



# Colorblind and Colorlined: African American Parents Talk to Their Adolescent Sons About Racism

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Colorblind and colorlined: African American parents talk to their adolescent sons about  
racism

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of the Graduate School of Education of Harvard University  
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## **A love letter to Black families**

## **Acknowledgements**

To everyone who has supported me along this journey

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## Abstract

Racial socialization, particularly preparation for bias and discrimination, is a long documented strategy employed by African American families to prepare their children for racist encounters. During the last fifteen years a new line of inquiry, theorizing the relationship between particular socio-historical periods and the content of messages communicated to children about race, has emerged. Scholars have started exploring African Americans' narratives about the messaging they received about racism against the backdrop of the social and historical period in which they came of age. In the period before the *Brown v. Board* decision many recalled hearing messages of the importance of deferring to whites. After the landmark decision and into the post-protest era, many reported hearing messages that were less focused on fearing whites and more focused on feeling pride as a Black person and in the Black race. Overall, messages have accurately reflected the then current state of racism and the particular etiquette required of African Americans to navigate a racially structured society. Furthermore, a look at changes in messaging over time suggests progress made on issues of racism. The experiences of the hip-hop generation, those born between 1965 and 1984, have not been documented. This study explored the messages that they received about racism along with the messages that they are currently sharing with their sons in a period equally marked by colorblind rhetoric and virulent anti-black racism. Using the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory and the Life Course Perspective, I conducted 51 interviews with 17 families. Today's African American parents

continue to convey many of the messages that their families shared with them, about the importance of individual and group pride, but there has been a distinct and unexpected addition to the content of the talks that they are having with their sons. Eerily similar to the messages conveyed to children pre *Brown v. Board*, parents' messaging about race largely urged compliance, fear of whites, and fear of figures of authority.



## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*“You know, when Trayvon Martin was first shot I said that this could have been my son. Another way of saying that is Trayvon Martin could have been me thirty-five years ago. And when you think about why, in the African American community at least, there’s a lot of pain around what happened here, I think it’s important to recognize that the African American community is looking at this issue through a set of experiences and a history that doesn’t go away.”*

*- Barack Obama on The Trayvon Martin Verdict*

Emmett Till could’ve been my uncle. He died the year that my mother was born. Despite his death, he played a significant role in my upbringing, sitting with me long after my mother’s conversations about racism, a symbol of a history of injury that would never, as President Obama explained after the acquittal of George Zimmerman<sup>1</sup>, remain in the past. Emmett’s story was a reminder that I was never too far from meeting a similar end. The physical threat of racism was a common theme in my mother’s discussions with me about race. These kinds of talks are emblematic of a long existing private practice of socialization that occurs in many Black families (Hughes et. al., 2006; Hughes et. al., 2008). Following the death of Trayvon Martin these conversations, or “the talk” as they came to be known suddenly became of great interest to the general public.

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<sup>1</sup> See Remarks by the President on Trayvon Martin (2013) for the full transcript of the press release. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/19/remarks-president-trayvon-martin>

On blogs, television, and radio, parents of young and adult Black children shared their experiences receiving “the talk” at some point in their own youth and now preparing to discuss racism with their own children. As I had grown up in the shadow of Emmett Till’s death, an entire generation of Black children would now grow up under the pall of horror cast by the death of Trayvon Martin. Trayvon Martin would now be a cautionary tale about the dangers of Blackness. Common to all descriptions of the “the talk” was a sense of the need to prepare one’s child for discrimination. Specifically, parents expressed the importance of prepping their African American child for encounters with officers of the law. For a moment, a national conversation about the strategies used by Black parents to raise their children, and by extension the continued impact of racism, seemed imminent. Unfortunately, “the talk” was reduced to ready-for-TV and radio sound bites and came to have a singular and simplistic meaning, which betrayed the complexity and nuance of the larger practice of socialization of which these conversations are a part. This dissertation study continues the conversation opened up to the general public by Trayvon Martin’s death by exploring “the talk” beyond the single themed conversation that has been popularized in the media.

Prior research makes clear that the messages communicated to children about race— and the significance of being Black in a racial hierarchy that devalues Blackness—by their parents are the product of three factors: the fit and applicability of the messages conveyed to parents as children to their current experiences with racism, the treatment of racism and the headway made towards tackling racial inequality in the parents’ life time, and parents’ assessment of the racial etiquette demands of the period in which their children are becoming adolescents (Brown & Lesane, 2006). Thus, in order to

understand how parents are speaking with their teenaged sons about racial discrimination, and the form and content of those conversations, I first explored and analyzed the messages that they themselves received as adolescents. The importance of adolescence as a life stage and a developmental period has long been established (Hall, 1904; Marcia, 1980; Phinney, 1980). Adolescence is understood to be a period of “generational imprinting” or time when individuals are marked by and begin remembering social and political events (Shuman & Scott, 1989, p.377). Early memories of these events begin to impact their outlook and the way that they relate to the world around them. For these reasons, in this study, I focused on what parents remembered about the messaging that they received in their adolescent years, parents’ descriptions of the social and cultural events that marked that period and perceived and actual progress made on issues of racial equality during their life-time. Additionally, given the importance of the developmental stage of adolescence, I also explored with parents the messages that they were now sharing with their adolescent sons.

Brown & Lesane-Brown (2006) explored the kinds of racial socialization messages adults remembered receiving as adolescents in an attempt to understand the origins of their current attitudes towards race and racism. The researchers’ sample fell into one of three periods: *pre-Brown v. Board of Education, protest, and post-protest*. The pre-Brown v. Board era, or the period before 1957, is a period that is characterized by blatant racism and “racial terrorism” (p.205). The period after this, the protest era, was characterized by the Civil Rights movement and the legislative moves made to dismantle structures and practices that perpetuated social and economic exclusion. Those born after the protest era are a part of the post-protest era, which was marked by ambiguity in the

form of the simultaneous slow rolling back of the gains made during the protest era and increasing economic and political opportunity for Black people. Their study sample did not include the current cohort, members of this hip-hip generation, or those born between 1965 and 1984, who reached their adolescence during the latter half of the post-protest era and are currently raising adolescent sons in a “post-racial” era<sup>2</sup>.

The idea that we are living in a post-racial period is a myth that threatens to eclipse the racialized lived realities of African Americans, during a time marked by increased Anti-Blackness (Paseck, Krosnick, Tompson, 2012; Teasley and Ikard, 2010), and color-blind racism. Color-blind racism, is characterized by majoritarian narratives about merit and grit, and insists that individual motivation and not structural racism defines the limit to one’s ability to succeed. Perhaps most dangerous are the post-racial claims that “racial phenomena”, like highly segregated schools or neighborhoods are normal, that racial profiling does not exist, and that the gaps observed between whites and blacks in education can be attributed to cultural differences instead of structural constraints (Bonilla-Silva, 2002). This “laissez-faire racism” leaves us blind to the way that race continues to operate in the lives of African Americans (Bobo, & Smith, 1997). Fox news personality Geraldo Rivera, in his comments after the shooting of Trayvon Martin, provided an excellent example of the everyday “laissez-faire racism” of this period when he said, “[Martin’s] hoodie is as much responsible for Trayvon Martin’s death as George Zimmerman was.”<sup>3</sup> In an instant he was able to normalize the killing of a young boy by blaming his death on the clothing that he wore instead of on the black

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<sup>2</sup> See Teasley, M., & Ikard, D (2010). Barack Obama and the politics of race: The myth of post-racism in AmErin. *Journal of Black Studies*, 40(3), 411-425. See also Crenshaw, K.W. (2011). Twenty years of Critical Race Theory: Looking back to move forward. *Connecticut Law Review*, 43(5), 1253-1352.

<sup>3</sup> See Katherine Fung’s 2012 article on the comments Rivera made while on the ‘Fox and Friends’ show: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/23/geraldo-rivera-trayvon-martin-hoodie\\_n\\_1375080.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/23/geraldo-rivera-trayvon-martin-hoodie_n_1375080.html)

misandry that surrounded him. This study pushes back on the myth that we are in a post racial era by exploring the “the talk” that Black parents are now having with their sons and using it as an diagnostic tool for understanding the way that racism continues to operate in the lives of African Americans.

For nearly four decades, the psychological literature has contributed to our understanding of the way that race operates in the private lives of African Americans by looking at “the talk”, one of many facets of racial socialization (Coard et. al.,2004; Hughes et. al, 2006). Racial socialization is set of practices employed or messages conveyed to make children aware of the existing racial hierarchy and their location within that hierarchy. A substantive body of literature has emerged around the many different strategies employed by parents to teach children about racism, revealing variation in the messages and practices, a taxonomy of different approaches used and correlates of the practice (White-John, Ford & Sellers, 2010). During the last fifteen years a new line of inquiry has emerged. A few scholars have pointed to the temporal nature of racial socialization messages, an aspect of these conversations that has been understudied. Shirley Hill (1999), Tony Brown and Chase Lesane-Brown (2006) and Jennifer Lynn Ritterhouse (2006) theorize the relationship between particular socio-historical periods and the content of the messages conveyed to children about race, pointing to the dynamic nature of racism often explored by sociologists but left out of conversations about racial socialization. Hill (1999) notes the distinction between messages from the past and those messages communicated at the time of her research. She asserts that, “in the past...messages included teaching the customs of racial dissimulation required of blacks for survival in a racial caste system, but today racial socialization more commonly refers

to teaching pride and self-acceptance” (p.102). This finding is corroborated and extended by Brown & Lesane-Brown (2006) and Ritterhouse (2006). However, very few scholars have followed this line of research, which situates parents’ “talk” in social and historical context. The proposed study built on previous studies in this vein by exploring the messages conveyed by African American parents to their children in the context of a “colorblind” era.

This dissertation has six chapters. In chapter two I review the relevant literature on racial socialization and present the conceptual frameworks used in this study. Chapter three focuses on describing the methodology that guides this study. Chapters four and five are analytical chapters. In chapter four I present the findings from my interviews with parents and families regarding the messages that were conveyed to them about racism. Chapter five analyzes the content of the messages about racism that these families are now sharing with their adolescent sons. In the final chapter, chapter six, I share what I learned overall through my analysis of the findings presented in the dissertation, revisiting my initial assumptions about the temporality of racial socialization messages. In what follows, I outline the importance of this study by first describing the current socio-historical context in which African-American parents of boys find themselves. Next, I present the problem statement and purpose of this study. Following this are the research questions and research design.

### **Background and Context**

On June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008, Barack Obama secured the democratic nomination for President of the United States and for a brief moment it seemed that America had finally addressed and overcome racism. Cameras covering one of the many post-election

celebrations showed a large and multi-hued crowd holding Obama '08 flags and posters while rejoicing. Confetti was being thrown, young white men rejoiced in the fact that a Black man had been elected president, black men and boys proudly wore shirts bearing the likeness of the president and people were dancing. In one screenshot, Congressman John Lewis, the civil rights leader, was seen jumping with joy. While the above description accurately reflects what happened on the night of June 3<sup>rd</sup> in cities all over the country, with other politicians and celebrities standing in the role of John Lewis, I am actually describing the video for rapper Young Jeezy's song for Obama entitled 'My President' (Appendix A).

I open this background and context section with a rap song and video fashioned to mimic the outcome of that election evening because of the role that Black popular music has played, and continues to play, in the background of Black American life, serving as a record of triumphs and defeats. Mark Anthony Neal (1999) reveals Black popular music to be a reflection of the Black experience in America. Looking through the lens of Neal's notion of Black popular music as public sphere, or institution which has been integral in the "transmission of communal values, traditions of resistance, and aesthetic sensibilities", I see Jeezy's song as one of the rare examples of music operating as 'Black public sphere' or space for communion and critique (Neal, 1999, p.1). The rapper's song is able to capture, in the short span of five and a half minutes, the gains and losses of the civil rights movement, the issues plaguing Black America since those losses, and the palpable hope felt by the nation, and not just Black Americans, at the prospect of having a Black president. Furthermore, as this dissertation study reveals, there is a relationship between Black popular music and racial socialization practices; Black popular music has served as

a medium of racial socialization, reflecting the contours of racism in America during certain periods. I would be remiss in my exploration of this topic to leave music out of this study. As parents explained, music is very much a part of the conversation with their sons.

Coming in at Number 16 on Rolling Stone's list of the top 100 songs for 2008, the refrain of the song 'My President' starts with, "My President is Black...". In it, artist Young Jeezy captures a popular and beloved sentiment expressed at the time, that America had finally realized her dreams and moved beyond race and racism into an era of hope, change, and true equity. The idea is represented in many ways throughout the video. However the most powerful indication of this idea was the purposeful inclusion of Congressman John Lewis, a representative of Dr. King and the larger civil rights movement. Lewis' appearance in the video suggested a promise fulfilled, a chapter completed and closed in the American story. This theme is revisited in a later remix of Jeezy's song, in which Jay-Z raps, "Rosa Parks sat so Martin Luther could walk/Martin Luther walked so Barack Obama could run/Barack Obama ran so all the children could fly/ So I'mma spread my wings, you can meet me in the sky" (Appendix B). It was as if the hit were written with the express purpose of being the final song on the soundtrack for America's racial drama. It was a song about triumph over racism, a new anthem proclaiming allegiance to a post-racial reality.

Indeed, data collected on attitudes about race in America in the years immediately before and after the President's election seemed to confirm the widely held belief that America was finally becoming a country where race no longer mattered. In a CBS News/New York Times poll conducted in 2009, the majority, 87%, of whites and 61% of



Blacks expressed the belief that this country had made significant progress towards eliminating racial discrimination (“The State of Race Relations,” 2009, p.1). Indeed, Blacks have made steady progress in several arenas. With regard to educational attainment and achievement 80% of Blacks have a high school diploma, a major increase from the 33% recorded in 1970. When it comes to income, the percentage of families who find themselves at the top of the income distribution has increased by 13% and the percentage of families finding themselves at the bottom of the distribution decreased by 7% since 1970 (U.S. Bureau Census “Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States, 2006”). However, for many, the most important piece of supporting evidence for the idea that America was finally moving beyond racism was the 2008 election of a Black man to the presidency for the first time in American history. It is this last point that has cemented the idea that we have transcended race into the American imaginary.

Barack Obama himself embodies the notion of a post-racial reality in America. As Kimberlé Krenshaw (2011) notes, “Obama as a post-racial figuration is key to the remaking of old debates into a new common sense, one that draws the masses as well as elites, whites as well as racial Others into a familiar and comfortable script about the benign nature of race and opportunity in American society” (1314). Part of what President Obama does for the ideology of post-racialism is sanitize and de-historicize America’s racial present. The year that Barack Obama, the son of a Black father and white mother was born, 1961, was the same year that Congressman John Lewis went on a freedom ride to desegregate public transportation. Lewis was arrested and jailed and the bus that he had ridden on from Washington D.C. was burned. Four years later, century-

year-old Jim Crow laws, which required the obsequiousness of the African American population, would be officially abolished<sup>4</sup>.

Under Jim Crow, Black people dealt with the indignities of being forced to use separate facilities that were labeled “colored”. They lived amidst the horror of the lynching of their community members for imagined, alleged, and logic-defying infractions like “boastful remarks”, “trying to act like a white person” and insulting a white person<sup>5</sup>. Drawing from a 1934 *New York Times* article and a report written by the NAACP that same year, Isabelle Wilkerson (2010) tells the story of a young man named Claude Neal who was tortured and hanged for the alleged rape and murder of a white woman. Prior to his highly publicized lynching, his killers cut off his genitals, made him consume them, periodically cut off his digits, which were later passed around as souvenirs, and burned him. He was eventually hanged from a tree, his body out on display in the front of a courthouse<sup>6</sup>. Additionally while slavery had ended on the books it lived on in the form of debt camps and convict leasing<sup>7</sup>. The torching of Black towns and the killing of their inhabitants was also commonplace<sup>8</sup>. However, in his now famous speech “A more perfect union”, Obama neatly describes the history of racism through brief references to school segregation and legal discrimination in housing and employment, asks Black people not to be victims to their past, to take “full responsibility” for themselves and suggests they should tie their “particular grievances – for better health

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<sup>4</sup> See Wilkerson (2011) for a description of the origins of Jim Crow and Jim Crow Laws.

<sup>5</sup> These details appear in Wilkerson’s (2010) work on the great migration. She cites the 1933 work *The Tragedy of Luning*.

<sup>6</sup> See Oct 28, 1934 s article “Group kills Negro; Disappoints crowd. See also the 1934 NAACP report *The lynching of Claude Neal*; Wilkerson, 2010, p.131; <http://tulsahistory.org/learn/online-exhibits/the-tulsa-race-riot/>

<sup>7</sup> Alexander, M. (2010). *The New Jim Crow*. The New Press:New York

<sup>8</sup> See Wilkerson (2010) p.59.; *Documented history of the event which occurred at Rosewood, Florida, in January, 1923*;

care, and better schools, and better job – to the larger aspirations of all Americans – the white woman struggling to break the class ceiling, the white man whose been laid off, the immigrant trying to feed his family.<sup>9</sup>”

Obama, in that speech, deftly glossed over systemic racism and structural constraints by drawing upon the palatable scripts of myth of meritocracy and opportunity and the minimization of racism, signature rhetorical devices in colorblind discourse. Yes, over the course of the 53-years since those freedom rides America has made progress. America has moved away from ‘colored’ toilets, restaurants and buses to having a Black man lead the United States of America. However, “Barack Obama’s shattering of the political glass ceiling can be analogized to the “White Only” signs that came down in the 1960s and 1970s”, Krenshaw (2010, p. 1312) states. “With the collapse of segregation came the confidence...that formal equality alone constituted the ultimate realization of racial justice...formal equality did little to disrupt ongoing patterns of institutional power and the reproduction of differential privileges and burdens across race.” The Obama presidency does not mean that America is beyond race or that race no longer has material consequences for those on the wrong side of the color line.

As Congressman John Lewis expressed in his speech on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March on Washington, “there are still invisible signs [of racism] buried in the hearts of humankind.<sup>10</sup>” One of the invisible signs that he refers to is the case of Trayvon Martin, a black Florida teen who was gunned down in his father’s gated community by self-appointed neighborhood watchman, George Zimmerman. Zimmerman claimed self-

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<sup>9</sup> See [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/03/18/obama-race-speech-read-th\\_n\\_92077.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/03/18/obama-race-speech-read-th_n_92077.html) for the full transcript of Barack Obama’s 2008 speech.

<sup>10</sup> See the transcript of the speech: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/transcript-rep-john-lewiss-speech-on-50th-anniversary-of-the-march-on-washington/2013/08/28/fc2d538a-100d-11e3-8cdd-bcdc09410972\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/transcript-rep-john-lewiss-speech-on-50th-anniversary-of-the-march-on-washington/2013/08/28/fc2d538a-100d-11e3-8cdd-bcdc09410972_story.html)

defense under Florida's Stand Your Ground Law. He was later found 'not guilty' by a jury of his peers. For an invisible sign, the Trayvon Martin case and the Stand Your Ground Law made the continued relevance of racism to the lives of Black boys and men hypervisible. At the time of the verdict, President Obama said, "Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago", a comment that suggested his chance escape from the fate that Martin suffered, a fate that is possible for and available to all Black boys in a nation that insists that it has moved beyond race. His statement may have appeared to be a simple gesture of solidarity towards the Martin family but it begins to make more sense when the realities of the context surrounding Black boys are examined in detail.

### **The world surrounding Black boys**

Ecological systems theory is a useful framework for describing the context in which many Black boys exist. Bronfenbrenner (1977) locates the developing child in a series of nested systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. The microsystem, which includes a child's parents, peers, school, and neighborhood, is where the child spends most of his time. The mesosystem, is where parts of the microsystem interact. Outside of the mesosystem, the exosystem contains settings that are more indirectly involved in a child's development. The macrosystem contains the cultural views and social context that surrounds the child. These systems lie within a chronosystem, which is the socio-historical period in which the child exists.

The microsystem of many Black boys is characterized by impoverished neighborhoods, among many other detrimental contexts. In 2012, 40% of African American children were living in poverty, compared to 14% of white children (Kids

Count, 2012). Children living in poverty are likely to experience chronic stress, which often leads to poor academic outcomes (Ferguson, Bovaird, & Mueller, 2007). African American boys graduate from high school at a rate of 52% compared to Whites who graduate at a rate of 78% (Jackson and Beaudry, 2012). Poverty accounts for some part of the academic experiences of many Black boys, but it does not account for all. Interpersonal relationships between teachers and students are also a contributing factor to the negative educational experiences of many Black boys. Teachers' preconceived notions about African American boys may be in large part to blame for their dismal performance and the likelihood that they are over-disciplined and over-expelled (Berkel et. al., 2008; Thomas et. al., 2009; Wang & Huguley 2012). They are more than three times likely to be suspended or expelled than their white peers (49% vs. 18%) for the same offense (Aud et. al., 2011). Increasingly, law enforcement officials facilitate many of the disciplinary actions occurring in schools.

In the mesosystem, teachers' perceptions of their students coupled with the increasing presence of law enforcement officials interact, resulting in disproportionate rates of arrest for students of color (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2012). Nationwide, African American youth are referred to juvenile court at an alarming rate of 9,633 per 100,000 youth, compared to 4,431 for whites and 5,409 for Native Americans. Despite being 16% of the national youth population they represent 28% of arrests, 37% of the detained population, and 58% of those who are passed on to adult prisons. The realities of the mesosystem and microsystem are exacerbated by media portrayals of Black manhood.

The media and social imagery, shape the exosystem in which many Black boys are nested. In the media, African American males are underrepresented as intellectually or technically skilled characters or as members of families and communities. They are portrayed as being menacing and inherently criminal (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Marable, 1995). Narratives about the historic, cultural, and material legacies of racism and the way that these legacies perpetuate Black-misandry remain untold. The absence of these narratives reinforces negative stereotypes about African American males with very real consequences in the realms of American public opinion and imagination (Opportunity Agenda, 2011). Repeated negative portrayals reify a well-worn script about Black males and Black masculinity that makes them institutionally “legible” (Neal, 2013) and makes it less likely that people will be able to empathize with actual Black males (Entman & Rojecki, 2001). For example, an alleged photo of Trayvon Martin baring his chest and brandishing two middle fingers in his backwards baseball cap and below-the-waist pants, circulated on the Internet alongside a picture of a smiling George Zimmerman in a suit. There was one problem; the photo was not of Trayvon Martin<sup>11</sup>. Despite this fact, it was successful in defaming his character, confirming for the collective consciousness the idea that Martin’s demise was attributable to a pathological culture and not to the structures and logics that sustain White supremacy (Dixon & Azocar, 2007; Entman & Gross, 2008). Ultimately, it seemed as if George Zimmerman was acquitted, of all charges, for killing the Trayvon Martin that the media had created.

These consistently negative portrayals have the potential to impact the inner psychological lives of Black children, who have one of the highest levels of media

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<sup>11</sup> Flock.E. (2012). *In Trayvon Martin case, plenty of misinformation*. <http://tulsahistory.org/learn/online-exhibits/the-tulsa-race-riot/>. Retrieved April 4, 2015.

exposure. While Black children are exposed to media for nearly thirteen hours a day, whites average eight and a half hours a day (Rideout, Foehr & Roberts, 2010). This difference in exposure becomes even more alarming considering the finding that Black children, who have the most exposure to media, exhibit decreased self-esteem (Martins & Harrison, 2012) and lower racial self-esteem (Ward, 2004).

The microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem surrounding many Black boys sit within a macrosystem and chronosystem that is structured along lines of race. For most of American history, America was characterized by “a racial dictatorship” (1607-1865; 1877-1965), which required the complete disenfranchisement of Black people (Omi & Winant, 1994, p.66). Central to the project of stripping them of all rights, was the idea that Black people were not human and could not enjoy the privileges attributed to humans, or white people. The erasure of Black humanity is consistent throughout this period and reinforced through the inhumane treatment of Black bodies, both male and female. A classic description of the widespread dehumanization of Black bodies is captured by Abel Meeropol’s “Strange Fruit” (Appendix C). Attitudes formed during the period of racial dictatorship were key to the maintenance of that system of terror and continue to structure racial norms today.

America can now more accurately be described as a racial hegemony. The dominant group, which was firmly established during the period of racial dictatorship, maintains power partially through consent and partially through the creation and maintenance of an elaborate system of ideas, that is promulgated through mass media and accepted by all as the norm (Omi and Winant, p.67, 1994). The pervasiveness and persistence of racism in our society can best be understood through the theory of

racialized social systems where all facets of life are informed by the stratification of individuals within racial categories and the resulting hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Within the American racialized social system, African Americans, particularly males, have consistently occupied the lowest rungs of the hierarchy.

There are serious consequences to navigating such a hostile context. Among them is what is known as racial battle fatigue, which is defined as the mental, emotional and physical strain experienced by members of racially marginalized groups coping with the daily stress of racism (Smith, 2004). Symptoms of racial battle fatigue include anger, depression, anxiety, sadness, confusion (Berkel et. al., 2008; Brody et. al, 2006; Brown et. al, 2000), hopelessness, lethargy, diminished self-concept, low self-esteem (Davis & Stevenson, 2006; Nyborg & Curry, 2003) aggression (Berkel et. al., 2008; Nyborg & Curry, 2003) and nihilistic behaviors including engagement in high risk activities that can end in what Brown et al., (2003) calls “police assisted suicide”. Unfortunately, as demonstrated by the death of Trayvon Martin, even a seemingly mundane task such as walking through a neighborhood at night, can be considered “high risk” for Black males.

In the quote at the beginning of this chapter, President Barack Obama expressed the fact that Trayvon could have been his son. Self-proclaimed pundits representing different ends of the political spectrum analyzed the President’s statement for racism. However, the words of the President were overlooked for what they intimated: an insight into the complex realities and unique responsibilities of parents of African American sons. Initial public conversations about “the talk”, sparked by the death of Trayvon Martin and a spotlight on Florida’s Stand Your Ground Law, opened up a national, albeit brief, conversation about the kinds of conversations that African American parents have with



their sons to prepare them for discrimination. However this initial foray into “the talk” reduced the practice to a singular conversation about interactions with authority, neglecting to examine variety and nuance within the conversation. It is this problem that this dissertation addressed.

### **Problem Statement**

Research reveals racial socialization, particularly preparation for discrimination, to be a common practice among African American parents. Racial socialization, or the set of practices employed or messages conveyed to make children aware of the existing racial hierarchy and their location within that hierarchy, has long been documented as a strategy employed by African American parents to prepare their children for racist encounters. In a period that many have assumed is post-racial or beyond racism, the talk is becoming decontextualized. The detachment of the talk from its social and historical context is dangerous, betraying the complex process by which the talk is constantly evolving to reflect the dynamic nature of racism. It is important to understand the way that parents are discussing racial discrimination with their sons in 2014, a period simultaneously marked by color-blind rhetoric and virulent anti-black racism.

### **Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore with 17 African American families the conversations that they have with their adolescent sons about racial discrimination. Additionally, following through on the line of inquiry suggesting the temporal aspect of these messages, I examined, with these parents, the way that different social, historical and cultural phenomena informed the types of conversations that they

chose to have with their sons. To shed light on this issue, I entered the project with the following research questions:

- A. What kinds of conversations do African American parents have with their adolescent sons to prepare them for encounters with racial discrimination?
- B. What, if any, are the social and historical factors, as identified by parents, that influence the kinds of conversations they have with their sons about racial discrimination?

My tools of choice were the qualitative methods of standard interviewing and visual elicitation interviewing.

### **Research Approach**

This dissertation challenges majoritarian narratives of colorblindness and post racialism that diminish and dismiss Black communities' experience with race and racism, by centering the "experiential knowledge of people of color" (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993, p.6). The dominant narratives which seek to minimize the existence of racism, are akin to stories, which passed down and repeated, become accepted as normal and true, preventing people from being able to recognize oppression, namely racism. Following in the tradition among Critical Race Theorists to forefront the "cultural wealth", or "array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression", of marginalized communities to create a counternarrative<sup>12</sup>, this dissertation focused on gathering, through interviews, recollections and descriptions of parents' experiences with racial socialization, their own and that of their sons (Yosso, 2005, p.77).

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<sup>12</sup> Counternarratives are stories that serve as a counter to dominant narratives.

With the approval of Harvard University's Institutional Review Board, I conducted 51 interviews with 17 families (Appendix D). These families all had at least one adolescent Black male between the ages of 12 and 18. In depth interviews, using Seidman's (2006) three interview series were the primary method of data collection (Appendix E). These standard interviews were supplemented by photo elicitation interviews. The interview process began with short pilot interviews with each of the families. The information obtained during these initial interviews formed the basis for the criteria around photo selection for the visual elicitation interviews (Appendix F). The interviews obtained through 51 individual interviews form the basis for the findings in this study. Both emic and etic coding categories were developed for the purpose of this study. Etic categories were based upon the relevant literature and the study's conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Emic categories emerged from participants' words in the data. Each participant was identified through a pseudonym, and all interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. To support the findings of this study parents were asked to read and review the study at different stages through out the study's progression. The notion of cultural wealth assumes valuable knowledge production occurs in communities of color, and moves to highlight the skills that are specific to communities of color as a result of racism. Additionally, foregrounding the voices of African American parents, as I have in this study, fills out the contours of full and calculated lives, humanizing communities that have been pushed so far outside of humanity that their deaths have been fodder for ridicule.<sup>13</sup> As I have written elsewhere, "the voices of people of color "can be used as pedagogical tools in teaching about racial oppression and the strength required of

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<sup>13</sup> After Trayvon Martin's death, gun practice targets in the shape of a hoodie sold out on the internet (Coates, 2012).

those who resist it” (DiAquoi, p. 86, 2012). Ultimately, this dissertation is a record of that strength.

### **Assumptions**

Three assumptions were made regarding this study. The first was that parents’ recollection of the content of messages that they received about racism and discrimination would differ from the content of messages that they are sharing with their sons. This assumption was based on the research of Hill (1999), Brown & Lesane-Brown (2006) and Ritterhouse (2006) on the temporal, social, and historical aspects of racial socialization practices and the recent use of Life Course Perspective Theory by Brown & Lesane-Brown to understand racial socialization practices. Second, parents’ description of the messages that they shared with their sons would demonstrate an understanding of the permanence of racism. This assumption was based on one of the tenets of Critical Race Theory as outlined by Derrick Bell (1989). The premise of the notion that racism is permanent and systemic, known as racial realism, is that racism is an important and efficient method of stratification integral to the functioning of American society. Third, parents would reflect a racial realist stance while simultaneously adopting majoritarian rhetoric about colorblindness and meritocracy. These seemingly contradictory beliefs would be apparent in the way that they described the talk that they have with their sons. This assumption was based upon Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s (2003) exploration of the way that African Americans make use of colorblind ideology and rhetorical devices. In his research he found that while African Americans did internalize a few of the mainstream color blind narratives about racial discrimination, their views generally differed significantly from those of whites. Many expressed the belief that racial discrimination

was at the core of their lived experience. However, even those who had not fully subscribed to colorblind racist ideology made some use of the frames of colorblind racism when describing their experiences with discrimination<sup>14</sup>.

In his book *White Supremacy & Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003) shares the story of Latasha, a parent who uses the colorblind frame of abstract liberalism to explain residential and school segregation. An abstract liberalist perspective denies structural constraints and practices that buttress the racist American social structure, supporting the notion of “equal opportunity” and “regarding each person as an individual with choices...”(Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p.28). For, Latasha school segregation was explained as a failing of the government. In her comments there was not any mention of systemic racism. The children of the parents in this dissertation study were born either a couple of years before or after Bonilla Silva’s study. All of their sons grew up with a president who looks like them. As I thought about how much the context has changed since 2003, the pervasiveness of post racial and colorblind rhetoric, and listened to the conflicting messages the parents in my study shared with their sons about race, I wondered whether and how parents in this study would make use of colorblind frameworks to describe racial inequality and if a larger portion of the parents in my study would employ colorblind ideology in 2014 compared with participants in Bonilla-Silva’s study, which was published in 2003.

### **The Researcher**

At the time of this study I was a full time doctoral student. I recruited participants from a program that I had attended as a child, Elite Prep. The mission of the leadership

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<sup>14</sup> See Bonilla-Silva’s (2003) description of the frames of colorblind racism: Abstract liberalism, affirmative action, cultural racism, naturalization and denial of discrimination’s systemic nature

development program, which continues to operate today, is to aid academically underserved minority students by providing them with access to educational opportunities. The idea behind teaching eleven-year-olds Latin, French, Spanish, algebra II, research skills, sociology, chemistry, and social psychology and requiring them to read texts such as *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *Black Boy*, *Death Be Not Proud*, and *Light in the Forest* is that exposure to a rigorous academic program will position and prepare them to assume leadership positions at elite schools and, eventually, in their communities and society. The motto of the program, “excellence, integrity, commitment, and courage”, reflects the values that Elite Prep wishes students to internalize and an unspoken rubric by which students’ growth and success is measured. As a result of my experience in the program, I had a lot in common with participants’ sons. We sat in the same classes, read the same books, took the same tests, and celebrated the same exact milestones from acceptance into the program until graduation. Being an alumna of the program proved particularly advantageous for developing deep relationships with the families in my study. The shared experiences that existed between their sons and myself were a bridge between us, diminishing the need for formalities and establishing almost immediate trust.

