational education that would train future workers for manufacturing jobs. In addition, political leaders were anxious to ensure that new immigrants were properly Americanized in citizenship. Wan (2014) complicated the idea of literacy and citizenship by exploring literacy education as a measure of citizenship and cultural acceptance. Literacy then becomes aligned with employment opportunities. Citizen becomes an act that is "produced" in "cultural and material spaces such as classrooms, workplaces, and community spaces" and "union education programs" (Wan, 2014, p. 6).

In language and objections that mirrored those of Du Bois (1903/2019) regarding Washington's support of industrial education, education reformer John Dewey railed against "social predestination, by means of narrow trade-training" and asserted the importance of "ingenuity and executive capacity as shall make workers, as far as may be, the masters of their own industrial fate" (as cited in Dewey's and Snedden's letters to the

New Republic, 1915 reprinted in Curriculum Inquiry, 1977, p. 38). Dewey feared that secondary education too aligned with business would institute a separate worker and educated classes (Snedden et. al, 1977). In his words, he believed the worker should "first alter the existing industrial system, and ultimately transform it" (Dewey, p. 39). Nonetheless, the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act passed, providing federal support for vocational education, and was supported by the National Education Association's Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education, published in 1919.

Appropriations for vocational education grew almost tenfold by 1943 (Gordon, 2014). Although some benefitted from vocational education, this was not the case for African Americans. In 1951 in Philadelphia, for example, 76% of African American students were tracked to modified vocational and commercial programs, compared to 54% of White students (Delmont, 2012). Not only were students tracked in these schools, at one school, they provided free labor to the city's Redevelopment Authority and the Citizen's Council on City Planning. Under the curriculum option named Operation Fix-Up, "students helped to lay concrete, hang doors, and repair brick outhouses to be used as trashcan shelters" (Delmont, 2012, p. 80). In essence, Black students were trained into their status quo position in American society, relegated to unskilled labor. Furthermore, the union restrictions against Black Americans in the 18th century now existed within secondary education because Black "students and workers were blocked from skilled trades because of the discrimination in the school's union-sponsored apprenticeship classes" (Delmont, 2012, p. 80).

Although the guidelines for vocational education and union political power have changed since the 1970s, the numbers are the same, suggesting that barriers remain and others may exist that problematize CCR for Black high school seniors. Furthermore, curriculum offerings did not keep pace with the economy's needs and the demands of work organizations for agriculture and limited funding for equipment expenditures for retraining, tuition and books, and rehabilitation (Gordon, 2014).

During the Civil Rights Era, vocational education began to experience greater federal oversight. On the heels of *Brown V. Board of Education* and prior to the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, the Vocational Act of 1963 broadened the scope of education in agriculture and home economics, provided funds for research experimentation, and made permanent health and technical fields of study. It also reduced federal supervision of vocational programs, shifted the funding to be determined by student population and age category, increased funding, and permitted funds to be used to purchase equipment. It also authorized work study and stated that vocational education was for "persons of all ages in all communities," including academically and economically challenged students and disabled students (Vocational Act of 1963). The act was amended in 1968 and its scope was expanded to include students who needed training or career guidance after secondary school and postsecondary school (Gordon, 2014; Hayward & Benson, 1993).

Vocational education policy changes reflect the social movements of the time as well as global and economic realities. During the Cold War, the National Defense Act of 1958 prioritized funding of technical education (Gordon, 2014). This act was absorbed into the Higher Education Act of 1972. When the Vocational Education Act became the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984, national urgency around global competition in technology had become embedded in educational priorities. At the same time, the nation was reacting to the post-Civil Rights realities of school integration, affirmative action, and equal opportunity in employment. This backdrop is noticeable in the addition of technical programs evidenced in the Perkins Act, including stronger legislative initiatives for greater access to opportunities for “minorities,” women, and disabled students. This included a funding structure of set-asides that created an interpretation that some vocational education programs were for disabled and disadvantaged students (Morrison, 1979).

To emphasize the focus on technical education and availability for all students, the Perkins Act was renamed the Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990. It called for academic integration and partnerships with industry (Imperatore & Hyslop, 2017), accountability through performance measures (Gordon, 2014), and local improvement plans for poor-performing programs (Hayward & Benson, 1993). Also, a funding formula required that 75% of funds be allocated to certain populations; funding for special populations was reduced (American Vocational Association, 1998), as was state funding for technical assistance (Hayward & Benson, 1993). In 1998, funding increased to 85% to local agencies and 15% to the state. The act was renamed, eliminating “applied” from the title, and special population set-asides and programs outside the Basic State Grant were repealed (American Vocational Association, 1998; Gordon, 2014). Tech Prep, funded through a planning and demonstration grant in 1990, became an authorized program that could be funded competitively or by formula (Gordon, 2014).

The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (“Perkins V,” 2018), which is valid through 2024, is the reauthorization of the similarly titled 2006 Career and Technical Education Act (“Perkins IV”), which eliminated the term “vocational” from previously described “vocational” education. “Career and Technical Education” (CTE} emphasized the nation’s focus on career pathways and technical education to support the economy. Several of the changes and prioritizations in the act include (a) replacing the term “vocational” with CTE; (b) emphasizing 21st-century jobs; (c) maintaining Perkins funding through the Basic State Grant; (d) eliminating Tech Prep, which had not been funded since 2010; (e) expanding career exploration funding below seventh grade to include fifth and sixth grades; (f) increasing state reserve funds to 15% to encourage local innovation and implement programs of study; (g) linking academic and career content across secondary and postsecondary education; (h) strengthening local accountability provisions to ensure program improvement; (i) providing $1.2 billion in federal support for all 50 states; (j) requiring a local needs assessment; (k) developing vertical secondary through postsecondary programs of study for new technical fields; (l) supporting dual enrollment in college courses while attending high school; (m) maintaining disaggregation of data; (n) adding a requirement for disaggregation by CTE program or career cluster; and (o) supplementing support for special populations.

To receive funding, each local education agency (LEA) must submit a state-aligned application that includes the comprehensive needs assessment and how the LEA will communicate programs to special populations, provide training for special populations, ensure nondiscrimination against special populations, and address their academic performance (National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity). Under the changes to the law, the Government Academic Office is responsible for the disaggregation of subpopulations, such as by race and gender and immigration status.

## Literature Review

In the previous pages, I discussed my theoretical frameworks, Bourdieu's social reproduction theory and the critical race theory tenet of Whiteness as Property. I also introduced community cultural wealth (CCW), a CRT-derived counter to the cultural capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) component of social reproduction theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990/2000). I then briefly discussed the history of race in U.S. education and the education and economic policies that influenced the current CCR agenda.

The remaining sections of this chapter synthesize previous research (including some from OECD countries, South Africa, Australia, and those similar to the United States in White and Black power dynamics) on (a) the ways that schooling and CCR operate to reproduce inequality; (b) the reproduction of Black educational and work mobility in CCR; (c) Whiteness as property to conceptualize how reproduction occurs for Black youth; and (d) CCW and other methods to exercise agency to overcome obstacles and support mobility.

### *CCR in the 21st Century*

In 2007, the National Governors Association (NGA), founded in 1908 and now consisting of 50 states, three territories, and two commonwealths, discussed the need for secondary students to be better prepared for college. For several years, the Reading and Problematic Solving rankings of the United States continued to decline compared to other nations. This decline that began in the 1990s was pronounced in 2007 because it also accompanied a decrease in secondary enrollment, an area the United States dominated since the early 20th century (DiBenedetto & Myers, 2016; Goldin & Katz, 1997).

The NGA developed national educational standards. These standards were based on international educational programs and state standards, with the goal of preparing high school graduates for CCR. Of concern is that as the NGA has compared the United States to other nations, it has not considered the homogeneity of these other nations and the post–World War II shift in U.S. public education that would not fare well against a neoliberal, global economy that endured its own shift.

In response to the' declining educational status of the United States among its peers, President Barack Obama commented, "The countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow" (cited in Malin et. al, 2017, p. 811). This new reauthorization of the ESEA specified funding requirements to boost postsecondary advanced training that would lead to four-year college education or two-year advanced training for advanced technology careers. Under President Obama, the 2015 ESSA, for the first time since the 1965 ESEA was ratified, articulated CCR as a defined policy goal embedded within the ESEA. Furthermore, Perkins V included clear academic requirements, shedding the perception of CTE as a nonacademic and less rigorous secondary school pathway.

College readiness has been loosely defined over the years as a combination of college preparatory coursework and competitive standardized test scores (American College Testing [ACT], 2012; An & Taylor, 2015). Career readiness has been less clearly defined. When Perkins V was instituted in 2018, "career readiness" replaced the term "vocational education" and its perception as the option for less academically able secondary school students (Castellano et al., 2003; Gordon, 2014; Lewis, 1998; Lynch, 2000; Plank, 2001; Scott & Sarkees-Wircenski, 2008). This was a necessary adjustment for an economy that required employees trained to operate the advanced technology used in today's marketplace. The United States faced similar challenges in the transition to industrialization during the post–World War II Cold War emphasis on science education.

Similar to previous eras, a shifting economy and international competition were the impetus for the focus on the Common Core Standards that led to CCR, as demonstrated by President Obama's focus on education and training to prepare Americans to compete in a global workforce. The standards reflect shifts in priorities for English language arts and mathematics. The English language arts shifts emphasize text complexity and academic language; nonfiction reading to develop background knowledge; and reading, speaking, and writing grounded in textual evidence. Mathematics shifts require greater focus on fewer topics, linking topics and focus across grades, and applying equal rigor to conceptual understanding, fluency, and procedural factors (Common Core, 2021).

Often recognized for CCR expertise is David T. Conley, who created a proficiency-based admission standards system for the Oregon University System in the 1990s and is credited with coining the phrase "CCR." Conley (2007) defined CCR as the preparation for students to enroll and succeed "without remediation" in a postsecondary institution to earn a baccalaureate or certificate for a pathway for future career development. He extended this preparation to what he named the four keys (Conley, 2012): cognitive strategies, content knowledge, learning skills and techniques, and transition knowledge and skills. According to Conley (2014), "One of the most important goals of the Common Core Standards is that they provide the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college, career, and life" (p. 4). Specific academic content standards were created to guide academic knowledge. However, the knowledge required for "life" is not clearly defined or easily measured. This concerned Roderick et al. (2009), who argued that content knowledge, core academic skills, behavioral skills, and the ability to effectively search for and apply to colleges are better indicators of college readiness.

### ***CCR Measures and Accountability***

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2002 reauthorization of ESEA), which was championed as the policy that would ensure that "disadvantaged" student would be proficient in reading and mathematics by 2013, started our nation's 21st century with punitive measures that compelled schools to reallocate a portion of their ESEA Title I budgets, shuttering neighborhood schools due to their claimed poor results on accountability goals. Despite research that indicated that NCLB math and literacy goals were impossible to achieve by 2014 (Bass & Gerstl-Pepin, 2011; Linn, 2003) and the reality that they were not achieved, we may now have to prepare for another round of standardized testing, again cloaked in a phrase that everyone will champion: CCR in the ESSA (2015).

The United States uses educational test scores as an indicator of success against global economic competition (Bass & Gerstl-Pepin, 2011). Allocating ESEA funding for testing and states, rather than directing it to the "communities or families in challenging economic circumstances" (Bass & Gerstl-Pepin, 2011, p. 919) for which it was originally designed in 1965, is an example of "standardized testing [as] a pernicious testing system" (Bass & Gerstl-Pepin, 2011, p. 872). Although there is a need to address the preparation of our youth for the future demands of society, there is also a need to appraise whether we are accurately and appropriately assessing our progress against our OCED peers and its use to "prepare" and "ready." This is especially significant given the diverse populations and unique educational history of exclusion and segregation, as well as the postindustrial, neoliberal global economy that excluded African American youth encounter.

Under the 2015 ESSA, many schools selected CCR to measure school quality or student success as the latest accountability measurement. Possible measures vary by state, with measurements ranging from postsecondary education enrollments to industry credentials, standardized test scores, college entrance examinations, advanced placement classes, and dual enrollment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014). In one northeastern state, students can meet their graduation requirements by gaining proficiency scores in the state's end-of-course examinations in English, Algebra 1, or biology. PSAT, SAT, and ACT scores, completion of a pre-apprenticeship program, and industry credentials are also eligible for graduation requirements. The provision of options is encouraging, but the emphasis on testing as a measure creates barriers for Black and low-socioeconomic students. Although research has indicated that state proficiency exams are problematic because family income tends to predict student test scores, they remain an accountability measure under the latest ESEA version, this time for CCR. For public schools that exist in communities that have grown increasingly impoverished, low testing scores are evident in the Adequate Yearly Progress school reports that local districts share.

Pennsylvania can determine if the "demonstrated performance level of the state academic standard . . . is included on a student's transcript" (High School Graduation

Requirements, 22 Pa. Code § 4.24., 2002). In effect, this creates a tracking system that will continue with the student after high school graduation, potentially determining their career. Another option for graduation is "a letter guaranteeing full-time employment," which must be accompanied by another "piece of evidence," of which a Service Learning Project is the only option. This presumes that African American teenagers will obtain full-time employment immediately after high school, despite experiencing the highest unemployment numbers of all populations (Spievack & Sick, 2019).

Thirteen states require high school exit exams for diplomas, including Florida, New York, Texas, and Virginia. Other states have discontinued the use of exit exams because of the impact on student graduation and postsecondary trajectory numbers (Papay et al., 2008). One of the most problematic complications of high school exit exams is that students with similarly successful academic proficiency scores are separated solely on meeting or not meeting a high school exam cut-off score. This exacerbates already existing testing inequities (Papay et al., 2022).

Research done in Kentucky demonstrated that when the ACT was used to measure college readiness, African Americans were at a disadvantage compared to White students. Even when using the National School Lunch Program, school compositions and neighborhood factors to include family, economic, and residential factors persisted (Herberger et al., 2020). This underscores that using socioeconomic status to remedy racial disparities is not effective. African Americans experience residential segregation in addition to racial segregation, which further exacerbates socioeconomic status. After *Brown v. Board of Education* mandates were undermined, Jefferson County, Kentucky attempted to address segregation using student, family, and neighborhood demographics in the belief that by using economic needs as a factor, the district would still be able to address their school desegregation requirement. They discovered that they were still unsuccessful. Furthermore, school choice, specifically districts that provide access to vouchers to provide access to nonpublic and charter schools with public education funds, has made balancing student populations more difficult. Socioeconomic status can be addressed as an additional factor impacting African American student progress, but it cannot stand in the place of race to appease White Americans.

### ***Improving College Readiness***

Other CCR research has focused on improving college readiness. I examined this research to see if it might have any bearing on African American youth and their postsecondary transitions and decision-making. Roderick et al. (2009) identified high school coursework, achievement test scores, and grade point average (GPA) as the most commonly used measures of readiness. To improve access to college and decrease racial and ethnic disparities apparent in the usual measures of readiness, they argued for the following: (a) valid indicators for college readiness in accountability systems, (b) building high school teachers' instructional capacity, (c) building schools' capacity to provide college and financial aid information to low-income students, and (d) incentivizing strong academic performance by students. Their suggestions move the work of college readiness from a student responsibility to a school responsibility. This shift is a positive action that may help student achievement; however, it does not acknowledge the personal capacity or cultural responsiveness of the school staff. In addition, it also possibly opens the door for more technology monitoring students' achievement and accountability rather than supporting personal attention to learning.

The College Readiness Indicator System (CRIS) was funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2008 and drew on the use of districts for decision-making and early warning indicators. The CRIS involved the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, the John W. Garner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University, and the Chicago Consortium on School Research. CRIS defines three areas of college readiness: academic preparedness, academic tenacity, and college knowledge. It includes "the knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes" needed to access and succeed in college; focuses on indicators at the student, school, and district levels; and includes indicators to provide citywide supports for student needs (Borsato et al., 2013; Mac Iver et al., 2019). CRIS is meant as a tool to improve college readiness, but it does not change teacher attitudes. Borsato et al. (2013) state, "Districts must then use CRIS in tandem with efforts to foster cultures, attitudes, and beliefs that reinforce the need to provide for all what was once reserved for some" (p. 35). This is a reminder that people construct and are the systems. Policies and initiatives are impacted by and dependent on the mindsets of those who administer them. It also reminds us of Mills's (1997) racial contract and its continuous presence.

### ***CCR in Schools***

Despite college-readiness initiatives and accountability expectations, administrators' personal deficit beliefs can create a "discourse of college worthiness" that undermines a college-going culture for all, as demonstrated in Convertino & Graboski-Baurer's (2018) case study in an urban high school. Their findings describe an administrator's personal beliefs in "personal ambition and economic entitlement" neoliberal discourse that creates a "culture of poverty" deficit lens of students and families whose immediate concerns about living expenses and college costs hinder their college interests. Rather than considering other options to address students' and their families' immediate needs and college options, the administrator's mindset prioritizes their beliefs, an action that often causes discontent with families. This research highlights the prevalence of an individualistic life view and its ideological culture clash with students and their families.

Other research on programs to improve student college readiness suggests the following target areas: leadership commitment, data infrastructure, building adult capacity around data use and college readiness, connecting indicators with supports to promote college readiness, and partnerships with community and higher education institutions (Mac Iver et al., 2019). More than half the population of 25- to 34-year-olds in the United States does not have a college degree, and large gaps in college attainment still remain for African Americans and Latinos in comparison with Whites (Balfanz et al., 2016).

Nonsupportive school staff also impact CCR. In a study of ninth graders across all school districts, including the largest district in North Carolina, students described the Internet and exposure to different careers as the "most helpful" in obtaining postsecondary information (Gibbons et al., 2006). Television and parents top the "most helpful" list at 27.6% and 26.2%, respectfully, with school counselors at 3.2%. African American students are the least likely to receive support according to this study, which does not distinguish Black students by economic level.

The lack of reliance on school counselors in this study highlights the importance of understanding the CCR from the student's perspective, and the potential impact of class, race, and residence on access to and support from school counselors. Providing in-school application support increased college applications by 15% and college enrollment increased by 5% points (Oreopoulos & Ford, 2019). Using 2015 survey data of seniors in urban schools, research has also shown that first-generation students are more likely to attend college when they have helpful counselors (Martinez et al., 2020). Still, in high minority, high poverty public schools graduates encounter both supportive and unsupportive counselors (Reddick et al., 2011).

### ***Career Readiness***

College readiness has been loosely defined over the years as a combination of college preparatory coursework and competitive standardized test scores (ACT, 2012; An & Taylor, 2015). Career readiness has been less clearly defined. Fletcher et al. (2019) identify several key components of preparing high school students for a changing world and CCR: (a) shared direction, (b) tackling challenges, (c) work-based learning, (d) local capacity, (e) collaboration, (f) a balanced curriculum, and (g) school-based internships.

When Perkins V was instituted in 2018, it bridged college-readiness expectations with what were formerly considered vocational expectations. This was a necessary adjustment for an economy that requires employees trained to operate the advanced technology used in today’s marketplace. The United States faced similar challenges in the transition to industrialization during the post–World War II Cold War emphasis on science education.

Despite their aspirations, many high school students do not believe they are prepared for college or their career (Fergus et al., 2014). A 2017–2018 survey taken in a northeastern urban school district reported that two-thirds of high school students strongly agreed that their parents had high expectations for them and slightly more than one-third of these students knew what they planned to do when they graduated and how to get the career they wanted. However, slightly less than one-third strongly agreed that their school was helping to prepare them for college. This may be an indicator of ineffective implementation, communication, measurement, or definition of CCR. Factors that research shows may negatively or positively impact CCR include neighborhoods, school systems, cultural relevance, spatial capital, and temporal capital.

### ***Community and CCR***

Residential segregation impacts multiple areas of economic inequalities, a double segregation for Black communities (Massey & Denton, 1993; Orfield, et al., 2012). Schools that are doubly segregated by race and class have been proven to have fewer experienced and qualified teachers. For high school graduates, this creates multiple challenges that follow them after graduation. For example, strong elementary school teachers benefit students much later in life as they demonstrate higher college attendance rates and employment earnings (Chetty et al., 2011). This suggests potential futures for young adults, depending on their neighborhoods.

In deindustrialized areas in England where students aspire to careers in a creative or knowledge economy, Allen and Hollingsworth (2013) found that “localised sets of material, social and imagined relations are central in producing young people’s sense of place in the world and their possibilities of mobility” (p. 513). Neighborhoods with greater diversity and proximity to higher education support future opportunities. Proximity to higher education and employment opportunities impacts students’ interests and aspirations. Social capital developed in these neighborhoods could support mobility connected to a creative economy. However, researchers have noted the social and spatial isolation created by the restricted exclusivity of the creative or knowledge economy, implying that the location and relationships become exclusive and less accessible for students of color (Gadsden & Dixon-Roman, 2017).

This may also reveal to students the federal investment policies by urban and suburban areas (Anyon,1997). How adolescents make meaning of their neighborhoods and experiences may vary, then, depending on their continual interactions and experiences that contribute to their habituses. Neighborhoods can then be examples and producers of the political economy invested in by federal policy (Gadsden & Dixon-Roman, 2017).

### *Family and CCR*

As important as exposure to future possibilities in the neighborhoods and communities that youth traverse is the interaction and social access to individuals with similar goals and experiences with the same cultural background. An especially interesting study developed by Ryan and Hopkins (2013) to support disadvantaged students in their transition to undergraduate study in Australia provides useful insight into strategies that may support and influence postsecondary aspirations of adolescent populations in lower socioeconomic classes. By combining social media and career development learning, researchers found that they were able to improve participants' preparation for postsecondary school by increasing their social network. Participants were students who had not been admitted to undergraduate school. They were provided with tuition, transportation, and meals to participate in a program to provide them with additional preparation for postsecondary education or a career. A Facebook site was required and used as a career and academic space for students to regulate and share information about assignments and progress.

The program resulted in more than 80% of the students transitioning to college, and they continued to use the virtual social network site after the program's conclusion. This strategy can be explored to support students in the development of social capital that will continue to grow and serve them throughout their academic and career lives (Ryan & Hopkins, 2013). But in the context of African descendent culture, it also represents familial capital. The students are building bonds as siblings would, facing a challenge together, offering a layered connection. Although the study occurred in Australia, because its focus was on participants of a similar economic demographic in a former English-speaking colony with similar issues of race, some ideas are of interest, in particular the building of a social network, which in Ryan and Hopkins study began prior to school, continued throughout school, and could be accessed after graduation.

According to Kerpelman et al. (2002), although school systems are essential for academic growth, the "family system is a central place in which African American adolescents receive messages about who they are becoming, and can (or cannot) become, in terms of education and career" (p. 289). The authors identified emotional preparation, a form of resilience, as an important strategy that African American mothers use to prepare their daughters for the future. Kerpelman et al. studied the perceptions that mothers and daughters had of the daughters' expected selves and strategies for promoting their daughters' progress toward attaining desired academic and career goals. The participants consisted of 22 pairs of African American mothers and their ninth- and eleventh-grade daughters. The study revealed that mothers assisted with "academic and emotional preparation for college" (p. 300). In addition to the "soft skills" of interpersonal relations for college and employment, emotional preparation for Black youth may be critical to their resistance to and self-preservation against anti-Blackness and inequities they will encounter in education, employment, and society.

Dixon-Roman (2013) concluded, with limitations, that family income, and correlating social and cultural capital, does positively improve math and reading achievement. Black males from homes of poverty versus middle-class homes have "a 1-year developmental lag in math achievement and a 1.7-year developmental lag in reading achievement at the age of 10" (Dixon-Roman, 2013, p. 854). Because achievement scores have been identified as a measure for CCR and therefore are linked to educational qualifications as a form of cultural capital, Dixon-Roman's study of Black middle-class families provides insight into social reproduction and mobility for Black families. However, the presence of the "middle class" parent advocating and visibly supporting their child is significant as well. The exercise of social and cultural capital provides insight and opportunities for low-income families.

### ***Exclusion and CCR***

A 2007–2012 study of a southeast Florida school district observed that as career academies became more diversified over time, Black participation decreased in particular academies. For example, African American enrollment in career academies increased from 9.3% to 11.7% (Cox et al., 2014). However, enrollment decreased from 15.9% to 8% in architecture and construction and from 22.5% to 10.9% in information technology. White student enrollment decreased from 69% to 64%; however, enrollment in the career academies of architecture and construction and information technology remained the same. This use of career programs and academics to support academically at risk students seems to impact the access that Black students have to economically promising careers as the number of Black students increases.

An additional concern in Cox et al.'s study was the decreasing Black student participation in more stable and higher-paying career academies while that of White students remained consistent. One reason may have been the use of standardized testing to recruit students and assess their progress, potentially creating the same problems that exist in academic testing. Non-White students from lower-income families do not score as high as White students on standardized tests (Reardon, 2016).

### ***Habitus, Dominant Culture, and CCW***

Bourdieu (2005) describes habitus, possessed by all agents, as "socialized subjectivity, a historic transcendental, whose schemes of perception and appreciation (systems of preferences, tastes, etc.) are the product of collective and individual history" (p. 211). Bourdieu expanded this idea of habitus so that we understand that it is in constant flux, growing and changing in response to individual and collective experiences. Unlike the fixed "fragmented consciousness" in service to a deterministic capitalist society, habitus shifts to adjust in response to the agent and field. Within the habitus, cultural capital (informational knowledge, such as education, literature, and language) that can be exchanged and transferred aids in the dispositions and actions of agents. High school seniors, then, draw on their habitus as they spend senior year preparing for postsecondary life.

As cultural sites, schools "represent arenas of contestation and struggle among differentially empowered cultural and economic groups" (Giroux, 2001, p. 74). Students fragmented by this hierarchy are visible, exposing their separations and a hierarchy of differences. This can lead to an understanding of the systems, making the curriculum no longer hidden (Anyon, 1980) and presenting a need to challenge these divisions. Similar to Bourdieu, Giroux, (referencing Gramsci) pointed to hegemony's impact hegemony on individual lives:

> Missing from the traditional view is the notion that culture refers to specific processes that involve lived antagonistic relations among different socio-economic groups with unequal access to the means of power and a resulting unequal ability to produce, distribute, and legitimize their shared principles and lived experiences. (p. 74)

By bringing this to light, Giroux provides us with another tool to analyze student behavior, rather than being categorized as oppositional, defiant, and in need of discipline, could be better understood as resistant, resilient self-protection from anti-Black behavior and symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990/2000).

For African Americans, the double consciousness that DuBois first named in 1903 provides youth with the ability to "feel his twoness—an American, a Negro" (2019/1903, p. 14). Double consciousness is in many ways invaluable for the survival and progress of Black youth. It enables them to recognize and understand their humanity, citizenship, and rights as American and Black, despite a White gaze that objectifies them as Black, as non-White. This double consciousness, then, similar to habitus, may be seen in the interactions and understandings of Black youth and may be best understood as Black habitus (Lofton & Davis, 2015). Students respond to and confront unequal structures. Their dispositions express their habituses and awareness of the agents they interact with in the education field, further establishing the salience of cultural capital in a capitalist economy because of its institutionalization in education qualifications.

Still, there are Black students who are resistant to higher education and a repetition of an educational experience that they believe devalues them and their identities (Carey, 2016). In other cases, the lack of role models limits the occupational choices students may consider (Goings & Bianco, 2016). Black youth and their families understand the importance of education for success and continue to demonstrate high career and educational aspirations. It is the symbolic violence from the dominant White culture that is omnipresent in educational structures and systems that may contribute to and propel Black student dispositions. These instances may express the African American youth grasping for air to assert their identity, culture, and humanity.

**CCW.** Focusing on the wealth of communities of color rather than the deficiencies that may be construed from Bourdieu and Passeron's (2000) idea of cultural and social reproduction, Yosso (2005) identified familial capital—cultural knowledge that supports economic and social advancement—as an element of her CCW framework. Some recent studies (Jayakumar, et al., 2013; Carey, 2016; Holland, 2017) have looked at the use of CCW, including familial and social capital, in support of the CCR success of students of color.

***Aspirational Capital***. Yosso (2005) defined aspirational capital as the ability to maintain dreams despite obstacles. Although resources are not easily attainable, many students in "high minority, high poverty" schools aspire to and achieve college admission (Reddick, 2011; Welton et al., 2014). Reddick et al. (2011) argue that Mexican American students use "funds of knowledge," a community approach to learning and sharing information (Moll et al., 2005), to achieve their college aspirations. Funds of knowledge incorporate different elements of CCW to support aspirational capital. One is familial capital.

***Familial Capital***. Reddick et al. (2011) conducted a study that included 57% female, 43% male, 57% Latinx, and 33% Black participants from high-minority, high-poverty schools and their access to higher education in Texas during 2008–2009. The authors underlined the importance of supportive relationships with peers, school staff, and family; maintaining connections with peers and family to maintain a positive academic image; support from college access programs; exercising self-motivation; and seeking positive school and community resources to counter negative school stereotypes The research emphasizes two tactics to support college access and enrollment, one that focuses on measuring data and one that focuses on human interaction and support.

***Navigational Capital***. Prudence Carter (2005) revealed that students differ ideologically in "how they deploy their social identities to engage in schools" (p. 12). These identities are formed by family and the dominant culture. As students interact in school settings, drawing on their habituses in formation outside and inside the educational system that legitimizes dominant culture, Carter observed that Black students interact in school as either noncompliant believers, cultural straddlers, or cultural mainstreamers. Cultural straddlers and mainstreamers tend to do well in school because these students depend on parents, teachers, and employers for behavior cues, understanding that the "culture" presented by those with power is the culture to emulate for success. Unlike cultural mainstreamers, cultural straddlers also seek affirmation from their friends. Straddlers understand the importance of maintaining their cultural identity, effectively using what we refer to today as "code switching."

In contrast, noncompliant believers do not look to parents, teachers, or employers for behavior cues or affirmation. They seek peer affirmation solely as confirmation of cultural identity and social capital. This may also be protection from symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000). Some researchers and school staff incorrectly pathologize this disengagement as family dysfunction, resulting from drug use, mental health issues, and trauma, rather than the result of real socioeconomic barriers such as homelessness, poverty, isolation, lack of transportation, and jobs that students experience (McGregor, 2017).

***Black Cultural Capital***. Prudence Carter (2005) researched the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors pertaining to racial and ethnic group relations and identity beliefs about opportunity structure and pathways to success and achievement, academic and career aspirations, and appropriate ethnic or cultural behaviors among peers and family. She interviewed 44 low-income African American youth ages 13–30, 59% females and 41% male, who attended a suburban public magnet school Nov 1997 to Aug 1998. Carter (2005) found that participants used Black capital to participate and identify within their cultural group and dominant capital to succeed academically and professionally. According to Carter, “Many noncompliant believers perceive schools as closed cultural and intellectual environments that do not allow them to link the concrete value of education to their own economic, political, and social realities" (p. 14). Many youth desire a socially connected education that links to their experiences and is practical. They begin to view education as part of a deterministic system (Bowles & Gintes, 1976) that is “rigged,” as evidenced by the “lads” in Willis’s (1977) study and the Hallway Hangers in Macleod’s (2009). It is possible that because these noncompliant believers understood the value of education, they did not value or respect social actors who did not value them or their time with inadequate education (Carter, 2005).

Carter (2005) proposed multicultural navigators to assist students in accessing the cultural capital needed to navigate the educational space and maintain their cultural capital through their social capital and network of friends. Student social networks are important for academic success. According to Carter, multicultural navigators "are individuals who harvest the cultural resources both from their own ethnic or racial heritages and from the opportunities provided outside of their communities" (p. 17). They are important because of their

> understanding of the functions and values of both dominant and nondominant ethno-racial cultures. They provide critical social ties for co-ethnic members who are less successful in navigating mainstream expectations. As social capital, they provide, for example, advice about how to write a college essay or how to interview for a job. (p. 18)

Carter argued that culture is important to the academic engagement of students, especially noncompliant students, and access to multicultural navigators provides the best resource for these students by delivering social and cultural capital. In this manner, the ability to straddle both cultures may also be considered an indication of CCR.

Multicultural navigators would be especially important in a social field that is also structured by race. However, as noted earlier, economic status may also impact the weight of this code switching. In this case, in the United States, race takes on multiple layers. It is cultural, but it is also habitus, thus containing individual and collective historic knowledge that is aware of Whiteness as property.

The significance of Whiteness as property and the permanence of race may provide additional insight into the significance of cultural and social capital in education and social reproduction of class, even under national and legal changes that abolish racial segregation. Naidoo (2004) analyzed how South African universities were able to maintain social reproduction despite political change from 1985 to 1990. Acknowledging the focus of the field to his analysis, Naidoo cited capital and habitus as relational and essential to Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction. Because dominant culture is linked to cultural capital and institutionalized in educational qualifications, the dominant culture remains powerful even with a change in political state. Naidoo concluded that the hierarchical nature of the higher education field "establishes stark differences in social origin and therefore dispositions between the student and staff populations in institutions positioned at different levels of relative hierarchy" (p. 467).

Although set in South Africa's higher education field, Naidoo's research demonstrates how students' habituses, influenced by social origin culture, conflict with that of academic staff. Inequality remains due to a lack of dominant cultural capital. If working class and poor students of color are less able to navigate the social field of education than their middle-class counterparts, "multicultural navigators" are a potential solution (Carter, 2005). It is important to assess the availability of school staff with the necessary capital to act as cultural guides for students of color in the education spatial field, and how this supports students in their transition from high school to employment and higher education.

***Critical Race Achievement Ideology***. Dorinda Carter (2007) researched high-achieving African American students to describe and understand the behaviors they employ in classroom, social, and extracurricular domains in a predominantly White high school. This critical race achievement ideology (CRAI) represents social and academic success. Her study consisted of nine students who attended an upper socioeconomic status, predominately White, suburban comprehensive public high school with 2,181 students during the 2003–2004 academic year. The students were 80% White, 5% Black, 4% Hispanic, and 9.5% Asian. Only 18 of 121 Black students were enrolled in honors or advanced placement classes, and only 18 had a 3.0 GPA or higher. Carter found that students "embody a critical race achievement ideology that allows them to view themselves within the context of being black and also overcome perceived racism in their school environment" (p. 477). She described this as a resilient adaptation to school.

CRAI is a psychological and behavioral framework that positions high academic performance as an act of resistance against racist systems and structures (Carter, 2007, p. 478). Carter proposed a model that includes the following tenets: (a) students believe in themselves and believe that individual effort and self-accountability lead to school success; (b) students view achievement as a human, raceless character trait embedded in their sense of self as a racial being; (c) students possess a critical consciousness about race and its potential impact on their current and future chances; (d) students possess a pragmatic attitude about the value of schooling for their future; (e) students value multicultural competence as a skill for success; and (f) students develop adaptive strategies to overcome racism and maintain internal racial pride and academic achievement. This framework could develop the precollege strong academic confidence that Strayhorn (2015) found contributed to college success of Black males in science, technology, engineering, and math majors. It also builds resistance capital, an element of CCW.

***Access to CCW.*** Familia is not strictly defined but may include close friends and neighbors. A study at a Florida career academy demonstrated the effect of familial capital on CCR. At a career academy that served mostly Latinx communities and had a Latinx principal, Fletcher et al. (2019) studied the impact of culturally responsive educational experiences on the students' CCR. These experiences empowered students and families to “expand cultural norms and barriers and envision pathways for success that may not have been previously considered” (p. 3257).

The career academy created outcomes that were mixed for CCR. One positive impact was that the familial capital identified and implemented in the career academy was transformational. It engendered a sense of resilience in students and encouraged potential social mobility through college enrollment. On the other hand, there were concerns that the Latinx school counselor encouraged only local community college attendance when some students could have attended more prestigious colleges. However, the study does not clarify if the counselor’s advice was based on financial concerns despite academic promise. Furthermore, students may have been drawn to the career academy because of a connection to familial capital rather than aspirational capital. This highlights not only the importance of more diverse teachers trained and employed to teach in various disciplines, but also the barriers that prevent school and community partnerships for employment opportunities and apprenticeships for careers.

The most significant shortcoming identified in Fletcher et al.’s study was that school community stakeholders lacked industry connections to provide job opportunities. Also, transportation was not provided for the work-based opportunities. Due to the adult stakeholders’ lack of social and spatial capital, career readiness was not fully actualized compared to college readiness. Thus, high school career exposure is also dependent on teachers’ and administrators’ social capital to effectively support student access and success. Familial capital provides soon-to-be graduates with an added level of support for college attainment, but it is not able to compensate for the missing social capital that is important for employment opportunities. This suggests that career readiness for high school graduates interested in working after graduation is more complicated, especially at schools where administrators and staff may lack the social capital necessary to connect African American students to opportunities.

Jayakumar et al. (2013) used a social reproduction framework that draws on the definition of cultural wealth proposed by Yosso (2005) rather than Bourdieu. The authors believe that Black youth are not adequately supported in the education system because their community's cultural wealth is marginalized and devalued, and thus, so are students. As a result, the educational system can "limit career trajectories and possible selves" (p. 557). The authors focused their research on the Young Black Scholars (YBS) program that was created by the 100 Black Men of Los Angeles, Inc., in response to a report finding that "only 3.6% of the state's twenty-five thousand African American high school graduates were eligible for entrance into the California State University System" (p. 558). The purpose of the YBS program is to prepare students of color "to become competitively eligible for university admission and college success" (p. 558). Research participants had spent at least one high school year in the program and were in college in 2007 or 2008. Out of 25 participants, nine were male. Most participants had college-educated parents, and all participants indicated a desire to attend graduate school. They were from middle- to higher-income families, allowing the researchers to focus primarily on race.

Participants in Jayakumar et al.'s study completed demographic and informational surveys and were interviewed for 45 to 90 minutes. Interviewers wrote memos after every interview to record and track themes. The interview protocol was reviewed to confirm the clarity of questions and usefulness of data. This revealed that participants were reluctant to discuss racism, so researchers added a specific question about racism. The authors found that although the high schools and YBS promoted college attendance, they differed in that YBS provided additional support in the form of CCW (Yosso, 2005).

The varying forms of cultural capital provided through YBS supplemented the school information and supports by offering "college preparatory training and resources beyond" that of the schools and "comprehensive assistance" regarding school performance (p. 561). By providing college visits and facilitating discussions where participants envisioned themselves on campus and thought about being Black in certain college settings, YBS was identified as second to parents in motivating participants to attend college. YBS also provided role models.

Many of the participants attended high schools with few, if any, teachers of color. In addition, they were often the only students in advanced placement or college preparatory classes. YBS provided a means for them to access cultural wealth in a setting of same-culture peers, mentors, and teachers. In fact, "excellence was normalized as part of students' cultural identity" (p. 565). YBS supported the participants by helping them develop aspirational, social, familial, linguistic, resistant, and navigational capital. Although the focus was solely on race and eliminated economic factors, this is still a concern for African Americans, considering how easily they can slip on the middle-class ladder.

In contrast, Carey's (2016) research demonstrates the tension experienced by eleventh-grade Black and Latinx males attending an academic preparatory charter school when student–educator relationships are not positive. The participants' familial capital represented and supported postsecondary college attendance. The boys' school experiences, however, complicated their quest for and interest in higher education. The school and family insisted that without college, students would not have a future. Participants then faced balancing the duty of contributing to family mobility. They also faced the prospect of academic success tainted by a high school experience of disengaging instruction, isolation, and exclusion. For one participant, the idea that college would be an extension of high school discouraged his interest. Familial capital provided support and some guidance for the students' future selves, but Carey's study also shows how boys of color are often isolated within the school space as they aspire to and prepare for their postsecondary selves. This is why emotional support and culturally relevant CCR supports and activities are important for Black youth as they transition into adulthood.

Holland (2017) studied 49 students at "Metro University" who were asked to retrospectively describe the people, experiences, and institutions that either helped or hindered them as they prepared for postsecondary education. This study examined students who graduated from a public school district within the previous five years. The survey and semistructured interviews were 25 to 60 minutes long and the interviews were audiotaped, and transcribed. Most participants (93%) were Black and female (70%). Holland found that social capital formed with school personnel, agemates, and church members provided students with minimal college knowledge support to enroll in and pursue college. This confirmed the significance of CCW.

Other research implies that students vary their use of CCW depending on the environment. Duncheon (2018) researched 25 students who attended a low-performing magnet school in a high-poverty neighborhood in Southern California. She found that students used aspirational and navigational capital for academic progress and familial and social capital for campus integration.

### ***Temporal Capital and CCR***

Black adolescents are aware of the racial disparity of time as a resource and concept. White high school graduates work more than all other groups and Black high school graduates work less than White high school dropouts (McDaniel & Kuehn, 2013). Whiteness as property elevates a White high school dropout over a Black high school graduate. As a result, White high school dropouts gain earlier employment access and experience, whereas a high school diploma is still required for African Americans to access higher education and the labor market. Black youth are aware of these time disparities, noting that White youth have more time for education and employment, whereas Black youths' time is compressed by family responsibilities.

In his study of the temporality of Whiteness, Mahadeo (2019) argued that time is also waged as Black youth expend physical, psychic, and emotional labor "to process racialization and racism" (p. 186). His study of approximately 30 self-identified non-White youth included 21 African American/Black, 13 female, 14 male, and two transgender participants and one nonbinary participant who used a multiservice center for "youth in crisis." In perceptions of futures compared with White youth and time, racialized youth believed that White youth have more time for education and employment, and that their own life horizons were shortened by education and employment structures that delayed their entry and completion.

Racialized youth make the distinction and analysis that White youth do not have to work and possess more leisure time, but they are also culturally "late" with fashion and attempt to copy their less time-progressive non-White peers. Non-White youth must also expend psychological labor to “process racism.” Mahadeo argues that non-White youth still find ways to subvert and use White future-oriented time and raced present and anterior time, and understand how temporal power of Whiteness works (p. 188). The power of time is that it is capital; Mahadeo (2019) suggests, “Time, being money, the intergenerational transmission of wealth was also understood as an intergenerational transmission of (available or free) time” (p. 195).

Citing multiple examples of White access to resources in addition to possession of their labor, economists Hamilton et. al. (2015) explain how the White/Black wealth gap is exacerbated by time:

> White families have had significantly more time to pass wealth from generation to generation. These generational transfers include financing their children’s college education, giving them down payments for houses, and more generally providing them with inheritance and other gifts to seed asset accumulation. Intergenerational transfers are central sources of wealth building. Black families, however, have never had comparable resources to pass down to succeeding generations. As such, black families whose members study and work hard are still hindered in their efforts to generate the resources necessary for their own security and to ensure the well-being of their children. (pp. 3–4)

This description of the impact of temporal inequality on African American families contextualizes the financial insecurity and uncertain independence of African American youth in this study.

### ***Summary***

Most research on adolescents and their careers has focused on identity (Holland, 1997), self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001), and cognitive development (Lent, 2013). Little research has examined the phenomenon of how high school students experience CCR during sociopolitical and economic changes. Understanding how African American youth experience CCR during challenging eras may provide necessary insight into providing effective CCR, especially for those Black students attending urban high schools where they are 69% of the K–12 population (NCES, 2019) and where nearly 80% of public secondary school teachers are White and 64% are women (NCES, 2019).

Conley's (2012) four keys (cognitive skills, content knowledge, academic behavior skills, and college knowledge) are often used to measure CCR. Some researchers have found that the four keys perpetuate inequality, maintain the status quo, and implement a colorblind mindset in a racialized country (Castro, 2013). Although other studies have discussed CCR outcomes, they have mostly focused on quantitative data. Narratives from the point of view of Black youth as they experience the phenomenon are scarce. What is known speaks to contributing factors that influence aspirations and choices, including social, community, and cultural capital, using the terminology developed by Yosso (2005) to address the capital that people of color employ to navigate society, and also what I term for this discussion as temporal and spatial capital. As secondary schools, states, and postsecondary institutions focus on college and career readiness, new barriers and old ones may prevent African American adolescents from experiencing education and employment success. Secondary education can teach students to "learn to work" (Washington, 1895/2021), "teach the teachers and create the leaders" (Du Bois, 1903/2019), or promote "social predestination" (Dewey, 1915). Who will "ready" Black high school seniors for "life" after graduation? After they are educated, what will our graduates be ready for?