Being from the same city, I had a lot in common with the parents. We shared a collective memory of all of the major geographical points in the city and the many tragedies that had marked them. Parents let me into their homes and their hearts and received me during our initial meeting as if we were long time friends. When parents learned that I was a graduate student at Harvard University they made a special effort to introduce me to their sons and had me discuss future possibilities with them. I shared my prior research experience with participants, making it clear that I had committed to

studying the educational experiences of African American children. I was also honest about what I was trying to study, my motivations, and why this project mattered to me. Consequently, parents were forthcoming about their experiences with racism, memories from their childhoods, and whether and how they were preparing their sons for discrimination. In a few cases parents, who suddenly remembered things after the interview, sent emails, texts, and even called to share what was on their mind, after their interview. In two separate cases, parents told their friends about the study, recruiting participants for the sample. Due to time and space constraints, I had to turn some families away and explain that this is a topic that I intend to study for years to come.

I know that my race and the experiences that participants assumed I had had because I was Black, factored in to the kinds of relationships that I was able to build. Participants were very comfortable with me. I imagine that they would have been less comfortable if I had been a white man or woman. I know this because of the way they talked with me about whiteness, white supremacy, and white people. They referred to white people as ‘they’, creating an ‘us’ that included me. At times they whispered to me, forgetting that the recorder was on. Other times they yelled and cursed in anger. Often we laughed when we should have been crying about the adaptive behaviors one must develop under a racist system. Some parents shed tears when talking about their fears for their sons. One father, John, asked me to turn off the recorder when he saw the picture of Trayvon Martin. The sacred space created by the interview sessions became what Kynard (2010) calls modern hush harbors, or “intentional communities [that] have historically allowed African American participants to share and create knowledge and find their voices in hostile environments...” (p.30). Our conversations were seasoned with African

American Vernacular English (AAVE) and phrases like, ‘you know what I mean?’, ‘you understand’, and ‘ I know you know what I’m talking about’. Yes, I knew what they meant. However, as a researcher I followed these statements up with clarifying questions so that I did not make assumptions about what they were trying to say.

Our hush harbors extended beyond the space created by the event that was the interview, into the digital realm. On two occasions, in response to the non-indictments of the police officers who murdered Mike Brown and Eric Garner, parents texted me about their feelings of sadness and anger and offered words of encouragement. I responded honestly to their texts, sharing my similar feelings and the impact that these events were having on my ability to complete my work. Casey, a mother of a 12-year-old, upon learning about my feelings via text, responded, “your work is so much bigger than the personal stuff that happens to you. How dare you succumb to your humanity. Get up and work.” One parent asked God to guide me after one of our interviews and another parent asked that I pray with her family, for the success of the project before leaving her house. Recently, that same parent sent me a message of encouragement via email. She knew that the deadline for submission was approaching and urged me to keep my eyes on the prize.

I recognize that my race and status as a graduate student may have influenced participants’ reaction and responses to interview questions and consequently the outcomes of the study as a whole. Qualitative research recognizes the influence, as a researcher, on participants in the study, as reactivity bias<sup>15</sup>. The importance of my race to this study became apparent during times when parents’ whispered to me about the culture of racism in America. In the ways that they talked with me about the effects of whiteness

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<sup>15</sup> See Maxwell (2006)



and racism on their lives, it was apparent that there was an assumed shared perspective on those topics. As I mentioned earlier, parents talked with me in ways that suggested that they believed we were bound by a collective cultural experience because of our skin color. During the course of interviews, some parents often asked me to share what I thought about the practice of preparing African American boys for racial discrimination. In these instances I became acutely aware of my graduate student identity and the assumption about my expertise on the topic that I was studying. They wanted to know if I saw the practice as useful and wondered if they were doing it properly. I reassured them by letting them know that there weren't any right answers and that I was interested in their particular experience.

In my experience interviewing parents in this study, I believe that the research topic and design also influenced participants. Over the course of our interviews, parents made statements that suggested that my interview questions and the photos that were presented during the visual elicitation portion of the interview made them think differently about whether and how they should speak with their sons about racism. After our last interview, Wade, a parent of a 12-year-old boy, shared:

You just made me realize that maybe if I didn't do this, I'd just be like... Going along. But when you really sit and look at, even the Trayvon Martin incident, to really sit down and have a discussion about it, I just never really sat and really spoke to him or speak to both of my kids about... Because that definitely is something that you definitely have to discuss with children, so that's a wake up call for me now. You really have to sit and think, 'Okay, what do you say...?'

Following this statement, I received periodic texts from Wade in the wake of the murders of Mike Brown, Eric Garner, Akai Gurley, and Tamir Rice. As a result of being a part of the study, he was now actively using each incident where an unarmed Black man was shot and/or killed as a starting point for conversations with his son. In Wade's case, my line of questioning about what he told his son about racism and Black masculinity, served as a "wake up call". While he had previously talked to his son on occasion about these issues, interview questions that asked him to very seriously reflect on the specifics of the practice created, in him, both a sense of urgency and obligation to have conversations about racism with his son.

I understand that participants' responses to my questions were a product of all of the spoken and unspoken aspects of our interactions like my Brooklyn accent and the way that I talked, the way that I wore my hair and my clothing choice, and the aura that surrounded my Harvard student status. Instead of trying to eliminate my imprint on participants and the interview experience, I worked to factor my influence into my data collection and analysis. On many of my first interviews, I dressed business casual. As I was meeting people in their homes, I eventually abandoned button down shirts, v-neck sweaters, slacks, and shoes for jeans, long sleeved tees and sneakers. I did this for two reasons. First, when I was dressed business casual, I wasn't relaxed. I took on a very serious tone and demeanor, very mechanically moved down the list of questions in my head, and spoke as if I were reading from a script. I believe that the way that I felt could have, in turn, created an environment that made parents feel like they had to have the right answer. Second, when I met with parents they were often dressed in casual clothes. Wearing business casual clothing to their house created a false distance between us.

Listening to the recordings of my earliest interviews I learned to practice a flatter intonation, not quite monotone, that neither affirmed nor negated what participants were saying. I wasn't always successful though. At times, I let an affirming 'mmhmm' slip out but I eventually mastered asking participants to elaborate even if they thought that I knew what they were talking about.

Reading verbatim transcripts helped me to avoid leading questions. My interview protocol went through several iterations before I felt that it would yield the kind of data that I needed to answer my research questions. After interviews, I listened to recordings to reflect on the way that I might have steered participants towards or away from certain answers and how I might have influenced the way that they answered. The benefit of the three-interview structure was that I was able to develop a consistent interviewing style over the course of several months. Additionally, the visual elicitation portion of the interview allowed for a change in the interviewee, interviewer dynamic. I only asked one question at the beginning of the entire interaction. Parents spoke freely and directed me to swap images when they were ready to move on to the next picture. They were also able to move and hold the pictures and return to pictures that they had already described if and when they wanted. During these instances, when they spoke uninterrupted and unguided by me, it became very apparent that they were the experts. Instead of my dictating our interaction with questions, they now directed the conversation. They used the pictures to revisit and reframe answers to previous questions and ask me some of their own questions. This form of methodological triangulation was useful in helping me to check for internal consistency in participant interviews. The most difficult

of all the strategies employed to test for validity in light of reactivity, was paying attention to, instead of dismissing, discrepant data.

There is a natural inclination to gloss over findings that do not support your emerging theory. To account for this, I included points of divergence in my analysis and thought about why a particular aspect of a participant's experience and response stood out from the other data that I had collected. These reflections led me to ask follow up questions of certain individuals and forced me to comb through transcriptions to see if and whether I had asked a question slightly differently to a particular participant compared to other interviewees. Most importantly, these moments pushed me to examine my assumptions and biases about racial socialization and whether and how families practiced it.

### **Rationale and Significance**

Practically, the significance of this study is apparent in parents' responses to the questions asked and pictures presented during interviews, and the continued communication between the parents and myself long after our last interview. For many parents participation in the project was cathartic, a chance for reflection on their parenting practices and all that they were doing to ensure their sons' safety. It was also eye opening for parents like Wade, who began to do his own research on the benefits of racial socialization, particularly preparation for bias, for his son. Over the course of the project other parents questioned their practices and wondered if they should be doing more or less. All of the parents expressed an interest in the final product. They wondered how their peers were handling the topic of discrimination when they spoke with their adolescent sons. Theoretically, this study adds to the literature on the temporal nature of

messages conveyed by parents about racism. The discussion of this practice, referred to as the talk in popular culture, has been decontextualized from its socio-cultural and historical contexts, begging a new model, which will be presented at the end of the dissertation, for understanding racial socialization: Life Course CRiT.

### **Terms and definitions used throughout this study**

**African American:** In the 2010 U.S. Census, the terms Black or African American are used to refer to people, who have origins in Africa, with the exception of Sudan, Cape Verde and North African Countries. Thus, ‘African American’ includes persons of Afro-Caribbean, Black American, African American and Sub-Saharan descent.

**Pre *Brown v. Board*:** Before 1957. A period characterized by blatant racism, segregation, “racial terrorism” and “economic exclusion” (Brown and Lesane-Brown, 2006, p.205)

**Protest:** 1954-1968. A period characterized by the civil rights movement (Brown and Lesane-Brown, 2006).

**Post-Protest:** 1969-1980. A period characterized by increased economic mobility for some African Americans and the creation of a black underclass (Brown and Lesane-Brown, 2006).

**Racial Structure:** The concept of a multiplicity of possible racial structures is that race and racism are static and evolve to reflect sociohistorical contexts (Bonilla-Silva, 2002).

**Race:** Race is an organizing construct in American society, and all over the world, whose meaning is contingent upon and shaped by its social, political and historical context at any given time and indicative of a struggle for power among groups of people (Omi & Winant, 1994). Throughout history and into the present day, race has been a way to differentially organize bodies with respect to the access to resources and capital. It is a system of stratification, which has proven to be self-sufficient in reproducing and maintaining itself.<sup>16</sup> Bodies are raced, or racialized, by the meanings that are attached to them, meanings, which reflect an individual’s relationship to and with society.

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**Racism:** “A system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress... people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms and color” (Marable as cited in Solorozano and Yosso, 2002)

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore with 17 African American families the conversations that they have with their adolescent sons about racial discrimination. Specifically, I sought to understand the way that different social, historical and cultural phenomena informed the form and content of the talks that they chose to have with their sons and the content of the messages that they were conveying during these conversations. In order to understand the talk, I conducted a targeted review of current literature. The review of the literature was ongoing over the course of the project through data collection, data analysis, and synthesis. This critical literature review explores the racial socialization practices of African American parents raising adolescent sons.

To this end, three bodies of literature were reviewed: (a) racial socialization (b) critical race theory and (c) life course perspective theory. A review of the racial socialization literature with a specific focus on the experiences of parents with adolescents provides an understanding of the importance of racial socialization for adolescents, the demographic correlates of the practice, and the content of racial socialization messages. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is reviewed to provide a context for racial socialization practices and allows us to understand the talk in terms of the permanence of racism. Life course perspective theory is reviewed to provide an understanding of the way that the practice of racial socialization interacts with the history and biography of parents.



To conduct this literature review I used many different sources including handbooks, books, dissertations, peer-reviewed journal articles, and periodicals. These sources were accessed through Google scholar, The Harvard University Library Catalog, 3-in-1 Education Articles Search: ERIC, Ed Abstracts, Academic Search Premier, ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Full Text, and PsycINFO. The literature included seminal works and material immediately relevant to Black adolescent males and the experiences of parents who are raising them. Given my interest in exploring the way that Black adolescent males have been discussed in the racial socialization literature there wasn't a delimiting time frame on the search. Search terms for this literature review include "racial socialization", "racial socialization and Black parents", "racial socialization and Adolescence", "racial socialization and adolescent Black males", "racial socialization and Black boys", "racial socialization and critical race theory", and "racial socialization and the life course perspective".

The literature review is divided into three major sections. These sections correspond with the bodies of literature that I have chosen to explore. In the first part of this review, I looked for the ways in which racial socialization practices have been discussed with an eye on Black males. I looked for when articles on racial socialization seemed to focus attention on the experiences facing adolescents, and Black male adolescents in particular, and at the themes, major lines of inquiry and methodological approaches discussed in articles on this topic. In addition, I discussed gaps in the literature and situated my research within these gaps. I linked the racial socialization literature to literature on Critical Race Theory and The Life Course Perspective to reveal recent approaches to exploring this topic that were relevant to this study. Each body of

literature was discussed in terms of the way that it has informed and contributed to the conceptual framework for this study.

### **What we think we know about Black boys**

As a society, the American public thinks it knows all it needs to know about Black boys, particularly adolescents. There is no shortage of “information” on their experiences in school and society. Data on academic outcomes shows that Black boys do not do well in school. Throughout primary and secondary school, the test scores for Black males reveal that they lag behind their peers in reading and math (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Many researchers have started to make the connection between these lagging scores and the amount of time Black boys spend out of the classroom, away from academic instruction. They are more likely than their peers to be held back a grade during the course of their education and or suspended and expelled (Aud et. al, 2010; 2011) In high school, they are less likely to take the kinds of courses that would prepare them for post-secondary education (College Board, 2012) and if they do take college entrance exams, they are more likely, than whites, Asians and Latinos, to score lower on them (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a). Following this data, it makes sense that only about half of Black males graduate from high school (Jackson and Beaudry, 2012; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010).

It is clear that they also struggle in society. Recent events, like the extra-judicial killings of several unarmed Black adolescents point to the troubling track record of Black male adolescents in their encounters with law enforcement. By age 18, 30% of all Black males have been arrested and by age 23, half of all Black males have been arrested (Brame, Bushway, Paternoster, & Turner, 2014) Many black boys first encounter or are

groomed for their encounters with law enforcement in school. The connection between school discipline and the prison system is well established (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2014). Boys make contact with the juvenile justice system when school offenses are reported to law enforcement. Harsh disciplinary punishments for misbehavior are given as early as preschool, with black children making up nearly half (48%) of suspensions even though they are only 18% of the preschool population (US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014). In adolescence, the presence of police officers in schools means that Black students are not simply suspended, they are referred to the police and arrested at rates that do not reflect their low numbers in the public school population (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2014). Beyond arrest, Black youth are overrepresented in the population of those who are detained and eventually incarcerated; They are 40% of the incarcerated youth population even though they are only 14% of the youth population (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2014). While many discussions on Black boys fixate on these outcomes and what they seem to reveal, there is another way to read this data and to think about Black boys.

### **What we fail to consider when thinking about Black boys**

More and more, the discourse around these realities is being framed in terms of the specific challenges that Black adolescents face and the failure of schools to acknowledge and support them as they navigate the risks associated with these challenges (Anderson, 2008; Noguera, 2008; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). These discussions in the literature all illuminate the condition and consequence of being a “problem”—a concept that is rarely considered in public discussions on Black males.

Dubois first articulated this concept in the *Souls of Black Folk* (1903/2005). He begins his examination of the experience of being Black with an experience from his childhood, the moment when he realized that his very being was a problem. Experiencing exclusion in his classroom, he suddenly recognized that he was different and understood that this difference would preclude him from the rewards awaiting his classmates. His skin color marked him as an outcast, as one “shut out from their world by a vast veil (p.10)”.

Dubois explains how he channels the contempt that he begins to feel for the racist system that cast him as perpetual “seventh son”. He decides that he will become a scholar so that he can gain access to the prizes that have traditionally been reserved for his peers. While he is more successful than most, he recognizes the long-term effects of this condition on the souls of Black boys when he writes:

With other black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrunk into tasteless sycophancy, or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white; or wasted itself in a bitter cry, ‘Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?’. The shades of the prison-house closed round about us all: walls strait and stubborn to the whitest, but relentlessly narrow, tall, and unscalable to sons of night who must plod darkly on in resignation, or beat unavailing palms against the stone, or steadily, half hopelessly, watch the streak of blue above (p.10).

Though written over a century ago, Dubois’ text reflects an understanding of race in terms of the way that it shapes the experiences of Black boys and its damaging effects on them. Literature from the field of psychology continues this thread by recontextualizing

the well-worn data on Black adolescent males who must contend with a changing mind and body while also grappling with the shifting meaning of their Blackness.

Adolescence has long been established as an important period in identity development (Erickson, 1968; Hall, 1904). During adolescence, youth stand between childhood and adulthood armed with newly acquired physical and mental capabilities. Cognitive gains made during this period allow youth to think about themselves in relation to larger society (Neblett et. al, 2008). As the adolescent becomes more independent he begins to see himself in terms of the roles that he may be able to play as an adult. Marcia (1980) describes this period in terms of crisis and commitment. According to Marcia the adolescent is in crisis when he has not yet committed to a particular identity. Impacting the identities that adolescents are able to choose, and the eventual commitments that they make, is the feedback that they receive from their environment and the way that they interact with this feedback (Sameroff & Gutman, 2004). While many adolescents encounter some form of opposition as they commit to an identity, Black adolescents experience the added and unique stressor that is racism as they begin formalizing their racial identity (Phinney, 1980).

Stevenson, Davis, and Abdul-Kabir (2001) assert, “one of the most challenging realities of being Black and near puberty is that not only do Black preteens feel like their bodies and the world change right before their eyes, but the world does change. It responds differently to Black youth than to other youth in America (p.116)”. The majority of African American youth have experienced discrimination (Neblett et. al, 2012). In a study of 153 adolescents, Landrine and Klonoff (1996) found that 150 of the participants or 98% of Black youth talked about experiencing discrimination. Racial

discrimination experiences begin for many Black youth by the time they are 10 years old (Martin et. al 2011). Sixty six percent of Black children between the ages of 10 and 12 years old have experienced a racial insult, 40% had a slur yelled at them and approximately 33% reported experiencing discrimination in places like stores by the age of 13. Black adolescents are more likely than adolescents in other groups to experience racial discrimination (Fisher, Wallace & Fenton, 2000; Romero & Roberts, 1998). Scholarship on adolescence and racial socialization suggests that Black adolescent males experience unusually high levels of racial discrimination compared to their peers (Berkel, 2008; Romero and Roberts, 1998). This may be due to the fact that they are actually seen as less childlike compared to other children their age.

Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta and DiTomasso (2014) found that Black male adolescents were not afforded the protections and courtesies often given to children. According to these scholars, by the time Black boys are nine-years-old, they are seen as being incapable of innocence. In the context of their study, which looked at Black children and their interaction with the Department of Justice, Goff et. al found that Black adolescent males were seen as older, less innocent and inherently guilty. For example, a Black male youth aged 13.5 years was generally seen as being 4.53 years older than his actual age, putting him at 18.03 years of age. Police officers interacted with Black male youth as if they were adults and believed that they were deserving of adult treatment. Simply put, Black males were not granted the considerations extended to children. The study goes beyond discussing the adultification of Black children and Black males specifically to point out that “Black children enjoy fewer of the basic human protections afforded to their peers” (p.528). Being mistaken for an older adolescent is certainly

problematic in light of aforementioned statistics about t involvement with the criminal justice system. However, the authors' main point is that Black children are not even considered human. While these findings are shocking and appalling, it is the fact that Black adolescents, and Black adolescent males in particular, must learn to cope with this reality that is even more troubling.

Several scholars of adolescent development and racial socialization have recognized racism as an ecological risk to healthy adolescent development (Copeland, Linder et al, 2011; Cunningham, Swanson, Spencer & Dupree, 2003; Davis and Stevenson, 2006; Frabutt et. al, 2002; Masko, 2005; Seaton, Sellers & Yip, 2009; Spencer, Dupree, & Hartman, 1997). In a survey of 300 African American males, Burt, Simmons, and Gibbons (2012) found that males felt that experiencing racism was a harmful experience. Hall, Cassidy and Stevenson's (2008) study of 132 African American males reveals that racism was a challenge to their health. Racism is related to low-self esteem (Fisher et. al., 2000) affects motivation and beliefs about self-competence (Wong et. al., 2003) and is related to anxiety disorders and somatization (Williams & Chung, 1996). Several scholars have noted the link between experiencing racial discrimination and displaying depressive symptoms (Davis & Stevenson, 2006; Neblett et. al, 2008; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin and Lewis-Mckoy, 2006). So well established is the link between experiencing racial discrimination and poor mental health that Brown et., al, (2000) calls for the inclusion of racism on measures of mental health because current mental health inventories do not take into consideration the unique stressors facing African Americans.

In a 2003 article Brown (2003) explores this further when he uses Critical Race Theory to conceptualize and name the mental health disorders that can arise as a result of living with racism. These include a tendency towards fatalism which he terms “nihilistic tendencies”, “anti-self” issues or internalized racism and self hatred, “suppressed anger expression” or the chronic resignation to indignities suffered as a result of racism, and “delusional denial tendencies” or a sense of misplaced optimism (p.295-297). Brown, along with Darity (2003) and Nyborg and Curry (2003), urges mental health experts to think more critically about community norms and experiences when diagnosing disorders. Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin and Lewis-McKoy (2006) point to the cognitive strength and energy required of adolescents encountering discrimination as they are simply trying to understand what is happening to them. Other scholars have documented more externalizing behaviors, among adolescents, related to experiencing racism. These behaviors include cursing (Scott, Jr, 2003) delinquency (Martin et. al., 2011) anger (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000; Thomas et. al., 2009) and violence (Copeland, Linder et. al, 2000). Thomas et. al, (2009) observed role-flexing among males, a technique in which a young man either manages his body within a space or changes the way that he speaks so that he can appear non-threatening.

In a 2005 study of Black male college students and their experiences with racism, Smith, Allen & Danley found that students reported feeling racial battle fatigue as a result of stereotyping and constant surveillance on campus. The concept of racial battle fatigue (Smith 2004; Smith, Hung & Franklin, 2011), accurately describes the potential and observed effects, both psychological and physiological, of prolonged and consistent exposure to racism related events. Borrowing from the literature on soldiers suffering



from combat stress fatigue (U.S. Department of the Army, 1994), racial battle fatigue helps us to understand what Pierce (1975a) explains is the mundane, extreme, environmental stress of racism. This framework corroborates existing research in psychology and the sociology of mental health on the mental, emotional, and physical consequences of racism for African Americans and captures all of the internalizing and externalizing behaviors associated with the ecological risk that is racism. Cassidy and Stevenson's work (2005) also helps to frame these findings by placing them within the context of African American vulnerability, forcing a look at the fact that Black youth are particularly susceptible to experiencing racial discrimination. While all African American youth and adults are vulnerable to racism and its effects, the onset of encounters with racism are particularly acute for adolescent African American males (Berkel, 2008; Stevenson, Davis, & Abdul-Kabir, 2001). Psychologists have discovered that parents and families have long adapted to this reality, engaging in a number of practices with the aim of providing their children with the tools they deem necessary for living in a racist society. These tools have been found to be effective in buffering the potential consequences of living with racism (Burt, Simmons, Gibbons, 2012; Stevenson & Arrington, 2009).

### **Learning to cope with racism**

Over the last three decades, scholars have come to understand racial socialization as an indigenous competency and form of support among ethnic minorities, particularly African Americans (Brown, 2008; Constantine & Blackmon, 2002). It is a means of transmitting information "concerning the nature of race status as it relates to (a) personal and group identity, (b) intergroup and inter individual relationships, and (c) position in

the social hierarchy” (Thornton et al., as cited in Caughy et. al., 2006, p. 1220). Thornton (1998) sees racial socialization in the context of African American child-rearing as a “distinctive childbearing activity” that black parents engage in to simultaneously prepare their children for life in America and life as a minority in America (p.56). Thornton explains that African American parents are raising a Black or African American child and their experience will be distinct from that of other Americans (p.56). This understanding of the unique demands of African American life and the onset of encountering these demands during early adolescence has been echoed by a number of scholars. Stevenson, Davis & Abdul-Kabir (2001), speaking in favor of racial socialization practices, assert “African American children need a deep historical and contemporary understanding of their cultural distinctiveness” (p.170). Many scholars have since written about the importance of teaching African American youth to cope, through racial socialization, with racism to ensure healthy development (Garcia Coll et. al, 1996; Spencer, Dupree, & Hartman, 1997; Ward, 1999; Ward, 2000).

Racial socialization practices are protective strategies that protect Black teenagers, who are particularly vulnerable in a hostile racial context (Davis & Stevenson, 2006). In fact, racial socialization has been found to be an effective buffer against many of the internalizing and externalizing behaviors described in the preceding section (Burt, Simmons, Gibbons, 2012; Evans et al., 2012; Stevenson & Arrington, 2009; Thomas, Coard, Stevenson, Bentley, Samuel, 2009). Racial socialization has been found to improve overall mental health (Burt, Simmons, Gibbons, 2012, Marshal, 1995; Neblett et al., 2008; Stevenson, 1995; Stevenson, Reed, Bodison, & Bishop, 1997). Scholars have also found racial socialization to have a positive effect on academic achievement.

Bowman and Howard (1995) observed a positive relationship between racial barrier awareness and academic achievement. In fact, students receiving mainstream messages instead of messages stressing their unique experience as African Americans have been found to suffer academically (Constantine and Blackmon, 2002). Davis and Stevenson (2006) extend this finding by demonstrating the relationship between depression and mainstream socialization methods. They explain, “that youth who primarily receive mainstream fit socialization will be at a loss to emotionally manage the inherent contradiction of the American dream” (p.312). In a recent, longitudinal study of 630 African American adolescents, Wang and Huguley (2012) found an aspect of racial socialization, cultural socialization, mediated the negative effect of teacher discrimination on students’ performance. As evidenced by the literature, the experiences of African American youth are positively enhanced when they are taught to be aware of racism and given coping strategies for dealing with it. Thus far, the empirical studies on the racial socialization practices of African American families have revealed the demographic characteristics of families engaged in racial socialization practices as well as the types of messages conveyed to children. Previous findings along these lines of inquiry inform my research design.

### **Demographic correlates**

Racial socialization messages and the content of messages communicated to children are affected by a number of variables including, parent gender, parents’ racial identity development, socioeconomic class, child age and child gender. Regarding the gender of parents, findings are mixed. Thornton (1997) and Thornton et. al (1990) found that mothers were more likely to engage in racial socialization practices than fathers

(Brown, Linver, Evans, 2009). However, McHale et al., (2006) found that fathers were more likely to engage in racial socialization practices with their sons. It should be noted that across the racial socialization literature, fathers are largely absent. What seems to be certain though is the relationship between parents' previous experiences of racial discrimination and the likelihood that they will talk with their own children about racism (Berket, 2008; Peters, 1985). Berkel (2008) finds that parents who have experienced racial discrimination are more likely to use racial socialization to help their children cope with racial discrimination and antagonism.

The majority of African-American parents participate in some form of race related discussion (Sanders & Thompson, 1994). Hughes (2003) for example, finds that they report engaging in more preparation for bias than other groups. This information is in line with the evidence that a majority of adolescents report having discussions about racism and prejudice with their parents (Biafora et. al., 1993) and the finding that a majority of African American parents with younger children also report teaching them about bias and cultural pride (Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, Jr., and Brotman, 2004).

Additionally, parents' responses to the need for racial socialization have been connected to their racial identity development. Using Cross' (1971) model of Black identity development, Thomas and Speight (1999) found racial socialization to be positively correlated with parents' being in the encounter and internalization phases of their racial identity development<sup>17</sup>. With regard to social class, an earlier study found that

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<sup>17</sup> Cross' (1971) model of Black identity formation posits that Black people go through five stages in their identity development: Pre-encounter, encounter, immersion, emersion, and internalization. The encounter stage begins when an individual experiences an event that suddenly makes her aware of race. During the third and fourth stages, the immersion and the emersion phase, this individual immerses herself in what they perceive Black culture to be, distancing themselves from and becoming critical of other cultures. In the final stage, the individual is confident in her Black identity. She is able to maintain a Black identity

married parents in higher socio-economic brackets reported more involvement in racial socialization practices than their peers of lower socioeconomic status (Hughes & Chen, 1997). However, parents of low socioeconomic status also practice racial socialization. In fact, these parents see “these teachings as unique, routine, and critical aspects of Black child rearing” (Coard et. al., 2004, p.288).

When it comes to age, it is clear that racial socialization may begin at any age. Parents of first grade boys report teaching their children coping skills for recognizing and managing discrimination (Caughy, Nettles, & Lima, 2001). In fact, a majority of parents of five and six year old children report speaking with their children about racism and teaching racial pride to children to counter the negative representations of their race that they may encounter (Coard, Wallace, Stevenson Jr.& Brotman, 2004). However a significant number of studies in the literature have documented increased preparation for discrimination as a child matures (Hughes & Chen, 1997; McHale et. al, 2006) with a significant portion of the literature covering the salience of racial socialization for African American adolescents (McHale et.al, 2006; Romero & Roberts, 1998; Stevenson, Davis, & Abdul-Kabir, 2001). Scholars have revealed the heightened importance of these practices around adolescence to be related to the increased likelihood of encountering discrimination as the world begins to see and treat adolescents differently (Fisher, Wallace & Fenton, 2000; Romero & Roberts, 1990; Stevenson, Davis & Abdul-Kabir, 2001;Stevenson et. al., 2002; Thomas & Speight, 1999).

When it comes to gender, parents respond in myriad ways. Some parents are gender neutral and others are very much aware of Black misandry and work to give

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independent of the ethnic/racial identity of others. This process is not linear; an individual may find herself revisiting certain stages throughout her life. For example it is possible for someone in the internalization phase to have an experience that puts him or her back in the encounter phase.

targeted and different messages to their boys and girls (Brown, Linver, Evans, 2009). There is evidence that suggests boys are more likely to receive messages about discrimination than girls (Brown, Linver, Evans, 2009; Caughy, Nettles, & Lima, 2001; Hughes et. al., 2006; Stevenson, 2002; Thomas and Speight, 1999). This is not entirely surprising given what we know about the exclusion of Black boys from childhood (Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta and DiTomasso, 2014). These findings inform the criteria for participant selection in this study. I will be interviewing mothers, fathers and/or parental guardians, of adolescent boys, in both higher and lower socioeconomic brackets.

### **Messages**

A second line of inquiry focuses on the type and content of messages conveyed to children. Boykin & Toms (1985) introduced the “triple quandary framework”, which suggested that African American parents considered the meaning of racial socialization for their children in three separate contexts: first, a mainstream realm in which dominant white American values were the norm; second a minority realm in which children needed to learn to navigate racial hierarchy given their minority status; and third, a black realm where children would learn about black identity within the context of African American culture and customs. Thornton (1998) discovered a fourth theme in parents’ practices. He found that among a group of parents, there were some who eschewed engaging in racial socialization altogether. Some parents chose to ignore race and focus instead on pushing their children to think only in terms of mainstream values. Recent work in the field of psychology has built upon early understandings of racial socialization and coalesced around four consistent themes: cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism (Hughes et. al, 2006, p.748; Neblett et. al., 2009).

Preparation for bias or discrimination is most prevalent among African American parents (Caughy et. al., 2002; Coard et. al., 2004, Hughes, 2003; Hughes et al., 2008). However, parents are reticent when asked to describe the ways in which they prepare their children for racial discrimination. It has been difficult to pinpoint the cause of this reticence. Hughes et. al, (2006) suggests two causes: the difficulty of discussing the practice within the context of an interview, and/or the possibility that parents are not immediately able to access memories of instances when they've prepared their sons for bias. As a result, there is little evidence of the types of messages that parents are conveying about discrimination. This finding, or lack thereof, provides a rationale for the use of alternative methods as a supplement to interviews when exploring the practices of families, who may engage in preparation for bias. I will discuss the method of photo elicitation, which compliments the interview method, in the chapter on methods.

There are also a number of recent studies that have extended the way that we think about the four themes in racial socialization (cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism) . Traditionally, scholars have looked at each theme separately. Caughy et. al (2001) moves away from the idea of four discrete messages and thinks about parents and their racial socialization practices in terms of groups or profiles. In their study they find that parents fall into four groups around racial socialization: Some are silent about race, some emphasize cultural socialization and nothing else, some focus on both cultural socialization and coping strategies and some exhibited a balanced approach which included all of the above responses. An interesting note is that in this study parents from the balanced group tended to be parents of boys. Neblett et al., (2008) adds to this idea of diversity in racial socialization practices. Like

Caughy et. al (2001) they find that parents fall into four groups: Moderate Positive, High Positive, Low Frequency and Moderate Negative. Parents in the Moderate Positive group are more likely to communicate messages of racial pride and self worth messages than racial barrier, egalitarian and preparation for bias messages. Parents falling in the High Positive profile conveyed all messages except for negative messages about race and parents in the Low Frequency profile very rarely communicated any messages aside from self-worth messages. These profiles add a layer of complexity to our understanding of this practice. Some parents are inclined to give certain messages over others.

### **The relationship between racial socialization messages and time**

In addition to moving beyond the concept of racial socialization as a set of discrete and mutually exclusive practices, in the last decade, the temporal nature of racial socialization messages has also been studied. Hill (1999), Brown and Lesane-Brown (2006) and Ritterhouse (2006) show that, though recently named “the talk”, these kinds of conversations are not a recent phenomenon. Furthermore, they are not simply the domain of the African American. They are particularly American. Consistently, across different periods in American history, these talks seem to reflect the country’s racial norms, or expectations for African Americans. To better understand this, I extend the metaphor from Holliday’s protest song about the strange fruit that were hanged from southern trees (Appendix C). I imagine all of America as a single tree and African Americans as perpetual strange fruit. In this thought exercise “the talk” is analogous to that tree’s growth rings. It is a record of the country’s racial climate and customs over time.



This understanding of the “the talk” is substantiated by the latest research on racial socialization. There is evidence, dating back to American slavery and threading through the second emancipation, suggesting the long history of “the talk”. Ritterhouse (2006) notes that during slavery, parents stressed obedience and submission in their talks with their children. Continuing with the metaphor of the tree, these conversations would be found within the first growth ring. She also found that parents in the era of Jim Crow, the tree’s second growth ring, used messages similar to those conveyed during slavery. They also taught respectability to children so that they would be armed to deal with the debilitating obsequiousness required by the period. The notion of respectability would serve as a reminder to children that they were not what whites insisted they were. Speaking about the period in African American history up until the civil rights movement, Hill (1999) notes the distinction between messages conveyed to children from the past and those messages communicated at the time of her research. She asserts that, “in the past...messages included teaching the customs of racial dissimulation required of blacks for survival in a racial caste system, but today racial socialization more commonly refers to teaching pride and self-acceptance” (p.102). The findings from these studies reveal a direct relationship between parents’ messages about navigating racism and the racial etiquette required by particular periods in American history (Ritterhouse, 2006).

Brown & Lesane-Brown’s (2006) analysis of racial socialization messages over time brings us closer to the current period. They find that in the post protest era<sup>18</sup>, or the American tree’s third growth ring, messages that children received differed significantly from those transmitted during the pre-*Brown v. Board* era, or the second growth ring,

with more people remembering messages of group and individual pride. In both studies, messages are a result of the confluence of parents' own experiences of race and racism and their understanding of the then current racial climate. These scholars analyze how these conversations have evolved to simultaneously reflect the changing nature of racism in America and what President Barack Obama identified, in his speech after the Trayvon Martin verdict, as a history of racism that remains very present for African Americans. Very few scholars have followed this line of research, which, in the case of Brown and Lesane-Brown (2006), uses life course perspective to situate parents' talk about racism in social and historical context. This study builds on previous studies in this vein by exploring the messages conveyed by African American parents to their children in the context of a "colorblind" era. Following this line of reasoning, in order to begin understanding the kind of messages parents might be transmitting in the present period, we must identify the features of the current racial climate. In the following section, I will demonstrate how Critical Race Theory and the Life Course Perspective can be used toward that end.

### **Life Course Perspective**

Central to the life course perspective is the notion that human lives interact with historical time and place and bear the imprint of this interaction. The notion of the birth cohort, or the time in which an individual is born, is particularly important to this paradigm. This concept assumes shared experience of social phenomena by membership to groups based on birth year (Brown, 2006). Furthermore, birth year is a marker of exposure to certain social, historical, and cultural phenomena. Sharing the example of the difference between children born during the Great Depression and those born before or

after that historical period, Giele & Elder (1998) explained that people's experiences are shaped in part by the unique features of the historical time in which they reside. While children born after The Great Depression may have also suffered poverty, their experience is different simply because they did not suffer this poverty during the distinct period known as The Great Depression. Similarly, in their study on racial socialization messages, Brown and Lesane-Brown (2006) made clear that the messages children received about race differed according to the period in which they were born: *pre-Brown v. Board of Education, protest, and post-protest*.

The authors' findings about the messages that participants remember hearing are largely supportive of the notion that messages received about what it means to be Black are related to and reflective of the racial climate of an historical epoch. For example, more messages communicating the importance of deferring to and fearing white people were recalled by those belonging to the pre-Brown v. Board era when compared to the other cohorts. As the authors point out, the period surrounding the members of this cohort was marked by blatant racism, segregation, and legalized terrorism against Black people. On the other hand, respondents born during the post-protest era more frequently recalled receiving messages reflecting the importance of individual pride. Messages about individual pride stressed the imperative to achieve in spite of racism. Also, members of this cohort were more likely to recall messages emphasizing group pride and unity or the importance of having pride in and supporting members of the Black racial group. The authors speculate that these messages reflect the experiences of a generation that experienced both simultaneous gains in opportunity and the creation of a black underclass.

The youngest birth cohort in Brown and Lesane-Brown's (2006) sample, who were born between 1956 and 1963 were between 17 and 24 at the time of the study and reached their adolescence at the beginning of the post-protest era. In conducting this study, I am extending the work of these authors by exploring the experiences of younger members of the post protest cohort, who were born after 1965 and were adolescents during the 80's and 90's. Individuals born after 1965 belong to the hip-hop generation (Chang, 2007; Kitwana, 2001). While their parents' racial identities and adolescent experiences of race relations were marked by the economic and political opportunity ushered in by passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Act of 1965, members of the hip hop generation are more likely to have been adolescents in a period characterized by increasing racial tension and violence and the systematic push back against and deconstruction of civil rights legislation (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Kitwana, 2001). The severe unemployment and deindustrialization of this period, which is described by Wilson (1987), and its accompanying sounds of abandonment and disillusion, which were put to music and called hip-hop, give this generation its name. Given the particular social and political features of the period in which they were raised, it is possible that parents of the hip-hop generation received different messages about race and racism than the generation before them. Understanding the kinds of messages parents received during their adolescence about racial discrimination will give us insight into the kinds of messages that they are sharing with their children today.

The concept of the birth cohort has influenced both the research design and data collection strategies for this study. Using preliminary data collected from parents about their birth year and defining events that during their lifetime, I was able to gather photos

for photo elicitation interviews that supplemented the standard interview protocol. The photo elicitation interview allowed for participants to reflect on events that stood out to them through out their lives. It also allowed for them to think holistically about racial socialization messages that they received. Many began to see the connection between what was going on socially, culturally and politically and both the messages they received as adolescents and the messages they were now communicating to their adolescent sons. Additionally, Life Course Perspective theorists have also given attention to the timing within an individual's life or the life-stage that they occupied when they experienced a particular change.

This notion of the timing of lives is illustrated by Elder's (1974) study of children during The Great Depression. Elder found that while children born at the beginning and end of this historical era were all technically born during this same historical period, their experiences and understanding of that period were qualitatively different because of life stage. Elder found that those who were youngest during this period and dependent on their severely stressed families were at greater risk for developmental difficulties than their adolescent counterparts. The take away here is that age or life stage interacts with and affects the way that an individual experiences change. Life course perspective theorists have made clear the importance of adolescence as a life stage (Elder, 1974, 1994; Stewart and Healy, 1989). In choosing their sample Brown and Lesane-Brown (2006) made a careful choice to think about birth cohort and the timing of lives, so that participants' all turned 16 during the historical periods that they had demarcated for this study. This focus on the sixteenth year reflects the understanding of the significance of the adolescent life stage in racial identity formation (Cross, 1991) as well as the

internalization of political and social change (Shuman and Scott, 1989, p.377). This attention to adolescence is reflected in my interview protocol, which asks participants to describe their teenage years. Specifically, I asked participants to walk me through what it was like being an adolescent, their interests and passions during this period and any other events or experiences that stand out to them during this period. The assumption behind the interplay between cohort, period, and age, is that individuals within a birth cohort or historical period will have similar experiences of social phenomena. However, two other concepts in Life Course Perspective theory, linked lives and human agency, explain challenges and exceptions to this model of human experience.

The concept of linked lives reveals the way that the imprint of social change on an individual can also be understood through an examination of their relationships and networks. In a study on the effects of World War II on men in Japan, Elder & Meguro (1987) found the war did not only affect the cohort old enough to enlist in service. The war also affected the male family members born after this cohort. These younger men knew of the war through the enrollment of their male elders and the impact of that the war on their family dynamics. These younger men's lives were directly impacted by the war through their relationship to those who had served in the war and the way that the previous generations' life choices affected their life trajectory. Since the older men in their family were off at war, these young men were required to leave school early so that they could begin to work and contribute to their families, which sped up the time at which they entered into relationships and started families. Similarly, the concept of human agency offers an alternate explanation for the way that individual lives reflect the impact of social change. The notion of human or individual agency allows for the

individual dispositions, motives, and goals of individuals and loosens the assumed coupling, to borrow a concept from Elder & O’Rand (1995), between a historical period and an individual’s life. Thus, “the life course is shaped by the interaction of cultural and social structural features with physical and psychological attitudes of the individual and by the commitments and purposive efforts of the individual” (Clausen, 1991, p.805).

In Brown and Lesane-Brown’s (2006) exploration of the relationship between the content of messages about race and historical period, cases where messages did not reflect social change are partially explained by parent’s individual attitudes. The authors suggest that regardless of the period of social change, there may have been some parents whose attitudes towards whites remained constant, allowing for the seeming lack of fit between an historic period and the messaging that a child received. The use of these aspects of the Life Course Perspective paradigm to explore the phenomena of racial socialization has provided us with information about the relationship between historical and social conditions and the various strategies that parents use to teach children about race and discrimination (Parker, 2004). However, absent from studies of racial socialization that employ the Life Course Perspective is an understanding of racism as a permanent socio-political condition that marks the lives of African Americans across life stages. For this reason, I have chosen to use the Life Course Perspective framework in tandem with Critical Race Theory.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Central to critical race theory (CRT) is the idea that racism is an ordinary, normal, and permanent feature of American life (Bell, 1987; 1993; 1995; Berry & Stovall, 2013). The ordinariness and normalization of racism, or the taken-for-granted belief in American

society, “in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby a right to dominance, manifest and implied”, is apparent in the innumerable instances, both past and present, surrounding the murders of young Black males at the hands of law enforcement and the legal outcomes of those extra-judicial killings (Lorde, 1984, p.124). Looking at a recent example, Berry & Stovall (2013) point to the circumstances surrounding Trayvon Martin’s death as an illustration of the way the right to dominance over Black boys manifests itself. George Zimmerman felt empowered enough by the law to stand his ground and assert his right to be and to live even if it meant death for Martin. His decision and countless decisions like his made available to police officers and citizens alike to shoot because they ‘fear for their life’ are an illustration of racism and the right to dominance plainly displayed. However the “right to dominance” is not only apparent in such overt instances of disregard for Black life, the law also supports it. Florida’s Stand Your Ground Law, the very law that resulted in Zimmerman’s acquittal, is one example.

The state’s law regarding self-defense allows for the use of deadly force if one is “in a place where he or she has a right to be” (Florida Statute 776.012). Research on the legal outcomes of cases invoking Stand Your Ground defenses suggests that the “right to be” is not conferred equally on all American citizens. Whites who killed Blacks were 354 % more likely to be found justified in their decision to use deadly force; cases where Blacks killed whites under the Stand Your Ground Law were only 56% likely to be ruled justified (Roman & Downey, 2012). While these numbers may seem shocking at first glance, the Stand Your Ground Law has only amplified extant disparities in the treatment of inter-racial homicide by the law (Congressional Research Service, 2013). Furthermore,



these kinds of laws and laws more generally are in large part why racism is such a normal part of American life.

Critical race theorist and legal scholar Derrick Bell explains, “abstract principles lead to legal results that harm Blacks and perpetuate their inferior status. Racism provides a basis for a judge to select one available premise rather than another when incompatible claims arise” (Bell, 1992, p.369). In short, the judicial system has legislated the inferiority of Black life. Indeed, the premise that Trayvon could have stood his ground, or that he had the “right to be” was never considered. This is because he is Black in a racial hierarchy that cements into the American imagination the notion that it is perfectly normal to act upon the assumption that Black boys are inherently criminal and therefore unworthy of protection. In addition to being an ordinary feature of American life, further examination of the law reveals that racism is a durable and permanent fixture as well.

Derrick Bell asserts, “Black people will never gain full equality in this country...this is a hard to accept fact that all of history verifies...” (Bell, 1991, p.12). Bell’s analysis of racism stands in contrast to the commonly held liberal belief, crystalized in Gunnar Myrdal’s (1944) famous report, that racism and its persistence is an anomaly, a blemish on the American body that can be removed. Racism is not a temporary flaw or defect on a perfect form; it is a congenital and incurable disease that is, ironically, essential to America’s longevity. The foundations of American society— notions of democracy and individual freedom—have only been able to exist because of racism and racial discrimination. Whiteness and freedom, two concepts that are dependent upon and intertwined with each other, exist only as contrasts to Blackness and

bondage. This relationship, started during slavery, has been strengthened over time through ideology and the law<sup>19</sup>.

A close look at racial history and policy, and the historical context of racism, supports the CRT notion that racism is permanent. As historian Edmund Morgan (1975) reveals, attempts to legislate white supremacy in the Virginia colony were gradually achieved through the creation of ordinances that prescribed more brutal punishment for enslaved Blacks compared to white servants, allowed white servants to abuse Black slaves without reproach, and or penalized whites for interacting with Blacks. Laws like that passed in 1691, banishing from the colony any white person who married a Black person, slowly inhibited and eventually criminalized camaraderie and relationships with Blacks and encouraged white contempt for Blacks. (p.335). Effectively, these early proscriptions established whiteness as a property to be protected by engineering social distance between those who were enslaved and those who were free. This tactic, the criminalizing of Black life and humanity, and the unstated imperative to limit and control Black freedom for the maintenance of white dominance, would be repeated throughout American history, strengthening the myth of Black inferiority and inhumanity, widening the social distance between white and Black Americans, and ensuring the continuation of a belief in White supremacy (Blackmon, 2008; Muhammad, 2011).

An example of the historical lineage of racist practices is seen in the evolution of New York's controversial Stop and Frisk Program. Police have disproportionately targeted black communities, since the inception of this program. African Americans consistently represent over half of those stopped, searched, and arrested by police. The

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<sup>19</sup> See Morgan's (1975). *American slavery, American freedom*. See also Genovese's (1972). *Roll Jordan roll: The world the slaves made*.

law allows for any police officer to search a citizen without a warrant provided that “he reasonably suspects that such person is committing, has committed or is about to commit either (a) a felony or (b) a misdemeanor defined in the penal law” (N.Y. CPL. LAW § 140.50). The officer, “may demand of him his name, address and an explanation of his conduct... or arrest such person.” (N.Y. CPL. LAW § 140.50). While many are alarmed by the intrusive and blatantly discriminatory nature of the law, it has existed, through out American history in some form, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, In 1866 Georgia enacted a vagrancy law, which made it possible for any person to arrest anyone “wandering or strolling about in idleness...all persons leading an idle, immoral or profligate life...” (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 102). Despite the colorblind language of this law, making it difficult to prove racial intent, it disproportionately targeted newly freed African Americans in the South in the same way that Stop and Frisk works in the present day (Browne-Marshall, 2013). The new found freedom of these former enslaved people existed as a contradiction to white control and domination and required intervention that would maintain the status quo. “Law enforcement officers would seek out blacks walking alone and arrest them on fabricated charges” (p.102). This law encouraged an assumption of Black criminality and legitimized that assumption through legal outcomes; African Americans were disproportionately arrested and convicted under this statute and many others like it leading to a system of incarceration that re-enslaved many African-Americans (Blackmon, 2008).

One century later, in the 1968 case *Terry v. Ohio*, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that police officers could stop and frisk individuals deemed suspicious without probable cause. The defendant, Terry, was an African American man

who was stopped and searched by a police officer despite the provisions of the Fourth Amendment. Justification provided for the ruling was “the rapidly unfolding and often dangerous situations on city streets” (392 U.S. 1, 11). Hidden from the neutral opinion delivered by Chief Justice Warren at the time was the palpable tension felt all over the nation in the wake of Dr. King’s death and the ensuing riots (Levy, 2011). The Terry decision occurred two months after the April riots. In their response to the assassination of King, African Americans directly challenged the racial status quo. Their demand to be heard and their display of power encroached on white freedom. The connection between this stop and frisk law and its antecedent is a change in the socio-political condition of African Americans.

In the first instance, in 1866, African Americans were newly freed from slavery. In the second instance, Terry’s case occurred in the midst of African Americans aggressively protesting the assassination of the Dr. King. These protests lead to riots in 125 cities across the nation that both literally and figuratively threatened to destroy the infrastructure of white supremacy (Levy, 2011). Changes in the condition of African Americans that disrupt the façade of white dominance are accompanied by simultaneous countermeasures to restore the racial status quo. This fact of the lasting and unchanging nature of racism in American life is supported by similar examples over the course of history. It is for this reason that Critical Race Theorists believe that racial equality or an end to racism is an impossibility. Racial equality would mean an end to white privilege, which as history demonstrates, can only exist in so far as Black freedoms are restricted.

African Americans are well aware of the permanence of racism. Unfortunately, as Berry & Stovall (2013) point out, they have become inured to its presence in their lives.

Indeed, an exploration of the talk parents have been having with their children about how to cope with racism supports this assertion. While the nature of the conversation changes to reveal the particular nuance of a racial period, the talk has been happening since slavery (Ritterhouse, 2006). The longevity of this talk, or the practice of speaking with one's child about racism demonstrates that Black people have lived and live constantly with an understanding of the ordinariness and permanence of racism. The idea that racism is permanent informed the choices that I make at both the data collection and analysis levels. I asked participants to recall the way that their families spoke to them about race and messages that they remember receiving outside of the home about race. The assumption in my questioning, given that racism is permanent and that research demonstrates that racial socialization is the way that parents deal with raising children in a racist system, was that the participants in my study encountered messages about racial discrimination at some point during their life, most likely adolescence. I analyzed parents' recollections of their own experience of being racially socialized through the frame of the permanence of racism to gain an understanding of the way that that racial socialization messages reflect the fact that racism is a normal part of life for African Americans.

In this study I drew upon the theories of the life course perspective and critical race theory to frame my exploration and analysis of parents' experiences with racial socialization and the shape of the talk that they are giving their sons at present. The Life Course Perspective literature offered theoretical insights and an analytic lens with which the interplay between parents' individual lives and experience with racial socialization and social change, or progress around issues of race and racism, was examined. Critical Race Theory provides a framework for exploring the role of racism in the lives of people

of color. Specifically, CRT allows for the notion of the permanence of racism, or the idea that race is an ordinary and normal feature of American life. Both Life Course Perspective and CRT have been used in research on racial socialization. The life course perspective has been used to highlight the relationship between the historical period in which an individual is born and the types of messages they received about race (Brown and Lesane-Brown, 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2006). Burton et. al., (2010) argue for increased use of critical race theory in research of racial socialization so that the interplay between families' lives and racialized social structures can be better understood. The combined use of both theories provided a framework that allowed for an understanding of racism as a permanent, yet dynamic, feature of American society. In light of the fact that the structure of racialized social systems do change with time, each birth cohort of African Americans is exposed to a distinct type of racism during each historical period. Consequently, I examined the life experience of participants in this study to ascertain the way that their exposure to a particular period in history was expressed over the course of their life. Moreover, I was interested in learning how the interplay between their lives and a particular historical period bore upon the choices that they made when thinking about what they would share with their sons about the nature of racism. Finally, I argued that the nature of the racialized social structure that marks an historical period is evident in the messaging that parents' received about what it means to be Black in an anti-Black world and the messages that they share with their own children.

### **Conceptual Framework: A New Theory**

To date the dominant frameworks used to explore racial socialization have included ecological theory and social cognitive learning theory (Lesane-Brown, 2006).

The use of these theories to explore the phenomena of racial socialization has provided us with information about how the surrounding environment affects racial socialization and the various strategies that parents use to teach children about race and discrimination. More recently, life course perspective theory (LCP) has been used in studies of racial socialization, to bring attention to the impact of social and historical conditions on the messages conveyed (Lesane-Brown, 2006; Parker, 2004).

The value of LCP to a study of racial socialization is that it moves scholars to think critically about the temporal aspect of these practices and the way that socio-political conditions bear upon the form and content of the talk. Absent from LCP is a critical examination of racism as a permanent and dynamic socio-political condition. Adding both the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and LCP to an exploration of racial socialization allows us to look at American history as one that is marked by persistent racism and understand “the talk” as a history of the way African Americans have adapted to racism. Using LCP in tandem with CRT allows me to examine and better understand the phenomena of the talk as a part of a timeline of public and private racial history. Below I present the basic components of a conceptual framework combining LCP and CRT. I call the resultant framework a Critical Race Life Course Perspective.

Table 1

*Origins of Critical Race Life Course Perspective*

Life Course Perspective	Critical Race Theory	Critical Race Life Course Perspective
Interplay of human lives and historical time (the notion that each birth cohort is exposed to particular historical events).	Centrality and permanence of racism in individual lives.	<b>The interplay of human lives and racism. Each birth cohort is exposed to a particular brand of racism under a racialized social structure.</b>
The timing of lives (the motion of the importance of age on an individuals perspective on a particular historical event).	Intersectionality and anti-essentialism	<b>An understanding of race and experiences of racism are understood in relation to other sites or subordination such as class, age, and gender.</b>
Linked lives (the notion that lives are embedded in human relationships).		<b>Racism that is experienced by an individual can effect those in his/her network. Secondary or second hand racism<sup>20</sup></b>
Human agency (an understanding that individuals are able to exert agency in the decisions that they make even when they are bound by the constraints of the period in which they find themselves.	The centrality of experiential knowledge	<b>Experiential knowledge is important to understanding how individuals exercise agency in racialized social structures</b>

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<sup>20</sup> See Gee, Walsemann, Brandolo (2012). A life course perspective on how racism may be related to health inequities.



## **Chapter 3**

### Methodology

“How did you come up with these questions?”

Casey, mother of 12-year-old son

### **Introduction and Overview**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore racial socialization practices among parents of adolescent African American boys. Specifically, this dissertation examined the relationship between racial socialization messages and time, looking at the messages that parents convey to their sons about racism and discrimination as a function of particular historical periods. This chapter presents the research methodology and approach used to examine this phenomenon.

### **Rationale for qualitative research design**

To date, the methods used to study racial socialization have been predominantly quantitative, relying heavily on likert-type survey questions, which only generally attest to the prevalence and frequency of parents' socialization practices (Hughes, 2003; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Johnson, 2001; McKay et. al., 2003; Stevenson, Cameron, Herrero-Taylor & Davis, 2002; Umana-Taylor & Fine, 2004). Hughes and Chen (1997) argue that the self-reporting required by survey methods are somewhat inappropriate for capturing parents' strategies because of the difficulty of fully remembering one's behaviors and practices out of context. These measures do not allow for a more nuanced understanding of the way that preparation for discrimination works, obscure the nature and quality of the messages transmitted, and fail to capture the multiple and complex strategies that parents use to prepare their children to cope with discrimination. Furthermore, scholars have observed an inexplicable reticence among African American

parents when asked to discuss the way that they prepare their children for bias and racial discrimination. With this in mind, I turned to qualitative methods to conduct this study, a mixture of semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation interviews, a visual elicitation method in which photos are incorporated into an interview (Harper, 2001).

### **Participant Selection**

Using purposeful sampling I gathered participants for this study from families involved with Elite Prep<sup>21</sup>, a leadership development program committed to providing scholastically underserved students of color access to top-notch educational opportunities and resources. Over the course of 14 months, Elite Prep prepares a cohort of students, between the ages of 11 and 12, for admission to the nation's most prestigious day and boarding schools. The fifth and sixth grade students in the program take a number of courses at the eight and ninth grade level, during what is called the preparatory component, so that they are prepared to participate in the social life of their new school and assume leadership positions within the student body. After placement in an independent school, Elite Prep continues to support its students by offering extra-curricular activities, counselors who monitor students' academic and social adjustment at their new schools, and a required module on the aspects and ethics of leadership that students must take before completing high school. The long-term goal of the program, which still exists today, is to demonstrate that all students, irrespective of race and class, can excel in both the academic and the professional arena. Though students come from modest

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<sup>21</sup> All names used are pseudonyms.

backgrounds, 91% of the graduates of the program attend the most competitive colleges. Thirty six percent of graduates attend Ivy League colleges.<sup>22</sup>

An alumna of the program, I have served in various roles that have allowed me to develop relationships with students, their families, and other alums. Being a part of the program in different capacities has allowed me to really understand the inner workings of its many components. In high school I became a part of the advisory system, a core group of students selected by the program to mentor and monitor the progress of students currently enrolled in the first phase of the program before entering independent school. Advisors are liaisons between faculty, students, and parents. They meet with teachers about students' progress, check-in with individual students daily during the summer and weekly during the fall and winter, share their concerns with parents, and relay messages from parents to teachers and students. Each advisor is assigned a core group of students. They are responsible for creating a cohort like atmosphere for their advisory and are given a period during the daily schedule to discuss various issues with students. Each day, students eat lunch with their advisory group. In college, I served as the head of the advisory system for a few of years. After this I took on different role and became a member of the faculty, teaching Chemistry. While I do not continue to play an active role in the program, I continue to visit frequently, attend holiday parties and other alumni events, the annual fundraiser, professional workshops, and remain connected to network of over 5000 alumni. Elite Prep is like your childhood friend's house. It is the kind of place that you can continue to visit and everyone is happy to see you no matter how long you have been away. When I discussed my dissertation topic with the current director of

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<sup>22</sup> From the website of Elite Prep

the preparatory component she was happy to help me to draft and send out a letter to parents and begin thinking about families that might be interested in participating in the study (Appendix G).

The program is now in its 37<sup>th</sup> year. About 50% of the students in the program are African American, 34% are Hispanic, 9% are Asian and 7% identify as mixed race (n=225). Fifteen percent of the students belong to families making under \$20,000/year and 15% of students belong to families making over \$60,000/year. The majority of students' families fall within the \$30,000-\$40,000 range (personal communication, Beau Edland, Vice President of External Affairs at Elite Prep). Families in the sample have an adolescent son born between 2002 and 2003, making them part of a cohort. Life course theorists use birth cohort, or the year in which members of the sample were born, as a sampling criterion. Elder (1994) explains, "birth cohort is an indicator of exposure to social change"(p.6). This idea is based on a principle of common experience (Ryder, 1965). Cohorts can also be defined according to a variety of shared experiences. The cohort in this study is defined by the year of their son's birth.

The Executive Director provided me with a list of potential participants for this study. Suggested participants were all parents of African American boys currently enrolled in the program. I was able to make contact with most parents in person. On Saturdays, parents picked their children up from the program at 5:00 p.m. I contacted the rest of the parents by phone. Parents who indicated an interest in being a part of the study were given an information sheet that included a description of the study and some information about my own background (Appendix H). Nine parents from the program participated in this study: Julia, Erica, Michael, John, Sabine, Mary, Casey, Wade, and

Claudine. Over the course of the project, parents began to suggest other parents who might be willing to participate in the study. In total, 17 parents lent their voices to this project. It became clear by the time that I interviewed my 17<sup>th</sup> participant that I had reached a point of data saturation. I was no longer hearing new answers to my questions or varied perspectives on the topic of racial socialization. Parents already participating in the study continued to refer families that they thought would be suitable to the study. I ended up turning families away, a problem that I did not expect to encounter and was delighted to have.

### **Participants**

Participants for this study reflected what we know from the literature about the characteristics of African American families and individuals who engage in racial socialization (Patton, 2001, p.238) (Table 1). As a result, there were more mothers than fathers in the sample (Brown, Linver, Evans, 2009). The sample (n=17) was majority (59%) female. There were 10 female participants and 7 male participants. The majority of the sample reported high incomes and educational attainment (Hughes & Chen, 1997). The mean reported income of participants was \$96,000 with the lowest reported income being \$7,000 and the highest being \$270,000. All participants had some post-secondary education. Two participants (11%) reported having had some college education. The majority (88%) of participants had a college degree or graduate degree. All participants had an adolescent son (Caughy, Nettles, & Lima, 2001; Hughes et. al, 2006), which made them a part of a cohort. Kroger (2006) defines adolescence as the period of development occurring between the ages of 11 and 22 and breaks this period into three phases. The first phase, early adolescence, occurs between the ages of 10 and 14. The second stage

occurs between the ages of 15 and 17. The last stage occurs between the ages of 18 and 22. Eighty two percent of participants' sons were born between 2001 and 2002. Three of the participants' sons were born between 1999 and 2000. All of the participants' sons were in the first phase of early adolescence.

As this study draws upon life course theory, I paid careful attention to when participants were born and when they, themselves, experienced adolescence. The average age of participants was 43.5 years. Eighteen percent of participants reached their adolescence between 1969-1980, during what Brown and Lesane-Brown (2006) call the post-protest era. The majority of participants (76%) belonged to what Kitwana (2001) calls the hip-hop generation as they were born between 1965 and 1984. These members of the sample experienced adolescence between 1980 and 1997.

Table 1

*Descriptive data about Participants*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Son's Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Highest Level of Education</b>	<b>Gross Annual Income</b>
<b>Brandy</b>	42 [b. 1972 ]	12	F	College	\$85,000
<b>Ray</b>	45 [b. 1969 ]	12	M	Some College	\$75,000
<b>Jared</b>	39 [b. 1975 ]	15	M	College	\$150,000
<b>Gilian</b>	37 [b. 1977 ]	13	F	College	\$38,000
<b>Erica</b>	27 [b. 1987]	12	F	Some College	\$7,000
<b>Michael</b>	47 [b. 1967 ]	13	M	College	\$90,000
<b>John</b>	57 [b. 1957 ]	14	M	Law School	\$120,000
<b>Sabine</b>	39 [b. 1975 ]	12	F	Master's	\$60,000
<b>Bobbi</b>	42 [b. 1972 ]	13	F	Master's	\$70,000
<b>Renee</b>	38 [b. 1974 ]	15	F	Master's	\$180,000
<b>Artesia</b>	47 [b. 1967 ]	13	F	PhD	\$90,000
<b>Eric</b>	47 [b. 1967]	13	M	Master's	\$270,000
<b>Claudine</b>	57 [b.1957 ]	12	F	PhD	\$75,000
<b>Casey</b>	42 [ b.1972]	12	F	Master's	\$60,000
<b>Wade</b>	39 [b. 1975 ]	12	M	College	\$20,000
<b>Mary</b>	43 [b. 1971 ]	12	F	Master's	\$50,000
<b>Kevin</b>	52 [b. 1962 ]	13	M	Master's	\$200,000

### **Data Collection: In-depth interviews**

Given my personal and professional interest in the way that parents understood the practice of preparing their children for bias and discrimination, I selected interviewing as my primary method of data collection. At the core of this method is the belief that people's explanations for their actions are integral to gaining insight to the meaning that they attach to that action. I used Seidman's (2006) three-interview structure, which draws from the phenomenological assumption of a dialectical relationship between our external experience of the world and our internal processing of that external experience. What participants reflected on and chose to share during the course of an interview, gave me insight into the way that they were making sense of the practice of preparing their sons for discrimination, and placed their experience in larger context. Accumulating these insights into racial socialization produced a fuller picture of the practice, combining the "objective reality" of what we believe we know about racial socialization practices with the "subjective reality", of those who have experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Most importantly, asking participants to talk, during interviews, about the way that they had navigated the task of discussing racism with their sons, assumed their expertise on the topic. This is a key goal among Critical Race Theorists when working with communities of color because of the way that the voices of these communities are often silenced.