Youth are also aware of economic and political realities and consider these as they address options for the future. One may consider that Black youth are constantly managing the past, present, and future in all that they do, similar to double consciousness

(Du Bois, 1903/2019) or perhaps Black habitus (Lofton & Davis, 2015). Their narratives may provide insight into this phenomenon.

# CHAPTER 3

# METHODS

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach to research the “lived experiences” (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of African American graduates of a northeastern urban school district and their postsecondary employment and/or education pathways. Qualitative research empowers and provides a platform for silenced voices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenological account gets inside the experience of a person or group of people and describes what participants have experienced, how they have experienced it, and their sense-making regarding various effects relative to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In this chapter, I describe the methodology used for the study and how it evolved from the original design

## Research Design

This original research was designed as a phenomenological case study. The case was bound by a northeastern urban school district during the 2021–2022 school years. Four high school sites were selected within the district for purposeful sampling. Two schools shared the same physical building, but occupied separate spaces within the building. All originally selected school sites were impacted by the legislative, economic, and political shifts of the Civil Rights and education reform eras. These schools provided academic and career and technical education (CTE) programs. Since the 1960s, student populations at these schools have become predominantly Black and Brown, economically disadvantaged, and increasingly English-learner, similar to other urban schools across the country (Orfield, 2012).

Two of the four original school sites had the distinction of originating from the relocation of their schools' faculty and junior and senior classes to brand-new buildings at new urban locations, one in 1937 and the other in 1957, shortly after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The brand-new buildings retained the old school names (School A and School B), faculty, students, prizes, and trophies. Schools A and B gained extensive space and playing fields, and School A had its own space lab simulator. They left behind older buildings that gained new names (A1 and B1); they left behind less experienced staff; and they left behind poor White students and a growing poor Black and Spanish-speaking student population. This practice of White educational institutions bequeathing old and used materials, equipment, and buildings to Black educational institutions had a tradition beginning decades earlier.

I also identified an additional school (School C), established in the early 21st century and offering CTE programs of study (engineering and digital video) as a fourth site for purposeful sampling. Exemplifying Whiteness as property, tracking, and dominant cultural capital, this school had the highest White student population of the four targeted schools and in the school district. In 2021, White students were a slim majority at this school at 38%, compared to 37% Black, 11% Asian, and 10% Hispanic student. Data from this site were intended to provide a contrast to the other public school sites with White student populations of 1%, 3%, and 16%. The average White student population in the school district was 14%. School C was relocated to the building site of School B1. This building now houses two schools, B1 and C. They have separate entrances, separate admission requirements, and separate academic and CTE offerings.

They also have distinctly different student populations. The planned 2020–2021 sites can be described as follows:

1. School A1 was once an all-male academic and vocational technology high school of working-class White and Black students established in 1957. It is a coeducational academic and CTE school occupying its 1988 structure built further north and west of its original location, with a population that is 68% Latinx, 27% African American, 1% White, and 4% multiracial, including 31% English-language learners and 100% economically disadvantaged students. The school was established in 1957 at the original location of the relocated and mostly White N High School.
2. School A was originally located at the School A1 site before relocating. Its student population is 26% Latinx, 29% Black, 16% White, 22% Asian, 7% multiracial, 21% English-language learners, and 94% economically disadvantaged students.
3. School B, a former all-male high school, is now coeducational. Its student population is 8% Hispanic, 83% Black, 3% White, 4% Asian, 3% multiracial, 8% English-language learners, and 100% economically disadvantaged students.
4. School C is a special-admit school that partnered with a local university and prides itself on its project-based learning model. School C's student population is 10% Hispanic, 37% Black, 38% White, 11% Asian, 5% multiracial, 2% English-language learners, and 51% economically disadvantaged students. It relocated and shared the same building in which School B1 is located.

## Research Sites

The final case study consisted of four sites in the same MetroTown district. Due to COVID-19 restrictions on research, however, only one originally targeted site remained (School A, which I named NorthPark). My connection as a teacher-leader at NorthPark facilitated recruitment of participants. Inquiry Maker 2 (partner school to the originally targeted School C) was also a site in the final study. Although the final sites were not all traditional public schools as I planned, and included two charter schools, they all were located in MetroTown district catchment areas. These school sites also were similar to the mix of neighborhood, special-admission, and predominately White public school spaces in the MetroTown district that I had initially targeted for purposeful sampling. Details of the final research sites are in Table 1. The research sites included one comprehensive neighborhood high school, NorthPark (formerly School A1), one special admission high school, Inquiry Maker 2 (partner school to School C), one network charter high school (Network Charter), one network community charter high school (Community Charter), and one predominately White charter school (Colonial Charter). Table 1 presents the research sites.

Table 1. *Research Sites 2021*

| Research Sites | NorthPark | Inquiry Maker 2 | Network Public Charter | Community Charter | Colonial Charter | Metrotown School District |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Enrollment | 1197 | 477 | 1079 | 1771 | 1234 | 202,944 |
| Male | 58.4% | 48% | 53% | 57% | N/A | 51% |
| Female | 41.56% | 52% | 47% | 42.9% | N/A | 49% |
| EL | 26.1% | 4.6% | 1.3% | N/A | 1.1% | 12% |
| IEP | 36.8% | 8.8% | 36.4% | 27.2% | 13% | 19% |
| Econ. Dis. | 84.7% | N/A | 86% | N/A | 59% | 70% |
| AI | 0% | 0% | 2.5% | 0 | 2% | N/A |
| Asian | .5% | 4% | .5% | 4.29% | 2% | 7% |
| Black | 33% | 75% | 93% | 33.8% | 13.3% | 50% |
| LatinX | 64.1% | 7% | 1% | 58.27% | 23.6% | 24% |
| Multi | .5% | 5% | 1.9% | 2.94% | 2.4% | 5% |
| PI | 0% | 0% | 2% | 0% | 6% | N/A |
| White | 1.8% | 8% | 1.8% | .62% | 57.9% | 14% |

*Note*. AI = American Indian; EL = English Learner; PI =Pacific Islander; IEP = Individualized Education Program.

Table 2. *Community Demographics of Research Sites Based on Zip Codes in 2021*

| Research Sites | NorthPark | Inquiry Maker 2 | Network Public Charter | Community Charter | Colonial Charter |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Population | 52,124 | 42,705 | 52,124 | 66177 | 8,682 |
| Employment | 41.6% | 49.4% | 41.6% | 54.6% | 53.3% |
| Median Income | $30,946 | $45,434 | $30,946 | $46,505 | $57,259 |
| Poverty | 40.4% | 28% | 40.4% | 28.7% | 16.4% |
| ≥ B.A. | 9% | 31.7% | 9% | 14.1% | 21.3% |
| Homeowners | 53.1% | 44% | 53.1% | 65.1% | 82.7% |
| Asian | 696 | 1536 | 696 | N/A | 76 |
| Black | 28,392 | 33233 | 28,392 | 32,799 | 372 |
| LatinX | 21,674 | 1535 | 21,674 | 21,498 | 892 |
| Other | 13,660 | 607 | 13,660 | 14,041 | 432 |
| PI | 56 | 18 | 56 | 28 | 3 |
| White | 3727 | 5403 | 3727 | 3368 | 7237 |
| AI | 365 | 114 | 365 | 433 | 27 |

*Note*. AI = American Indian; PI =Pacific Islander

## Recruitment

Participants were enrolled after Institutional Review Board approval in July 2021. Although I had planned to use purposeful sampling to recruit participants, this strategy evolved due to COVID-19 restrictions. Community organizations were contacted to facilitate recruitment of participants. Participants were screened for completion of student and parent/guardian consent forms and criterion sampling for the study. Participation was voluntary. Participants were first recruited through outreach to community youth organizations, such as churches and the Boys and Girls Club. This approach was utilized due to district restrictions on student interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community organizations were contacted by email and telephone to facilitate distribution of research project information to community youth members through posting recruitment ads and by email. Email and telephone addresses for churches and organizations were obtained using Internet search engines. Emails were sent to organization contacts responsible for youth education or career initiatives. Organization contact names were determined through information on websites and through direct calls to the organizations.

I created and used a recruitment script and email to guide these communications. I also asked organizations to distribute digital participant interest forms and post research recruitment ads. These materials, participant interest forms, and recruitment ads were provided to organizations to facilitate recruitment.

I conducted two waves of personal outreach in addition to phone calls and emails. Beginning in July 2021, when I did not receive responses to my messages, I went to job recruitment fairs. I printed a list of recreation centers, addresses, and contact information and went to various sites. I first identified the sites by zip codes that were the same as the school sites I had targeted. After visiting those sites, I went to other recreation centers in the vicinity.

While driving through various neighborhoods, I noticed that more White middle-class singles and families had moved into formerly predominately working-class African American and Latinx neighborhoods (field note, 7/21/21). It was striking to see mostly White children playing at recreation centers named after African American and Latinx cultural leaders and historical icons. I wondered if these children knew or would learn the histories of these Americans. I was reminded again of this when I took a Praxis exam for an additional credential so I could qualify for a salary bump. In my notes I wrote the following:

> Recognized today the stark difference between the --- Rec Center and the --- Rec Center. Interesting to consider in the context of the morning. Taking the Social Studies Praxis for an additional credential to increase my compensation to Senior Career. In the Curtis Center—place that would not accept Nina Simone as a student. Lots of hidden history—lots of invisible moments, invisible histories.

Former predominately African American middle- and working-class neighborhoods and their recreation centers were visibly suffering, and some of the recreation center workers at a few sites shared their concerns. This gentrification impacts not only residential housing but also neighborhood schools and communities (Cucchiara, 2019). I spoke with one recreation center director outside a crumbling, faded brick building with chipped paint trim. A metal slide, secure in the play area, burned under the sun. He lamented the MetroTown cuts that halved the budgets for recreation centers and forced centers to fundraise and compete with each other for funding. There were also replacement and transferring of Black recreation center directors in favor of White directors, which he believed were tied to the new White families. His description was very similar to what had been occurring in public schools. He mentioned that there were 22 shootings at recreation centers that summer (field note 8/13/21).

A digital participant interest form was used to screen for race, age, year in school, school attending, and type of school. Information of potential participants who were not suitable for the research were maintained for potential inclusion in follow-up research if needed. Participants selected for the study identified as African American/Black, first language English or fluent English speakers, current high school senior or recent graduate, and attended a public high school with a CTE program. Participants under the age of 18 were redirected to have their guardian complete the guardian consent form; they were not asked for identifying information without their guardian's consent. Interviewed participants received a dining delivery e-gift card in the amount of $25.00.

Six African American youth participants were recruited, three males and three females. Two participants attended NorthPark; one student transferred from a neighborhood high school to an innovative project-based, special-admission high school (Inquiry Maker 2); one student transferred from one district converted-charter-network school (Network Charter) to another district converted-charter-network school (Community Charter); and one student attended a majority-White charter school (Colonial Charter). All youth except one worked during high school and/or was working at the time of the interview.

The participant selection provided three male–female pairs linked to three distinct site locations. Five of the six participants were 2021 high school graduates; participants were 18 to 20 years of age. Table 3 provides more details of the participants' profiles.

Table 3. *Participants*

| Participants | Gender | Class | High school | Status at interview |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mason | Male | 2021 | NorthPark | Working |
| Taneka | Female | 2021 | NorthPark | Working; Community college |
| Aaron | Male | 2021 | Inquiry Maker 2 | Rising college sophomore |
| Farah | Female | 2021 | Colonial Charter | Rising college sophomore |
| Alonzo | Male | 2023 | Network Charter | Rising high school senior |
| Anaya | Female | 2021 | Community Charter | Rising college sophomore |

## Participant Profiles

### ***Mason***

Mason was an African American male in the high school class of 2021. He attended a comprehensive high school, NorthPark, situated in a low-income, working-poor, primarily Black and Latinx, semi-industrial section of MetroTown. This school is the result of pressure starting in the 1930s to relocate schools from areas that were becoming increasingly non-White. Around the time that *Brown V. Board of Education* was gaining the national spotlight and the Little Rock Nine fought to integrate Little Rock Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957 two "new" schools were founded in the discarded structures of the city's elite academic and vocational schools. NorthPark became the site of the "new" school, whereas the original school relocated with its name, most faculty, and students to a newly built structure in the newly developed northeast part of the city.

At the date of the interview, Mason was looking forward to a new job as a trade assistant. He had graduated earlier that year and was working with his mother as a care provider for adults with special needs. He enrolled in the electric CTE program at the high school after transferring from an innovative high school founded by the district. His mother found the innovative high school lacking in structure, supervision, and innovative academics. Like many seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mason was unable to accumulate the needed hands-on experience for his CTE program, and on the advice of his instructor, did not complete the practical section of the NOCTI (National Occupational Competency Testing Institute) exam.

Mason had various work experiences. In addition to his new job, he had worked for a popular children's pizza birthday restaurant, a local clothing manufacturer, and a home care company. His career aspirations shifted over the years, from his initial middle school desire to be a lawyer, boxer, or city water maintenance technician to the electrical field. Although he had considered college, the cost and potential debt dissuaded him. He often mentioned his mother and grandfather regarding his life and aspirations to become a property owner and invest in the community.

### ***Taneka***

Taneka was an African American female in the high school class of 2021. She attended the same comprehensive high school, NorthPark, as Mason. At the time of the interview, Taneka attended community college and worked. She attended NorthPark because of her interest in cosmetology. Her academic abilities placed her in honors and advanced placement classes. Taneka's outgoing personality made her an instant fit for the relatively new high school cheerleading team.

Similar to many of her classmates, Taneka worked while in school, first at a fast-food restaurant and then at a retail store. Her mother (a hospital custodian), father (an "under-the-table worker"), and grandfather were strong family influences, supporting and encouraging her in her educational and life choices. She was self-aware and observant of the pressures of school, work, and life, as well as the strength of women. She seemed to struggle with the desire and ability to pursue an advanced degree in sociology or psychology and the financial necessity of working while attending community college.

### ***Alonzo***

Alonzo was an African American male in the high school class of 2023. He attended a former traditional public high school converted to a charter network school. He was interviewed at a picnic table outside a recreation center that also appeared to be the site of a community baseball team. Although he was with a friend who was not interviewed because he did not meet the requirements, Alonzo agreed to the interview and sat and maintained focus. He was the only participant who asked multiple questions after the interview about what I was doing, how long I had been in school, and about my education journey. The interview took place in a neighborhood that was relatively calm. There was some car traffic, typical for a neighborhood street. At one point, however, it did occur to me that there had been several shootings in the city near recreation centers. As I weighed the safety of the interview location, I noted that there were children on the playground, parents, and several groups of youth had passed by a few times.

When you grow up in an urban neighborhood, a Black urban neighborhood (as I had), there is a familiarity that makes you feel safe, but also alert. I have memories of summer street games, fire hydrants, ice cream trucks, and bicycle races. However, I also have a memory of how to traverse the area—a type of code-switching—but one that is as much about physical presence as speech. I am then, of course, reminded of my age and the year and how much has changed since my teenage days in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Alonzo shared his desire to be an artist. His goal of being a musician also represents another view of what a career looks like today. Social media and independent artists were more present in his discussion of a career and future than was the case with other participants. He also spoke of having a case manager and of his mother as being instrumental in his life.

### *Anaya*

Anaya was an African American female in the high school class of 2021. In her senior year, for "personal reasons," she transferred from the same charter network school that Alonzo attended to another traditional public high school converted into a community charter school. She had completed her freshman year in college and was working as an assistant at a recreation center in the target research region.

Anaya was initially resistant to participating in the interview. It was not until she overheard me speaking with other staff about the research and answering their questions that she finally agreed to the interview. She was more comfortable when I reassured her that her name would not appear in the final study. Like Taneka, she did not want to be videotaped.

Anaya's mother and younger brother were important influences on her career goals. She expressed a desire to work with younger children, influenced by her experiences supporting her autistic brother. Another future goal of hers was to leave MetroTown and live elsewhere. This desire to leave MetroTown is one that I have heard from several youth in addition to those in the study. I have also heard public school staff say that they advise students to leave MetroTown and live elsewhere. The ever-present gun violence and segmented social circles and experiences, based on class, access, and mobility, are some reasons why people want to leave the area.

### *Farah*

Farah was an African American female in the high school class of 2021. Farah had family roots in the targeted research region but was the only participant who attended a predominately White high school, a charter school located near the site of the original targeted site, School A, which she described as being more a business than a school. At the recreation center, she worked as a recreation assistant and as a MetroTown Youth Network (MYN) summer worker. She had been tasked with another MYN worker and participant, Aaron, to produce a documentary on the recreation center and surrounding neighborhood. After she finished working a full day at the recreation center, she worked at a fast-food restaurant.

As a young child, Farah first attended an elementary school in the targeted research neighborhood. When her parents moved to a different neighborhood at the far edges of the city limit, she attended a mostly White neighborhood public school. Her parents then transferred her to the mostly White charter school, which she attended from middle school through high school. She had just completed her freshman year of college and had plans to become a traveling registered nurse. Her summer was booked with work so she could save the money she needed for the certification tests, scrubs, and other materials for the nursing program.

Her family network was layered and important to her. Although her parents were divorced, she spoke of them both, as well as her sisters, and mentioned that her grandmother lived close to the recreation center and was one of the lifeguards there as well. Her father was retired from the military and her mother worked as a grants officer at a selective, predominately White institution.

### *Aaron*

Aaron was an African American male in the high school class of 2021. Aaron worked at the same recreation center as Farah and was also the son of the recreation center director. Unlike the other participants, Aaron grew up in Florida. He lived with his mother and stepfather and was homeschooled. He was placed in foster care after a family incident and subsequently moved to MetroTown to live with his father.

Because Aaron had been homeschooled by his mother for most of his years, high school selection was challenging. He only had a transcript from the time he was in foster care, and he was fearful of the reported violence in the schools and city. His father lobbied to have him admitted to a project-based innovative public high school, where Aaron was successful. The project-based program appealed to his interest in science, and he also began to discover additional talents and interests, like debate.

Aaron had completed his freshman year in college and was interested in public relations and media. When we met, he was working online from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. as an internal communications intern at a national finance company and had just been approved to work in the office. After completing his shift there, he worked alongside Farah at the recreation center as an MYN worker on the documentary. He was studying marketing but was interested in all aspects of media, from directing to editing.

## Data Sources

I collected field notes, personal notes, school and district documents and surveys, and participant interviews. Although observations within school sites were prohibited due to COVID-19, I made general observation notes at NorthPark because of my work there. Additional data I collected included CCR information, school and recreation center site program offerings, and yearbooks. I also collected census and demographic information of the school site communities (see Table 2). Visual data were also collected and analyzed. In addition to gathering digital documents, I digitally photographed recreation center site locations and their surrounding communities. I also viewed two documentaries, *High School and --- 64*, one on the initial planned site School A and the other on NorthPark. Both school sites gained national attention during the 1960s and 1970s.

I conducted semistructured interviews with six participants from four separate sites. Interviews lasted up to 90 minutes. The questions were adapted from the New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, Metropolitan Center for Urban Education Protocol developed by Dr. Edward Fergus (see Appendix A). All interviews were recorded using Zoom. Four of the six interviews occurred in person; however Zoom was used as a recording interface. I audio and video recorded four of the participants. Two of the three female participants declined to be video recorded.

## Data Management and Analysis

I organized the interview data, following a modified version of Moustakas' (1994) guidelines as presented in *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design* (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I submitted the audio recordings of the interviews to the transcription service Ubiqus. Transcriptions employed a full verbatim format that included all words and utterances of each respondent.

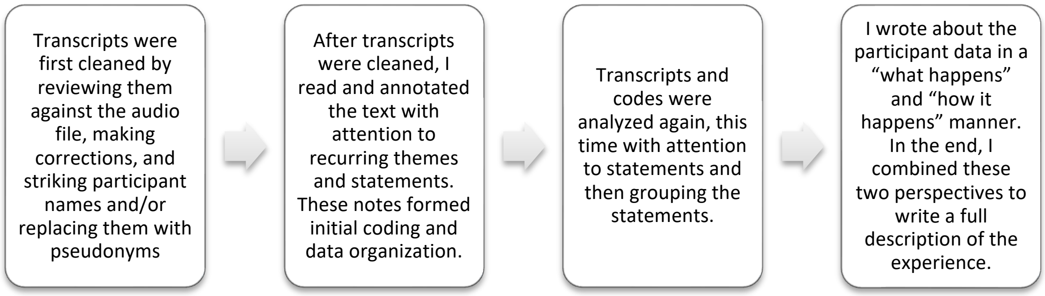
After interview data were collected and transcribed, data files were created and organized following a modified version of Moustakas' (1994) guidelines as presented in *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design* (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transcripts were first cleaned by reviewing them against the audio file, making corrections, and striking participant names and/or replacing them with pseudonyms.

After transcripts were cleaned, I read and annotated the text with attention to recurring themes and statements. The initial review of data assisted in developing the organizational structure. These notes formed initial coding and data organization. I also used the software program Dedoose to support organization of the interviews. Transcripts and codes were analyzed again, this time with attention to statements, and then the statements were grouped thematically. I wrote about the participant data in a "what happens" and "how it happens" manner. In the end, I combined these two perspectives to write a full description of the experiences of each participant.

Because of the nature of phenomenological research, the analysis was recursive: findings were generated and systematically built as successive pieces of data were gathered (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). According to Cameron (2001), when applying the ethnographic form of discourse analysis, "any given instance of language use is analyzed as part of a whole social situation" and "in relation to the wider culture in which they occur" (p. 53). I chose this approach to analyze discourse data because it acknowledges the existence of multiple social situations and cultures. The ethnographic approach acknowledged the social factors in discourse, which were important to consider because of the study's location and participants' socioeconomic backgrounds. This allowed for the recognition of African American culture, as well as youth, school, regional, neighborhood, and generational (Boomer, GenX, Millennial, GenZ) cultures.

Through a CRT lens, these youth narratives are counternarratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) to the fabled dominant narrative of the attainable American dream, a postracial society, and land of opportunity and meritocracy (Bell, 1992; Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Hochschild, 1995). Counternarrative interviews through a CRT lens are linguistic capital, an element of CCW (Yosso, 2005). Linguistic capital, defined as “storytelling, oral-histories, parables, [and] proverbs” includes “memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and rhyme” and “the ability to communicate via visual art, music or poetry” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Applying this definition to data collection and analysis reinforces qualitative research’s empowerment of silenced voices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Figure 1 presents the data analysis steps.

Figure 1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After transcripts were cleaned, I read and annotated the text with attention to recurring themes and statements. These notes formed initial coding and data organization.
Transcripts and codes were analyzed again, this time with attention to statements and then grouping the statements.
I wrote about the participant data in a “what happens” and “how it happens” manner. In the end, I combined these two perspectives to write a full description of the experience.

## Data Analysis

## Credibility and Trustworthiness

To support credibility and trustworthiness of the data, I used triangulation, debriefing, and reflexivity. Triangulation was applied using multiple data sources. I cross-checked participant interviews. I also checked interviews against district surveys and data. National census data were also used to compare participants’ trajectories and experiences with the research site and district site data. Debriefing was employed throughout the data analysis. At various stages of analyzing findings, I checked in with my dissertation chair, Edward Fergus, to share themes that I saw emerging. This provided a neutral view to interpret data that I may have viewed more subjectively. It also permitted me a space to talk through my analysis, recognizing that in the process of talking through my analysis this created another reflexive turn. Dr. Fergus reminded me to go back to the theoretical framework, and to follow the steps. He also prompted me to memo the ideas that emerged. This helped me further consider themes with the research sites, theoretical frameworks, and participants in mind. This also returned my focus to the research questions and how the interview data answered those questions. This became reflective of the recursive research process, and my perception of the data.

Recognizing that as the researcher, I brought my own experiences and point of view (Lincoln, 2009) to the study, it was important for me to bracket my analysis. I am a cisgender, light-skinned, African American woman who was born in the 1960s and grew up in a northeastern, urban, working-class Black neighborhood in the 1970s and 1980s. I was one of four African American girls to graduate in a class of 36 from an all-girls private school founded in 1879. I attended this school on scholarship from Grades 9 through 12; two of the other Black girls were enrolled in eighth grade, and the other was a “lifer,” having attended since first grade. I graduated in the early 1980s, and that fall matriculated at a predominantly White institution founded in 1740. I am also a second career educator, who transitioned from screenwriting in Los Angeles to education. I have taught students in Grades 6 through 16. My K–12 public school work has been in charter, public school, nonpublic alternative, Blue Ribbon high-performing to low-performing, and failing schools, and across a range of racial, socioeconomic, and special education demographics. At the time of writing this, I work as an instructional coach for teachers who are new to the district and teachers who need additional support to improve their practice.

While conducting this research, I worked as a school-based teacher leader at one of the school sites from which two of the participants graduated. It was important for me to be aware of this connection while conducting the interview (Hesse-Biber, 2014). I maintained memos and notes throughout the research, reflecting on my actions as a researcher, as well as participants' and other stakeholders' perceptions of me as a researcher.

## Summary

This research examined how six African American youth, three male and three female, ages 18–20, who attended and graduated from four high schools in a northeastern urban school district from 2020 to 2022 made meaning of their CCR experiences. Data, including documents, demographics, and interviews, were collected to study influences on participants' postsecondary trajectories and intergenerational mobility. Interviews were conducted and analyzed for (a) narratives of aspiration leading to intergenerational mobility, (b) education aspirations, (c) career aspirations, and (d) how these aspirations were influenced by interactions with families, communities, and schools. I coded interview data using deductive and inductive reasoning, with attention to CCW and theoretical frameworks of social reproduction and CRT's Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993).

# CHAPTER 4

# FINDINGS

These findings express the college and career readiness reflections and postsecondary experiences of six African American youth, three males and three females, ages 18–20, who attended public secondary schools (two traditional and three charter) in a northeastern urban school district and their meaning-making of CCR in spaces and structures of family, school, and work. My analysis revealed that participants accessed all elements of community cultural wealth capital (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant) across multiple social structures, with specific CCW capital availability varying by structure. There was also an increased significance of Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993), evidenced as the ability of participants in my study to access dominant social and cultural capital and temporal and spatial capital in education and employment structures. As African American youth traversed education and employment structures, the barriers and bridges they confronted and their ability to access and navigate them varied by their parents' education and employment backgrounds. Furthermore, I noticed emerging themes that expressed the tensions that these participants experienced in their quests for the American dream and the reality of their quests in spaces that harbored Whiteness as property.

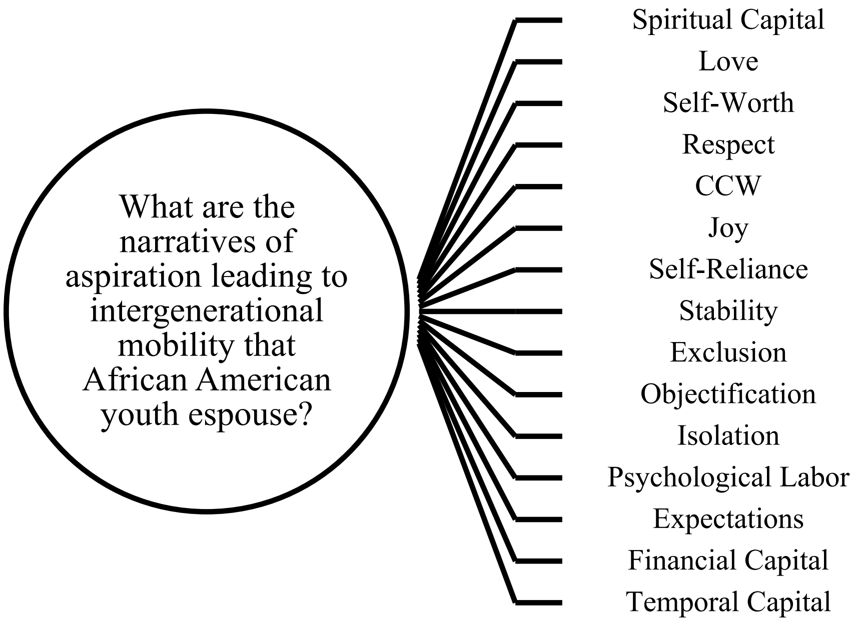
I first present the findings of Research Questions 1–3 which address aspirations in family, education, and employment social structures. I then examine how these interlocking CCW assets come up against the systems and structures defined by majority -rooted cultural and social capital as African American youth transition from high school

CCR into their postsecondary lives. In counternarrative tradition (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), participants' words aid in highlighting salient themes and giving voice to the African American youth participants.

### RQ 1: What are the Narratives of Aspiration Leading to Intergenerational Mobility That African American Youth Espouse?

African American youth's aspiration narratives centered on financial and residential stability, freedom, and family (see Figure 2). Participants desired a stable home, stable income, family, travel experiences, relocation, and wealth to invest in their families and communities. They encountered bridges and barriers in their pursuit of their aspirations. Elements of CCW (Yosso, 2005) assisted with their journeys; still, they wrestled with ideals of self-reliance and realities of financial and temporal capital challenges which implied Black habitus (Lofton & Davis, 2015) at play.

Figure 2


What are the narratives of aspiration leading to intergenerational mobility that African American youth espouse?
Spiritual Capital
Love
Self-Worth
Respect
CCW
Joy
Self-Reliance
Stability
Exclusion
Objectification
Isolation
Psychological Labor
Expectations
Financial Capital
Temporal Capital

Participants' Narratives of Aspiration

Family is the first structural and developmental space that youth experience and navigate. The multiple ways that family is structured was apparent in the participant interviews and aligned with the expanded African American description of family. Family encompasses dynamic and genetic relatives and nonrelated “play” relatives (Yosso, 2005) who are included in the ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1993) and influence the habitus of African American youth. Familial capital was salient for African American youth in my research because it provided the linguistic capital that imparts aspirational and navigational capital.

In this research, it was evident that family influenced and contributed to participants’ high school choices, their values, sense of self-worth, and sense of responsibility, and that parental figures included grandparents. Research indicates that coresidence with grandparents is beneficial for youth education attainment (Monserud et al., 2011). Three participants (Mason, Taneka, and Farah) referenced their grandparents. In addition to participants’ families’ influence on their high school selection, their parental figures influenced their future outlook, ethics, and self-worth. This was apparent in both male and female interviewees and underscores the significance of familial capital.

### ***“Do More Than What They Did”***

All participants expressed aspirational capital for improved educational and economic success despite known and unknown barriers. They repeatedly, spoke of family members wanting them to be successful. That success is often connected to the basic tenets of the American dream, educational attainment, financial stability, and property ownership, with additions of economic independence and spatial mobility. According to participants, their families wanted to see them attain the following:

**Mason:** Own properties.
**Farah:** Make it . . . go to school, don’t come back.
**Anaya:** Go for what I love . . . work somewhere [I’m] passionate about.
**Alonzo:** Get out of school, have my own stable house . . . be financially stable.
**Aaron:** Be successful…be able to sustain myself when he’s [father] gone.
**Taneka:** Be better than [them]…do more than what [they] did.

In many cases, participants’ future dreams overlapped with their families’ dreams. They shared dreams of travel and relocation to a different city. Their visions of their future selves in ten years were relayed in some instances with confidence and clarity, and with hesitancy on other occasions. Participants were still making meaning of what they wanted for their futures. Anaya envisioned herself travelling as an established psychologist:

> I want to be traveling actually. . . . I just want to be more so in my career, which is psychology. Working with younger kids, early childhood. I really like working with little kids, just because my little brother, he’s autistic. I technically raised him. And . . . I know right now; kids are scared to talk to people. So I feel like they’ll be able to talk to me, open up to me.

Farah also envisioned herself traveling, but as a nurse, living in another city:

> I'm 19–29, I should be a nurse. I think I wanna be a traveling nurse, though, now, hopefully I don't got no kids, 'cause I'm still gonna be young. [Laughter] I just wanna travel and just explore, because sometimes you need a break, and MetroTown is not the nicest place. It's, like, everybody's gonna rep their city, and I do, but it's, like, you don't wanna stay here for the rest of your life, you know what I'm saying?

Aaron identified media as his intended career field:

> So, in ten years, I wanna be 30. No, [laughter] I definitely wanna be more involved in media. So, I think whether it's screenwriting, camera switcher, or camera director, basically, director, whatever it is, or even if it's still on the marketing aspect, like I told you earlier, of me doing advertisement or something, I just, I wanna be more in the field of, better in the field of, or closer to the field of media, even if it's still in the marketing pocket.

Alonzo aspired to become a musician and avoid the fast-food jobs his friends work at:

> I want to be an artist. But like musician. But it's like I be having to think sometimes like realistically like because . . . I said that when I was younger. I said I was supposed to blow up at 18. I'm 18 now. So because I would work but I really don't to work. Like I don't want to like I see my friends like some of them work at McDonalds. Like I just be seeing them I'll be like it just looks depressing. I mean I want to do a job where I don't really got to do too much but I'm still getting paid. Music, I know I already know how to like make music. So that would have been so easy for me. So ten years, probably like anywhere that's just going to give me money and make me happy. I don't really got to know where I want to be yet.

Mason planned to follow his grandfather's example and become a property owner:

> I want to be wealthy, and I want to be able to own a couple properties and things like that. And just be in a good position where I can give back and take care of my family and close friends.

Taneka, who worked and took classes at the community college, was less certain:

> I've been thinking about liberal arts, I've been thinking about psychology, sociology, I want to know why people think the way they think. So, some say I should be a psychiatrist, but who knows where that might go, take me. But I know that, like, who knows if I wanna stay in college, because college is very hard. I don't have to go to college to be successful. I can start a business; I can do other things to be successful. But I honestly don't – I don't know where I see myself in ten years. Maybe I will just finish off with college and just push through, to become a psychiatrist or a social worker or anything. I really don't know the answer to that right now.

In addition to the similar aspirations these participants have regarding property ownership, their career, and travel, Aaron added an aspiration that most youth take for granted—more life—when he said, "I wanna be 30." Taneka and Farrah factored in the possibility and responsibility of children, underscoring their identity as women and a latent belief about their assumed caretaking responsibilities. Although Anaya did not mention children, she spoke of her younger brother and how she "practically raised him," signaling another aspect of intersectionality of Black female youth in working-class families who assume caretaking responsibilities for younger siblings.

As concrete as these aspirations seem, participants were still forming their future plans and the pathways to them, as is apparent in Taneka's discussion. She discussed college and business, then returned to college, ending with "I don't really know right now." Not knowing right now implies her continual processing of her goals, current experiences, and future goals.

### *"You Might Have to Take a Loss to Get That One"*

Linguistic capital, the advice and stories that families share with youth, often provides strategies to manage the systems and structures in which they live and encounter for success in life. This navigational capital is present in family stories, and advice shared is generational memory to prepare others to attain their dreams in a society that is wrought with oppressive forces that are anti-Black, antifemale, and antipoor, and may hinder their reach for success. Participants discussed navigational capital that often emphasizes self-reliance, independence, perseverance, respect, and resistance and supplements what may be an internalized critical race achievement ideology (CRAI; Carter, 2008) inherent in Taneka's reflection on her family's expectations for her to "do more than what they did."

**Self-Reliance**. Similar to other participants, Taneka had been encouraged by family to "make it." Her grandfather advised her to be independent, too:

> He said, "Don't depend on nobody." . . . Like, you don't depend on a man to buy you a car, a house, none of that. If you want that car and that house, get it in your name, you buy it, you accomplish it. . . . Because he always said, "If a man buy you a house, he can kick you out, and where are you gonna go? But a man can't kick you out of your own house. It's your house."

Taneka's grandfather linked the accomplishment of home ownership with self-respect, independence, and security. His words, "Don't depend on a man" underscore the protective nature of their relationship, including his perceived role as an elder, teacher, and guide. His linguistic capital, “Get it in your name, you buy it, you accomplish it” relays the significance of aspirational and navigational capital, the value of property ownership, and the intersectionality of being a young Black woman in a society established by the laws created by White male property owners.

One category of analysis does not suffice for women of color (Crenshaw, 1989). Taneka’s grandfather advised her, “A man can't kick you out of your own house. It's your house.” This protects not only her ownership but also her safety, security, and shelter. The significance of self-respect and understanding and developing one’s intrinsic value and maintaining freedom is evident. Property ownership in one’s own name provides security but also freedom from potential male–female power dynamics. That her grandfather, a male, would caution her about this is also significant. For young women, financial freedom and security is especially important, even more so for young Black women. Thus, African American families also prepare their children for the nuanced differences, challenges, and struggles they will face and ways to navigate those hurdles.

**Faith and Spiritual Capital**. Belief in a higher being, faith, is another element of CCW. Spiritual capital (Park et al., 2019), a newer specified addition to CCW, was incidentally referenced only by Mason, whose grandfather advised him on the importance of faith in decision making:

> Matter of fact, my grandpa did tell me, like, sometimes think of your life choices and what you do and that you got to take a leap of faith to do something. And sometimes you might have to take a loss to get that one.

He spoke to analyzing available options and strategically deciding while having faith in the future. What is still clear is the undying belief in a possible future and dreams, an understanding of the balance of free will and trust in God. Mason’s grandfather further impressed on him that his aspirational reach would have obstacles, but his faith and decisions would support his progress. Navigational capital is also present here.

When Mason's grandfather told him to "take a leap of faith," he was advising Mason to trust in himself and perhaps a higher power that he would reach his aspiration. This speaks to self-confidence and faith in the future—a support for aspiration that may be difficult for a young person. The tension and difficulty in reaching the next level is present in Mason's response. His grandfather advised that he had to be confident and that both faith and strategy were important. It is in these moments that the participants seemed to be processing their preloaded dispositions with the new information they encountered.

Each new experience and space that youth encounter forces a new balanced navigation of their efforts and goals. This message promotes and nurtures aspirational capital and the understanding that it takes faith to achieve dreams and goals. By relaying the idea of a "leap of faith," Mason's grandfather communicated the significance of extraordinary trust that he would reach his dreams and that his choices might require immediate or future gain or sacrifice. In this sense, it is not the dream but faith and strategic decision-making that would lead him to the dream—and the dream was, at its most basic level, the fundamental needs and expectations of any citizen: shelter, income, family, and stability.

**Emotional Strength and Perseverance**. Mothers often model and reinforce the emotional strength and intelligence that participants need to navigate their postsecondary lives (Kerpelman et al., 2002). Drawing on their own experiences, mothers of participants advised, cautioned, and nurtured. Taneka recalled her mother sharing, "It's hard when you're not your own boss.” This was an employment reality that other participants had witnessed, too. Alonzo remarked that his mother’s coworkers and customers were “just disrespectful, like cursing at her. . . . And she can’t do nothing.” Despite the difficulty of the employment space, mothers share the importance of being “patient” and “understanding.” Similarly, Anaya’s mother warned her to “never go to work angry” and Alonzo witnessed the emotional control needed in the work environment. This linguistic capital, family employment narratives, contributed to the participants’ navigational capital of essential workplace survival and mobility strategies. Participants testified to the emotional strength and perseverance that their mothers wielded to maintain their dignity and humanity and continued to aspire despite disrespect in the workplace, essentials for navigating oppressive systems and structures.

Mothers not only model and teach their children emotional awareness and regulation, they also emotionally lift their children, cheer them on, and celebrate them so that they can persevere when the challenges become difficult. Farah shared,

> I feel like I'm always broke. But my money's going to something good this time, because I had to buy my nursing scrubs, I have to get compliances for my nursing stuff, like, I just had to buy a whole lot of stuff for nursing that I didn't have, since I have clinicals next semester. And every time I get something, my mom's just, like, "Oh, my God, I'm so happy, like, you're really gonna be a nurse, like, I'm so excited for you." And she's just really happy about it.

This loving and joyful validation offset the financial struggle of pursuing a nursing degree by centering the aspiration, and helped motivate Farah and her dream. Farah recalled her mother’s celebration of each small act, which brought her closer to her aspiration, displaying the impact on Farah’s confidence and resolve to fulfill her nursing aspirations. Similarly, Alonzo’s mother cheered him on to follow his music dreams:

> When I share my music, [my mother] like[s] how far that can get me and stuff. Because she likes how I sound. And she always tells me like . . . to just keep going hard and stuff. Because I told her that's all I want to do really is make music. So she's telling [me], just keep –keep going, she just tell me keep going. Yeah.

Parents, in these instances mothers, cheer on and compliment their children's abilities and successes and their ability to persist and continue to reach their dreams. These are words, linguistic capital, that help support their aspirations and persistence. Alonzo's "she just tell[s] me keep going," and the resounding "Yeah" in his retelling are both a confirmation of what he remembered his mother said and a reminder to himself that this was what he had to do.

Fathers, too, are actively involved in families, providing a positive influence on youth development (Gadsden, 1995; Nord et al., 1997). Aaron discussed his father's efforts to enroll him in a high school where he would feel safe:

> I didn't really know how much he had to fight for me to get into Inquiry Maker 2 School but, so, first reason, the first biggest reason was, when I first came to MetroTown, I was afraid of MetroTown when I first came here. I thought everybody came to school with guns, I was about to die, I was about to get in fights every week. So, I guess his main thing was trying to get me in an environment where I kind of was able to not only be introduced into MetroTown in a more positive manner, but also, since, like, the neighborhood school kind of got this reputation where, you know, there's fights going on. And it's, like, you know, there's more chances of teenagers taking a negative path from that school.

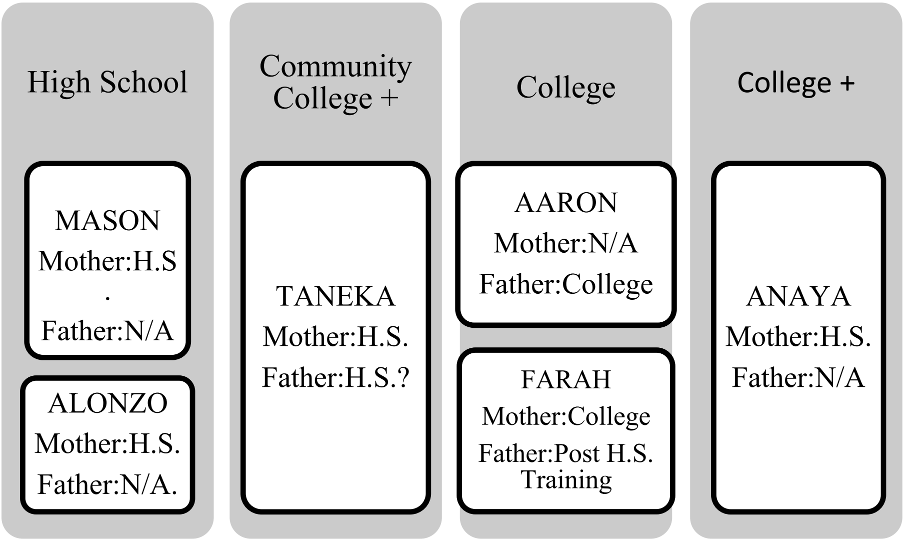
Fathers model perseverance, protection, and resistance capital in support of their children's aspirations and emotional and physical safety. The multiple ways in which parents protect children is not always visible to youth, as Aaron confirmed: "I didn't really know how much he had to fight." His retelling of the experience indicates that he was clear about his father's commitment to his education in a positive environment where he would not be afraid and there were fewer "negative path[s]" for him to take.

Whether it is actively searching for the right schools to enroll their teenagers in or providing the linguistic capital that Anaya's father shared, advising her to be confident in her ability to succeed and "be brave," African American families want the best for their children. They want their children in educational spaces where their lives are valued, protected, and enriched. This familial capital provides participants with the linguistic and navigational capital to traverse social systems for their aspirations. In the best cases, the families' dreams for their children will align with the school's assets, and, in many cases, students armed with CCW will find similar capital in the school spaces to assist their navigation. Navigational capital in service of aspirational capital is necessary for African American youth and families at various points in life's journey. In the K–12 educational space, it is critical in the last stop of the high school pathway, leading students to their postsecondary lives.