Seidman's protocol, which requires three separate interviews, gave me the opportunity to situate participants' racial socialization strategies in the broader context of their lived experiences as African Americans (Appendix E). Each interview took place at a location of participants' choosing. The interviews, which were digitally recorded and

later transcribed, lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. The first interview explored the factors that have informed parents' current approach to racial socialization. This interview focused on participants' past. I asked parents to discuss the way that they were raised, to recall the values that their family instilled in them, and whether or not they received messaging about being Black. The second interview asked participants to describe details of their current practices of preparing their child for discrimination. Finally, the third interview asked participants to engage in a meta-reflection of their racial socialization strategies. I use the word meta-reflection because they had been engaging in deep reflection throughout the interview process. By the time of the third interview, I am asked them to review the reflections that had been brought out by the interview process. They were asked to connect the threads from the previous interviews, share their understanding of this phenomenon and imagine the way that this phenomenon may or may not change shape in the future. Seidman's structure dovetailed neatly with the presuppositions of the life course perspective in that it assumed a connection between history and biography. Through participants' descriptions and stories, I made the on-going practice of racial socialization visible and accessible so that we may understand the requirements placed on African American parents by the latest American racial project, which is colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2001).

The goal of interviewing is to elicit rich information about a topic. However, the structure of this linguistic event can serve as an obstacle to acquiring the kind of information that my inquiry requires. Interviews are generally researcher-driven. The questions posed by the researcher may not fully accommodate participants' understanding of their experience. It is the researcher's questions that largely shape how



and what type of knowledge is being collected. Additionally, it can be argued that the standard style of semi-structured interviewing is at odds with CRT's attempt to privilege the knowledge of participants. These reasons, combined with the observed difficulty of getting parents to talk about certain aspects of racial socialization, specifically preparation for bias, (Coard et. al., 2004; Lewis, 1999), informed my decision to use photo elicitation. Triangulating the interview transcripts from the semi-structured interviews with transcripts from photo-elicitation interviews strengthened data collection.

### **Data Collection; Photo Elicitation.**

Photo elicitation interviews can address many of the limitations of standard interviews. Increasingly, photo elicitation is used to supplement standard interviews (Epstein, Stevens, McKeever & Baruchel, 2008). Photo elicitation describes the inclusion of photographs and other visual media in research interviews for the purpose of enhancing memory and discussion (Banks, 2001). Harper (2002) explains, "the parts of the brain that process visual information are evolutionary older than the parts that process verbal information...images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain's capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words" (p.13). Photographs have the power to bring up facets of a topic that the researcher might not have considered. While photo elicitation interviews can be researcher-driven, with photos being selected or produced by the researcher, they can also be participant-driven, which means that participants can select images to discuss in an interview. Allowing participants to select photographs pertinent to the research questions that will be asked in a particular interview

allows their subjectivities to be centered in the research process and also encourages participants to examine the context that informs their behavior.

Photographs were used to accompany the first two interview sessions (Appendix F). The third interview was not followed by a photo-elicitation interview. Pictures reflected the session's line of questioning, placing questions in socio-historical context. The selection process was both participant and researcher driven. I ask participants to list the important or significant social and political events that marked their adolescence. I compiled these lists, eliminating events that appeared less frequently. I chose images representing those events that appeared with the most frequency for the photo elicitation interview. For the first session, photos of events occurring around the time of the parents' adolescence were selected. The average age of parents in the cohort was 43.5 (M. Johns, personal communication, January 12, 2014). Pictures reflected events occurring between the years of 1982 and 1990, the period during which this cohort experienced their adolescence. In the life course perspective, adolescence is a particularly salient period because it is a time of increased autonomy and identity formation. Schuman and Scott (1989) found that "memories of important political events and social changes are structured by age...adolescence and early adulthood is the primary period of generational imprinting in the sense of memories" (p.377). Thus the period of adolescence is a time when individuals begin remembering and forming their outlook on distinct events. The same process was repeated for the second interview. Parents were asked to recall those events that marked their son's life up until the current period or their adolescence. With each photo, parents were simply asked to describe the photo and the period surrounding the photo. In most cases, photo elicitation seemed to help participants by aiding them to

more clearly remember specific events that they mentioned during the course of their standard interview and their relation and reaction to those events. Parents were presented with the photographs immediately after the interview. Unprompted, parents often made a connection between the photos of events and their understanding of factors surrounding their socialization into the racial hierarchy and their current attempts to speak with their sons about race and racism.

### **Data Analysis**

There were two components to my data analysis strategy: memoing and coding.

#### **Memos**

I wrote two separate memos for each interview. One memo, which I called a summary memo, was written immediately after an interview (Appendix I). Here, I will summarize the issues specific to each interview and provided space for rethinking questions for subsequent interviews. A second memo, less rigid in format, was written during and after the coding of each interview (Appendix J). This second memo helped me to experiment with and interrogate emerging codes in the data, begin testing out initial theories about relationships between concepts and make plans for incorporating information gleaned from coding into subsequent data collection and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

#### **Coding**

I had two sets of documents to code per interview: the semi-structured interview transcript and the photo elicitation interview transcript. Using a grounded theory approach and the qualitative analysis software *Dedoose*, I began by first conducting line-by-line coding. This aided me in developing categories or chunks of data that facilitated

easy comparison across transcripts and began helping me to establish relationships between concepts (Charmaz, 2006). I looked for repetitive phrases and language, metaphors and symbols, and dissonance within and across interview transcripts. After focusing on the emic codes or codes that arose out of the data, I looked for etic codes that were informed by the literature and the theoretical frameworks provided by the Life Course Perspective and Critical Race Theory. Potential themes that I expected to see included an understanding that racism persists and is a threat for African American children, knowledge of the vulnerability of African American male youth, and an awareness of the need for practices that will prepare African American male youth to survive and succeed in a racist society. The benefit of using both emic and etic coding strategies was that it encouraged dialogue between participants' experiences with racial socialization and existing literature on the topic. That is to say, I was able to compare participants' definitions and descriptions of what they remembered against the literature. Additionally, this kind of mixed coding approach allowed theory to serve as a guide for the design of the study and aspects of data collection while simultaneously providing space for the discovery of a new theory around factors contributing to the kinds of messages about race that parents share with their African American children.

Several features of the data collection and analysis plan helped ensure validity. Seidman's interview structure required participants to be interviewed three times over the course of a three-week period. Over the course of this period, participants were able to develop a relationship with me, reflect on their previous interviews and make changes to comments previously shared. This structure and process made it easy to check for internal consistency within a participant's interviews and across all participants' interviews.

Perhaps most importantly, the final interview required participants to reflect on the entire process and articulate what they have come to better understand as a result of the process. Cederholm (in Jenkins, Woodward and Winter, 2008) states that photo elicitation interviews are simultaneously a method of data collection and a method of data analysis. Analysis is an iterative process during photo elicitation interviews, not a process that begins at the conclusion of an interview. As participants describe photographs and reflect on what these photographs bring up for them, they will also be searching for words to categorize and compare photographs. During the course of the interview, phrases used will be discussed and analyzed by both the researcher and the participant. Through this collaborative process, the participant can move from simply sharing data to offering an analysis.

### **Data Management**

Each participant was assigned an electronic folder, which was stored on a password protected hard drive. Each folder contains: a participant's signed consent form, summary memos, and transcripts (semi-structured and photo elicitation) of digitally recorded and transcribed interviews. Each participant's folder was assigned a random numerical code. Interview transcripts were identifiable only by this randomly assigned code. The digitally recorded files will be erased a year from the date of the participant's last interview. A key codebook linking participant's pseudonyms with their numerical code will be stored on a separate password protected hard drive.

### **Conclusion**

Three major findings emerged from this study. First, many participants reported receiving a single message about race and racial discrimination from their families.

Second, for the majority of participants adolescence was a turning point, to borrow from Clausen's (1995) conceptualization of the term. It was a period in which they became acutely aware of their identity and learned about racial discrimination and racism. Third, many of the participants made connections between this turning point and the way that they discuss race and racism with their sons. Following is a discussion of each of the findings with illustrative quotes from interview transcripts to support the findings. The use of participants' quotes allows the participants to speak for themselves and gives readers a sense of the nuances of this phenomenon.

The following chapters, which highlight the hidden narratives of Black parents raising adolescent sons, is an extension of the protests that began last year with the death of Michael Brown and a window onto a sector of American society that has learned over hundreds of years to live in spite of the constant threat of impending death. I am honored to have been able to conduct this study and have parents open up to me.

## Chapter 4 Parents recall learning about racism

“I really think that my racial awareness came from hip-hop.”- Renee, mother of a  
sixteen-year-old son

As a teenager I wouldn't go and watch the news. I became aware of him and those events... probably more through music and hearing his name in music... Chubb Rock named Yusef Hawkins in a song. ‘Yusef Hawkins...black on black remember that, it's important.’ ‘Treat 'Em Right’, I think, is the Chubb Rock song.

-Jared

In this quote by Jared, a father of a 15-year-old boy, he describes how he first learned about sixteen-year-old Yusuf Hawkins. In 1989 Hawkins and three of his friends went to the predominantly white neighborhood of Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, in response to an advertisement for a used 1983 Pontiac (Lorch, 1989). Hawkins and his friends never picked up the car. Instead, they were met by a mob of white teenagers who shot and killed Hawkins because they thought that he was dating a white girl in their neighborhood. Hawkins’ murder sparked protests against racially motivated hate crimes and called attention to ever present racial tension in American society. As protesters marched through the neighborhood where Hawkins was slain, they were met by watermelon wielding whites chanting, “Niggers go home” (Ravo, 1989). Jared was 14 when Yusuf Hawkins was killed. Asked to recall how race and racism figured into his adolescence he recalled the words of hip hop artist Chubb Rock. Jared refers here to rapper Chubb Rock’s 1990 song *Treat ‘em Right*, in which he memorializes Hawkins. Rock asks

listeners, “In your hearts and minds never forget Yusuf Hawkins and you’re walking/ You don’t just run/ Black on black; remember that; it’s important”. During his interview, Jared also mentioned the lyrics of rapper KRS one who,” likens the word officer to being a derivative of the word overseer” in his song ‘Black Cop’, an ode decrying Black on Black crime that was released two years after the L.A. riots. He also mentions Tupac’s ‘Young Black Male’ and ‘Brenda’s Got a Baby’, songs from the 1991 *2Pacalypse Now* album in which Tupac offers a critique of the structural issues facing African Americans. These artists alerted Jared to, “the problems that black people in cities were facing”.

Jared’s experience of learning about race during his adolescence and the kinds of messages that he received around issues of racism runs parallel to the experience of many of the African American parents in this study. While this dissertation is primarily concerned with the messages that African American parents are sharing with their adolescent sons about racism in a period that has been marked simultaneously by the election of the nation’s first African American president and the highly publicized deaths of young Black men at the hands of police, this chapter focuses on the experiences of parents.

In this chapter, I explored the first two contributing factors to the talk, outlined by Tony Brown and Chase Lesane-Brown in their 2006 study: the messages that were shared with parents during their teenage years alongside contextual information about major racial incidents that occurred during their adolescence.

### **Findings**

The findings reported here reflect the major themes or analytic categories that surfaced through the coding of interviews with parents about their recollection of their



experience with racial socialization. Across participants' narratives, three themes appeared consistently. The first theme was that many parents remembered messaging from their parents about the importance of hard work and achievement. The second was the importance of adolescence as a period of racial awareness. The third theme was an awareness of a connection between their racialized experiences as adolescences, current racial issues, and the way that they think about how to discuss racism with their adolescent sons.

### **Messages from their parents: The importance of working twice as hard**

The majority of participants said that their parents did make sure to communicate a single message to them., that things would be difficult for them and that they would have to work harder than everyone else to achieve the same goals as their white peers.

When asked to explain the content of this message Jared shared:

Like in my family, it wasn't a big discussion. In my household, I just told you the lessons that were being taught to me were about being, about working hard. It was never really discussed why I had to work so hard, not directly. My stepfather, he's from the South. He's from Tennessee. He would talk about like I have to be twice as good as anyone else in the things that I'm doing to get opportunities. Yeah, he would say why...I can't articulate it verbatim, but it was because of race. My stepfather, because of his experiences growing up in the South, was more verbal about the challenges I would encounter because I was black...but there was a lot that was unspoken.

Similarly, Brandy, a mother of two adolescent boys between the ages of 12 and 19 and one young adult man who is 20, remembered that her mother told her that "yes, it's going

to be harder for you to be black. It meant that, yeah you have to prove yourself if you're black".

Across participants' descriptions of the message that their parents and family members shared with them about working hard was the use of either the future tense or the future progressive tense. Wade remembered that his parents told him, "yeah, you're gonna have those struggles here and there, but it's nothing. Sabine recalled receiving this message in the context of her education. She shared that her father told her, " You can't trust the white folks and you've got to be smart...ten times smarter to do what you have to do to get ahead". Erica remembered hearing, "black people will always be struggling in this country. You have to work twice as hard if you want anything a white person has. You have to work twice as hard and your job will never stop." The messages that Kevin received added a structural element to the idea that African Americans would have to work harder than whites. He shared that he was told, "You've got to work twice as hard...It's beaten into you. We got to work twice as hard. I remember that one for sure. So, my parents always talked about "twice as hard"...because, the way the world was set up".

Despite the repetitive nature of the messages that participants reported receiving from their parents, many felt that they did not actually encounter racism until the onset of their adolescent years. Indeed, consistent with the literature on minority adolescent development, racial socialization, and the life course perspective, the teenaged years of participants stood out to participants as being the first time that they encountered racial discrimination (Clausen, 1995; Fisher, Wallace & Fenton, 2000; Phinney, 1980; Romero

& Roberts, 1998; Stevenson, Davis, & Abdul-Kabir, 2001). Their experiences awakened them to the meaning of their racial identity in a racialized social structure.

### **A turning point: Adolescence and initial encounters with racism**

For participants adolescence was what life course theorist John Clausen (1995) describes as a turning point. Turning points are the “transitions [that] stand out in the memory; they were for one reason or another far more salient than others” (p.368). In participants’ responses adolescence stands out as a clear line of demarcation, cutting them off from a previous period when race did not seem to have a real impact on their lives. Recalling when he first starting really seeing racism in action, Jared said, “The first time that I experienced racism, that I could recognize was...around 13. I was probably 13”. It was at this same age that Casey began to also notice racism:

Probably 13, I think that’s when I started breaking away from the notion that America was... ‘land of the free’...So that’s when I started to understand that being Black in America and being Black and poor in America, you have a very different experience of what the world is, and that's when I understood.

Casey also noticed a change in her friendships during this period, a change that reflected a burgeoning awareness of race among her peers. She explains, “My friends...They started changing. And I think that it’s part of that mid-adolescence, pre-adolescence where you start to get those messages: You stick to your own.” Describing junior high, Bobbi says:

And at that point, I still had friends of both races. But then I noticed, like halfway through 7<sup>th</sup> grade, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, this split started to come and people’s behaviors would change, and then people starting getting into their groups. It wasn't

anything that was said, but I felt it was this forced thing, like you had to choose. Am I gonna hang out with the Black kids, or am I still gonna hang out with my white friends, or can I have the best of both worlds? And I felt all of us were under a tremendous amount of pressure to choose which groups that we felt most comfortable in. And I remember splitting.

These realizations were sometimes accompanied by anger. “I was getting angry...”, Casey said, “that definitely was like around 15, 16...I felt like we got such a raw deal...we as Black people.” Renee also felt “that anger”. Referring to the system of racism she recalls feeling at the time that, “this is not fair, and I’m not gonna take it. I’m not gonna pretend like it’s fair.” Participants encounters with racism ranged from the passive and mundane to the violent and surreal. Julia recalled being followed around or mistreated in stores. “I remember my mom and I went to a store in Manhattan once and the guy made a very...He made a nasty comment to us...He made a comment that made me realize or it somewhat opened my eyes”. She began to understand how racism played out in neighborhood segregation:

I started traveling in the trains and I realized that, when I leave Manhattan the train...When you get to a point in Manhattan the train is white and then when you move farther into Brooklyn it’s just [black] and I kept saying to myself like, ‘oh it looks like all the black people live in here and all the white people live in [here].

Jared recalled a physical altercation, when he was 13, with another boy who called his cousin a nigger:

So, we went to Florida somewhere, and we were in a pool, and there were me, my stepbrother, my stepsister; my mother and stepfather were off somewhere else.

And there were these white kids in the pool, and they were definitely weren't older than me. They were probably about... My stepbrother is three years younger than me, and my stepsister is two years younger than me. They were probably about my stepbrother's age. There was at least two boys and there might have been another kid with them... and he kept trying to play with these kids, and I'm like, "Leave them kids alone. They don't wanna play with you." Those boys called him a nigger, and I punched that boy straight in the face. I punched him in the face because that's how I felt. That's what I thought the appropriate response was to what he did. And nothing really came out of it. They got outta the pool, and they went somewhere crying, and they never came back. I kinda was expecting some adults to come. I don't know what I thought was gonna happen, but no one ever came back. That was my first encounter with racism. I felt victorious, when I responded that way, and he left.

Kevin recalled race riots at his school:

Race really jumped out at me 'cause we had race riots in Flushing, Queens. To this high school you had kids coming from Jamaica, Queens, LeFrak City, Corona, Jackson Heights, Elmhurst, literally. Bronx, man everybody came to this school for whatever reason. A lot of kids and there were race riots... I mean, bats and cops and blood and chains and fighting over race.

The threat of violence over issues pertaining to race and racism came even closer to home when Michael was driving home one night on the Belt Parkway:

I was coming back from school around that time, and then I was driving and I saw the sheet covering the body. It's when I listened to the news, I realized it was

Yusuf Hawkins' body that I saw in the highway: I think his car broke down, or something broke down, and he entered into Howard Beach. And then he was chased across the highway and then he got hit by a vehicle. But that was in one... Then the traffic slowed down. I was in one of these vehicles coming up and seeing the sheet covering the body, and then later on finding out it was Yusuf Hawkins.

Michael mentioned Yusuf Hawkins here, but he is actually referring to a separate but strikingly similar incident that occurred three years before Yusuf Hawkins' death.

The event that Michael describes here, occurred in 1986, when he was 19, in the still predominantly white Howard Beach neighborhood in Queens. African Americans Michael Griffith, Cedric Sandiford, Timothy Grimes, and Kevin Sylvester went to the Queens neighborhood on an errand when their car broke down. After eating at a local pizzeria, the men were attacked by whites. Michael Griffith, who was beaten brutally, ran into a highway to escape the mob that was attacking him and was hit and killed by an oncoming car. The beating was described by then Mayor Ed Koch as "the kind of lynching party that took place in the Deep South" (Gates Jr., 2001, p. 417). Art would later imitate life when Spike Lee released his film, *Do the Right Thing* in 1989, providing the nation with a portrait of the racial tensions that plagued New York City. Sabine recalls going to see the film with her friends. "I do remember going to see it with my friends at the movie theater..." she said "it...definitely had to do with our time, our generation, like the our type of cultural things going on, dealing with the issue of black and white and stuff like that." It is worth noting that this Howard Beach incident struck a

chord with five out of the seventeen participants, many of whom made it clear that it was a neighborhood that they continue to avoid even as they are adults.

While the incident happened over two decades ago, it still deeply affected Wade. “I remember...Howard Beach” he said. “Now, I live not far from Howard Beach...Whenever I pass Howard Beach I always, always... [it] never left my mind because again, he was a young kid. The corners of his lips slowly moved downward as he explained what happened. “It was in the media, it was a big thing. It was like, they murdered this young man, the car had stopped or something, and they were attacked with baseball bats and he was killed.” For a few minutes, his eyes focused on something outside of the window. I shifted my gaze as he did but only saw the scaffolding that crowned the building across the street. He seemed to be looking past that to a scene not in the present. After a long pause his eyes returned to the interview and me. “And to this day, I still remember... [I] Just...I don't wanna go in that neighborhood. I'll do anything not to go in that neighborhood...within the first half a mile. I don't go further than that. I just choose not to... If I can avoid it, I'll not go.

Similarly, Brandy talked about how she felt when this incident happened and how she continues to feel about the neighborhood of Howard Beach. “You would never go to Howard Beach. You can't go to Howard Beach...If you are black, do not go. You're going to die. They are going to lynch you. Don't go there. Don't ever go.” This Howard Beach incident was a harbinger of things to come for many of these participants. What they did not realize as Black teenagers was that Howard Beach was all around them. While they could avoid the Howard Beach in their city, they could not escape the Howard

Beaches of the nation. Their right to be in certain spaces would always be under suspicion. This is evident in their descriptions of their encounters with law enforcement.

**Adolescence and encounters with police.** Seven of the participants reported having encounters with the police during their adolescence. For them, it was clear that these encounters happened because of race. On their way to visit a friend who was at college, Brandy, her brother, and his girlfriend were stopped by the police. The police explained to them that they were being stopped because three black men were suspects in a crime in a neighboring city. According to Brandy, who expressed her anger to the officer, the vehicle was then confiscated. The officer accused her brother of having a suspended license. Brandy claimed that he was not, in fact, driving with a suspended license. "It was the three of us: Me, my brother driving, his girlfriend in the passenger seat. We get stopped, pulled over by state troopers high way patrol. One woman, white woman, pulled [us] over." The officer wanted the driver to present his license and registration. From the backseat, Brandy asked, "Sure, why did you stop us?" The officer replied, "Cause there was a murder just committed in Boston by three men with New York plates." Brandy was in disbelief. "At that point I was like, 'screw you',... clearly we're not three black men, right? We're two women and a man." She continued to question the officer demanding an answer. "Why would you stop us?" The officer then said, "Please step out of the vehicle." Shocked at his little sister's audacity, Brandy's brother said, "God! You're a big mouth." She offered, "but clearly we're not three black men." After the exchange, the trio "stepped out of the vehicle..". "[The officer] confiscated the vehicle, left us on the highway."



These participants described frequent encounters with the police. In fact, being stopped by the police happened so frequently for Wade that he was inured to the practice. Wade very casually stated how he dealt with being targeted by the cops so frequently as a teen, “You can either look at it like, complain or you just roll with the... I just roll with the punches. You get stopped by the cops, you get harassed.” As an afterthought during one of our interviews, Ray remembered playing in the stairs of his building with a friend in Junior high school when police officers came up the steps with their guns drawn.

Jared was actually arrested by the police. During our interview his son walked into the room and he lowered his voice as we moved closer to this topic. Eventually he signaled to me, by swiping his hand horizontally across his throat, that we would have to stop talking until his son left the room. After his son left the room, his voice returned to its normal volume. “It's not a secret but we haven't had the discussion, I didn't want him to overhear it for the first time... don't want that to be something that is overheard. I rather that come as a conversation.” Only after his son left the room did he continue the interview and describe the details of his arrest:

So, I was arrested... I started noticing the police are following and they're thinking there's three black dudes in a BMW, but I'm not doing anything wrong. I know they're behind me, they follow me, follow me, follow me. So as soon as I cross the town line into Hartford, they pull me over. So, when they pulled me over I jumped out of the car. I went to confront them, which only heightened the problem or the situation. So I don't... I wouldn't want my son to do that. I still, to this day, I shouldn't have done that because I just put myself in greater risk, but I felt I was valid in confronting them for pulling me over for no reason. So, the

situation ended with, they told me to show them my license and registration and I told them, "If you tell me what you pulled me over for, I'll show you my license and registration." So, they wouldn't tell me so I wouldn't show them. So, it led to me getting arrested. But I was arrested for assaulting an officer, which I did not do... They were very rough with me but, considering, I was very fortunate that it didn't go worse than it did... .

His grandmother came to bail him out of jail after being contacted by his friends. He explains, "After they'd bailed me out, my grandmother was raising hell in there. And she was telling them that they only arrested me, "cause I'm a nigger...that they arrested me 'cause I'm a young black man." Apart from Brandy, Wade, and Jared, none of the participants had direct encounters with the police. Erica, Sabine, and Casey recalled encounters that their family members and friends had with the police.

Erica, the mother of 12-year-old Nasser, recalled her brother constantly being harassed by the police. "I've seen my older brother get guns pulled on him for no reason. He's like a saint, like honestly as close to being the best person." Despite being "such a good person" her brother would be harassed by police, sometimes at gunpoint. "And to see police pull guns and almost shoot him for no reason, just because he's walking to the ATM machine..." These instances that she witnessed definitely shaped her perception of the police. "And that is like, 'Oh my God!' It's true", she said. "They will kill you for no reason."

Sabine remembered speaking with her male friends who would share stories of their encounters with the police during their breaks at work. "I remember a little part-time job... I guess we used to talk about it because some of my friends would tell me their

stories, like my male friends would tell me their stories of their encounters with the police and stuff like that and what happened.” One of her friends described an instance where the police surrounded his car when he was out driving one night because “someone called and there’s a rapist in the area. And they ran his ID, and after all of that, he said something, ‘Don’t I get an apology?’ And they said, ‘Be glad you weren’t the rapist.’ The stories that her friends shared with her alerted Sabine to the precarious nature of encounters with law enforcement. “So, that was kind of troubling because it’s like, you don’t know if somebody could lose their life for something like that. And we all thought that was a lie, we all know there was no rapist, they just wanted to harass him.”

Casey’s encounter with the police occurred when her grandparents were arrested. While she wasn’t present at the time of their arrest, she remembered the story vividly because it was shared with her:

They got arrested... I wanna say coming out of the port authority, coming from a bus on Atlantic city...something happened between my grandmother and the man...and the cop went to arrest my grandfather and my grandmother was like, ‘Don’t you put your hands on him.’ And the cop told her to stop it or whatever, and she slapped the cop to keep them from cuffing my grandfather and then my grandparents were fighting the cops, and then the cops of course wrestled my grandparents down and arrested them. And my grandmother in turn was suing the police department, because she had all these injuries. I think my grandfather broke his arm. It was really like... It was really terrible. They didn’t win, but I remember that and that was all around, ‘cause my grandmother, when they grabbed them, my

grandmother was yelling, ‘Eleanor Bumpers, Michael Griffith, that boy that was running.’ I remember that. Terrible.

According to Casey, while her grandmother was being arrested, she called out the name of the aforementioned Michael Griffith, who was beaten and killed in Howard Beach, and Eleanor Bumpers. Eleanor Bumpers was a 66-year-old African American woman who was shot and killed by police in 1984. She was killed because officers were trying to subdue her while she was being evicted from her home<sup>23</sup>. The incident surrounding Bumpers’ death was another picture in New York City’s family photo album of racial tension in the 1980’s. To cope with the trauma inherent in their adolescence, because of their sudden awareness of racial issues, a number of the participants sought an alternate education.

**Finding counternarratives.** Five of the participants said that they sought and found positive messages about Blackness and the Black experience, which helped them to cope with what they were experiencing during this time, with the help of educators at their schools or on their own.. Brandy, recalled a teacher who spoke explicitly with students about what it means to be Black. One teacher was invested in “making kids aware of it, like self-awareness”. This teacher would tell students:

Yes you're black, but you need to understand what that means in America, right?  
You're a black male. That's two strikes against you right now. You have to work twice as hard...If you don't do this, this is how hard it's gonna be for you because you already come to the table with darker skin.

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<sup>23</sup> See Raab, S. (1985). State judge dismisses indictment of officer in the bumpers killing. [www.nytimes.com/1985/04/13/nyregion/state-judge-dismisses-indictment-of-officer-in-the-bumpers-killing.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1985/04/13/nyregion/state-judge-dismisses-indictment-of-officer-in-the-bumpers-killing.html)

To supplement his message, he would share article and books with students about Africa. For Erica, who had spent a significant period of time in the foster care system, the figures in books that she came across at school about black history became a part of her family. “When I got older like in my teenage years, I always was being into black history and stuff... I didn't have anything to attach to. So I guess learning more about myself and learning about history, it really grounded me. Even though I didn't have a family, that was my bigger family”.

Casey turned to reading. During her adolescent years, she focused on learning about Black authors and African history. She told me that after she noticed that the racial composition of her group of friends was split along racial lines, she spent more time with her books than with her friends. “I spent a lot of time alone because I started to read even more”, she said. “I'm trying to think. That's probably when I first encountered Maya Angelou. I was particularly... I know I was particularly drawn to Kemet, but at that time I didn't call it that; it was still Egypt for me. I would read these books about the dynasties and all this kind of stuff.” Just as Casey created her own syllabus, Renee also took charge of her own education.

Choosing to write a paper on the disadvantages of segregation for her ‘US History since 1945’ class in high school, Renee devoured texts on the Black Power movement. She recalled, “that was my first black studies paper senior year of high school. I remember just in terms of my racial identity that was huge...that was the first time that I engaged with black intellectual thought”. For Wade the Black Student Union was where he first learned about Blackness more completely. He shared, “So pretty much we had the black events...There you started coming together, and started learning about yourself as a

whole.” While some of the participants were able to turn to their schools or books for messages about Blackness, many shared that they also learned about Blackness and what it means to be Black from hip-hop.

**The soundtrack to a racialized adolescence.** Eight, or nearly half, of participants believed hip-hop played a major role in helping them to navigate the racial tensions that characterized their adolescence. In essence, the sounds of hip-hop underscored the highly racialized experience that these participants were having. Explaining when race and racism became salient for him, Ray said, “yeah, in high school, so 14 to 18, and it all intertwines with Public Enemy, and that’s for real. That’s when I really saw all that stuff”. Trying to remember when issues of race and racism were most salient for him, Ray revealed that a hip-hop album marked each year of his adolescence. He remembered the hip-hop group Public Enemy, whose 1990 album, ‘Fear of a Black Planet’, included the songs that highlighted many of the issues of oppression facing the larger African American community during the late 80’s and early 90’s. It is fitting that Ray would explain that his racial awareness was peaking around the same time that this group was becoming popular because, “the group public enemy was perhaps the most accomplished at projecting black rage as a political discourse that would prove attractive to the youth audience that hip-hop garnered” (Neal, 2004, p.374).

Indeed, this group did not only project black rage, it mirrored and gave language to the anger that many of the participants felt at the time. In one interview, Brandy explained the way that Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power”, which would be featured in Spike Lee’s film *Do the Right Thing*, made her and her peers feel. She began by reciting the lyrics to one of the song’s verses. “Elvis was a hero to most, but he never meant s\*\*t

to me, he was straight out racist, the sucker was simple and plain. Motherf\*\*k him and John Wayne... ." "Every other song was about self... ." she said. "Oh my God you felt empowered." "That whole era [was about] being proud, black and proud...And the music had a lot to do with it", Wade echoed.

The music that groups and artists like Public Enemy and KRS-one were creating initiated a generation into activism by "combating the racial amnesia that threatens to relegate the achievement of the black past to the ash heap of dismemory" (Dyson,2004, p. 66). Following the line that Brandy recalls from the song "Fight the Power" Public Enemy explained their feelings towards celebrated artists and actors like Elvis Presley and John Wayne: "Cause I'm Black and I'm proud/I'm ready and hyped plus I'm amped/ Most of my heroes don't appear on no stamps/ Sample a look back you look and find/Nothing but rednecks for 400 years if you check... ." These lyrics reminded listeners that white celebrities were not their heroes and that Black heroes were systematically erased by American history. Most importantly, the song urged those who were listening to study history for themselves to verify the consistent omission of Black achievements. "Such actions...brought a renewed sense of historical pride to young black minds that The pride that the rappers spoke about made them feel hyped, or empowered. Wade remembered the way that hearing this music affected him when he was in school. Hip-hop got him "through the day", he said. "Like especially when I was at school. Some of the hardcore hip-hop, just like I would feel hyped like...High, empowered.

Bobbi, recalled the impact of seeing female rappers like Queen Latifah in hip-hop videos during this period:

I remember her in that video and I was like, "Wow, this is pretty powerful." 'Cause that's when hip-hop, like hip-hop had already started, but we were really getting into it. And I remember watching MTV Raps with Fab 5 Freddy... She is just a strong black woman and it was all about black power moment and I was like "Wow!". And the stuff that they... The stuff that she and other rappers talked about resonated for me because it was about self-empowerment and just like embracing who we are as a people and I really connected to that... But I also think about this era for me was more about social justice and talking about our stories.

These stories to which Bobbi referred were narratives about issues that faced the African American community. As shown by Public Enemy, hip-hop had the ability to bring long forgotten narratives to a generation coming of age, a generation somewhat removed from the history of their current condition. Hip-hop was also able to illuminate contemporary problems. This became apparent in one interview when Sabine tried to list all of the rappers that she loved as a teenager. "Okay, and again KRS-One, one of my favorite rappers, rapped about police brutality. I don't know if he was one of the first rappers to rap, I think he did the *Sound of Da Police*". Sabine talked about KRS-One's 1993 song, in which he rapped about being followed and accused of selling drugs because of his race.

The power of hip-hop for these participants, when they were adolescents is evident, in Wade's recollection of the way that musical genre helped to him to understand his relationship to the narratives presented by artists:

I listen to a lot of hip-hop, a lot of hip-hop, Doug E. Fresh, and all these people, they really start... They are speaking of their experiences, then you start to



identify... I started to identify more, because when incidents like these happen, it's like, 'Oh lord, I'm here too'.