### RQ 2: What Education Aspirations Do African American Youth Have?

The educational aspirations of African American youth in this research (see Figure 3) mirrored that of their parents and indicated aspirations for intergenerational educational mobility. This aligns with Bourdieu's (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990/2000) social reproduction theory. Also, analysis of participants' narratives revealed themes implicating Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993), especially exclusion and symbolic violence through White cultural dominance. African American youth accessed, applied and wielded CCW capital depending on their availability in their educational spaces.

Figure 3


High School
Community College +
College
College +
MASON
Mother:H.S.
Father:N/A
ALONZO
Mother:H.S.
Father:N/A.
TANEKA
Mother:H.S.
Father:H.S.?
AARON
Mother:N/A
Father:College
FARAH
Mother:College
Father:Post H.S. Training
ANAYA
Mother:H.S.
Father:N/A

Participants' Educational Aspirations

Participants with parents who possessed a high school diploma or some high school education (Mason, Taneka, Alonzo) and spoke of financial hardships demonstrated social reproduction or partial educational mobility by obtaining their high school diploma (Mason, Taneka) and engaging in postsecondary study while working nearly full-time (Taneka). Participants whose parents possessed college or some postsecondary training (Anaya, Farah, Aaron) all demonstrated college aspirations and were enrolled in four-year colleges. Still, Taneka and Anaya represent students in "high minority, high poverty schools" who had college aspirations and pursued them (Reddick, 2011; Welton et al., 2014). In addition to aspirational capital, supportive relationships and developing familial capital at their college was significant to their success in school.

All participants had an appreciation for education and what they could achieve with it. All except Mason and Taneka said that school was very important. Their vision of education in their lives differed. Anaya, Farah, and Aaron, who were in their summer after their freshman year of college, discussed what they had gained from education and where it would lead them. Anaya emphasized that it was a “top priority”:

> I think about it 24/7 because I guess for me, in order for me to become who I want to become and make it out I have to go to school. I have to graduate. Once I get that bachelor’s degree, I’m able to get a great job with a great salary. And the higher the specialist degree, the higher the pay.

Similar to Anaya, Farah understood the significance of a degree to reach her employment goal:

> I need school. Like, you can work at a nursing home or something without having your nursing degree. But if you wanna be a certified nurse, like an RN, a registered nurse, you have to go to school for that.

Aaron emphasized the opportunities and social capital he had developed at college:

> I feel so many opportunities opened up. I was in organizations. I was in the Black Student Union, NAACP, their activity board, and what really helped me was because I was doing PR and marketing, and so they were, like, "You can do this? We need you." And so . . . the thing that makes school so important, for me at least, is because of how much I am learning and the opportunity that it's given me for really, like, that I wouldn't be able to get at home, honestly. And I could, like, read this stuff online, but I wouldn't really be able to practice it unless I was actually in the school.

Mason, Taneka, and Alonzo linked education to a high school diploma and a job. In addition to better jobs, Alonzo considered the admiration of girls to be another benefit of a high school diploma:

> It gets you far. It gets you, like, better jobs sometimes. Like, you get looked at, like, I don’t know, like way better like if somebody sees that you care about your education. I just know people look at you way better. Like, okay, “He actually cares about school,” especially girls, too. Like talking to a girl, she sees you like your education and stuff, yeah.

Mason only considered high school to be “somewhat important,” commenting that he learned more in middle school. The high school diploma was the benefit for education. Taneka’s position was similar:

> I always thought about that like, “This is my job. I have to get that diploma so I can make that money. So, ’cause if you don’t have a diploma, you’re only gonna get a job under the table. And under the table they can fire you any time they want and you’re not gonna get unemployment or nothing, because that was under the table. So, if you get fired, you get fired. You ain’t going to get no money. So, yeah.

The resoluteness that Mason, Taneka, and Alonzo had about the significance of a high school diploma for a job may be linked to family and community experience and knowledge. All of their parents had some high school or finished high school. Their families were all supportive of their educational success.

In some participant interviews, staff and the school community were described as family. This expanded view of family expresses familial capital and its presence in some schools. The alignment of family and school values appears to be significant to high school selection and family/school communication. Youth and parents are aware when this alignment exists and when it does not.

Mason explained the reasons for his transfer from a new innovative public high school to the comprehensive neighborhood school with several CTE programs from which he graduated:

> Everything they said it was about, it wasn't true. Like, for instance, they said that it would be, like, no more than 20 students in each class, and the class was more filled than that. And, like, they said that most work would be done on the computers. It was kind of true, but then it kind of wasn't true.

The alignment of family and school values can also be seen in the reasons for Mason’s transfer:

> My mom, she didn't really like this school so much. It felt more like the students were in the school more than the actual staff members. Like, the actual principal couldn’t control his school. Only the dean could.

The high school disorder and scarce staff oversight was a concern for Mason's mother. Lack of order undermines safety and learning. For parents and youth, school safety is a persistent concern. There is also the issue of trust, expectations, and respect. Parents choose schools that they believe will give their children the best possible opportunities in life, only to have the promises broken and hope deferred. Grounded in familial capital, participants recognized and appreciated the availability of this capital in the high schools they attended. They also noted when high schools lacked these assets, evidenced by Mason's transfer from a school that his mother believed was unsafe.

Although families influence where their children attend high school, it is the children who attend these schools. Their experiences with classes, staff, rules, other students, and the environment are a precursor and influencer of what they expect to experience in their postsecondary lives, including higher education (Carey, 2016). Educators and staff who provide a sense of community and cultural support in the school space are important to Black students (Fergus et al., 2014). This pressure can potentially increase CCW elements of familial, social, navigational, or aspirational capital for students.

Alonzo described his school as a place where "everyone works with each other. . . . And there's not like you feel like left behind or something, yeah, I feel like I'm learning." Anaya appreciated the welcoming environment where a teacher "would always try to say 'Hi' to me or make sure I was okay; or . . . see me in the hallway, trying to speak—you know, go out of his way." Cooperative learning and daily greetings are simple instructional and relationship-building strategies that create relationships and extend familial capital. For Taneka, being accepted "for who you are" was essential:

> I liked that they are like a family to you, they accept you for who you are, because I'm outgoing, I like laughing, I'm silly and "extra," as some might say. So, they accepted me; they didn't deny me, like, "Oh, you're doing too much," like, "You need to calm down." They just let me be me and let me feel like I was at home. It was like my home from away from home.

Because Black girls are often disciplined disproportionately (Morris, 2015), it resonates that the school and Taneka's family values were aligned. Community and family, encompassed in the phrase "they didn't deny me," also offer protection and safety from symbolic violence and misrecognition (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000), which can create multiple challenges and compound emotional health and security issues for Black youth, particularly young Black women, who are often caricatured as "loud" and "aggressive" (Morris, 2016). This idea of not being "denied" resonates with the personhood and humanity of youth and also their culture. Unfortunately, educational staff often tend to undermine academic engagement and identity by failing to offer a culturally relevant curriculum (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and its affirming possibilities (Paris & Alim, 2017).

After attending a majority White elementary charter school, Farah attended the charter school's high school, excited that the upper grades had more student diversity. However, that diversity was missing from the curriculum and faculty. Although African American history was a required course for the district public high schools, it was absent from the majority-White charter school that Farah attended:

> I took AP US [history]. That was probably my least-favorite class. And it wasn't, like—it was the curriculum. [Laughter] 'Cause it's not like I don't like history, because I like history. I took AP world [history], too, and I liked both of them. But US history, it was more so, like, the teacher and the way he talked, and the way that he explained things. I didn't learn anything about African American history or anything, until, like, either I went to college or my mom or dad were telling me themselves. . . . Even in college, when I took this art history class, . . . [the teacher] was, like,

> naming Black figures, and a lot of kids did not know them, and they went to White neighborhood schools. I guess a lot of them just don't teach it.

What becomes clear in Farah's narrative is that student diversity is not enough for Black youth. Black youth also value and need teacher and curriculum diversity.

Farah's knowledge of African American history was nurtured by her familial capital. However, unlike other participants in this study who experienced familial capital and cultural navigators within their school environments, Farah's school lacked this. She expected change when the only Black teacher in the high school was hired.

> When he first arrived, I was, like, "Oh my God, we have a black teacher!" I was just so excited. And he ended up being my computer teacher. Yeah, he ended up being my computer teacher for my freshman year. And then, I think it was my sophomore year, or my junior year, I forgot which year, but they fired him one of those years, and I was just, like, "He's literally the only black teacher. You could've fired a different computer teacher."

The school's reason for ending the teacher's contract was that it was overbudgeted with three computer teachers. This was unacceptable to Farah and other students. Farah shared, "We were all thinking the same thing, like, 'He's the only black teacher.' We kind of thought that it was like a racial thing, so it was just a little weird."

The significance of this teacher's presence is evident in Farah's repetition of "my computer teacher," and her thinking about and identifying when he arrived and when he left. This marks his arrival, presence, and departure as important events in her high school experience. Although there was another Black staff person at the high school, contact with her was infrequent. Farah shared:

> She was, like the psychologist or something. But if you didn't go to her for any help, you didn't really have a connection with her. And she was just a little whitewashed, so it wasn't always a connection with her.

Being Black does not create or guarantee community or family. Participants, like Farah, desired cultural affinity, recognition, awareness, and authenticity:

> Colonial got all these white teachers. It's just, like, you notice it, as a child, even in elementary school. And once he was there, he would be, like, I remember we had a Halloween thing, and I was, like, I think I dressed up as Left Eye for Halloween, and it was, like, he knew who I was, but all the other teachers, they were like, "Mm, who are you?" It was just a cultural thing, like, just a connection type of thing, for, like, I think that's why it's important to have someone, like, at least the same culture or background as you, as a teacher.

As a Black student in a majority-White high school, the presence of Black faculty was impactful for Farah. Yet she also distinguished between Black teachers and staff with whom Black students occasionally interact or were not culturally aligned when she described the Black psychologist as being “whitewashed.” This deeper understanding of school staff who are full-time, consistently available, culturally aware, and safe and can be trusted is also essential. Participants were acutely aware of the employment of Black faculty and staff in their school spaces. The significance of Black educators and staff in high schools is tied to the school environments and participants’ individual experiences and interactions in the school space.

Participants experienced how Black educational staff contribute to familial and social capital, and potentially build students’ aspirational and navigational capital, all of which contributed to their postsecondary transitions and success. Aaron spoke of the Black faculty presence as reinforcing his future identity and aspirational capital:

> It kind of puts in your brain that, "If I wanted to do this, I could do this." This is kind of, like, an idea of, "Hey, Black people can be teachers as well." Also, it is also the cultural connection, and just the connection overall. Like, I'm pretty sure there are Black students out there who, if they need help with something, they would be probably more comfortable going to a Black teacher or a Black staff member before they go to a White teacher. It's probably some things that Black teachers will understand more than White teachers. And there are cases where there are White teachers who you could connect to, you know what I mean? And so, I think having that mix is always helpful, yeah.

Aaron spoke to the significance of relationships, a support network, and the possibilities of college in counteracting some negative neighborhood influences and strengthening CCR (Fergus et al., 2014).

### *“We Do Our Schoolwork, and We Act Like Ourselves”*

Another barrier that is often touted as a reason for lack of student achievement is lack of student engagement. The presence of Black staff who are culturally aware and aligned with African American students can be beneficial. Engagement is about understanding relationships and educational success. Inadequate Black student achievement is often tied to a lack of engagement and student work, influenced by oppositional peer culture (Farkas et al., 2002). However, participants spoke of teachers who were distant, apathetic, and disengaged with students and teaching.

Anaya and Alonzo believed in the importance of culturally responsive (Gay, 2000) Black educators. Alonzo said it “feel[s] like they understand you more,” and “People are all racist a little bit. Like, somebody that looks like you, it’s like you probably going, like, I don't know how to explain it.” Anaya expanded on Alonzo’s comments:

> I say that is because we’re both, we are the same color. And we understand society so that we understand the racism that’s going on. So I feel like if it was a Caucasian person teaching, I wouldn’t be uncomfortable. But certain topics would be uncomfortable. So if I’m in history class and I have a Caucasian teacher teaching me about history, I would feel a little weird. Not coming from, like, if it was a Black person teaching me. . . . Yeah, I would be more comfortable with a Black history teacher teaching me history.

Alonzo’s “I don’t know how to explain it,” is a pause, as he was processing, thinking about the question, and remembering his experience. He then shared his experience with an African American teacher:

> I think his class was some African American culture or something. And he’s like the only like African male in there too, yeah, that's really a teacher, a guy. And I go in his class and it's like he really works with us. Like, we—he lets certain . . . stuff slide, the other people and all the other teachers won't let slide. Like, he talks to us like we're his friend, like we friends. Any other class I go to, somebody that doesn't look like us, it's like more serious. Like, it's actually school. In his class we do our schoolwork, and we act like ourselves. He acts like his self, like, outside of school. Yeah, I like that, yeah.

Alonzo spoke of the sense of community, relationship, and authenticity. The underlying joy that was expressed as Alonzo described his experience in this African American male teacher’s class is apparent as he defined him as “the only like African [American] male in there too, yeah, that’s really a teacher, a guy.”

Alonzo discussed the authenticity of the interaction and his comfort. His reflection, “We act like ourselves. He acts like his self, like, outside of school,” describes community underscored by safety and trust that aligns closely with familial capital. It also describes a relationship where Black students are seen, recognized, respected, and valued as youth while they are accountable for schoolwork and responsibilities, which is significant when Black youth are often adultified and criminalized (Alexander, 2012 Dancy, 2014; Epstein et al., 2017; Morris, 2016).

Participants needed and desired educators who were kind and caring. Farah shared,

> My math teacher, she was just really sweet. Like, I know my voice is high-pitched, but hers is really high-pitched, so she was just really sweet, and we would always play games to help get ready for tests, she would bring in brownies and stuff. She would just be really thoughtful. Like, if it was our last day of the semester, she would come in with munchkins. If it was spirit week, she got brownies. It was just really fun and stuff.

Participants appreciated educators who knew that “teenagers are teenagers.” Aaron said,

> Almost any science teacher, most of the time, or engineering teachers, they just don't care. And, you know, they're goofballs, they're funny, you

> know what I mean? And they're always making jokes on everything. I think my engineering teacher, he just had a strong personality, so a lot of people kind of gravitated towards him automatically. And he just was one of those teachers who just didn't care. Like, get the work done. He really don't care. He knew that teenagers are teenagers. Like, "You guys are gonna act how you guys are gonna act. Just act like you got common sense, get your work done, you know, that's fine." So, that was definitely one of my favorites.

Participants were engaged by teachers who facilitated relevant discussions about life. Aaron shared this about his English teacher:

> She's another one who brought up really good conversation within classes. And like I said before, her whole thing is, "This is not just for academics. This is about life." And so, she really cared about her students, and she showed that even though she did the most annoying stuff sometimes. But she really was a good teacher.

This teacher's conversations about life added relevance to learning. They also demonstrated a form of linguistic capital, connecting her to CCW and suggesting that she cared about her students and their futures. The teacher's expression of linguistic capital balanced her "annoying" teacher behavior, which Aaron seemed to link to academics without any real world relevance.

Taneka described her chemistry teacher as "fun and interesting. . . . Like, she made you want to come to her class, made you wanna learn. Like, even bad kids went to her class, 'cause she made her class fun." By describing a class that "even bad kids went to," Taneka confirmed teachers' roles in student engagement that "made [students] wanna learn" and explained why "bad kids" cut certain classes.

Similar to Aaron and Taneka, Alonzo's favorite classes discussed "real life" and were engaging:

> We [talk] about like a lot of stuff in the past, like stuff in our [African American] history and stuff. And all of the effects, so it's today and stuff, all that. It's, like, it just be in passages and stuff that we see, but somebody's talking about the stuff that like, yeah, we went through and all

> that. . . . He actually, like, made jokes during class. It was, like, we would get off topic sometimes. Like, it wouldn't just be always about Algebra. Like, talk about real life stuff in there.

Research indicates that student engagement is tied to teacher practices that are caring and interactive and that promote critical thinking, teamwork, and self-direction (Wiggan, 2007). Taneka described the uninterested, lackluster engagement of high school teachers, contrasting two different math teachers:

> [He was] boring and, like, [he] didn't make me want to learn geometry. [He] didn't make me want to know more and ask questions. . . . Like, I felt like he was just over it, so that made us over it. [The other teacher] would just make teaching fun. [He] broke the problems down, made jokes in class, like, "Oh, you gotta take that line away and drop it down." [He], like, sung along to make the math fun.

Wiggan's (2007) research on high-achieving students from working-class families who attended college concurs with Taneka's experience. Unlike the common narrative of disengaged students, unprepared, unmotivated teachers and teacher-centered practices discourage student participation and create student disengagement (Wiggan, 2007).

Youth need care, attention, variety, freedom, support, and guidance. But Black youth are perceived and designated by White U.S. social structures as "adultified" boys (Dancy, 2014) and girls (Epstein et al., 2017). This label permits adult penalties but disallows childish mistakes. In a precarious situation, Black youth lose the distinction of innocence. Excluding Black youth from the youth category is the ultimate act of exclusion. It sanctions adult correction, expectation, and knowledge.

### ***"Can't You See Them Going Somewhere"***

Exclusionary practices are easily recognized in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which ushered in Jim Crow laws and separate-but-equal education laws. Researchers and educators have noted the continuation of these practices in educational systems that favor

White students, those possessing Whiteness as property. As Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explained, Whiteness as property "has been demonstrated by white flight and the growing insistence on vouchers, public funding of private school, and schools of choice. Within schools, absolute right to exclude is demonstrated by resegregation via tracking" (p. 60).

Participants were acutely aware of how they were perceived by staff, teachers, administrators, and other adults by the way those individuals spoke and interacted with them. Mason described a teacher at the school from which he transferred:

> He would take a couple people that he only really liked, and he would take them over to a different side. He probably would close the class up or stuff like that. He would only teach a certain amount of classes. And then when you try to go over there and learn, he would just stop and just like . . . stuff like that.

Mason interpreted this act of selective education as an active refusal to teach some students, included himself. He understood this as a form of disrespect, exclusion, and sorting.

Mason expressed a dual understanding of his self-worth versus how others perceive him, stating that changing his behavior or code-switching had little influence on unequal treatment by teachers. He noticed that teachers, "might talk to you a certain way but then treat another person different. A lot of teachers don't treat everybody equal no matter how you act." He continued:

> 'Cause a lot of teachers won't ask if you need help. They won't ask if you're stuck on any problems, stuff like that. But I like when certain teachers, they come over there—instead of trying to call you out in the middle of the class, "Oh, this and that. . . . Do you know how to do this and that? What's the answer for this?" Things like that where they actually come over there and talk to you. "Oh, do you have a problem with this? Do you need extra help? I can help you. Come sit at my desk." Things like that.

Mason spoke of a desire to be seen, to be recognized, and to have his humanity and dignity honored in ways that would respect, personalize, and support his learning and champion his academic growth. In this understanding, Mason also demonstrates what Bettina Love's (2019) family described as skills for upward mobility: "Education was what you learned in school and common sense was what you learned to survive, and they taught us that upward mobility done with your dignity intact depended on a combination of the two" (p. 43).

The difficult skill here is application of the awareness that may jar one's sense of self-worth. How do you guide African American youth to absorb school lessons, then apply the common-sense understanding of who is for you and who is not, and how to coax the education you need from them? This is one reason participants desired experiences with teachers who looked like them. They desired teachers who were committed to their learning and future possibilities. Some teachers fit both profiles; some did not. Mason said, "It's just more about the teacher behavior. That's what I like more, the teacher's behavior." Participants were aware of teachers and staff who excluded students. They viewed those exclusions as another form of disrespect.

**Discipline.** The disproportionate discipline of Black youth, often described as the school-to-prison pipeline or as Morris (2016) reframed it, the "school to confinement pipeline," is echoed by student experiences. Treated as if they are four years older than they are, Black youth are dehumanized and robbed of their innocence (Goff et al., 2014). According to participants, the school systems did not encourage them away from the hallways or suspension. They were instead expected to exist there. Taneka shared,

> I felt like the kids that weren't going to class and weren't doing what they're supposed to do, [staff] just let them be in that place that's going to

> be, like, in the streets. They weren't really strict on us. Like, if somebody fought, they would get suspended. Oh, wow, what is that suspension gonna do? Like, make them do community service or something. You all just suspend them; they're gonna constantly do what they—they're gonna keep doing it over and over and over again.

Mason echoed:

> Instead of just telling them, “You know, you're doing bad,” and this and that, they don't really talk to them as much. They just try—there was a couple of teachers that just tried, like, “Okay. That's on you,” to the student instead of really trying to push. I feel as though [teachers] should be more on the students. Especially the ones that they know will have a good opportunity but that's throwing it out of the window. Because I had a lot of friends that had a good opportunity, but they threw it out the window by not graduating.

Mason said the GEAR-UP coordinator “did good, making sure students were okay, encouraging them about college and stuff like that.” Unfortunately, that funding, tied to one school cohort, ended with his class and was not scheduled to resume for another three to four years, indicative of the impact of politics and changing administrations on educational funding and programming.

Attending a majority White school with minimal Black staff, Farah remembered experiences that disciplined the female body, especially the Black female body:

> When we had dress-down days—'cause we had, like, uniforms at our school, so we had dress-down days . . . [the administration was] just really strict on the girls. So, even when it came to tights, they would be, like, "Okay, this person doesn't have no butt. She can pass." Like, "This person is a little thick, she has a butt. Go change,” or, like, “You gotta go home." Like, you'd get a detention if you, like, you know, just because you just were a little thick at the bottom. But if you were just like a skinny little toothpick, it was, like, okay, it wasn't that noticeable, you could pass. So it was a little bit unfair, on the girls' behalf, of, like, what they could wear, what they couldn't wear.

This system that disciplines clothing and physical shape, dehumanizes girls. Black girls are particularly disciplined because their bodies do not conform to the White female image (Morris, 2005) under the White gaze.