As Wade explains, through the stories that rappers shared through their lyrics, he and his peers were able to recognize themselves and their experiences. Renee summed up the significance of hip-hop for her:

I loved music and I loved hip-hop music. And I loved hip-hop music that was conscious or had a message. I loved Public Enemy... Well, even before "Fight the Power," I listened to Public Enemy. It's gotta be somebody else besides, like the De La Soul or even... I'm trying to think of when A Tribe Called Quest came out... Definitely KRS-One. I remember being conflicted about NWA, I remember that. I remember just when the video came out and just seeing a black man being beaten like that, it was like the videos that you... The footage you see of the Civil Rights era, when dogs being sicced on people and it was 1990, and it was very reminiscent of that. I remember being like, 'This is proof that racism still exists. It wasn't just back in the '60s, it's still happening now... That's crazy Raygine. I really think that my racial awareness came from hip-hop.

In her recollection, Renee named several of the hip hop artists that she listened to and then she mentioned her feelings about the West Coast hip hop group, NWA or Ni\*\*az with attitude, who became notorious for their song *F\*\*k Tha Police*. Her conflicted feelings were a response to the group's highly charged lyrics, urging violent retaliation against police and their brutality. In the video for their song, a montage of images of incidents of police brutality, including the beating of Rodney King, were used. She compared what she saw in this video to archived footage of interactions between Black

people and the police during the Civil Rights era. At the end of her comment, she suddenly recognized how much hip-hop taught her about racism during her adolescence. Discussing the effects of songs and lyrics like those remembered by the parents in this study, Michael Eric Dyson (2004) points out that those lyrics “brought a renewed sense of historical pride to young black minds that provides a solid base for racial self-esteem” (p.66). This covert racial socialization, to borrow a concept from Umaña-Taylor and Fine (2004), through rap lyrics opened this cohort’s eyes to the legacy of centuries of racism and their place in a racial hierarchy. Becoming parents would force them to think about the relationship between a long history of racism and their sons.

#### **From Yusuf Hawkins to Trayvon Martin: Connections to present parenting practice**

All of the participants discussed the connection between their racialized experiences and awareness as adolescents, present day racial events, and the way that they approach race in discussions with their sons. Consistently, parents made links between past racial events and the current state of race relations. Michael remembered the incidents involving Michael Griffith, Yusuf Hawkins, and Rodney King. “And this kind of stuff probably led to what we're suffering from today like stop and frisk and all these other policing techniques that are being used against the black or children of color in United States”, he said. For John, Amadou Diallo’s death cries were echoed in the screams of Trayvon Martin. He explained, “Diallo, yes. Diallo, who was killed in Bronx here...Honestly, that still bothers me up till today that they did and got away with it. It's similar to what is happening in Florida today, to me”. Kevin articulated the connection differently when he pointed out:

Here is the connection to Yusef Hawkins from me like again connecting the dots. When I went to high school with a bunch of Italian kids and a bunch of Irish kids and a bunch of everything kids. Those are your cops now... These are your cops now and so now it's a license to do this or that. This boy lost his life for no reason... so what is this '89? And now we go to 2012 Trayvon Martin. I am sick of it.

Kevin locates racism in the minds and bodies of his white adolescent peers who have now grown into adults. For Kevin, this personally mediated racism is living. It grows up with individuals and as it grows it is expressed in different ways. While it revealed itself in the shape of an unruly mob of adolescents in 1989, for Kevin, today it wears a police uniform or patrols neighborhoods under the guise of being a neighborhood watchman.

Soberly recalling his own encounter with the police and the fact that he could have paid for that encounter with his life, Jared shares, "I wouldn't want my son to do that". Participants' personal experiences combined with their burgeoning awareness of black misandry, informs how they think about raising their sons today. Ray explains that these experiences have shaped how he chooses to speak with his sons about racism when he states, "This influenced us even more with how we wanted...why we instilled this into our kids." He adds:

When Dwayne was born... This is gonna sound crazy, but it was important for us, knowing that we had to teach him about cops when he was a kid... Any situation. You see the way we're talking now? The correlation, again, with why? These are the reasons. It just adds onto the anger. I would've never been able to talk about and say all the names or put the names together and say, "These are probably the

reasons." Didn't realize that it was, all that stuff, which is probably why we just did it together, and it's not like we even really had to talk about it.

Here Ray realizes that he and his wife's experiences with race as adolescents were so powerful that they did not even have to have discussion about how they were going to communicate with their then young son about police brutality. Their experiences as adolescents make it clear to the participants that they must inform and prepare their sons for the inevitability of being targeted because they are Black and male. Similarly, Erica pointed out the impact of her racial encounters with police and her learning about the Black Power Movement on the way that she thought about what she would eventually have to say to her son. Erica shared, "it made me realize, especially when I became pregnant, I had to teach my son how it is to be growing up a black man in America." Recalling the racially charged events of the late 1980's and thinking about how she prepares her sons for racism, Sabine suggested:

That was the start of profiling young black boys and stuff like that. I know now I have to because I have two young black boys. And it's like you can't go about your daily life without worrying if something's gonna happen to you like that or your children. Sometimes I worry for my son who has to go to school in Manhattan now. I do worry.

This feeling of worry for their sons' safety threads throughout participants' comments. This is apparent in Kevin's explanation of his reasoning for providing his son with instructions on how to interact with the police:

And with Amadou.. he was like, 'Man, shoot, I dropped my wallet, I'm kicking it home now. I ain't going to pick that up'. I remember in Minnesota, as a teenage

boy Kyle went out with Miles and his older brother and [I asked] how are you guys getting to the target center? [He said], well, we're gonna drive. I said Kyle, please listen to me. For whatever reason if the cops pull you guys over and all you guys [are] in the car, make sure everybody's hands are where they can see them. Please make sure. And as God is my witness they got pulled over. And I said what did you do with your hands? And he said, 'I had them out Daddy where they can see my hands.' But it's crazy that we have to... But it's crazy that we have to... But those are the rights of passage that we have to do.

This sense of worry is very clearly rooted in the past and fueled by accumulated knowledge of encounters with the police. For Brandy, her worry came from realizing that the people who are supposed to help her son, the police, will probably hurt him before helping him:

You're supposed to be able to tell your kids "if you need help, these are the people you go to for help." I can't tell my black boys that. As a matter of fact, it's the opposite... When we talked, it was, "we have to make sure that they are prepared. We have to make sure that he understands that it's not gonna be easy for him. We have a black male, period. And so, we have to make sure that they are informed...

No holds barred, we're not holding. This is just the straight out rule of how it is.

Underscoring this sense of worry is an understanding, among parents, of the inevitability of a racist encounter in their son's future. Casey was very blunt about how she prepared her son for this:

You never tell them they can't pick up a gun. I never taught my sons not to pick up a gun. I've never taught my sons not to lie. I told them, "A lie will save your

life. If somebody's trying to kill Black people that day, 'Are you Black?' 'Hell no, I'm Cuban.' And you better find some Spanish to speak. I've never taught them that. I never taught them don't steal. I taught them don't steal from me, but you don't know what kind of condition we're gonna have.. They're gonna use a gun on your baby. Whatcha gonna do? What your baby gonna do?

Casey's reflection on how she prepares her sons for racism reveals two things. First she is aware of the dynamic and changing nature of race and the process of racial formation (Omi & Winant, 1994). She instructs her sons to learn ways to escape the consequences of *Blackness*. Here she jokes around and says that she encourages them to speak another language. The hope is that a language other than English coming from their bodies will cause the police to pass over them. Second, they must also learn to do what ever is necessary to defend themselves. For Casey and the other parents in this sample, the message that they share with their sons is slightly different from what they heard as children. While she and her peers were largely told that they must work twice as hard as others, it seems that the message that these parents must convey to their sons is that they must work twice as hard as others to stay alive.

### **Discussion**

This chapter examined African American parents' recollections of their experience with racial socialization, placing parents' racial attitudes and the messages that they are conveying to their teenaged sons about racial discrimination in greater social and historical context. The overarching research question here was, "What kinds of conversations to African American parents recall their family members having with them

about race and racial discrimination?” Thus participants were asked to provide a focused life history up until the birth of their first son.

Three findings emerged regarding parents’ experience of racial socialization. First, growing up, participants received similar messages about race or racism from their families. The majority of participants, revealed that their parents communicated the importance of working twice as hard; because they were black they would have to do more to prove themselves deserving of what their white peers received. What is striking about this finding is the similarity in the nature of the message among members of the hip-hop generation, those born between 1965 and 1984.

Second, participants recalled their adolescence as a period when they became intensely interested in their racial identity and acutely aware of the systemic nature of racism. Some participants became aware of race as the dynamics of their friendship groups changed. Many noticed that their multiracial posses split along the colorline. Other participants remembered feeling intense anger as they experienced microaggressions in their daily life and learned about the way that racism structured the lives of African Americans. A few of the participants were ushered into their racial awakening violently. One participant recalled fighting a peer who called him a nigger. Many recalled the violence surrounding the racial incidents of the late 1980’s, particularly the deaths of Michael Griffith, Yusuf Hawkins, and Eleanor Bumpers. Nearly half of participants described increased encounters with the police. Participants remembered being followed, being arrested, and watching their friends and family members suffer harassment from the police. At this time, some of the participants turned to school groups, teachers, and texts about the African American experience for alternate

narratives about Blackness. Nearly half of the participants cited hip-hop as a major source of empowerment during this period. Like the traditional texts that some of the participants found in school, hip-hop lyrics provided participants with language to understand their personal experience and the larger Black experience within the context of racism.

Third, participants connected their experience in adolescence with the way that they thought about and talked with their son's about race and racial discrimination today. For some, there was a direct connection between the mob mentality and police brutality experienced by Black people in the 1980's and 90's and the recent murders of Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis in Florida. These incidents made it clear that they had to be vocal and transparent with their sons about what awaited them as Black males. The participants expressed fear and worry about the reality of an inevitable racist encounter. They were all making sure that their sons were informed and prepared for such an event.

Most participants revealed that they did not receive much in the way of explicit conversations about racial discrimination beyond the mantra communicated by their parents to, "work twice as hard". It appears, from participants' descriptions of their adolescence, that many of them did not fully understand the import of this taken for granted message. The normative mantra that the participants, "work twice as hard", appears quite simple at first glance. On the surface, this message appears to be about exactly what parents are saying and nothing more. However, a look at the literature on racial socialization, the life course perspective, and critical race theory reveal otherwise. Looking specifically at Brandy, Wade, and Erica's description of the messages that they received, the use of the future progressive tense suggests knowledge that this notion of



having to work twice as hard is continuous. It will never disappear. They will have to contend with it in the future. In Kevin's recollection of the messages that he received there are allusions to the systemic and durable nature of racism.

He remembers his parents telling him that he would face difficulties because of his skin color due to "the way that the world was set up". This messaging about the ongoing nature of having to work twice as hard reflects the understanding that racism is an ordinary, permanent, and pervasive feature of American life (Bell, 1987). Furthermore, in mentioning "the way that the world was set up", Kevin's parents alert him to the fact that there was a racial hierarchy buttressed by policies and structures created to maintain the status quo. Kevin would have to work harder than his white peers to achieve the same goals simply because of the fact that this hierarchy is structured along the lines of race and Kevin is black. Indeed, a closer look at all of the participants' descriptions of the messaging that they received reveals some reference, though minimal, to this racial hierarchy.

Erica, Brandy, Jared, and Wade's accounts of what their families tell them make clear that being black is possibly on the lowest rung in this hierarchy because of the difficulties inherent in that identity. Working harder than everyone else to meet the same goals that others reach with less effort is just one of those burdens. Embedded in this mantra is also a message about racial identity. It is likely that learning about these challenges communicated to participants that these struggles were inextricably tied to their Blackness. Indirectly, they learned that Black people were looked upon with suspicion and distrust, assumed to be unintelligent and underserving. This finding reflects the conceptualization of racial socialization as a practice of conveying to children information "concerning the nature of race status as it relates to personal and group

identity, intergroup and inter individual relationships, and position in the social hierarchy” (Thornton et al., as cited in Caughy et. al., 2006, p. 1220). In their warning to their children, it seems that parents of these participants sought to communicate the distinct nature of the experience of being African American (Stevenson, Davis & Abdul-Kabir, 2001; Thornton, 1998).

Following the life course perspective, the normative and consistent messaging that members of this hip-hop cohort remember receiving from their parents and families is an expression of the interaction between the features of the particular period in which they were coming of age and their life course (Elder, 1994; McAdam, 1989; Steward and Healy, 1989). Consistent with prior research on the relationship between racial socialization messaging and historical time, these participants received messages that many African Americans growing up during the protest and post protest era received: messages focusing largely on the importance of group and individual pride (Brown & Lesane-Brown, 2006; Ritterhouse, 2006; Ward, 2000). This messaging reflects a change in the nature of racism after *Brown v. Board of education* and the Civil Rights movement.

The pre-*Brown v. Board* period (1607-1865; 1877-1965) has been described as an epoch of brutal racial dictatorship in American history (Omi & Winant, 1994). This time was characterized by the blatant and unchecked project of subjugation, disenfranchisement, and dehumanization of African Americans through social and political means (Morgan, 1975; Ritterhouse, 2006). In light of the realities of life under the threat of constant terrorism messages communicated to children during this period stressed deference to and fear of whites (Brown & Lesane-Brown, 2006; Ritterhouse;

2006). This messaging reflects parents understanding of the rules of intergroup relations during this period. A breach in racial etiquette, actual or supposed, often resulted in death.

The Civil Rights Movement and subsequent legislation challenged the status quo, ushering in a 15-year period of Civil Rights gains for African Americans (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Blatant segregation, which characterized the previous epoch of racial dictatorship was disrupted through the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which made illegal segregation in education, voting, housing, and other public domains (Bell, 1992). However, these gains were slowly and steadily turned on their head and dismantled beginning with the 1973 *Keyes v. School District No. 1* decision (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Suddenly, the notion of what characterized an unconstitutionally segregated school was up for debate. School segregation, it would be decided, could only be classified as such if the intent to segregate students could be pointed to and proved (*Milliken v. Bradley*, 1974).<sup>24</sup>

The messaging that the parents of these participants shared reflects what Ward (2000) calls a coping mechanism. They learned to focus on themselves in the face of a system that would not support them and shared the message with their children. The messages received by members of this generation are similar to the messages that their parents received (Brown & Lesane-Brown, 2006; Hill). This similarity in messaging between the protest and the post-protest era suggest that the treatment of racism and the progress made towards racial issues remained largely unchanged between the protest and the post-protest era.

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<sup>24</sup> The manipulation of the law in ways that would disadvantage African Americans continues today (*City of Richmond v. Croson*, 1987; *Gratz v. Bollinger*, 2003; *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003; *Hopwood v. University of Texas Law School*, 1996; Proposition 209, 1997; Initiative 200, 1998; One Florida, 2000; *Parents v. Seattle*, 2006; *Meredith v. Jefferson*, 2006; *Schuette v. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action*, 2014).

For the majority of participants, adolescence was a turning point. This is consistent with adolescent development theory (Marcia, 1980), racial identity theory (Cross, 1991) and life course perspective theory (Shuman & Scott, 1989). Participants' descriptions of having to choose between their black friends and their white friends align neatly with Marcia's (1980) notion of crisis and commitment. Marcia reveals that adolescents experience a crisis because they are trying to choose and commit to identity during this tumultuous period. As demonstrated by participants' narratives, many struggled to understand this new-found change that played out in the rapidly evolving dynamics of their friendship groups. However, they were also beginning to explore their racial identity, or their understanding of what it meant to be Black.

The exploration of racial identity is unique nature to Black adolescence (Phinney, 1990). In addition to thinking about who they are and who they will be as a person, they must also think about who they are and who they will be as a racialized person. This is reflected in the accounts of Casey and Renee who both remembered feeling anger about the treatment of Black people. It is captured by Casey's use of the word 'we' to include herself as a member of this marginalized group and Renee's refusal to accept a system that she begins to realize she has inherited. The attempt to find answers at school about who they are is also a reflection of this effort to choose and commit to an identity. While they are thinking about the multiple aspects of their identity, psychologists have found that adolescents of color must also make sense of the constant negative feedback that they are receiving from the environment (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Neblett et. al, 2012; Sameroff & Gutman, 2004; Stevenson, Davis, & Abdul-Kabir, 2001). This insight is reflected in the accounts of 7 of the participants about their encounters with the police

force and their recollections of the deaths of Michael Griffith, Eleanor Bumpers, and Yusuf Hawkins. Additionally, Brandy, Sabine, Erica, and Casey's reflections on the interactions that they observed between their family members and the police reflect the life course theoretical concept of linked lives. While they did not personally suffer encounters with police, having people in their networks who did profoundly affected their perception of the police and added to their understanding of racial inequality.

For many participants, hip-hop music was where they were able to find counternarratives to challenge the negative messaging that they were receiving about Blackness from their environment. Their accounts of the impact that hip-hop played during their lives at this time finds its theoretical reflection in the assertion among life course perspective theorists that the generational memories of social and political events are imprinted during adolescence (Shuman & Scott, 1989). Additionally, Hip hop culture and music told the narratives of individuals growing up in these times and helped them to make sense of the racial volatility that characterized the period. Consistent with the finding that media can be a racial socialization agent, hip-hop influenced the way that these participants began to understand their individual and intragroup racial identity (Graves & Graves, 2008). It is apparent that hip-hop, worked in a fashion similar to racial socialization practices. Rappers lyrics alerted participants to the history of racism, provided them with examples of racist practices and strengthened them to contend with racism in their daily experiences. Additionally, the hip-hop lyrics that the participants recited as children were time capsules of their racial identity development during this time, reminding them of the way that they saw and felt about what was happening around

them. Participants' very clear memories, associated with this period, are related to their approach to talking with their son's about race in the present.

All of the participants' connected their racialized adolescent experiences with the way that they thought about what to discuss with their sons about racism. Parents saw a direct connection between what they witnessed during their adolescence and what was taking place currently during their son's adolescence. This is reflected in the way that Kevin and John link the deaths of Amadou Diallo and Yusuf Hawkins to Trayvon Martin and the lives of their own sons. What was most startling here was parents' understanding of the unique lessons required of their children because they were Black boys. Overwhelmingly, participants expressed the understanding that their son would eventually be targeted because of the intersection of their race and gender, a concept captured by CRT's intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1998). This current understanding is undoubtedly shaped by their experiences as adolescents, which were marked by multiple attacks on Black males like Michael Griffith and Yusuf Hawkins. What becomes evident from these parents' fears for their teenaged boys is the weight of the imprint of the previous historical period on their lives and the ways in which they reside at the intersection of their history and biography. Their current racial attitudes are very strongly informed by their experiences. However, the world in which their adolescent sons are growing up is slightly different from the world in which they came of age.

To begin to understand the difference between the world in which these parents grew up and the world in which they find themselves raising adolescent sons it is important to consider that the hip-hop generation was "the first generation of African Americans to come of age outside the confines of legal segregation" (Kitwana, 2002, p.

13). The reality of this hard to believe fact is apparent in Kevin' recollection of the race riots that plagued his school during his adolescence as students of color were being bussed in to his predominantly white high school from different parts of the five boroughs. It is also evident when Ray says, "I've worked in the corporate world for a little bit, seen more white people than I've really ever seen growing up." The experiences of these two men reflect the generally segregated nature of the lives of members of the hip-hop generation and the gradual process of gaining access to spaces once closed off to African Americans. For the most part, the experience of many of the participants in this study is captured by Cherise Harris' (2013) study of middle class African Americans.

Harris (2013) refers to the cohort of middle class Blacks, which became highly visible during President Jimmy Carter's presidency, in the late 1970's and early 1980's as "the first generation" (Harris, 2013, p.xii). According to Harris they were the "first sizable generation of middle class Blacks" (Harris, 2013, p.xii) The parents of most of the participants in this study were likely members of this "first generation". This "first generation" mainly had lower middle class occupations; They were teachers and firefighters (Patillo-McKoy as cited in Harris, 2013, p.xxi). Needless to say, their experience was very different from that of their white middle class peers. This cohort would integrate many white neighborhoods and workspaces, while maintaining close ties to the Black lower class (Feagin Sikes 1994; Patillo McKoy, 1999).

The "second generation", or hip-hop generation, was born sometime between 1965 and 1984 and benefited from their parents' upward mobility (Harris, 2013, p.xiii). The participants in this study are all members of this "second generation". Harris aptly names this cohort the Cosby Cohort after 'The Cosby show', which coincided with the

lives of the members of this generation and served as a representation, albeit an unrealistic one for many, of the lives of middle class Blacks (Indeed, a picture of the cast of the Cosby show was included in the photo elicitation interviews). Harris reports that members of this cohort grew up in predominantly white neighborhoods that their parents had integrated. They also attended predominantly white schools.

This cohort experienced extreme stress because of the isolating experiences in their predominantly white communities. In fact, in the late 90's the Center for Disease Control (1998) issued a report on the experiences of Black middle class children in middle class environments. Findings from the report revealed myriad psychological consequences for the "second generation", including an increased rate of suicide. A number of studies have been written on the transmission of cultural capital among the Black middle class with very little attention paid to the role of racism in the lives of the "second generation" or their parents' (the "first generation") attempts at racial socialization (Lacy, 2004; 2007; Lareau, 2003; Tatum, 1999). According to Harris, the racial socialization that the "second generation" received from the "first generation" was focused more on class and ways of maintaining class status in the face of status inconsistency. They were simultaneously black and middle class, disadvantaged and privileged, owners of two identities that were thought to be mutually exclusive (Harris, 2013, p.76; Lacy, 2007). Thus, race was often discussed in terms of being an obstacle for middle class blacks, a stone to be avoided in the path towards upward mobility.

The children of members of this "second generation" or hip-hop generation have benefitted from the achievements of their parents in much the same way that their parents benefitted from the gains made by those who came before them. Many have continued to



integrate schools and neighborhoods, somewhat unaware of and unburdened by the atmosphere that initially surrounded integration efforts. This lack of awareness worries many of the parents, who, as will be explored in the next chapter, feel that their sons do not adequately appreciate the very real and continued threat of racism. However, it has become increasingly clear to their parents that while they have been seemingly granted access to certain spaces, including neighborhoods and schools, they are very much precluded from enjoying the benefits of this access. This is clear in Brandy's observation that she should be able to tell her sons to go to the police for help but she can't because they are not likely to protect her Black son. It is also apparent in the way that Kevin must prepare his sons for an encounter with the police when they are headed to the Target Center. In the following chapter, I explore the way that these parents are navigating the tension between their past experiences, their understanding of racism, and the multiple realities that now shape their sons' experience.

## Chapter 5

### Parents prepare their sons for discrimination

“I think it’s very important for black kids to be exposed to this”- Sabine, a mother of a 12-year-old and 14-year old son

“You see he’s not big. I don’t want him to carry that big-ass bag, by himself. What I try to do, I do try to pick him up in the car on Saturday. So at least he’s only carrying that thing one way. I could do it for him, but I don’t do it for him because I’ve seen what kind of men those little boys grow up to be, and it’s not good. And you want to protect your sons, but you gotta make them tough. They gotta be tough, because they can’t be a black man in America, and not be tough. This country will eat you, it’ll eat you up easy. And use your bones for a toothpick...The country will tear you up.”

-Casey

We were sitting at Casey’s living room table when I asked her to help me understand what it means to have two Black adolescent sons. Her younger son, aged 13, sat at the table with us, pretending to do his homework and her eldest son was behind us on a couch. Secretly, he was reading a Manga comic book and tracing his favorite characters. Her young daughter would eventually make her way to the table as well, standing behind her brother, waiting to hear her mother’s response to my question. In Casey’s response she spoke, specifically, about her younger son. He attends a Elite Prep on Saturday mornings. His book bag is comically big and heavy and he struggles to carry it on his small pre-pubescent frame. For Casey, this book bag is more than a knapsack

filled with school supplies; it is a metaphor for the unique trials her son will face as he matures into a man. She would carry his book bag but she makes a conscious effort not to do so to toughen him up for the loads that he will have to carry in the future as a Black man. While she wants to protect and baby her son she feels that it would be detrimental to do so in a society that requires a particular strength from Black males. Her son's book bag is full of textbooks and binders now but Casey knows that his current load cannot compare to the very heavy load of Black misandry that he must learn to walk with if he is to survive in America. Casey's belief that Black boys will encounter obstacles simply because of who they are and that they require a unique set of competencies to survive in America captures the overarching theme of this chapter.

In chapter four, I explored the messages participants received when they were children and their recollection of the progress made on issues pertaining to racism during their lifetime using the framework provided by Brown and Lesane-Brown (2006). The authors assert the messages that families communicate to their children about race and racism are the result of three factors. First, parents consider the messages that they heard about discrimination and the applicability of those messages to their current experience with or views of racism. Second, they consider the progress made in addressing issues of racial inequality during their lifetime. Third, parents examine the racial etiquette of the period in which their children are being raised. This chapter delves into this final factor: parents' assessment of the perceived racialized codes, customs, and behaviors required of their sons today.

Throughout my analysis of the interview data, several phrases in parents' responses emerged, reflecting the three major themes in their experience of preparing

their boys for discrimination: *You're already targeted, survival skills, and they're growin' up differently.* The phrase *you're already targeted*, which first came out of a comment made by Brandy, a mother of three adolescent boys, captures the sentiment among parents that their sons are automatically criminalized and singled out because of their gender and skin color. Unfortunately the phrase was not used figuratively. These mothers and fathers contended daily with the grim reality that their sons might be shot and killed. As a result, parents' shared the realization that they needed to teach their sons *survival skills*. *Survival skills* included conveying discrete behaviors for interacting with the police and navigating public spaces in light of their race. Additionally "strategies of resistance"—namely, "lessons aimed at developing character, morals, and values, as well as lessons in caution, suspicion, and at times the judicious use of self-silencing to control race related emotions like anger, frustration, and fear", were understood to be a part of the "survival skills" that these boys needed (Ward, 2000, p.54).

While parents believed that their sons must be prepared to face inevitable adversity as a result of their race and gender they also struggled with whether, when, and how to do this. They recognized that their sons were growing up during a time quite different from the period in which they came of age. These young men were going to diverse schools where they were comfortably ensconced in the dangerously soothing rhetoric of colorblindness and post-racial supremacy. This sentiment is captured by the phrase *they're growin' up differently*. This phrase, which appeared in Sabine's articulation of the tension between wanting to prepare her 12-year-old son for encounters with racism and wanting to let him hang on to a worldview in which race is seemingly irrelevant echoed throughout parents' description of the difficulty of having to prepare

their sons for bias and discrimination. I stay close to parents' words and these definitions in hopes of capturing the strength and vulnerability that they displayed in sharing their stories with me.

## **Findings**

### **You're already targeted**

Being a Black man, Jared did not hesitate to explain how he thought the larger community sees Black boys. "Black boys are perceived to be the embodiment of the negative aspects that are represented of the black community...which saddens me. I don't carry that at the forefront, but I don't forget that either". When he learned that his, now 15-year-old, son was going to be born, these ever present and simultaneously latent thoughts quickly moved to the forefront of his mind. "I often think about how I was terrified when I was going to have my first child and then I found out it was a boy as well, I was just...I was scared of...The world that we live in, there's just so much stuff and to become a parent [of] a young black male... ." He trailed off and looked down. He was quiet for a few minutes before starting up again. "I was scared about what his future would be and the challenges that come with that, things he would face and have to overcome", he said. "So it wasn't a general fear, it was just a specific fear. It wasn't just, 'Oh, I'm having a child'. It was something extra...because of things that I had experienced as well and not wanting him to have that. I've talked to other parents and they've had that experience. He paused and looked away from me. "But my fear is also one of... I don't want him to feel limited; I don't want to fail him as a parent." While many other parents might have the luxury of simply being anxious about a new addition to their home and the lifestyle change that a tiny roommate will require, Jared's anxiety went

beyond new parent jitters. It was related to the tension between knowing and wanting to prepare his son for the future experiences and obstacles that he would have as a Black male and not wanting his son not to feel constrained by race.

During his previous interview, he described many of the indignities that he had experienced as a child, teenager, and young adult—being called a nigger, being arrested by the police. I recalled the way that he lowered his voice during that interview when we came to the subject of his arrest. While he understood that he would soon have to discuss the realities of Black manhood with his son, he was trying to shelter him for as long as possible. Jared’s fear about his son’s experience in an anti-black world and the importance of preparing him for certain inevitable experiences, was complicated by the realization that telling his son about what he might face could limit his son’s potential and hinder his growth as an individual. Of course, all parents want to make sure that they do not fail their children. However, Jared’s fear of failure reflects the unique quagmire that is Black parenthood. While he wants his child to experience the world as one with infinite possibilities, he recognizes that he must also prepare his son for potentially limiting reality of racism.

Brandy echoed Jared’s fear. Speaking about her family, she said, “we’ve been blessed with three boys. And with those three boys...there’s a lot of fear behind raising them... and I don’t care what part of the country you live in, same fear. They’re black men, to them, to us boys...” Again, fear features in her response. Brandy believes that Black parents all over the country experience this fear. At the end of her response she says that while she still sees her sons as boys, society will see them as men. Implied in this last sentence is the reality that her boys will be treated as men and not given the courtesies,

such as leniency, that are often extended to those who are perceived to be young children. Brandy's sentiment reappeared through out parents' explanations of their particular and current fears for their young sons. While some parents still saw their sons as little boys they were quickly coming to terms with the harsh reality that others would not treat them as such. For all of the parents, their son's adolescence loomed before them, a harbinger of things to come.

Referring to her 12-year-old son Malachi, Claudine explained, "I think he's still being treated like a child. But the time passes, I think, earlier for young black boys and young black people in general. As young black people they have to be aware of what's going on or how society views them." For Claudine, Malachi still has some time left to be and be treated as a child. However she, like Goff et. al, (2004) knows that like many Black boys, his childhood will be shortened early and abruptly. For this reason, Claudine believes that "young black people" must be taught how discern how they are being seen by others. Unlike Claudine, Erica did not believe that her son had any time left to be a child. Erica believed that childhood ended for her son three years ago. "At this age, they see him like a gangster or anything else because like after nine years old they stop looking at kids as innocent. They don't see them as innocent anymore. Well, black boys, they don't seem as innocent anymore." When I pushed Erica to explain why she believed this happened for Black boys at the age of nine she initially hesitated and then quickly provided an answer. "I don't know. Because like after nine years old, it's just like I know this from my personal experience. Like after nine years old, people like, "Oh, he's not a baby. He belongs in jail", she said. "Like any little thing, you're ready to discard this child like he's not a child anymore...He's going to experience racism and he's going to

experience prejudice like some people might clutch their purse if they see him walking down the street...” As if paraphrasing Goff’s (2014) findings on the way that African American boys are viewed by police officers and the broader society after nine years old, Erica matter-of-factly states that her slight framed, not yet five foot tall, son is probably seen by others as a gangster who belongs in jail. Ejected from innocence, she knows that Naseer will be subject to microaggressions by those who perceive him to be a predator.

Julia felt similarly about her 12-year-old son, Denzel. She now expected that because of the way that he looks and the fact that he is traveling far from home, he would have certain encounters. “He's no longer little Denzel who's just trying to grow up. He's traveling the subway by himself now. He may run in to cops, albeit when the cop stops, do you resist?”, she asked. “Or is he just gonna walk away? Do you stop and at the professional center? And with all these shooting of unarmed black men, I realized that, "Wow!" Julia believed that since Denzel is growing, it was likely that police might stop him. Furthermore, she began to identify with the shootings of unarmed Black men because her boy is becoming a Black man. She was still trying to figure out how Denzel should react in a situation where he encounters the police. The problem, for Julia and many of the other parents, was that the very people who were supposed to protect him from harm could be the ones to cause it.

Recognizing the hyper visibility that would come along with puberty for their sons, parents took great lengths to communicate to them their position in the racial hierarchy and the very different set of standards that applied to them. Eric, explained that he often talked to his sons about knowing their place. “In America... Know your position. You basically don't have the same... You have to understand that you're not the same and



that you have certain things against you. This is what I want to get into their heads, basically.” For Eric, it was important that his boys know that they were, in fact, different from everyone else. This difference would be imposed on them. Not even high status could exempt his sons from being treated differently “I don't care where you go, who you are, as far as if you're, again, a physician or whoever, if you're from Stanford, if you're from Yale, you're from Harvard, what I'm trying to say, the standard is still not equal.” Consequently, Eric felt that his sons would have to know and practice the dispositions required of their low caste like position. This is my take, and this is why I say it's important for him to know his position in society... And so, you have to act accordingly.

During this portion of the interview, Eric had just finished looking at a picture of Henry Louis Gates Jr. being arrested in front of his own house. In 2009, after returning to Cambridge from a trip, the Harvard Professor found that his front door was jammed and attempted to force the door open. While he was working on the door, his neighbor called the police and reported that she saw two black men trying to force their way into a house. The second black man was Gates' driver. While the accounts of the officer and Gates differ, Gates was arrested in front of his home after yelling at the officer. Gates felt that he had been treated this way because of his race. Putting the picture of Gates down, Eric began to speak broadly and then related the picture to his sons. For Eric, his sons do not only have to understand their place in the racial hierarchy. They must also understand the requisite behaviors that come with their position in that hierarchy. Gates, Jr. had not acted “accordingly.” He wrongly assumed that the unwritten rules of etiquette assigned to him as a Black man did not apply to him because he was a Harvard professor. It was most important to Eric that his sons understand that they will be judged by a different standard,

that they do not have the same rights as others, and that they will not ever be treated, in America, as equals.

Several of the parents echoed the notion that their sons would be held to a different standard. Even when dealing with quotidian activities, parents made sure that their sons understood that they would always be treated differently from their peers.

When Marisa's 12-year-old son asks, "Can I go to such and such birthday party?", the first thing she thinks about is his skin color. "I always tell him I have to know the person real well for years before going. Because if anything... I want to tell you the same thing I tell him, because if anything goes down, like anything bad happens, you're going to be blamed for it...cause he's a black boy". Marisa's idea that her son will be singled out and blamed for things that he has not done simply because he is Black is echoed by Julia and Casey. They are mothers of 12-year-old boys as well. Preparing her son to go to the store, Julia explains that she has explain to her son, "when you're black...if you go in a store...And they stole something, probably they're gonna see...it's you because of the color of your skin. Because you're black, you're seen as you're a thug, you're criminal." Like Marisa, Julia tells her son to be expected to be singled out and wrongly assumed to be a criminal even if he is not actually responsible for a crime.

This notion of being unfairly singled out also appears in Casey's reasoning for ordering her sons not to play in the grassy area in front of the building. "I don't let my kids play on the grass. In the spring we get landscaping here", she said. "Why?... Because you ain't gonna be the Black kid that's on the grass. You know? The sign says "keep off the grass" but the white people let their kids... flip all over it and whatever, and the minute my son goes on the grass, somebody's gonna say something to him: 'Get your ass

off the grass.” She advises her son to avoid the grassy area altogether. “Don't even be on there so nobody has to say anything to you.” Casey felt that the white children would get away with disregarding the sign that advised residents to refrain from playing in the grass. She also believed that as soon as her Black sons touched the grass they would be reprimanded. She advises her sons to simply stay to avoid any confrontation that she expects will occur. Many parents, hyperaware of the likelihood that their son will always be singled out in a negative fashion described the way that they chose to compensate for this unfortunate reality.

Michael and Marisa, both parents to 12-year-old boys, talked about hypothetical and actual ways that they tried to mitigate the impact of their son's race and lessen the possibility that they would be singled out. Michael believed that his son must carry himself a “certain way”, reminding me of Brent Staples' (1986) article on '*Black men in public spaces*', where he described the purposeful way in which he carried himself as a young man so that white women would not fear him. While in graduate school at the University of Chicago, Staples became “familiar with the language of fear”, the subtle indications that someone was afraid of him— backward glances, quickened footsteps, people running at the sight of him or crossing the street to walk on an opposite sidewalk, and drivers locking their car doors when he walked past them (p.1). Slowly he understood “the unwieldy inheritance” that had been saved for him, his “ability to alter public spaces in ugly ways” and, consequently, the constant “possibility of death” (p.1). Eventually he learned to employ tactics that would make him seem less frightening to the public. Among them was his intentional whistling of recognizable melodies from composers like Beethoven and Vivaldi.

Like Staples, Michael thought it important to take extra steps to make sure that people in the neighborhood of his son's school were familiar with him. He explained what he often did for his son when he picked him up from school. "When I go to up to Collegiate, I go to the stores, make sure they know who he is and that he attends this school...I do that, without telling him, by the way." He went to all of the stores in the school's vicinity. "I go to the local, like pizza store, the bookstores. I carry my son there. I purchase things in the neighborhood, with him...So that they'll know." He wasn't completely certain that his tactics were working. "Sometimes with a few black customers, I believe that they are paying attention. I think they do remember who he is." However, he knew that it was something that he had to try in order to ensure his son's safety. "That's something I did on my own because sometimes, you know, my son doesn't have a cellphone, by the way. So, I always told him if he's in trouble, just run into one of these stores. But now, when he runs into those stores, they got to know you...but I don't tell him", he explained. "Sometimes when I pick him up from school, I patronize these stores. So, they see him walking with me, sometimes his Collegiate friends come into the stores at the same time. And well, that's something that I do. I don't think he understands why I do it, but that's one of the reasons that I do it." His actions were part of a purposeful campaign to control the way that others saw his son. "He has to be visible, things that he's familiar with, and the people in the surrounding are familiar with him...Yeah, we're visible."

Michael purposely patronized stores in the area where his son goes to school. He did this so that his son would be protected if he ran into one of the stores because he is being pursued. He also did this to make sure that people saw and recognized his son.

Black boys are often hypervisible because of the negative stereotypes that people have about them and the assumptions that they make because of those stereotypes. Michael hoped to counter this negative hypervisibility by making sure that he managed the way that his son is seen. Marisa echoed the importance of making sure that Black boys are seen and that people are familiar with them after she looked at a picture of Trayvon Martin:

If my son was to visit his father in a gated community in Florida...where he himself had not lived... I will send a letter to the administration, to the neighborhood association, to every fucking body that can have a say over that tiny property. And I will make sure that [they know] he is coming, and I'll make sure they acknowledge him, and I'll make sure I will enclose a picture of him. And that will make sure that we have saved his life. It's just like that little thing is saying I'm watching you. I'm watching you. I know the way you operate so I'm watching you and I have all your names. I have you all by the tail, you better watch out because the week he is there, I'm gonna be all over you, all the time.

Again, like Michael, Marisa placed importance on making sure that people are comfortable with her son's presence. They needed to know that he was on the premises. Implied in her comment was the belief that if Trayvon Martin's parents had done the same thing, their son might be alive. Furthermore, embedded in the comments that Michael and Marisa make is the knowledge that if they did not make sure that people recognized their son, they would suffer the treatment, whether that be false accusations and death, that seems to be reserved for all adolescent Black boys, irrespective of who they are as an individual.

Ultimately, despite coming to terms with the fact that their boys would no longer be seen or treated as children, taking pains to make their sons understand that they would always be held to a different standard, and attempting to mitigate these harsh realities, parents understood that their sons could not be completely protected because they were, and always would be, targets for harassment and assault. Artesia made this clear while she looked at a picture of Sean Bell, a young man who was slain by police in 2006:

**A:** Well that's the guy that was... Is that the one that... He got shot, going to his car or something?

**R:** Yeah it was the night before his wedding. He was at his bachelor party.

**A:** Yeah the night before his wedding...here in New York. He was at a strip club and coming out of the strip club... Here it is...for his bachelor party.

**R:** Yeah.

**A:** Here it is.

**R:** What do you mean when you say here it is?

**A:** [Long pause] It is unfortunate. He wasn't doing anything...and this what I try to tell my boys because black men are endangered species.

In addition to recalling the incident, Artesia said 'here it is'. That *it* to which she referred implies recurring phenomena of which this picture represents a single incident among many. That *it* is the extrajudicial killing of young Black males. Upon looking at the same picture, Claudine said:

I went to high school in St. Albans and I... The area where he was killed is in that area. See, these are the things that make me fear for Malachi. These are the...

These are extreme, but then there are a lot other less extreme situations that he can encounter too. But this is what makes me fear for him, stories like that.

For both Artesia and Claudine, incidents like the death of Sean Bell resonated deeply for them. These were not distant events outside of the realm of possibility. These were events that made them fear for their sons and realize that death walks with their sons at all times.

Bobbi echoed a similar understanding when she stated, “I mean I am just having two black sons and so, I am terrified and I am like, ‘You guys are walking targets’. This idea that their sons are walking targets reappeared in many parents’ comments. For example, whenever her son is going out Brandy makes sure that he understands that there is a permanent target on his body because of his race and gender:

**M:** You're already targeted...you're black. You're a male. That's two strikes. And so, don't give them a reason to say anything to you. Sometimes, they'll still stop you, but it's less of a chance if you are just going about your merry little way, and you don't have this look about you.

**R:** And what is the look?

**M:** You know. I mean, you got your pants sagging. You're chilling on a corner with a whole group of dudes, they're gonna stop you. They're going to look twice at you...You don't wanna draw the attention to you. You already got attention that's gonna be drawn to you, but if they're gonna take a second look, it's because you're drawing more attention to you. Not always the case, but often enough it happens that way. Yeah. And so, you have to make sure that, Dylan, when you're with your nine dudes and all your little black boys, going hanging out downtown, you're not acting like fools. Yeah, just don't be like that. You're not rowdy in the

street and hanging off the scaffolds. And stuff like that. Like, Y'all are just a bunch of nice kids hanging out together.

Like Michael, Brandy wanted her son to carry his self a certain way, to avoid behaviors that would call attention to him and attract the police. Similarly Claudine believed that Black men were unfairly targeted in America. When I asked her to tell me about her hopes and dreams for her 12-year-old son Malachi, Claudine said:

**C:** Oh, gosh...My hopes and dreams, number one, and this really is what comes to mind first, is that he stays safe, okay, and that he's able to navigate through life without encountering any adversity, that would threaten his life, or his state of mind.

**R:** Why does that come to mind immediately?

**C:** That comes to mind immediately because I believe that black males are targeted in this society, and that if a young black male... and if they are not taught how to move in this society, which is still a very racist society, they will stumble upon adversity. They can very well end up in prison.

While many parents hope that their sons will find success in school and life, Claudine's first hope is that Malachi is able to navigate a racist society successful and avoid threats to his life. In the comments that Artesia, Brandy, and Claudine shared, they referred vaguely to individuals and institutions that unfairly single out Black males. Other parents soon began to identify the specific threats to their sons' lives—encountering suspicious and armed civilians, the police, and the criminal justice system—and the skills they thought their sons should have to combat this threat.



## Survival Skills

When I asked them to tell me what they felt their sons needed know as young black boys, parents voiced that their sons would have to learn certain skills to minimize their risk of death. A major skill that they wanted their boys to master was knowing how to do anything and everything to make sure that they walked away from encounters with armed individuals, alive. Referring to Trayvon Martin as an example of the horrible things that could potentially happen to her 15-year-old, Renee thought about how that situation might have turned out differently:

I don't know if he tried to deescalate the situation, it may have turned out the same way. But the idea is to increase the likelihood that...to swing...The odds are already against you, once that confrontation happens, the odds are already against you as the black male...The unarmed black male in that situation right? But you wanna do what you can to keep as much of the odds on...That you will come out alive as much as possible. But it is hard to say exactly how to do that.

In her short comment, Renee used the word 'odds' three times. She also used the word 'possible' in mentioning that Black males should do everything that they could in order to ensure that they came out of situations, like the one Trayvon faced, alive. The repeated use of the word 'odds' and the word 'possible' points to an understanding that keeping Black boys safe is a game of chance in which the odds are stacked against them. Renee said that even if Trayvon had tried to "deescalate" the conflict between him and George Zimmerman there was the chance that the outcome would have been the same. Implicit in her comment is an understanding that even if Black boys do everything that they can to make sure that they come out of a situation alive, there aren't any guarantees.

Sabine echoed the same sentiment when talking about Trayvon Martin. She and her sons:

Talked a lot about the case, the outcome of the case. It was kinda hurtful to them to know that Zimmerman was released and I think they felt for the family. We just talked about like, "Well, you know, they don't wear hoodies". They don't wear baseball caps and stuff like that. I'm not gonna lie. They have some hoody jackets but even when they were putting their hoods on I would say, "Well don't put your hood on 'cause you know what happens." And I'm like, "Okay, if you're with me it's fine but if you're on your own, don't put your hoody on." If we step out of the car and go in the store I'll say, "Take your hoody off, take your hat off"... Some people say, "Dress how you want. Live how you want." But you have to be proactive at the same time. It doesn't really matter how you dress I know but if you can avoid something you try to avoid it.

Like Renee, Sabine used Trayvon Martin as an example. She urged her sons to abstain from wearing hoodies in public. She spoke as if Trayvon's death was a result of the fact that he was wearing a hoody. However, she knows that the avoiding hoodies is not the solution. It is a stopgap measure that allows her to hold on to the illusion that these kinds of situations can be prevented if the right steps are taken and she is "proactive". However in the end she made it clear that she knows that she doesn't have control over what happens to her sons and that it is not the absence of a hoody or a hat that is going to save them. She knows that how they dress has little impact on what happens to them but she has to do all that is in her power. Controlling what the boys wear is something that she can do. Despite this knowledge, parents still taught their sons other skills that might

increase the probability that they walked away from encounters like the one that Trayvon, and countless others, have faced, alive. Among them was mastering the management of the Black adolescent male body.

Looking at a picture of Trayvon Martin, Claudine shook her head in silence for a few seconds before speaking. “Again, this boy was walking while black with a phone, and a soda, and candy in his hands, and he was such a threat to this fool that he had to be murdered. And then, it was covered up for a while. It's just horrible. Horrible. Another reason why I try to teach Malachi how to move... .” When I asked her what she meant when she said that she was trying “to teach Malachi how to move” she explained that he had to be, “Taught how to behave. For example, I have begun teaching Malachi things. When we go into stores, as a little kid, you want to touch things. I let him know, "Listen, you're a big boy, when you go into stores, understand that somebody's watching, okay every move, by the very fact that you are a black person" she said. "They're watching me, and they're watching you. They have cameras. Somebody could be sitting in the back. In most stores, there's surveillance, and you have to be careful about touching things. Sometimes, they will assume that you're walking in there to steal or they will assume that you might have stolen something even if they didn't see you....” She made it clear to Malachi that he wouldn't only be watched in stores. He would be watched everywhere. She told him, “that extends to just walking through the streets and so forth. I just want him to really, really get it in his head that he has to be careful about how he moves, you know?”

In order for Malachi to fully understand how he would have to move in society, he would have “to learn to use that sixth sense.” Learning to use this sense would mean

mastering additional skills. Claudine explained, “It's so important to multi-task, and to see beyond what's in front of you. To be able to interpret and analyze. All of those skills are so important regarding surviving in this... in terms of surviving in this country, and in this world. As a black person... .” Claudine explained that having this skill did not recently become important “because this type of thing has happened countless times, starting with... Not starting with, but you can go as far back as Emmett Till.” ...Consequently she believed that Black boys would “have to develop a sixth sense in terms of not only using all of their senses, but using that other sense, the third eye, in just really, whatever situation you're in.” While she focused on Black boys for most of her answer, she also made clear that this wasn't a skill set particular to them. “I think this is something we have to develop as people living through... historically living in this country. We have to analyze situations the minute we step into them. Maybe, before we stepped into them and decide how are we going to move around these people?”, she said. Returning to the longevity of the practice of developing an understanding of how to manage one's body, Claudine asserted that even newly freed Black people had to have a thorough understanding of how to navigate their bodies through certain spaces. “When you're going into town, as a young black boy right after emancipation, you have to really analyze people, size them up, size up situations and decide how am I going to move so I can get out of here alive ”, she said. “It's crazy, but it's real and it's still real today. Because of the situations like Trayvon Martin and so many others, Abner Louima, there's a whole list of names that we can continue to recite.”

For Claudine, teaching Malachi “how to move” means teaching him that he is only allowed to move about in certain ways in particular spaces because of his race. The

spaces that he must navigate are both physical and mental. His Black body makes him a bull in the china shop of our precariously arranged and tenuous racialized social structure. Often, she tells him that he must not touch or disrupt any of the objects in the store because it will be assumed that he is stealing. He must also maneuver carefully around the stereotypes that exist in the minds of shopkeepers.

Surveillance, or the idea that Black boys are being watched, is captured both by Claudine's mention of the cameras in the store and her belief that Black boys must develop a third eye. Just as the cameras in the store are able to see and capture images that the eye alone cannot, a third eye allows for seeing beyond what the eyes are normally able to see. The third eye is a kind of second sight, to borrow a phrase from Dubois (1903) that allows Black people to be able to know when they are being watched and to watch those who are watching them. In essence, Black boys are living in a panopticon. Keeping in mind that they are always being watched, Black boys must learn to move and act accordingly. If not, they face dire consequences. Claudine placed the importance of the need for and development of this extra sensory sense in historical context. She mentioned Emancipation, Emmett Till and Trayvon Martin to demonstrate how crucial it is for Black boys, past and present, to develop this third eye, or ability to carefully read situations so that they can avoid becoming casualties of terrorism that has long marked the life of Black men and boys.

Ray also touched on the importance of teaching boys how to control their bodies when he recalled an incident involving his 17-year-old. After a night out, his son Dylan arrived home out of breath. He told his Dad that he had run home from the train station to the house so that he would not be penalized for missing his curfew. His father explained

to him, “Next time you need to leave earlier. You can't be running from the train. You can't be running in the damn street like that...I would rather you not do that shit than to have you die...You just can't do it... .” Again, as with Claudine, Ray let his son know that there are things that he simply cannot do because of who he is. While his son did what most children would do so that their curfew privileges are not revoked, Dylan is reminded that he is not like most children. For him, his father explained, running in the street at night is a lethal activity. As in the case of Malachi, Ray recognized that his son is always being watched and that the assumption that Dylan is a criminal would be made if he is seen running in the street. Similarly, Claudine and Ray spoke generally about how important it is for their sons to know how to manage their bodies. However, when it came to discussing interactions with police officers parents shared that they had taught their sons concrete and specific rules. These rules, which were astonishingly consistent across their responses, involved knowing how, when, and whether to move specific parts of their bodies. Parents’ descriptions of what they tell their sons to do are truly lessons in “how to move”.

### **Police interaction**

When advising their sons on what to do if the police stop them, parents offered two pieces of advice. First, they instructed their boys on what to do with their hands. Second, they made sure that their sons carried identification at all times. Both instructions are reminiscent of Foucault’s (1975) *Discipline and Punish*, in which he detailed ways to discipline and dominate certain bodies. Foucault’s writing on ways to use space, time, observation, and documentation to control people, is useful to understanding the expectations and restrictions placed, past and present, on Black bodies. One way to

discipline the Black body is to restrict and control its movement in time and space. An example of the use of time to discipline exists in the phenomenon of “sundown towns” or geographic spaces that were off limits to Black people after a certain time. If they were found in a “sundown town” after the sunset, they were liable to harm or worse. Another way in which time can be used to discipline a body is by requiring the body to perform a set of actions or act in a particular fashion during a fixed amount of time. This is broadly seen in the schedules and routines that are set in schools and prisons, places where the Black body is often seen as being out of control. A specific example pertaining to the control of the movement the Black body, and relevant to this current study, is apparent in how quickly police officers expect Black men to submit when stopped. As parents revealed, it is important that their sons understand that there are times of day that are particularly perilous for them and minimize the amount of time they spend interacting with police officers by following a particular code of conduct.

With regards to using space to discipline Black bodies we can return to the era of the “sundown town”. In addition to being banned from certain towns at a particular time, Black people were also banned from even setting foot in certain spaces. This includes particular geographic areas and many institutions. Another way that space is used as a site of discipline is in the way that movement of the body or parts of the body can be restricted or regimented. In the accounts below, parents order their children to arrange their body or parts of their body in specific ways so that they are not punished. Both forms of discipline, restrict movement in time and space, were apparent in the comments that Kevin, Ray, and Sabine made.

Kevin, recalled an incident with the police that occurred when he was living in Minnesota with his now adult son:

As a teenage boy Kyle went out with Miles and his older brother. [I asked], ‘how are you guys getting to the target center?’ [He said], ‘well, we're gonna drive’. I said, ‘Kyle, please listen to me. For whatever reason if the cops pull you guys over...make sure everybody's hands are where they can see them. Please make sure’. And as God is my witness they got pulled over. And I said, ‘what did you do with your hands?’ And he said, ‘I had them out Daddy where they can see my hands.’...those are the rights of passage that we have to do.

Kevin instructed his son to make sure that his hands are seen. That is to say, they must be within the police officer’s line of sight. In this instance movement of the hands was restricted to where they can be seen from an officer’s point of view. The young men were not at liberty to place their hands wherever they wanted. Kevin, aware of the way that the boys would be expected to move in space and time, offered advice that reflected an understanding of the fact that they would have to act instinctively and move quickly. Failure to place their hands appropriately could have had fatal results. Offering the same advice on what to do during an encounter with the police in a succinct fashion, Ray explained that he tells his three sons, “Don't reach for shit. Keep your hands in plain sight.”

Sabine’s comments to her sons moved beyond what they should do with hands. In addition to offering advice similar to that offered by Kevin and Ray, Sabine also told her boys what to do with other parts of their bodies:



I know they don't like when you move your hands around a lot. So, if you're driving you keep your hands on the steering wheel. If you're talking, you don't move your hand around. If they ask you questions you don't be... You speak to them articulately, you answer the questions, you don't try to mouth off, and stuff like that, and try to be respectful...you just have to play the game. You can't yell, can't argue, you have to speak respectfully, and answer whatever, and don't try to agitate them.

Sabine said that she tells her sons to manage their voices in addition to managing their hands. She makes it clear that they should restrict the movement of their hands and that it is especially important to do so when they are talking. They should not be talking and moving their hands at the same time; this would mean that they were occupying more space than they are allowed. Their voices are to be carefully regulated in terms of tone and they should make sure that they are speaking in a way that is acceptable to the officers. If we think about her sons' voices strictly in terms of vibrations, we see that their movement is still being restricted.

Vocal chords vibrate faster at higher frequencies when one feels extreme anger and fear. Producing higher pitches is most often associated with the emotions and behavior that Sabine warns against—anger, yelling, and arguing (Sauter, Eisner, Calder & Scott, 2010). Sabine requires that the boys remain respectful, answer questions with poise and not “mouth off”. Indeed lower vocal pitches, which are seen as an indication of intelligence and trustworthiness, occur when vocal chords vibrate slower and tend to be favored by the general public (Tigue, Borak, O'Connor, Schandl, & Feinberg, 2012). Thus in order for her sons to make it through a police encounter they must monitor their

voices, making sure that they speak at lower pitches which require slower vibrations. As with their hands and other parts of their body, the movement of their vocal chords must also be managed. Additionally, while it is imperative that these boys show that they are moving quickly when they are commanded by police officers, they must simultaneously move slowly to ensure that they do not agitate the officers or make them nervous.

Though seemingly arbitrary, this particular set of rules was rattled off by every parent. It was as if they had all received the same parenting manual. At the end of an interview, John explained that he told his son a number of things about how to handle himself and his body. “Yeah I tell him don’t wear your pants down”, he said. “Dress appropriately. When somebody asks you a question, just answer to the best of your ability. Don’t add anything. Don’t try to get angry...” The commonalities across parents’ descriptions suggest that they were coming to similar conclusions about the racial terrain that their sons had to navigate.

Another mode of disciplining the body is through the observation, documentation, and classification of bodies. The main mechanism for this tactic is the identification card (Foucault, 1975, p.287). In some parents’ advice to their sons, carrying identification was most important. Michael explained to his son:

If you're stopped by a police officer, you present your ID, and then you just keep moving. Fortunately for us, he hasn't been stopped and frisked by any police officer. Well, I dread the day that it happens, because I know it would have a bad impact on him. And then how we deal with it, I mean...

While Michael communicates the importance of carrying an ID, he also understands that this measure will not necessarily protect his son from the inevitable harassment that awaits him. Kevin expressed a similar sentiment:

I always tell my kids, 'You better make sure you have your wallet with ID' cause it's... I guess a lot of people walk around without ID, anyone ever stops you like a cop or something, always co-operate with them, so just teaching them survival skills around like what you do when something happens.

Kevin's comment helps us to understand that the ID card is an indication of compliance with police officers, an unspoken and understood rule for young Black boys and men. If this rule is not followed there are clear and immediate consequences that all of the parents seemed to know about. This became apparent when Brandy explained why she tells her boys to carry identification:

So we tell him to always have your identification on you. Like those sort of things. Why do you do... Because you get arrested if you don't have your identification. If they do a sweep and they just... Or if they just come to you and say, "Let me see your ID," and you don't have it, they arrest you. This started from back in the '80s when there was a lot drug dealing going on. They will arrest you and ask questions later...

In parents' words to their sons, there is evidence of a tacit understanding of the requirements that exist for them. The I.D. card works as a system of classification and documentation turning Black boys into nameless objects and requiring a stifling of a Black male subjectivity. Both the I.D. card and the way that parents tell their sons to move certain parts of their body demonstrate the way that Black boys must ask

permission to move in certain ways. They are “docile bodies”, monitored, controlled, and subjugated without coercion or objection to the enforced code of discipline (Foucault, 1975, p.138). Furthermore, their Black body is site for the re-enactment of white supremacist tropes: management, control, and punishment. As these boys come to know themselves as dominated and managed, those participating in the project of white supremacy come to know themselves as dominating and free. These are modern day race-making practices. They make clear that Black boys are predatory, dangerous, unmanageable, and inherently criminal. As Black maleness and criminality become intertwined, Black males are seen as different and separate from mainstream society. They are denied access to the rights and privileges of whiteness. They are raced. Despite their compliance and their efforts to make sure that their sons understand the code of conduct, parents always know that providing their sons with these survival skills does not necessarily ensure their survival.

Sabine recognized the difficulty of providing her boys with survival skills when she knows that these skills do not guarantee her son’s safety:

So no matter what you do it's tough. It's tough. You could tell them this, you could tell them that but there's no secure or concrete thing that they can do to really protect themselves. So that's the hard part. You just gotta pray.

For Sabine, her son’s safety is completely out of her hands. Renee, placed her feelings of helplessness in historical context:

**Re:** But as a parent, I wanna teach him how to increase the likelihood, that he comes out alive on the other side of whatever the situation might be.

**R:** And how do you increase the likelihood?

**Re:** By trying to deescalate whenever possible.

**R:** And what exactly does he have to do to deescalate?

**Re:** It's hard to be exact because there's so many different situations and so many different things that could happen, but I think not trying to... Not getting caught up in a back and forth with law enforcement, to say, to basically affirm that you know your rights, and that to say as little as possible, and to... To answer questions that... You don't have to answer all the questions, I feel the way you deescalate is to say and do as little as possible, in those situations. But there's going to be a... Just looking at his face, there's gonna be a natural desire within you in that moment to assert your humanity, right? And you never wanna kill that part of yourself, but you also don't want that part of yourself to take over to the point where the situation becomes more dangerous in that moment, I just feel your goal in that moment is to make it through and not be shot. I think it's sad, it shouldn't be that way but that's that way it is and I don't know any other... I don't know life any other way. I just think about Emmett Till, or all of these situations when it comes down to preserving your life you do what you have to do to survive and sometimes that might mean swallowing your pride or doing something that you know you shouldn't have to but you have to. If you want to survive you have to. But I just... I don't know life any other way for black people in America. This has always been the case.

Like Sabine, Renee shared advice with her son so that he “comes out alive” in interactions with police officers. She recognized the way that the rules of conduct that he must follow objectify him and negate his humanity. Ironically, exhibiting his humanity

may cost him his life. She expressed sadness that this is the state of things and resigned herself to this reality. For her, the uncertainties about her son's safety are part and parcel of Black life. As evidence of the long legacy of the persecution of Black boys, she mentions Emmett Till, previously mentioned by Claudine, who was murdered in August of 1955. Not only does the extrajudicial killing of Black boys have a long history. In her final sentences she lets us know that she cannot even imagine another way or a different future.

The effect of such a morbid reality on adolescent Black boys and their parents is captured by Casey's recollection of the conversation that she had with her son after the not guilty verdict was handed down by the jury in the George Zimmerman case:

**C:**I lived that. My kid was crying every single day for months...Every single day. I never saw that little kid like that...He cried every day, for months. He was talking about it in school. What was he... What is... 'Cause, that thing just broke his heart. He was just like, 'Mommy, why? I don't understand.' He just couldn't grasp it. He was like, 'What is this? I don't get it. Why?' I had no answer for him, except, 'Cause that's just how people are. We're black, we live here and if we go some place else, I can't even promise you that it will be any different. There's really nowhere for me to even take you. This is probably as good as it gets for us, as black folk. It's probably as good as it gets for us... 'That's hard to tell your kid, 'This is a reality of where we live, and... Yeah, It could be [ you] one day.' I don't think so, but it's possible. Who sets their kid up for 'maybe you're gonna get killed?' How could you do that? How could you do that? And still have a kid that's energetic and hopeful, and unafraid to tackle the world?

**R:** So, what did you tell him?

**C:** We made jokes. That's what we always do. That's how black people deal with pain. We make jokes. "Carry ketchup in your pockets kid, get over it. Buck up. You are black in America."

Casey's son was inconsolable for a long time after the verdict. He could not understand why George Zimmerman had been acquitted on all charges in the case of Trayvon Martin's murder. He wanted answers that would help him to make sense of why Zimmerman had not been charged with murder. He also wanted to understand how this had happened in the first place, how it had been allowed to happen. Casey found that her son was constantly questioning her. He very suddenly seemed to see the way that racism manifested itself in daily life. As a parent, Casey wanted to be able to provide answers to her son but she could not. She could not guarantee that something similar would not happen to him and was instead forced to tell him that this was all a part of the reality of being Black.

On top of this sense of futility and inevitability that many of the parents reported they struggled with, they also wrestled with the dilemma of choosing between maintaining their children's innocence regarding racism and contributing to their sons' loss of innocence by speaking with them about the realities of Black misandry. Jared explained the phenomenon:

And sometimes I ask him about race, but sometimes I don't particularly specifically talk about that. Like in the context of the... Central Park Five<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> In 1989 Five males, Antron McCray, Raymond, Santana, Jr., Keven Richardson, Yusef Salaam, and Kharey Wise, were tried and convicted in the case of a young white woman, Trisha Meli, who had been raped and assaulted in Central Park. Race relations were particularly strained at this time. The city was still reeling from the murder of Michael Griffith. Racially coded language, painting the teens as heartless animal

Central Park Five, we had to talk about that. It was... My son seems... The innocence of a child is so obvious in a conversation like that because he's like, 'Why would they do that to them? They didn't do that.' He doesn't understand why anybody would mistreat somebody in that way which is beautiful, but I'm like, 'That happens and you need to make sure, try and not be in that situation. And if you are in that situation, protect yourself.' I don't want them to be aloof, but I don't want to burden them with carrying who they are.

Jared's comment about his son's innocence is arresting given studies that have revealed the adultification of boys of color (Goff, 2014 ). His observation of his son's innocence presents a stark contrast to data that shows Black boys are assumed to be 4.53 years older than they actually are. Furthermore, throughout this project, I have referred to these young men as adolescents. Jared refers to his son as a child, reclaiming the courtesies that are extended to other children for his son. He describes his son's innocence as beautiful but then quickly shifts to his understanding that he still needs to make his son aware of these situations even if this knowledge is a burden for him. While Jared attempts to reclaim that innocence that is prematurely taken from Black boys, it is clear that Jared recognizes that his son doesn't really have the time or luxury to be a child.

This tension between wanting to allow Black boys to be children and understanding that racism requires that they grow up faster than their peers is apparent in

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was used by the media to villainize the boys, prosecuted them in the court of popular opinion long before their trial. At the time, Donald Trump took out \$85,000 of ads in New York's daily newspapers, asking the state to reinstate the death penalty. The young men, who all spent time in jail for the crime, were exonerated of charges when a rapist admitted to committing the crime alone. His semen was the only DNA found on the victim. The other four admitted that their false confessions were coerced. Recently, they sued the city and received a settlement.



Casey's assessment of the predicament that she must navigate as the parent of a Black boy:

C: But I felt like you can't leave your children their innocence because their innocence will make them prey. They have to be aware. I'm not saying that you put everything in their face, but they have to know what the world is that they live in if you wanna keep them safe. You're not gonna be around them every minute. Then what are you gonna do?

Again Casey's comment revealed an assumption about the innocence of Black boys, something that society tends to forget when Black adolescents are killed by police or civilians.

Zimmerman, Trayvon's killer, referred to the teen as a "real suspicious guy who looks like he's up to no good". His words had more to do with Trayvon's race and the conflation of Blackness and criminality. This was the first strike that Trayvon had against him on that fatal night and likely a tactic that would be used against boys like the sons of Casey and Jared, boys too innocent to even understand why one person would harm another or comprehend the way that people would see them (Staats, 2013). Conservative media vacillated between calling Trayvon a thug and wondering if he could be an innocent child. Ultimately the 17 year old's innocence was invalidated because his twitter account was laced with curse words, he was suspended from school, and a picture of him posing with his grill, or gold teeth, surfaced on the internet (Adler, 2012). Further evidence of the way Black boys were stripped of their innocence can be seen in the controversy over the teen's portrayal.