Black boys were also subjected to intensified surveillance. Alonzo noticed and disliked the surveillance of physical behavior and movement exerted by teachers:

> [The teacher] took her job, like, too serious. Like, she was like, we couldn't even do anything in there. Like, I couldn't like we had to really ask to use the bathroom. Like she would tell us, “Ask,” [but] when we do ask we can’t go. It’s, like, I would do stuff in that class, like little stuff, like be talking to my friends, and get in trouble for it. Like, I just felt like especially at the age that I am, it’s like, I don't know…

In contrast, as an honors student at a neighborhood school, Taneka also noticed the difference in surveillance of herself and students who were not considered academic achievers:

> Like, if I was in the hallway, [a teacher would say], "Oh, you're an honors kid, go back in class.” Like, “You know you're supposed to belong . . . in class." But if it was a bad kid in the hallway, they would laugh and joke with them. But why when I'm in the hallway and I'm–-why can't I get a laugh or a joke? Why do I have to go back to class immediately? Why don't they have to go back to class? Just because, yeah, you might see me going somewhere in life, but why can't you see them going somewhere in life either, just because you don't know what's going on at home?

Taneka recognized the dichotomy in the school’s actions: she was aware of the sorting of students based on their perceived futures. Black youth are cognizant of being labeled and separated. They perceive it as another act of exclusion and disrespect. Furthermore, they see these as acts that shape their futures positively or negatively.

**Testing**. CCR relies heavily on standardized testing and passes the reality of structured inequity from policymakers onto students and teachers (Darling-Hammond, et. al, 2014 ; Gerstl-Pepin, 2006). Despite their aspirations, participants had mixed attitudes toward taking and performing well on standardized tests, connected to their understanding of the purpose of the tests. They perceived tests as maintaining a system, and they were resistant to being manipulated to comply with a system that does not recognize, respect, support, or propel them. As a result, the value they placed on standardized tests like the SAT, ACT, and NOCTI varied.

Similar to her same age peers, Anaya did not take the SAT or ACT standardized because many schools waived them due to COVID-19:

> Since COVID happened, some colleges weren't really expecting those tests, because kids weren't able to take those tests. Because you know, you had to be in a big room to take it. So COVID-19 stopped that process a lot. But if COVID didn't happen, colleges were looking at those.

Anaya was accepted to college and was successful there in her first year. When asked if tests influenced future success, Mason weighed the impact on students and teachers:

> I'd say it kind of played a role, but a lot of people were telling me that it doesn't. But I wasn't too sure. So I think it kind of played a role because the people down at the school district and who—and they still look at these things. So it's going to show a background on yourself and a background on the teachers. 'Cause if you're just thinking, "Okay. I'm just going to guess all of these or I'm going to do this and that," and then your grades are at—they're going to think either, "This student isn't learning nothing or it's something with the teachers."

Mason recognized that the testing system is used to measure students' and teachers' capabilities. Taneka, however, interpreted testing differently:

> I feel like a test shouldn't define who a person is, 'cause a score determines if I get into this school, or if I determine if I get into this program. I feel like standardized tests are just a way of them saying, "Definitely not choosing you." Because here's a person that got—say if I'm a straight-A student, all in honors classes, my GPA is a 3.5 or higher, and I take a test and I fail the test, they're not gonna pick me 'cause I failed the test, 'cause of my test scores. But overall, you see that I'm a scholar student, but just because I failed a test, you're saying I can't come to your school or I can't get into your program? I feel like that's just bogus, that's unfair.

Due to COVID-19, the test requirements changed for the 2021 high school graduates. Many colleges waived the SAT and ACT exams. The NOCTI exam, the CTE standardized test, was still made available. However, many CTE students did not take it because of a lack of hands-on training in school due to COVID-19 health concerns. This hands-on training is essential for the performance portion of the exam. Mason followed his CTE teacher's advice:

> Well, the electric teacher more likely—he gave us the option. . . .But he's like, "I would just turn it down because the COVID-19 messed a lot of things up." So, a lot of stuff that we really were supposed to do got messed up.

Although many CTE teachers advised their students against taking the NOCTI practical exam because of the impact of COVID-19 on their ability to have necessary hands-on practice training, school administrators made the SAT exams a requirement for senior activities, including senior prom. Taneka shared,

> I didn't feel prepared. And if I'm being honest, I guessed. Because I don't like how NorthPark, they told us that if we didn't do it, we weren't going to be able to go to prom. "Yeah, it's okay," I told them. I said, "Well, I'm gonna guess on it, 'cause I really don't care. I wanna go to prom." How are you gonna try to tell—First of all, the SATs are optional, so why do I have to take it?" And they wanna say that they paid for the test. They did not pay for the test. The College Board paid for the test. I did my research, that's the thing. They didn't think I knew what I was talking about, but I knew what I was talking about. So, I just guessed all of it, and that's how I went to prom. But, no, they didn't prepare us for the SATs, that's why a lot of the teachers were, like, "Why are you all forcing them to take the test that we didn't prepare them for?"

Because it was used as a requisite to attend a prom, Taneka resisted. Not feeling prepared for the SAT, she resented that she was required to take it. This running line of duality can be noted in the above excerpt. Following the regulations initiated by the No Child Left Behind Act and continuing through the most recent reauthorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act, the SAT, ACT, and AP tests exist to measure student ability and college readiness as well as teacher and school accountability for schools identified as failing.

Taneka's admission that she guessed and her reason for guessing—exercising resistant rebellious reaction to administrators predicating prom attendance on SAT test completion, a form of resistant capital—reveals the fallacy of using standardized tests to measure student, teacher, school, or district achievement. Taneka's intentional act of resistance is another reason to examine how accurately test scores represent student knowledge, teacher performance, and a school's improvement (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

In contrast, Farah and Aaron, both rising college sophomores and, respectively, graduates of a "high performing" magnet school and a predominately White charter school, had different testing experiences and interpretations. They tried to make meaning of the end-of-course exams when asked if they felt prepared for them:

> **Farah:** I lowkey don't know what they're for.
>
> **Aaron:** For college maybe.
>
> **Farah:** Like, at my school, we took the [end of course exit exams] and we got a shirt, like, if we got proficient or advanced, but I don't know what they go to. Like, when we get those results, are— you know what I'm saying? Like, you know how you take the SAT for college and you get into a college, like, I don't know what the [end of course exit exams] are for.
>
> **Aaron:** Isn't the [end of course exit exams] for the school to know how the students are doing?

Although aware of the purpose of the SAT and ACT as college entrance exams, the state end-of-course exams had little significance for the college-bound and college-attending Farah and Aaron, and they had little understanding of why they were required to take them. Still, they dutifully complied and "got a shirt." This further exposes the barriers, contradictions, and time theft created by heavy reliance on testing to measure CCR. College-bound students who prioritize SAT exams will probably achieve the identified "cut score," gain acceptance to college, and complete one of the many required graduation pathways in this northeastern state. This path may not be as easily accomplished by all students.

Taneka discussed her performance on two of the three state high school end-of-course exams:

> Yes, I felt prepared. It's just, I'm a very bad test-taker. Like, I was five points off, I was so close. I let my anxiety get the best of me when I take a test, so, it wasn't their fault, it just was, I'm just a bad test-taker. Now, biology, I feel like she didn't prepare us, but she did. It's just, the way she went about teaching us, that's what made me, like, not really want to learn more. Like, I understand [teachers] have to engage inside your class in order for your students to engage inside the class.

Taneka recognized the role of her teachers' instruction and her testing anxiety on her test scores. Her testing experience was similar to Alonzo's. When asked about preparation at his high school for standardized tests, Alonzo expressed ambivalence:

> Not at all. I mean I knew some of that stuff, but I still don't feel prepared, though. Like, I didn't really feel prepared. None of us really was, I'm not going to say that. Some of us did not feel prepared.

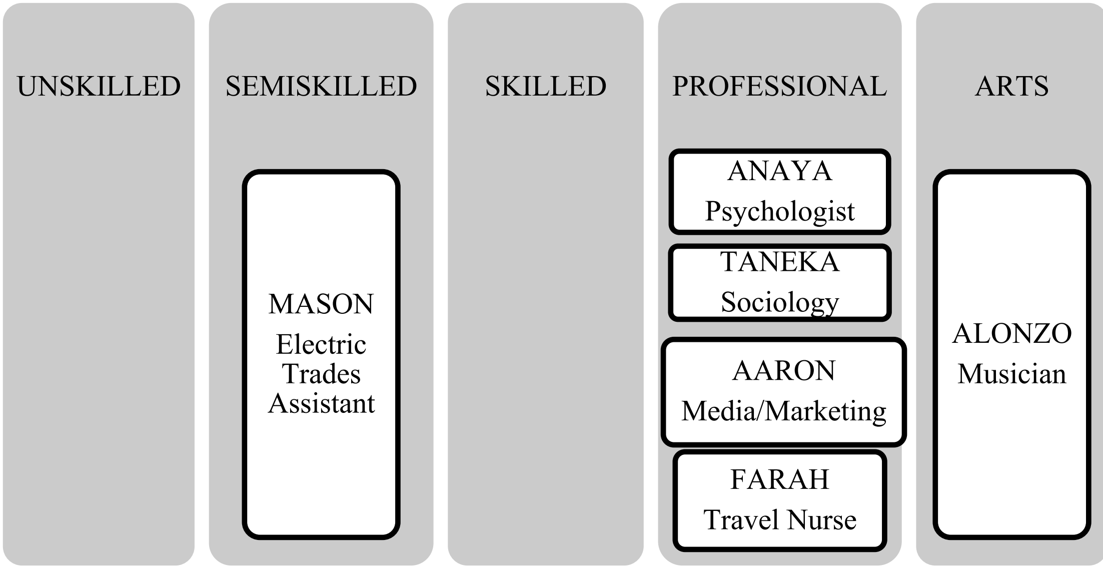
Alonzo's searching response relates his effort to fairly assess his and his peers' preparation. However, he was unaware of how these tests could impact his future. In some states, the implementation of standardized tests is an evolution into a method of sorting youth futures to specific roles in society's hierarchy (Bowles & Gintes, 1976/2011; Castro, 2014).

In Pennsylvania, high schools can determine if the "demonstrated performance level of the state academic standard . . . is included on a student's transcript" (Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], 2019). In effect, this creates a tracking system that will continue with the student after high school graduation, potentially determining their future possibilities and career. Another option for graduation is "a letter guaranteeing full-time employment," which must be accompanied by another "piece of evidence," (PDE, 2019), of which a service-learning project, is the only option. This presumes that African American teenagers will obtain and be guaranteed full-time employment immediately after high school, despite experiencing the highest unemployment numbers of all populations.

## RQ 3: What Employment Aspirations Do African American Youth Have?

As shown in Figure 4, all participants whose parents worked at unskilled jobs aspired to professional positions, except the two males. Alonzo aspired to become a musician. Mason settled into a semiskilled position after high school. His middle school goals of becoming a lawyer and being a property owner may propel him to a different future. These employment aspirations could lead to economic mobility; however, this was unclear at the time of this study because participants were still on the college and career pathway. Other participants identified careers in psychology (Anaya), nursing (Farah), and marketing (Aaron). Their college pathway provided them with a clearer road to their career aspirations. None of the participants worked in skilled labor.

Figure 4


UNSKILLED
SEMISKILLED
SKILLED
PROFESSIONAL
ARTS
MASON
Electric Trades Assistant
ANAYA
Psychologist
TANEKA
Sociology
AARON
Media/Marketing
FARAH
Travel Nurse
ALONZO
Musician

Participants' Employment Positions

Mason, who graduated from his high school's CTE electric program, obtained a position as an electric trades assistant. This position could potentially train him so that he could evolve into a fully skilled electric tradesman. The unskilled employment was supplemental (Anaya, Farah) or to support expenses for community college (Taneka).

Work experiences can have a range of influences on high school students' future education and career choices. The workplace was a site that participants had to mostly navigate independently. The stories, lessons, and advice shared by their family and sometimes gained through social capital developed at school was what they drew on as they worked.

### *"Working Here Since I Was Fourteen"*

All participants discussed at least one work experience. Some had been working since they were 14 (Anaya, Farah). Many youth work to pay for personal or school expenses, or contribute to paying household expenses. Four of the six participants spoke of working during high school, summer breaks, and college. They worked while in school, and often had multiple jobs:

> **Anaya:** I actually have two jobs. So, I work at the summer camp full-time working with little kids. Basically, it's just a summer camp. Summer job, summer camp. I work here every summer. Working with the little kids. We do activities, we go on field trips. And then at—I'm a cashier.

> **Farah:** So, I actually have three jobs. I'm the camp supervisor at [Recreation Center], then I'm a MYN worker at [Recreation Center] and [Laughs], and then, I'm also, I work at [fast-food restaurant] So, I've been working here [recreation center] since I was 14, really, 13. Really, it was since I was really 7, 'cause I went to camp here. [Laughs] I went to camp here, and my aunts and stuff, they worked here.

> **Aaron:** So, I do MYN; I work at [financial company]. So I'm their internal communication intern. And I do freelancing for making brand boards for small companies, and also try to find vendors

> > for them, and stuff like that. [Financial Company] is strictly online. Actually, just today, I got approved that I could go in, I got an office that I could go into whenever I want, so that's helpful. And, yeah, here, I guess in—here, MYN is strictly the documentary.

Alonzo referenced the work challenges during COVID-19:

> I was working at this pizza place. I had . . . takeout. I was cutting the pizzas, like, and I was putting them in the boxes, It was too, like, fast paced for me. Like, especially we had like big events, like, if it was, like, a game on, like, the phone would be going crazy. People would be calling out and so it [would] just be, like, me there and I was, like, it was just overwhelming. Like, I went there like 4:00 to, I think it was 8:00. Was it every day? It was every day, but I didn't work weekends. I didn't work weekends, that's what it was.

Although participants found work to be a site of community building, they were also exposed to unfair and unsafe work conditions and disrespect. This was more evident in the experiences of Mason, Taneka, and Alonzo, who worked solely for fast-food establishments or small businesses. They discovered that disrespect was not confined to school. Taneka shared a moment when she made an error as a cashier:

> It was early on when I first started. This was my first job ever. And I kind of messed the order up a little bit, but it wasn't as bad. Like, I think I gave her a medium fry instead of the large fry. But it was a lot of orders on the screen, so it was, like, she started calling me out of my name. So, I'm like, "You're not about to be calling me out my name. Like, yeah, you're a grown woman trying to argue with me over some fries. It's just some fries. I apologize. I will get you a new fry." . . . Just because I'm a child don't mean that I get less respect than you would give a parent, an adult. And I had to go to the back and cool down. But that's one thing I learned, I learned that, like, people say anything when they're mad. People say stuff just to get under your skin, so you have to be able to humble yourself in situations like that. And that day forward, I learned, like, to calm down and breathe, breathe and breathe.

Mason was confronted with working in unsafe conditions:

> Well, another thing why I quit the factory job—because I didn't really like it . . . 'cause it was so much electricity going through there. Everything you touched you would just get shocked. And it was a lot of metal. So, like, the conveyor belt was metal. Then we have to actually weigh the

> package out. That's metal. Then when the packages comes down to you, you have to get it off of something. Off another conveyor belt, which is actually metal, also. 'Cause even if it’s just your leg, your arm or little finger, anything—only thing that would ever shock you was from your foot 'cause of course you'd have shoes. But any little thing, it would shock you. I thought it was only for me, but it was for everybody. Because I actually had another friend that worked there around the time I worked there, and the same thing was happening.

Taneka and Mason were verbally assaulted and subjected to unsafe work conditions. They navigated these physically and emotionally challenging situations as adolescents. Mason determined that the position and compensation provided at a local clothing manufacturer was not worth his physical safety. Taneka used the teachings of her family to address her situation, stating, “I was raised that, like. . . . don't let nobody treat you with disrespect. That don't mean you gotta fight them, but, like, tell them, like, "I'm not gonna tolerate disrespect.” Taneka was able to calmly attend to the customer but also took a necessary moment to regain her composure. African American youth work in environments that often require emotional maturity and strength beyond their years, an expectation that aligns with the adultification of African American youth and reveals the harm that this inflicts on our youngest citizens.

Anaya balanced her own emotional needs as a staff member at the recreation center. She said the children “all have their own trauma and background stories.” That had taught her that “each and every kid is different. Don’t treat them all the same.” Her recognition of this offers potential hope for a more understanding, empathetic future generation. The promise of this possibility could be greater if there were more interactions between children from various communities and backgrounds. Like others before them, this generation of participants also knew the stories that their parents shared with them regarding work. Most of the stories that participants remembered and shared in my research came from their fathers.

### *“One of the [Family Work] Stories”*

The employment space could extend participants’ social and community capital as well as their worldview. In relaying conversations with their parents, participants revealed having learned that life lessons and personal development continued in the workspace. Farah shared how her father overcame his fear of heights:

> My dad, so he mostly talks about, like, the army. He talks about his experiences all the time, and the one that I'll always remember is him doing I think basically jumping out of the airplane. Like, they were doing that type of training. But he's scared of heights, so they practiced it, like, on a side of the building.

By sharing how he overcame his fear of heights, Farah’s father provided a model of how to conquer fear though practice and then transferring that growth to the challenge. What is also remarkable about this example is that Farah’s father chose a profession where a job expectation required that he conquer his fear in order to succeed. This was an example that Farah could consider when she faced challenges that required overcoming her own fears.

Aaron said that his father shared a moment when he became supervisor of a new center:

> My dad, he always likes to tell his story about when he first came to this rec center and how he kicked everybody out and changed how the rec center was. So that's one of the stories that he always tells, which actually, he uses it as showing how helpful structure is in life.

When navigating the school space or workspace, participants became increasingly aware of how their self-value and respect clashed with others’ perceptions. How they navigated these workplace encounters as Black youth was especially significant to their futures.

Parents and grandparents reinforced the importance of a motivated, self-starter attitude. Mason said that his grandfather advised him on the following:

> He would just tell me how sometimes he was really focused on a job. And when he lived in Baltimore—he was about, like, 16, 17 at the time—and he said he used to have to walk, he had to walk a couple miles to get to his job. And he said it would be cold, early in the morning, but he's like, "That can't stop you."

Taneka's mother impressed upon her the importance of emotional intelligence when working for someone else:

> My mom always said that it's gonna be hard. It's hard when you're not your own boss. So what I learned about having a job is that I have to have patience. But now that I have a job and I've been working with customers, 'cause I work at [Chain Big Box Store], and before I used to work at [Fast Food Store], so, that gave me a little bit more patience and understanding than anything.

There is also an aspect here of maintaining dignity and self-worth in circumstances that may not challenge or match their true abilities. Working for other people—"not being your own boss" also involves relinquishing some of one's personal power, existing in a space of vulnerability where income is linked to one's relationship with supervisors, coworkers, and possibly customers.

When recalling their parents' work stories, the fathers' stories often centered on camaraderie and risk-taking. Mason recounted:

> My grandpa, he had more stories and it's just better. My grandpa, he told me, he said, like, some stories he would tell me, he would just tell me how sometimes he was really focused on a job. And when he lived in Baltimore—he was about like 16, 17 at the time—and he said he used to have to walk, he had to walk a couple miles to get to his job. And he said it would be cool, early in the morning, but he's like, "That can't stop you." They were working on a bridge and a wheel came off the 18-wheeler, and one of his friends jumped in the water [laughs] instead of just running out [of the way].

Mothers imparted more direct advice about the importance of enjoying one's work. Anaya shared this about her mother:

> She always just told me to go for what I loved. She said, "Don't work somewhere that you don't love it, because you're not going to want to wake up every day and just be, 'Oh, I can't wait to go to work tomorrow.' Don't work somewhere where you just want to make money. Work somewhere you're going to love, that's what you're passionate about, or you're just going to hate it."

Alonzo's mother talked about the difficulty of working in a hostile workplace:

> I hate when she tell me that stuff. It's like I can never see nobody, like—because at her job she can't say nothing to nobody. So it's, like, she's getting older, it's just, like, [people are] talking to her so crazy. Like, just disrespectful, like cursing at her and all that. And like, she can't do nothing, she's just, like, working with a person that's talking to her crazy ... And I be like, that is so crazy. . . .It's somebody she actually works with who talks to her like that.

Alonzo expressed the frustration he felt knowing that his mother is disrespected at work. He also learned that his mother had to endure this disrespect to make a living even though she was getting older. From direct experience and discussions with family members, participants discovered that the employment space can be a place of camaraderie and social capital. It can also be a place of unsafe physical and psychological/emotional conditions.

**Postsecondary Lives: The Future and Life Space**

Five of the six participants were high school graduates in the class of 2021. Of these five participants, Anaya, Farah, and Aaron were rising sophomores at four-year colleges, working as recreation center staff during the summer of 2022. Anaya and Farah had second jobs working as cashiers after their recreation center shifts. Aaron and Farah also work as MYN employees, creating a documentary highlighting the assets of the recreation center and the neighborhood where it was located. Aaron, Farah, and Anaya's work experiences can be extended to future career aspirations in psychology, nursing, and media.

### *"People Brainwashed Me"*

Mason and Taneka, also 2021 high school graduates, were exploring different paths. Mason entered the workforce full-time as an electric trades assistant, a position he obtained through his former CTE teacher's social media page. Taneka attended community college and worked full-time.

Unlike Anaya, Farah, and Aaron, who seemed to be on a clearer path to their aspirations, Mason and Taneka seem wistful as they reflect on their early aspirations. Although they had clear ideas about what they wanted to be in middle and high school, they discussed how these dreams shifted with the influence of family, teachers, friends, and time. Mason shared,

> Well, when I was in middle school, I wanted to be a lawyer. I was going to go to college and take studies on that. But then everybody was just saying, like, a lot of people brainwashing—'cause I still would've done it––but a lot of people brainwashed me, "You got to be here for this amount of time, pay this amount," and just kept saying and kept saying. And so, I was just thinking, like, "Dang, I will be here for like eight years paying this and then"—everybody just kept getting in my ear about that. So that's what made me change that one. Like, I will say certain people out in the neighborhood and certain people—yeah, certain people out in the neighborhood. And one person that I actually worked with, like, he was just telling me about how he's still in debt and things like that. And he wished he knew more before he went to college, even though he did get his bachelor's and stuff. Is that what it's called? Well, he did receive that and all that, but said he's still in debt. He said he'd been in debt for over 10 years now paying back the colleges.

Friends' and neighbors' warnings about the debt and time to complete the degrees discouraged Mason from attending college and law school. These warnings were more disconcerting when Mason soon shifted his interest after seeing people at work in his neighborhood.

Curiosity from “seeing the [water department] digging in the ground” when he was younger provided Mason with other options. He said that he “[had] a couple family members that work[ed] in the water department . . . telling [him], ‘When you graduate, we could get you [on] one of the [jobs].’” The force of familial capital almost led Mason to another employment option, but soon he changed his mind again, this time turning his interest toward sports:

> I was actually going to take boxing to a further extent, or football, but everybody just kept telling me, like, “It's okay to go to the training and spar. But really taking it as a further career, that's where, like, most of the injuries and things like that come into play.”

Advice from his community steered Mason away from an athletic career that could cause long-term injury. Enrollment in NorthPark’s CTE program and relationships with NorthPark staff also influenced Mason’s future work aspirations. He said, “Once I got to NorthPark, the electric, that was my thing and I just stuck with it since.”

Taneka, also a NorthPark graduate, experienced similar aspirational changes during and after high school. The shift in outlook, enthusiasm, and optimism is evident as Taneka recalled her eleventh-grade goals and her transition to her current reality:

> If you were to ask eleventh-grade Taneka, I would've said, in ten years, I would've been an RN and started my family, going back to be a doctor. But now, I don't think I wanna be an RN anymore. I've been thinking about liberal arts. I've been thinking about psychology, sociology. I want to know why people think the way they think. So, some say I should be a psychiatrist, but who knows where they might go, take me. But I know that, like, who knows if I wanna stay in college, because college is very hard.

The aspiration and ability for college and a science-related career is evident even as Taneka wavered from nurse to doctor to psychology and sociology in her discussion. Lack of preparation to navigate the academic and financial challenges of the college experience as well as not having the necessary information appeared to drive her hesitancy:

> Like, NorthPark didn't prepare me for college at all, it didn't. They hold our hand. Like, it's completely different. In college, there's no one there. So you're basically on your own. Because, right now, I'm being honest: like, I don't wanna finish school because it's hard trying to maintain a job and going to school, because it's just, I don't know, it's just hard. And I feel like I didn't wanna take a break, because I knew if I took a break I wouldn't wanna go back. But I'm trying to get through the semester, but I don't know if I'm going to school next semester.

The challenge of working while attending school is evident. There also appear in Taneka's response moments of bargaining, searching for other options. She feared that if she took a break from school, she would not return. Still, it was clear that working while taking classes was almost unbearable when she stated, "I don't know, it's just hard."

When Taneka discussed the difficulty of attending school and working nearly full-time, her language expressed her confusion as she tried to determine what she would do in the long term:

> I don't have to go to college to be successful. I can start a business; I can do other things to be successful. But I honestly don't—I don't know where I see myself in 10 years. Maybe I will just finish off with college and just push through, to become a psychiatrist or a social worker or anything. I really don't know the answer to that right now.

This internal struggle was apparent in Taneka's shift from "I don't have to go to college to be successful. I can start a business" to "Maybe I will just finish off with college and just push through." The change in outlook, enthusiasm, and optimism was evident as Taneka shifted again, now to her current reality: "I really don't know the answer to that right now." In the end, she expressed an authentic, real description of her understanding rather than what she perceived she should know or be.

A rising senior, Alonzo, was aware of the challenges in pursuing a music career, but spoke with confidence:

> You really got to, like, have dedication; you gotta really have the voice for it. I know people say, like you really do gotta have the voice for it. Because, like, people gotta like how you sound. You just gotta be creative, like, be yourself. Like, if you know you mess with, like, I don't even go off of what other people say. Like, if I like it, then I'll drive it. I'm not going to ask people, like, "You like this?" That's how people just be so down because they just worry about, like, what somebody else said about your song.

Alonzo acknowledged how outside opinions can influence aspirations. He reinforced the significance of self-confidence to propel oneself forward. Still, Alonzo did not discuss a plan to accomplish his career goals.

Participants shared ideas on how educational systems can better prepare high school graduates for postsecondary education and employment opportunities. Their reflections considered temporal capital and how the pandemic has made time more precious. Participants saw time as "creeping up on you." Taneka shared,

> We're in a pandemic, so it's, like, it's harder for you to accomplish things or harder for you to do things. But I feel like that should motivate people to do it. Like, don't let COVID-19 stop you from doing what you gotta do. But it is a big problem, because people are dying. Nobody wants to die. And then there's also, people are getting shot, killed, and et cetera. It's, like, life is really hard, so I feel like, I live by "you only live once."

The phrase YOLO ("you only live once") is part of the participants' generation and represents conflicts with a traditional long-term time range for life goals, especially during a pandemic and environments that are plagued with gun violence, in addition to the national anti-Black violence. Still, Mason expressed his anxiety about time passing before he could accomplish his goals:

> You could sit up and waste a lot of time. And then when it's that time or it gets close, you're going to be like, "Dang. I had this amount of time to do

> this and that, and now it creeped up on me and I can't finish it," or stuff like that.

Anaya considered the future and process of time:

> Yes and no. . . . I say that because I'm 19 right now. I'm not where I want to be. But I'm headed to where I want to be. But I feel like if I just take my time and I know the process is slow, because I mean it is working, that everything just takes time. So I can't rush it. So I guess I would say time is on my side because it's just still taking time. But time is on my side.

Anaya recognized the duality of goal accomplishment as inching forward in service of her goals. In this sense, she is both responsible for time as well as in service to and dependent on time.

Time spent in school exposes youth to new people, ideas, and experiences. These experiences can develop respect, understanding, and compassion for others in society. Taneka drew on a broadened understanding of society as an African American female who attended a school with a majority-Latinx student population:

> Like, you can't just assume, behind somebody's looks or dress or what they have on or how they carry themselves, that they're better than you or they're beneath you. Everybody is equal, so everybody's going through problems. So NorthPark made me look at that. Like, I always thought, like, Puerto Ricans, they were, like, different. But I learned that they're just like me, they're minority just like me, so it was, like, it's hard for them like how it's hard for me. So Just 'cause their skin tone may be lighter than mine, so that don't make them much different from me.

This exposure to and interaction with Latinx youth influenced Taneka's compassion and appreciation for other cultures. It also shows Taneka thinking about the meaning of skin tone among people of color and her perception of and ability to identify with non-Black people of color. In Taneka's evaluation of skin tone, it is important to note that it is premised on a dark to light scale that is rooted in Anti-blackness (Fergus, 2017). Her experience at school provided her with an opportunity to expand her understanding and her social capital.

### *“Ask Them What They Want to Do”*

Participants believed that secondary schools could provide more hands-on support and guide students in their future plans. Most participants shared that they wanted an education that will prepare them for the realities of the future. Anaya said,

> After high school, you need to know whether or not if you’re going to go to college or if you want to find a good-paying job. High school . . . I think, that is the high school, that is high school, to prepare us. But after high school, then it’s like, shouldn’t we prepare ourselves?

Alonzo suggested honoring what student needs are and sharing advice, a form of linguistic capital:

> Work with kids more, like, one on one and ask them what they want to do. And really work with that. Like, you can help in any way to get that kid to whatever they want to be. Help them, tell them stuff that you already know.

Taneka also suggested occasional lectures from alumni to share their pathways to success:

> I feel like they should give them, like, a class or a lecture, once in a blue moon, about life after high school. . . . They need people like alumni to come and talk to the kids, not people that went to college and people that––someone they can relate to. They can't relate to them. How are they gonna relate to a billionaire? How are they gonna relate to them? They can't relate to somebody that they don't know. They relate to me before they can relate to a billionaire.

Taneka also believed that school staff should have high expectations for all students:

> They didn't prepare us for the real world, because they were holding our hand, they were holding those kids' hand. They laughed and joked with them when it was, like, "Listen, if you want a job—" NorthPark was, like, basically our job, school is like a job: you have to wake up, go to school, then make—You weren't [wasn’t] making money, but that diploma will get you some money.

Mason shared similar thoughts, seeming to suggest the need for warm demanders (Ladson-Billings, 1994):

> I feel as though they [teachers] should be more on the students. Especially the ones that they know will have a good opportunity but that's throwing it out of the window. Because I had a lot of friends that had a good opportunity, but they threw it out the window by not graduating.

Aaron believed that high school students should receive more education to prepare them for the financial costs of college and how to address those costs:

> High schools need to tell, talk to students about money, like, about the money for colleges. We went through this whole time, in high school, thinking we just needed to get accepted to a school, then we were in, we won, we're there, we're in college. And then, right after high school, I'm like, "Whoa, thirty thousand dollars?" And so, like, and they touched [on] scholarships, but they didn't talk about, like, "Hey, you could create payment plans. You need to pay this amount of money by this," you know, and even, like, stuff like that. It was just, like, "Get to college and leave us alone."

Aaron also believed there should be more guidance around essay writing for college applications:

> I think when I had to write mine, I was completely confused. I was like, "What do they wanna hear about?" you know, what do they wanna know about? And I read other examples and stuff, and stuff from big schools, and it's like, some of them were writing about a specific moment, but they were able to highlight it so well and they were able to take a life lesson out of it and all this stuff. And you saw the literature, like, the well-written literature within it, and so, or the life lesson from it, or whatever, felt emotionally drawn, or they used that ethos, pathos, logos. And I think one of the biggest things is, that's what, kind of, students don't know, understand, and so, probably if teachers helped—if that could be a project for the end of the school or for English class. And it's, like, all right, your project is not, you know, whatever we're gonna do. It's going to be more of, "Let's write your personal essay," you know. That would be very helpful and just help along the way.

Farah agreed that support with college essays is important:

> I feel like schools make us write so robotic. Like, they want us to follow a certain format, like, "In this book by so-and-so author, they show alliteration," and we're following that format. And I feel like a lot of kids

> were so confused when we got the college essay because it wasn't that format. It was, like, a lot of freedom of what you can do and how to write it.

Farah's observation also points to the problems of a standardized testing culture that emphasizes regimented writing styles and undermines creativity and critical thinking skills. These tests are standard for many state graduation and CCR accountability requirements.

CCR undermines the freedom youth may discover in their literacy development and mobility. Nordquist (2017) argues that the Common Core Standards train students to approach writing "as tools of accommodation and conformity rather than as ways of making meanings, identities, and the relationships that constitute and connect scenes of literacy" (p. 77). Teaching youth to be aware of and reflective on the ways in which they communicate in various physical places provides insight into how they "accommodate" and "resist" (Nordquist, 2017, p. 133). This self-awareness could benefit youth as they transition to their postsecondary lives and begin to employ all citizenship guarantees.

### ***"Helping Each Other"***

Just as often as they spoke of how schools could improve CCR, participants also discussed what youth should do. The recommendations were split. Farah and Aaron spoke of building social capital at school, and Anaya, Mason, Alonzo, and Taneka focused more on what they had to do independently. Farah shared advice she learned from upper-division students in a first-year college program:

> I guess the best advice I got from the upperclassmen was saying how, like, students help others. Like, we wouldn't be where we are without us helping each other. Like, we wouldn't go to the next grade, what I'm basically trying to say. Like, I know how people say, "Okay, you know, if you don't do it, no one else will," but—I don't really know how to put it. But at a college, especially being away from your family, if students don't

> help other students, whether it's mentally, socially, academically, then we'll all just be lost, you know? I don't know if that makes sense.

Farah spoke to the significance of developing social capital for college success. She then dispelled the idea that success is a solitary adventure by sharing college upper-division students' emphasis that if "students don't help other students . . . [they'd] all be lost." Creating and building familial and social capital may be easier to develop in a four-year college where students tend to reside on campus.

Aaron shared an additional layer of social capital, suggested by his father: "Make your teachers your best friends." Alonzo offered that it is important to stay "focused" but it also depends on your path and you need a plan:

> I don't know, like, you just gotta be focused and, like, just know what you're doing. You gotta go into the world knowing what you want. Yeah, stuff changes when you get older—you gotta, like, actually, like, plan for what you want to do now. I can't just ask my mom, right, I just got—you just gotta know what you want to do, that's what _____ said.

A theme underlying some participant narratives was that they were solely responsible for their success after high school. They commented as follows:

> **Alonzo**: I can't just ask my mom.
>
> **Anaya:** But after high school, then it's like, shouldn't we prepare ourselves?
>
> **Taneka:** So, I feel like it all starts with you. If you want to succeed, you have to succeed; if you want to not succeed, you're not going to.
>
> **Mason:** It's not as easy as your parents make it seem or make it look. You have to really be motivated if you really want to be successful in life and not just stuck in one place or relying off of your parents, because then when your parents are not here, you're going to be stuck.

Unlike Farah and Aaron, who pinpointed actions that the educational system can implement and identified their actions as primarily developing and expanding social capital to build their success, Alonzo, Taneka, Anaya, and Mason believed that their success was dependent on their actions alone. They contextualized their responses with an understanding of preparing for a time when family support will not be readily available. Still, their responses speak to a sense of responsibility that is based on complete independence. Furthermore, they were unclear about what they might face in their postsecondary paths. Mason shared, “It’s not as easy as your parents make it seem,” but he focused on motivation for success (“You have to be really be motivated”). Similarly, Taneka, Alonzo, and Anaya focused on self-reliance for success, which seemed to begin for them at the postsecondary stage.

### *“A New, Brand-New Change”*

Participants in this research shared experiences and reflections on postsecondary readiness and their postsecondary lives. Their families’ educational and employment backgrounds and their high school and postsecondary experiences varied. They all represented a new generation for their families. As Taneka shared, this role carried conflict and uncertainty:

> Like, if I'm being honest, everybody at NorthPark [said], "Taneka, you need to go to college. Like, college is for you. Like, you need to do that." And then my family was, like, "Taneka, if you don't want to go to college, you don't have to go to college, because it's not for everybody." But my aunt, she was saying that, like, you don't have to go to college, because my aunt didn't go to college. Now look at her: she has her own food truck, opened up her own store; she's got a daycare. She's doing all these things that are making her successful, when she didn't go to college. But all the teachers and some administrators and my family, they always said, "I want you to be better than me. I want you to do more than what I did, so it can be a new, brand-new change." Because nobody in my family went to college. I would be, like, the first to go to college. So, that was a lot of weight on my shoulder.

Taneka emphasized the pressure of expectations from family and school, sharing a sense of familial capital with teachers and administrators. This extends to a feeling of community ties and responsibility to make others proud. Although Taneka has the ability, motivation, and aspiration to attend college, she shared that she is also considering the path of business owner. Through the difficulty of "shouldering" the financial, familial, academic, and emotional challenges, Taneka reminds us that forging "a new, brand-new change" can be exciting but also solitary and difficult. Her word choice implied that there exists a path, but simultaneously the path is different, change]. Ironically, this language also implied that this "new, brand-new change" is not new. It was brand-new before. Before that, it was new.

## Summary of Findings

The African American youth in this research shared aspirations, elements of CCW, and perseverance during exclusion and tensions restricting their mobility. Social reproduction and Whiteness as property by exclusion and restriction of financial and temporal capital was evident as they pushed to "make it" and "do better than their parents did" on the road to intergenerational mobility. The participants in my research commented on systems and structures. They experienced teachers who tracked them in the hall, standardized tests that excluded them ("definitely not picking you"), work customers who dehumanized them ("call me out my name"), and school staff who minimized their abilities and futures ("don't really push").

To resist oppressive forces, these participants exercised and demonstrated self-respect ("Nobody calls me out of my name"). They recognized racism ("They don't teach African American history"); worked hard at school ("We do our work") and at work ("I've been working since I was 14"); and wrestled with their sense of U.S. indoctrinated self-reliance ("Isn't it on us?"), their economic challenges, ("I always felt broke"), inequities they faced ("not prepared for that test"), and their commitment to their families and communities ("I want to give back"). They also shared how they believed African American youth should be supported in their high school CCR experiences and postsecondary life with the following: (a) relevant guidance that is person-to-person and not computerized *(*"work with kids one-on-one"); (b) financial counseling regarding money and how to handle college costs after they were accepted to college ("talk to students about money"); (c) academic readiness that encompasses college preparation and not test preparation ("Schools make us write so robotic"); (d) support for youth who are not college-bound ("college . . . or a good-paying job"); (e) lectures and talks with alumni ("someone they can relate to"); and (f) educators who are caring and demanding ("teachers should be on the students").

# CHAPTER 5

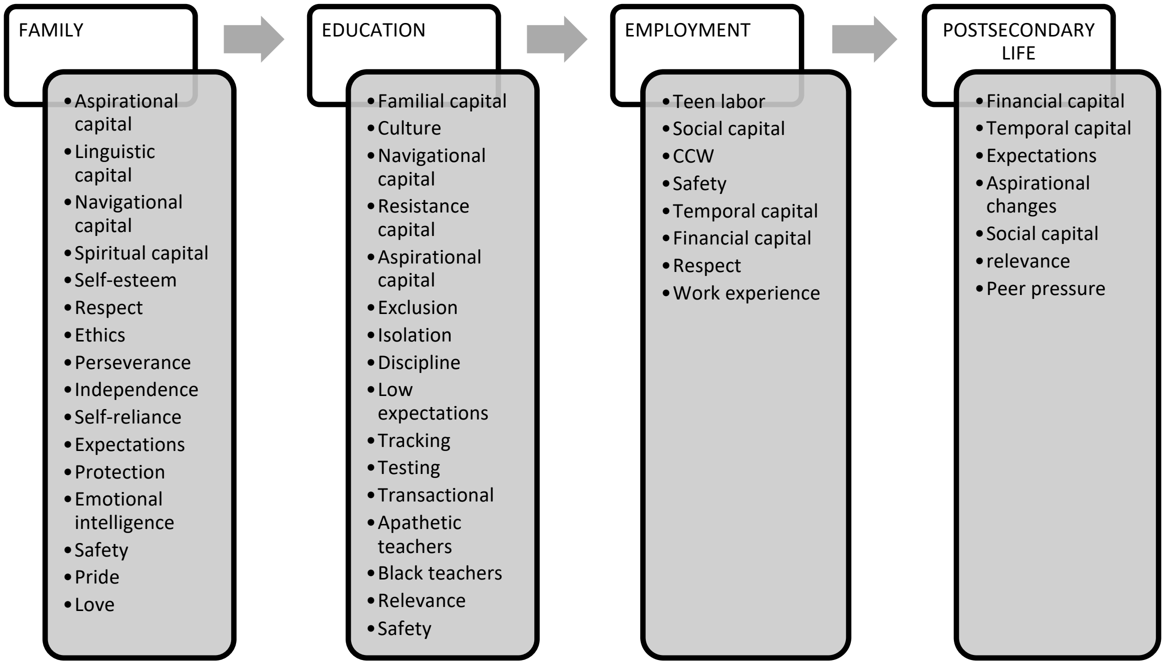
# DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This research was conducted to better understand African American intergenerational mobility. I was interested in how family, school, employment, and community experiences influenced African American youth's postsecondary trajectories. If social reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000) and Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) were evident in African American youth narratives, I wondered if there would be evidence of community and cultural wealth (CCW; Yosso, 2005), Black habitus (Lofton & Davis, 2015), or other forms of cultural agency to resist the oppressive structures and systems that reproduce status, hinder African American mobility, and caste African Americans. In this chapter, I review and discuss the findings and themes from my research and the implications for policy, theory, and future research.

## RQ 4: How Are the Education and Employment Aspirations of African American Youth Influenced by Their Interactions with Families, Communities, Peers and Teachers?

All social spaces influenced the college and career aspirations of African American youth in this study (see Figure 5). The significance of these influences varied depending on the participants' secondary school, parental education, or employment status and gender. A discussion of the influences of those social fields follows.

Figure 5


FAMILY
Aspirational capital
Linguistic capital
Navigational capital
Spiritual capital
Self-esteem
Respect
Ethics
Perseverance
Independence
Self-reliance
Expectations
Protection
Emotional intelligence
Safety
Pride
Love
EDUCATION
Familial capital
Culture
Navigational capital
Resistance capital
Aspirational capital
Exclusion
Isolation
Discipline
Low expectations
Tracking
Testing
Transactional
Apathetic teachers
Black teachers
Relevance
Safety
EMPLOYMENT
Teen labor
Social capital
CCW
Safety
Temporal capital
Financial capital
Respect
Work experience
POSTSECONDARY LIFE
Financial capital
Temporal capital
Expectations
Aspirational changes
Social capital
relevance
Peer pressure

Social Structures and Participants' Education and Employment Aspirations

### *Family*

Families contributed elements of CCW that nurtured participants' aspirations. All participants described their families as nurturing and influential, and commented on peers whose families were not. This familial capital, which often included grandparents (Monserud et al., 2011), contributed to participants' sense of self-worth, respect, humanity, and ethics. Families also expanded participants' navigational, aspirational, and spiritual capital (Park et. al, 2019) and strengthened them to be independent and persevere (Holland, 2017).

Mason, Aaron, and Farah spoke of their parents' active participation in their high school choices. Participants' parents prioritized their children's safety and authentic, honest school staff who would deliver an equitable curriculum and educational resources.

Participants' parents and family members provided support, guidance, and aspirations regarding work goals. Participants whose parents had professional positions (Anaya, Aaron, Farah) worked at the same location throughout high school summers and continued to work there during the summer. With this consistent summer work, their responsibilities also increased over time.

### *Education*

Participants shared educational experiences that reflected larger themes of culture, symbolic violence, low expectations, and exclusion. These themes also intersected with Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) and social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1993). These themes also connect to postsecondary aspirations.

**Culture.** Themes of culture appeared as elements of CCW (Yosso, 2005). Culture also appeared as cultural responsiveness. Availability of CCW at school sites was positively identified and desired. Participants (see Chapter 4) highlighted familial capital, aspirational capital, and social capital in their schools. They were able to be their authentic selves. There were school staff who supported and encouraged them. This was especially true for Mason and Taneka, the graduates of a neighborhood school. When CCW was less available at school sites, its availability was emphasized.

Participants also spoke of the importance of Black educators. Farah, the female graduate of the predominately White Colonial Charter school, and Alonzo, the male participant from the Network Charter school, emphasized the connection they felt with teachers who looked like them. For Alonzo, gender was important, too. Anaya, the female participant from Community Charter (she transferred from Network Charter), and Alonzo both commented on feeling more comfortable with Black educators teaching African American course subject material.