Trayvon was described as being three inches taller than his actual height and a picture of the tattooed, weathered, 35 year old, and ever scowling rapper, The Game,

was circulated by conservatives and described as being an accurate description of the teen. When an actual picture of the smiling teen in a Hollister t shirt surfaced, many complained that it was a deceptive picture because he looked like a child (Capehart, 2013)! Similarly, Michael Brown, who was killed in Ferguson this past summer by an officer named Darren Wilson was not allowed the innocence of a child. Brown was described by the officer as having an "aggressive" face that looked like a "demon" and being so large that he made the officer feel like a child (Bouie, 2014). In positioning himself as a child, Michael Brown became an adult by default. The officer and Brown had a one-inch difference in height.

Knowing the facts of these two incidents and many others, Casey is caught between wanting to protect her son from the harsh realities of racism and discrimination and the very real possibility that he could be hunted and killed. On the set of the Piers Morgan Show, Sybrina Fulton, Trayvon's mom, expressed, "I believe that George Zimmerman hunted my son like an animal." (Fulton, 2012). Further more the use of the words 'prey' and 'safe' point to the vulnerability of Black boys, a state that Black boys are never allowed. At the end of her comment, Casey shares that she cannot monitor her son's every move, suggesting resignation and acceptance of the reality that she can only do so much to ensure her son's safety. She spoke this last sentence very calmly, making the kind of face that normally accompanies a shrug of the shoulders. Her demeanor affirms Stovall's (2013) observation that Black people have become inured to racism and validate Foucault's concept of the disciplined and docile body.

This fatalism echoes throughout parents' responses to the question, 'Do you discuss racism with your son?' Sabine's comment reaffirmed Casey's sense of resignation. Sabine explained:

It's difficult. I don't want them to feel bad about themselves or lower their self-esteem but at the same time I want them to know what's going on in the world so it's hard. It's tough. You just gotta pray.

Like Jared, and Casey, Sabine is caught between wanting her sons to know about racism and the potential discrimination that they will encounter and her concern that talking to them about this topic is detrimental to their psychological health.

### **They're growing up differently**

By the end of our interview, Parents began to express their belief that there was another factor that complicated their dilemma: Their sons' experiences were fundamentally different from theirs. These experiences, they explained, made it so that their sons had a different relationship to issues of race and racial trauma. This became apparent when Renee talked about her son's relationship to blackness and his black identity. "So I feel like for Jossy, he doesn't feel the struggle part of being black as much as I do and probably that is the case with each subsequent generation." In response to the question, 'what does it mean to be Black to you?', many parents mentioned struggle. They equated blackness and being black with a history of struggle that was not quite in the past. Renee felt that her son did not have this connection to or understanding of Blackness. Similarly Casey mentioned the difference between her lived experiences and those of her sons:

It's so interesting that you say that, that you asked me this question, because of a very stark difference between my childhood and my kids. I don't think any of my kids, I don't remember any of them ever coming up to me and asking me why we weren't white. Or why they could not be white. Not even my daughter, and you know with little black girls with the hair and the this and the that. You know, we usually have some kind of something. I had so much self-hatred as a kid. None of my kids have that. They might be upset about other things, but not that. Not blackness.

Casey felt that her childhood was very different from her son's childhood. As Casey transitioned to adolescence, Blackness become quite salient for her. In chapter four, she described how the composition of her friend group changed. Her white friends went one way and her Black friends another. She turned to books for solace, discovering Black authors and history. From her surprise at the fact that her sons do not seem to be displaying signs of self-hatred, it is clear that some form of self-hatred informed her adolescence. She finds that Blackness and being Black do not consume her sons.

Many parents attributed the difference between themselves and their sons to their son's educational opportunities. In chapter two I mentioned the work of Cherisse Harris (2013). Harris studied the Cosby cohort, whom I refer to as the hip-hop generation, and their children. She found that the children of members of this cohort exhibited an unawareness of racism and its history. They benefitted from the gains made by their parents and grandparents and continued to integrate schools and neighborhoods. According to their parents. They did not see racism and could not imagine experiencing

any kind of discrimination. Parents' attributed this attitude to the fact that their children attended very diverse schools.

Sabine said:

I guess because they're growin' up in a more diverse environment, with their school, started from kindergarten. And they grow up with all different children and they all get along, and they're all friends. Even my friends or family goes with me to different events at their elementary school, that they use to go to before prep, they're always so impressed by how all the students get along so well. You know? And so they get invited to parties, play-dates, and all of those stuff and everyone gets along. So, it kinda hard, and Jaymond's at his boys school now, all boys which is mostly Caucasian, they all get along. So, it's kinda hard to let them know that, in school, it's like this, but sadly when you get out of school I might not, but then times are changing, so I don't wanna really put too much thoughts in their head.

John said:

He is in independent school. Everybody is his friend but he is still in middle school. I don't think things are gonna be like that when he get up to high school. I think it's gonna start changing very soon. Right now my son does says like 'Daddy, you read too much meaning into anything that everything. Daddy, you worry about a whole lot of things. I am fine. These people are my friends.' I'm like 'Okay.' He has not had any negative experience yet.

Both John and Sabine's sons are growing up in an environment that is somewhat foreign to them.

They have been attending school with a diverse group of children. Currently both sons attend elite, all white schools. Sabine and John explain that because of their sons' experience in school it is difficult to talk with them about racism. Both parents want to communicate to them that their current experience in school is not representative of the reality that will face in the world as Black men but their sons are not yet receptive to their messages. However, as Sabine states there is something else that makes it difficult for her to talk with her sons about race; "the times are changing".

Parents understand that the differences that exist between them and their sons are not just a result of their educational experiences. For them, the context in which their sons are coming of age contributes to, for better or for worse, their drastically different views on race and racism. Renee shared her views on the current context:

In popular culture today, racial identity is very different. I think that this whole idea of a post-racial America is not something that I subscribe to but I think that there are messages being sent to young people about it all the time and sometimes I feel maybe my messages are not strong enough to counteract the messages that they get outside of our home and our family and then you see less and less... Again, I'm really just speaking about media and popular culture but you see even in schools...

For Renee, post-racial supremacy, or the dominant and pervasive narrative that this nation is finally beyond race, is a message that may be too strong to counter. She worried that her discussions about racism would not stand up to this rhetoric. As we know from a previous quote Renee has equated Blackness with struggle and is noticing that her son has a different relationship to his Black identity. The messages about post racialism that

are spread in schools and via media a crafting a Black identity that she doesn't necessarily approve of. The tension between wanting their children to come to know Blackness in the way that they did, as embodying struggle and sacrifice, and the messages that their sons are currently receiving is palpable in Casey's words:

Well, I definitely want them to know their history and I want them to... It's important me that they don't forget and it's important to me that they don't believe this dream that MTV and all those other kind of things are trying to shove down their throat, that that stuff doesn't matter anymore. That's important to me... That slavery stuff, that black/white stuff. Come on, that was years ago. Everybody's just people now. Who cares about that stuff?" I want them to.. Slavery has been around for like hundreds of years and we're supposed to forget about it in 50? To me it's important that they know the truth of their story because as the years pass, what I notice happening, which is incredible to me too, I notice that the ugliness of America, particularly with his black, as Booker T calls us, it's darker children, they trying to erase the ugliness. And it's like... No, that's part of it too. So I'm like these three, they are gonna know their culture, they are gonna understand where they come from, they are gonna understand that is nothing shameful about it, it's just a truth that happened. However, you have a responsibility to remember this truth, and the honor it, and not only to honor it but to progress the culture. Honoring the truth? It's acknowledging it, and it is not allowing all the suffering, and the. The suffering and the hardships, ...sacrifices that our people have gone through and that have been made for them, go in vain, because we stand on all that. We stand on that. I tell them all the time. And it's not

that long ago. People act like it was sooo many years, it's not that long ago. My grandmother's grandmother was a slave. So for me, it's don't be believin' this kumbaya nonsense, don't you dare believe that...

Casey orders her children not to believe that race is no longer important and that everyone is now colorblind. For her, colorblind rhetoric is a deliberate attempt to diminish Black history and, by extension, Black culture. The suffering and the hardship and the resilience necessary to live and thrive under racial social structures, both in the past and at present, are the reality of the Black experience. Post-racialism is a dangerous dream that threatens to make them forget that.

### **Discussion**

This chapter examined the messages African American parents conveyed to their sons about racism. The overarching research question here was, “What kinds of conversations do African American parents have with their adolescent sons about race and racism?” Parents were asked to describe their current practices around preparing their sons for racial discrimination. Three major themes emerged in parents’ discussions of their experiences with talking about racism with their sons. First, parents conveyed to their sons that they were essentially walking targets. Because of their race, they were hypervisible and thus more likely to be singled out for the wrong reasons. However, parents did not only use this term figuratively. They also expressed fear about the likelihood of their son actually being shot and killed in an interaction with a police officer or armed civilian. Second, parents believed that their sons needed a set of competencies that they termed “survival skills”. These skills included developing an understanding of how to move through public spaces, manage public perception by controlling their bodies,



and comply with unwritten protocols. Third, participants struggled between wanting to make sure that their children were knowledgeable about the dangers that faced them as Black boys and wanting to preserve their innocence. Ironically, the innocence or seeming unawareness of racism that many of the parents observed was the result of integrated educational and social experiences. This made the process of preparing their sons for racial discrimination both challenging and interesting. They had to convince their sons that their interactions with white people, which had, for the most part, been characterized by levity, friendship, and openness might soon be marked by gravity, animosity, and opposition. This kind of paradox was emblematic of the challenges faced by these parents tasked with preparing their sons for discrimination.

Many parents expressed feeling fear for their sons. Jared admitted to feeling fear when he learned that his wife was pregnant and they would be having a son. These parents knew of the challenges that were guaranteed to their sons, particularly those that came with being singled out. Their fear was grounded in the knowledge that society could not see their boys the way that they saw them, as children. As their sons inched closer to puberty, many parents felt a real urgency to make them understand the way they would be viewed as Black males. This sense of immediacy clashed with the natural desire to prolong their sons' childhood and maintain their naivety about the racialized world around them and their place in it. Knowing that their sons would soon be prematurely and forcefully cast out of childhood left parents with a difficult decision to make. Many felt that teaching their sons about the perils of racism might stifle their sons, saddling them a reality that would stunt their potential. However, they also realized it was impossible to shield them from what they were sure to inherit.

While some parents found themselves caught between either wanting to shelter their sons from or expose them to a racialized reality, many had already started to adapt to their son's "unwieldy inheritance", affirming Thornton et. al (as cited in Caughy et.al., 2006) definition of the components of racial socialization practices. Erica very casually stated that her son's adolescence ended in fourth grade because of his race, validating a recent study's (Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta, & DiTomasso, 2014) findings on the way police officers view boys of color and conveying an understanding of the way that race intersected with other aspects of her son's identity, namely his age. Marisa was already explaining all of the factors that had to be considered, because of her son's race, if he was going to attend a sixth-grade party, communicating the way that race factored into intergroup relationships. Eric had started to tell his son to understand his place in society and the rules required of members of his caste, demonstrating the knowledge, among African American parents, of the importance of conveying to children the existence of a racial hierarchy and their place in it.

Understanding the way that their sons would be seen, some parents chose to manage public perception of their sons as much as possible. Michael shopped in stores around his son's school so that shopkeepers and residents in the area would be comfortable with him. Mary suggested that if Trayvon Martin had been her son, she would have reached out to building management, made contact with the community, and sent a picture of her son before he arrived to make sure that everyone recognized him and that he would not be mistaken for a criminal. Sabine, advised her sons to avoid wearing hoodies. Other parents taught their sons how to control their environment by sharing with them appropriate ways to occupy public space and time. They provided concrete

instructions about how they should move their bodies in public and the speed with which they should, or should not, move certain body parts. Dylan, a 17-year old, was told that he should not run at night. Many parents instructed their sons to make sure that, in the event of an encounter with police, their hands were visible and still. Others advised their sons to always carry around identification, even if they were walking their dog in their own neighborhood.

They provided their sons with the alternative forms of capital, or “cultural wealth”, recognized among Critical Race Theorists (Yosso, 2005). Their sons were being given “navigational capital”, or those skills necessary for knowing how to navigate spaces that are hostile to and dismissive of the experiences of Communities of Color (p.78). They were amassing linguistic capital, learning that different situations called for different communication styles. Additionally they were being instilled with aspirational capital, “the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (pp.77-78). The conversations that these parents were having with their sons about their place in the social and racial hierarchy occurred against the backdrop of the assumption that their sons would be extremely successful. While parents recognized that these tactics would not necessarily guarantee their son’s survival it was something that they all felt that they had to do.

At the same time, they struggled with the understanding that the very messages and competencies that were meant to save their sons could slowly kill their spirits. Renee worried about the way that the lessons that she was sharing with her son about how to interact with law enforcement would affect his sense of self because he would be required to deny or suppress his humanity. Echoing research that revealed the challenges that

racism posed to the mental and emotional health of African American males, Casey questioned how she could both inform her son about the pervasive and entrenched nature of racism and expect him to be a healthy child (Fisher et. al.,2000; Hall, Cassidy, & Stevenson, 2008; Neblett et.al, 2008; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin & Lewis-Mckoy, 2006; Williams & Chung, 1996 ). How could she explain Trayvon's death, and the death's of other Black boys and men that were to come later that year, the following year, and the year after that? How could she explain these things to her son, who doodled with crayons at the table throughout our second interview? He was barely able to carry his large bookbag on his small frame but she was forced to add conversations about racial inequality and the fear that his brown body would soon evoke to his knapsack.

Parents understood that the practice of preparing Black boys for discrimination had predated them. As Claudine and Renee noted, it had existed, at least, since emancipation and was practiced by Emmitt Till's mother, Mamie Till, in 1955. It was, as Renee expressed, what African Americans did. Renee was correct in her acknowledgement of the long history of the practice. It, and the circumstances that continue to require it seem to be a permanent feature of the American landscape. Renee remarked that she could not actually imagine another way of being. The findings, in this study, about the content of the messages parents were now sharing with their sons added a new entry to the historical record of the talk.

Brown and Lesane-Brown's (2006) theory on the link between racial socialization messages and time, suggests messages reflect the current racial climate including attitudes towards and the treatment of those who are racialized and progress made on matters of racial inequality. The mantra to "work twice as hard" that many Black youth

growing up during the protest and post-protest era received was, as noted by Brown and Lesane-Brown, was a call to Black individual and group pride. This vestige of the counter etiquette Black parents conveyed to their children during Jim Crow was, “an alternate code of respectability...centered on bourgeois values of temperance, thrift, sexual self-restraint, hard work, and perseverance...” (Ritterhouse, 2006, p.). This messaging was a conscious reaction to the stealthy rolling back of Civil Rights gains and the realization that no single legislation would instantly give African Americans their civil rights. However, it was indicative of progress; during the previous era, *pre-Brown v. Board* (1607-1965), there was less room for messages focused exclusively on pride. Messages communicated to Black youth during this period stressed the importance of displaying extreme deference, if not obsequiousness, to whites.

The change in messaging about racism between the *pre-Brown v. Board* era and the protest era is easily explained by the historical legislation passed during the latter period. Messaging between the protest and the post protest era remained the same because the racial climate had not changed drastically between two periods. As the messages that parents share with their sons are a mixture of the messages that they heard as children, the fit of those messages with their current experiences, and the racial terrain that their children must currently navigate, it is clear that something has changed dramatically in the period between participants’ own adolescence and the current period in which their sons are coming of age. Today’s parents are speaking very explicitly with their sons about the very real possibility of death if they do not follow certain protocol as Black boys. Like their parents had done for them, this set of parents conveyed to their sons the necessity of having to work twice as hard as their white peers for the same level

of success. However, the bulk of the messaging that they were passing down to their sons focused on the importance of working twice, if not three times, as hard as anyone else to avoid death. During one interview, Claudine compared the current period and the skills required of Black children today to those required of children growing up during the period immediately following emancipation. Indeed the rules of racial etiquette, or rules and codes of interracial conduct, that Black parents were currently conveying to their boys were eerily similar to those conveyed to young boys in the period leading up to the Civil Rights movement. Stated differently, this current birth cohort is learning many of the skills shared with those who came of age during the *pre-Brown v. Board* era.

What parents could not see was how all of this was killing their own spirits, forcing them to downplay their own humanity as mothers and fathers. They calmly discussed with me, the very real possibility of their sons' death, a thought that they lived with daily. With an undertone of resignation, they told me that all they could hope for was that the odds, if and when their boys found themselves in the life threatening situations for which they were prepared, would be in their favor. The narrative of post-racialism has pushed to the back of our collective mind the continued impact of racism on the lives of people of color, lulling the public into believing that racism was a thing of the past, a thing that Black parents, and Black people at large, were irrationally preoccupied. This dominant narrative penalizes those who try to point out race or racism and the way that it continues to be operationalized to both dismiss and account for the experiences of Black people. This actually, is the newest iteration of racism. Racism, was wearing a new cloak, a cloak of invisibility. Therefore it was hard to see, its existence harder to believe.



## Chapter 6

### Conclusion: Reading between the rings

The rules of racial etiquette during the period *pre-Brown v. Board* were “determinedly, fiercely asymmetrical” (Ritterhouse, 2006, p. 4). White people expected Black people to interact with them in a certain way and were at liberty to interact with Black people, as they deemed appropriate. Black children were taught a specific script that included directions on how to speak and move. Ritterhouse noted, “As a set of rules, etiquette gave individuals a supply of words, phrases, and gestures to use in interracial situations” (p.5). These rules were based on the deference whites required from Blacks. They helped to maintain a caste-like system, as noted by Davis, Gardner, and Gardner (1941) , that relied upon the compliance of both Blacks and whites. It was clear to children that if they did not follow these unwritten rules, they left themselves vulnerable to punishment both from their own community and the white community. The gravest penalty enforced by whites was lynching.

These race making rules or “Jim Crow arrangements” taught both White people and Black people their distinct roles, making real the socially constructed differences between the races (Powdermaker, 1939, p.51). “The code would be complex and varied, but it outlined a fundamental pattern of white supremacy that both Blacks and whites understood” (Ritterhouse, 2006, p.25). Thus, even as children, whites would come to know their dominance and supposed superiority through the rules that allowed them to dominate Blacks. “Whenever Blacks rejected the command performance of deference—whenever whites lost the zero-sum game of racial etiquette—violence could and often did



result”. (p.25) A breach in etiquette was understood to be an affront to white status and whiteness itself. Challenges, both minor and major, to the status quo were protests against white supremacy and were met by whites with renewed commitment to vigorously and violently take actions to uphold the practices that were instrumental to creating their whiteness. An example of reactions to perceived violations of racial etiquette can be seen in the lynching that occurred after emancipation.

Ritterhouse (2006) found that a quarter of the 4,715 lynchings known to have taken place in the South between 1882 and 1946 resulted from breaches of racial etiquette...”(p.36). The greatest violation of the racial code of conduct of this period was the change in the status of African Americans that occurred with the abolishment of slavery, a move that challenged and threatened to dismantle the racial caste system, by allowing Blacks rights that would “make them *subjects* and stewards of their own destiny and not *objects* of the experiences and wishes of others” (Asante, 2003, as cited in Teasley and Ikard, 2010). This dramatic change in the status quo had the potential to lead to structural changes in society. Thus, the violence that ensued in the form of gruesome lynchings was a way for Whites to maintain power and reinforce racial boundaries that would be destroyed by the formal end of slavery. The figures that Ritterhouse shares represents those lynching that were known to have occurred. Of course, it is possible that there were lynchings that went unreported. These 4,715 lynchings took place over a 64-year period. The daily terror of the possibility of hearing about a lynching or being lynched is easier understood if broken down into smaller measures of time. Four thousand seven hundred and fifteen lynchings over this period of time translate into 70 lynchings a year or approximately 6 lynchings a month. These numbers become even

more alarming when we compare them to current statistics on extra judicial killings of African Americans.

Between 1999 and 2014, a 15-year period, the police killed 76 unarmed Black men and women. This number translates to approximately 5 modern day lynchings a month (NAACP legal defense fund, 2014). Continuing at this rate, 72 Black men and women will have been killed by the end of this year, a figure that is nearly identical to that recorded during the years between 1882 and 1946. Indeed, not counting those cases that received media coverage, at least 5 men were killed between July 17 and August 12, 2014 (Eric Garner, John Crawford, Michael Brown, Ezell Ford, Dante Parker). Looking at April of this year, it is easy to name 5 Black men shot and killed by the police: Walter Scott, Tony Robinson, Anthony Hill, Freddie Gray, and Eric Harris. However, as the recent deaths of Walter Scott and Freddie Gray show, 5 deaths per month is a modest number. These names represent highly publicized cases; it is likely that there are cases that do not make it to the media and do not get recorded in history and memory. Additionally, this number does not account for those instances in which police exculpate themselves by fabricating an alternate version of what actually transpired, often blaming victims for their own death. This phenomenon was made public by police actions in the case of Walter Scott. Prior to the media receiving a video of the incident, the officer who shot Scott fabricated a story that would have justified his death and ensured that it would not receive the media attention that it did (citation). These current figures on police killings of unarmed Black men suggests that there has been a severe breach of racial etiquette on the part of African Americans. I contend that today's transgression is the

election of a Black president. The Obama presidency rejects what Ritterhouse (2006) describes as the “command performance of deference” (p.25).

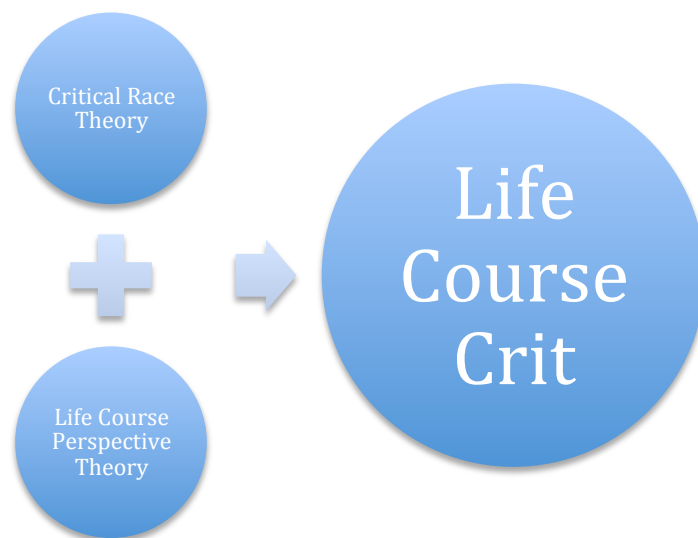
In 2010, Teasley and Ikard posited that the election of President Barack Obama could lead to an increased sense of agency among African Americans, changing the way that they view and participate in the American political process. Indeed, the presidential election of 2007 was the first time in American history that African Americans voted at a higher rate than whites, erasing the long existing gap between black and white voter participation (Census Bureau, 2009). The most significant aspect of this development was the possibility of structural and cultural changes that might alter interracial relations. Not surprisingly, anti-black racist sentiment in this country has increased dramatically during the Obama presidency, a concept made concrete by the wave of extrajudicial killings of African Americans (Pasek, Krosnick, and Tompson, 2012).

In response to this reality, African American parents are teaching their sons a complex system of words and gestures to ensure their safety. Their strategies reflect the racial mores of what is commonly understood to be a bygone era: Jim Crow. My overall analysis of the data from this study suggests that the conversations that African American parents are currently having with their adolescent sons to prepare them for encounters with racial discrimination are similar in content to the kinds of conversations had and messages conveyed to Black children coming of age before the Civil Rights movement. Black boys are no longer required to step off of a sidewalk to give way to an oncoming white person. However, the major theme that recurs in parents’ present day warnings to their sons requires the same degree of obsequiousness, a conspicuous relic of the Jim Crow era.

Parents in this study gave their sons clear instructions on what they needed to do to ensure that they came out of encounters with white authority, alive. These skills included dressing a certain way, knowing how to navigate public spaces, acting in a manner befitting of their caste-like station, making sure that their hands were visible, talking a certain way, not displaying anger or frustration, moving their bodies in ways that did not make others uncomfortable, and carrying identification at all times. While parents understood the necessity of teaching these skills to their children, they like parents of the Jim Crow era, also wanted to shelter their sons from the psychological harm that racist encounters could inflict. Participants found themselves caught between wanting to maintain and prolong their sons' innocence and making sure that their boys were prepared for the reality of racial discrimination. Parents conveyed an understanding of the importance of exposing their sons to these survival strategies but they also expressed a sense of futility in teaching such practices. They knew that, ultimately, their sons' lives were not in their hands. These skills would not necessarily protect them from the consequences that came with perceived affronts to racial etiquette. Similarly, during the *pre-Brown v. Board* era, despite teaching racial etiquette to their children, parents were fearful for them. "Parents' fear for their boys were similarly compounded by their own powerlessness in the face of white authority...They feared that boys might be arrested, beaten, or worse and they would be unable to do anything about it" (Ritterhouse, 2006, p.89).

The findings from this study about ways in which parents prepare their sons for bias or discrimination reveal a new model for understanding this aspect of racial socialization. I explored parents' racial socialization practices through the theoretical

frameworks of Life Course Perspective Theory (LCP) and Critical Race Theory (CRT). LCP aided me in making sense of the temporal dimensions of racial socialization practices, specifically the way that these practices intersected with the personal biography of each participant and the social and historical period in which they became adolescents. LCP required that I place racial socialization messages in social and historical context. However, it did not take into consideration the ever-present social, political, and historical phenomenon that is racism. When viewed through the lenses of LCP and CRT, it is apparent that racial socialization practices, particularly preparation of discrimination, are records of the racial etiquette required during particular socio-historical periods. The use of these theories together adds to the literature a new understanding of the factors that contribute to the content of “the talk” and a new framework for understanding the way that racism intersects with biography: Critical Race Life Course Perspective or Life Course Crit.



Critical Race Life Course Perspective deepens our understanding of the way that racism operates in the lives of people of color. It considers the experiential knowledge of

communities of color, in this case Black parents, a powerful source for understanding how racism and racial etiquette change with time and a gauge of racial inequality. This is particularly important in a period where people are quick to assume that racism is a thing of the past. At the core of Critical Race Life Course Perspective is the idea that racism is permanent and that each birth cohort experiences a particular type of racism, recognizable by its unique set of racial rules. The kinds of messages that are conveyed to a cohort or by a cohort are evidence of those rules. The four tenets of Critical Race Life Course are:

- 1. The interplay of human lives and racism. Each birth cohort is exposed to a particular brand of racism under a certain racialized social structure.** This tenet comes through in the differences between the messages that parents remember receiving from their parents and the messages that the parents in this study are currently conveying to their sons. As parents described the social and political occurrences that shaped their adolescence and the ones that now surround their sons as they navigate adolescence, it became apparent that the messages conveyed to African American children about discrimination correlate with the kind of racial incidents and violence characteristic of the period in which they are coming of age. Put another way, the talk that parents are having with their sons at any given period in time is an indicator of the racial mores of that particular epoch.
- 2. Age and life stage affect the way an individual experiences racism.** While many participants' recalled receiving messages about race and racial inequality from their parents it wasn't until adolescence that issues of race and racism

became salient to them. This tenet aids us to understand how racism can be experienced differently in childhood as compared with adolescence.

**3. Racism and be experienced vicariously through relationships and networks.**

A number of the participants came to understand police harassment through the experiences of friends and family members. While they had not come into contact with police themselves, the experiences of those close to them helped to understand the way that racism manifested in daily interaction. This tenet provides us with new ways of understanding the way that racism impacts families and communities.

**4. Experiential knowledge is important to understanding how individuals**

**exercise agency in racialized social structures.** Without participants' stories and explanations "the talk" is reduced to a script for victimhood. However, participants' narratives reveal that these parents are not victims. They choose when to have these conversations with their sons and what and how much they will share with their sons about the realities of racism. These strategies are representative of what Yosso (2005) describes as the "cultural wealth" and "resistant capital" of communities of color, capital often overlooked in research on marginalized communities. As Lorraine Hansberry explained, "the vantage point of Negroes is entirely different". Though long explored by scholars such as W.E.B. Dubois, the way that African Americans experience the world, their ability to "see the limitations, flaws, weaknesses and contradictions of spaces and structures that appear transparent and accessible, but are not", remains

underutilized as a tool for understanding the way that racism currently operates (Dixson and Rousseau 2006, p.19).

The implications of the Critical Race Life Course Perspective for education practitioners and educational policy are many. In education, racial socialization strategies must be understood as an unrecognized form of parental engagement. Knowledge of the resistant capital that students and families bring with them to school should inform the relationship between schools and the communities that they serve and teacher education induction programs. Schools must begin to think about the resources that they provide to African American families and ways to realistically support what is happening in the home by providing workshops and classes that provide both marginalized students and the general student body with language and strategies to discuss and disrupt racism. This practice has already started in a number of elementary schools around the country that recognize the burden of racial discrimination on students of color. These schools have taken it upon themselves to provide safe spaces for these students while also promoting programming devoted to developing racial literacy for the entire student body (Racial literacy programming at Ethical Culture & Fieldston lower school, 2015). For example the Ethical Culture Fieldston School has instituted a new racial affinity group program. The purpose of the program is to help elementary school students think about the concept of race and their racial identity. Most importantly, students are encouraged to think about what their race and racial identity mean in terms of their experience in school and their relationship to the larger society. One of the goals of the program is to eventually have the different affinity groups have meaningful dialogue between them. Additionally, the school provides a list of resources, including picture and chapter books, for parents who



are interested in continuing the conversations at home (FAQ about racial affinity groups, 2015).

Teacher induction programs must begin thinking about what the continued need for African American parents to prepare their sons, and their children more broadly, for discrimination means for their practice as teachers and the way that they develop curriculum for the classroom. Additionally, teacher education programs need to include in their curriculum substantive materials that cover the topics of race, racial identity development for students of color and white students, the relationship between racial socialization, particularly preparation for discrimination, and academic achievement and ways to discuss race and racism across content areas so that they can promote racial literacy in their classrooms.

In terms of policy, knowledge of the talk and the way that it serves as a gauge for the shape of racism during a particular period can be used to make the argument for necessary initiatives that have been or are in the process of being dismantled as a result of post racial rhetoric and thinking and anti-blackness. Educational policy makers must support and argue for programming, like the aforementioned racial affinity groups, in schools and communities that use the experiences of communities of color in service of promoting racial literacy.

The premise of this dissertation study is that parents who are currently raising sons are conveying messages about racial discrimination that are eerily similar to the messages that parents conveyed to their children during Jim Crow, a period characterized by overt racial terrorism. There is a caveat to this premise. While the messages are similar, it must be noted that certain aspects of the context are quite different. First, the sons of the

participants in this study attend de-segregated and diverse schools that promote the notion of post-racialism and colorblindness. Second, while the state violence against Black people during this period bears striking resemblance to that of the Jim Crow period, today's state violence occurs against the back drop of a white house inhabited by a Black family. Finally, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the agency that parents are able to exert during this current period.

Returning to the thought exercise at the beginning of this dissertation where I imagined America as a tree and "the talk" as that tree's growth rings, the similarities between the first, second, and fourth growth rings beg thorough analysis of the current racial climate. The annual growth rings of an actual tree reveal changes in the environment and the overall health of the tree during each year. Conversations found within America's first and second growth ring reveal more than two centuries of poor racial health. During this period, the talk urged children to defer to and fear whites. Looking at her third growth ring, America's health seems to improve slightly for approximately 50 years. Messages during this period focus less on deference. The most recent growth ring, representing this current period, suggests that America is once again, experiencing extremely poor racial health. "The talk" that Black parents are having with their sons is key to helping us understand the changes that are taking place in our racial environment because "Black parents measure society's racial pulse judging whether racial matters are stable or changing in reference to their own experience" (Brown and Lesane-Brown, 2006, p.282).

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Lyrics to 'My President'

[Intro: Young Jeezy]

Yeah, be the realest shit I never wrote  
I ain't write this by the way nigga, some real shit right here nigga  
This'll be the realest shit you ever quote  
Let's go!

[Hook: Young Jeezy]

My president is black, my Lambo's blue  
And I'll be goddamned if my rims ain't too  
My mama ain't at home, and daddy's still in jail  
Tryna make a plate, anybody seen the scale?  
My president is black, my Lambo's blue  
And I'll be goddamned if my rims ain't too  
My money's light green and my Jordans' light grey  
And they love to see white, now how much you tryna pay?  
Let's go!