Improved educational and career outcomes have also been noted when educators are culturally matched with diverse students (Easton-Brooks, 2014). This can be especially significant for Black males (Hines et al., 2022). Mentors and educators, stakeholders who reflected the student population of Black males in this study (Hines et al, 2022), were a positive, culturally responsive postsecondary approach, confirming the significance of school stakeholders who reflect the student population (Easton-Brooks et al., 2010).

Participants also identified the importance of educators who were kind and caring, understood that "teenagers were just teenagers," and made classes "fun and interesting." Furthermore, classes that discussed "real life" and were relevant were important to participants. They also commented that they and their peers were more engaged by teachers who enjoyed teaching. Culturally responsive postsecondary readiness practices may also address other concerns that participants voiced. Culturally responsive educators tend to hold culturally matched students to higher expectations and interact in a caring and supportive manner (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Salim, 2017).

**Exclusion.** There were also negative school experiences. Both male and female participants from NorthPark spoke of experiences of exclusion, tracking, discipline, and deficit mindsets (Convertino & Graboski-Bauer, 2018). Alonzo spoke of heightened discipline and feeling scrutinized for talking or moving. Farah shared that Black girls were disciplined for the way their bodies looked (Morris, 2016) in clothing compared with White girls on uniform-free days. Taneka discussed the paradoxical way that school staff at NorthPark monitored the students by not providing any guidance for some students who roamed the halls and reprimanding “on-track,” “good” students who were out of class without a pass.

Last, participants had varying understandings of the purpose of standardized testing, including testing for CCR. Participants from NorthPark seemed most knowledgeable and opinionated about the testing. Participants from Colonial Charter and Inquiry Maker 2 seemed the least knowledgeable. Taneka argued that the tests were unfair; they were designed to exclude certain students, despite their grades or other achievements (Bowles & Gintes, 1976/2011; Castro, 2017). Mason believed that the tests were related to how well students were learning and teachers were teaching. Farah and Aaron said that he did not know the reasons for the tests. Aaron thought that they might measure students’ academic knowledge. Farah shared that students received a shirt if they passed the test.

### ***Employment***

Participants’ work experiences included early entry into the labor market as teen workers, managing work and school, long work hours, unsafe and unfair work conditions, developing skills, and social capital (see Chapter 4). Two participants (Anaya and Farah) spoke of starting work at the age of 14. Five of the six participants were working at the time that I interviewed them in winter 2021 and summer 2022. Two participants, Anaya and Farah, began working at the age of 14 at recreation centers. The recreation center where Farah worked was across the street from her grandmother’s home. Anaya worked at a center in her neighborhood. Most participants had employment experiences that began in high school. All participants had at least one work experience. Proximity to work and a desire to begin working as soon as possible and as many hours as possible were important to the participants.

Three of the four participants who attended high schools in high-poverty communities spoke of working throughout high school. In 2015, young Black women, ages 16 through 19, represented 22.4% of the U.S. labor force living below the poverty level; 18.7% were Latinx women, 16.7% were Black men, 14% were Asian men, and 10.10% were Latinx men (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Four of the six participants who continued with postsecondary education worked during high school, summer breaks, and college. Aaron, Farah, and Anaya, who were enrolled in four-year colleges, worked multiple jobs during the summer that I interviewed them. Taneka, who I interviewed during the academic year winter break, worked almost full-time while taking classes at a community college.

In addition to the full work schedules, participants were often confronted with unfair and unsafe work conditions and disrespectful customers and coworkers. This was evident in the experiences of Mason, Taneka, and Alonzo, who worked solely for fast-food (Taneka) and small business establishments (Mason and Alonzo). Taneka, Anaya, and Farah spoke of different occasions when they made efforts to regulate their own emotions when interacting with others in the employment space. Mason and Alonzo commented about making choices to end their employment because of safety and mistreatment.

Participants also experienced joy and community in the workspace. They had coworkers with whom they shared ideas, building social capital. In some cases, they were also able to explore fields that they were interested in pursuing long-term. As a staff worker at the recreation center, Anaya, who was interested in early childhood psychology, interacted with children. Aaron’s work to create a documentary for the recreation center aligned with his media aspirations.

Employment experiences exposed participants to real workplace issues, such as compromised safety, long hours, and disrespectful coworkers and customers. They also gained basic work skills, such as time management, task completion, and interpersonal skills. These soft skills are important as youth transition into more independent lives.

## Limitations

In this study of postsecondary trajectories, I collected data of six African American youth ages 18–20. These youth attended or were graduates of the same northeastern urban school district during the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 academic years. Limitations of this study include the sample size, interview data, and data interpretation. The research sample size falls at the lower end of 5 to 25 individuals recommended (Polkinghorne, 1989) for case studies. The small sample size decreases the generalizability of the results. Another limitation is that phenomenology is subjective experience (Wertz, 2005). It calls for researchers to recognize their role as a researcher, and to be reflexive in their interpretations. This acknowledges potential problems with interpretation.

## Implications for Policy and Practice

High school college and career readiness in the MetroTown district focused primarily on college readiness as career preparation. Career readiness was rarely presented other than as a transition from postsecondary education, or a career and technical education (CTE) program. This corresponds with the way CCR is implemented and measured in most states .

Mason and Taneka were the only participants enrolled in CTE programs in high school—electric and cosmetology, respectively. Mason eventually found work in the electric field through his CTE instructor. However, this position was not available until December after his June graduation. Although Taneka chose NorthPark because of its cosmetology program, her career focus shifted to nursing and then sociology. This confirms the need for CCR practice that cultivates CTE programs that strategically ready students for employment ("good-paying jobs") after high school graduation, and supports youth with postsecondary direct-to-work goals.

CCR often focuses on Conley's (2014) four keys when implemented in schools. Although participants in this study were unclear about what CCR meant and how it was implemented at their schools, they were able to identify at least one or two school staff members who supported their postsecondary transition. Participants from high-performing public schools knew less about the purpose of the state end-of-course content exams than participants from the lowest-performing school site. One participant spoke of being penalized if she did not take the test, despite the test being optional due to COVID-19. This spurred her to guess the answers as an act of resistance.

Participants also were not clear about whether CCR programs were available to them and how they were offered. One mentioned that they might be "computer based," another participant thought there was a class, and another participant mentioned GEAR-UP. However, that program follows one cohort of students at a time. Although there was little discussion regarding preparation for SAT, ACT of PSAT exams, participants did comment about preparation for the state end-of-course exams.

Participants offered their own suggestions for how CCR should be implemented in high schools (see chapter 4): (a) prepare students for college or “a good-paying job,” (b) engage with students “one on one” and mentor them with “stuff that they already know,” (c) provide classes or lectures about “life after high school” given by school alumni that students “can relate to,” (d) employ caring and culturally responsive educators and staff with high expectations, (e) create discussions about money and how to pay for college expenses after the scholarships, and (f) develop a less regimented curriculum and offer more creative and critical thinking educational experiences. The participants identified relevant guidance that is person-to-person and not computerized. This adds to research showing that first-generation students are more likely to attend college when they have helpful counselors (Martinez et al., 2020). Still, in “high minority, high poverty public schools” graduates encounter both supportive and unsupportive counselors (Reddick et al., 2011). This also brings to light the need for culturally responsive CCR and educators.

In-school college application support increases college applications (Oreopoulos & Ford, 2019). Participants in this research expressed a need for in-person guidance regarding money and how to handle college costs after they were accepted to college. They also distinguished high school “standardized” learning versus college academic expectations. Also, participants commented on support for youth who were not college-bound and the need for guidance to “find a good-paying job,” conversations with people “they can relate to,” and teachers who are “on the students” to do well.

As such, the life readiness that is briefly referenced in CCR policy seems to be encapsulated in “college and career readiness,” implying that readiness for college and career is readiness for life. According to participants in this study, however, life readiness in this form does not consider their current life status, postsecondary needs, or aspirations. Instead, they and their peers are "readied" for a life determined centuries ago and persisting in the systems and spaces generating and perpetuating standardized tests, anti-Blackness, exclusion, low expectations, and sorting. Still, African American youth continue to push, resist, and use their critical consciousness, independently and with the support of multiple CCW assets. CCW is invaluable and priceless for these African American youth.

## Implications for Research and Theory

Social reproduction theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990/2000) and Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) were the theoretical frameworks I used to study African American youth and intergenerational mobility. Community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and Black habitus (Lofton & Davis, 2015) were also analyzed for evidence of cultural agency despite obstacles. This dissertation adds to the research on the significance of CCW in supporting the success of African American youths' postsecondary trajectories ( Holland, 2017; Jayakumar et al., 2013). Linguistic capital (family narratives) is a way that families boosted participants' aspirational, spiritual, and navigational capital. This research also confirms the presence of social reproduction and Whiteness as property. Navigational, social, cultural, and temporal capital are especially important to succeed.

The African American youth in this study possessed multiple forms of CCW to resist oppressive forces and continue a forward journey of educational and economic mobility. However, despite the strength of CCW, dominant social and financial capital was always ubiquitous. Steeped in Whiteness as property (Harris, 1993), dominant forms of capital stymied mobility. This was evident when participants struggled with temporal and financial capital. This tension seemed to indicate a continuation from critical race theory to Black critical theory. As African American youth dreamed, aspired, and used CCW, struggle was also present. There were moments of excitement and joy in the midst of navigating obstacles. These opposing states suggest Black habitus (Lofton & Davis, 2015) and connections to other CRT-related theories.

Data in this research describe ways that educational and employment structures and systems embody and implement dominant White cultural capital and Whiteness as property to reproduce inequality and thwart mobility, and how African American youth employ critical consciousness and cultural agency to “keep pushing.” African American youth narratives express CCR and postsecondary experiences of great aspirations, cultural agency. and resilience, positioned against exclusion, violence, and instability. Armed with various elements of community cultural wealth, these youth learn to use this capital and shapeshift (Cox, 2015). African American youth stretch their Black habitus (Lofton and Davis, 2015) to maintain their humanity and trajectories as they navigate inequitable structures and systems. These efforts do not mitigate the instances where their navigation must occur alone, independently and spontaneously without community support. In fact, the additional psychological labor that our African American youth encounter as they traverse the usual psychological challenges of adolescence should not be overlooked (Mahadeo, 2019), especially when many of these journeys are solitary, as African American youth exist in time, space, and being that Christina Sharpe (2016) describes as the “wake.”

By extending our understanding of the middle passage and the meaning of “wake,” Sharpe prods us to consider the aftermath of slavery as a continuum of antiblackness. In this continual perpetuation of Black social death (Patterson, 1982), our mourning, the wake, incites “wake work” so we “think through containment, regulation, punishment, capture, and captivity and the ways the manifold representations of blackness become the symbol, par excellence, for the less-than-human being condemned to death” toward “re/seeing, re/inhabiting, and re/imagining the world” (p.22). Wake work offers a way to consider the African American youth transition to postsecondary life that may illumine the “containment” and “regulation” and transform to “re/seeing, re/inhabiting, and re/imagining the world” (p. 22). It may also describe the “in-moment” making of Black habitus. New theoretical frameworks of Afrofuturism, Afro-pessimism, fugitive pedagogy, and wake work are theories that may offer additional frameworks to examine African American youth economic and educational mobility in this era of rapid technological change that has altered the way we measure and value time and space, as well as truth and authenticity, privacy and freedom.

Elements such as temporal capital, social capital, and critical consciousness are necessary to support shapeshifting and double consciousness. Communities of color provide the explicit guidance and support that African American youth need to become critically conscious and navigate systems. However, temporal capital may be overlooked as a valuable asset that is diminished and regulated by structures and systems, thus interfering with the abundance of CCW. Furthermore the exposure and impasse that occurs with CCW and dominant White capital should be explored.

## Implications for Future Studies

As discussed earlier, my original study was adjusted due to restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. This impacted the planned sample size and research sites for purposeful sampling. Nevertheless, I was able to recruit participants who were relevant to the initial research. Although the sample size is too small for generalization, the findings present important information regarding African American youth CCR and postsecondary experiences and opportunities for other studies. For example, the findings suggest the need for postsecondary employment for students who did not want to attend college immediately after high school. The one participant in the study who participated in a CTE program did not obtain employment in his field until six months after graduation. This shows the need to explore and evaluate postsecondary job placement of CTE students following high school. CTE programs could provide opportunities for African American youth to attain employment that pays a fair living wage immediately after high school. In consideration of high school college and career readiness, are high schools considering and measuring postsecondary skilled or semiskilled job placement? There are also opportunities to study union labor opportunities for CTE students. Ideally, a high school CTE student enrolled in some skilled labor fields, electric (like Mason), plumbing, or carpentry, would have an opportunity to apply for an apprenticeship or learn more about the unions and how to join them. These skilled labor apprenticeships usually consist of paid on-the-job training, culminating with full union membership and journeyman status after completion of the training requirements.

In addition to evaluating employment of CTE students immediately after high school, studies on district and school effectiveness of job placement for non-college-bound students is needed. All participants either spoke about financial needs or demonstrated need by their work experience in high school and multiple jobs after high school. How high schools and districts provide opportunities and support for high school students to obtain adequate work and "good-paying jobs" (Anaya) after high school would be essential to know. However, it would be important to monitor the work opportunities that high school graduates receive and if they are true equitable options, or a designation of caste.

Just as multigenerational occupancy may influence linguistic capital, the influence of grandparents' narratives was evident in participants' discussions about their futures in this study. Research that records education and employment narratives from African American urban residents across Boomer, X, Y, and Z generations could provide insight into the availability and use of other forms of CCW over generations and elements that form Black habitus or modes for shapeshifting. This research indicates the overlapping advice and direction that parents and grandparents provide. Due to changes in technology and communication during these time periods, research could also reveal how and when these forms of linguistic capital, specifically narratives, are shared and employed. Last, a continued study of the participant group in my dissertation would offer an opportunity to follow the education and economic mobility of African American youth through their postsecondary choices and experiences. This would offer a deeper understanding of the results of their postsecondary choices and reflect on how they understood the influences on their choices. It would also offer an opportunity to understand how they navigated those choices as young adults and if their family experiences of linguistic capital changed as they aged.

## Conclusion

The American dream is a conflicted and treacherous quest for African American families and African American youth. The United States' history of enslavement of individuals of African descent, enforced illiteracy, and subsequent laws developed a foundation that stratified U.S. citizens by race and class. High school college and career readiness focuses primarily on college readiness, embedding career readiness in postsecondary education. As such, the life readiness that is briefly referenced in CCR policy implies that readiness for college and career is readiness for life (Conley, 2014). Participants in this study, however, describe CCR policy that does not fully consider their life, their cultural capital, or their postsecondary needs or aspirations.

In some ways, these students are "readied" for a life determined centuries ago and persisting in the systems and spaces generating and perpetuating anti-Blackness, exclusion, and low expectations. Yet African American youth and families continue to "push," resist, and use their critical consciousness, independently and with the support of multiple CCW assets. Thomas Jefferson envisioned education as a necessity for a democracy of White men. The presupposition that CCR leads to life readiness, then, could presuppose that in the United States, African American youth are being readied for a life and caste confinement determined by White men for White men. African American youth in this research were aware of systems and structures. Their experiences did not always evidence fully supportive CCR systems and structures, but CCR systems and structures that perpetuate a caste status that African American youth refuse to occupy, and against which they resist (shapeshift).

Participants in this research spoke with excitement, anxiety, and caution when describing their aspirations and reflecting on their postsecondary readiness. African

American youth experience and witness physical, psychological, and symbolic violence in educational structures and systems that diminish their humanity, discipline their physical appearance, and surveil and restrict their mobility. CCR can ready African American youth to endure this caste or ready them to exercise their full citizenship rights and challenge the life restrictions and caste confinement created, perpetuated, and maintained by the nation's structures and systems.

The U.S. participation in the global economy and neoliberalism has prioritized hegemony. In efforts to maintain a superior global position in knowledge and the economy, the country has embraced policy that does not adequately acknowledge the U.S. history of chattel slavery and violent, structural, and systemic racism, or the barriers that African Americans have faced in education, employment, politics, and society. Data in my research revealed ways that educational and employment structures and systems embody and implement dominant White cultural capital and Whiteness as property to reproduce inequality and thwart mobility. The findings also described how African American youth employed critical consciousness and cultural agency to "keep pushing," as Alonzo's mother advised him. African American youth narratives expressed great aspirations, cultural agency, resilience, and resistance positioned against exclusion, violence, and destabilization. Armed with various elements of CCW, these youth used this capital to shapeshift (Cox, 2015) to maintain their humanity and trajectories as they navigated inequitable structures and systems. These efforts do not mitigate the instances when they navigate alone, independently, and spontaneously without community support. Often, participants encountered in their CCR and postsecondary paths, dominant White capital—financial, spatial, temporal—that was ever present and difficult to navigate.

Most intergenerational mobility research has focused primarily on the traditional family unit. Recent findings indicate that Black middle-class mobility across generations is as likely to stagnate or decline as it is to improve (Chetty, 2019; Darity et al., 2021). Intergenerational mobility will always be tenuous for African Americans. As long as current systems of oppression endure it will always be a battle. The "new, brand-new change" phrase that Taneka used, without irony, to identify her place in her family's hopes and aspirations not only describes her postsecondary path, but comments on the repetitive "brand new" change for African American progress and economic and educational mobility.

Always prescient, W. E. B. Du Bois (1930) predicted nearly 100 years ago that African Americans would need more than just a high school education to succeed:

> Today there is but one rivalry between culture and vocation, college training and trade and professional training, and that is the rivalry of Time. Someday every human being will have college training. Today some must stop with the grades, and some with high school, and only a few reach college. It is of the utmost importance, then, and the essential condition of our survival and advance that those chosen for college be our best and not simply the richest or most idle. (p. 106)

Du Bois reminds us that mobility is time. It is the time that one generation passes knowledge to the next; the time that a generation progresses in educational and economic competency; the time it takes for the transfer of knowledge, the fulfillment of skills and ability. The 2023 U.S. Supreme Court rulings that have reset the legal framework to eliminate race as a college admissions consideration, effectively mandating a continued decline of African American university enrollment, speak to the tangled experiences that we have with time. Time is an asset; it is capital; it informs the factors that influence economic and educational mobility for African Americans. When considering intergenerational mobility for African Americans, time is a significant construct because it is irreplaceable. Its theft is not only impactful in the moment. It is continual, eternal, exponential, impacting not only the individual but the family, the group, the community, and the country and the systems and structures they traverse and inhabit.

As they strive toward their postsecondary aspirations, African American youth continually implement a double consciousness to aid them in shifting modes to strive and thrive. The double consciousness that Du Bois described in 1903 remains in constant play even in today's world. This has been the African American experience for many generations. In the 21st century, the concept of shapeshifter appropriately addresses the constant African American reality with the added prisms of rapidly changing technology, communication, and policies. What appears to have changed since the Civil Rights Era is the swift advances in technology, communication, and travel, and the swift retrenchment of racially segregated public education with an added layer of economic segregation. This economic segregation has disconnected many African Americans from the available social capital in the neighborhood community. Aspirations are more tangible when they are present in your community. As Taneka expresses regarding her peers, "They'll listen to me before they'll listen to a billionaire." Technology can be used to create community despite temporal, spatial, and economic distance. Without critical consciousness, however, creating and connecting community and social capital can be misleading for African American youth and the community. Critical consciousness, awareness of the continual presence of anti-Blackness and other oppressive forces, is essential in this era of rapidly shifting sociopolitical realities. Du Bois's description of double consciousness, then, is a necessary shield against real and symbolic violence and exclusion, critical for

African Americans to survive and thrive in the United States. This may represent the tension that African American youth experience and what Du Bois (1903/2019) describes in *Souls of Black Folk*:

> One ever feels his twoness—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. 14)

It is this double consciousness, contained by “one dark body” that, depending on African American youth awareness of Whiteness of property (Harris, 1993) in social structures, can simultaneously facilitate African American youth’s survival and also stultify their mobility. African Americans exist in a tension of maintaining their humanity in the midst of the awareness that they are othered in the United States and all its spaces. As African American youth reflect and make meaning of their experiences, and their habituses evolve with the “second sight” that Du Bois (1903/2019) identified long ago as an element of the African American experience in a country (world) with a “color-line” and a “Negro problem.” Perhaps this also describes the constantly “shifting” or elastic habitus that Black youth develop as they ready for and experience postsecondary life in this contemporary global, sociopolitical, and economic reality. African American youth are learning that they must hold both tensions to survive and thrive as they navigate toward their dreams.

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# APPENDIX A

# INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How did you come to attend your school?
2. What did you like about your school?
3. What did you dislike about your school?
4. What were your favorite classes?
5. What was your least favorite class?
6. Is there something that you learned at school that's prepared you for life?
7. Is there someone at your school that you can count on to help you accomplish your goals?
8. How did adults at your school view you?
9. Do you think all students were treated the same at your school?
10. What do you think it took for students to get good grades?
11. Are students with higher grades treated differently by their teachers?
12. What do you want to be in ten years from now?
13. What does it take to become/achieve?
14. What kind of work do your parents do?
15. What kind of stories have they told you about work or their experiences working?
16. Do you work?
17. Is there a story you can share about work where you learned something?
18. How important is school to your life right now?
19. What do you think the benefits are to getting a good education?
20. What do you think your parents or other adults hope for you to do in the future?
21. Do you think your school prepared you for college or to obtain a good-paying job?
22. What's the best advice you've received about being successful in school?
23. Who gave you this advice?
24. What's the best advice you've received about being successful at work?
25. What's the best advice you've received about being successful in life?
26. Do you think that time is on your side? Do you think you have time to do things that you want to accomplish, your goals?
27. Did you know anything about college and career readiness requirements for graduation at school?
28. Did you feel prepared when you took the PSAT or SAT or the ACT?
29. Did you feel prepared to take the keystone exams in algebra, biology, or literature?
30. How important do you think these tests are to your future success?
31. What knowledge do you believe a student needs to have before they graduate from high school?
32. What do you think your school could do to ensure that everyone who graduates is either accepted to college or offered employment?
33. Is there someone in society or that you know personally that you would consider a role model.