[Verse 1: Young Jeezy]

Today was a good day, hope I have me a great night  
I don't know what you fishin' for, catch you a great white  
Me, I see great white, heavy as killer whales  
I cannot believe this: who knew it came in bales?  
Who knew what came with jail? Who knew what came with prison?  
Just cause you got opinions, does that make you a politician?  
Bush robbed all of us, would that make him a criminal?  
And then he cheated in Florida, would that make him a Seminole?  
I say and I quote, "We need a miracle"  
And I say a miracle cause this shit is hystErical  
By my nephews and nieces, I will email Jesus  
Tell him forward to Moses and CC Allah  
Mr. Soul Survivor, guess that make me a Konvict  
Be all you can be, now don't that sound like some dumb shit  
When you die over crude oil as black as my nigga Bu  
It's really a Desert Storm, that's word to my nigga Clue  
Catch me in Las Vegas, A.R. Arizona  
Rep for them real niggas, I'm winnin' in California  
Winnin' in Tennessee, hands down Atlanta  
Landslide Alabama, on my way to Savannah

[Hook]

[Verse 2: Young Jeezy]

I said I woke up this morning, headache this big  
Pay all these damn bills, feed all these damn kids  
Buy all these school shoes, buy all these school clothes  
For some strange reason my son addicted to Polos  
Love me some spinach dip, I'm addicted to Houston's  
And if the numbers is right I take a trip out to Houston  
An earthquake out in China, a hurricane in New Orleans  
Street Dreams Tour, I showed my ass in New Orleans  
Did it for Soulja Slim, brought out B.G

It's all love Bun, I'm forgivin' you Pimp C  
You know how the Pimp be, that nigga gon' speak his mind  
If he could speak down from heaven, he'd tell me "stay on my grind"  
Tell him: "I'm doing fine", Obama for mankind  
We ready for damn change so y'all let the man shine  
Stuntin' on Martin Luther, feeling just like a King  
Guess this is what he meant when he said that "he had a dream"

[Hook]

[Verse 3: Nas]

Yeah, our history, black history, no president ever did shit for me  
Had to hit the streets, had to flip some keys so a nigga won't go broke  
Then they put us in jail, now a nigga can't go vote  
So I spend dough on these hoes strippin  
She ain't a politician, honey's a pole-o-tician  
My president is black, Rose golden charms  
22-inch rims like Hulk Hogan's arms  
When thousands of peoples is riled up to see you  
That can arouse your ego. We've got mouths to feed, so  
Gotta stay true to who you are and where you came from  
Cause at the top will be the same place you hang from  
No matter how big you can ever be  
For whatever fee or publicity, never lose your integrity  
For years there's been some prize horses in this stable  
Just two albums in, I'm the realest nigga on this label  
Mr. Black President, yo Obama for real  
They gotta put your face on the 5-thousand dollar bill

[Outro: Young Jeezy]

So I'm sittin right here now man  
It's June 3rd haha, 2:08 AM  
Nigga I wanna say win, lose or draw  
Man we congratulate you already homie  
See I motivate the thugs right  
You motivate us homie, that's what it is  
This a hands off policy, y'all touch him we ridin nigga  
Yeah, first black president, win, lose or draw nigga  
Haha, matter of fact, you know what it is man  
Shouts out to Jackie Robinson, Booker T. Washington homie  
Oh you ain't think I knew that shit?  
Sydney Poitier what they do?  
I'm important too though  
I was, I was the first nigga to ride through my hood in a Lamborghini



## Appendix B: Lyrics to 'My President (Remix)'

[Hook]

My President is black, my Maybach too

And I'll be God damned if my diamonds ain't blue

My money's dark green and my Porsche is light grey

And I'm headed for D.C, anybody feel me?

[Verse]

My President is black, in fact he's half-white

So even in a racist mind he's half right

If you have racist mind you'll be a'ight

My President is black but his house is all white

Rosa Parks sat so Martin Luther could walk

Martin Luther walked so Barack Obama could run

Barack Obama ran so all the children could fly

So I'mma spread my wings, you can meet me in the sky

I already got my own clothes, already got my own shoes

I was hot before Barack, imagine what I'm gonna do

Hello Miss AmErica, hey pretty lady

Red, white, and blue flag, wave for me baby

Never thought I'd say this shit, baby I'm good

You can keep your puss, I don't want no more Bush

No more war, no more Iraq

No more white lies, the President is black

## Appendix C: Abel Meeropol's 'Strange fruit'

*Southern trees bear a strange fruit,  
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,  
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,  
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.  
Pastoral scene of the gallant South,  
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,  
Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,  
And the sudden smell of burning flesh!  
Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,  
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,  
For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,  
Here is a strange and bitter crop.*

## Appendix D: interview Protocol

### Interview Protocol

Interview one: Focused life history (Placing the participant's experience with racial socialization into broader context, discussing their entire experience, up to the present, with racial socialization, reconstructing early experiences with racial socialization in their families, at school, in their community, at present, with their children, etc., How did parents come to their current understanding of and practices of racial socialization, particularly preparation for discrimination/bias)

**GOAL: To get a sense of how the participant came to their current racial socialization practices/understanding of ways to prepare their child for bias**

1. Could you walk me through what it was like growing up in your family?
  - a. When you were a child, were there things your parents or the people that raised you taught you to help you know what it is to be Black? (Adopted from Brow & Lesane-Brown, 2006)
    - i. What are the most important things they did or told you
  - b. Did you and your siblings receive the same messages about race from both of your parents?
  - c. Did both of your parents communicate the same messages to you? How?
  - d. If and when your parents shared conflicting messages, how do you remember making sense of them?
2. What was your family's approach to talking about blackness and racism
  - a. When you were a child?
  - b. When you became a teenager?
3. Can you tell me about a defining moment when your parents talked to you about
  - a. Race?
  - b. Racism?
  - c. Stereotyping?
  - d. Discrimination?
  - e. Assimilation?
4. Did your parents' conversations about race and racism prepare you to deal with discrimination? In what ways? What were you not prepared for?
5. What lessons, if any, did you learn about race and racism outside of your home? In school, with peers, in your neighborhood? If the messages about race and racism in your home conflicted with messages communicated outside of your home, how do you remember making sense of them?



Interview two: Concrete details of the experience (Reconstructing details of times when they have prepared their child for, thought about preparing their child for, discussed preparing their child for racial socialization; Eliciting stories about responses to specific events.

**GOAL: To gain information on the participant's current practices around teaching their own children about race and racism.**

1. Describe your son for me physically? Skin tone?
2. How does your son identify? Racially? Ethnically?
3. What are some of the ways that he is changing as he becomes a teenager?
4. Does your son belong to any groups outside of school?
5. What are your hopes and dreams for your son?
6. What does being Black in AmErica mean to you?
7. What are the stereotypes that exist about your son because he is a Black boy?
8. Are there any special coping strategies you feel that are especially important to teach a...black child?" (adapted from Ferguson, 2002, p.64)
9. Could you reconstruct a specific conversation or talk that you have with your child about race and discrimination?
  - a. Did you and your child talk about the Trayvon Martin shooting that occurred in February of 2012? What was that conversation like?
10. How do you help your child understand what it means to be black? (adapted from Hughes and Chen, 1997)
  - a. What resources, if any do you use?
  - b. How do you use these resources?
  - c. Why these particular resources?
11. "How does your family go about ensuring that your child will have a positive Black identity?" (adapted from Johns, 2004)
12. Describe any special feature of your family's overall education program for your child because (s)he is a Black American child. (adapted from Johns, 2004)
13. What do you think is most important for your son to know as a Black male?
14. Over the years, how have you decided what to share with your child regarding race and racism?
15. If your child were sitting here, what messages would they say you have conveyed to them regarding racism and discrimination?

Interview three: Reflection on meaning (Reflection on the meaning of participating in racial socialization, “Given what you have said about your experience with racial socialization throughout your life and given what you have said about the way that you participate in your child’s racial socialization, or prepare that children for discrimination, how do you understand racial socialization or preparation for bias in your life?” (Seidman, p.18, 2006), Reflecting on the future necessity, utility of such practices, “Given what you have reconstructed in these interviews, what do you expect parents’ racial socialization practices to be like in the future?)

**Goal: To gather information about the participant’s understanding/reflections about the way that they teach their children about race and racism; To gather information about the participant’s opinion about the future necessity for such practices.**

1. What do you think your children will have to convey to their children regarding race and racism?
2. Given what you have reconstructed in these interviews, what do you think this practice of preparing African American children for discrimination will look like in the future?
  - a. Do you think that this will continue to be a necessary practices (adapted from Seidman, 2006)

## Appendix E: Photos & Questions for Visual Elicitation Interviews

(Photo Elicitation Interview Prompt)

I will explain to parents that interviews 1 and 2 will have two parts, a standard semi-structured interview portion and a photo elicitation portion

### Interview 1



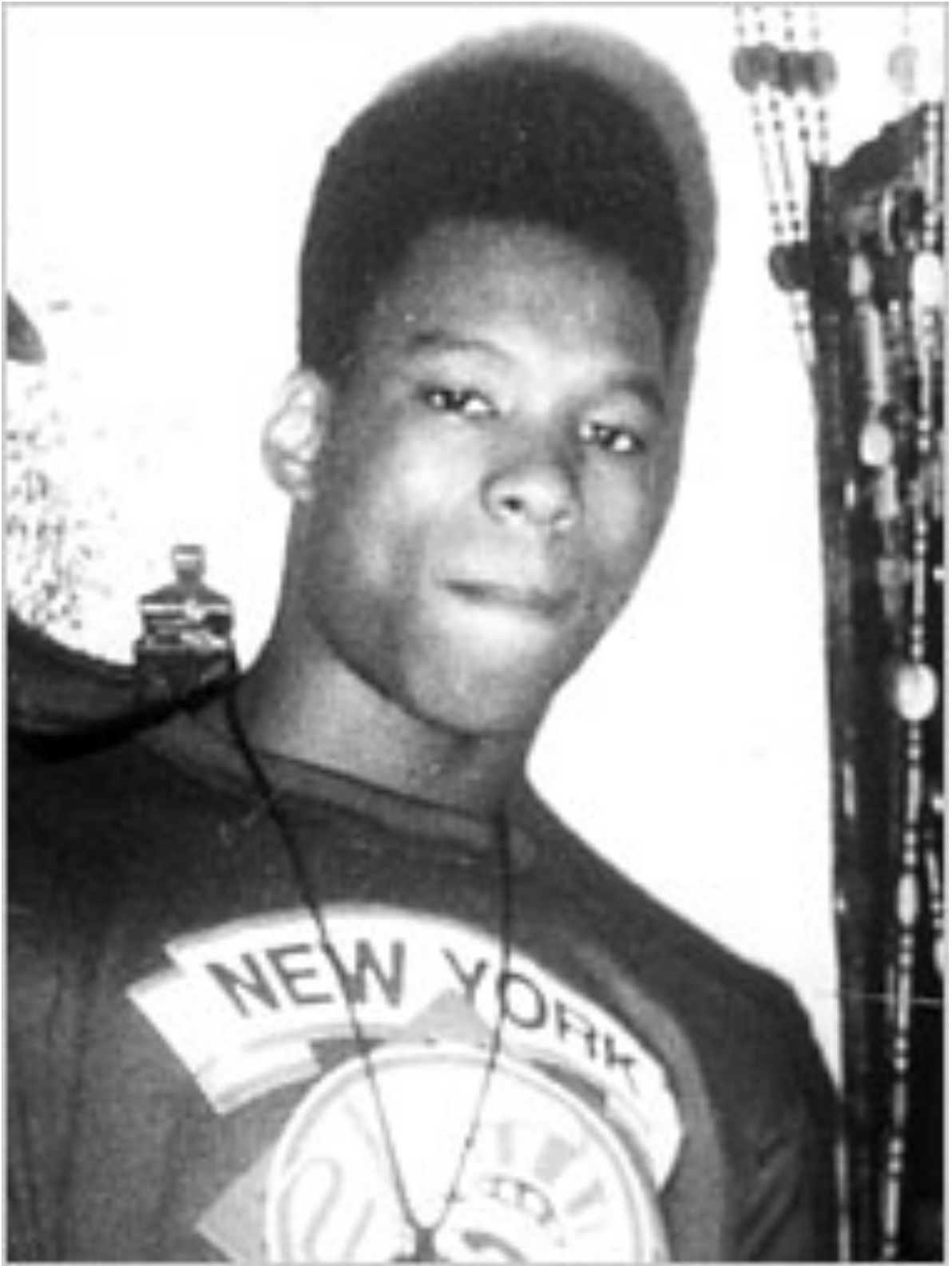
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**1983** Nancy Reagan appears on *Diff'rent Strokes* to popularize her "Just Say No" anti-drug campaign.



















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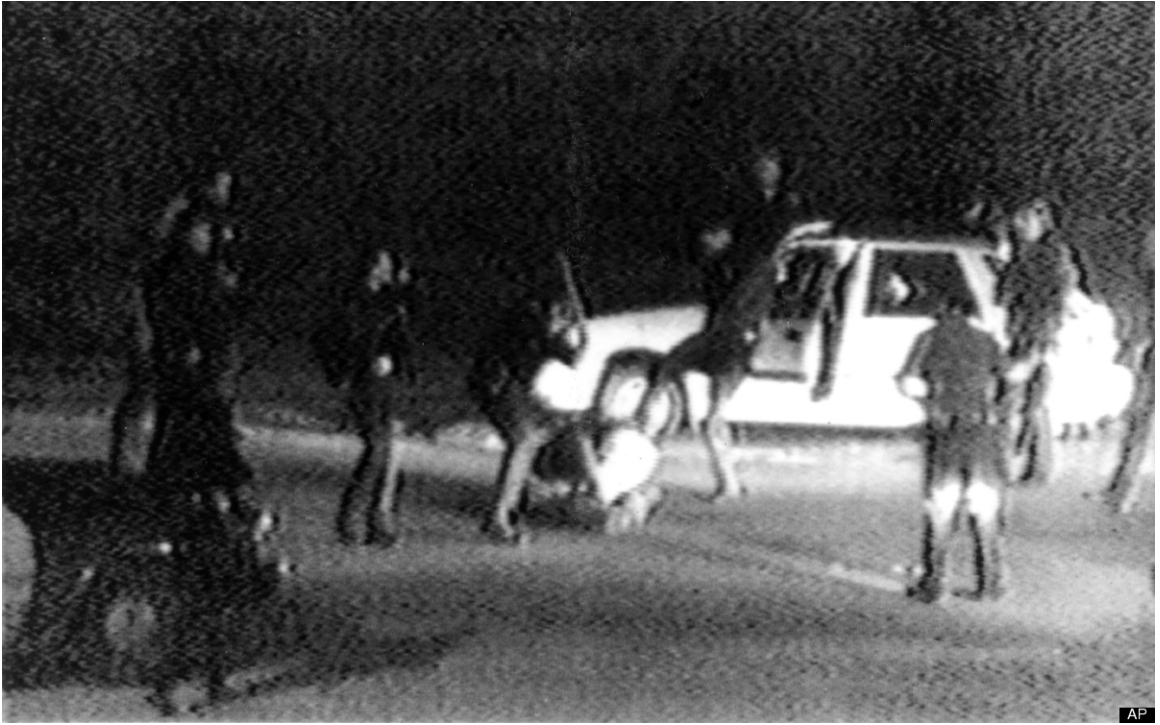














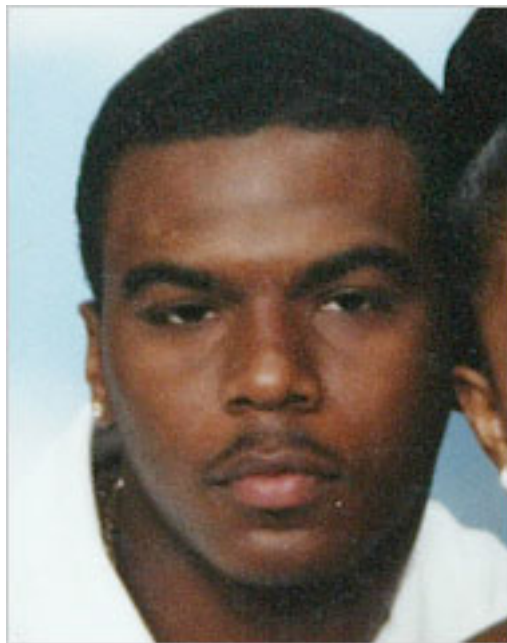
**Interview 2**



















(Photo Elicitation Interview Protocol)

1. Tell me about these pictures.
2. What if anything stands out for you as you look at these pictures?
3. What, if anything, do you recall about the period surrounding these photographs?

## Appendix F: Letter Drafted and Sent to Parents

January 18, 2014

Dear Parent,

My name is Raygine DiAquoi, a member of Prep for Prep Contingent XVI and a graduate student at Harvard University. As part of my doctoral program, I am required to complete a research project for my dissertation. I am kindly asking for your support in this endeavor.

In order to complete this research project, I must conduct research with parents. The topic of my study is the conversations that parents have with their adolescent children about race.

If you decided to volunteer for this study, you will be asked to participate in three interviews (60-90 minutes each). You will be asked several questions. Some of them will be about your experiences around race. Others will be about your current experiences of discussing race with your children. This study will contribute to a body of research on the messages that parents share with their children about racism.

I will keep the data I collect confidential, and will not share your personal information with anyone outside of the research team.

Being in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw at anytime.

Questions? If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact: Raygine DiAquoi (646-660-5992) or [rcd092@mail.harvard.edu](mailto:rcd092@mail.harvard.edu) or the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research at Harvard University. They can be reached at 617-496-2847, 1414 Massachusetts Avenue, Second Floor, Cambridge, MA 02138, or [cuhs@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:cuhs@fas.harvard.edu)

The nature and purpose of this research has been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely,  
Raygine DiAquoi

**Please return your signed consent form to Ms Smith.**

### **Appendix G: Description of Study & Consent Form**

A study of African American parents' racial socialization practices  
Please consider this information carefully before deciding whether to participate in this research.

**Purpose of the research:** To understand the experiences of African American parents who talk to their sons about race and racism.

**What you will do:** If you decide to volunteer for this study, you will be asked to participate in three interviews (60-90 mins each). You will be asked several questions. Some of them will be about your experiences growing up and learning about race and racism. Others will be about your current experiences of talking with your son about racism and race. For two of the interviews, you will be asked to share family photos pertinent to your experience with learning about and teaching about race and racism. You will be provided with more details if you choose to participate.

**Time required:** Each interview will take between approximately 1 hour and 1 ½ hours.

**Risks:** Some of the questions may cause discomfort or embarrassment. However, risk is anticipated to be no more than minimal.

**Benefits:** This is a chance for you to share your story about your experiences with talking to your adolescent son about what it means to be Black.

**Confidentiality:** Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. At no time will your actual identity be revealed. You will be assigned a random numerical code. Anyone who helps me transcribe responses will only know you by this code. The recording will be erased a year from the date of our last interview. The transcript, without your name, will be kept until the research is complete.

The key code linking your name with your number will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office, and no one else will have access to it. It will be destroyed a year from the date of our last interview. The data you give me will be used for my dissertation and may be used as the basis for articles or presentations in the future. I won't use your name or information that would identify you in any publications or presentations.

**Participation and withdrawal:** Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You may withdraw by informing me that you no longer wish to participate (no questions will be asked). You may also skip any question during the interview, but continue to participate in the rest of the study.

**To Contact the Researcher:** If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact: Raygine DiAquoi Phone: (646-660-5992), 1378 East 37<sup>th</sup> Sreet, Brooklyn, New York 11210. Email: [rcd092@mail.harvard.edu](mailto:rcd092@mail.harvard.edu) You may also contact the faculty member supervising this work: Dr. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, Gutman 463, 617-496-4837, [wendy\\_angus@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:wendy_angus@gse.harvard.edu)

Whom to contact about your rights in this research, for questions, concerns, suggestions, or complaints that are not being addressed by the researcher, or research-related harm: Jane Calhoun, Harvard University Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research, 1414 Massachusetts Avenue, Room 234, Cambridge, MA 02138. Phone: 617-495-5459. E-mail: [jcalhoun@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:jcalhoun@fas.harvard.edu)

**Agreement:**

The nature and purpose of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (print): \_\_\_\_\_  
version)

(4/1/13



## Appendix I: Second Memo

Participant's Name(s)

## References

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- Wang, M.-T., & Huguley, J. P. (2012). Parental racial socialization as a moderator of the effects of racial discrimination on educational success among African American adolescents. *Child Development*, 83(5), 1716–1731.
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<https://www.whitehouse.gov/node/226526>

White-Johnson, R. L., Ford, K. R., & Sellers, R. M. (2010). Parental racial socialization profiles: Association with demographic factors, racial discrimination, childhood socialization, and racial identity. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 16*(2), 237–247.

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Wilkerson, I. (2011). *The warmth of other suns : the epic story of America's great migration* (1<sup>st</sup> Vintage Books ed.). New York: Vintage Books.

Yosso, T.J., (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 8*(1), 69-91.

## Vita

**RAYGINE DIAQUOI**

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### EDUCATION

**Harvard Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA**

Ed.D. Candidate: Cultures, Communities & Education

Dissertation: Colorblind and colorlined: African American parents talk to their adolescent sons about race and racism

Advisor: Daren Graves

**Harvard Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA**

Ed.M Master of Education

**Columbia College, Columbia University, New York, NY**

B.A. Sociology; New York State Teacher Certification

Andrew W. Mellon Minority Undergraduate Fellowship

**Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Ontario, CA**

Visiting Scholar

### RESEARCH INTERESTS

Critical Race Theory in Education

Anti-colonial Pedagogy

African Americans

Racial Socialization

Adolescent Males

### PUBLICATIONS

**Journal Editor**

Harvard Educational Review **2009-2011**

**Articles in Refereed Journals**

DiAquoi, Raygine (2014). Separate and connected: A portrait of perspectives and pedagogy at an Afrocentric shule. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, education & society*, 3(2), 105-130 <http://decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/view/20468>

### **Interviews in Refereed Journals**

DiAquoi, Raygine. (2011). [Interview with Dr. Fabienne Doucet and Dr. Louis HERN Marcelin on the importance of cultivating local capacity after the earthquake in Haiti]. *Harvard Educational Review*, 81, 267-277

DiAquoi, Raygine (2011). [Interview with Maryse Desgrottes, founder of Ecole Village Lucina in Petit Goave Haiti, on post-earthquake reconstruction efforts]. *Harvard Educational Review*, 81, 331-342

### **Chapters in Edited Volumes**

DiAquoi, Raygine (2014). Limited and limitless: Preparing Black boys for colorblind racism. In K.J Fasching-Varner, A.D. Dixson, R. Reynolds, & K. Albert (Eds.), *Trayvon Martin, race, and "American justice": Writing Wrong (pp.forthcoming)*. Netherlands: Sense Publishers B.V.

DiAquoi, Raygine (2012). Hopefully they will see you in a different light: Examining double consciousness in post racial AmERICA. In B. Sams, J.Job & J.C. Jupp (Eds.), *Excursions and recursions through power, privilege, and praxis* (pp. 81-96). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Gatzambide-Fernandez, R., & DiAquoi, R (2010). A part and apart: Students of Color Negotiating Boundaries at an Elite Boarding School. In H. Adam & R. Gatzambide-Fernandez (Eds.), *Educating Elites: Class Privilege and Educational Advantage*, (pp. 55-78) Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Education

### **Book Reviews**

DiAquoi, Raygine (2012). Editor's review of the prep school negro. *Harvard Educational Review*, 82(2), 303-309

DiAquoi, Raygine (2012). A review of "Hello Professor: A Black Principal and Professional Leadership in the Segregated South". *Educational Studies: A Journal of the American Educational Studies Association, Special Issue: Black Teacher's Theorizing*, 48(3), 321-324

DiAquoi, Raygine (2010). How it's being done: Urgent lessons from unexpected schools. [Review of the book *How it's being done: Urgent Lessons from unexpected schools*, by Karin Chenoweth.] *Harvard Educational Review*, 80, 1, p.135-137

### **Other Non-Refereed Publications**

DiAquoi, Raygine (November 11, 2013). For Renisha McBride and us. Retrieved from <http://newblackman.blogspot.com/2013/11/for-renisha-mcbride-and-us-by-raygine.html?view=magazine>

### **Edited Volumes**

Afolabi, P.K., Bocala, C., DiAquoi, C. R., Hayden, M. J., Liefshitz, A. I., & Oh, S.S (Eds.).(2011). *Education for a multicultural society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review

### **AWARDS**

2015 Harvard Graduate School of Education Equity Fellowship  
2014 Harvard Doctoral Travel Grant  
2014 Harvard Data Collection Travel Grant  
2014 Dean's Fellowship for Dissertation Research  
2014 Dean's Diversity Initiative Fund  
2012 James T. Sears Award  
2012 Visiting Scholar Appointment, University of Toronto  
2012 UREAG (Underrepresented Racial, Ethnic, and Ability Groups), CIES  
2011 Doctoral Travel Grant, Harvard Graduate School of Education  
2011 Curriculum and Pedagogy Conference Support, Curriculum and Pedagogy Group  
2009-2010 Presidential Instructional Technology Fellow, Harvard University  
2009 Save-University Partnerships for Education Research Fellowship  
2003-2004 Andrew W. Mellon Minority Undergraduate Fellowship, Columbia University  
2003 Dean's List, Columbia University  
2002 Dean's List, Columbia University  
2001 Dean's List, Columbia University  
2000 Dean's List, Columbia University

### **CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**

"Addressing challenges within the U.S. Education System. Separate and connected: A portrait of practice and pedagogy at an Afrocentric shule." *Black Doctoral Network Conference*, October 23-25, 2014

"Separate and connected: A portrait of practice and pedagogy at an Afrocentric shule." *American Educational Research Association*, April 3-7, 2014

"Im/Possibilities of educational revolution: The contours of education and Black subjectivities. Separate and connected: A portrait of practice and pedagogy at an Afrocentric shule." *Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society*, April 22-27, 2012

"Intentionally separate African American schools: Separate and Better?" *Curriculum and Pedagogy Conference*, October 19-22, 2011

“Hopefully they will see you in a different light”: Examining double consciousness in post racial AmErica” *Critical Race Studies in Education Association Conference*, May 19, 2011

“Because of race: New paradigms of oppositional culture and cultural capital in the creation of a Black achievement Ideology” *Harvard Student Research Conference*, March 26, 2010

“Responding to Alienation: How Students of Color Negotiate Double Consciousness” (co-presenter with Ruben Gaztambide-Fernandez) *Harvard Alumni of Color Conference*, February 27, 2010

## **GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIPS & FELLOWSHIPS**

	<b>8/2012-7/2013</b>
<b>Dean’s Advisory Committee on Equity and Diversity</b> Harvard Graduate School of Education	
	<b>9/2012- 5/2013</b>
<b>Program Coordinator: Culture, Communities and Education concentration</b> Harvard Graduate School of Education	
	<b>10/2009- 1/2010</b>
<b>Project: Elite Undergraduates on Multiculturalism and Education: A cross-national study</b> Harvard Graduate School of Education Principal Investigator: Natasha Warikoo,	
	<b>7/2009-9/2009</b>
<b>Save University Partnerships for Education Research Fellowship</b> Save the Children, Haiti	
	<b>2008-2009</b>
<b>Project: Achievement Gap Initiative</b> Harvard Kennedy School of Government Principal Investigator: Ron Ferguson	
	<b>2008-2009</b>
<b>Project: School Leadership, Organizational Change, and Educational Equity</b> Harvard Graduate School of Education Principal Investigator: John Diamond	
	<b>2007-2008</b>
<b>Project: Finding Culture in Talk and Images</b> Harvard Graduate School of Education Principal Investigator: Wendy Luttrell	

## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

### **Graduate Level**

<p><b>Teaching Fellow, Introduction to Qualitative Research</b>  Harvard Graduate School of Education  Faculty: Elizabeth Duraisingh</p>	<p><b>9/2014- 12/2014</b></p>
<p><b>Teaching Fellow, Critical Race Theory in Education</b>  Harvard Graduate School of Education  Faculty: Daren Graves &amp; Kimberly Truong</p>	<p><b>9/2014- 12/2014</b></p>
<p><b>9/2013-12/2013</b>  <b>Teaching Fellow, Introduction to Qualitative Research</b>  Harvard Graduate School of Education  Faculty: Elizabeth Duraisingh</p>	<p><b>9/2013- 12/2013</b></p>
<p><b>Teaching Fellow, Critical Race Theory in Education</b>  Harvard Graduate School of Education  Faculty: Daren Graves &amp; Kimberly Truong</p>	<p><b>1/2013-5/2013</b></p>
<p><b>Teaching Fellow, Race, Class, and Educational Inequality</b>  Harvard Graduate School of Education  Faculty: John Diamond</p>	<p><b>1/2013-5/2013</b></p>
<p><b>Teaching Fellow, Strategies and Policies for Narrowing Racial Achievement Gaps</b>  Harvard Graduate School of Education/Harvard Kennedy School of Government  Faculty: Ronald Ferguson</p>	<p><b>9/2012- 12/2012</b></p>
<p><b>Teaching Fellow, Introduction to Qualitative Research</b>  Harvard Graduate School of Education  Faculty: Elizabeth Duraisingh</p>	<p><b>9/2011- 12/2011</b></p>
<p><b>Teaching Fellow, Empirical Methods: Introduction to Statistics for Research</b>  Harvard Graduate School of Education  Faculty: Terry Tivnan</p>	<p><b>10/2009- 12/2009</b></p>
<p><b>Teaching Fellow, Observation and Participation in Educational Research</b>  Harvard Graduate School of Education  Faculty: Mica Pollock</p>	<p><b>9/2009- 12/2009</b></p>
<p><b>Teaching Fellow, Introduction to Educational Policy</b>  Harvard Graduate School of Education</p>	

Faculty: Jal Mehta

**9/2008-11/2009**

**Teaching Fellow, Observation and Participation in Educational Research**

Harvard Graduate School of Education

Faculty: Mica Pollock

**9/2008-1/2009**

**Teaching Fellow, Growing up in a Media World**

Harvard Graduate School of Education

Faculty: Joe Blatt

### **University Guest Lectures**

**“An introduction to photo elicitation” 10/2014**

Course: Introduction to Qualitative Research

Faculty: Elizabeth Duraisingh

Harvard Graduate School of Education

**“What are microaggressions?” 10/2014**

*Student Affairs*

Harvard Graduate School of Education

**“Critical race theory and post-racial supremacy” 9/2014**

Course: Critical Race Theory in Education

Faculty: Daren Graves & Kimberly A. Truong

Harvard Graduate School of Education

**“Big Data & Equity” 9/2014**

Course: Data Science in education: Big Data, learning analytics & the information age

Faculty: Charles Lang

Harvard Graduate School of Education

**“An introduction to portraiture” 10/2013**

Course: Introduction to Qualitative Research

Faculty: Elizabeth Duraisingh

Harvard Graduate School of Education

**“Examining double consciousness in post racial AmErica” 10/2013**

Course: Critical Race Theory in Education

Faculty: Daren Graves & Kimberly A. Truong

Harvard Graduate School of Education

**“What are microaggressions?” 10/2013**

*Student Affairs*

Harvard Graduate School of Education

**“Gender and African Centered Education” 3/2012**

Course: Gender Equity in the Classroom  
Faculty: Lance McCready  
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

**K-12**

**6/2008-8/2008**

**Invictus Teacher**

Prep for Prep, New York, New York

**9/2006-7/2007**

**Humanities Teacher, Sixth Grade**

The East Harlem School, New York, New York

**10/2005-  
7/2006**

**Chemistry Teacher, Fifth & Sixth Grade**

Prep for Prep, New York, New York

**9/2004-6/2005**

**Head Teacher, Second Grade**

Harlem Day Charter School, New York, New York

**5/2000-8/2003**

**Head of the Summer Advisory System,**

Prep for Prep, New York, New York

**PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

**Undergraduate Tutor in Harvard's House System**

**9/2014-5/2015**

Non-resident tutor (education & race ), Cabot and Currier House  
Harvard University

**Conference Review Committees**

**2009**

Paper and Panel Selection Committee

Alumni of Color Conference

**7/2012**

Paper Selection Committee

American Educational Studies Association Conference

**Consultant Contracts**

**6/2013-9/2013**

Contracted by the East Harlem Tutorial Program to develop a  
college readiness writing program for high school students that is aligned  
with the New York Common Core State Standards

**6/2014-8/2014**



Contracted by the Passaic Arts and Science Charter School in New Jersey to develop a balanced and authentic literacy curriculum.

**6/2012-8/2014**

Contracted by the Programs in Professional Education Art of Leadership Institute at Harvard University to lead and facilitate discussions on aspects of leadership and issues of equity with school leaders.